Globalizing Indigenous Psychology: An East Asian Form of Hierarchical Relationalism with Worldwide Implications

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has changed almost every facet of life for people around the world, and today the flow of influence is no longer uni-directional. It is argued that East Asian (and especially Chinese) societies are anchored in an indigenous form of hierarchical relationalism where social structure is produced by relational obligations of an ethical and normative nature that have slowed its traditional culture "melting into air" as prophesied by Marx. The successfully modernization of East Asia has involved hybridization, compartmentalization, and sequencing of traditional psychological features of Confucianist societies such as delay of gratification and respect for education, paternalistic leadership, filial piety, and beliefs in harmony or benevolence. Features of hierarchical relationalism are adaptable to creating niches for East Asian societies that thrive under globalization as characterized by the paradoxical coupling of economic *inequality in fact* with discourses of *equality in principle*. Moral, ethical demands for enlightened leadership constrain East Asian elites to at least attempt to protect subordinates and protect societal (rather than merely individual or familial) well-being. A fundamental contribution of East Asia to global society may be in the articulation of how to ameliorate economic inequality using Confucian principles of hierarchical relationalism.

Globalization has changed almost every facet of life for people around the world, and not uni-directionally (see Arnett, 2002; Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011). While influence has flowed from Western societies to the rest, so has financial wealth, to the point where today 6 of the 10 largest sources of sovereign wealth in the world are Asian (including 3 Chinese societies, with China having far and away the largest cash reserves in the world at $3.2 trillion USD, followed by Japan

at \$1.2 trillion), and only one is Western (Switzerland). By contrast, 6 of the largest economies in the world in terms of GDP are Western, and only 3 are Asian[1]. Clearly, there are major differences in how Asian societies manage wealth, and this has had significant flow-on effects to the rest of the world, as when the European Union goes to China for a cash infusion to save their troubled Euro.

Karl Marx, once prophesied in Chapter 1 of his *Communist Manifesto* that with the advent of capitalism, "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind". George Ritzer (2011) writes following Marx (and more proximally Bauman, 2000) of globalization as "a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing *liquidity* and growing multi-directional *flows* of people, objects, places, and information as well as the *structures* they encounter and create that are *barriers* to, or *expedite* those flows". I argue that it is the unevenness of this liquidity that has given Asian societies a window of opportunity to develop prosperity and influence global culture, and with it global psychology. It is precisely because East Asian societies are anchored in an indigenous form of social structure produced by relational obligations of an ethical and normative nature that its traditional culture has *not* "melted into air" but successfully modernized.

Despite all the changes caused by the rush to catch up to the West, East Asian societies still have culturally distinctive characteristics (see results for "Confucian societies" in Inglehart & Baker, 2000 for example). They are what Hofstede (2003) describes as collectivist and high power distance societies. Collectivist and high power distance societies emphasize enduring relationships based on *preference for* or *acceptance of* unequal forms of reciprocity (see Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994) and emphasis on primary group memberships as self-defining (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Role-based moral obligations (Hwang, 2012a) and continual self-cultivation (Kitayama & Markus, 2003; Hwang, 2012b) provide the intellectual basis for maintaining high power distance between societal members (Yuki, 2003; see Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010 for an integrative overview). In other words, in East Asia there is a strong moral, ethical, and intellectual component to maintaining a high position in a collectivist social order. Classical Confucianism (e.g., the *Analects*) was never about blind obedience to authority, despite its co-optation for those purposes by imperial dynasties from the Han onwards.

Cross-cultural psychologists (Smith & Bond, 1993) might describe East Asian societies as collectivist and high power distance. But though this is the most numerically prevalent form of the culture in the world according to Hofstede's (2003) country-level analyses, no other clusters of collectivist and high power distance societies are able to maintain the massive sovereign wealth that is now characteristic of East Asia. East Asians are able to control certain kinds of emotions (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006) and delay gratification (Mischel,

Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989) in such a way as to allow thrift and high levels of savings to emerge as a societal virtue (see Huang & Huang, 2002).

This does not have to be narrated as a consequence of an abstract characteristic as "collectivism" and "power distance" but rather as a specific complex of affect, behavior, and values that for Japanese, Chinese, or Korean culture can be narrated as an indigenous psychology to be described in this paper. These can be theorized as a complex originating in an indigenous system of thought and action to be evaluated on its own grounds and extensions of these grounds, rather than following the universalizing impulse described by Bond (this issue), where Chinese culture is "non-mainstream" and "adds value" to the baseline provided by Western psychology as the mainstream. Work described by Sundaraajan (this issue) to translate between a Western universal model (Fiske's) and Chinese models of social relations may be required to bridge the gap in orientation between these approaches. In line with Gergen's (this issue) proposal to construct culturally inclusive theory based on pragmatics of communication and meaning making, building forums that add value to both East Asian and Western mainstream dialogues is desirable.

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures contain important shared elements, but are also importantly unique, so I have been uncertain whether I should focus my argument in terms of Chinese indigenous psychology, or the psychology of an East Asian cultural zone. I leave this as an open question, grist for the mill of further reflection and discussion.

Historical Trajectories: Towards Indigenous Psychologies of Adaptability. There is something about the indigenous psychology of East Asians that has been very adaptable to the conditions of globalization and the requirements for modernization. In just over a half century, out of the ruins of World War II (WW II), this cultural zone has emerged as the most concentrated source of sovereign wealth in the world, though the scars of that calamity and the half century preceding it make it anything but a unified political block (Liu et al., 2011b, 2009). An apt motto for East Asia under globalization might be: "culturally connected and politically divided."

I argue that the adaptability of a culture to globalization is one of the fundamental elements to consider as a basic building block for indigenous psychology that will turn it into a global movement with enduring force. This is because to gain awareness of a social force (globalization) that has heretofore been outside of the field of conscious understanding is the key to gaining agency and control over this process. The Asian tiger economies rode post-WW II globalization as an economic opportunity emanating from the needs of Western capital, but in the 21st century, together with the rising dragon China they now are the states that control more sovereign wealth than anyone else. It is time for East Asian societies to look proactively rather to reactively to the social forces that have made them what they are: containers of cultural capital consisting of a special moral and ethical form of high power distance collectivism that I term "hierarchical relationalism".

East Asian collectivism evolved from a feudal structure of lords and their retainers in Japan, to a corporate structure of giant companies with lifelong loyalty. It evolved from an extended family structure of villages in China to more nuclear and intergenerational obligations that drive parents to save money for their children and children to achieve highly in school that all fits in very nicely to a contemporary market economy (e.g., Tu, 1996). It evolved in Korea from the shadow of Japanese colonialism into a national structure of chaebol that rival the mega-corporations of Japan in their ability to compete in international markets.

Ronald Inglehart and colleagues concluded from two decades of research using the World Value Survey that "a history of Protestant or Islamic or Confucian traditions gives rise to cultural zones with distinctive value systems that persist after controlling for the effects of economic development: 'We doubt that the forces of modernization will produce a homogenized world culture in the foreseeable future' (p. 49, Inglehart & Baker, 2000). While all societies appeared to be moving towards Western values, they have done so in different trajectories and from initial starting points that have maintained differences even amidst constant change. "Economic development seems to move societies in a common direction, regardless of their cultural heritage. Nevertheless, distinctive cultural zones persist two centuries after the industrial revolution began". (p. 30); and the differences persist after statistically controlling for per capita GDP and for the structure of the labor force.

In East Asian societies, a critical element of the initial starting point and trajectory is the status of religion. There were rarely (if any) religious wars in antiquity, because religion was pressed into service for the state from a very early time, and lost much of its supernatural character. This is unlike in other culture zones, where religion has resisted the secularizing force of modernity, as in Inglehart and Baker's (2000) analysis of Catholic countries (pp. 34–37). Even in traditional China, Japan, and Korea, the ruler, even though symbolically the "Son of Heaven" was more of a moral and ethical symbol of authority ruling over the people than an avatar with supernatural powers. This is the moral and ethical legacy of Confucianism, which I would argue is one of the major elements of the indigenous psychology of East Asia that is highly advantageous under globalization. Inglehart and Baker (2000) note for example that "Confucian-influenced societies have relatively secular values, regardless of the proportion of their labor forces in the industrial sector" (p. 31). The Confucian system of ethics and rites is not exactly secular, but it does not rely on supernatural arguments either.

We will return to the spiritual but not supernatural character of Confucian ethics momentarily. For now, it is sufficient to note that it is this lack of centrality for the supernatural in determining the social order that makes East Asian indigenous psychology particularly adaptable. There is no conflict between science and religion. The sacred values of Confucian societies tend to be more immanent than transcendent, allowing for dialogue with the more absolutist religious traditions of

the West without destroying core ethical values of relationalism (see Liu, 2011). Confucianism is a humanist philosophy that has facilitated East Asian peoples to embark on a trajectory towards the market economics of modernity without dissolving critical elements of the traditional moral order. Confucian ethics are relational, reciprocal, and hierarchical, not supernatural. They are based in status differences that are not immutable, but incorporate inequality sourced from both the external mantle of social positions and from the internal virtues of self-cultivation (Hwang, 2012a, b). While much of traditional East Asian society has liquefied, enough of its core has been retained to provide a position of leverage from which to engage with the rest of the world (Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010).

It behooves each indigenous psychology to consider elements of its sacred or core values and the cultural affordances they provide against the liquefying forces of globalization. For if all that is solid within an indigenous society melts into air, the people will have nothing left of spiritual value to sustain them, and they will have a severely compromised social order bereft of a coherent morality and ethics. They become utilitarian tools at the periphery of a neo-liberal world order with Western values and Western states at its core (Wallerstein, 1974), constantly struggling against one another for short-term instrumental gains that are not sustainable. The past of a people is a critical symbolic resource for constructing what of a people's identity should be maintained amidst change (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

Multiple Pathways Towards the Future: Contributions of hierarchical relationalism to global ethics. If the cultures of the world can be likened to playing a game of poker to decide the shape of world society, what has become manifest is no one civilization holds all the trump cards. For the core strengths of the liberal philosophy of the West, its commitment to equality and freedom as sacred values (e.g., Fukuyama, 1992), have also turned out to be a weakness under the liquefying flows of globalization. Equality in particular is a core value with the dual character of aspiration and description that has become troubling for Western societies. As long as they kept growing, Western societies could maintain an ideology or principle of equality in the face of manifest inequalities in fact (Liu & Mills, 2006). Globalization has been hollowing out equality in fact in Western societies for about forty years now, since the collapse of Keynesian economics in the 1970s[2]. Inequality has increased in almost every Western state over that period, and people have suffered and are complaining (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Jobs have transferred from high wage Western economies with liberal protections for workers to lower waged non-Western economies with fewer protections: the benefits of growth in Western societies today are for the few, not the many. It appears that the contradictions that Marx pointed out for capitalism have finally come home to roost under globalization. East Asia has been part of this global movement and it has navigated it better than most.

Much work on indigenous psychology emanating from East Asia suggests that Confucian ethics regarding the moral and ethical obligations of unequal

relationships can be a powerful ameliorative for neo-liberal, market-oriented expressions of freedom and equality in principle and the inequality in fact these policies can produce (for a psychological summary, see Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010; for a philosophical take see Tu, 1996). They form the basis of a cultural system (see Hwang, this issue) rather than piecemeal additions that provide underlying coherence to many social phenomena in Chinese societies.

At the family-level, the work of Kuang-hui Yeh and colleagues (e.g., Yeh & Bedford, 2003) has shown that reciprocal filial piety, rooted in classic Confucian traditions (*wu lun*) of the mutuality of unequal exchange rather than post-Han dynasty dogma (*san gang*) of uni-lateral and authoritarian obedience, has the best psychological consequences for families. Reciprocal filial piety, characterized by positive and reciprocal affect in the service of duty is a winning formula. In even more globalizing terms, Yeh (2010) has more recently argued that an authentic affection emphasizing feelings between parents and children is consistent with classical Confucian theory, and augments the traditional emphasis on role-based obligations (see also Liu, Ng, Weatherall, & Loong, 2000 for similar empirical findings on overseas Chinese) to provide a more fulfilling and complete prescription of well-being for contemporary families. Indeed, recent survey research among adolescents (Liu, Yeh, Wu, Liu, & Yang, under review) found that belief in the benevolence of central government authorities in Taiwan was predicted by reciprocal filial piety and authentic affect with mothers (not fathers) and for daughters (not sons). This suggests *affect-based* transfer of beliefs about benevolent authority from the family to societal leaders rather than rote learning based on power relationships (which would be expected to favour fathers and sons).

Furthermore, Huang and Huang (2002) produced an intriguing study of mother-child conflict/instruction that suggests a uniquely East Asian relational approach to delay of gratification quite distinct from the individualism that characterizes the mainstream Western literature (e.g., Mischel et al., 1989; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). Mischel and colleagues analyze delay of gratification as an emergent property of competing cognitive (cold, control-oriented) and emotional (hot, gratification-seeking) systems in self-regulation. Delay of gratification is portrayed as an emergent property of individual learning in response to external stimuli, whereas Huang and Huang (2002) analyze it as the interactive product of a relationship between the mother and child. They put children through a cognitive task that became progressively more interfered with by an attractive distracter (e.g., cartoons on television). But the difference is, they did it in a more ecologically valid manner (see Cole, Cole, & Lightfoot, 2005) where they were under instruction from the mother, who tended to increase the level of command (e.g., authoritarianism/high power distance) in her instruction as the temptation for the child to stray off-task became stronger. The mother began with reasoning and then moved to authoritarian commands as the child did not listen, a near-perfect illustration of the virtue of Confucianism in education in contemporary Chinese societies. This type of relational learning is one reason why East

Asian societies are superior to Western societies in academic subjects (like maths) that require repetitive practice (see Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). The fundamental unit of analysis in Huang and Huang's (2002) paper, which has unfortunately not been followed up on (it was framed as mother-child conflict, not as delay of gratification) is the mother-child dyadic relationship, not the child and a set of objective external stimuli; it is classic case of meaningful action (Eckensberger, this issue), as the parent is intentionally interpreting the cartoon as a distractor (at the behest of an educational authority) that she needs to guide the child to disregard, instead of, for example, questioning the authority why the child is being distracted by cartoons if the academic task they want the child to perform is important.

Ho, Peng, Lai, and Chan (2001) have described methodological relationalism as a general research strategy to correct the blind spots of Western methodological individualism.

One of the keys to the success of East Asian societies is the strength of its family units, based not solely on voluntaristic affect-based bonds as narrated by utilitarian theory, but on role-based obligations that enable cultural scripts of endurance through difficulty, and delay of gratification in order to achieve expectations and to cultivate self-in-society. It seems that with modernity, positive affect and relational give-and-take is central to the maintenance of justifiably hierarchical beliefs not only within family roles, but more generally for the idea that people in central government are benevolent, and have obligations to provide for the well-being of society in a top-down manner. Hence, the articulation and practice of mutuality in unequal social roles within the family is an area where Western theory could use help to provide a stronger social and moral order for society.

At the level of work organizations, the work of Bor-shuian Cheng and colleagues (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004) similarly shows that benevolence (providing benefits to subordinates) and morality (being perceived as a upright moral exemplar) are positive influences on all manner of work outcomes in Chinese societies, whereas more traditional forms of authoritarian leadership may be part of the fabric of indigenously Chinese paternalistic leadership styles, but costly in terms of employee morale. This work provides important evidence for the central tenet of Confucian theory, that moral leadership is the most important form of leadership in society. This is far less emphasized in contemporary Western society, where there has been a proliferation of neo-liberal popular discourses along the lines of the "Greed works" mantra from Oliver Stone's film *Wall Street*. Utilitarian values based on entertainment rules have proliferated in the on-line civic spheres of Western societies in recent years, and this has not necessarily been to the advantage of civil society (August & Liu, in press). Moral leadership from above based on humanism rather than religion is another area where indigenous East Asian psychology may join in the global dialogue to produce a better world order.

In the arena of harmony and conflict resolution, the work of Huang, Jone, and Peng (2005) demonstrated that Taiwanese Chinese workers having a good

relationship with their boss typically would approach them directly about an issue, rather than avoiding the issue or dealing with it indirectly as stereotypes in the literature might lead one to expect. Only after being rebuffed would they retreat into accommodating or conflict avoidant styles of conflict resolution. In Huang's work, multiple modes of communication in sequence is the norm. This type of multiplicity suggests that globalization may tend to sequence rather than replace traditional modes of conflict resolution. The concept of sequencing complements the work on frame-switching developed by cross-cultural researchers working in this area (see Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). This type of sequencing and frame-switching is an area where members of less powerful cultures, because of the necessity of having to learn English to do business, have an advantage over members of dominant Anglophone cultures.

In all this work, the creative input of culture and culture change is obvious. Perhaps less apparent but no less important is the role of individual and collective agency in making the right choices to increase individual well-being and promote an ethical social order.

At the society-level, the survey research by Liu and colleagues on benevolent authority (Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010; Liu et al., 2011a) has shown that adults from mainland China have a greater belief in the benevolence of their central government than a comparable sample of adults from the United States, even though on international transparency measures, China is more corrupt than the United States. Liu and colleagues interpreted this as providing a kind of cultural capital that provide East Asian leaders with a window of opportunity to lead in a strategic manner, instead of having to provide bread and circuses to stay in power. They argued that being able to maintain a long-term sense of strategic direction is the main advantage of the governance styles of high-power distance East Asian societies. On the other hand, belief in benevolent authority might also be based on state control of mass media and other outlets for dissent, so that a complementary weakness is the inability of information to flow freely and rapidly through the society to enable fast reactions to dissatisfaction from below. By comparison, Western societies now appear to lack strategic direction except for the neo-liberal economics that is hollowing out its manufacturing base, but they are better able to respond quickly to short term signals from ordinary citizens. How to best move between these two systems has not yet been articulated by Liu and colleagues.

But Corey Abramson's (2012) division of cultural inputs into motivations, resources, and meanings is a promising direction for the future. East Asians are especially motivated by the ethics of managing relationships, as their social networks have traditionally been the most reliable among their resources (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994): this traditional structure is being challenged by globalization, and hence dynamic, situated (and sometimes hybridized) meanings navigating back and forth between hierarchical relationalism and liberal democracy are emerging, and changing culture (see Eckensberger, this issue; Gergen, this issue).

Cultivating Reflexive Awareness as a Basic Tool for Globalizing Psychology. The hegemony of the West has reached its apex and is receding. It is now up to indigenous societies around the world to take a stand and make their contributions to a parallel and distributed consciousness of the world as having multiple pathways to modernity and multiple value systems that can co-exist. Both Kashima (2005) and Atsumi (2007) have used different language to argue that epistemologically, East Asians can provide a more complete human science where the generative input of culture and the agency involved in human relations take center stage.

Hence, a final, and perhaps the most important contribution Chinese indigenous psychology in particular can make to such a global endeavour is to make morality and ethics visible at the center of their practices as opposed to relegating them to an invisible periphery as in Western natural science epistemology. The most valued form of agency (Eckensberger, this issue) in Chinese culture is an act to define one's moral/ethical standing; the mother in Huang and Huang's (2002) is taking moral agency by teaching her child to ignore the pleasure of watching cartoons to complete an academically ordered task. While such an overtly ethical formulation might not be as agreeable to Japanese indigenous psychologists as Chinese in totality, as Japanese indigenous philosophy is more naturalistic, the task of the mother to teach the child to internalize delay of gratification in order to improve academic performance is common to East Asian cultures. The same moon shines on different rivers, as the great Song dynasty philosopher Chu-Hsi wrote.

K. K. Hwang (2012a) has argued for an indigenous Chinese psychology that is fundamentally relational. I would add to this that developing a relational psychology is fundamentally reflexive (see Gergen, this issue), and involves the creation, and not just the description of a better understanding between people, both in terms of cognitive mental modelling, and in terms of authenticity of feelings between them. The micro-world articulated by scholars is an ideal, and to the extent that this ideal resonates with the lived world of society at large, it will be amplified. The ideal of the scholar practitioner is a social role in a hierarchically ordered relational universe that requires further articulation (see Liu & Liu, 1997, 1999 for some ideas about this).

Indigenous psychologists therefore have an important role to play in global consciousness that does not stop within the borders of their own culture (Huang, this issue, Bond, this issue). At the higher level, indigenous psychologies provide a moral, ethical, and empirical counterpoint to the universalizing impulses of the Western core of the global system (see Harrison & Huntington, 2000 for an exciting debate around similar issues in economics and political science). A truly global consciousness must be able to encompass knowledge of the reality of global circumstances, an awareness of the deep rootedness of cultural diversity, and a moral and ethical orientation towards future action that acknowledges both role-based differentiations and psychic unity together (Liu & Liu, 1997, 1999).

Cross-cultural psychology originated out of a Western impulse to prescribe and know the limits of universalism. Indigenous psychology emerged out of an impulse to validate non-Western systems of social organization and articulate the value of indigeneity. These impulses come together in global consciousness where a full articulation of culture specificity becomes more and more rather than less and less meaningful in the context of globalization. A global psychology is a psychology of human systems and their aspirations, and the possible transitions, complementarity, hybridity, and boundedness between them.

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NOTES

[1] Downloaded May 17, 2012 from http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2011/10/15/chinas-cash-position-swells-to-record-high/
[2] Keynesian economics advocates a mixed economy where government spending is used to stimulate demand especially during recessions where pure market forces are weak or somehow dysfunctional.

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