

How I am Constructing Culture-inclusive Theories of Social-psychological Process in our Age of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

Accepting Cole's the premise that, "cultural-inclusive psychology has been . . . an elusive goal" (1996, pp. 7–8) but one worth striving to attain, I first set out to identify my domain of interest and competence as an intellectual. Deciding it to be social interaction between individuals, I then searched out theoretical approaches to this domain that encompassed as many approaches to this trans-historical concern that have emerged from cultural traditions bequeathing us their legacies. Doing this search comprehensively required me to move outside my Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, Renaissance heritage and its international diffusion via the European Empires since the 1500's, embodied most recently the American dominance of intellectual discourse since the Second World War.

In my case, this journey has taken me in to Chinese culture and psychology where I have worked towards integrating the Chinese worldview and its psychological measures into the discipline of social psychology. Striving for a more inclusive culture-view, I am now using multi-cultural data bases to transcend this two-cultural focus and incorporate wider measures of cultural variation into our theorizing and empirical validation of universal models for social interaction. This paper describes my current procedures for such culture-mapping.

Keywords: indigenous constructs, culturally inclusive social psychology, universalizing theory

"To seek, to strive, to find, and not to yield"

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

Prolegomena

. . . all times I have enjoyed

Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those

That loved me, and alone;

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

Mine is a personal essay, unabashedly auto-biographical. It briefly describes the stages of my life-in-culture and the stages of my journey towards a psychologist's understanding of culture's role in shaping mundane, individual, social behavior. These behaviors in their many guises are my outcomes of interest, and this essay outlines my current apprehension of how to approach them social-scientifically.

Many previous papers have described these intellectual stages along my way, some focusing on the characteristics of the stages reached (Bond, 2009, 2010a; Bond & van de Vijver, 2011; Smith & Bond, 2003), others focusing on the struggle to reach those new vistas on our enterprise (Bond, 1994, 1997a, 2003, 2011). So, I will liberally cite such sources for those readers wishing greater elaboration of the following points in my argument.

Culture is Everywhere!

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink

Life to the lees: . . .

How dull it is to pause,

To make an end,

To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

Studying the impact of culture on social behavior satisfies my restless intellectual curiosity while providing me work as a social scientist in the academy. I think of culture in both of its senses—the repository of humankind's fascinating output in cuisine, music, art, architecture, literature, philosophy and science on the life that teems around us, but also in the more esoteric sense of the residue from this legacy in the life-as-lived by each of us—our beliefs, our values, our worldviews, our talents and vocations and our relationships, their style and content, that structure our living from cradle to grave. I think of these two faces of culture as the manifest and the implicit.

My interests are kaleidoscopic and promiscuous, reflecting my high levels of curiosity and openness to experience. I am both a sensualist and an intellectual, more the latter than the former as I age, and delight in trying to make sense of the cultural caravan extending behind my mind's eye.

A Social-psychologist-in-culture

. . . for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

My purchase on culture is as a social psychologist. I am intrigued by the varieties of human interpersonal behaviors and their consequences, benign and malign, for each of us actors in this evolving drama. But, I try to apprehend and understand this drama and its *sequelae* using intellectual constructs, the theories

that “bring these constructs to life” and the measures we develop to map the “flow of play” among actors in terms of these constructs.

In struggling towards this lofty goal, I am a “stranger in a strange land”, having spent 46 years detached from my birthplace of Toronto, Canada, first in the United States of America, then in Japan and finally rooting myself in the Chinese culture of Hong Kong, from which I have made forays to other exotic locales like the Philippines, Panama, Mexico and South Africa. But, the daily locale for most of my life has been Hong Kong and the cultural system that has provided me a playground for mutual accommodation is the Cantonese variant of the Chinese heritage.

This setting has proved an intellectual gadfly whose continuing intellectual surprises stretch my thinking, pushing me to enlarge my construct system, as Kelly (1955) described it, and I attempted to ground it in the experience of culture-travelers (Bond, 1997b). These confrontations require me to elaborate, refine and test the sense-making tools I use both to negotiate my daily work and living but also my academic productions (Bond, 1994, 1997a, 2003). My home base is a fiery, tempering crucible for self- and other-discovery. Fortunately, I live among an agreeable, business-like and “unhostile” people who provide me with a forgiving environment for my learning.

Indigenous Inputs to Social Psychology?

For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known;

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

A culture traveler is receiving indigenous, or locally originating, inputs all the time. These inputs are channeled innocently by the culture-carriers with whom one interacts. The challenge is to detect them, and use them to craft a more workable reality for oneself and those around one. In my academic work, these inputs come as explicit challenges that I have not yet “got it right”, i.e., carved out the constructs and their relationships that truly reflect the psychological, interpersonal and systemic features of the cultural system in which I function.

These challenges to my way of thinking and constructing social-psychological reality emerge out of the clash between mainstream social science and local discipline-building. This confrontation has informed our sister disciplines of anthropology and sociology (see Dirlik, Li, & Yen, 2012), and been lively food for thought in psychology also. As the prospectus for the International Conference on “New Perspectives in East Asian Studies” puts the issue for psychology:

When the research paradigms of mainstream Western psychology were exported to non-Western countries, many scholars and practitioners of non-Western countries have found them to be irrelevant, incompatible, or inappropriate to understanding the local population;

knowledge generated by WP cannot be used to solve their daily problems. Therefore, some psychologists decided to develop IPs [indigenous psychologies] in reaction to the dominance of WP [Western Psychology]. (Hwang, 2012, p. 3, square brackets added)

I am reminded of the lines from the song, “Phaeton”, by Patricia Barber:

I have institutions in the West
 To make institutions in the East;
 I historically revise
 With deconstructionist ease . . .
 I'm a gangster in a Hummer
 And this culture will yield to me
 Whiteworld. . .
Barber, Mythologies, 2006

which describes the same Western imperialist assault on Eastern patrimony.

The exportation of intellectual products is often regarded as an insidious form of cultural colonization, ill-considered, generating reactance and requiring an apt response:

. . . with a special focus on the process of “contextual turn,” meaning the texts and ideas as well as political, economic and legal institutions are “decontextualized” and transmitted from their home countries to East Asia where they should be “recontextualized” to suit the new cultural environment. (Hwang, 2012, p. 1)

Conference proceedings and papers emerging from such meetings are one type of reasoned reactance to the inadequate representation or even misrepresentation of local cultural reality.

Has Chinese psychology been decontextualized? In a balanced and appreciative review of the *Oxford handbook of Chinese psychology* (Bond, 2010b), Lee (2011) pointed out that:

There is a general lack of theory in the whole handbook . . . The topic-oriented chapters have done a great job in reviewing and reporting extensively empirical findings in the field regarding the Chinese people. However, very few chapters offer indigenous theories of Chinese psychology . . . Most of them stay at the level of confirming/disconfirming western findings, referring to well-known cultural dimensions such as collectivism and power distance to explain the variation found, despite the openly stated effort to push for indigenous research. Moreover, most of the studies cited in the book simply dichotomized their findings as Chinese vs. Western, failing to capture the much more refined complexity of the world. (pp. 271–272)

This review signals an apt concern about the energetic importation of Western theories, concepts and measures into the practice of Chinese psychology, a “de-contextualizing” dynamic.

Although in general agreement with this concern, I, as the editor of the *Handbook*, concluded that there had been some more culturally sensitive yield from recent theorizing and research in Chinese psychology than recognized by Lee (2011). Specifically:

To date, I would venture to say that Interpersonal Relatedness, Holism, the Dialectical Self, Relationship Harmony, Paternalistic Leadership, and concern with the other's face have been adequately demonstrated to be distinctive constructs adduced from a dedicated and disciplined examination of Chinese culture, to identify the most prominent. (Bond, 2010a, p. 712)

At the level of constructs and their dynamic interplay, progress had been made in "recontextualizing" Chinese psychology by adducing measurable reflections of Chinese cultural reality that work bi-culturally to predict outcomes of psychological interest. But, further progress was needed when I wrote in 2010a, and still is needed.

Further recontextualizing Chinese psychology. As the editor of the *Handbook*, I also pointed to a way through this clash of cultural traditions by citing an earlier challenge by Nathan to the claim that Chinese culture was distinctive:

Nathan addressed the question, "Is Chinese culture distinctive?" by responding, "Although anyone who studies it must be convinced that it is, we have far to go to state clearly how it is distinctive and to prove it empirically." (Nathan, 1993, p. 936) In assessing the potential of social sciences in responding to claims for Chinese distinctiveness, Nathan answered, "What is required is to demonstrate that such distinctiveness exists, what it consists of, and what influence it has on the performance of societies (and of individuals from those societies)?" (Nathan, 1993, p. 923, brackets added) (Bond, 2010a, p. 711)

Stating its distinctiveness "clearly" and proving it "empirically" is not easy, however, as Smith (2010) has shown by describing his attempts to do so in the last content chapter of the *Handbook* on cross-cultural comparisons of indigenous constructs.

I then concluded that taking "the way forward" required a "recontextualizing" of the arresting differences arising from the psychological discoveries generated by indigenous psychologists and their incorporation into the bi-cultural contrasts arising from studies in cross-cultural psychology. As asserted there, "If culture matters, and results suggest that it frequently does (e.g., Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006), then this imbalance must be rectified by building *models of culture of use to psychologists*" (Bond, 2010a, p. 714, italics in the original). Specifying the necessary features of this model, Bond (2010a) wrote,

Scientifically, these models of culture require the identification of dimensions across which cultures may be compared and along which they may be ordered with respect to one another. This dimensionalizing requires many more than two cultural groups, and the more the better; no comparison between any two cultural groups can evince such a dimension, only suggest some plausible candidates. In that respect, Chinese-American comparisons, which form the bulk of this handbook, may be provocative and stimulating—they help generate ideas. Eventually, multi-cultural contrasts are needed. (p. 714)

The above "cry to arms" from the Conclusion to the *Handbook* presaged my intention to improve the study of Chinese culture and its peoples. That improvement must acknowledge the concerns of the indigenous psychology movement heralded by Hwang (2012):

... the emergence of the indigenization movement in psychology implies that the implantation of Western paradigms to non-Western countries has encountered numerous anomalies awaiting a scientific revolution. Nevertheless, if non-Western IPists [indigenous psychologists] are unable to construct culture-inclusive theories to replace or to compete with dominant WP [Western psychology] theories, it is unlikely for such a scientific revolution to be successful. (p. 3)

As I now regard the matter, this “revolution” requires at least two features to be successful: 1. a logarithmic increase in the number of cultural units included in any analysis of the cultural impact involved—WEIRD, i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic—Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) in this 21st century at this stage of development in cross-cultural psychology is not merely weird; it is unconscionable. Such research will be effortful, as many participants will be necessary within these many units, but such extensive “culture coverage” is necessary if social scientists are to tease out and metricize the dimensions of culture involved; 2. close attention to the inclusion of constructs and theories less salient to practitioners themselves socialized “under Western eyes” who may well miss the wealth of alternative conceptualizations of reality presaged in earlier cross-cultural work (e.g., Osgood, May, & Miron, 1975; Shweder & Bourne, 1982; Triandis, 1972) and recent developments in construct elaboration, especially in Chinese psychology. This attentiveness requires a willingness to read widely, analyze carefully and to network internationally. Let me outline the progress I have tried to make in this ambitious undertaking to date.

Definitions of Culture for Social Psychological Use

For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments . . .
 Tennyson, *Ulysses*

As a social psychologist, my outcomes of interest are features of interpersonal behavior. If I am to explore the impact of culture on these *explicanda*, then I want definitions of culture that use constructs applicable to explanations for these behavioral outcomes.

Defining culture psychologically. I have elsewhere proposed a *psychological* definition of culture:

A shared system of beliefs (what is true), values (what is important), expectations, especially about scripted behavioral sequences, and behavior meanings (what is implied by engaging in a given action) developed by a group over time to provide the requirements of living (food and water, protection against the elements, security, social belonging, appreciation and respect from others, and the exercise of one’s skills in realizing one’s life purpose) in a particular geographical niche. This shared system enhances communication of meaning and coordination of actions

among a culture's members by reducing uncertainty and anxiety through making its member's behavior predictable, understandable, and valued. (Bond, 2004, p. 64)

Given this definition, what psychological elements have been adduced for building models of interpersonal behavior that incorporate *psychological* approaches to culture? To do so, we must develop measures of psychological constructs that are metrically equivalent across a host of cultural groups. So far in our discipline, these psychological constructs have primarily included dimensions or domains of values (e.g., Bond, 1988; Schwartz, 1992, respectively) and types of self-construal (e.g., Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996), but have been expanded to include social axioms or beliefs about the world held by the individual (Leung & Bond, 2004), motives, such as distinctiveness (Becker et al., 2012) or power (Brochner et al., 2001; Hofer, Busch, Bond, Li, & Law, 2010), contextualism, an individual's tendency to rely on the context in understanding people (Owe et al., 2011), and dimensions of stereotyping used by individual perceivers (Cuddy et al., 2009). It should be noted that some of these adduced constructs have a provenance outside the Mainstream and are non-WEIRD productions; they are indigenous in origin, but applicable pan-culturally!

Other approaches to defining culture. Not all culture is defined in terms of its members' psychological characteristics, nor perhaps should it be. Indeed, there are many approaches to studying culture, sometimes incompatible (Jahoda, 2012). One may use measures of the cultural unit itself, e.g., its productions, or one may ask its members to rate the cultural unit itself, be that unit the nation, organization, company, school, team, family, or dyad (Bond, 2001). The point at issue is whether the dimension of culture, however adduced and whatever its target, may be effectively applied in explaining one's outcome of interest. In my work as a social psychologist, these dimensions extracted for any unit of culture must be linked to individual social behavior through some plausible social-psychological construct.

Indigenous Theorizing and Construct Development

To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
Tennyson, *Ulysses*

In my conclusion to the *Handbook*, I acknowledged the importance of initiatives outside the Mainstream of WEIRD nations and samples in extending our disciplinary compass:

The role of indigenous theorizing, then, is to enlarge our repertoire of constructs and theories in describing and explaining the human condition using scientific best practice. Their ultimate function is to demonstrate how, "Within the four seas, all men are brothers". Non-mainstream cultural groups like the Chinese can enlarge our conceptual ambit, and ground psychology in the whole of human reality, not just their Western, usually American, versions (Arnett, 2008). (Bond, 2010a, p. 713)

I have already mentioned some of the theoretical-conceptual initiatives undertaken by Chinese psychologists in that concluding chapter to the *Handbook*. There are other such initiatives taken by other scholars elsewhere (see e.g., Smith, Huang, Harb, & Torres, 2012, on *wasta*; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984, on *simpatia*), albeit few. The majority of this “boundary extension” has emerged from Chinese psychologizing; regrettably, few other cultural traditions are generating their own constructs and theories (Smith, Fisher, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013).

Value-added indigenizing. There is no guarantee that developing indigenous constructs and theories involving these constructs will help us do a better job in explaining our outcomes of interest. That judgment must be based on whether these additions to our inherited theoretical armamentarium add predictive power over and above the already-existing repertoire in the discipline. If not, what practical use are these local claims? When tested only in Chinese culture, some indigenous constructs do in fact add predictive power to the standard array of established measures, e.g., Keung and Bond, 2002, on social axioms and political attitudes; Zhang and Bond, 1998, on interpersonal relatedness and filial piety; some do not, e.g., Yik and Bond, 1993 on dimensions of person perception and westernization.

Although indigenous constructs may enjoy stronger *local* endorsement, there is no guarantee that they will perform better than WEIRD-derived constructs in bi-cultural or multi-cultural extensions. In such extensions, indigenous constructs occasionally perform better locally than in foreign cultures (e.g., Hui & Bond, 2009, on face loss and the motivation to maintain a relationship), but usually not, e.g., Kwan, Bond, and Singelis, 1997, on relationship harmony; Smith et al., 2012, on *guanxi* (connections); Stewart, Bond, Kennard, Ho, and Zaman, 2002, on *guan* (parental training). Indigenous constructs may feel natural and resonate better with those socialized into their originating community, but there is no guarantee that they will work better for social science when exported into the international arena. That litmus test remains to be passed by any contending construct.

Using Measures of Culture Social-Psychologically

Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
 Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 Tennyson, *Ulysses*

The stage is now set for taking conceptualizations of culture, however derived, onto the world stage. It is here that they must combine with social-psychological constructs, however derived, to prove their worth in explaining the interpersonal outcomes to social psychologists. The surviving theories and their associated constructs could then lay claim to “universal” or pan-cultural status. It is in the quest for this Holy Grail that this insight from the conclusion to the *Oxford handbook of Chinese psychology* becomes relevant:

a second benefit of dimensions [of culture] extracted from multi-cultural studies lies in enabling sophisticated, multi-level studies where individual-level processes are explored across cultural groups using HLM analyses. These studies allow us to see both mean differences [across cultural units] and linkage differences [among individual-level constructs] simultaneously in the same study. (from Bond, 2010a, p. 714, square brackets added)

The role of personality in multi-cultural studies. Fundamental to all studies of interpersonal responses, be they cognitive, motivational or behavioral, is the personality of the actor. Most cross-cultural studies of individual processes, assume that variations across cultural units in the typical personality profile of its members is responsible in large part for the average differences observed in the interpersonal response of interest, be it depression, speed of talking, levels of conflict or degree of emotional expressiveness. The essential role of the actor's personality holds whether the cultural units being compared are dyads, families, teams, companies, organizations or nations, even though nations have been the typical unit compared in our early cross-cultural work.

Of course, any model of interpersonal behavior should also take situational variations into account, using Lewin's simple formula, $B = f(P,S)$, i. e., behavior is a function of personality and situation, as a guide (Lewin, 1936). Given that the actor's personality profile often determines the situations he or she selects for activities, it becomes difficult to disentangle measures of personality from measures of the situation or context for action (Bond, 2013). It is, however, possible to effect such a separation (see Bond, 2013, for suggestions), and an ideal multi-cultural study of social psychological processes should do so, using both personality and situational constructs together.

An example: achieving life satisfaction in 51, representative national samples. Lun and Bond (2013) adopted a simple additive model to predict an individual's subjective well-being, viz., subjective well-being = health + financial satisfaction + trust + autonomy. Using the World Values Survey, they tested representative samples of respondents in 51 national groups, using a total of more than 70,000 participants. This general model was confirmed across all nations, but the strength of the contribution made by some of the predictors varied across the nations concerned.

Using an HLM analysis, Lun and Bond (2013) showed that the components of health and autonomy in their model applied to individuals *regardless* of their nationality. Trust in others and satisfaction with one's finances were, however, variable in their impact, being moderated by the two socialization goals extracted from the World Values Survey, viz., Self-directedness versus Other-directedness and Civility versus Practicality (Bond & Lun, 2013). In nations where Self-directedness is endorsed more strongly, citizens' subjective well-being was more strongly driven by their feeling of trust and less by their judgment of their finances; in countries where Civility versus Practicality is endorsed more strongly, citizens' subjective well-being was more strongly driven by their feeling of trust and less strongly driven by their judgment of their finances. These results show that the socialization emphases characterizing one's national-cultural context operate to

make key outcomes in life more or less important, and hence moderate an individual's sense of satisfaction with his or her achievements in life to date. National culture matters!

Our Disciplinary Future?

Come, my friends, 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

There lies the port;

the vessel puffs her sail:

There gloom the dark broad seas.

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

So, where one was socialized appears to shape how one achieves subjective well-being in that national context (Lun & Bond, 2013). The point here is that the cultural context for one's life makes a difference on this important outcome of interest, and that the difference effected by cultural context is measurable and predictable. With metricized, social-psychologically relevant descriptions of cultural context, we can begin developing testable theories of cultural influence on individual processes and outcomes of interest. Such work will add to the nascent promise for Chinese psychology presaged in my conclusion to the *Handbook*:

Typically, these [multi-cultural] studies show differences across the cultural groups involved, and that the culture-level variables modify or moderate the individual level processes being examined . . .; sometimes not. Regardless of outcome, such studies allow social scientists to begin exploring the universality of psychological processes empirically. Surely, this is the next goal for all cross-cultural psychological work . . . (Bond, 2010a, p. 714, square brackets added)

That emerging "universality" will take social psychologists "beyond the Chinese face" by exchanging two-cultural contrasts involving Chinese persons for multi-cultural contrasts involving many cultural groups, Chinese and non-Chinese. Cultural groups will be mapped according to operationally explicit, psychologically relevant and measurable dimensions of culture. Chinese cultural groups will become embedded within a wider cultural mapping, with Chinese groups disentangled from one another and allying themselves with some surprising cultural partners (see e.g., Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Bond et al., 2004).

Those dimensions of culture will then be used to develop models for individual functioning that include the individual's cultural context as a factor shaping his or her responding. These models may include constructs emerging from any cultural heritage, as long as these constructs are metrically equivalent across the cultural groups involved. These models, when assessed multi-culturally, will then carry some claim to be "universal" or pan-cultural in their application. Each cultural group will show its unique and indigenous profile in terms of the model-derived formula for predicting the outcome of interest the model has been developed to explain.

Epilogue

... I am part of all that I have met;
Tennyson, *Ulysses*

I conclude this latest chapter in my intellectual Odyssey by reiterating my debt of gratitude to those persons who have supported me and those institutions that have sustained me over these many decades. As expressed earlier in my conclusion to the *Handbook*:

I am stunned to realize the extent of my debt to my fellow Chinese psychologists and to the educational environment in Hong Kong culture and in other parts of the Chinese polity that have enabled me to do this work. I have been provided with a resource-full and sustaining job environment, a cooperative network of competent, enthusiastic colleagues, service-oriented support staff. I have written appreciations of these happy circumstances elsewhere (Bond, 1997a, 2003), but wish to close this handbook by thanking its contributing authors and reiterating my life-long gratitude. (Bond, 2010a, pp. 714–715)

Four years later there are more colleagues to thank and another institution to appreciate, and so my gratitude remains and grows.

To seek, to strive, to find, and not to yield.
Tennyson, *Ulysses*

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