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An Epistemological Strategy for Initiating the Third Wave of Psychology

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Commentary

In my article, Philosophical Switch for the Third Wave of Psychology in the Age of Globalization [1], I proposed an epistemological strategy for constructing culture-inclusive theories of psychology which had been used to study Confucian cultural system by myself and my colleagues in Taiwan for more than ten years [2]. The strategy consists of two steps: First, based on the philosophy of post-positivism, I constructed a Mandala model of self [3,4] and a Face and Favor model for social interaction [5,6], both of them are supposed to be universal. Second, I used them as frameworks to analyze the text of four books on pre-Qin Confucian classics, namely, Analects, Mencius, The Great Learning and ZhongYung by the method of hermeneutics. By doing so, we are able to understand the deep structure of pre-Qin Confuciansim including four parts:

- Confucian concepts of Heaven and destiny
- Confucian ethics for ordinary people
- Confucian ethics for scholars
- Confucian theory of self-cultivation

Confucian ethics and morality are transcendental formal structure for sustaining people's lifeworld's in Chinese society, which will be manifested in various aspects of Chinese social life. Once the structure of Confucian ethics and morality have been clearly identified by the scientific methods [1], we are able to construct many culture-inclusive theories with a careful consideration of the context for social interaction. In my book, Foundation of Chinese Psychology: Confucian Social Relations, I demonstrated how I constructed a series of theoretical models for conducting empirical research on social exchange, moral judgements, face dynamics, achievement motivation, organizational behaviors, and conflict resolutions in Chinese society. All of these theoretical models constitute the scientific microworld or the scientific research programmer of Confucian rationalism with the structure of Confucian ethics and morality as its hard core [7].

Because any theoretical model of social science can depict only a particular side of social life [8], now I am teaching member of my research team how to construct more culture-inclusive theories by this epistemological strategy to dialogue with Western models of individualism. Recently, we have published a series of articles as a special issue of Frontier of Psychology to address on issue related not only to Confucianism [9-13], but also some aspects of Legalism [14,15], Daoism [16-19]. Due to the one-sidedness of theoretical construction in social science, I encourage my colleagues to construct more and more culture-inclusive models for the sake of establishing a tradition of autonomous social science in Confucian culture.

Because my Mandala model of self and Face and Favor model of social interaction are supposed to be universal, my epistemological strategy with the utilization of these two models can be applied to study any non-Western culture. In opposition to the pan-cultural dimensional approach prevailing in contemporary cultural psychology or cross-cultural psychology, which pretend to capture the cultural differences by reducing them on such dimensions as individualism/collectivism [20,21], or independent self/inter-dependent self [22], my strategy provides an alternative for non-Western psychologists to construct their own cultural system. Instead of assuming an attitude of anti-colonizationalism, I do belief that a comprehensive understanding on the progress of Western philosophy of science, particularly the switch from positivism to post-positivism, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for non-Western psychologists to escape from the trap of being colonized. As a member in the camp of non-Western psychologists, we should stop complaining about Orientalism, Euro-centrism, or the domination of Western theories and research paradigms, and begin the jobs of constructing culture-inclusive theories by multiple philosophical paradigms to illuminate the subjectivity of our own cultural tradition. I hope that the performance of our works on Confucian cultural tradition may provide an example for non-Western cultural psychologists to follow so that we may initiate the third wave of psychology in the age of globalization.

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