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Globalization and the Global Mind: An East-West Split?

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Abstract. This article highlights Issues in identifying and validating group psychological differences.

Throughout the works of historians, examples of popular cultural products, and analyses of discourses and behaviors, one can find and stay with the thread of hypotheses about group psychological differences.

The different groups in question may be conceived through real or putative material differences (a "hard science" approach)--e.g., skin color, genes, facial structure, geographical or meteorological context--or real or putative social, cultural, political, and economic differences (a "soft science" approach). This "hard science" versus "soft science" distinction is at times self-contradictory as the empirical and experimental methodologies necessary to yield interpretive data often are often more sophisticated and "hard" for the latter than the former. Moreover, there often are more complex difficulties of judgment, logic, and rationalism with the latter given that the social science precursors of alleged psychological differences within, between, and among groups themselves share psychological variance.

The nature of psychological differences stemming from the various criteria used to conceive of groups seem to comprise two classes--viz., behavioral and intrapsychic phenomena with the latter being more tenuous because it's less amenable to observation and is based on a more intricate nomological net of inferences. Yet it is often the class of intrapsychic phenomena that seems to have more potential utility to the sponsors and consumers of such research who seek answers to questions such as "How do they think?" and "What do they think?" and "What do they want?"

The intrapsychic phenomena that are said to substantiate group psychological differences comprise structural, functional, process, and substantive aspects of "the mind." These differences are not only more problematic than behavioral phenomena--as mentioned above--but can effectively be attacked on a number of other grounds. Some researchers have seemed to harbor racist stereotypes concerning group psychological differences and have crafted projects in attempts to support these stereotypes--one notorious example in academic psychology's history involving putative and apocryphal differences as to intelligence. Other researchers have applied data collection and interpretive strategies without even the most remote concern for the ecological validity of these strategies. Still other researchers seem to discount how knowledge can be socially transformed through time--i.e., that the shelf life of empirically validated differences may vary through situation to historical moment.

All the above is but a brief introduction to a significant psychological Issue bearing on today's highly-trumpeted era of globalization: That is, will the many sectors of growing international contact and interdependence contribute to a global psychological homogeneity, heterogeneity, some combination of the two, or no significant effect? This Issue is based on an assumption that there are or can be group psychological differences--behavioral and intrapsychic--that meet the test of the above concerns.

One well-validated psychological difference between individuals socialized in the United States (US) and those socialized in various East Asian countries has to do with causal attributions. East Asians have been

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often shown to be less likely to exhibit the correspondence bias--a preference for to explain the behavior of other people in terms of inferred traits, dispositions, and other internal attributions concerning these other people. In conjunction with this psychological difference, East Asians also seem to view others in a more holistic manner that takes account of salient situational factors.

Such differences in causal attributional styles between groups may have huge significance in matters of life and death--interpreting fatal accidents as the clarion calls of war or economic crises as stemming from controllable belief systems mirroring the local way of doing business as opposed to uncontrollable global macroeconomic factors.

A vital contribution from political psychologists--even beyond documenting group psychological differences and their degree of transience--would be identifying the factors from which policymakers and opinion makers might predict where and when heterogeneities and homogeneities leading away from and towards the global mind are operative. (See Choi, I., Nisbett, R.E., and Norenzayan, A. (1999). Causal attribution across cultures: Variation and uncertainty. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 47-63; Hot air about heat-trapping gases: Causal attributions and global warming policy. (November 20, 1998). *IBPP*, 5(21); McRae, R.R., & Costa, P.T. (1997). Personality trait structure as a human universal. *American Psychologist*, 52, 509-516; Shweder, R.A., & Bourne, E.J. (1991). Does the concept of the person vary cross-culturally? In R.A. Shweder (Ed.), *Thinking through cultures: Expeditions in cultural psychology* (pp. 113-155). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; The psychology of reactance and causal attributions: Implications for public diplomacy. (November 7, 1997). *IBPP*, 3(15); Triandis, H.C., McCusker, C., & Hui, C.H. (1990). Multimethod probes of individualism and collectivism: Cross-cultural perspectives on self-ingroup relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1006-1020.) (Keywords: Causal Attribution, Cross-Cultural Psychology, Globalization, Group Psychological Differences.)