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A Sociology of Science Approach to Understanding Indigenous Psychologies

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In this chapter I discuss several conceptualizations of indigenous psychology movements and identify some critical issues and challenges with which research on these movements must contend. I do not address the intellectual agenda of the movements; instead, I take the role of a sociologist, trying to understand the course of a scientific discipline as an end in itself. I will touch on five broad topics, each briefly.

- How can we look at the movements in a sociological manner? I suggest several models and present some supportive data.
- Who can and who may study these movements? Who has the requisite authority and who has the right?
- How is indigenous psychology rearranging the specialties of social science?
- What is the effect of national wealth in the development of indigenous psychology?
- How do we know when there's progress?

Some research results will be presented in a cursory fashion. This paper is intended to stimulate thought and to bring some controversial topics to the fore more than to present these ideas and issues in a fully developed form. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, please refer to Gabrenya (in preparation-a; in preparation-b).

The Sociological Approach

My approach to understanding indigenous movements focuses on the social, organizational, political, and societal aspects of the movements rather than their intellectual content, except to the extent that this content is itself a source of data. The approach is essentially sociological: "sociology of science" (SoS), outsider analysis of the movements. In my use of

SoS, I'm interested in three phenomena: First, the career of the psychologist, conducted within an academic community and a societal setting; second, the dynamics of social movements that guide and constrain careers; and third, the effect of societal and situational characteristics on the intellectual activities of the academic researcher. One could say that this is a very "cold" approach to the problem in its reduction of the career strivings of many of our colleagues to mere data (much as we treat our research subjects). Cold as the approach may be, at the outset I would like to express my greatest respect for the work of indigenous psychologists and my view that their movements make positive contributions to the field.

The Sociology of Science, also termed Social Studies of Science and sometimes Social Psychology of Science, attempts to understand science, here indigenous psychology, as a social phenomenon occurring in a particular time and place, and does not concern itself with the validity of the intellectual argument. We are not concerned with who is right and who is wrong, or indeed if anyone in social science is making real progress. (Of course, progress is always desirable.) SoS, broadly, looks at science in a societal context, focusing on how societal processes and events affect the direction, speed, and in some accounts, content, of science. It also looks closely at the career dynamics of individual scientists, their motivations, lifestyles, personalities, reward structures, positions in the social stratification system of the society (e.g., gender and ethnicity), social networks, career paths, and educational experiences (cf. Ben-David, 1981; Cole & Cole, 1973; Cole, 1992; Merton, 1973; Restivo, 1994; Shadish & Fuller, 1994; Zuckerman, 1988).

Unfortunately, SoS itself encompasses sharply contrasting approaches to science that generally fall on the same dimension that cross-cultural and cultural psychologists always argue about: relativism (Zuckerman, 1988). In this context, the universalists are often called "realists" because they believe that there is a real, natural world that scientists gradually reveal through research and analysis. The speed at which various branches of science progress, the wrong turns, the distribution of face and favor among scientists, and so on, are viewed as socially or culturally determined, but fundamentally there is something real to be discovered. Wrong turns will eventually be straightened out through good scientific practice.

The relativists are social constructionists who believe to varying degrees that science is a social product influenced by social and cultural

processes (e.g, Restivo, 1994). Since the constructionists are themselves social scientists researching science, they proceed to deconstruct their own research as well, rendering their activities "doubly relativist" and outside of our concern in the present paper.

The difficult problem for even a realist approach to indigenous psychology is that social science is often considered less "paradigmatic" than natural science in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn, 1970), and the realism-constructionism problem is strikingly more problematic. The implication of this problem is that it is very possible that a SoS of indigenous psychology might take several steps beyond not caring if the content of the movement's ideas are right or wrong. For example, it might assume from the start that both itself and all social science are at least partially wrong (at least at present). However, regardless of the validity of the intellectual content of the field, my interest in this research is in indigenous psychology as a social phenomenon.

Five Paths to Indigenous Psychology

I have developed a series of process models that describe "paths" through which individual psychologists and national communities of psychologists become progressively more indigenous at ideological, behavioral, and organizational levels. My research in Taiwan has been aimed at trying to find support for selected components of these models. I am a cultural materialist (Harris, 1979, 1999), and I view the situation of working scientists as an ecological niche to which they must adapt in order to survive and thrive. These models rely heavily on the situational constraints of careers. In its strong form, this approach argues that ideological or intellectual products spring from these ecological concerns and then perhaps exert an autonomous influence on the course of the movement. These models are discussed here very briefly; for a more complete explanation and a description of the empirical research, see Gabrenya (in preparation-a; in preparation-b). Indigenous psychology movements may be facilitated through any combination of the five paths; no single path can be assumed to be necessary or sufficient.

The Local Irrelevance Path

Indigenous movements complain that Western psychology is irrelevant to their local cultural milieus (e.g., Enriquez, 1997; Kim & Berry, 1993;

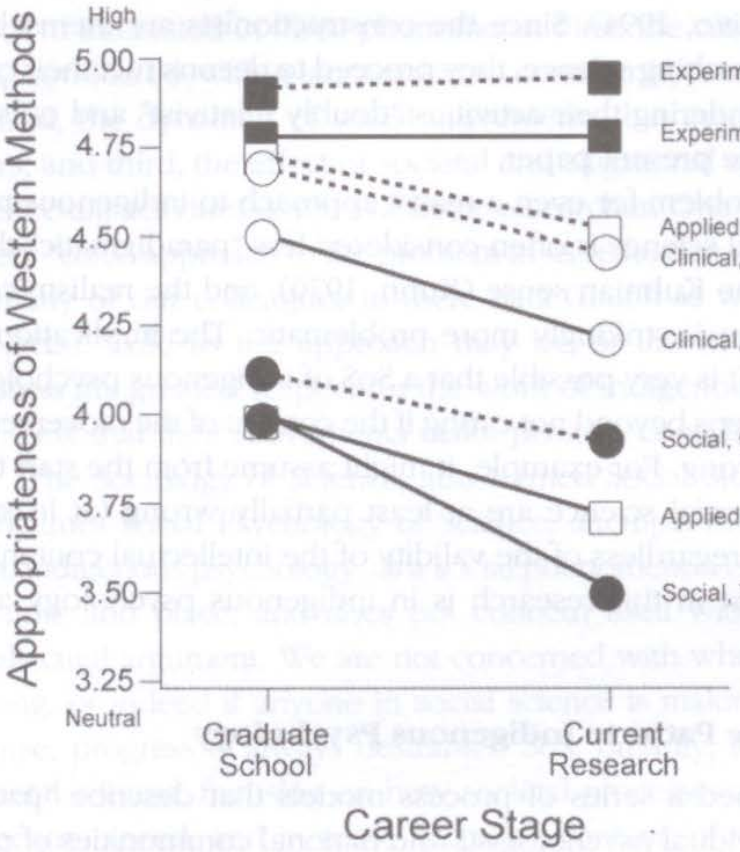

Figure 1. Judgments of appropriateness of primary research activity during graduate school and currently, as a function of field and place PhD was earned.

Naidoo, Olowu, Gilbert, & Akotia 1999; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Sinha, 1997; Yang, 1993, 1997a, 2000). This complaint is certainly one of the key intellectual arguments of the movements, but of interest here is the felt experience of the academic psychologist. I argue that Western-trained psychologists experience four kinds of irrelevancy in their work when they go home to a non-Western country, and that this experience motivates, in part, the exploration of indigenous thinking. Locally-educated psychologists have many of the same experiences, and are socialized to local disciplinary norms. First, the topics that were studied in Western graduate schools (or published in Western journals) may seem silly and unimportant, especially in areas like experimental social psychology. Second, the methods taught in Western graduate programs may be difficult to use given local resources, or tied to topics that are themselves out of place.

Third, the Protestant ideology of Western science may feel discordant with local ideologies, and the arguably rigorous and remote methodology of neo-positivist, quantitative research may seem irrelevant. Finally, the language of graduate training, such as English, may present conceptual problems in dealing with local people and culture, and practical challenges to publishing and communication with Western colleagues.

Research in Taiwan provided various types of evidence supporting these ideas. A sample of 103 Taiwanese psychologists participated in a mail survey that addressed each of the models described here. (See Gabrenya, in preparation-a, for details of the research.) For example, we asked respondents if their main topics of interest in graduate school, and presently, could be investigated using empirical methods that are commonly used in Western psychology. The relevance of Western empirical methods varied as a function of respondents' field (social, experimental, clinical, applied), $F(3, 83) = 6.72$, $p < .05$, of whether we were referring to their graduate school or current research, $F(1, 83) = 6.03$, $p < .05$, and of whether they received their doctoral degree in Taiwan or in the West, $F(1, 83) = 4.91$, $p < .05$. The results show that respondents in the three non-experimental fields have come to see Western methods as less appropriate, and that Taiwanese-trained psychologists feel this way more than Western-trained psychologists. (See Figure 1.)

Conditions of Work Path

The Conditions of Work path hypothesizes that several characteristics of an academic employment situation affect career activities and goals, such as the expectations and resources of the university, teaching loads, the importance of and support for publishing, and certain outside, societal factors. In many non-Western nations, these situational factors present contingencies that differ from those that returning Ph.D.s experienced while in Western graduate schools, and a satisfying career in line with the expectations and goals acquired in graduate school may be unattainable. Sometimes indigenous programs offer more obtainable expectations, and a career can be redefined. This sort of problem may in fact be faced by every academic who is trained in a research university but then must find a career in a teaching university or very small school.

Two measures in our survey study addressed this problem. We asked respondents to evaluate the quality of the resources available in Taiwan

compared to what they thought was available in the West. The overall assessment was very negative: 77% of respondents rated Taiwan below the midpoint of the scale, and 43% chose the lowest scale value. We also asked respondents the extent to which working far from the West makes it difficult to keep current in their field, and found a similar result. Only 25% claimed it was easy or very easy to keep current. This problem appears to be more serious for younger faculty; a moderate relationship was found between year of degree and difficulty, $r_{(76)} = .41$, $p < .0001$.

National Identity Path

Participants in indigenous psychology movements are keenly aware of the political and academic domination of Europe and America and evidence various degrees of resentment of this situation. They also realize, as some citation research has illustrated (Gabrenya, 1988b), that Western psychologists generally ignore the theory and research coming out of non-Western countries, and do so because of a misguided universalism, or more seriously, a misguided "absolutism" (Adamopoulos & Lonner, 1994; Lonner, 2000). Out of this situation, given sufficient societal resources, we might expect the development of a movement to establish a psychological identity in its own right, independent of Western ideas and dominance. No one likes to be ignored.

Our survey of Taiwanese psychologists included four items that formed an index measure of this felt need for identity and recognition. Social, clinical and applied psychologists indicated a need for identity (*Ms* = 3.88 to 3.99 on a 5-point scale), whereas experimental psychologists tended not to ($M = 2.79$), $F(3, 87) = 6.78$, $p < .001$. Throughout this research, experimental psychologists showed a preference for a universalist, natural science conception of psychology that usually precluded indigenous thinking.

The Great Leader Path

The familiar Great Man versus *Zeitgeist* debate returns in the present context. It appears that most of the extant indigenous movements have (or had at their inceptions) strong leaders whose ideas and influence appeared instrumental in the movements' progress. A SoS analysis examines the impact of these leaders and asks difficult questions such as what will become of the movements after these leaders become less active, even if the cultural milieu supportive of indigenous movements continues.

Some indirect support for the importance of leadership was found in our research. Our respondents were asked to nominate a leader of the Taiwan movement, and among respondents who answered these questions, about 90% chose the eminent psychologist Kuo-Shu Yang as the movement's intellectual as well as organizational leader. I interpret this high consensus as an indicator of strong leadership.

Social Movements

Indigenous movements appear to share many of the defining traits of social movements (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1988; Snow & Oliver, 1995): ideology; charismatic leadership; members who share personal motivations for participation; resources; social or material control over members; a supportive milieu; a sense of identity that is tied in part to what they are against and in part to what they hope to change. Adopting a social movement perspective allows us to understand the development of indigenous psychology as a truly social phenomenon.

We would expect that one accomplishment of a successful academic social movement would be control of critical resources such as grant funding and faculty positions. We asked our respondents if their research needed to be "indigenized" in order to be funded locally. Respondents from all fields reported that they needed to indigenize for funding (*M*s = 3.5 to 3.7) with the exception of experimental psychology ($M = 2.2$), $F(3, 66) = 7.0$, $p < .001$. Among experimental psychologists, 20% reported some degree of need to indigenize (endorsing scale responses "neutral, somewhat needed, very much needed") while among the other three field groups, 84% reported such a requirement.

Wealth: The Sixth Path

From a SoS or a social movements perspective, we should look at the intersection of wealth and other factors in predicting when an indigenous movement will appear. The development of psychology may run parallel to the development of democratic political institutions, both appearing and prospering under favorable economic conditions in the context of societal modernization. In the same manner that democracy requires the development of "civil society," indigenous psychology may depend for its development on the achievement of a certain level of "psychological infra-

structure": sufficient Ph.D. psychologists, faculty positions, research opportunities, social acceptance, and so on. Psychology is an expensive activity and, like art, it "follows the money" (Sarason, 1981). Since the lifting of martial law in 1987 Taiwan certainly provided these prerequisite conditions for democracy and indigenous psychology, and both have flourished (Marsh, 1996). Korea has followed a similar course. Understanding the complex mechanisms—economic, social, and psychological—through which wealth affects cultural change in general, and the development of indigenous movements in particular, requires a societal-level analysis.

Cognitive Ecology

Restivo (1994), following in the tradition of Adam Smith, Marx, and Veblen, suggested that "what [scientists] do is more an outcome of the pressure of the situation they are in than of what they have earlier 'internalized'" (p. 106). His concept of "occupational culture" (common tasks, work schedules, job training, career patterns) applies readily to the situations of psychologist working in different nations. "Cognitive ecology" refers to situational influences on the ideas of the working scientist, analogous to an ecological niche but emphasizing the effect of the niche experience on intellectual activity such as metatheories, epistemological orientations, theories, and values. Situations might be viewed in a hierarchical structure beginning at the scientist's academic department and the courses he or she teaches and extending up or out to the *zeitgeist* or *weltanschauung* of his or her time and place. Even in an "era of unprecedented information overload" the load is not evenly balanced and what the psychologist experiences intellectually and ideologically day to day reflects more the nature of his or her social and scientific community than of all the ideas extant in the discipline (especially in a global context). The situations described in the five paths discussed previously in this chapter also represent much of the substance of the cognitive ecological niche of the psychologist.

A strong version of this ecological argument holds that psychologists can't think too far beyond the ideology and intellectual content of their cognitive ecological niche, whereas a weak one would suggest a more distal or multiply determined influence. Both versions suggest that American psychology's slowness in understanding the importance of culture can

be explained by the monocultural experiences afforded psychologists working in a large, insular, effectively monocultural nation.[1] For example, my informal observation of the field suggests that people don't choose cross-cultural psychology because they come to a careful assessment of its value based on a full intellectual review; rather, they have experiences that wrench them from the cognitive ecology of the mainstream.

The cognitive ecology of a Western graduate program can be expected to constrain thought, and of course action, along the lines of Western psychology in a myriad of ways, including explicit contingencies placed on students, the department's value system, and the kinds of experiences, coursework, and ideas to which they are exposed. Most psychologists will not deviate from this ecological constraint unless something happens that "reorients their cognitive ecology." PhDs returning from Western graduate programs to non-Western countries are by necessity subject to a transforming experience—they go home. The cognitive ecology they experience upon return is different than that of their graduate training and differs from the cognitive ecology experienced by those of their graduate school peers who made their careers in the West. Beyond simply a matter of irrelevancy, a different way of thinking about psychology might be expected, perhaps influenced by the processes described in the other models outlined previously.

Who Can and May Study These Movements?

The implicit assumption made in this chapter so far has been that the author has the right to perform this research and has the authority (in the academic sense) to present his findings to an audience of his peers. Although in science the writer's c.v. should suffice as the source of his or her scientific authority, in the present context the issue of authority is complicated by the persistent insider-outsider debate. We ask, who *can* and *may* study the indigenous movements of others?

"Can" and "may" are different ideas. "Can" begs the question of what we are capable of knowing; "may" of what we are allowed to do. Not unlike anthropologists, cross-cultural psychologists have an ongoing, difficult, awkward, maybe exploitative, relationship with the "other" that we hope to figure out. In anthropology, the post-modern debate rages as to whether we can ever know the "other" and if so, how our research can be

sufficiently grounded, intersubjective, emic, relative, and so on, to approach an understanding of the other (D'Andrade, 2000). For these reasons, some Anthropologists have concluded that they *cannot* study the Other, while for ethical or political reasons some feel that they *may* not. However, I know of no writing by indigenous psychologists that directly claims that outsiders *may* not study their movements. But the same might not be true for *can*.

My experience, so far, has been that insiders to an indigenous movement cast a cold eye on outsiders who are peeking in. From an epistemological perspective, these movements take a skeptical stance in their evaluation of outsider, etic, cross-cultural strategies in general (e.g., see Kim, 2000). Compounding the methodological objection, outsiders studying indigenous movements are also famously ill-informed and possibly disruptive. We are ill-informed because we are outside the cultural, academic, and national systems in which the movements develop (Yang, 1997b). Sometimes we cannot speak or read the language in which our data (textual artifacts) are written. (The writings coming from *within* the movement are the data for studying it from *without*, but only if the outsider can read them). Our work is, some might say, "shallow." A similar critique has been made by cultural psychology of cross-cultural psychology (see Hwang & Yang, 2000; Yamaguchi, 2002). However, I argue that this is both a weakness of which we have long been aware, and a strength if etic research strategies are valued. I suggest that outsider perspectives are both (a) always shallow and (b) a necessary complement to insider perspectives. Anthropologists not associated with the post-modern movement have long recognized the value of outsider perspectives:

> "...a century of fieldwork has proven that it is the outsider who is able to articulate cultural practices that are invisible and commonsensical to insiders" (Fiske, 2002, p. 85).

This is a year of ironies in the world, and the insider-outsider problem has its own. Much of the ideological content of indigenous psychologies begins with a two-pronged critique of Western psychology: first, of its validity for studying cultures outside the West, and maybe for studying its own culture, too; and second, of its motives in studying non-Western peoples and in studying non-Western psychologies. However, this critique of Western psychology is itself performed from an outsider perspective.

Phrased slightly differently, indigenous psychologies could be viewed as taking an outsider perspective in criticizing Western psychology, including its sins, as an outsider. "Outside" is a relative assessment, and it is true that many non-Western social scientists have lived in the West and studied Western psychology, while the opposite is less common. It is difficult to assess the extent to which these social scientists, living briefly in the West as young foreign students, really come to understand Western culture in sufficient depth. To use the central term of Taiwanese indigenous psychology, the non-Western critique of Western psychology can never achieve *bentu qi-he xing*, indigenous compatibility with the research subject (K. S. Yang, 1997b; but see C. F. Yang, 1997, for an opposing point of view), because those performing the criticism can never share the perspective of the subject. Taken at face value, this state of affairs leaves all sides incapable of *bentu qi-he xing* and highly limited in their research prospects. However, I believe that both insider and outsider research present useful, mutually balancing perspectives. For example, the outsider critique of Western Psychology has been shallow and unfair, but at the same time very effective in calling to Western psychologists' attention our bad habit of performing culturally uninformed "imposed etic" research "by 747" (Doob, 1980).[2]

Disruptive Outsiders

Outsiders who study indigenous movements are disruptive in the same sense as any anthropologist hanging around a tight community and asking awkward questions. One is reminded of Napoleon Chagnon's (1968) experience among the Yanamamo. We know what he experienced and what he found, but we don't know how much trouble he caused in Bisaasi-teri village. In my own research on the Taiwan indigenous psychology movement, I encountered considerable reluctance among my research subjects, sometimes of the form, "here's what I think but please don't use my name because I want to keep my job." I eventually learned, for example, that I could get more survey data by having it mailed back to Florida than to my research assistant in a Taiwan university. But the other side of this reluctance was that I found myself in a role not unlike Chagnon's, a confidante or outsider to whom "things could be said" to the extent that I was trusted to keep secrets or maintain anonymity. I was careful with my database of field notes.

As an outsider/foreigner studying a controversial social movement, it is difficult to make anyone happy. Members of the movement assume you are engaged in a Western-biased attack on their work, and critics of the movement suspect you are trying to support people who they believe are wasting precious grant money. Members have their own internal conflicts (e.g., see Hwang, 1997; Yu, 1997) and some are insecure about the status of the movement; non-members are worried about being seen as outside the movement. The result is, of course, insecurity on the part of the researcher, frustration, a sense of being in over one's head, and a pervasive feeling that social psychology was never this mysterious.

The Fish Scale Model

Donald Campbell, a brilliant psychologist who cross-cultural psychology (and several other areas) can call one of its own, wrote in the field of SoS. His "fish-scale model of social science" suggests another way to look at indigenous psychology. Campbell argued in this 1969 paper that academic specialties are like overlapping fish scales, and academic fields are collections of scales. The collections are not completely arbitrary but their boundaries were determined in the past by various historical processes in the context of Western universities. Once a field, like psychology, is established through the collection of adjacent scales or specialties, processes of group dynamics, occupational socialization, chauvinism, and academic political economy (competition for resources) come into play that gradually bring the specialties closer to the central values, beliefs, and behaviors of the field. The field, transmitted at ground level through the experiences and contingencies of being in an academic department, produces a proximal component of the cognitive ecology that I discussed previously.

Individual scientists working in "deviant" specialties within the discipline have a difficult time getting respect, promotions, and resources, and in the end have to make hard choices that involve their career aspirations and feeding their families.[3] Campbell argued that the chauvinism and organizational politics of disciplines impairs communication between adjacent specialties that happened to fall into different disciplines (e.g., cross-cultural psychology and psychological anthropology), and this is a problem for social science. I think we experience this all the time in our own work, as I have argued elsewhere (Gabrenya, 1988a).

Indigenous psychology (and probably cultural psychology) seems to be attempting to redefine psychology by rearranging the scales, placing specialties that now fall in psychology and anthropology into the same field. For example, much indigenous work has adopted variants of the ethnographic field methods of anthropology and utilizes the theoretical material of philosophy and cultural studies (e.g., Hwang, 2001). Of course, this violation of boundaries makes everybody angry, because those at the center of the field (read: experimental psychology) can't appreciate the way the deviants at the periphery (read: cultural psychology, indigenous psychology, cross-cultural psychology) are thinking and acting.

Does Progress Matter?

I have stated that the SoS approach doesn't care if the actual products of the disciplines or specialties under examination are scientifically right or wrong. But in fact, if one takes a realist point of view, one could include "progress" as a valid object of study. So how do we know if indigenous psychologies are making progress in their own cultural domains or if they contribute to the progress of world psychology? In Taiwan, K. S. Yang frequently cites various indicators of progress (e.g., see Yang, 1997a), but he is concerned with the progress of a social movement as much as, and possibly more than, simply scientific progress. The reader will recognize the old issue: is social science progressing? In the American pragmatic tradition, we would say that progress is indicated when something works to solve a real problem. Unfortunately, the content of much indigenous work, at least in Taiwan, can't be evaluated that way because it takes a highly theoretical, sometimes ethnographic, style. However, one domain of indigenous activity in Taiwan can be scrutinized from the criterion of pragmatism—applied psychology. Applied psychology must be effective in the local cultural context, or else it disappears; it is indigenous, or it is gone.[4] In my Taiwan research, I found that the applied psychologists shared many indigenous beliefs and attitudes–their appraisal of positivism, acceptance of indigenous psychology, etc.–with social psychologists, in sharp contrast to experimental psychologists.

Conclusion

My concerns in this chapter focused on whether the SoS approach is useful, whether my models are valid, and whether or not we can actually perform this research using each other as "subjects" without causing the kinds of problems that make life as an academic unpleasant. I proposed a set of models to describe the paths along which psychologists in non-Western societies may travel in their journey from an imposed Western psychology to an indigenized, local psychology. The models are ecological or materialist in two senses: the development of indigenous psychology is viewed within the social and economic "ecological setting" of the greater society; and the scientific thinking and creativity of the psychologist is viewed within the "cognitive ecology" of the immediate work situation and larger cultural milieu.

Sociology of science presents a way of thinking that is at once familiar to psychologists trained in the etic traditions of theoretical, universalist research, but at the same time alien in its greater distance from the subject and its disinterest in the validity of the subject's activities and products. This way of viewing the field is not completely unfamiliar to cross-cultural psychology, as evidenced by the several citation analyses and overall appraisals of the field that have appeared over the years (Doob, 1980; Gabrenya, 1988b, 1997; Lonner, 1980, 1994; Öngel & Smith, 1994). However, to my knowledge, the domain of activities—the development of disciplines, the behavior of individual psychologists—on which the SoS analysis focuses is much broader, more difficult to quantify, more amenable to multiple interpretations, and ultimately more controversial than any previous research of which I am aware.

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Notes

[1] Although America is a multicultural society, I suggest that the experiences of psychologists are much more monocultural than those of psychologists outside the United States: "Even the rat was white" (Guthrie, 1997).

[2] Extending this irony, I argue that the outsider critique by cultural psychology aimed at its aging parent, cross-cultural psychology, has been shallow, unfair, and in the end the best thing to happen to cross-cultural psychology since Hofstede's first book (Hofstede, 1980).

[3] This is why it's so hard to get a good job doing cultural or cross-cultural psychology. We all are working in specialties that are deviant from the central perspective of modern psychology.

[4] Lin (2000) illustrates dramatically the failure of an insufficiently indigenized clinical psychology to respond to the mental health service needs of victims of the 1999 Taiwan earthquake.

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