

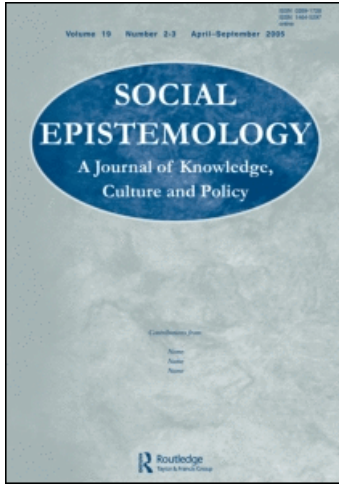
This article was downloaded by: [BIBSAM]

On: 21 April 2011

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 926988077]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Social Epistemology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713765921>

### On the Use of the Culture Concept in the Indigenous Psychologies: Reply to Hwang and Liu

Carl Martin Allwood

Online publication date: 20 April 2011

**To cite this Article** Allwood, Carl Martin(2011) 'On the Use of the Culture Concept in the Indigenous Psychologies: Reply to Hwang and Liu', Social Epistemology, 25: 2, 141 – 152

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2011.552128

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2011.552128>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## REPLY

# On the Use of the Culture Concept in the Indigenous Psychologies: Reply to Hwang and Liu

Carl Martin Allwood

*The culture concept used in the indigenous psychologies is important since these psychologies aim to be rooted in the local culture of the research participants. Culture is an empirical phenomenon. Thus, the extent to which meaning content is shared in a society, and by what categories of people, is an empirical issue. It should not be solved by default by the use of a culture concept that assumes that all cultural content is shared. The philosophical and pragmatic–political reasons suggested by Hwang and Liu are not convincing enough to change this conclusion. Moreover, irrespective of the cultural concept used, it is imperative that the researcher has empirically informed him/herself about the cultural understanding of the participants in the study. Finally, the indigenous psychologies are not intrinsically allied with the nation state and need to be seen as a part of cross-cultural psychology.*

*Keywords:* Indigenous Psychologies; Culture Concept; Meaning; Reification; Heterogeneity; Research Programme

I welcome the responses of Hwang (2011) and Liu (2011) to my paper discussing the foundation of the indigenous psychologies (Allwood 2011) and the possibility thereby created to further elucidate this issue and the use of the culture concept in the indigenous psychologies. In my paper I first noted that researchers in the indigenous psychologies see mainstream psychology as being too western in its cultural foundation. Additionally, a common feature of the indigenous psychologies is that they aim to develop a psychology based on the cultural features that are characteristic of the researcher's society. This feature is commonly stated by authors in the indigenous psychologies, irrespective of their global location. For example, Ho noted that “An

---

Carl Martin Allwood is Professor of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg. Correspondence to: Carl Martin Allwood, Department of Psychology, Box 500, University of Gothenburg, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. Email: cma@psy.gu.se

indigenous psychology is the study of human behavior and mental processes within a cultural context that relies on values concepts, belief systems, methodologies and other resources indigenous to the specific ethnic or cultural group under investigation” (1998, 94). One reason for this approach is the belief that results from psychological research based on the culture in the participants’ own society are likely to be more useful in the sense that they are more applicable to that society.

In my paper I highlighted that, given that the indigenous psychologies are defined by their creators as being rooted in the local culture (i.e. the current culture of their participants), it is surprising that researchers in the English literature associated with the indigenous psychologies have spent so little effort in problematizing or developing a culture concept that is suitable for one’s research programme. When they have done so, they have essentially tended to end up with defining the culture in a society as the shared understanding in the society in question.

Both Hwang and Liu basically appear to agree with me that a culture concept which acknowledges the heterogeneity of the different understandings circulating in a society is fundamentally a good way to understand culture (see also Hwang 2006, 89–90). However, both authors, for philosophical and pragmatic reasons, appear to be of the opinion that the culture concept I propose is unsuitable for the indigenous psychologies. As discussed below, by this stance they provide an interesting example of Eagleton’s observation that “The word ‘culture’, which is supposed to designate a kind of society, is in fact a normative way of imagining that society” (Eagleton 2000, 25). Next I will, as a background to my comments, very briefly present my perspective on the culture concept. Then, I will discuss the response by Hwang and thereafter the response by Liu.

### Meaning and Culture as Phenomena in the Natural World

The culture concept that I argued for in my original article is influenced by the framework provided by the anthropology of knowledge that deals with the change and reproduction of human understanding in its natural, social and cultural contexts (see Allwood 1987, 1993, 1998; Barth 2002). In this framework it is assumed that to understand the development of human understanding in a society, it is not only necessary to attend to how understanding previously shaped within the society is handled, but it is also necessary to study how meaning content (understanding) from other societies is interpreted, modified, and understood in the society. In the anthropology of knowledge, understanding is centrally taken to consist of *meaning* (i.e. represented content),<sup>1</sup> and I suggest that meaning should be seen as a naturalistic phenomenon occurring in the world. Moreover, the culture in a society is seen as the understanding held by the people living in that society. Various parts of this understanding can obviously be shared to a smaller or greater degree among the people living in, or outside, the society.

In general, reaching a consensus about how a meaning should be defined is difficult. Meaning is obviously a complex phenomenon, but I suggest that a useful starting point is to see it as resulting from an interaction between two or more components in the world, one of which is a representation of some kind (e.g. encodings in memory, an utterance, the print of a text in a book, a code, a mental representation in the brain,

etc.). Put differently, meaning may usefully be seen as the result of an interpretation of a representation, which gives rise to some effect; for example, a lived experience, an action or some understanding. In brief, meaning is seen as a naturalistic phenomenon, at least in the sense that it is dependent on local substrates (e.g. brains, print on paper, or zeroes and ones in computers). Since the local substrate on which meaning is dependent differs between actors, their held meaning content (even about the same phenomenon) can be expected to show (however small) variation.

### Lifeworlds and Microworlds

According to the *constructive realism* espoused by Hwang,<sup>2</sup> “there are three levels of reality, the most important of which is called the *actuality* or *wirklichkeit*. [...] However, humans have no way to recognize these structures or rules [that may characterize *actuality*]” (2006, 83; brackets added). The other two levels of reality are the *lifeworlds* constructed by humans in everyday life and the *microworlds* constructed by researchers. Hwang, early in his response to my original article, devotes much space to explain the difference between lifeworlds (a concept inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology and that denotes the individual’s original and to some extent unreflected experience): “For the individual, the lifeworld in which humans live is a primordial world in which everything presents itself in a self-evident way”, and microworlds: “Any scientific construction can be regarded as a microworld” (2011, 127). He notes that “a clear distinction between these two worlds may help us to see the blind spot of Prof. Allwood’s arguments” (Hwang 2011, 127).

The absolute separation of the three “levels” of reality assumed by Hwang (2006) (and presumably also in his response) appears too extreme. It has not been shown that we cannot describe reality to some extent and thus it cannot be taken for granted that this cannot be done. In general, evolutionary epistemology provides good arguments why there are sound reasons to think that there is not a complete separation between the features of “actuality” and our ability to describe it (for example, Campbell 1988a, 1988b). Furthermore, the separation between lifeworlds (i.e. everyday conceptualizations) and microworlds (science) does not seem to be absolute as claimed by Hwang. Science may better be seen as linked to, and dependent on, the understanding in the lifeworld (i.e. everyday understanding; see, for example, Cook’s and Campbell’s 1979 use of this idea in their arguments against Kuhn’s paradigm theory).

### Hwang and the Definition of Culture

In his response to my original paper, Hwang appears to hold many versions of the culture concept. On the one hand, as I noted above, Hwang gives approval to the approach to culture that I suggest in my paper. For example, he notes that

Edward Said is correct in saying: “... all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinary differentiated and unmonolithic” (cited in Eagleton 2000, 15). The social anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1993, 21) is also correct in arguing that the traditional concept of society in the social sciences is unrealistic

for it erroneously assumes that there exist “internally shared cultural features”. (Hwang 2011, 129)

Hwang also notes that “it is essential for indigenous psychologists to construct scientific microworlds from lifeworlds for the progress of indigenous psychology” (2011, 126). This quote could imply that the microworlds should be reflective of the properties of the lifeworld of the people in the researched society.

However, later in his response Hwang rejects the culture concept that I, in line with Said, Barth, Atran, Medin, Ross and others, suggested in my original article. He writes:

we are neither literary theorists, nor cultural critics [like Said], nor cultural anthropologists [like Barth] who are deemed to pay close attention to what is going on in the lifeworld. We define ourselves as indigenous psychologists with our own mission and academic goals to accomplish. (Hwang 2011, 129; brackets added)

The academic goals of indigenous psychologists are said to be “to construct a new theory, even to develop a scientific microworld with appropriate research paradigm to compete with the old ones” (Hwang 2006, 7). By “old ones” Hwang presumably means theories from western psychology that are inadequate or inappropriate to explain domestic phenomena.

This mission apparently, according to Hwang, does not allow for the acceptance of the culture concept I suggested in my original paper. It is here that, according to Hwang, “the blind spot” of my argument appears: microworlds are created by researchers in order to be of strategic use in fulfilling their missions and strategic goals. Thus, Hwang appears to be saying that researchers use microworlds for their pragmatic purposes and that a pragmatic purpose for researchers in the indigenous psychologies is to develop research paradigms that can be used to compete with the ones from mainstream psychology. In brief, Hwang appears to be suggesting that in order for the indigenous psychologies to compete with mainstream psychology, they should, if need be, abandon the central goal of their research programme to be rooted in the culture of the “ethnic or cultural group under investigation” (Ho 1998, 94).

### **Making Theory about Culture**

Hwang also offers assertions on what it takes to make theory about culture. He notes that “It is also well-known that theorizing culture implies its reification” (Hwang 2011, 129). This point appears to be central for Hwang since it reflects the title of his response. In the context of his own work on Confucianism, he acknowledges that:

I fully understand that my strategic approach of solving this problem may reify Confucianism. I certainly understand that nobody in his/her lifeworld will behave exactly in the Confucian way even though Confucian sayings are frequently cited by Chinese people in their daily life. (Hwang 2011, 130)

I agree with Hwang that theorization of culture implies its reification (to some extent), but the question of whether the researcher *to any extent* reifies a culture or not

is not my worry. The more important question in this context is *to which degree* culture is reified. I worry when cultural understanding is assumed to be quite stable over time without any empirical evidence brought forth to substantiate this claim.<sup>3</sup> For example, Hwang (2006), in a structuralist manner, argued that cultures have “deep structures”; and further speculated that:

the language games played by people in their lifeworlds are constituted by the rationality of a cultural group under the influence of their collective unconscious over the history of their evolution. These language games originate from the deep structure of the culture which is an *unconscious* model. (Hwang 2006, 91; original emphasis)

However, no empirical support is provided for these speculations.

Hwang argues for his culture concept by noting that:

Acknowledging that most western theories of psychology are constructed on the presumption of individualism, but that most cultures of the world are not individualist, many indigenous psychologists have attempted to construct theories to describe various aspects of their own cultures. (2011, 130)

It is not clear what this is intended to mean, but possibly Hwang suggests that if the society in question is assumed to have a collectivistic character, the culture concept used when studying that society should also have a collectivistic character. The assumption seems to be that the definition of culture should follow the researcher’s speculations about the character of the society studied and thus that individualistic societies should be studied with one type of culture concept and collectivistic societies with another type of culture concept. However, no clear reason is given why cultures in societies that are assumed to differ in character need to be studied with different culture concepts. In general it will be easier to relate and compare results from different indigenous psychologies if the same culture concept is used in the different indigenous psychologies. Here it is important to remember that culture and the clustering of understanding are empirical phenomena.

In addition, the classification of societies as either collectivist or individualistic can be a shaky enterprise. For example, East Asian societies are usually seen as collective, but it is not very clear what this means and also it is not clear whether this actually is the case for each East Asian society. For example, Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) in an ambitious review found evidence that Japan should not be classified as a collectivist society. Similarly, Yates (2010) reported that Taiwanese participants showed higher overconfidence on various metacognitive probability judgment tasks than participants from the USA, and especially Japan. Another example showing the precariousness of classifying societies as simply collectivist or simply individualistic is the USA. This country is usually seen as an individualistic society but Cross and Madson (1997), after a thorough review of the research literature, concluded that one-half of the population in the USA—that is, the women—is better characterized as having *dependent selves*. If the indigenous psychologies are to be rooted in the culture of the researcher’s society, it seems imperative that the researcher has empirically informed himself about the cultural understanding of his/her society.

## The Development of Culture

Hwang also discusses the stability and development of culture. He notes in his response that, “However, while people living in the same culture experience changes to their lifeworlds, their lifeworlds are constantly sustained by a transcendental formal structure called cultural heritage” (2011, 127). Thus, according to Hwang, lifeworlds are upheld by what he calls “cultural heritage”, but he does not offer any explanation of what he means by “cultural heritage”, nor does he provide any suggestions for mechanisms whereby change to lifeworlds is accomplished. Furthermore, it is not clear if he by “cultural heritage” means *tradition*, which I would consider as only a subpart of the current culture in a society. The reason is that it seems likely that much of the current understanding (culture) in most of today’s societies—for example, understanding associated with “modern life”—is not “inherited” from previous generations in that society (the defining feature of tradition). Given this observation, it does not seem convincing to claim that our lifeworlds are sustained by cultural heritage.

An important aspect of the development of cultural understanding is the new impulses created by the movement of people between societies, but this point does not appear to be appreciated by Hwang when he discusses cultural development. When discussing the development of cultural understanding he does not attend to the fact that over time in history there has been a continuous migration of people into and out of societies. Instead he writes: “groups of people construct their lifeworlds using language and knowledge from the same cultural background in their course of historical development” (Hwang 2011, 127). Likewise, he states: “As people of a given culture contemplate the nature of the universe and the situation of mankind, they gradually formulate their worldviews with original thinking over the course of their history” (Hwang 2011, 128). What is missing in this story is the great flow of people that has occurred in history between societies. In Hwang’s description of how cultures develop, it is as if no-one ever left their living quarters to emigrate to a different place. When people move they take their knowledge and understanding with them. For this reason they may function as creative inspirators, or maladjusted newcomers, in their new environment.

Hwang also argues that “cultures” have “formative” periods. This argument is in line with his assumption (Hwang 2006) that cultures have “deep-structures”. Accordingly, cultures are seen to persist as entities with the same character over longer time stretches and with some phases being easier to influence than other phases. This indicates that Hwang sees the culture of a society on a collective level that exists over time somewhat independently of the understanding of the specific societal members. However, whether the “culture” of a society goes through periods that differ in how easy the culture is influenced and, if so, when such periods occur, are empirical questions that cannot be decided by armchair philosophizing.

Thus, to sum up, the important aspect with respect to culture is that it is an empirical phenomenon, and for this reason it is a very risky enterprise to assume by definition that cultural content is, or is not, shared by the members of the studied society. It is possible that some cultures share more content than other cultures, but this is, in the end, an empirical question.

### Is it OK to Criticize the Indigenous Psychologies without Also Criticizing Mainstream Psychology?

Towards the end of his response Hwang chides me for not also criticizing mainstream psychology, since “if he takes patience to review the literature of mainstream psychology, he can find that his criticism also applies to any effort of constructing social psychology theory in western society” (2011, 130). In contrast to what Hwang then hints—“assuming that western theories of psychology are acultural and universal may save him from the act of attacking mainstream psychology” (Hwang 2011, 130)—I fully agree that any psychology has to rely on cultural premises (i.e. preunderstanding) and that, for this reason, also (“western”) mainstream psychology is culture dependent.

However, the difference between the indigenous psychologies and mainstream psychology is that mainstream psychology has not claimed, or made it part of its research programme, that it is to be rooted in its own culture.<sup>4</sup> If it had done so it would have been relevant to criticize it in this context. This is why I have not attended to mainstream psychology in the context of my original paper, and this also makes it clear why I do not find that the allegation that I am “a commissary for mainstream psychology” is a valid argument (irrespective of that I do not define myself as such). (Just for the record: let it also be noted that I am not “a culture-nihilist” as suggested by Hwang. With respect to culture, I believe that culture is best seen as the understanding located in a society and, accordingly, I do not assume that there is no culture at all, as a “culture-nihilist” would.)

### Philosophy or Empiricism?

I next discuss the response by Liu. Liu asserts that my original paper is grounded “in western thinking about science that privileges analytical philosophy, particularly the importance of constructing definitional categories” (2011, 134). In contrast, Liu’s reply is an argumentation for the usefulness of a pragmatic empirical approach to science. In Liu’s approach it appears that there is no need to spend very much attention on the distribution of the actual cultural content held by the members in a society. Thereby the paradoxical situation arises where a conception of culture that stresses the empirical distribution of understanding in a society (i.e. the culture concept that I argue for) is claimed to be “analytical philosophical”, and a conception of culture that argues that how the culture of a country should be seen should be decided *a priori* from the pragmatic interests identified by the researchers (the culture concept argued for by Liu) is called “empirical”.

Liu argues that the way he suggests that culture should be handled (by, for example, using large geographical divisions such as East Asia and the West) has been empirically supported by the great publication successes of cross-cultural psychology, as compared with, for example, sociology and anthropology that have “wrestled more with difficult epistemological issues like the nature of culture and society” (2011, 135). Although I agree that the approach of looking at differences between countries has been successful in terms of publications, it is not obvious whether the differences often found between,



for example, nations by use of the research methodology described by Liu should be explained by differences in “culture” or by some other factor, such as specific properties of the education system in which the participants have taken part. But more to the point is that this discussion has now lost touch with the original issue; namely the assertion that for the indigenous psychologies to be based on, or rooted in, the culture of the researcher’s society, it is reasonable that the researchers should use an empirical approach to learn about the understanding of various groups and categories of people (e.g. males and females) in his/her society.

In fact, Liu occasionally gives an impression that he argues that the importance of the cultural rootedness of the indigenous psychologies should be down-played: “It is the demands for quantitative verification of theory that provide the basis for determining culture’s contribution to psychology, not analytical reasoning about category definitions” (2011, 135). Liu also asserts that it follows from “Asian philosophical traditions” and “Asian implicit theories” that “Different implicit or explicit definitions of culture will arise in response to different situations that are managed in a pragmatic way to serve researcher agendas” (2011, 138). Given that he holds these assertions to be correct, it is easy to see why Liu does not seem to think that it is an important issue what the empirical culture is in the indigenous psychologist’s society.

Liu argues that my position concerning culture excludes (or, as more vaguely expressed by Liu, that my claim “reminds” him of a philosophy that excludes) “social change, which requires the operation of shared ideas spread out and activated by the leadership of a substantial sub-population” (2011, 138). However, this is a misconception since the culture concept I advocate does not at all preclude that people, in larger or smaller groups, share ideas to a sufficient extent to be able to act on them as a group (they obviously do not have to share the ideas completely to act on them).

In contrast to my actual stance, Liu asserts that my approach to culture is symptomatic of a dualistic approach. In this context, Liu interprets a paper by Kashima (2005) to argue that the debate between hermeneutics and empiricism stems from “within a western dualist ontology that separates mind from matter, human nature from material nature” (Liu 2011, 137). Here Liu appears to move too fast. First, the ontological philosophical debates in the West have often been between dualism and monism, not only between different forms of dualism. Second, if I was to locate my approach to culture anywhere, it would be in cognitive science, which originated in the 1950s and which typically has taken a monist ontological approach (e.g. consider the great importance of the information processing approach for cognitive science!) and not a dualist approach.<sup>5</sup> Thus, neither myself nor, for example, Atran, Medin, and Ross (2005) would, I think, have any problems with the following views by Kashima cited by Liu in his paper:

If we take a view that intentionality is materially realized, meaning is part of a causal chain, and social scientific investigation is also part of complex causal processes, we can adopt a monist ontology, in which human nature is not distinct from, but continuous with, material nature. (Kashima 2005, 35 cited in Liu 2011, 137)

Thus, at least as reviewed here, there does not appear to be any important difference between what Liu labels *Asian holism* and modern cognitive science.

In his response Liu also makes assertions about the nature of psychological science and about the indigenous psychologies that I am sure many researchers would not agree with. For example, he claims that “psychological science is based on quantitative forms of empiricism where the validity of particular categorical boundaries is determined by their predictive utility rather than their definitional status” (Liu 2011, 134). Many researchers would probably argue that this stance is only partly true and that especially the important and central concepts in psychology are also, and should be, determined by their conceptual definitions. That is, many researchers are likely to argue for the importance of theory in contrast to the naked empiricism argued for by Liu.

Liu also makes the controversial claim that the indigenous psychologies are part of cross-cultural psychology and that both are “infused” with what he calls “American utilitarian forms of scientific epistemology” (2011, 134). However, it can be assumed that Liu is well aware of the ongoing debate within the indigenous psychologies with respect to the relation between the indigenous psychologies and cross-cultural psychology.<sup>6</sup> In this debate, many authors do not see the indigenous psychologies as allied with cross-cultural psychology and, in contrast, feel that they have broken loose from cross-cultural psychology and have sided with what is called *cultural psychology* (for examples, see Allwood and Berry 2006). Kim and Park describe the situation as follows:

Indigenous and cultural psychology attempt to examine, articulate and analyze the substantive aspects of culture. General and cross-cultural psychologists, however, criticize the development of indigenous psychologies for accumulation of idiosyncratic data, fragmentation, reverse ethnocentrism, moving against the trend of globalization, and violating the law of parsimony. (2006, 30)

Why Liu chooses to disregard this debate is not clear.

### **Are the Indigenous Psychologies Allied with the Nation-state?**

Finally, Liu claims that the indigenous psychologies, for pragmatic utilitarian reasons, have aligned “themselves with nationalistic projects, rather than pursue more sharply delineated and internally divisive lines of thinking with respect to culture” (2011, 134). In this context, he describes the indigenous psychology launched by Enriquez in the Philippines as an example of an indigenous psychology that is famous partly just because of its political overtones (see, for example, Church and Katigbak 2002). Again, I feel quite confident that many writers in the indigenous psychologies would not agree that it is (or should be) a general characteristic of the indigenous psychologies that they have aligned themselves with the interests of the nation-state. For example, Moghaddam (2006) described the presence of the two indigenous psychologies in Iran, one supported by the state and one more or less in opposition to the state, or at least not well tolerated by the Iranian state.

In his discussion of indigenous psychologies as allied with the nation-state, Liu appears to assume that the relevant problem is how to draw boundaries *around* “cultures”. Liu argues that nations are suitable and relevant units to see as cultural entities and to use for describing cultural boundaries. The reason, according to Liu, is that

it is important not to create chaos in new nations by recognizing the diversity of different ethnic or other groups in the nations. In the context of the culture concept I have no quarrel with this argument (about cultural entities) since my point is that the entities the researcher uses as cultural units should not *a priori* be seen as homogeneous with respect to the content of their cultural understanding; instead, it is important to pay attention to the variation in contents held by the individuals in the cultural entity.

However, I still argue that it would be unfortunate if the indigenous psychologies in general should see themselves as allied with the nation-state. The reason is that they would then obviously risk making it more difficult for the minorities in their nation to make their voices heard and for this reason to be criticized by the minorities in their country as colonial, just as the indigenous psychologies themselves have criticized the West for being colonial also with respect to its way of doing science, including mainstream psychology. Moreover, as I noted above, the English-writing indigenous psychologists do not in general appear to take the stance that the indigenous psychologies should be aligned with the nation-state and that they should tune down the diversity of different ethnic groups. For example, Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006) in the preface to their anthology wrote:

If we had to identify a weakness in the present volume, it is the lack of representation of psychologies representing the indigenous peoples. The volume focuses on modern nations and we could not fully represent scholarly work on indigenous peoples. (2006, xvii)

## Conclusions

In brief, Hwang and Liu agree with my description of the indigenous psychologies' research programme—that is, that they should be rooted in the participants' own culture. And, at times, they also appear to agree with my description of culture content as heterogeneously spread in a society. However Hwang and Liu still resist, for various philosophical and pragmatic reasons, both the conclusion of my original article—that the indigenous psychologies should spend more attention on how they define culture—and that researchers in the indigenous psychologies should carefully base their research on the culture of the actual participants in that research.

I suspect one reason why Hwang and Liu disagree with these conclusions is that they still hold on to a culture concept that foregrounds the shared cultural content in a society. Hwang's assumption that cultures have formative periods and his assumption that cultures have deep-structures exemplify this. Likewise, Liu basically seems to see culture (and maybe cultural content) as shared and, in scale-level, aggregated above the individual and group level. For example, he argues against my culture concept by stating: "There is no way to distinguish individual-level effects from group-level effects from culture-level effects using such a definition" (Liu 2011, 139) and he notes that "sharply defining boundaries between cultures could have had politically devastating consequences" (2011, 136). However, given that cultures to a large extent develop by diffusion, sharp boundaries with respect to the understanding (culture) of different neighbouring populations may often not exist.

In contrast to the culture concept I argue for in my original article, both Hwang and Liu stress the importance of taking a pragmatic stance towards what is seen as culture; Hwang mainly for philosophical reasons, and Liu for pragmatic–political reasons. For example, Liu stresses the legitimacy of the interests of the nation-state in contrast to the interests of minority groups in a country. Without comment Liu reviews the following: “the ‘nation-state’ [has] [...] enormous powers of persuasion that not only describe cultural boundaries, but create and attempt to enforce them ...” (2011, 134; brackets added). For minorities such as the indigenous populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and the various minority groups of The Sudan, this is not good news.

In conclusion, if the indigenous psychologies want to live up to their self-postulated research programme to be rooted in the research participants’ own culture, they should not follow the suggestions by Hwang and Liu to use pragmatic and loose indicators of culture such as the amount of explained variance in comparisons between nation-states (such as, for example, India and China) or the social success of articles being accepted for publication in high-impact factor journals. Instead I suggest they should attempt to live up to their research programme; that is, to attempt to be rooted in the actual culture of the “specific ethnic or cultural group under investigation” (Ho 1998, 94).

## Notes

- [1] Somewhat broader defined understanding can also be taken to also include skills and abilities.
- [2] Hwang (2006) provides a more elaborated version of the epistemology he argues for in his response to my original paper. See also, for example, Wallner and Jandl (2006), who describe the constructive realism on which Hwang relies. Parenthetically, it can also be noted that my assumption above that meaning content can, in general, be assumed to show variation between actors appears to be compatible with the approach to meaning taken by Wallner (for example, Wallner and Jandl 2006).
- [3] In this context it can also be noted that Confucianism and other religions/life-philosophies are instances of culture where there exist canonical texts that contribute to content stability. Other parts of cultural content are not supported by texts that can be interpreted by successive generations.
- [4] But, another type of criticism may be (and has been, many times) levelled against mainstream psychology; namely that it may be insufficiently aware of its cultural rootedness.
- [5] See, for example, Allwood (1989), where I argue for a naturalistic interpretation of Gadamer’s hermenutical approach.
- [6] See, for example, Hwang (2006, 73): “Bitter debates occurred among psychologists supporting indigenous psychology and cross-cultural psychology (Hwang & Yang, 2000).”

## References

- Allwood, C. M. 1987. Anthropology of knowledge and cognitive psychology. *Communication and Cognition* 20 (4): 295–310.
- Allwood, C. M. 1989. Hermeneutics and interpretation in anthropology. *Cultural Dynamics* 2 (3): 304–22.
- Allwood, C. M. 1993. On the anthropology of knowledge. In *New genres in science studies. Papers from the 4S/EASST Conference, Vol. 2, Report No 179*, edited by J. Hultberg, pp. 9–21. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

- Allwood, C. M. 1998. The creation and nature(s) of indigenized psychologies from the perspective of the anthropology of knowledge. In *Knowledge and society*, vol. 11, edited by S. Gorenstein, pp. 153–72. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Allwood, C. M. 2011. On the foundation of the indigenous psychologies. *Social Epistemology* 25 (1): 3–14.
- Allwood, C. M., and J. W. Berry. 2006. Origins and development of indigenous psychologies: An international analysis. *International Journal of Psychology* 41 (4): 243–68.
- Atran, S., D. L. Medin, and N. O. Ross. 2005. The cultural mind: Environmental decision making and cultural modelling within and across populations. *Psychological Review* 112 (4): 744–76.
- Barth, F. 2002. An anthropology of knowledge. *Current Anthropology* 43 (1): 1–18.
- Campbell, D. 1988a. Evolutionary epistemology. In *Methodology and epistemology for social science. Selected papers Donald T. Campbell*, edited by S. Overman, pp. 393–434. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Campbell, D. 1988b. Descriptive epistemology: Psychological, sociological, and evolutionary. In *Methodology and epistemology for social science. Selected papers Donald T. Campbell*, edited by S. Overman, pp. 435–86. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Church, A. T., and M. S. Katigbak. 2002. Indigenization of psychology in the Philippines. *International Journal of Psychology* 37 (3): 129–48.
- Cook, T. D., and D. T. Campbell. 1979. *Quasi-experimental design and analysis issues for field settings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Cross, S., and L. Madson. 1997. Models of the self: Self construals and gender. *Psychological Bulletin* 122 (1): 5–37.
- Eagleton, T. 2000. *The idea of culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Ho, D. Y. F. 1998. Indigenous psychologies: Asian perspectives. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 29 (1): 88–103.
- Hwang, K. K. 2006. Constructive realism and Confucian relationalism: An epistemological strategy for the development of indigenous psychology. In *Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context*, edited by U. Kim, K.-S. Yang, and K. K. Hwang, pp. 73–107. New York: Springer.
- Hwang, K. K. 2011. Reification of culture in indigenous psychologies: Merit or mistake? *Social Epistemology* 25 (2): 125–31.
- Kashima, Y. 2005. Is culture a problem for social psychology? *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 8 (1): 19–38.
- Kim, U., and Y.-S. Park. 2006. The scientific foundation of indigenous and cultural psychology: The transactional approach. In *Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context*, edited by U. Kim, K.-S. Yang, and K. K. Hwang, pp. 27–48. New York: Springer.
- Kim, U., K.-S. Yang, and K. K. Hwang. 2006. Preface. In *Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context*, edited by U. Kim, K.-S. Yang, and K. K. Hwang, pp. xv–xvii. New York: Springer.
- Liu, J. H. 2011. On the limited foundations of western skepticism towards indigenous psychological thinking: Pragmatics, politics, and philosophy of indigenous psychology. *Social Epistemology* 25 (2): 133–40.
- Moghaddam, F. M. 2006. Origins and development of indigenous psychologies: An international analysis. C. M. Allwood and J. W. Berry, *International Journal of Psychology* 41 (4): 256–7.
- Oyserman, D., H. M. Coon, and M. Kemmelmeier. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin* 128 (1): 3–72.
- Wallner, F. G., and M. J. Jandl. 2006. The importance of constructive realism for the indigenous psychologies approach. In *Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context*, edited by U. Kim, K.-S. Yang, and K. K. Hwang, pp. 49–72. New York: Springer.
- Yates, J. F. 2010. Culture and probability judgment. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4 (3): 174–88.