The Mandala Model of Self

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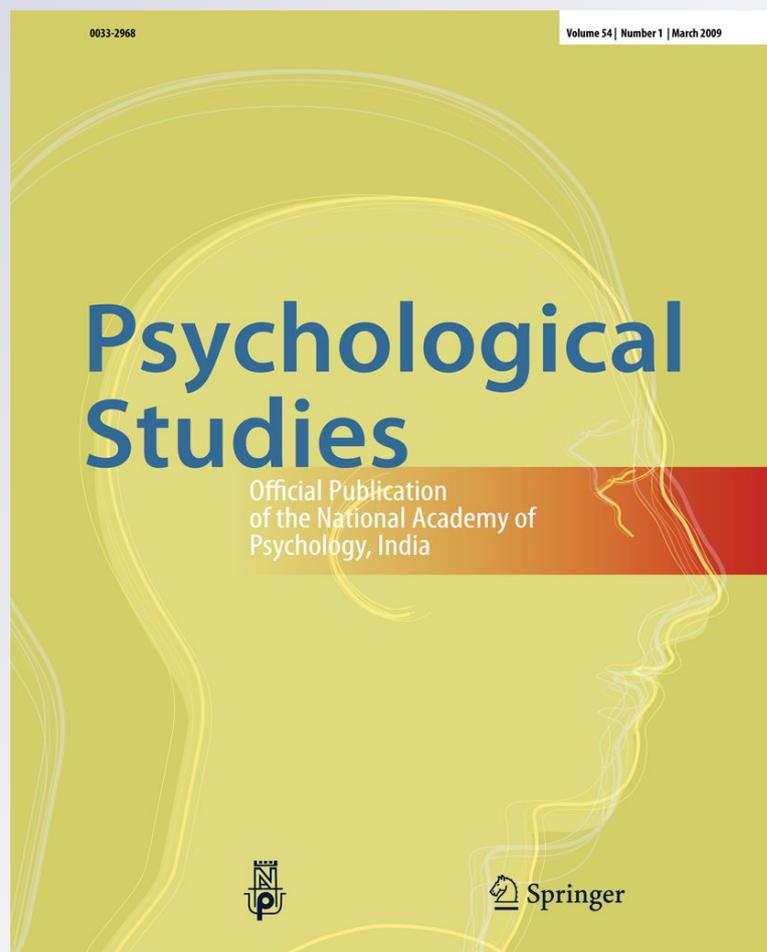
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Abstract The research by Hendrich et al. (2010a, b, c) from the University of British Columbia has indicated that 96% of psychological samples published in the world's top journals from 2003 to 2007 were drawn from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies, which house only 12% of the world's population. Compared with the WEIRD samples, most of the world's population is non-Weird. Therefore, the most important mission of Asian indigenous psychology is to initiate a scientific revolution by constructing various kinds of theoretical models to describe psychological phenomenon and behavior of people from non-Weird countries. Keeping this in view this paper tries to articulate a theoretical model of self which has potential to go beyond the western models.

Keywords Reflexivity · Knowledgeability · Self-identity · Social identity · Quadratura circle

A Universal Model of Self

This article proposes a universal model of self for the development of indigenous psychologies in either Western, or non-Western countries. I strongly object to the reductive approach of cross-cultural psychology, e.g., the research paradigm of individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Triandis, 1994, 1995), or the model of independent-interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1998), which attempted to put the WEIRD samples of Western countries on the side of individualism or independent self, and to arrange samples from non-Western countries on various locations along the dimension of collectivism or interdependent self. This type of approach might be adequate for describing WEIRD samples from Western countries, but it is very likely to draw distorted conclusions for understanding people of non-Western countries. Therefore, it is necessary for us to construct a universal model to illustrate the functioning of self in various cultures.

The Mandala Model

The model thus constructed is called the Mandala Model of Self. The so-called "self" in this model refers to an individual who has been socialized with the ability of reflexivity, whose life world can be represented by a structural model with a circle inside a square (See Fig. 1). In her article *Symbolism in the Visual Arts* which was included in the book *Man and his Symbols* edited by Jung (1964), Aniela Jaffe indicated that alchemists played an important role around 1000 A.D, when various sects appeared in Europa. They sought the integrity of mind and body and created many names and symbols to denote this integrity. The core of one of them was called *quadratura circle*. This name appears to be incomprehensible; but in, fact it can be depicted as a standard model of Mandala.

Jaffe (1964) showed that whether in the sun worship of primitive people, or in modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the Mandala plotted by Tibetan lamas, or in the planar graph of secular and sacred architectures in every civilization, the symbol of the circle represents the most important aspect of life, namely, the ultimate wholeness; whereas the symbol of the square indicates secularity, flesh, and reality. Therefore, Mandala can be viewed as a symbol for the prototype, or the deep structure of the Self.

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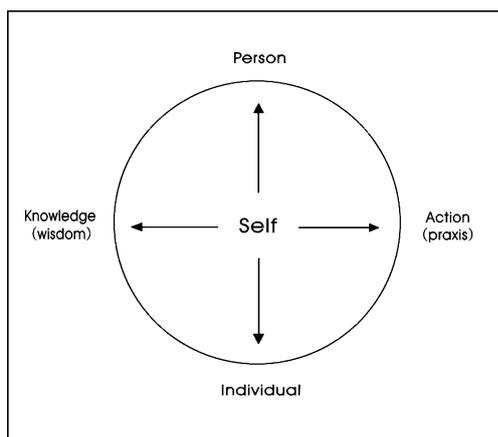
Fig. 1 The prototype of self as a Mandala

When considering the deep structure for an individual's self, we are able to construct a universal model of self to illustrate the relationship between an individual's action and his/her cultural traditions, to facilitate the development of indigenous psychologies.

Person, Self, and Individual

In Fig. 1, self in the circle is situated in the center of two bi-directional arrows: One end of the horizontal arrow points at 'action' or 'praxis', the other end points at 'knowledge'. The top of the vertical arrow points at 'person', and the bottom points at 'individual'. All of the four concepts are located outside the circle but within the square. The arrangement of these five concepts means one's self is being impinged by several forces from one's lifeworld. But, all the five concepts have special implications in cultural psychology, which need to be elaborated in detail.

The difference between person, self and individual was proposed by the anthropologist Grace G. Harris (1989). She indicated that these three concepts have very different meanings in the Western academic tradition which holds the individual as a biological concept. It regards individual human beings as members of the human species who are no different from other creatures in the universe.

'Person' is a sociological or cultural concept. A person is conceptualized as an agent-in-society who takes a certain standpoint in the social order and plans a series of actions to achieve a particular goal. Every culture has its own definitions of appropriate and permitted forms of behaviors, which have been endowed with specific meanings and values, that can be transmitted to an individual though various channels of socialization.

Self is a psychological concept. In the conceptual framework of Fig. 1, self is the locus of experience which is able to take various actions in different social contexts, and is able to indulge in self-reflection when blocked from attaining its goals.

Habitus and Reflexivity

According to Giddens' (1984, 1993) structuration theory, the self as the subject of agency is endowed with two important capabilities—reflexivity and knowledgeability. Reflexivity means that the self is able to monitor his or her own actions, and is able to give reasons for its actions. Knowledgeability means that the self is able to memorize, store, and organize various forms of knowledge, and make them a well-integrated system of knowledge.

However, it is unnecessary for an individual to reflect on each of his or her actions. Giddens (1993) argued that an actor's practical consciousness enables oneself to be familiar with and even embody particular practical skills or knowledge in a tacit way. In Bourdieu's (1990) constructivist structuralism, he used the term *habitus* to denote this kind of embodied structuralized behavioral tendency. Habitus means an actor's disposition toward praxis or action in a specific social context, that enables the actor to carry out the dynamic physical and mental practice within specific socio-cultural orders.

Though there are some rules for the actor's practical consciousness, most people may have to learn them through practical experience. They know how to act, but may not necessarily know why they have to do so. However, when an individual reflexively monitors his own actions or that of others, his discursive consciousness enables him to calculate or to evaluate the consequences of his action, and to rationalize his own or other's actions.

The Duality of Self

From the perspective of psychology, an individual's ability of reflexive awareness will result in the duality of self. First, self as a subject is able to integrate his own behaviors which make one different from others; this is the basis of one's sense of self-identity. In addition, self has the ability to reflect on oneself and therefore knows one's relationship with other objects in the world. Therefore, one may regard oneself as part of a particular social group and acquire a sense of social identity.

An individual's self-identity and social-identity have very important implications for one's self-reflection. In Fig. 1, the horizontal bi-directional arrow points at action and knowledge, and the vertical one points at person and individual respectively. This means that the self in one's lifeworld exists in a field of forces. When an individual intends to act, his decision may be influenced by several forces, especially when one identifies oneself with a particular social role. On the one hand, the individual has to think about how to act as a socialized person. On the other hand, he is pushed by various desires for he is also a biological entity. When he takes action and encounters

problems, he may reflect by using the information stored in his personal stock of knowledge. If the problem persists, he may take further steps to search for the solution from his social stock of knowledge.

When an individual identifies with a particular social group, he has to communicate with other group members thereby constructing a mutually shared social reality. As members of a particular social group, the social reality thus constructed may be plagued by certain specifc problems. In such a situation, an individual may have to search from the social stock of knowledge for the solution of a particular problem, on behalf of the whole group.

The Development of Personal Knowledge

In the aforementioned model of self, personal stock of knowledge and social stock of knowledge are two core concepts which should be elaborated from different perspectives. First, the content of personal stock of knowledge can be understood in terms of Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

Cognitive Schema

The genetic epistemology proposed by Piaget (1977) argued that knowledge is neither the apriori truth advocated by idealists, nor determined by sensory experience as insisted by empiricists. It is a product of interaction between subject and object, during the process of attaining familiarity with the object. Piaget's interactionism advocated that all recognition, even the perceptual processes, are not simple copies of the reality. The mechanism of recognition always includes the process of integrating new experience with the object into preexisting cognitive structures.

'Schema' is a core concept in Piaget's psychology. It is the cognitive structure of the 'same kinds of activities' that can be transferred from one situation to another. An individual is able to use it to coordinate various actions, by assimilating all activities sharing the same characteristics, while maintaining commonality for actions of repetition. For example, a child's behavior of collecting toys and his behavior of collecting stamps at a later age, may both stem from the same schema of gathering. Arranging stones according to size and numbering objects may be coordinated by the schema of ordering.

Thus we may find a lot of schemata, accordingly. Because an activity may contain many actions, several schemata are required to structuralize a specific activity. In other words, a schema does not work alone in most situations. In this sense, human intellectual activities are

the collaboration of various schemata so as to integrate them into a holistic system.

The Process of Adaptation

Piaget (1977) argued that an organism has to adapt to the changing environment constantly. Human intelligence is just a form of adaptation during an organism's evolution. Stated more clearly, human intelligence is gradually developed through various forms of adaptation. It is a special form of an organism's adaptation. An organism's way of adaptation is to construct its world by using materials; the way of adaptation for human intelligence is to be creative by using spiritual (?) materials.

Adaptation is the process by which an organism changes oneself to coordinate with the environment to reach a state of equilibrium, with the purpose of pursuing one's survival and maintenance. Two mechanisms are operating in the process of adaptation—assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation means that an organism integrates environmental factors into one's preexisting structures without changing itself. Accommodation requires an organism to change one's preexisting structures to incorporate the novel situations encountered in the environment. The ideal state of equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation is called adaptation.

Human intelligence adapts to its external environment in the same way. In the process of assimilation, intellectual activities have to structuralize empirical materials from the external world and integrate them into the pre-existing schema or intellectual structure. In the process of accommodation, intellectual activities have to change the structure of schema constantly to adapt to the new environment. The operation of these two mechanisms is a bi-directional dialectical process—only when assimilation and accommodation reach equilibrium and the structure or schema of intelligence becomes a steady system, will the process of adaptation be completed.

The Development of Intelligence

Therefore, knowledge has neither originated from the prior forms as emphasized by idealists, nor the mechanical reflections of the real world in the human mind as proposed by the empiricists. It is a consequence of the interaction between the subject who is recognizing and the object which is to be recognized. Piaget believed that a subject's recognition of the world must be grounded on the basis of one's biological development. Therefore, he devoted his lifetime to study the developmental stages of children's concepts of such categories as time, space, numbers and logical thinking. In general, children's intellectual development can be divided into four stages (Piaget 1977), namely,

Sensory-Motor Stage, Pre-operational Stage, Concrete Operational Stage, and Formal Operational Stage. From the age of eleven to fifteen, children's thinking will gradually go beyond concrete objects and begin to use formal and abstract reasoning, which enables them to draw conclusions by deduction from the hypothesis. At this stage, they will be able to formalize hypotheses according to the requirements of logic and combine them systematically. Their knowledge thus obtains infinite possibilities.

Of course, when we say that children are able to develop logical thinking at formal operational stage, we do not mean that every child at this age will develop the ability of logical thinking. As I mentioned before, Piaget was an interactionist. He believed that recognition has originated from the interaction between the subject and object. If one's cultural environment does not provide enough stimuli, and children have no opportunities to learn logical reasoning, they may not develop the habit of logical thinking even though they have reached the age when the formal operational stage begins, and the growth of their knowledge might thus be limited.

The Wisdom for Action

The wisdom for action is certainly contained in one's personal stock of knowledge. It may guide an individual to conduct intelligent actions in various social contexts. According to the theoretical model of Fig. 1, the social praxis of self in a certain context is pulled by two forces—person as a social agent and individual as an organism. In order to act as a person accepted by the society, when an individual wants to satisfy one's own desire, he has to learn how act in accordance with the socio-moral order via the process of socialization. Viewing this from a psychological perspective, an individual has to learn moral principles which he has to follow in the developmental process of his increasing interaction with the society.

In his book, *The Moral Judgment of the Child,* Piaget (1932) advocated using the method of structuralism to study children's development of moral judgments. He argued that children's development of moral judgments has to go through several stages from heteronomy to autonomous self-discipline. The transformation of cognitive structures is a consequence of personal cognitive maturity and synergetic interaction with others. Only when a child has developed the ability of logical thinking required for formal operations, and is able to interact with peers on the basis of social equality, can he be released from the suppression of adult authority and develops the cognitive schema of reciprocity. This kind of structural transformation is not a result of social learning. Social learning can explain only superficial behavioral changes, not the development of cognitive deep structure.

Stages of Cognitive Development for Moral Judgments

Inspired by Piagetian theory, Kohlberg (1984) postulated children's cognitive development of moral judgments as three levels and six stages. The first level of pre-conventional morality can be divided into punishment-and-obedience orientation and hedonism orientation; the second level of conventional morality can be separated by 'good boy' or 'good girl' orientation and social order maintenance orientation. The third level of post-conventional morality is further divided into contract, right, and democratically accepted law orientation, and individual principles of conscience orientation.

Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment development (1984) is an elaboration of Piaget's theory (1932). He also believed that an individual's moral development is basically a kind of transformation of cognitive structure, originating from one's interaction with the environment. Each level is characterized by a specific thinking style which forms a hierarchically integrated structural order, including rules for connecting empirical events and organizing actions that may activate the principle of adaptation, with the purpose of reaching a higher-level equilibrium. More importantly, through the process of individual development, different thinking styles formed a constant order. Cultural factors can only affect the speed or the limitation of development, but they are not able to change the order of development.

Cross-cultural studies which have been done in different parts of the world indicate that children's development from stage 1 to 4 is basically universal, as predicted by Kohlberg's theory (1984). However, considerable variation has been found in the content of moral judgment in stage 5, in different areas of the world, which do not match with the prediction made by Kohlberg's theory (Snarey 1985). Moreover, Kohlberg found that the moral reasoning style of stage 6 is just an ideal, because few people think in this way. Therefore, Kohlberg thought that it is a hypothetical construct—only very few people who go beyond stage 5 can reach this level. In fact, Kohlberg did not measure the reasoning of stage 6, in the final edition of his book *The Measurement of Moral Judgment* (Colby & Kohlberg, 1984).

Reflections on the Meaning of Existence

John Gibbs (1977, 1979), one of Kohlberg's students, found several such problems in Kohlberg's theory of moral development, after long-term collaboration with him. Therefore, he tried to re-interpret Kohlberg's theory in terms of Piaget's theory of epigenetic epistemology. He

argued that the unique feature of human development can be understood in terms of two phases—standard and existential. According to Piaget, the development of human intelligence is an integration of various aspects of social, moral and logical thinking, which follows a certain standard phase, just as in other organisms. However, its maturation provides the foundation for the development of a human's unique existential phase.

The four stages of the standard phase in Gibbs' theory of moral development (1979) correspond to stage 1 to 4 of Kohlberg's theory. However, with the expansion of second-order thinking in adolescence, individuals in the higher stages of development are able to use 'objective meta-perspective' to understand the complex modern social system. Furthermore, they can reflect on the special circumstances where they exist in the world. This leads to the possibility that they may define a personal moral theory to illustrate the moral principles that they obey, from a standpoint different from other members of the society (Kohlberg, 1973: 192). Because the development of existential phrase is not affected by epigenetic factors, it does not necessarily follow a standard process. People around the world show different kinds of wisdom when they are thinking about their own morality, science, and philosophy of living. When individuals in this stage attempt to define their own moral conscience, normative philosophy that circulates in a society may become material for one's second-order thinking/meta-ethical reflection.

Social Stock of Knowledge and Cultural Tradition

Gibbs' (1977, 1979) modification of Kohlberg's theory of moral development has important implications for the development of indigenous psychology. Thinking in terms of the Mandela model of self, when an individual's cognitive development reaches the formal operational stage, or his moral development enters the stage of postconventional morality, the development of his cognitive ability enables him to learn not only various kinds of knowledge, but also different concepts of personhood. An individual has to integrate various concepts of personhood to forge his own self-identity with a specific sense of conscience. Furthermore, he may formulate his own social identity when he identifies himself as a member of a particular social group.

Social Stock of Knowledge

When an individual takes action in accordance with a specific socio-moral order and is able to deal with various problems in his daily life, it is unnecessary for him to change his cognitive structure. However, when an individ-

ual's personal knowledge is not enough for him to solve the problems which he encounters in daily situations; he may begin to search for solutions from various types of social stock of knowledge.

Social stock of knowledge has been preserved by a specific cultural group during the progress of its history. The so-called cultural groups usually have existed for a period of time; therefore, their way of solving problems in their daily lives may become a fixed pattern. These patterns may become so-called cultural traditions (Shils, 1981), which could be transmitted to others from generation to generation. When an individual is in need of this knowledge, he may seek them from experts, books and even search the internet.

Cultural Groups

In this article, "cultural group" is defined in a very loose way. All those who have identified themselves with a specific group and their daily social practices have become a kind of tradition, can be called a "cultural group." For example, Christianity in Europe, Confucianism in East Asia, Hinduism in South Asia, and Islam in the Middle-East and Southeast Asia, are significant cultural groups that have a definite impact on people living in these areas; they may thus become targets of research for indigenous psychologists. In addition, business organizations, NGO groups, and even playgroups which have been formed by teenagers through the internet, also have their own ideal person, and can be regarded as "cultural groups" for targets of research in indigenous psychologies.

Viewed from this perspective, the white American college students, which constitute the major samples of research in contemporary mainstream psychology, are no more than a specific kind of cultural group. The psychological knowledge, especially the social psychological knowledge, which has been constructed on the basis of such biased samples, is surely very WEIRD. Thus, the most important mission of indigenous psychology is to pay close attention to cultural traditions of non-Western countries and study the actions of different cultural groups in their daily lives.

However, it should be noted that as a consequence of rapid cultural exchanges among different regions in the modern world, new cultural groups are emerging constantly. They are deemed to encounter many problems which can become the targets of research for indigenous psychologies. According to the theoretical model of this article, even the community of "indigenous psychology" itself is only a kind of "cultural group" emerging from the rapid cultural exchanges of the contemporary world. People who identify themselves with indigenous psychology or even indigenous social science, may also encounter similar problems and

challenges from the perspective of this article. Indigenous psychologists should be able to provide reasonable solutions to these problems to facilitate further progress of indigenous psychology.

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