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978-0-521-76015-7 - Fundamental Questions in Cross-Cultural Psychology

Edited by Fons J. R. van de Vijver, Athanasios Chasiotis and Seger M. Breugelmans

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## Introduction

FONS J. R. VAN DE VIJVER, ATHANASIOS CHASIOTIS  
AND SEGER M. BREUGELMANS

There is a time-honoured tradition in academia of writing a *liber amicorum* for a senior at the end of a typically successful career in university. But, as we know from ethnography, even rituals with a seemingly similar purpose come with much cultural variation. The idea of a combination of a universal theme and local variations is applicable to this book in a double sense.

First, it explains why the book has been written. Ype Poortinga is no longer Professor of Cross-Cultural Psychology at Tilburg University, the Netherlands, but has become an emeritus professor. This book is a *liber amicorum* dedicated to Ype as the founding (and still active) father of cross-cultural psychology in Tilburg and a key international player in the field. Yet, we deviate from the implicit recipe of the *liber amicorum*. This variation is mainly inspired by Ype's preferences. We think that a book with an up-to-date overview of modern theories and models in cross-cultural psychology will give him much more pleasure than a selection of chapters with anecdotes from his colourful past, in however lively a manner these are described. History is important in the book, not as anecdotes, but as references to the state of cross-cultural psychology forty years ago and to its current state. We take stock of cross-cultural psychology of the last forty years, which roughly spans Ype's professional career as well as the rise of empirical cross-cultural psychology.

Second, the theme of universal phenomena with local variations has become the prevailing view of cross-cultural differences in the field, and Ype was one of the early adopters. The theme of similarity against a backdrop of differences (or differences against a backdrop of similarities) is a running thread through all chapters.

In the first part, the editors set the stage for the book. The central question of the book is how far empirical cross-cultural psychology has advanced in the last forty years. Progress is evaluated here in an unusual manner, in the sense that the chapters do not separately present the evidence for any (lack of) progress for each subdiscipline of the field. We first define the crucial

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questions of our field in the first chapter; the later chapters describe how subdisciplines have dealt with these questions. The book focuses on four pivotal questions in cross-cultural psychology; providing answers to these questions and changes in the answers over time implicitly address the topic of progress in cross-cultural psychology. These four questions, which have been leading themes in Ype's work, are as follows:

1. *How do we explain cross-cultural differences?* The history of empirical cross-cultural psychology has shown considerable changes in preferred causal frameworks for explaining cross-cultural differences, such as field (in)dependence, popular in the 1960s and 1970s and now largely abandoned, and individualism–collectivism, which is very popular nowadays. The chapters in this section address this question by evaluating how successful causal frameworks are and whether we should look for the sources of cross-cultural differences at a global level, such as individualism–collectivism, or at the more specific level, such as culture-specific norms and conventions.
2. *What is the role of methods/methodology in the explanation and interpretation of cross-cultural similarities and differences?* In the early days of empirical cross-cultural psychology it was fairly common to argue that cross-cultural psychology was first and foremost a method. The field did not have its own theories, and was mainly characterized by applying models and measures of Western descent in new cultural contexts. Much has happened in the last forty years. There is a massive database with empirical findings, more cross-fertilisation of theories in cross-cultural and mainstream psychology and an ever-expanding set of statistical tools to address bias and equivalence issues. We are much better equipped than ever before to integrate theory and methods. The chapters in this section deal with the question to what extent methods have been successfully integrated in substantive fields.
3. *What is the role of development in cross-cultural psychology?* It is an interesting question how newborns are socialised and eventually become the adult carriers of their culture who in turn socialise their offspring. The study of cross-cultural similarities and differences is necessarily the study of their ontogeny. We can learn much about how cultures influence behaviour by studying cross-cultural differences and similarities across the lifespan. The chapters in this section approach the question of development from different angles, showing various ways in which the integration of developmental questions can enhance our understanding of cross-cultural similarities and differences.
4. *How can culture best be conceptualised?* Psychologists tend to shy away from the question of what they mean by culture and leave this difficult question to other disciplines like cultural anthropology. In particular when culture

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is seen as the property of aggregates such as an ethnic group, psychologists seem to think that they can conveniently ignore the issue. However, we contend that the way in which culture is conceptualised in theories is essential for cross-cultural psychology. It is more productive to deal with the question explicitly than to ignore it and implicitly adopt a perspective that may not be fruitful or cannot stand critical scrutiny. The chapters in this section explicitly address the question of what culture is and how it should be conceptualised in cross-cultural studies.

Each of these questions is dealt with in a separate part of the book. The topic of the second part is the explanation of cross-cultural differences and the evaluation of theories and frameworks to account for these differences. Gustav Jahoda provides a historical overview of attempts to systematise cross-cultural similarities and differences in terms of general principles and models by our immediate and more distant intellectual ancestors. He describes the origins of methods and models in cross-cultural psychology. Walter J. Lonner provides an overview of prevailing theories dealing with the patterning of cross-cultural differences. He first describes various types of universals and then applies the categorisation to prevailing theories to evaluate their status. John W. Berry has a more focused perspective and examines the development and applicability of the ecocultural framework. The model is one of the most encompassing frameworks to explain cross-cultural differences and attempts to understand the relation between individuals and their physical, cultural and social context. Dianne A. van Hemert describes a meta-analysis testing various frameworks of cross-cultural differences. Her chapter links to the method theme of the book in that she found strong evidence for the impact of methodological factors on the size of observed cross-cultural differences, such as the type of sample (e.g., students and adults) and correction for bias. Finally, Seger M. Breugelmans critically reviews current conceptualisations of individual-culture relationships, notably adaptation and internalisation, as well as the extent to which these can account for empirical findings. He proposes to use norms, which can be situation-specific, to link individuals with their cultures.

The third part of the book deals with methods to study culture. Johnny R. J. Fontaine builds on the well-known distinction between absolutism, universalism and relativism. He proposes to introduce a fourth category, labelled repertoire universalism. The category refers to (non-genetic) organism–environment contingencies that lead to universals in psychological functioning; for example, universal requirements for groups to survive contribute to a universal value structure. Ronald Fischer reviews models of relationships between individual-level and group-level variables. He discusses opportunities and limitations of the most common cross-cultural study designs (i.e., culture-level studies, studies unpackaging culture–behaviour links at the individual

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level, cross-level studies and experimental priming studies). He concludes that the four approaches provide pieces of a jigsaw that need to be combined in order to be meaningful and comprehensive. Alison Karasz describes the renaissance of the use of qualitative methods and recent attempts to more fully integrate qualitative and quantitative methods as well as the implications for cross-cultural psychology. Finally, Fons R. J. van de Vijver describes the relationship between bias and real cross-cultural differences, as well as methods that can be used to combine these two sources of cross-cultural differences. He argues that the dichotomy between biased and unbiased cross-cultural comparisons is often applied in a static, mechanical manner, which does not do justice to the often strong relations between bias and valid cross-cultural differences.

Development is the focus of the fourth part. The chapter by M. Cole, Boris G. Meshcheryakov and I. V. Ponomariov fits in the cultural-historical tradition and links Russian and Western research on the role of culture. Much attention is paid in this tradition to the role of development and the formative role of culture in the development of psychological functioning. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı describes the interface between culture and self. She is interested in the question how the self develops in the interplay of two universal needs, namely relatedness and autonomy. She argues that, contrary to what is often assumed, these two needs are compatible and complementary. Heidi Keller addresses the systematic interrelationship between biology and culture with the resulting conception of culture-specific developmental pathways. The development of the child can be understood as being based on both species-wide processes that lead to universal features of human functioning and context-specific features that are much more likely to lead to culture-specific aspects of psychological functioning. In his chapter, James Georgas describes the role of the family in ontogenetic development. Based on a large cross-cultural study of families, he emphasises universal aspects of families, such as strong emotional bonds with members of the nuclear family and kin, and the greater expressive and childcare roles of mothers compared to fathers. These universals are found against a backdrop of substantial cross-cultural differences in various family aspects, such as the focus on hierarchy in the family, which is typically less in more affluent countries. Finally, Athanasios Chasiotis links evolutionary developmental psychology to cross-cultural psychology. He describes how various fundamental questions of cross-cultural psychology can be successfully addressed if we use insights from evolutionary developmental psychology, notably the concept of open genetic programmes. These programmes are suitable for overcoming dichotomies between universal and culture-specific aspects of psychological functioning.

The fifth part deals with culture conceptualisations. Lutz H. Eckensberger distinguishes four perspectives in cross-cultural psychology (physical, biological, sociocultural and the potentially self-reflective human being).

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He describes the incommensurability of these perspectives. This is followed by an outline of cross-cultural psychology in which meaning plays a crucial role and which can overcome the incommensurability. Michael Harris Bond describes various basic issues in cross-cultural psychology by describing conceptual, methodological and practical challenges he met during his professional life. He views culture as a shared system of beliefs, values and expectations that enable coordination and communication among its members. Shalom H. Schwartz describes a thorny issue in cross-cultural psychology, namely the relations between concepts at different levels. He describes both similarities and differences in human values at individual level (e.g., security, achievement, hedonism and concern for others) and at culture level (e.g., hierarchy, egalitarianism, harmony). His argument is that the two levels are complementary, have important similarities but cannot be reduced to each other. Peter B. Smith explores the conceptualisation of culture in studies of organisational behaviour. He addresses the interplay of organisational and national culture, followed by an overview of studies that examined cross-cultural differences in organisational behaviour. Globalisation of business is discussed as an important domain where local and international culture meet. He argues that, despite this globalisation, differences in national culture will probably remain relatively intact. Finally, Chi-yue Chiu and Young-hoon Kim explore the relationship between culture and self in detail. They go beyond the debate on whether self-processes are universal or culture-dependent by proposing a set of basic principles to organise the extant literature on East–West differences in self-processes. The need for positive distinctiveness of the self is taken to be universal; yet, its expression is moderated by cultural factors such as norms. Culture is viewed as an evolved mechanism for regulating personal and class interests such as distinctiveness.

The final chapter (and part) of the book has been written by Ype H. Poortinga. He first reviews the previous chapters, emphasising what he sees as the crucial contributions. He comments on the advances in some domains and the sluggish progress in other domains of cross-cultural psychology. In the second part of his chapter he describes a proposal to advance the field; themes of special importance are the balance between biological and cultural aspects of human functioning, levels of explanation, the need to include development in our studies and the question of whether cross-cultural differences have stochastic components (which would imply that there are limits to the predictability of cross-cultural differences in psychological functioning). Drawing on work by ethologists such as Tinbergen, he wants to move away from the dichotomy between universal and culture-specific features of psychological functioning and to focus more on biological foundations of behaviour and behavioural variation. He proposes a distinction between constraints referring to law-bound regularities in

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behaviour and affordances referring to the range of available options within which choices are being made.

As argued above, the book is not organised as a regular *liber amicorum*, a textbook, or an edited volume that presents the state of the art in a particular field. Rather, the authors and editors have attempted to focus on themes that are crucial for cross-cultural studies. Providing answers to these questions was, is and will continue to be crucial for the advancement of cross-cultural psychology as a science. We hope that the reader shares the excitement we experienced when editing the volume and also shares our view that much has been achieved in past forty years, but that the challenges ahead of us are at least as big.

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## PART 1

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### Setting the stage

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## 1

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## Fundamental questions of cross-cultural psychology

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The source of a river is often difficult to find. More often than not, rivers originate from multiple small-water sources and creeks that trickle down, often underground, until they merge in larger streams and eventually become a river. The situation is not much different for scientific disciplines. Cross-cultural psychology started about forty years ago as a separate discipline, but its intellectual parental disciplines are much older. Since its inception, the field has grown considerably. Indeed, it may even be fair to argue that, as a scientific discipline, cross-cultural psychology has come of age. There are a few journals (such as the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, the *Journal of Cross Cultural Management* and the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*) that are entirely devoted to the field, and there are many more journals that publish cross-cultural studies on a regular basis. All mainstream psychology journals have published cross-cultural studies. In addition, there is a professional organisation that is exclusively devoted to cross-cultural psychology (the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology). Both the association and the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* were launched at about the same time forty years ago, which seems to provide sufficient institutional reasons for defining this as the beginning of the discipline.

The ancestral roots of cross-cultural psychology can be traced back to a variety of social and behavioural sciences. The most important examples are psychology, anthropology, ethnography and sociology. The strongest influence has always come from mainstream psychology. Most pioneers in the field were originally trained as psychologists, and by far most of our theories and models have been directly or indirectly derived from psychology. This dominance has led to a preference for the use of quantitative methods in cross-cultural studies, although there have always been strong undercurrents that emphasise qualitative methods, often inspired by anthropological work. However, in spite of the predominance of a single, (quasi-)experimental methodology, the topics that have been studied cross-culturally have changed considerably in the past forty years.

A clear shift can be observed in topics of cross-cultural studies, as has been observed in content analyses of publications in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural*



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*Psychology* (Brouwers *et al.*, 2004; Cretchley, Rooney and Gallois, 2010; Lonner *et al.*, 2010; Öngel and Smith, 1994; Smith *et al.*, 2001; van de Vijver and Lonner, 1995). The studies that drew most attention in the 1960s and 1970s involved perceptual habits such as visual illusions and cognitive style (field dependence/field independence), and cognitive development such as studies of Piagetian conservation. However, in the last decades the focus has shifted to social-psychological topics, such as attitudes, norms and values. Concurrent with this change, a decrease in experimental studies and an increase in the use of self-report data can be observed. The shift towards more social psychological topics is exemplified by the emerging field of 'cultural psychology', which is particularly popular in the USA (Kitayama and Cohen, 2007). It is notable that writers in this field hardly refer to earlier cross-cultural studies, suggesting that the social psychological orientation on culture is tending to become a field of its own.

There are also some themes that have received a continual flow of attention since the establishment of the discipline, such as the development of research methods in cross-cultural studies (and the limited applicability of mainstream methods). This attention is a consequence of the specificity of methodological issues in cross-cultural comparisons and the ever-increasing possibilities of statistical analyses and software packages that open up new avenues of cross-cultural comparison. Another recurrent theme is the uncritical usage of Western instruments in non-Western cultural contexts including the use of Western norms in other cultural contexts and the poor quality checks on translation procedures.

To summarise, cross-cultural psychology is now an established field, and many developments in the discipline have taken place since it was first set up. In this book we want to look back and see how far we have advanced in answering the questions posed by the pioneers of our field, such as the nature, patterning and emergence of cross-cultural differences. In addition, we want to look forward and describe our views on how we can build upon the achievements of past research and how we can meet the challenges that are posed to our field.

In the remainder of this chapter we first focus on four fundamental questions that have been present since the inception of the field, namely: (1) how 'deep' or profound are cross-cultural differences in psychological functioning? (2) what are the main methodological challenges to the field? (3) how does culture become ingrained in human development? and (4) what is the relationship between individual and culture? Secondly, we address some of the major achievements and challenges in cross-cultural psychology. Thirdly, we address the ways in which culture can be conceptualised in cross-cultural research. Finally, we draw some conclusions about the current state and development of cross-cultural psychology and provide some scenarios for how the field might develop in the years to come.

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[More information](#)**Four fundamental questions***Question 1: how ‘deep’ are cross-cultural differences in psychological functioning?*

Are cross-cultural differences the tip of an iceberg that hides important universals or are these differences so pervasive that similarities and universals can only be found in very specific areas (e.g., neurophysiological) or at very abstract levels of generalisation? Although not always explicitly stated, positions on this issue differ substantially among cross-cultural researchers. Disagreement on the profundity of cross-cultural differences goes back to opposing views on what could be called essentialism. Theories in favour of essentialism claim that cultures (or groups of cultures) are fundamentally incomparable because they are based on incommensurable principles. Examples of this view are Nisbett’s (2003) distinction between East Asian dialectical thinking and Western analytical thinking, and Shweder’s (1990) claim that culture and psyche ‘make each other up’, which both prominently feature in the field of cultural psychology. In its extreme form, essentialism argues that cultures are fundamentally incomparable, making cross-cultural psychology a futile undertaking.

The extreme form of cultural relativism is opposed by a view which has become known as ‘the psychic unity of mankind’, which goes back to Waitz (1821–64), Bastian (1826–1905), Boas (1858–1942) and Tylor (1832–1917). For Bastian, ‘the mental acts of all people everywhere on the planet are the products of physiological mechanisms characteristic of the human species . . . Every human mind inherits a complement of species-specific “elementary ideas” . . . and hence the minds of all people, regardless of their race or culture, operate in the same way’ (Wikipedia, 2008). In its extreme form, universalism can take the form of denying the relevance of cross-cultural variation (a view called absolutism by Berry *et al.*, 2002). Cultural differences are seen here as epiphenomena that can be completely accounted for by minor variations in the expression of universal variables. Examples can be found in the work of evolutionary psychologists such as Tooby and Cosmides (1992), who claim that culture can be totally explained in terms of adaptations, and of psychologists who favour a genetic explanation of cross-cultural differences. An example can be found in work of Rushton (1989), who claims that a whole variety of cross-cultural differences in psychological functioning, notably intelligence, can be explained by genetic differences.

It is clear that neither the extreme relativist nor the extreme universalist perspective can count on widespread support among researchers. Still, differences in opinion regarding the size and nature of cross-cultural differences in psychological functioning have been prevalent all along the forty-year history of the field. A few examples of such discussions can be found in the debate on