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How Can Indigenous Research Contribute to Universal Knowledge?

An Illustration with Research on Interpersonal Harmony

Abstract

The indigenous perspective is argued to provide a more complete, in-depth, and accurate account of psychological phenomena for a given culture. However, a major issue is that indigenous research tends to be ignored by researchers from other cultures. Chinese researchers who conduct research on indigenous issues may find it hard to publish in major English-language journals. This paper explores how Chinese indigenous research is able to contribute to universal knowledge. Chinese are characterized by a relational and collectivistic orientation, whereas theories in the West tend to have a self-focus, primarily due to its individualistic culture. However, most psychological research conducted in the Chinese context is guided by Western theories, which likely results in incomplete understanding of Chinese behavior. A relational perspective can augment Western theories and facilitate the contribution of Chinese indigenous research to new theory development. To illustrate this possibility, the paper summarizes current indigenous research on two harmony motives, and shows how such research can help advance social exchange theory.

Keywords: indigenous research, Confucian, collectivism, harmony enhancement, disintegration avoidance.

The indigenous perspective is argued to provide a more complete, in-depth, and accurate account of psychological phenomena for a given culture (e.g., Enriquez, 1990; Kim & Berry, 1993; Tsui, 2004; Yang, 2000). Practically speaking, indigenous research should generate the most appropriate solutions to local problems because the findings and the theories guiding the research are highly compatible with the phenomena under study (Leung, 2009). However, a major issue is that indigenous research in non-Western cultures does not receive much attention from Western researchers, who tend to regard indigenous research and theories as irrelevant to their cultural contexts.

As the “publish or perish” mandate has spread to many non-Western cultures, such as Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, and Singapore, there is a surge in the need to publish in high-impact journals in the West (Leung, 2007). Researchers in non-Western countries who conduct research on indigenous issues may find it hard to publish in major English-language journals. To illustrate this point, we focused on organizational psychology and analyzed the 92 articles published in *Journal of Applied Psychology* in 2011. We found 10 papers based on research conducted in the Great China region, but none of them followed an indigenous approach. Indeed, the vast majority of organizational research conducted in the Chinese context is mainly guided by Western theories (Tsui, 2007, 2009). Some studies try to offer insight for Western organizations to operate in China by taking the Chinese cultural context into account (e.g., Kim & Wright, 2011; Leung, Zhu, & Ge, 2009; Li, Chen, & Shapiro, 2010; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007). However, this type of research is generally not indigenous in orientation even though the aim is to help the adaptation of non-Chinese firms in the Chinese context.

Is Indigenous Research in Chinese Culture Relevant for the West?

We believe that the difficulty in publishing indigenous research in Western outlets arises mainly because Western researchers – major contributors to psychological knowledge – tend to view the findings of indigenous research as only relevant to the local context. We argue that this is more a bias than an established empirical fact, as we are not aware of any compelling argument and finding for the conclusion that indigenous theories and findings from non-Western cultures are unlikely to be applicable in Western cultures. For argument's sake, Western psychological theories can be regarded as indigenous in nature, as the goal is to develop accurate understanding and prediction of the behaviors of individuals in the Westerner cultural context, but not the behaviors of people from non-Western cultures. However, Western theories and findings are often assumed to generalize to other cultural contexts, and previous research has indeed demonstrated that many Western theories do perform reasonably well in non-Western contexts like China. For example, the five-factor model, originally developed in the West, posits five basic dimensions of personality (the so-called Big Five dimensions), namely, Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The five-factor model has been examined in quite a number of non-Western cultural contexts (for a review, see McCrae & Costa, 1997; McCrae, Costa, Del Pilar, Rolland, & Parker, 1998). Studies in China reviewed by McCrae, Costa, and Yik (1996) suggest that the five personality factors are identifiable in the Chinese cultural context. They claimed that the five-factor model “can be said to summarize aspects of Chinese personality structure that are universal” (p. 198). If the theories or findings from North America or Western Europe work reasonably well in

very different cultural contexts like China, there is no compelling logic why findings and theories from non-Western cultures are typically not generalizable to Western cultural contexts.

We argue that indigenous researchers from non-Western cultures are able to develop novel, seminal ideas and theories that are not necessarily restricted to their own cultural context, but may be applicable in diverse cultural contexts (Leung, 2009). Indigenous research in non-Western cultures, which have different intellectual and cultural traditions from those of the West, has immense potential to contribute to universal theories by modifying, enriching, or supplementing Western concepts or theories, and by offering brand-new theories (Li, Leung, Chen, & Luo, 2012). For example, a comparison of creativity across the East and the West can reveal omissions in Western creativity research, and findings and theorizing originating from the East may point to intriguing and novel research directions (De Dreu, 2010; Morris & Leung, 2010).

This paper explores how Chinese indigenous research is able to contribute to universal knowledge. We propose that theories in the West tend to have a self-focus, primarily due to its individualistic cultural orientation. For example, Western researchers have devoted much attention to theorize and investigate how individual differences influence people's attitudes and behaviors. Judge, Heller, and Mount's (2002) meta-analysis confirmed the linkages between the Big Five personality traits and job satisfaction. Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, and Scott (2009) demonstrated that core self-evaluations such as optimism are associated with fewer perceived stressors, lower strain, and less avoidance coping. Although impressive progress has been made in

relating individual difference variables to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004), the vast majority of the constructs examined are characterized as “self-contained” (Sampson, 1988), without much concern for the way people are embedded in and related to their social environment. These personal attributes and orientations are typically based on self-descriptions or characteristics about the self, and Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992, p. 23) observed that “the individualistic and rationalistic character of contemporary psychological theories of the self reflects an ethnocentric Western view of personhood.” For theoretical advances, Sampson (1989) decades ago called for alternative conceptualizations that differ from the self-focused theoretical constructs dominant in the literature in the West, but little progress has been made.

The Global Relevance of the Relational Perspective

Chinese culture is characterized by a relational and collectivistic orientation, and provides a good source of ideas for refining and extending Western self-focused theoretical constructs (e.g., Cheung et al., 2001; Farh, Zhong, & Organ, 2004; Smith, Huang, Harb, & Torres, 2012). Doubt may be raised about the applicability of indigenous theories and ideas developed from a relational perspective in the West. However, we argue that even if relational constructs are not highly salient in Western cultures, it does not mean that they cannot be identified. Triandis (1996) suggested that individualistic and collectivistic tendencies can be found in different situations within any given culture, which deviates from the previous conceptualization of culture as relatively homogenous (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). Because individualistic and collectivistic elements may co-exist in a culture, it is possible to expect an individualist to display

collectivistic behavior in some situations. Consistent with this view, Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Benet-Martínez (2000, p. 709) argued that cultural frame can shift in “response to culturally laden symbols,” suggesting that collectivists can behave like individualists when they are subjected to individualist primes. Hong and Chiu (2001, p. 181) suggested that cultures are not rigid systems, but should be viewed as “dynamic open systems that spread across geographical boundaries and evolve over time.” Recently, Fang (2012) argued that cultures should be viewed as possessing inherently paradoxical value orientations, and that opposite traits of any given cultural dimension can coexist in a particular culture. These arguments suggest that culture is fluid, and people may shift their cultural orientations as a function of the relevant stimuli encountered in a situation (Leung & Morris, in press). Westerners may become relational and collectivistic in a given context, and this dynamic conceptualization of culture supports the possibility that many indigenous findings and theories may be relevant for Western cultures.

Some studies have indeed shown that relational theories and constructs developed from an indigenous approach in China are applicable in Western cultural contexts. For example, the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI) (Cheung et al., 1996) was developed as an indigenous personality inventory to measure Chinese personality. In a comparison of the CPAI with the NEO-PI-R, an instrument based on the five-factor personality model from the West (Costa & McCrae, 1992), a similar factor structure was found for both Chinese and American participants, including the indigenously derived dimension – Interpersonal Relatedness of the CPAI (Cheung, Cheung, Leung, Ward, & Leong, 2003; Cheung et al., 2001). That is, the five factor model was found among the Chinese respondents, and the interpersonal relatedness

factor was found for Americans. As another example, although the notion of relationship harmony is developed based on collectivistic cultural dynamics, it has an impact on life satisfaction beyond the influence of self-esteem in Hong Kong as well as in the United States (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). These findings support the argument that research findings and theories developed in non-Western contexts can be relevant in Western contexts, and that indigenous research may offer new insight and contribute to the development of truly universal theories.

In sum, indigenous research from a relational perspective in the Chinese context can address the individualist bias in Western psychological research. Generally speaking, when compared with Westerners, Chinese people emphasize relationships with others more, and their own personal characteristics less (Chen & Chen, 2004; Li, 2006; Luo, 2011), thus providing a rich source of relational constructs and theories to complement theories originated from the West.

Two Broad Approaches to Globally Relevant Indigenous Research

There are two broad ways for indigenous theories derived from the Chinese context to become globally or universally relevant. In the *distinctive approach*, indigenous researchers can develop their own unique and novel universal theories that are distinct from existing theories. For example, paternalistic leadership, a Chinese leadership style that combines strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence and moral integrity, is a prominent leadership style in Chinese culture (Farh & Cheng, 2000). This leadership style is very different from mainstream leadership styles in the West because of very different assumptions and ideologies, including the emphasis placed on individual accountability, efficacy, and

autonomy. However, recent research suggests that paternalism may also be identifiable in the North American business context (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). A theory of paternalistic leadership is likely to account for important leader and follower behaviors in the West, which may be a novel contribution to the global knowledge of leadership behavior.

In the *integrative approach*, indigenous findings and theories are integrated with relevant theories from the West for the development of both locally and globally relevant theories (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). This approach is much more prevalent than the distinctive approach because Western research has a long tradition, and it is natural to compare and contrast Chinese indigenous research with similar research originated from the West. However, a successful integration of Chinese indigenous research and relevant Western research for the development of a universal theory is rare, and we don't know much about how such an integration should be achieved. To illustrate how Chinese indigenous research can be integrated with relevant Western theories and research for theoretical innovation, we discuss below a program of indigenous research on interpersonal harmony and its integration with a major Western theory. In this research program, the concept of interpersonal harmony was developed based on the traditional Chinese culture, then generalized to a Western context, and recently integrated with a major theoretical framework of interpersonal interaction from the West – social exchange framework (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Homans, 1961). We highlight how Chinese indigenous research can contribute to the extension of social exchange framework, a universal theoretical framework that is relevant for diverse social behaviors.

Chinese Indigenous Research on Harmony and its Universalization

Harmony and Confucianism

Among Chinese indigenous constructs, harmony is probably most important for understanding conflict behavior of Chinese (Chen, 2001; Chen & Chung, 1994; Knutson, Hwang, & Deng, 2000). Harmony is rooted in Confucianism, and the nonconfrontational communication and conflict style widely observed in East Asia is typically attributed to the prominence of interpersonal harmony and relationship maintenance (e.g., Chen & Pan, 1993; Hwang, 1997-8). However, Leung, Koch, and Lu (2002) suggested that although harmony is emphasized in Confucian teachings, the attribution of the conflict avoidance tendency of Chinese people to Confucianism is inaccurate. While Confucius did advocate harmony, he also encouraged diversity of views. This tenet is articulated clearly in the Analects, and one example is given below:

“The gentleman agrees with others without being an echo. The small man echoes without being in agreement.” (The Analects, translated by Lau, 1983)
君子和而不同，小人同而不和 《子路篇第十三》

Leung et al., (2002) concluded that the essence of harmony in Confucianism is about maintaining a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship, and promoting a common concern for humanity and morality rather than about the primacy of avoiding disagreement and confrontation. In Confucian philosophy, confrontation, debate, and disagreement are encouraged in the pursuit of righteousness. Leung et al. (2002) therefore argued that conflict avoidance commonly observed among East Asians has little to do with Confucianism, but is closely related to cultural collectivism as conflict avoidance is consistent with the emphasis on the smooth functioning of an ingroup in

collectivistic societies (Yamagishi, 1988; Yamagishi, Jin, & Miller, 1998). The importance attached to groups in collectivistic cultures gives rise to values favoring the maintenance of their integrity and proper functioning by suppressing disagreement and conflict (Leung et al., 2002). Because confrontation and conflict can threaten group cohesiveness and cause the disintegration of relationships, they are typically viewed as negative and avoided in collectivist cultures (Brett, 2001; Leung, 1997).

A Dualistic Model of Harmony

Leung et al.'s (2002) contrast of classical Confucianism and cultural collectivism suggests two dimensions along which harmony can be reconceptualized. The classical view of harmony in Confucianism suggests a value perspective that recognizes harmony as a goal rather than a means to an end, while the cultural collectivism view is more in line with an instrumental perspective that views harmony as a tool to secure self interest. The distinction between an instrumental and a value perspective is well-known in the literature, and an example is justice, which can be conceptualized from a value and an instrumental perspective (Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

In line with the two perspectives, Leung (1997) identified two harmony motives. In *harmony enhancement*, interpersonal harmony is promoted because it is seen as a virtue and an end in and of itself. In contrast, individuals motivated by *disintegration avoidance* tend to avoid actions that may strain a relationship to prevent potential loss in self-interest associated with the disruption of interpersonal harmony. In a similar vein, Huang (1999) identified two major types of harmony based on her qualitative research conducted in Taiwan. Genuine harmony refers to truly harmonious relationships while surface harmony refers to seemingly smooth relationships with latent conflict. Generally

speaking, genuine harmony and surface harmony correspond to interpersonal situations characterized by the salience of harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance, respectively.

Harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance are not opposite ends of a single dimension, and their interplay forms a 2×2 framework (see Figure 1). The first category, labeled as *aligning*, represents a situation when harmony enhancement is high but disintegration avoidance is low. People in this category pursue interpersonal harmony out of a genuine concern for harmony, which is close to the Confucian ideal. In the opposite category, *smoothing*, people high in disintegration avoidance and low in harmony enhancement pursue interpersonal harmony because of the desire to protect self-interest. This type of people are prevalent in East Asia, which explains why conflict avoidance is commonplace in this region. People in the third category, *balancing*, are high in both harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance. These people not only accept the importance of harmony as a virtue, but also see harmony as a means for goal attainment. In the fourth category, *disintegrating*, people are low in both harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance. This group of people do not care about interpersonal relationships in their social behavior.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Is the Dualistic Model of Harmony Universal?

Although harmony is typically viewed as prominent only in East Asian cultures, Leung, Brew, Zhang, and Zhang (2011) provided cross-cultural data to support the

universality of the dualistic model of harmony. A harmony scale was developed and validated in the Chinese cultural context. A cross-cultural study was then conducted, with participants from Mainland China and Australia. Both Chinese and European Australians responded to the harmony scale as well as a conflict scale based on the dual concern model developed in the West (Rahim, 1983). Confirmatory factor analysis showed that harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance were identified in both cultures. Furthermore, Leung et al. (2011) investigated the relationships between the two harmony motives and the five conflict styles from the Dual Concern model (Rahim, 1983). Consistent with their conceptualization of harmony, disintegration avoidance was related positively to avoiding, whereas harmony enhancement was related positively to integrating in both cultures,. This pattern supports the argument that disintegration avoidance is concerned with the protection of self-interest by smoothing and avoiding confrontation, whereas harmony enhancement involves an acceptance of open communication and disagreement in order to promote the well-being of all parties (Leung et al., 2011). In addition, disintegration avoidance and harmony enhancement were positively related to compromising in both cultures, but the relationship was stronger among Chinese than European Australians.

An unexpected finding is that disintegration avoidance was related positively to dominating in both cultural groups, although this relationship was marginally significant for European Australians. This finding contradicts the association of disintegration avoidance with a readiness to swallow all interpersonal conflict and transgression. A plausible explanation is that people high on disintegration avoidance can be aggressive, perhaps by means of cloak and dagger tactics rather than upfront verbal attacks

(Friedman, Chi, & Liu, 2005). This reasoning is consistent with the prior finding that people with a highly accessible relational self-construal are likely to exhibit covert but aggressive behavior when frustrated and angered by thwarted relational goals (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006). It is also consistent with Hwang's (1997-8) "obey publicly, defy privately" conflict style for Chinese people, where goals are stealthily pursued with compliance ostensibly displayed on the surface.

Although the dualistic model of harmony is in its early stage of development, Leung et al. (2011) and a study by Lim (2009) in Singapore suggest that the two harmony motives may be identifiable in a wide range of cultures. The next step is to investigate how it may contribute to current theories concerning interpersonal relationships. We suggest that harmony motives are closely related to the social exchange framework (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Homans, 1961), and this line of indigenous research may extend this major Western theoretical framework for a better understanding of interpersonal interaction.

An Extension of Social Exchange Theory from a Dispositional Perspective

Since the seminal works of Blau (1964), Emerson (1962), and Homans (1961), the social exchange framework has been used to account for diverse social behaviors, such as social power (Cook, Cheshire, & Gerbasi, 2006), psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995), organizational justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), and leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). A major tenet of this framework is that social interactions can develop into trusting, loyal, and mutually committed relationships if people follow certain exchange rules, of which reciprocity is arguably the most important (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

While the norm of reciprocity is likely to be universal (Gouldner, 1960), research has demonstrated significant individual variation in the extent to which this exchange rule is followed (Clark & Mills, 1979; Murstein, Cerreto, & MacDonald, 1977). A major extension of the social exchange perspective is concerned with the role of individual differences in social exchange processes. This research direction received impetus when Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) proposed the notion of exchange ideology and found that people with a stronger exchange ideology were more likely to track obligations carefully and return favors to others. Subsequent research has provided compelling evidence for the importance of this dispositional approach to social exchange processes (e.g., Andrews, Witt, & Kacmar, 2003; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Scott & Colquitt, 2007). More recently, researchers have refined the notion of exchange orientation by differentiating negative from positive reciprocity orientation (Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage, & Rohdieck, 2004; Perugini & Gallucci, 2001; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003). Individuals with a negative reciprocity orientation tend to react more strongly to negative treatment from others, while individuals with a positive reciprocity orientation are particularly responsive to positive treatment (e.g., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). This recent development adds further weight to the importance of the dispositional approach to social exchange.

Dispositional research on social exchange has thus far focused exclusively on how individual differences affect the reactions to the exchange behaviors of other social actors without considering the role of individual differences in the active regulation of social exchange relationships prior to any exchange behavior. Blau (1964, p. 91)

suggested that social exchange involves “voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others,” and that such expectations may vary from person to person. Blau’s argument suggests a proactive perspective on exchange orientation, in that the actions of individuals depend not only on actual treatments received from others, but also on the expected treatment they would receive. In other words, confronted with a social exchange situation, individuals may actively regulate the exchange process based on their expectation of how other social actors would behave. Harmony motives as a pair of individual difference variables may be conceptualized as individual orientations towards the active management of interpersonal interactions prior to the occurrence of social exchange. People who attend to and attempt to promote positive reciprocity can be distinguished from people who attend to and try to avoid negative reciprocity, and this distinction can complement and extend Western dispositional research on social exchange.

Harmony Motives as Orientations of Social Regulation

Harmony motives capture people’s proclivity towards the maintenance of interpersonal relationship, which has significant implications for how they regulate their social exchange behavior. This view of harmony motives provides a novel way to study individual differences in social exchange. Molm (2003, p. 10) argued that people actively engage in social exchange “not only to increase rewards or gains, but also to decrease costs or losses.” This perspective suggests that people’s expectation of the potential gains and losses incurred in social exchange is pivotal in shaping their perceptions of what is appropriate in social exchange and hence the actions taken. The

two types of harmony motives reflect different expectations towards social exchange relationship and hence guide the active regulation of social exchange processes. Specifically, harmony enhancement reflects the motive to promote a mutually beneficial relationship for the long run and the active engagement in behaviors or actions that promote the quality of a relationship. On the other hand, people high on disintegration avoidance focus on negative consequences of a strained relationship and avoid actions or events that may hurt interpersonal relationships. It follows that harmony enhancement represents an affinity for positive exchange with others because of the expectation of positive outcomes associated with harmonious relationships, whereas disintegration avoidance represents an affinity to avoid negative social exchange because of the expectation of negative outcomes associated with poor relationships.

We propose that harmony motives fill a theoretical gap in the social exchange framework by conceptualizing harmony enhancement as an orientation toward positive social exchange, and disintegration avoidance as an orientation toward the avoidance of negative social exchange. Harmony motives as individual differences in the regulation of social exchange relationships offer a new framework for understanding how people develop and regulate their social exchange relationships. Next, we introduce some research findings in the work context that support the conceptualization of harmony motives as orientations in social exchange regulation.

Harmony Motives in the Organizational Context

We argue that the two harmony motives reflect the way people regulate their exchange relationships with others based on their emphasis on different aspects of social exchange. We reason that harmony motives should affect the way individuals perceive

their social environment because they attend to different aspects of an exchange relationship. We examined this possibility in the work setting and investigated how harmony motives shaped people's perception of their interpersonal communication environment. We propose that harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance are related differently to the perception of a safe communication climate through directing attention to different aspects of the social situation. People who embrace harmony enhancement desire to build long-term positive relationships with others (Leung et al., 2002). They are more likely to attend to and recognize the opportunities for joint gains and collaboration, and view confrontations, debates, and disagreements not as signs of deteriorating relationships, but as actions necessary for arriving at mutually beneficial relationships. Thus, they tend to perceive social interactions as benign and potentially beneficial, and their focus on the opportunities for positive exchange leads them to view the communication climate as safe.

In contrast, people high on disintegration avoidance are concerned about protecting their self-interest and vigilant in avoiding potentially negative consequences. They are sensitive about potential threats to interpersonal relationships and negative reactions of other social actors. Open communication about problems and one's viewpoints is a double-edged sword, and may lead to negative repercussions from other people (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Expressing opinions that contradict the views of other people and challenging their positions may cause heated debates and conflict, which may damage the relationship with them. We therefore propose that people who endorse disintegration avoidance tend to perceive communication as risky and potentially harmful.

Consistent with our theorizing, in a survey of employees in China (Wang, Leung, & Zhou, 2014), harmony enhancement was found to be positively related to perceived safety in communication. However, the relationship between disintegration avoidance and perceived safety in communication was not significant, which should be interpreted in light of a significant interaction effect involving job autonomy as a moderator. When people have high job autonomy, they work relatively independently in performing their tasks (Pierce, Newstrom, Dunham, & Barber, 1989). A low dependence on the actions of others tends to reduce attention to other social actors, resulting in less elaborate and differentiated cognitive activity about interpersonal interactions (e.g., Fiske, 1993). This tendency suggests that job autonomy can mitigate the effects of the two harmony motives on perceived safety in communication. Indeed, our results supported this reasoning, but an interesting finding was obtained for disintegration avoidance. The linkage between disintegration avoidance and perceived safety in communication was negative when job autonomy was low. Unexpectedly, this relationship became positive when job autonomy was high.

The non-significant relationship between disintegration avoidance and perceived safety in communication is attributable to the disordinal interaction effect between disintegration avoidance and job autonomy. We speculate that because people with high disintegration avoidance are sensitive about potential gains and losses in social interactions, they understand clearly that when job autonomy is high, they are shielded from the repercussion of negative relationships. In other words, they are fully aware that their self-interest is not affected even if they run into communication problems with other people. The recognition of the independence provided by job autonomy leads

those high on disintegration avoidance to perceive more safety in the communication environment. Such a disordinal interaction effect between disintegration avoidance and job autonomy suggests that the effect of this harmony orientation is more complex than originally conceived.

In line with the argument that harmony motives are predictors of relationally oriented variables (Leung et al., 2011), these findings suggest that harmony motives may be related to a variety of contextual variables that are interpersonally oriented and have implications for social exchange processes. We note that the vast majority of the dispositional constructs in the literature are self-focused, which are concerned with individual tendency without considering the interpersonal context. While this type of dispositional variables are important, they do not provide the whole picture in describing and predicting how people will behave in an interpersonal situation. In contrast, harmony motives are concerned with individual tendencies in the regulation of social exchange relationships and hence can contribute to a more complete picture of the dynamics involved in contexts where relational processes are salient, such as in predicting willingness to cooperate (e.g., De Cremer & Tyler, 2007), relational satisfaction (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2010), and the development of social capital (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2010).

Given that harmony motives reflect different styles in regulating social exchange relationships, we reason that they should influence the effects of variables that have interpersonal consequences. The styles with which individuals regulate their exchange relationships should shape the effects of relationally oriented variables because the focus on specific aspects of an exchange relationship can alter the magnitude and nature

of these effects. To evaluate this possibility, we examined the role of harmony motives as moderators and investigated whether harmony enhancement moderated the indirect effect of psychological safety on helping behavior through cooperative goal interdependence, and how disintegration avoidance moderated the effect of psychological safety on innovative performance. We reason that because individuals endorsing harmony enhancement have a tendency to actively promote positive social exchange relationships, they will do so even if psychological safety is low. Thus, the positive effect of psychological safety on prosocial behavior through cooperative goal interdependence is less salient for people high on harmony enhancement. In other words, the effect of harmony enhancement on cooperative goal interdependence parallels that of psychological safety, and it can to some extent substitute for the effect of psychological safety.

Given that individuals high on disintegration avoidance orient towards the avoidance of actions that may trigger negative social exchange reactions from others, they are sensitive about issues that may damage interpersonal relationships (Leung et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2002). When disintegration avoidance is high, individuals are cautious about interpersonal risk and vigilant in avoiding it. We therefore propose that the capacity for psychological safety to create a low-risk interpersonal environment to promote innovative performance is offset by the tendency of disintegration avoidance to sensitize individuals to potential threats that may disrupt a relationship. Because disintegration avoidance can counteract the effect of psychological safety, we propose that people high on disintegration avoidance are less likely to feel encouraged to innovate by psychological safety. Only when people are low on disintegration

avoidance will they be able to benefit fully from psychological safety in initiating innovative performance.

All these arguments are supported in a survey of employees in China (Leung, Deng, Wang, & Zhou, in press), which provides further support for conceptualizing harmony enhancement and disintegration avoidance as two different approaches to regulate social exchange processes. The findings offer some interesting theoretical insight about how harmony enhancement as an orientation to promote positive social exchange plays out in the realm of a particular type of interpersonal behavior, i.e., helping behavior. The findings also show that people high on disintegration avoidance tend to avoid interpersonal risk, and as a result disintegration avoidance can offset the capacity for psychological safety to promote innovative performance.

To conclude, dispositional research guided by social exchange theory has traditionally focused on dispositional variables associated with people's reactions toward the social exchange actions of others, such as exchange ideology and reciprocity orientation. Despite that individual differences in the regulation of social exchange are recognized (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2004; Scott & Colquitt, 2007), this proactive perspective on individual differences in social exchange has not received attention in past research. The dualistic model of harmony, although derived from Chinese indigenous research, may fill this gap by introducing harmony enhancement as an orientation toward positive social exchange, and disintegration avoidance as an orientation away from negative social exchange. Harmony motives as individual differences in the regulation of social exchange relationships offer a new framework for understanding how people develop and regulate their social exchange relationships, and

hence can contribute to a more complete picture of the dynamics involved in contexts where relational processes are salient.

Based on our theoretical analysis and the empirical results obtained, we believe that the dualistic model of harmony has the potential to be developed into a universal framework. This new theoretical perspective can enrich the social exchange framework and point to some globally relevant research directions. For example, some researchers in the West (e.g., Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2007; Tse, Dasborough, & Ashkanasy, 2005) have recently suggested that individual perceptions of the interpersonal context should be considered in studying social exchange relationships at work, including leader-member exchange and team-member exchange. An interesting future research direction is to evaluate whether harmony motives also function as dispositional antecedents of these constructs developed in the Western context.

Conclusion

With a research program on interpersonal harmony, we show that indigenous research in the Chinese context can generate theories and findings that are not only locally relevant, but also complement and extend Western theorizing. Three steps are involved in this universalization process. First, a program of indigenous research is conducted, with the goal of providing the more accurate understanding and prediction in the Chinese cultural context. A model or framework is developed based on such indigenous research. The second step involves testing this model or framework in diverse cultural contexts to assess its universality. Modification may be necessary to render a model or framework universal, and not all indigenous models or frameworks have universal applications around the world. The final step involves the integration of

the indigenous model or framework with a relevant theory that is supposed to be universal. Researchers have to demonstrate that the theoretical innovation spurred by the indigenous model or framework leads to compelling refinement and extension of existing theories. Alternatively, if the indigenous model or framework is entirely novel, integration cannot be done, but researchers have the burden to demonstrate that it can explain and predict social behavior better than existing theories in diverse cultural contexts. In any event, this final step is crucial in confirming the incremental value of an indigenously derived model or framework from a universal perspective.

As different cultural contexts provide diverse sources of ideas for theory development, indigenous research in different cultural contexts should be encouraged (March, 2005). Chinese indigenous researchers can turn to two basic sources for innovative indigenous ideas (Li et al., 2012). The first source is the diverse “schools of thought” in the Chinese culture, including traditional thoughts such as Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, the Art of War, as well as modern thoughts such as Deng Xiaoping’s ideas about social and economic reforms (Chen & Lee, 2008; Pan, Rowney, & Peterson, 2012).

The second source is concerned with the relatively unique phenomena in Chinese societies, both traditional and contemporary. Examples of traditional phenomena include the circles and networks of *guanxi* (e.g., Chen & Chen, 2004; Li, 2006; Luo & Yeh, 2012); *face* (e.g., Ho, 1976); and *renqing* (compassion) (e.g., Hwang, 1987). Examples of contemporary phenomena include the migrant labor force, the new generation of single child under the one-child policy, and the rapid social and economic changes in the past three decades.

To sum up, these two sources can generate ideas and concepts for constructing mid-range indigenous theories, some of which may eventually be developed into universal theoretical frameworks that are relevant around the world. Hopefully, indigenous research in Chinese culture context will play a front-and-center role in advancing our knowledge of human behavior from a global perspective (Chen & Miller, 2011).

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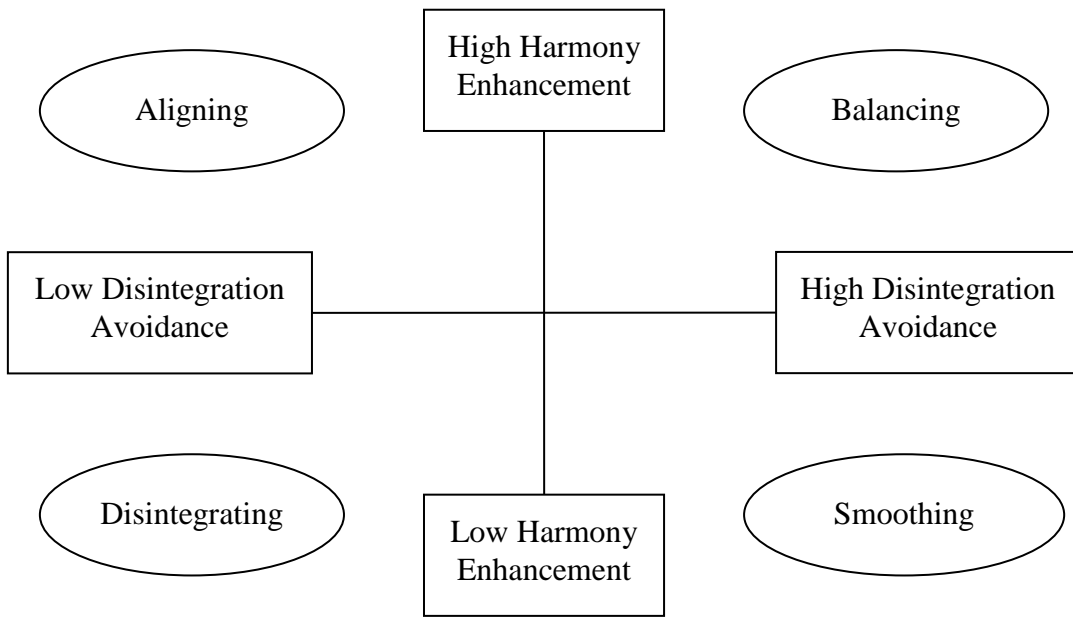


Figure 1. A dualistic model of harmony adapted from Leung et al. (2002)