

# INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

THEORY, METHOD, AND  
APPLICATIONS

UICHOL KIM  
HARRY C. TRIANDIS  
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EDITORS



Volume 18, Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology Series

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Volume 18, Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology Series



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## FOREWORD

The relationship of an author with his or her brainchildren resembles to some extent the relationship of a parent with his or her children. The nature of the latter, of course, depends on the type of society—which puts us right in the middle of our topic. In my society, at least, feelings of parents about their grown-up children are usually mixed. If a child does well, the parent feels proud and thankful; yet, having become a person in his or her own right, the same child unavoidably sometimes moves in directions that puzzle or worry the parent.

They say my 1980 book *Culture's Consequences* started the interest in individualism and collectivism (henceforth abbreviated as I/C) in cross-cultural psychology, which puts me in the position of a spiritual parent, and I do recognize the moods described above with regard to this intellectual offspring. Surprisingly, *Culture's Consequences* is not really a psychological treatise at all. It does not belong to any single social science discipline. If one tries to transgress the borderlines of national cultures, one piece of intellectual luggage that has to be left at home is the division of labor among the social sciences as it has been developed in Europe and North America in the past hundred years. I have always considered this academic division as most unfortunate anyway. Psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science all study only facets of the same social reality. Academic inbreeding and atomization in the West have led to extensive production of irrelevant speculations. The system has become self-destructive in that it punishes rather than encourages borrowing from related disciplines.

Cross-cultural social sciences therefore cannot but be cross-disciplinary at the same time. If, for example, one moves to an East Asian environment where the concept of the person as a separate entity is debatable, one cannot stay within the limits of psychology as defined in Western universities. Part of my worries about the present use of the I/C dimension in

cross-cultural psychology is that monocultural habits die hard, and that psychologists groomed in the Western style will try to domesticate cross-cultural psychology into a subdiscipline of psychology rather than into a metadiscipline beyond Western psychology.

In *Culture's Consequences* I compare survey data from matched samples of respondents from 40 countries, a number extended to 50, plus 3 multicountry regions, in later publications. I found that about one-half of the country-to-country differences could be explained by four dimensions: large versus small *power distance*, strong versus weak *uncertainty avoidance*, *individualism versus collectivism*, and *masculinity versus femininity*. Later research by Michael Bond, who used questionnaire items designed by Chinese scholars, led to the addition of a fifth dimension, *Confucian dynamism*, or *long-term versus short-term orientation*.

The dimension of I/C, empirically derived, made theoretical sense in terms of classic sociology. It resembled, for example, a distinction described by the German scholar Tönnies (1887/1957) as *gesellschaft versus gemeinschaft*, or *society versus community*.

Out of the five dimensions, I/C was the one that most directly appealed to psychologists. Other dimensions were more immediately relevant to other academic fields. Power distance and uncertainty avoidance became favorite dimensions in comparative management and organization theory; masculinity versus femininity is crucial for a number of political science and comparative religion issues; Confucian dynamism has consequences for economics. *Culture's Consequences* has been cited, approvingly or critically, in such disparate contexts as theoretical history, airline safety, sociology of law, comparative accounting, and comparative medicine. Its dimensional framework is used in many intercultural training programs.

Psychologists are attracted to I/C because the relationship between the individual and other individuals has traditionally been a central concern in Western psychology. However, as stated above, the dimension I introduced is sociological and not at all psychological. It does not compare different personalities, but different societal contexts within which children grow up and develop their personalities. It is not about individuals, but about the constraints within which, in different countries, a psychology of relatedness (to use the term proposed by Kagitçibasi, Chapter 4, this volume) should be developed.

A key issue in any type of cross-cultural social science, and therefore also in cross-cultural psychology, is the influence of the researcher's own culture on the outcomes of his or her research. It is inconsistent to study differences in psychological functioning of people in different countries or societies without including the psychologist's own functioning in one's relativism. Cultural background determines, among other things, what one

considers desirable as well as one's feelings and biases in this particular area. Psychologists from less individualist societies have rightly felt a certain condescension in the way their colleagues from more individualist societies have handled collectivism.

One issue that comes up repeatedly in this volume is whether individualism and collectivism are not really two separate dimensions. The answer should depend on whether we mean the sociological dimension, distinguishing societies, or a psychological dimension developed by psychologists for distinguishing the personalities of individuals within societies. In *Cultures's Consequences* I deal exclusively with differences between societies, and I found that a single, bipolar, dimension is a useful construct (that is, conceptual tool) for subsuming a complex set of differences. Scores on this dimension, empirically derived, correlate significantly with a multitude of external measures, providing extensive validation for the bipolar construct. This does not mean, of course, that a country's Individualism Index score tells all there is to be known about the backgrounds and structures of relationship patterns in that country. It is an abstraction that should not be extended beyond its limited area of usefulness.

*Culture's Consequences* makes no assumption about the suitability or dimensionality of individualism and collectivism as *psychological* concepts. If one were to ask me, I would suppose that at the individual level a multidimensional model would be more useful than a unidimensional one. The latter revives too much, to my taste, the search for a "modal personality" in the anthropology of the 1930s to 1950s, which led to unwanted stereotyping. A culture does not consist of modal personalities; culture is no king-size personality. A culture is the anthropological equivalent of a "biotope" in biology: the population of animals and plants that belongs to a particular habitat. A culture is a population of different, complementary, and interdependent personalities and conditions. This is statistically reflected in the fact that correlations between variables at the culture level (based upon the mean scores of the various individuals within the culture) can be completely different from the correlations of the same variables at the individual level. Thus it is quite possible that the same set of variables produces a bipolar dimension at the culture level and two or more unipolar dimensions at the level of individuals.

An indispensable insight for cross-cultural psychologists, I think, is that concerning the distinction between *emic* and *etic* points of view. This distinction belongs to anthropology, not to psychology. It is actually borrowed from linguistics, as an analogy to the distinction between phonemics and phonetics: the study of carriers of meaning versus the study of sounds. An emic point of view is taken from within a culture, usually the author's own. An etic point of view is a "view from the bridge," comparing

different cultures according to criteria supposed to apply to all of them. My approach in *Culture's Consequences* is obviously entirely etic. The emic and the etic points of view are almost by definition complementary. The ethnic psychologies that are developing within various non-Western societies are necessary emic complements to the imposed Western emic of classical Western psychology. However, in order to learn from each other we also need an etic meeting ground and a terminology with which we can explore our common concerns and our differences. Occasionally, an author from one particular country has tried to disprove the dimensional model in *Culture's Consequences* with insights from within his or her own culture. But this means applying emic reasoning to an etic problem; it is like attempting to draw a regression line through one single point.

The external measures used in *Culture's Consequences* for validating the empirically derived country Individualism Index consist of both measures taken at the country level (such as an index of press freedom or the relative frequency of traffic deaths) and measures based on surveys of other matched samples of individuals from the same countries, reported by other researchers. One of the strongest correlations found is between the Individualism Index and national wealth (per capita gross national product, as reported by the World Bank). The correlation coefficient (for 40 countries, using 1970 data) is .82, which means that  $.82^2 = 67\%$  of the variance in country Individualism Index scores can be accounted for by differences in national wealth. Wealth goes hand in hand with *modernity*, and it should surprise no one if many symptoms of individualism are related to modernity. Many, but not all: A part of the unique cultural inheritance of countries with regard to individualism and collectivism survives in spite of poverty or affluence. India and Japan, based on my 1970 data, both scored about halfway on the Individualism/Collectivism Index scale, but, according to its average poverty, India could have been expected to score even more collectivist, and on the basis of its wealth, Japan could have been expected to score more individualist. There is, by the way, a persistent myth that I found Japan to score at the extreme end of the Collectivism Index scale. In fact, among 53 countries and regions, Japan came in at a shared twenty-second and twenty-third position on the individualist side. True, all affluent Western countries scored more individualist than Japan, but among the poor countries, India was the only one that did not score more collectivist than Japan, and only marginally so.

One crystal clear implication for the psychology of relatedness, of cultural differences on the I/C dimension, is the need to distinguish in-group from out-group members. Many classical experiments in Western social psychology are about "ego" and "other(s)." In culturally collectivist societies, this distinction will not do. It all depends whether the others are from

ego's in-group or not. This also means that there is no relationship between cultural collectivism and altruism, as some researchers have postulated. Collectivism is not altruism, but in-group egoism. In a collectivist society, a poor relative can expect to be helped, but not necessarily a poor stranger. Whether a stranger can expect to be helped depends on the society's degree of "femininity." The Good Samaritan does not represent the collectivist society, but the feminine one.

This brings me to my last point, a caution not to take the I/C distinction as a catchall for cultural differences in general. The usefulness of the five-dimensional model based on Bond's work and my own is precisely that it discriminates among different kinds of cultural influences. Some cultural differences can be expected to relate to the I/C dimension, some to one or more of the other dimensions, and some will probably be idiosyncratic to a given country or society and not related to any known dimension at all. In particular, I believe the masculinity versus femininity dimension deserves more attention from cross-cultural psychologists than it has received so far. A conceptual framework based on the two dimensions of I/C and masculinity/femininity is a lot richer and potentially more revealing than the single pair of concepts to which this volume is devoted.

This is not meant to play down the significance of the present book. It is, of course, no accident that the initiative for the conference at which these papers were collected and the actual publication of this volume, and its companions, was taken in Korea. In my 1970 data, Korea scored strongly collectivist: at the forty-third position out of 53 countries and regions. On the other hand, many Koreans have been exposed to Western ideas and theories, and the country's affluence has increased at a rate unparalleled in human history. This situation has provided the creative tension that explains why Koreans, in particular, would support this landmark initiative. The kind but firm leadership of Uichol Kim, a Korean himself, made it all happen. He should be warmly complimented.

Geert Hofstede



## SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Every now and then, a paradigm, model, or concept comes along in an academic and research enterprise, usually confined to a specialization area within a discipline, that attracts significant attention. Like magnets, these developments draw the attention of most people who identify with particular disciplines. Such is the case with individualism and collectivism, concepts that appear to define the endpoints of a hypothesized continuum that can be used effectively to help explain sources of variability in human thought and interaction.

During the past 15 years, the individualism/collectivism continuum has been the focus of dozens of studies done in and across various cultures and societies. Indeed, as the editors of this volume point out in their introduction, the 1980s might be characterized as "the decade of I/C." It has also been the focus of numerous symposia at international meetings. Probably the most influential meeting ever held on the topic, at least from a cross-cultural psychological perspective, was a well-attended conference sponsored by the Korean Psychological Association and held in Seoul, Korea, in July 1990. Because many psychologists interested in the role played by culture in shaping human behavior were planning to attend conferences in Japan that summer (primarily the meeting of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, held in Nara, and the meeting of the International Association of Applied Psychology, which took place in Kyoto), a significant number took the opportunity to attend the unique Seoul conference. Uichol Kim, senior editor of this volume, was a key figure in the planning of the conference, along with influential Korean psychologists Sang-Chin Choi and Gene Yoon, who also are co-editors. Harry Triandis, a leading figure in the development of cross-cultural psychology and the second editor of the volume, has for about a decade been the central figure in studies of individualism/collectivism. The third editor of the volume, Çigdem Kagitçibasi, has also been very

active in this area, and has written major articles and book chapters dealing with this concept. Together, the five editors formed an effective team in assembling the volume. Their job was a difficult one, for they had to choose among a large number of manuscripts that were vying for inclusion. The result is an important collection of chapters written by accomplished researchers, all of whom have made significant contributions to the ways in which individualism and collectivism might be understood, both conceptually and methodologically. A foreword by Geert Hofstede, who has made significant contributions toward the understanding of individualism/collectivism and other human dimensions, completes the package.

Although we doubt that anyone views the continuum of I/C as a paradigm shift of Kuhnian proportions, we do think that the overall idea is very compelling and well worth close scrutiny. This volume is an excellent collection of contemporary research on the topic. As such, it will help define future research in this area, and will influence many during the next decade of continued research.

For those not familiar with the nature and intent of the Sage Publications Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology Series, a few words are in order. The series was created to present comparative studies on cross-cultural topics and interdisciplinary research. Inaugurated in 1975, the series is designed to satisfy a growing and continuing need to integrate research method and theory and to dissect issues from a comparative perspective. We believe that a truly international approach to the study of behavioral, social, and cultural variables can be done only within such a methodological framework.

Each volume in the series presents substantive cross-cultural studies and considerations of the strengths, interrelationships, and weaknesses of the various methodologies, drawing upon work done in anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology. Both individual researchers knowledgeable in more than one discipline and teams of specialists with differing disciplinary backgrounds have contributed to the series. Although each individual volume may represent the integration of only a few disciplines, the cumulative totality of the series reflects an effort to bridge gaps of methodology and conceptualization across the various disciplines and many cultures.

We welcome you to the current volume.

—Walter J. Lonner  
Western Washington University  
—John W. Berry  
Queen's University

## PREFACE

The present volume is the culmination of work that was presented at the First International Conference on Individualism and Collectivism: Psychocultural Perspectives From East and West, July 9-13, 1990. The conference was sponsored by the Korean Psychological Association and held at the scenic surrounds of the Academy of Korean Studies. Approximately 300 participants attended the conference, and 70 papers were presented on the topic of individualism and collectivism. The conference also served as a rare opportunity to invite scholars who previously would not have been able to participate: The thawing of the Cold War allowed scholars from Eastern Bloc nations (i.e., Estonia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and the former Soviet Union) to take part, and travel funds were provided for scholars from developing countries. It was a truly unique international conference devoted to a topic that has dominated cross-cultural research since the 1980s.

Although the academic seed had been planted in 1980 by Geert Hofstede and subsequently watered by Harry Triandis and his colleagues, the organizational seed of the conference was planted when the first two editors of this volume organized two symposia devoted to the topic of individualism and collectivism for the Eighth International Congress of Cross-Cultural Psychology in 1986, held in Istanbul, Turkey. Interest in this topic grew, and Yoshihisa Kashima, in cooperation with the first two editors, organized four symposia in 1988 for the Ninth International Congress of Cross-Cultural Psychology, held in Newcastle, Australia. The very success of these symposia suggested a need to develop a workshop devoted to the topic of individualism and collectivism.

In 1990, Uichol Kim planned to hold a special workshop in Seoul, Korea, prior to the Tenth International Congress of Cross-Cultural Psychology in Nara, Japan. Dr. Gene Yoon, co-organizer of the conference, suggested that the Korean Psychological Association become involved and be the official sponsor the workshop. With the full support of the Korean

Psychological Association and the Korean Ministry of Education, what was planned as a workshop blossomed into an international conference.

The conference was made possible through the support of various organizations. The Korean Psychological Association provided full support for the execution of all phases of the conference, and special appreciation is extended to that organization's Executive Council: Dr. Neung-Bin Im, president; Dr. Heung-Wha Koh, president-elect; Dr. Shin-Ho Ahn, vice president; Dr. Sung-Soo Chang, secretary-general; Dr. Jin-Hun Sohn, public relations; and Dr. Myung-Un Kim, treasurer. We also would like to thank Advisory Committee members Kwan-Yong Rhee, Chang-Ho Lee, Chang-Woo Lee, Jae-Ho Cha, and Chung-Hoon Cho; Organizing Committee members Gene Yoon, Uichol Kim, Kyung-Hwang Min, Myung-Un Kim, Kyung-Ja Oh, Jin-Hwan Lee, Jean-Kyung Chung, Geung-Ho Cho, Sang-Chin Choi, and Doug-Woong Han; and operations manager Keum-Joo Kwak. Graduate students from various Korean universities and the University of Hawaii also assisted in the execution of the conference, and we are grateful for their help.

The conference also received financial support from several organizations. The Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, contributed major financial support, in addition to the Opening Address provided by the minister of education, Dr. Won-Shik Chung. The Academy of Korean Studies provided the facilities: meeting rooms, dormitory, and restaurants. Major funding was also provided by the Korea Institute for Socioeconomic Affairs, the Federation of Korean Industries, and Sam-Sung Company Limited. Additional funding was also obtained from the following companies: Sam Seong Publisher, Dong-A Publisher & Printing Co., Chung-Ang Chuck Sung Publishing Co., Tam-Gu-Dang Publisher, Bob Mun Sa and Sam-Sung Electronics Co. We would like extend our gratitude to all of these organizations for their support.

After the successful completion of the conference, individual presenters were asked to submit their papers for publication. An editorial board consisting of the five editors for this volume was established to review, select, and prepare the papers to be published. Each submitted paper was read by two reviewers and the editors. We would like to thank those scholars, in addition to chapter contributors, who served as reviewers: John Adamopoulos, Marc Bosche, Gui-Young Hong, Harry Hui, Lisa Ilola, Yoshihisa Kashima, Kwok Leung, Kate Partridge, Ype Poortinga, Paul Schmitz, Peter Smith, Peter Weinreich, and John Williams. The present volume represents approximately 30% of the papers submitted for publication. Significant contributors to the area of individualism and collectivism who could not participate in the conference were also invited to submit papers. We extend special thanks to Drs. Walt Lonner and John

Berry, editors of the Sage Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology Series, who guided and supported the project. The chapters in the present volume represent a truly collaborative effort on the part of the editors, the contributing authors, the reviewers, the series editors, and the Korean Psychological Association.

We would like to thank the following people for their editorial assistance: Maria Chun, Ann-Marie Horvath, Genie and Patrick Lester, Yi-Jin Lin, Kunling Lu, Lalita Suzuki, and Kozue Ueki.

The first editor would like to express his gratitude for the first institutional support provided by the Department of Psychology, University of Hawaii at Monoa and the Department of Social Psychology, The University of Tokyo.

Uichol Kim  
Harry C. Triandis  
Çigdem Kagitçibasi  
Sang-Chin Choi  
Gene Yoon

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

UICHOL KIM

HARRY C. TRIANDIS

ÇIGDEM KAGITÇIBASI

SANG-CHIN CHOI

GENE YOON

The topic of individualism and collectivism (I/C) has been the focus of a great deal of research interest in cross-cultural psychology, so much so that Çigdem Kagitçibasi, in Chapter 4 of this volume, labels the 1980s “the decade of I/C.” This interest culminated in the Korean Psychological Association’s sponsorship of the First International Conference on Individualism and Collectivism: Psychocultural Perspectives From East and West, which was held July 9-13, 1990, in Seoul, Korea. The conference attempted to integrate and consolidate an ever-proliferating area of research. The occasion also marked the tenth anniversary of the publication of Geert Hofstede’s (1980) classic contribution to this area, *Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*.

Hofstede (1980, 1983b), in a study of more than 117,000 IBM employees in 66 countries, found four dimensions of cultural variation: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. The dimension of individualism captured the interest of cross-cultural psychologists. It is considered by many to be a bipolar dimension, with individualism on one end and collectivism on the other. The United States, Canada, and Western European countries were found to be high on the individualist end of this dimension. Asian, Latin American, and African nations were found to be high on the collectivist side.