



Culturally based lay beliefs as a tool for understanding intergroup and intercultural relations[☆]

Julie Spencer-Rodgers^{a,b,*}, Melissa J. Williams^c, Kaiping Peng^{d,b,**}

^a University of California, Santa Barbara, United States

^b Tsinghua University, China

^c Emory University, United States

^d University of California, Berkeley, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 31 December 2011

Keywords:

Cross cultural differences

Dialectics

Intergroup dynamics

Asians

ABSTRACT

Dialectical thinking represents a constellation of culturally based lay theories about the nature of the world in which social objects are viewed as inherently contradictory, fundamentally interconnected, and in constant flux. In this paper, we argue that dialectical thinking gives rise to cultural differences in numerous social cognitive phenomena (e.g., stereotyping) that are known to influence intergroup and intercultural relations. Specifically, we present psychological evidence relating dialectical thinking to cultural (East–West) differences in social categorization, causal attribution, group perception, stereotyping, ingroup/outgroup attitudes, cooperative/competitive behavior, and cross-cultural adjustment and competence. Dialectical thinkers are hypothesized, for example, to be less vulnerable to essentialistic, rigid thinking about social groups and more open to stereotype change and intercultural adaptation. We note important topics in need of further investigation and offer predictions regarding possible cultural differences in as yet unexplored social cognitive domains.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Culture may be conceptualized as a set of folk theories or lay belief systems that are developed through an individual's social experiences. These theories help social perceivers understand and make inferences about the individuals and groups they interact with in their everyday social environment, as well as people they encounter from different countries and cultures. Lay theories influence basic cognitive processes, such as person and group perception, causal attribution for social behavior, and judgment and decision making, among others (Hong, Levy, & Chiu, 2001; Lehman, Chiu, & Schaller, 2004; Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 2002; Peng, Ames, & Knowles, 2001). This approach to studying cultural differences – as mediated by lay theories (Hong & Chiu, 2001; Hong & Mallorie, 2004) – has guided recent research into a wide variety of domains, including intergroup and intercultural relations (e.g., Hong et al., 2001; Menon, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 1999; Oyserman & Sorensen, 2009).

The lay theory perspective provides a middle level of analysis between individuals and the national or cultural groups to which they belong (Morris, Menon, & Ames, 2001). That is, rather than locating the origins of individual differences

[☆] This paper was presented as part of an invited address for the 2011 Early Career Award at the 7th Biennial Conference of the International Academy for Intercultural Research, Singapore, 2011.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of California, Santa Barbara 93106, United States.

** Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley 94720, United States.

E-mail addresses: rodgers@psych.ucsb.edu (J. Spencer-Rodgers), kppeng@berkeley.edu (K. Peng).

within individuals themselves (free of their cultural context) or within cultures (glossing over intracultural heterogeneity), researchers can locate underlying causal mechanisms in lay theories, beliefs that are maintained in individual minds but fostered and sustained by cultural contexts. Lay beliefs are transmitted through various cultural institutions, including religion, philosophy, and literature (e.g., the *I-Ching* or *Book of Changes*; Legge, 1964), the popular media (e.g., advertising, television, cinema), and cultural symbols (e.g., yin/yang). By locating the source of many cultural differences in different folk epistemologies and ways of viewing the world, a new level of understanding of culture and social cognition may be achieved. This may have particular relevance for intergroup and intercultural relations. Culturally based lay beliefs influence how individuals understand, interact, communicate, and competently relate to the members of the ethnic, national, political, religious, and other collectives that surround them. Naïve dialecticism (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010) represents one constellation of culturally based lay beliefs that can provide new insight into these topics.

The effects of naïve dialecticism or “dialectical thinking” have been studied extensively in the domains of self-perception, emotional complexity/ambivalence, and psychological well being (for a review, see Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010). Considerably less scholarship has been devoted to the role of dialecticism in how people think about others, such as in intergroup or intercultural contexts. Because the empirical evidence is limited, many of the hypotheses put forth in this article are necessarily tentative. In the following sections, we offer predictions and summarize previous findings on cultural (East–West) differences in various social cognitive phenomena that have been shown to differ between Eastern and Western cultures, and connect them to the relatively stronger presence of dialectical thinking among East Asians. The topics include social categorization, attribution for individual and group behavior, group perception and impression formation, stereotype maintenance and change, intergroup attitudes (e.g., ingroup/outgroup evaluations), cooperative/competitive behavior, and cross-cultural adjustment and competence. We hope that this review may stimulate further research into dialectical thinking, especially in areas of interest to scholars of intercultural relations.

1.1. Naïve dialecticism

Naïve dialecticism (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010) is based on three main concepts: (a) the concept of *change* (reality is not static, it is a process and is in constant flux), (b) the concept of *contradiction* (reality is not precise, it is complex and paradoxical), and (c) the concept of *holism* (nothing is isolated; all phenomena in the universe are interconnected). With its origins in Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian philosophy, naïve dialecticism is more frequently found among members of East Asian than Western cultures. Naïve dialecticism has broad implications for human cognition, emotion, and behavior, and influences the manner in which lay people in East Asian countries (notably, China, Japan, and Korea) deal with contradiction and change in the self, others, and the physical environment (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Peng & Nisbett, 1999).

The dialectical concept of change asserts that the universe is in a state of flux and that all objects, events, and states of being in the world are forever oscillating between two extremes or opposites (yin and yang). From this perspective, all phenomena are composed of elements that are harmoniously counterbalanced (e.g., prosperity/adversity, joy/sorrow, health/illness), with each element perpetually transforming into its counterpart over time (e.g., prosperity will become adversity and vice versa). As a result, East Asians, in comparison to North Americans, take a broader temporal perspective and are more likely to expect and predict cyclical change (Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001). For example, Chinese college students estimate a higher probability than do Canadian college students that financial stock will grow and decline in value over time. North Americans, in contrast, including experienced investors, tend to predict that recent trends will continue and they overlook longer price patterns when making selling decisions (Alter & Kwan, 2009; Ji, Zhang, & Guo, 2008). Another consequence of the dialectical proclivity to expect and anticipate change is that individuals high in dialectical thinking, in various nations, demonstrate greater variability in their self-judgments and emotions than do those low in dialectical thinking (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010), as well as greater change in their actual behaviors as rated by outside observers (e.g., Chinese supervisor ratings of employees' work performance; Chen, Wang, Huang, & Spencer-Rodgers, 2012).

According to the related concept of contradiction, all objects and events in the universe are thought to comprise opposing elements. Because contradiction is regarded as natural and ubiquitous, dialectical thinkers are less likely to recognize contradiction in themselves and others or to seek to reconcile incongruities. Considerable scholarship shows that Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are more tolerant of apparent contradiction than are Americans (Choi & Choi, 2002; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). An apparent contradiction occurs when two propositions are seemingly logically inconsistent; if one proposition is true, then the other is probably – but not inevitably – false (e.g., “Human beings are inherently good” and “Human beings are inherently bad”). When confronted with such contradiction, East Asians are more likely than Americans to endorse both propositions, finding each to be valid, without the need for resolution (e.g., “Human beings are both inherently good and bad at the same time”). Westerners, who are guided by Greek Aristotelian logic, exhibit more polarized judgments when faced with apparent contradiction (Norenzayan, Smith, Kim, & Nisbett, 2002; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). In order to avoid or reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), they seek to synthesize conflicting information by rejecting the least, in favor of the most, reasonable argument, sometimes to the point of exaggerating their views in favor of their preferred perspective.

Lastly, the concept of holism has been shown to differentiate East Asian thought from the relatively analytic Western thought (Nisbett et al., 2001). For a person who perceives the world holistically, all components are interconnected, and a single object cannot be recognized or understood without simultaneous perception of the context in which it is embedded. Whereas Westerners tend to focus on the attributes of a single, salient person or object, individuals with holistic mentalities attend more to the larger field in which persons and objects are embedded (Ji, Nisbett, & Zhang, 2004; Masuda & Nisbett,

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات