

Book Review

Review of *Cultural Psychology*

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Cultural Psychology, by Steven J. Heine, New York: Norton, 2008. 545 pp. ISBN 978-0-393-92573-9. \$75.37, paperback.

Starting with the late 1980s, cultural psychology has enjoyed great popularity by showing how East Asians think, feel, and behave differently from European Americans. For example, the need to feel good about the self, the desire to exercise control and agency, and the aspiration to keep self-consistency were human motivations shown to be fundamental to European and Americans and believed by researchers to be basic to all human beings. But when East Asians did not show the corresponding needs, the assumptions of universality were brought into question. Heine was one of the scholars who helped to show the limitations of the universalists' position. He is a highly respected scholar of cultural psychology who has published three books and over 50 influential articles on how differently individuals perceive the self as a function of culture and motivation. In producing his text, he felt that it was time to integrate these diverse findings and to present them in a format that could be used in an undergraduate course.

The book starts off with a discussion of the foundation of human culture, which is distinctive from that of other animals, based on the interaction of geographical environment and cultural knowledge being communicated among

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people (Chapters 1 and 2). Then, in Chapter 3, the author reviews the unique set of methodologies used in cultural psychology research. Particularly impressive is the presentation of most up-to-date research methodologies, including those that (a) deal with methodological and conceptual equivalence between cultures, (b) experimentally manipulate the variable of culture, and (c) unpack the cross-cultural differences found. Next, before describing cultural differences in the following chapters, Heine takes Chapter 4 as a place to set up the theoretical basis to explain the cross-cultural differences in cognition (Chapters 5, 6, and 9), emotion (Chapters 7 and 8), and behavior (Chapters 10, 11, and 12). Mainly, he stresses biological preparedness, developmental transitions, and socialization through cultural practices in school, family, and institutions. In Chapters 5 to 9, the author presents cross-cultural differences between European Americans and East Asians, particularly the Japanese, in relation to how they perceive the self, others, and the world (Chapters 5 and 9), how they experience a diverse set of emotions (Chapters 7 and 8), and how they make decisions about the self as a function of underlying motivations (Chapter 6). The author wraps up the book by discussing cross-cultural differences in such fundamental areas as the way culture shapes physical and mental health (Chapter 10), the way people form interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Chapter 11), and the way people living in multicultural worlds engage in psychological processes.

I have found many features in this book to be useful and believe it would be very desirable as an undergraduate textbook in cultural psychology. One of the most fascinating features is that the author, as a scholar who grew up in Canada but spent many years in East Asian countries, describes the cultures of East Asians in a clear and vivid fashion, just as a foreigner would actually experience East Asian cultures while traveling. His skillful narratives would help European and American readers to apprehend East Asian cultures, especially in comparison to their own cultures. Similarly, East Asian readers would understand their own cultures better, particularly from the perspective of European and American cultures. Another appealing feature is the way Heine makes cross-cultural differences so alive and so engaging that readers would find themselves becoming “insiders” rather than outsiders merely observing the scenes being depicted. Simply, he writes in an easy narrative style throughout the book, such that readers would feel that they are listening to an entertaining storyteller, not a lecturer. Another important feature of the book is that, as an undergraduate textbook, it is a most comprehensive survey of cultural psychology and cross-cultural differences as reflected in research topics in general and social psychology.

In comparison to other books on cultural psychology, this book is unique in many perspectives. First, this book is intended to be a textbook for lower- to middle-division undergraduate courses, while several frequently used textbooks in culture and psychology are exclusively geared towards graduate courses (e.g., *Handbook of Culture and Psychology* edited by David Matsumoto, 2001; *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* by Shinobu Kitayama and Dov Cohen, 2007)

or upper-division undergraduate courses (e.g., *Social Psychology of Culture* by Chi-Yue Chiu and Ying-yi Hong, 2006; *Social Psychology Across Cultures* by Smith & Bond, 1998; *Cultural and Social Behavior* by Triandis, 1994). Second, most undergraduate textbooks in culture and psychology, except the one by Chiu and Hong (2006), were published during the relatively early stages of the history of culture and psychology research. Given the massive outpouring of research done on culture and psychology since those times, this is clearly the most up-to-date text. Third, the textbook by Chiu and Hong (2006), which might directly compete with Heine's (2008) book, takes a different theoretical approach to organizing cross-cultural differences. That is, Chiu and Hong (2006) in their book take a universalist (vs. relativistic) perspective in describing cross-cultural differences such that they are understood under the presumably basic psychological principles that operate differently as a function of interactive role of situation, context, time, and person. Therefore, they take a theory-oriented approach and focus primarily on the psychological mechanisms underlying cross-cultural differences. In contrast, Heine (2008) in his book takes a relativistic (vs. universalist) approach such that cross-cultural differences are understood as reflecting genuinely different psychological processes. Therefore, Heine focuses on how individuals think, feel, and behave differently as a function of culture, though Chapter 1 also has a very interesting discussion of what we mean when we say something is universal. These two approaches may be seen as complementary in terms of theoretical perspective—one focusing on how and the other on why. Heine's book is the starting place, especially good for lower- to middle-division undergraduate courses and also for general education courses offered to a diversity of non-psych majors, while Chiu and Hong's book would provide an alternative that students could appreciate in their upper-division undergraduate and graduate courses. Both perspectives are essential to a full appreciation of cross-cultural psychology.

AUTHOR NOTE

Young-Hoon Kim is a PhD candidate in the psychology department at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His research examines both within- and between-culture differences in how people perceive and define the self, particularly in terms of its effects on intellectual achievement, achievement motivation, and psychological well-being.

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