

Psychology in China

CHINESE psychology may seem enigmatic because of its cultural and political isolation in the Mao Zedong years, but that is changing as China engages more with the wider world. China is among the fastest-growing economies in the world, and will soon become a leader in research and development. Chinese psychology is also growing rapidly and rising in international status; China hosted the International Congress of Psychology in 2004, and psychologists there are keen to engage with the UK.

Psychology in China shares common roots with European psychology, beginning with German influences in the 19th century. But now China has a range of unique cultural problems that are of interest to psychologists, and indigenous approaches are being developed.

Psychological thought in China

Psychology as a scientific discipline has existed in China for 90 years since the establishment of the first psychological laboratory in Beijing (Peking) University in 1917 (Lawson *et al.*, 2007; Zhao, 2000). But it is hard to know where to begin to identify the first evidence of psychological thinking in China, whose rich 3000-year history and culture has always had psychological undertones. Ancient classical literature such as *Tao Te Ching*, or *The Classic of Word and Virtue* (written by Lao Tze around 463BC, at the beginning of the Shang Dynasty), and *Confucian Analects* (a collection of Confucius' teachings written by his students, edited from 436BC to 402BC), are all rich in wisdom with respect to intelligence, mental ability of self-control, balancing human relationships, and management at personal, group, and state level. Indeed, in traditional Chinese medicine, mental disorder has

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always been regarded as one of the six major causes of physical disease; many approaches to treatment were introduced in Emperor Huang's *Orthodox Classic* (edited around 400BC) and later developed more formally. There is now a Traditional Chinese Medicine Psychology Committee, as part of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies.

As in many European countries, China's academic psychology can be traced back to German laboratories. One of its senior initiators was Professor Yuanpei Cai who studied at the University of Leipzig in 1908–11, and took eight courses of psychology, including three lectured by Wilhelm Wundt on experimental psychology. He was appointed President of Peking University, and it was he who supported the establishment of the first Chinese psychological laboratory in 1917 by Professor Daqi Chen (1886–1983;

Zhao, 2000). The first Department of Psychology was established at South-East University in 1920. Since then, psychology has made steady progress, stopping only during war periods.

The first translator of psychology was a Chinese pastor Yongjing Yan (1838–1898). He translated and published *Mental Philosophy (Xing Ling Xue)* as long ago as 1889, from its English version (written by Joseph Haven, an American pastor) published in 1857. The first writer of a psychology textbook in Chinese was an American Missionary, W. Martin (Ding Weiliang). He wrote *Aspects of Human Nature (Xing Xue Ju Yu)* in Chinese and had it published in 1898 (Jing & Fu, 2001). The first textbook of psychology, *Simplified Psychology (Xin Ling Xue)*, was written by Chinese scholar Huang Chen and published in 1905 in Japan (Zhao, 2000).

Where is psychology taught?

In the 1980s there were only five departments of psychology in universities – Beijing (Peking) University, Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, South China Normal University and South-West China Normal University. Since then the rate of progress has been staggering. Our trawl in 2000 revealed that there were by then already 45 independent institutions, including 20 departments of psychology, increasing to 187 by 2007. There are usually about 10,000 students studying for four-year bachelor degrees, over 2000 for two- to four-year master's degrees, and more than 300 PhD candidates (finishing within three to six years) in these institutions.

Professor Yuanpei Cai

Before the revolution

Professor Cai (see above) also helped to establish the Institute of Psychology in 1929, when he was the President of the Academia Sinica. Research topics focused on physiological and comparative psychology, and experimental psychology in areas such as Chinese character recognition. Over 40 psychological assessments were developed before 1950s (Chinese Psychological Society, 1982). In laboratories of psychology in several universities, studies were carried out in industrial psychology and learning processes in civilian education (Zhao, 2000). Several senior Chinese researchers returned from studying abroad to work in universities or in the Institute of Psychology Chinese Academy of Sciences (IPCAS). Biological traits were emphasised as mainstream research in psychology, while Pavlovian psychology dominated from the 1950s to 1970s.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, psychology was considered as a branch of philosophy. This was reflected both terminologically and at institutional level. In many universities, departments of psychology and philosophy merged. However, basic research and education in psychology continued. Former President of the Central University, Professor Shu Pan, was appointed Director of IPCAS, which was re-established in 1951 as the only national-level basic research-oriented Institute of Psychology. Systematic experimental studies on visual perception and developmental psychology were conducted in the Institute, adopting Pavlovian principles. Some clinical studies were piloted and applied successfully, e.g. rapid integrated therapy on job burn-out in workers in the workshop of the Beijing Steel Factory. However, as a result of ideological disputes, education in and research in psychology stopped altogether during the cultural revolution (1966–1976).

Modern research

Teaching and researching in psychology recovered quickly after 1976, with cognitive psychology becoming pre-eminent. Psychology was also well resourced, becoming prosperous along with the application of the national policy of reformation and re-opening. More and more psychologists, among many professionals from other disciplines, were visiting and learning psychology abroad.

Professor Shu Pan

Psychological research in China is now led by IPCAS. Its five branches – Key Laboratory of Mental Health of the CAS, Laboratory of Cognitive Psychology Research, Research Center for Social and Economic Behavior, Division of Developmental Psychology, and a newly established Center of Behavior Genetics – are focusing on both basic research and applied projects. It also publishes a bi-monthly review journal *Advances in Psychological Science*, starting in 1979.

Within clinical and applied professional areas, Chinese psychologists are working very hard to develop indigenous approaches. There is a huge demand among psychological professionals to copy the West, with increasing research on the high rate of suicide attempts, divorced families, problems in the education system, social conflicts, and urbanisation, along with the modernisation of the economic level of society. Attention has focused on urgent issues within particular age groups; for example, for the younger generation, there are problems like parenting conflicts, learning behaviour, psychological resilience, internet addiction, and the leaving behind of offspring in rural areas by parents working in urban areas. There is also, of course, the issue of China's only children (resulting from the one-child policy): psychologists have found that only children had superior cognitive abilities, but no significant difference of personality traits, compared to children with siblings (Jing *et al.*, 2003).

For adults in working environments, there are problems such as unemployment, marital and family conflicts, job burn-out, and continuing education. Psychologists also participated in the recruiting process

for pilots and astronauts. Ageing issues – such as life satisfaction, early diagnosis of pre-senile and senile diseases and dementia, and psychological training for social service providers – are attracting more and more attention from psychologists.

Also of interest are neuropsychological studies, specifically with fMRI. Increasingly, studies by Chinese psychologists relating to Chinese language processing (Siok *et al.*, 2004) and the Aha! reaction in riddle processing (Luo *et al.*, 2004) are published in international journals, and are featured because of their cultural uniqueness or creative experimental protocols. Many arise from international cooperations. Many Chinese psychologists still struggle to get their research published in English – important because having high-quality peer-reviewed publications is a basic criterion for psychologists working in major universities and IPCAS to pass annual evaluations and to obtain promotion.

Comparative and educational psychology have long been the two main fields of psychological research, with studies of personality and management becoming increasingly popular in the past 10 years. Cognitive psychology has also been a major area, and other areas have developed, such as sport psychology, social psychology, psychology of religion (Chen *et al.*, 2006), medical psychology and clinical psychology (Hou & Zhang, 2009; Qian *et al.*, 2002). Psychology is, happily, getting more and more effective in getting funding support for research in competition with other disciplines (e.g. biology and medicine).

Employment of psychologists

Graduates with psychological training backgrounds are welcomed by a variety of institutions, such as schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and government departments. The need for psychological professionals is increasing in administration, business, health service, and in training professions. This makes psychology as a discipline increasingly attractive to the younger generation, so there are demanding criteria for university admission.

Psychological societies and organisations

Professional organisations recovered after the cultural revolution, and the Chinese

Psychological Society (CPS) was accepted by the International Union of Psychological Science in 1980, returning Chinese psychology to the world stage.

There are now four major organisations representing psychology in China at national level. The basic research-oriented CPS (www.cpsbeijing.org) has 20 branch committees representing the current development of main areas of research and application. It was founded in 1921, and was thus only the seventh national society of psychology in the world (Rosenzweig, 1992). National conferences are held in cooperation with one of the 31 provincial psychological societies. CPS currently publishes two journals bi-monthly, *Acta Psychologica Sinica* and *Psychological Science*, in Chinese (with occasional articles in English) but with single page English abstracts.

CPS issued its first ethic codes for psychological assessment in 1993 (CPS, 1993). As the demand for mental health service providers keeps increasing, psychologists in the 'Clinical and Counseling Committee' of CPS are working together to develop an ethical code for Chinese Clinical Psychologists, and to build a supervision system (registration and regulation) for psychological service providers. This first step of professionalising the psychological service in Chinese society has been approved by the Standing Committee of the CPS.

In 2004 the 28th International Congress of Psychology was held in Beijing

The Chinese Ergonomics Society (CES, www.cesbj.org) was founded in 1989. It was affiliated to IPCAS from 1994 to 2002, and to Beijing University now. It publishes the *Chinese Journal of Ergonomics* quarterly.

The medical application-oriented Chinese Association for Mental Health (CAMH) was founded in 1979 and is currently affiliated to Beijing AnDing Hospital. It publishes the *China Mental Health Journal*, *China Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *Journal of Health Psychology* and *Psychology and Health Magazine*. CAMH and CPS, jointly in cooperation with Beijing University (Department of Psychology), will hold the 5th World Congress of Psychotherapy (WCP2008, www.wcp2008.org) in Beijing in October 2008.

The Chinese Association of Social Psychology (CASP, tinyurl.com/yw9uld) was founded in 1982, with five specialty divisions (Theory and Instruction; Economical and Organizational

Psychology; Ethnic and Cultural Psychology; Military Psychology; and Journalism and Communication Psychology), and 16 provincial branches. Their quarterly academic publication, the *Journal of Social Psychology*, has been published since 1990.

International communication

Formal communication between Chinese psychologists and foreign colleagues took off early in the 20th century. The USA and UK were the two main destinations for Chinese students and visiting scholars studying psychology before 1949, and then the former Soviet Union and East European countries from 1949 to 1966. Since China reopened to the Western world, more and more students have flown to the USA and European countries to study psychology. Some of them return to mainland China after finishing their studies to take leading positions in teaching, research, and professional applications. International exchange programmes have proliferated among students, scholars and administrative staff.

A peak achievement in terms of international academic communication within China was the 28th International Congress of Psychology, held in Beijing in 2004, hosted by the CPS under the auspices of IUPsyS. It was the first ICP ever to be held in an Asian developing country, and it attracted more than 6000 psychologists from 78 countries around the world.

Conclusion

Psychology in China is developing rapidly and Chinese psychologists are working hard to serve the country, meeting its demands while in the process of vast economic development. We are also targeting the frontiers for our own contributions to psychology both as a science and a profession, through international cooperation and in the context of indigenous Chinese culture.

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Acknowledgement

We very much appreciate Professor Qicheng Jing's valuable suggestions on the historical background of psychology in China.

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