



An Experimental Study on the Relationship between Confucius Culture and the Social Cognition of Chinese People

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Abstract

Confucius Culture profoundly impacts on people's social cognitive processes and behavior style. Study One used the Qualitative Research Method, the Content Analysis, to analyze the "Confucian Analects". The result showed that Confucius Culture is a kind of culture of the internal. Based on the result, one experiment was conducted showing that the experimental group which was exposed to some symbols associated with Confucius Culture elicited a more tendency to make internal attribution.

Keywords: Confucius culture, Activation of culture, Social cognition, Cultural meaning systems

1. Background

The subject that culture affects social cognitive processes has been the academic research focus these years. Cultural psychologists consider that culture and mental are mutually constructed, while the psychological processes are formed by internalization of the cultural patterns and norms (Fiske A P, Kitayama S, Markus H R, & Nisbett R E, 1998, pp.915-981). Cultural meaning system (Shweder. R. A & Sullivan, M. A, 1990, pp.399-416) (Markus, H. R. & Kitayama, S. 1991, 98, pp.224-53) has become the main mode used to explain the relationship between culture and social cognitive. This system provides a framework for interpreting people's own experiences and making these experiences meaningful. According to this system, social cognitive processes might be changed with culture. With cultural meaning system, people are showing the own social cognitive style when they judge social events. However, these effects can not be measured directly except by the activation of the cultural meaning system. A new research paradigm for studying the relation of culture and social cognitive processes are proposed. In this paradigm, the influences of culture on social cognitive processes are assumed to be mediated in part by activation of cultural meaning system.

Consistent with this prediction, Shweder & Sullivan (1990, pp.399-416), Markus & Kitayama (1991, 98, pp.224-53, 1994, 20, pp.568-79), Miller & Bersoff (1994, 20, pp.592-602), Morris & Peng (1994, 67: pp.949-971), etc. have done a series of studies on cultural meaning system. In the experiment of Morris & Peng (1994, 67: pp.949-971), Chinese participants would show the values of Chinese-style when they were exposed to some symbols strongly associated with Chinese culture. In this way, these participants were activated the implicit attribution style and made the same relevant attribution. Ying-yi Hong (1997, pp.135~146) selected the dual cultural background participants from Hong Kong University. Then she used the pictures strongly related with the Oriental or Western culture to activate the cultural meaning system, making the cultural values implicit exposed, and thus guides them to carry out the corresponding social judgments. Drawing on the cultural meaning system theory, the present research sought to develop a new research accessibility of the Chinese cultural meaning system and thereby the likelihood of their using it to guide judgments. Similarly, due to their extensive exposure to Western cultures, these participants have developed a Western cultural meaning system. And it can be activated and used to guide judgments when pictures strongly associated with Western cultures are presented.

Most of the previous researches focused on the cross-cultural comparison and did little study on the sub-culture and the special cultural background. In fact, the sub-culture which influences on the formation of one individual's unique patterns of social cognition coexists under the main cultural circumstances. Researching on the sub-culture or the specific culture will be helpful to deeply understand the social cognition intrinsic mechanism.

In this study, based on the Chinese localization, using experimental design and research methods, we select Confucian Culture, which coexisted with other components of Chinese traditional culture, as the research background to prove our predictions.

Confucius Culture is a kind of culture system which is an important part of traditional Chinese culture, based on Confucius Thoughts, founded by Confucius and his disciples, has a very significant impact on the future generations. However, it does not include the supplement and the development of the latter Confucian scholars. Confucius Culture differs from Confucianism which is the original part and typical representative of it. Most parts of Confucius Thoughts and the essence of some doctrines are found in *The Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *Zhuang Zi*, *Xun Zi*, etc. Confucius Culture has a tremendous influence on the thought and values of Chinese and East Asian today, which profoundly impacts on social cognition and behavior of Chinese people.

To provide a more direct test for our predictions, we make two hypotheses: in study one, using the Qualitative Research Method analyzing *The Analects of Confucius*, we propose the Confucius Culture is a kind of culture which emphasizes the internal. In study two, based on study one, an experiment is conducted. We propose that the participants with the endorsement of Confucius Culture will make internal attribution if they are activated by some symbols associated with Confucius Culture when they judge social events.

2. Study 1

2.1 Method

In order to know whether Confucius Culture emphasizes the internal of oneself, we choose the most significant representative of Confucius Culture, *The Analects of Confucius*, as the study material.

The Analects of Confucius, is a record of the words and acts of the central Chinese thinker and philosopher, Confucius and his disciples, as well as the discussions they held. The Chinese title literally means "discussion over Confucius words." It is the representative work of Confucius Culture. Chapters in the *Analects* are grouped by individual themes. However, the chapters are not arranged in any way so as to carry a continuous stream of thought or idea. In fact, the sequence of the chapters could be said to be completely random, with the themes of adjacent chapters completely unrelated to each other.

We adopted Qualitative Research Method, the Content Analysis, analyzed *The Analects of Confucius*. Totally there were 512 statements, 20 chapters in *The Analects of Confucius*. According to the meaning of each statement, we classified these statements into three categories: the first part consisted of some sentences to emphasize external factors; the second part consisted of some sentences to emphasize the internal factors; and the third one was the neutrality.

Each member of the research team classified *The Analects of Confucius* respectively. If result could not reach an agreement, we would discuss it until all of us reach the agreement. After the whole process, we consulted some experts on Confucius Culture, comparing all of the results of the Content Analysis, solving the divergence. In this way, the final result came out.

2.2 Results

Totally there were 512 statements in *The Analects of Confucius*. Among these statements, there were 245 neutral statements, and 229 focusing on internal factors and 38 paying attention to external factors (see Table 1).

χ^2 with the number of both the internal and external statements was significant different at the 0.001 level. ($\chi^2 = 136.633$, $p < 0.01$).

As expected, Confucius Culture is the culture which emphasizes the internal of oneself.

3. Study 2

3.1 Method

Based on the result of the above experiment, using the new paradigm, culture activation experiment paradigm (Hong Y, Chiu C, & Kung T, 1997, pp.135~146), we explore the social cognition processes on which Confucius Culture impacts. We sought to extend Study one finding by testing the effects of exposure to cultural materials on causal attributions.

Ninety-eight undergraduate students randomly selected from Shandong Province were asked to list 10 statements which could be the most representative of Confucius Culture in their mind. According to the frequency, we chose top 20 statements and then asked the experts on Confucianism to select the most representative 10 sentences respectively from these 20 statements. Synthesizing the opinion of these experts, six statements which could be the most representative ones become the experimental material.

Eighty participants (undergraduates from some universities of Shandong) were averagely randomly assigned to the experimental group and the controllable group. In the experimental group, the participants were shown the six selected statements and asked to explain the meaning of each statement, while the controllable group did nothing. In this way,

the participants who were exposed to the symbols of Confucius Culture would show the Confucius Culture meaning system. This procedure lasted 15 minutes. Then both two groups were presented with a picture depicting a fish swimming in front of a school of fish and asked to write down what they thought was the major reason for the fish's swimming in front of other fish and how they were assured with their answers. We asked them to indicate on a 7-point scale why the one fish was swimming in front of the other fish. A score of 1 on the scale meant "very confident that it is because the one fish is leading the other fish" (an internal cause) and a score of 7 meant "very confident that it is because the one fish is being chased by the other fish" (an external cause). We predicted that participants in the Confucius Culture condition would express a higher confidence in the internal explanation than would participants in the controllable group.

3.2 Result

As shown Table 2, our prediction was confirmed. On the whole, participants perceived the target fish to be leading the other fish, possibly because all the fish in picture belong to the same kind of fish, which makes the "leading" explanation more reasonable than the "chasing" explanation. However, participants in the two groups differed in how confident they were in this explanation. Participants who were exposed to Confucius Culture condition were more confident in the internal explanation. In summary, this experiment suggests that, showing the pictures associated with one culture may activate the implicit causal theories in the associated cultural meaning system and thereby affects casual inferences. Specifically, activating a Confucius Culture meaning system tended to enhance confidence in internal attribution whereas without activating any meaning system tended to reduce confidence in internal attribution.

4. Discussion

According to study one, the result indicates that Confucius Culture is the culture which emphasizes the internal of oneself. The Confucius Culture tells people if you face some problems, you should look inside. Then maybe you will find some way to solve problems. Confucius advocates the introspection, "Everyday, I look inside my own soul to find if I have done anything betray myself" (*The Analects of Confucius*). The Confucius Culture stresses that through introspecting personally, enhancing the accomplishment of one, enables everyone to reach a higher standard of achievement. In this way, we could coordinate with the outside. Confucius proposed the core connotation of Confucius Culture --- Benevolence, advocated "benevolence is the self-restraint and ritual". The other thoughts of Confucius were the Good Faith, the Filial Piety, Loyal, being Gentleman, Study, and Making Friends and so on. However, there is a common characteristic on all of Confucius Thoughts which he spares no effort to stress that one person should find the reason from the interior, "not resentful day, not especially human". People should depend on themselves. From the values of the Confucius Culture, it advocates the importance of individual's efforts and that people should pay great attention to their own life and work diligently. In brief, Confucius has constructed a cultural system which treats Benevolence as the core, chooses "the Filial Piety" as the basis, and takes "Loyal" as the method, unites politics, ethics and the philosophy together. This ideology has great tendency to emphasizing the internal. Therefore, Confucius Culture is the culture which emphasizes the internal of oneself.

As shown in study two, Participants who were exposed to Confucius Culture condition were more confident in the internal explanation. When they judge some social events, they find the solution inside. According to the cultural meaning system theory (Shweder & Sullivan, 1990, pp.399-416) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, pp.98, 224-53) and the knowledge activation theory (Higgins, E. T. 1990, pp.301-38) (Mischel, W. & Shoda, Y. 1995, pp.102, 246-68), the culture affecting individual's social cognition processes is mediated by the cultural meaning system---the intermediary variable adjustment. A cultural meaning system theory provides individuals with an interpretive frame to make sense of their experience. Research following this approach has sought to assess the role of cultural meaning systems in social cognition by comparing social cognitive processes in cultures with very different dominant conceptions of persons and social relations (Miller 1994, 20, pp.592-602) (Morris M W, Peng K. 1994, 67: pp.949-971). Once the cultural meaning system is activated, the social cognition process will display the culture effects (Morris M W, Peng K. 1994, 67: pp.949-971). Higgins (1989, pp.75-123) pointed out that the cultural meaning system is a network which combines series of mutually connective cognition ingredients. In this experiment, the participants were shown the statements from *The Analects of Confucius*. By exposed to the Confucius Culture circumstance, the Confucius Culture meaning system of the participants was activated. The participants would express the same cognitive style consistent with the values of Confucius Culture. They have the same characteristic cognition system organization.

Morris & Peng (1994, 67: pp.949-971), Ying-yi Hong (1997, pp.135~146) have proven that in their respective researches, the Chinese express a tendency to make external attribution when faced with the social events. However, our research proves that Confucius Culture is a kind of culture which emphasizes the internal of oneself. People who are affected deeply by Confucius Culture would show a tendency to make internal attribution. Since several thousands of years, Chinese people who have been deeply influenced by Confucius Culture should have stronger tendency to make internal attribution. But why does this research differ from the western studies? In my mind, Confucius Culture is only a part of China traditional culture. Correspondingly, it only takes a small part of the influence on the people society

cognition. The attributional style is formed by many kinds of joint influences. Therefore the Chinese might not show the completely same attributional style consistent with Confucius Culture. Moreover, the former researches either were done ten year ago or chosen the adults as the subjects. However, the attributional style of the present Chinese undergraduate students might be changed with the time. The Confucius Culture meaning system may remain largely implicit, and may still affect the person's social inferences when it is activated. How does the cultural element play a role in the process of Chinese social cognitive style? What about the traditional culture? This needs to be further analyzed.

In summary, this research opens up new possibilities for investigating the psychological process of social cognition under specific culture, the Confucius Culture. In this way, we can analyze the unique cognitive style of Chinese. Also, can discuss the psychic-mechanism of the culture influences on the social cognition

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Table 1. The classification of the statements

Contents	Statements of the internal	Statements of the external	Totally
Chapter One	12	2	14
Chapter Two	12	3	15
Chapter Three	5	2	7
Chapter Four	19	2	21
Chapter Five	21	1	22
Chapter Six	16	2	18
Chapter Seven	18	1	19
Chapter Eight	8	3	11
Chapter Nine	10	2	12
Chapter Ten	1	2	3
Chapter Eleven	2	0	2
Chapter Twelve	17	3	20
Chapter Thirteen	18	0	18
Chapter Fourteen	15	5	20
Chapter Fifteen	34	3	37
Chapter Sixteen	8	2	10
Chapter Seventeen	13	2	15
Chapter Eighteen	0	0	0
Chapter Nineteen	0	2	2
Chapter Twenty	0	1	1
Σ	229	38	267

Table 2. Result of the Confidence

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Experimental group (n=37)	5.38	1.516	
Controllable group (n=39)	4.08	1.660	3.563*

* $p < 0.01$