What are the differences in moral psychology between Chinese and Western cultural contexts?

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Abstract

Since its inception, modern Western ethics and moral psychology have experienced a century of development, characterized by abundant literature, remarkable achievements, and diverse schools of thought. By contrast, Chinese moral psychology, despite having accumulated certain theoretical inquiries and empirical results, ultimately lacks theoretical construction grounded in an ethical thought system based on Chinese culture. Furthermore, empirical investigations from the perspective of experimental social psychology are notably limited, leaving the field in a preliminary stage of exploration. This article seeks to systematically review and evaluate modern-oriented mainstream Western moral psychology theories and their limitations, as well as discussions on moral psychology within the Chinese cultural context and future prospects, aiming to inspire future researchers to collaboratively advance the development of a Chinese moral psychology discourse system that integrates both international vision and indigenous sensibilities, ultimately serving to describe, explain, predict, and enhance the moral psychology and moral behavior of the Chinese people.

Full Text

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Abstract

Modern Western ethics and moral psychology have developed over the past century into a rich literature with remarkable achievements and numerous schools of thought. In contrast, while Chinese moral psychology has accumulated certain theoretical discussions and empirical findings, it remains in a preliminary exploratory stage due to the lack of a theoretical framework grounded in Chinese

cultural ethics and the limited number of empirical studies from an experimental social psychology perspective. This paper seeks to review and critique modern Western mainstream moral psychology theories and their limitations, as well as to examine moral psychology within the Chinese cultural context and its future prospects. Our aim is to inspire future researchers to collaboratively advance the construction of a Chinese moral psychology discourse system that possesses both international vision and local sensibility, ultimately serving to describe, explain, predict, and enhance the moral psychology and moral behavior of Chinese people.

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Morality has been a timeless and core pursuit of humanity throughout history. Disciplines exploring morality include but are not limited to philosophy, psychology, economics, political science, education, neuroscience, primatology, and anthropology. Among the many conceptual definitions of morality, the most influential include Turiel' s (1983, p. 3) definition: "Morality is about normative judgments concerning how people ought to relate to each other, about justice, rights, and welfare."Renowned social psychologist Haidt (2008) proposed an alternative definition emphasizing the function rather than content of moral systems, defining morality as "a set of interlocking values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperative social life possible" (Haidt, 2008, p. 800). We contend that morality represents social norms acquired through long-term human evolution and cultural shaping, which define how people should think, feel, and act, establishing criteria for right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and ugliness.

Moral psychology examines how humans function in moral contexts and explores how these findings can inform ethical theorizing (Doris & Stich, 2006). This field encompasses both philosophical and psychological orientations, integrates multiple theoretical perspectives, and is currently experiencing multidisciplinary revitalization and flourishing (Haidt, 2007). Throughout history, numerous moral theories have attempted to depict and explain the complex, multifaceted, and profound phenomena of human moral psychology. Early intellectual origins include Plato' s *Republic* and Aristotle' s *Nicomachean Ethics* from ancient Greek philosophy, as well as Confucius' s *Analects* and Mencius'

s *Mencius* from ancient Chinese philosophy. This paper aims to introduce and critique modern-oriented moral psychology theories, methods, and empirical evidence from Western cultural backgrounds, while preliminarily elaborating on moral psychological perspectives within the Chinese cultural context. We also identify limitations and criticisms of existing theories and methods, hoping to guide future scholars toward greater attention to cultural differences in moral psychology between China and the West and to promote the construction of a moral psychology discourse system with both international vision and local sensibility.

2.1 Philosophical Foundations

The philosophical foundations of contemporary moral psychology consist of three major schools: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Utilitarian scholars (represented by Bentham and Mill) argue that the best morality maximizes human happiness, with the moral worth of an action determined by the goodness of its consequences. Deontological scholars (represented by Kant) maintain that actions should be judged by absolute moral principles regardless of outcomes—for example, killing is universally wrong no matter how many lives might be saved. In other words, "the ends do not justify the means" (Amit & Greene, 2012). Virtue ethics asserts that people possess certain good and bad moral qualities, and that moral institutions should promote virtues such as honesty, compassion, and kindness (Hursthouse, 1999). Despite fundamental disagreements, utilitarianism and deontology share commonalities, including emphasis on parsimony, reasoning, and attention to abstract, universal principles (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Both traditions have shifted ethical inquiry from the virtue ethicist's question "What kind of person should I become?" to "What is the right thing to do?" (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Nevertheless, virtue ethics is experiencing revival, with growing attention to the social responsibilities of moral institutions and the importance of intrinsic moral character.

Western ethics provides a rich and profound intellectual foundation for moral psychology. Thought experiments such as the trolley problem have supplied research content and narrative materials for experimental ethics, making the integration of ethics and experimental social psychology possible. However, ethical inquiry operates at the "normative" level—how people *ought* to act—while social psychology operates at the "descriptive" level—how people *will* act. The gap between these two levels remains inadequately bridged, and whether conclusions from experimental ethics can directly guide moral practice requires further investigation and verification.

2.2 Theoretical Schools

Western moral psychology synthesizes multiple knowledge systems and has been influenced by philosophy, anthropology, religious studies, cognitive science, and life sciences, forming a relatively complete theoretical system that has increas-

ingly demonstrated interdisciplinary integration in recent years (Haidt, 2007). Against this backdrop, ethics research in the Western world has achieved fruitful results and developed a comprehensive and profound Western moral psychology discourse system. Since the 20th century, numerous moral theories and paradigms have emerged, including Durkheim's theory of moral education (1925), Freud's theory of moral personality (1962), Piaget's theory of moral development (1932), Kohlberg's theory of moral stages (1958), Gilligan's theory of moral development (1988), Turiel's social interaction theory (1979), and Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986). Over the past two decades, two major theoretical perspectives have dominated moral psychology research: the developmental psychology orientation, which investigates the origins, acquisition, and development of moral concepts and reasoning; and the social psychology orientation, which examines moral intuition, emotion, and behavior through an integrative lens of evolution, neuroscience, and social psychology (Haidt, 2008). Below we review three of the most representative Western moral psychology theories.

2.3 Moral Foundations Theory

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) is one of the most influential modern theories, offering a robust explanation of the psychological basis for moral judgments with substantial cross-cultural empirical support (Graham et al., 2011; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Joseph, 2004, 2007; Haidt, 2001, 2013). MFT conceptualizes moral judgment as akin to aesthetic judgment, primarily driven by moral intuitions defined as "the sudden appearance in consciousness, or at the fringe of consciousness, of an evaluative feeling (like-dislike, good-bad) about the character or actions of a person, without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of search, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion" (Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008). Despite rationalism's dominance for over two centuries, MFT embraces six trends reshaping moral psychology: the affective revolution, revival of cultural psychology, automaticity revolution, neuroscience, primatology, and evolutionary psychology (Haidt, 2013). While the cognitive revolution reshaped psychology in the 1960s, subsequent waves of change, particularly the "affective revolution" since the 1980s, have rewritten this landscape (Graham, 2013).

David Hume's famous assertion that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (1777/2011, p. 2) provides a foundational insight that MFT adopts and situates within social discourse. The mid-1980s development of cultural psychology, led by cultural anthropologists Richard Shweder and cultural psychologists John Berry, Steven Heine, Harry Triandis, and Richard Nisbett, significantly influenced the framework of moral psychology. MFT adopts a pluralistic approach, attempting to apply a general framework to various forms of culture, such as national boundaries, political orientations, and social classes. By integrating empirical evidence from neuroscience, primatology, and evolutionary psychology, MFT provides a multi-perspective and robust social psychological model.

Haidt and colleagues proposed the Social Intuitionist Model (SIM) to synthesize decades of work in moral psychology. SIM advances three main principles about the psychological processes underlying moral judgments (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2007; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010): First, intuitions come first, reasoning second. Although individuals often engage in deliberate reasoning, moral intuitions arise automatically, rapidly, and effortlessly during moral judgment, with careful reasoning primarily serving as post-hoc justification of initial evaluative feelings. SIM does not claim moral persuasion is impossible, but suggests it rarely occurs in everyday life. Second, morality is more than care and fairness. MFT proposes a broader conception of the moral domain that extends beyond care and fairness. When examining other cultures, we discover moral norms distinctly different from WEIRD cultures (Henrich et al., 2010). For instance, Koreans highly value authority, while Islamic cultures emphasize purity. MFT proposes five "best candidates" to explain the underlying psychological basis for cross-cultural moral differences. Third, morality binds and blinds. Everyone views the world through their own moral lens, motivated to form moral communities that prescribe how members should behave, achieve extreme group solidarity, and satisfy people's need to belong, as seen in religious organizations (Haidt, 2007). However, moral disagreements between highly cohesive moral groups become more difficult to resolve.

In summary, MFT represents a nativist, intuitionist, and pluralist approach to studying morality (Graham, 2013). Notably, the innate components within the MFT framework do not imply existence at birth or universal expression across all people or cultures, but rather mean they are prior to experience (Marcus, 2004). Importantly, moral foundations entail universal psychological preparedness developed through evolutionary processes (Seligman, 1971). Undoubtedly, MFT has made significant contributions to moral psychology, reshaping its contemporary landscape in diverse ways. First, it provides a functionalist definition of morality and broadens its scope beyond harm and fairness. Second, it adopts a pluralistic approach that minimizes cultural bias and allows scholars to develop more nuanced understandings of subcultural differences. Third, it provides compelling evidence for the intuitive nature of moral judgments (e.g., research on moral disgust) and attempts to reconcile the debate between reasoning and intuition. In conclusion, MFT has extensively influenced the conceptualization, theoretical evolution, and practical applications of morality over the past two decades and will certainly inspire more research in conceptually and practically meaningful ways in the coming decade.

Most criticisms target Haidt's (2001) provocative claim that "moral judgments are caused by automatic processes, not by reasoning and reflection." MFT treats moral reasoning as post-hoc justification that serves social persuasion purposes well. Other researchers have questioned this core claim of SIM, suggesting that moral judgment may be an iterative process where intuitive and rational, deliberate processes intertwine (Saltzstein & Kasachkoff, 2004). The phenomenon of "moral dumbfounding" —where people often cannot explicitly reason or verbally articulate why they consider certain moral actions right or wrong—has

been taken as evidence that moral judgments are primarily driven by emotional processes. However, this does not prove that intuition determines moral judgment while excluding the critical role of reasoning. Furthermore, MFT needs to provide clear evidence revealing how these moral intuitions are generated. If deliberate moral reasoning is merely post-hoc justification, then moral intuitions should not originate from the culmination of iterative reasoning processes. Nevertheless, MFT theorists acknowledge they have focused too much on initial moral judgments while paying insufficient attention to how morality develops and improves with experience (Graham, 2013).

Despite synthesizing substantial research from evolutionary psychology, cultural psychology, anthropology, and primatology, and proposing several criteria for "moral foundations," the initial selection of five "candidates" appears somewhat arbitrary rather than systematic and theory-driven. MFT theorists acknowledge that other candidates may exist, such as liberty/oppression, efficiency/waste, and ownership/theft, though their eligibility requires further verification.

2.3 Dual-Process Theory

Building on the general framework of dual-process models and the conceptualization and empirical evidence provided by MFT, Greene and colleagues proposed the Dual-Process Model of Moral Judgment (DPM) to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying moral judgments. Consistent with MFT, DPM recognizes the central role of emotion in moral decision-making, validated by both behavioral experiments and fMRI evidence (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley & Cohen, 2001). However, DPM contends that moral judgment is the master of "cognition" (involving the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex) rather than the servant of "emotion" (rapid intuitive judgments relying more on brain regions associated with emotional responses) (Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom & Cohen, 2008). Greene and colleagues argue that cognition and emotion in moral judgment resemble the relationship between utilitarian reasoning and deontological principles, with these intertwined processes constantly competing in the brain. Nevertheless, DPM agrees with the basic intuitionist claim that fast, automatic, affective processing typically drives moral reasoning and transforms it into rationalization (Graham, 2013).

The methods used in Greene and colleagues' research differ from the various types of moral violations employed in MFT. Moral dilemmas, particularly trolley problems, serve as the most commonly used moral scenarios. DPM posits that two distinct types of psychological processes jointly determine moral judgment outcomes: automatic mode and manual mode. These processes correspond to specific brain regions that either work cooperatively or compete to "win." Recently, DPM has proposed an "integrative moral judgment" framework to reveal underlying psychological processes. Both behavioral experiments and neuroscience evidence support the hypothesis that the amygdala provides affective evaluation of relevant actions, while the vmPFC integrates this signal to conduct utilitarian evaluation of expected outcomes, producing an "all-things-

considered" moral judgment (Shenhav & Greene, 2014).

DPM provides rich empirical evidence for how emotion and reason function in moral decision-making. Both fMRI and behavioral evidence indicate that individuals' judgments of various forms of moral dilemmas depend heavily on emotional responses, while reason can override initial emotional responses by enforcing utilitarian principles. DPM emphasizes the theoretical and practical significance of dual-process theory in the moral domain and expresses skepticism toward the intuitionist approach emphasized by MFT. In summary, DPM advocates for a return to rationalist methods and highlights contrasts between moral dilemmas, inspiring future research to more carefully examine the underlying psychological mechanisms of moral reasoning.

The relative roles of emotion and reason in moral judgment remain contested. DPM provides empirical evidence arguing for the critical role of moral reasoning. For example, Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom, and Cohen (2008) found that cognitive load indeed slows utilitarian responses to moral dilemmas, suggesting reasoning plays some role in moral judgment. However, it does not appear to change final moral judgments, which is inconsistent with the view that two independent processes work in opposition (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). One major limitation is DPM' s use of abstract moral dilemmas (e.g., trolley problems). Placing subjects in quiet laboratory environments inherently increases the relative importance of reasoning processes, and more compelling evidence from the real world would provide stronger empirical support for DPM. DPM also lacks cross-cultural evidence to prove its universal applicability, as most samples consist of American college students or online populations. Whether DPM exhibits larger or smaller cultural differences between or within cultures represents a theoretically and practically meaningful question. Importantly, DPM has been criticized by social neuroscientists for "reverse inference" —it should provide behavioral evidence to establish connections between psychological processes and moral judgments, then validate theoretical claims through consistent fMRI evidence. However, most evidence provided by DPM consists of direct fMRI results from which the dual-process model of moral judgment is derived. Finally, the newly proposed "integrative moral judgment" model may function differently across subpopulations, with some individuals highly sensitive to reasoning processes while others more readily detect emotional cues. Individual differences may moderate specific interaction patterns between emotion and reasoning, yet DPM has not considered the boundary conditions of the integrative framework.

2.4 Model of Moral Motives

Globalization, cultural collision and integration, and contemporary cultural wars in American society have highlighted the need to understand moral disagreement. Janoff-Bulman and colleagues proposed the Model of Moral Motives (MMM) to explain the basic psychological motivations underlying these moral differences (Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh & Baldacci, 2008). MMM claims that crossing basic approach-avoidance motivations with

self-other focus yields four moral motives: self-restraint (avoidance-self), self-reliance (approach-self), not-harming (avoidance-other), and helping (approach-other) (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008). They also examined these moral motives in the context of political orientation, concluding that political conservatism relates to avoidance motivation while liberalism relates to approach motivation (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh & Hepp, 2009).

Importantly, MMM reviews previous empirical evidence revealing substantial distinctions between proscriptive and prescriptive morality. Proscriptions focus on what we should *not* do and are more severe and demanding, whereas prescriptions focus on what we should do and are more discretionary and less stringent (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008; Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Furthermore, MMM suggests that proscriptive morality better aligns with deontology's rule-based right/wrong framework, while prescriptive morality resonates with utilitarianism's promotion of maximum benefit. Moral development research indicates that children across age groups can distinguish proscriptive from prescriptive morality in early moral norms (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Thus, MMM provides compelling explanations of underlying moral motives by integrating approach/activation and avoidance/inhibition systems. MMM further revised its theoretical framework to incorporate two group-based moralities: social order and social justice. Consequently, MMM integrates a 2×3 model across two analytical levels, serving groups by encouraging individuals to undertake shared responsibilities while protecting group solidarity to strengthen community cohesion. Interestingly, MMM proposes a socially embedded view of morality (Carnes, Lickel, & Janoff-Bulman, 2015) to examine how different moral principles meet situational demands and facilitate successful regulation of complex human social life. By testing whether specific social contexts can explain people's subjective perceptions of moral principles operating within social groups, research reveals unique psychological patterns in how people evaluate different group types. Loyalty emerges as the primary operating principle in intimate groups (e.g., family members), fairness dominates social categories (ingroup members) and task groups (e.g., colleagues), and sanctity applies most to loose associations (e.g., strangers in coffee shops). MMM seeks to better understand the underlying motivations of moral differences and how they adapt to specific social environments. Conceptually, it integrates frameworks from the Behavioral Inhibition and Activation Systems (Carver & White, 1994) and Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1998). Unlike MFT, which controversially claims conservatives have a broader moral scope, MMM does not assert that conservatives or liberals possess more or less moral breadth, but rather includes responsible and meaningful understandings of individuals and groups (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008). As Janoff-Bulman (2008) stated, "By trying to understand and appreciate the moral motives of others, we may not always achieve greater consensus, but we may still achieve the worthy goal of a more civil society." MMM provides a comprehensive and dynamic perspective for explaining ideological differences, integrating behavioral activation/inhibition theories and distinguishing between two fundamental moralities—prescriptive and proscrip-

tive—that reflect a dual system of moral regulation. MMM holds theoretical and practical significance and offers a new perspective for conceptualizing the moral domain. However, while MMM helps highlight underlying moral motivations, it may be too general to provide nuanced explanations for specific moral differences, such as classic moral dilemmas between utilitarian and deontological principles. Moreover, it does not theoretically help reconcile the debate between intuition and reasoning. Finally, whether MMM is culturally universal or specific remains to be clearly addressed.

3. Moral Psychology in the Chinese Cultural Context

3.1 Philosophical Foundations

Chinese discourse on morality boasts a long, rich, and profound history. From the Hundred Schools of Thought in the pre-Qin period to Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties, ancient Chinese ethical discourse systems were replete with discussions and interpretations of "Dao" and "De" (the Way and virtue), as well as the "ethical heart," including Confucian "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness," Mencius's four beginnings ("The heart of compassion is the beginning of benevolence; the heart of shame is the beginning of righteousness; the heart of respect is the beginning of propriety; the heart of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom"), Mozi's "universal love," and Guanzi's "propriety, righteousness, integrity, and shame" (Liu & Zhang, 2013). Since the founding of the People's Republic of China over 70 years ago, contemporary Chinese ethics has experienced a winding development path. Scholars argue that the urgent task for Chinese ethics is constructing an ethics with Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese ethos—one that highlights Chinese ethical culture, reflects China's contemporary spirit, and addresses China's major issues (Li, 2019). The following sections briefly elaborate on moral psychological perspectives within the Chinese cultural context.

3.2.1 Confucian Perspectives on Moral Psychology

The field of moral psychology has yet to develop a systematic, coherent, and comprehensive psychological theory to depict and interpret the Chinese moral system. However, many scholars have provided conceptually and empirically meaningful frameworks that challenge mainstream Western theories.

Bedford and Hwang (2003) highlight psychological differences between Eastern and Western cultural traditions. The Judeo-Christian view of life's origin suggests that humans are created by God, all people are equal, personality is defined within the individual as an independent entity, and personal goals are more important than group goals—characteristics supported by extensive research on individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988). In contrast, Confucian culture holds that "our body, skin, and hair are received from our parents," emphasizing that human life is ancestral heritage. The family is conceptualized as an extended self, with self-boundaries

flexible enough to include family members and significant others (Hwang, 1998). Hwang (1995) analyzed Confucian ethics and proposed a theoretical framework to identify Confucian ethical characteristics by referencing distinctions between positive/negative and imperfect/perfect duties.

During the period when rationalism dominated moral psychology, Kohlberg (1971) famously claimed cross-cultural universality in moral development: "All individuals in all cultures use the same basic moral categories, concepts, or principles, and all individuals in all cultures go through the same general developmental sequence or order of stages, though they vary in rate and endpoint" (p. 19). Kohlberg's theory has been criticized as a case of scientific cultural bias (Simpson, 1974). Shweder and Bourne (1992) accused the theory of treating the values of male, white, American intellectuals as the endpoint of moral maturity, formulated from a Western rationalist, individualist, and liberal ideological perspective (Shweder & Bourne, 1982). Hwang (1998) argued that Kohlberg's theory failed to recognize substantive differences in ethical philosophy, inevitably leading to systematic ethnocentric bias. He contrasted these Western ethics with East Asian Confucian ethics to provide an appropriate framework for explaining moral reasoning in Chinese society. Hwang (1998) noted that Confucianism envisioned five fundamental ethics for dyadic relationships in Chinese society, proposing specific ethical requirements for particular relationships. The roles or functions in these five basic relationships differ, indicating that each emphasizes distinct core values: "affection between father and son, righteousness between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, order between elder and younger, and trustworthiness between friends."

The case of Sage-King Shun illustrates Confucian resolution of moral dilemmas. When Shun's father committed murder, Mencius's response represented the Confucian solution: "As a sage-king, Shun should not stop the judge from arresting his murderous father; but as a filial son, he cannot allow his father to be punished." Mencius advised Shun to abandon his throne and escape with his criminal father to a place beyond the reach of authority—an resolution Confucius considered most appropriate (Hwang, 1998). Profound cultural differences may stem from different emphases on perfect/positive and imperfect/negative duties. Negative duties require inaction (e.g., do not kill, do not deceive, do not steal), while positive duties are typically formulated as guiding principles for action (e.g., practice charity, help those in need). Confucian humanity has both positive and negative dimensions. Mencius proposed an empirical rule: first care for your own elderly parents, then care for the elderly in general; first nurture your own children, then love other people's children (*Mencius*). Through careful analysis of Confucian cultural traditions, Hwang (1995) proposed a relational model depicting Chinese moral perspectives as depending on specific social relationships and their embedded interpersonal obligations. Although China has experienced unprecedented cultural changes over recent decades, traditional cultural beliefs remain deeply rooted in Chinese social mentality, particularly in moral judgment processes. Hu et al. (2018) found that individuals influenced by traditional Chinese culture indeed prioritize relational ethics over justice ethics

when facing moral dilemmas.

3.2.1 Daoist Perspectives on Moral Psychology

Daoism, which developed from shamanism, represents a fundamental Chinese philosophical thought that has influenced Chinese daily life and psychological processes for millennia (Lee, Chen, & Chan, 2013). Substantial cultural differences exist between Eastern and Western individuals regarding altruism such as generosity and selflessness. One of the most important components of Daoist belief is Laozi' s concept of "the highest good is like water." Lee and colleagues proposed the "Water-like personality," including flexibility, transparency, gentleness, persistence, and power, as a Daoist approach to personality. While Western morality strongly emphasizes virtues such as compassion, justice, loyalty, and liberty, Daoist and Laozian philosophy focuses more on harmony—including harmony with oneself, with others, and with nature (Lee, 2003). Therefore, considering these new theories, perspectives, and methods based on traditional Chinese culture holds important theoretical and practical significance for constructing a Chinese moral psychology discourse system and enriching the future global research landscape of moral psychology.

3.2.3 Cultural Influence: Universal or Specific?

Psychologists have increasingly recognized the critical role of culture in moral judgment, particularly examining the dynamic constructive relationship between culture and morality from cross-cultural, within-cultural, and multicultural perspectives (Hu, Yu, & Peng, 2018). Morality is embedded in specific cultural contexts; an individual' s morality is constructed from an initial template at the evolutionary level and then develops as they grow up in a particular culture with specific life experiences (Graham et al., 2013). For instance, virtues cherished by nomadic cultures differ dramatically from those cultivated in agricultural cultures and urban settings (Nisbett & Cohen, 2006). Genes and culture are hypothesized to co-evolve to support human life in these highly interdependent groups, as group living provides numerous benefits for survival, health, and reproduction (Richerson & Boyd, 2005). So, is moral psychology culturally universal or culturally specific? We argue that this depends on the level of analysis. In evolutionary terms, morality represents important social norms for every society and community —all morality is a product of cultural construction, and these social functions and deep mechanisms have universal significance. However, which virtues people value, which cultural contexts reinforce which moral psychological dimensions, and how cultural change reshapes moral maps—these content-level aspects represent culturally specific processes of change. As Shweder (1998) stated, "one mind, many mentalities." We endorse the position that people worldwide may develop sustainable mentalities or lifestyles appropriate to their cultural backgrounds from the potential of universal human capacities. This issue remains contested and requires scholars to further expand theoretical

thinking from multidisciplinary, multidimensional, and multilevel perspectives, accumulate cross-cultural empirical research, and confirm or falsify existing universal and difference hypotheses to develop more explanatory theoretical frameworks and more robust research findings.

4. Summary and Outlook

This literature review of moral theories from Chinese and Western social psychology perspectives is incomplete, as many scholars have proposed alternative frameworks to analyze the origins, functions, and psychological mechanisms of morality. For example, Rai & Fiske (2011) propose that moral psychology is relational regulation, while Gray (2012) presents a harm-based moral monism. However, most theories and methods to date have cultural limitations that may be less applicable to non-WEIRD cultures (Henrich et al., 2010).

Looking ahead, the field of moral psychology will continue to develop and progress along three directions. First, it will continue to integrate Western ethical thought with experimental social psychology methods to conduct theoretical construction and empirical exploration, including cross-cultural comparisons between China and the West. For instance, philosophers' thought experiments (such as the famous trolley problem) can be developed into moral dilemma stories to investigate intuitive moral judgments among different individuals and groups, the reasons for such judgments, and their cultural differences. Second, as globalization deepens, researchers increasingly focus on cultural differences in moral judgment and behavior. Human moral psychology represents an interactive product of long-term evolution and cultural learning. An important question for future research is the extent to which and in what aspects human moral psychology is culturally universal or culturally specific. Third, an emerging trend involves innovative and cutting-edge exploration using interdisciplinary technological methods such as big data, brain science, artificial intelligence, and computational modeling. Moral psychology in the Chinese cultural context must move beyond "WEIRD" populations to study the complex and vivid moral lives of Chinese people, reveal the psychological mechanisms underlying Chinese moral psychology, and thereby guide Chinese moral practice and moral education. Over the next decade, moral psychology will present a trend of multidisciplinary integration, exploring moral issues at multiple analytical levels, including economics, political science, anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, cognitive neuroscience, and artificial intelligence. As renowned moral psychologist Haidt (2013) noted, 21st-century moral psychology is in its golden age—precisely because we face a century filled with global threats, commons dilemmas, cultural conflicts, and injustice.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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