

Humanities and Social Sciences : After

My life has been the culmination of an intellectual journey that has encompassed such diverse disciplines as Psychology, Chinese Literature, Philosophy, and History. Observing different facets of the human experience, I have found that while people's minds radiate a diversity of colors – we all have a fundamental hue. My interdisciplinary approach has led me to refine my interest to studying the basic characteristics of the human mind and human cognition through the prism of our individual experiences and culture.

I can encapsulate this approach by my passion to learn about three broad concepts: 1) How people think and appreciate the world, 2) How people are influenced by different languages and cultures, and 3) How I can customize my personal approach to different personalities and thinking styles to help people alleviate their suffering. This belief has led me to apply to the Ph.D. program in Psychology at the University of *****.

I have always been interested in how behavioral differences can be attributed to cultural differences. I have found that as the boundary of “you-group” and “we-group” became salient, people became aware of the influence of culture and language on human behavior, thinking, and decision-making. However, culture cannot perfectly describe or predict how people act and think, but these elements do affect our focus, and our worldview. Our common human experience must overcome our divergence due to nature; and our divergence must serve as reflection of our potential for adaption, and further enrich our appreciation of others.

Studying Cultural Anthropology and Culture Linguistics at ***** University helped me immerse myself in Chinese academic thought, while balancing these concepts by simultaneously reading Western philosophy. This “dual” approach made me realize some mutuality among cultures. For instance, both philosophies developed theories of metaphysics, dialectics, and ethics, and display certain commonalities between the two philosophies. This reason is simple: regardless of culture, people are interested in the unknown, have an urge to coordinate opposite opinions, and must handle conflict. As Shwede eloquently states, there are many mentalities, yet one mind.

Therefore, I have tried to incorporate this concept of mental commonality into my research, statistical analysis, and experimental designs. I have been interested in dialogue and integration between cultures, not for comparison purposes, but to increase understanding. Initially, one of my goals was to re-interpret the literary work and thought of Chinese people from a psychological perspective. In one essay, *History of Chinese Thought*, I discussed the differences between interpersonal theories belonging to different sects based on aspects of social psychology. In another project, I discussed how Chinese literary works use scenic imagery through an elaborate interspersion of words, and blend this with psychological processing theory. I envision two different realms formed in different cultures that could communicate with each other; and their interaction could even elicit some deeper insights of both Chinese culture and general psychology.

I realized that philosophy and critics of literary works use a different approach than scientific psychology. Therefore, I started reading psychological papers to focus on

cognitive psychology, especially papers discussing the influence of culture on human thinking and reasoning, and more specifically, how this related to Chinese culture. At the University of *****, I plan to focus my research on several interrelated questions: Are the different behavioral and inferential forms of different cultures generated from the common potential of human beings? Do different methods of reasoning and categorization provide more profound knowledge of the human cognitive process, and consequently, make people more flexible and creative than we expect? And finally – can we truly appreciate the value of thinking strategies used by those who think differently?

I have found that in the past, cognitive psychology has often applied a research outcome in a specific culture to other populations based on the assumption that people had the same mental structure. More recently, researchers have discovered that there are different strategies for reasoning and categorization used by different cultures, and holistic versus analytical reasoning also has been a topic of concern. Although cultural influences are addressed -- the focus of the research is usually on divergences. The problem is that a person who performs a cognitive task might be influenced by multiple and complex cultures. Therefore, I hope to generate research that measures the effect of culture on human cognition, using my knowledge of Chinese history, language and culture. My experience of acculturation into different cultures can also assist this research.

During my tenure at the University of *****, my specific research topics will be reasoning; concepts and categorization; analogy and symbols. These are not the limit of my interests, but rather will provide the foundation for other independent research. I already have conducted insightful research in these areas including analyzing the difference between inferential strategies of Eastern and Western cultures, and I developed my own theory about an alternative explanation by tracing cultural roots of the history of China. I also completed a project involving cultural linguistics that utilized psychological theories of concepts, such as prototype and exemplar models, and theories of Chinese writing characters to explore the particularity of Chinese language. I concluded that cultural linguistics reflects the difference in some dimensions yet offers “one mind” from another viewpoint.

One reason that I want to study at ***** is that although I am very familiar with Chinese culture and thinking, I would like the opportunity to gain more insights into other cultures. I am not content with only exploring the commonality of human cognition based on my understanding of Chinese culture, but instead yearn to be saturated by the academic tradition of a familiar yet alien culture: the practice of science and logic, and the tradition of epistemology and methodology. That is why I have decided to study abroad. I believe that understanding a “clash” between different people is the beginning of true understanding of each other, and the true meaning of human nature.

Since my research interests focus on culturally related cognition processes, I wish to pursue a Ph.D. from the University of *****. I am especially impressed by professor *****’s research in language, culture and cognition, and am eager to undertake the impressive curriculum that includes cognitive psychology, as well as studies of critical aspects of human inference. I am also interested in the Culture and Cognition Lab, though the main area of this lab is social psychology. Moreover, the

Department of East Asian Studies at the University of ***** is world-renowned for its international study body, and cultural resources.

My goal is to become a leading researcher in academia that focuses on the disciplines of culture and cognition. I anticipate publishing research that expresses the true value of different forms of thinking and cognition while discovering the underlying principles of human nature. I am concerned about people that are suffering because they cannot exhibit socially favored abilities such as abstract thought; ultimately, I would like to help them by encouraging others to accept their unique thinking styles. An elite international education at the University of ***** will allow me to help those that suffer from psychological disadvantages through their background or culture, which would give me the opportunity to use my abilities to contribute to society.

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