Signs and origins of the West's 'easternization': the case of situational forces

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Social science that makes a difference

East's westernization

- Uptake of West's consumer brand:
    - McDonalidization (Ritzer, 1993); Cocacolization (Mlinar, 1992)
    - Nike, jean, T-shirts
    - Music, movies, TV programs

    …

- Uptake of West's philosophical & psychological 'goods':
    - English
    - Analysis and logic
    - Independence & competition

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West & East

- Assumptions & validations:
  - Dichotomous typology
    - Max Weber's re-examination of west in defining & explaining distinctive west (Bendix, 1959)
    - Compass concept (Campbell, 2007)
    - Nisbett (2005): The Geography of thought
    - Footnote: ideal types
  - West & East is converging:
    - Fukuyama
    - Huntington
  - Globalization = westernization?

- Our question:
  - What happens to the West in this globalization process?

West's easternization

- Conventional examples:
  - Cuisine; medicine/medical practice; religious &martial art practice (e.g., Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong).
  - Management styles: eg, organizational culture; employer-employee relations
- Nisbett (2005):
  - Logical systems: beyond binary true or false
  - Quantum mechanics: Niels Bohr attributed their progress to appreciation of eastern ideas
- Campbell (2007): *The Easternization of the West: a thematic account of cultural change in the modern era*
  - Revived popularity of astrology, mythology, intuition, FengShui & fantasy literature
  - Rise of the whole food & vegetarian, and environmental & animal rights movement ,
  - Rise of the concept of human potential, holistic health, and New Age movement.

Situational forces

- An eastern concept?
  - comparative literature (mostly psychology literature)
    - "Chinese are situation-centered, they are obligated to be sensitive to their environment. Americans are individual centered. They expect their environment to be sensitive to them" (Chiu, 1972)
    - Chinese, when asked to explain certain events, "invoke situational factors more frequently than do those of Americans…and Americans… more with respect to a target and its properties" (Nisbett, 2005, p296).
    - Americans are more prone (than easterners) to the Fundamental Attribution Error (Nisbett et al, 2001)
- Collectiveness culture:
  - individuals are defined within a socially situated & interactive context;
  - individual identity/action inseparable from the context–Confucianism
- Relativism & holistic worldview: multiple and contradictory views

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Situational forces in social psychology

- Kurt Lewin(1930s & 1940s): Behavior=f (Person, Situation)
  - Implication: dual origins of human behaviour; fixed amount of behavioural variance
- Max Weber (1958): bureaucracies could induce situational powers that constrain individual behaviour
- 1970: causal attribution debate became central
  - *Personality and Assessment* (Walter Mischel , 1968): correlation between character-related behaviours (across dissimilar situations)<0.3 (typically close to 0.2) ;
  - Paradigm crisis for trait researchers
  - Diverse body of empirical experiments
    - Eliciting cruelty: Milgram's obedience experiment; Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment
    - Suppressing helping behaviour: good Samaritan experiment; dime experiment
    - Bystander effect; Group conformity

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Situational forces in social psychology (Con)

- Effect size of situation
- Criticism:
  - Over emphasis on behaviour (insufficient focus on inclination & reasoning)
  - Methodological flaw (lack of longitude, focus on situations)
  - interpretation of 0.3;
  - Misleading 0 sum assumption;
- Behaviourism convert to cognitive science
  - conceptualisation of personality and research design become more nuanced
- partial consensus--interactionist school: behaviour is the product of both personality and the situation
- However, situationism still thrives (Funder, one of the leading proponents for personality psychology, 2006); bestsellers (*Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion; The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference; Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die; Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard; Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions...*)

Situational forces in philosophy

- ## Harman & Doris:
  - Took up social psychology experiment findings
  - Proposed to discard the notion of character altogether

- ## Aristotelian virtue ethics philosophers:
  - Pointed to the weakness of those finding;
  - Defended the strength of virtuous character (misunderstanding of Aristotelian notion of character, full virtue, flexible character, strategic use of variation)
  - Comparison to Confucius is sometimes drawn
    - Confucius also focuses on cultivating character (although focus on via controlled environment)
    - Confucius also identify full virtue as ideal but not realistic

Situational forces in business ethics

- 1960s:
    - Growing concerns with socio-political problems in the U.S (e.g. student protests, Vietnam War, decay of urban life, environmental concerns)
    - Religious and theological critiques of business practice

- Early 1980s: established as a discipline
    - Philosophers entered into the discussion
    - The application of economic theories (rationality)

Situational forces in business ethics (Con)

- Teaching, training and research remains an essential part of the field

- Aristotelian virtue ethics (through conceptualization of justice, fairness, moral, rights, virtue, and duty) is one main philosophical base of the discipline
    - Rational, autonomous, objective individual

- The impact of organizational culture
    - Citing work from the behavioural sciences and social psychology
        - Milgram and Zimbardo experiment: explain pressure from seniors and pressure to make profits.
        - Other organizational mechanism: systems of monitoring & supervision, behaviour of a 'reference group' or significant others, codes of conduct and codes of ethics), rewards and sanctions, and industry competitiveness

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Situational evil

- 3 potential causal factors on torturers (Einolf, 2009)
    - The psychology of individuals
    - The social psychology of groups and organizations
    - The broader social, political and cultural context

  - Question on responsibility and accountability
  - Traditional western view: individual responsibility (Justice should be blind)
  - Situationalism: diffuse responsibility and weaken the justification of moral condemnation of the wrong-doer

  - Historical perception of source of evil (Zimbardo, 2004)
  - 16 and 17th century Europe (in theology): evil originates from the Devil and is transferred through intermediaries (eg, witches)
  - Psychodynamic theory: locates the source of individual violence and anti-social behaviour within the psyches of disturbed people, tracing back to infantile conflicts (pathological origins)

Situational evil (Con)

- Nazi studies
    - Arendt (1963) : Adolf Eichmann (a Nazi officer in charge of the transportation of the Jews during the Final solution) was perfectly ordinary
    - Browning (1998): Reserve Battalion 101 (a unit of about 500 elderly family men with no police or military experience. Within 4 months they committed mass murder of at least 38,000 Jews in Poland and deported another 45,000) were as ordinary as can be imagined
    - Dicks (1972) and Lifton (1986): after interviewing Nazis directly involved in the Holocaust conclude that they are ordinary people

    - Milgram, Zimbardo & other experiments/studies
    - Source of evil:
        - authority pressure; role stereotype; peer loyalty; overlapping and confused nature of authority; lack of clarity in rules; de-individuation and anonymity, dehumanization, and distorted promotion of honourable images (such as of suicide bombers as heroes)

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Situational evil (Con)

- Abu Ghraib prison abuse (2004): bad apple versus bad barrel
  - The Bush administration depicted the abuse as the isolated acts of a few sadistic individuals (including General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff & Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld etc)

  - Investigative journalists, political commentators & academics:
    - Huge leadership failure (in Iraq & Washington)
    - Artificially inflated hostile environment towards "terrorists" and "evils" that followed the September 11, 2001 event

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increasing emphasis on situational forces: origin

- Not a conscious uptake of an eastern approach; but emerged from the western empirical work in social psychology

- Influences of the key figures
    - Mischel: through preparation of a teaching course, was struck by the discrepancies between what personality theories and data
    - Milgram devised his psychological study to answer : "Was there a mutual sense of morality among those involved in the Holocaust?" (it began in July 1961, 3 months after the start of the trial of Eichmann); he completed his dissertation under Asch—who is known for his conformity study)
    - Zimbardo acknowledged his indebtedness to Milgram's research; he claimed to be a situationist early on, attributing his perspective to personal experiences (eg, dramatic changes in popularity at schools) and later repeated observations of his students
    - Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)—reference to the East is minimum
    - Trevino's 1986 article central to the debate in business ethics and remains the most influential article in JBE history; the article is influenced by psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's work on cognitive moral development . Kohlberg makes reference to the Milgram's obedience experiment.

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Further note

- Campbell proposes that the West is actively easternizing itself (eg, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Charles Chaplin, the Beatles)

- The case of situational forces: the increasing acknowledgement of situational forces seems to be an independent process that originated within the west itself

- Proposal: this seeming easternization resulted from dualism
    - Discomfort with contradiction; motivation to resolve the contradiction, and natural swing between the alternatives

- Further proposal: both routes contribute to west's easternization

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- **Thank you!**
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- **Questions?**

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