

The Role of Culture and Understanding in Research
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The generation of scientific knowledge is a central issue in the social epistemology of knowledge. How then, can the generation of scientific knowledge best be described? In the sociology of knowledge, science tends to be seen as closely linked to society at large and it is usually seen as the central task of the sociology of knowledge to investigate and analyze this relationship (Yearley 2005). Therefore it is of interest to read the article "Linking Science to Culture: Challenge to Psychologists" in *Social Epistemology* (Hwang 2013) where Professor Hwang claims that scientific knowledge is, or at least should be, constructed in a process whereby researchers create *microworlds* which he argues are completely separated from what he calls their "lifeworlds". In this rejoinder I will scrutinize this and other claims and also answer some of the criticisms that he levels against my article on the culture concept used in the Indigenous Psychologies (Allwood 2011a, b; Hwang 2011). The indigenous psychologies (IPs) are psychology research programs that aim for the approach to be scientific but that see mainstream psychology as too Western, and specifically too US, in its cultural foundation. Instead the psychology developed should be rooted in the culture of the society being investigated.

Lifeworlds and Microworlds

In order to clear the ground for what follows, I start with an analysis of Professor Hwang's concepts *lifeworld* and *microworld*, in that order. Professor Hwang is quite consistent in the various texts he has written about the distinction between lifeworlds and microworlds and about each of these. Therefore I will assume that he is not just writing metaphorically about this issue but literally intends what he writes.

In his (2011, 127) article he notes that "groups of people construct their lifeworlds using language and knowledge from the same cultural background in their course of historical development" (also cited in Hwang 2013), and he similarly notes in (2006) that "Lifeworlds are constantly sustained by a transcendental formal structure called cultural heritage" (84). However, in modern societies much of the understanding currently circulating is not from a traditional cultural heritage of the society. Instead much of the current cultural understanding in societies around the world comes from abroad, for example from scientific research done abroad, films and television programs from the US and other countries and from the internet, etc. This would also seem to apply to the meaning content in Professor Hwang's lifeworlds. It seems that Hwang's approach may be most useful for societies with very little contact with neighboring societies and for societies that do not change, or only change very slowly over time. I find it hard to understand why and how Professor Hwang thinks that his approach to lifeworlds and culture can have any relevance in today's fast changing and globalizing societies. Barth (1992) noted that even in, what we might think are traditional and fairly slowly changing societies like Afghanistan and Oman people of all kinds of ethnic backgrounds and cultural understanding meet and mingle in places like Herat and Sohar. Moreover, Professor Hwang's position is somewhat confusing since he writes in the same paper "In

fact, culture change caused by contact with foreign cultures has been the major concern of my research works." (109), and later:

In my discourse on how to solve problems faced by IPists, I totally agree with Allwood's (2011, 142) argument that to "understand the development of human understanding in a society, it is not only necessary to attend to how understanding previously shaped within the society is handled, but it is also necessary to study how meaning content (understanding) from other societies is interpreted, modified, and understood in the society. (110)

Professor Hwang here makes a statement in line with my concept of culture (described below). To sum up, I find Professor Hwang's concept of *lifeworlds* lacking since he either 1) thinks that they are more or less solely founded in traditional cultural heritage, or 2) thinks that the contribution of other understanding than traditional cultural heritage to lifeworlds is irrelevant and not worth discussing.

There are also questions to be asked with respect to Professor Hwang's concept of microworlds. Hwang (2006) writes: "Any scientific construction can be regarded as a *microworld*. A microworld can be a theoretical model built on the basis of realism, or a theoretical interpretation of a social phenomenon provided by a social scientist from a particular perspective" (84). He is also careful to specify that microworlds are constructed by "single scientists" (Hwang, 2006, 2011, 2013). The reason for this specification is not clear since most researchers in science studies would probably argue that scientific theories and research are often or usually developed by smaller or larger groups and that when the the researcher's submitted manuscript reach the peer-reviewers, the collective influence on the researcher's microworld is still more evident. Moreover, Hwang regards microworlds to be constructed by means of "Technique thinking" and "Formal rationality". Hwang (2013, 107) writes: "Formal rationality pays attention only to value-neutral facts and the calculability of means and procedures that can be used by everyone to pursue personal goals". In Hwang (2006, 86) he writes that the formal rational way of thinking "is essentially different from the way of constructing knowledge used by non-Western people in their lifeworlds." It is not clear if these descriptions are intended as normative suggestions for how science should be conducted, or if he really believes that research is carried out solely by use of formal rationality, or possibly that he is only stating that theories and conclusions should be justified by means of adherence to "formal rationality" as far as possible.

Professor Hwang argues that lifeworlds and microworlds are completely separated. Thus, he writes (2006, 85) "The language and the way of thinking scientists use to construct theoretical microworlds are completely distinct from those used by people in their lifeworlds" and "all phenomena irrelevant to [the theme of the specific microworld in question] will be excluded". However, it is more likely that understanding used in the everyday world overlaps to some, maybe substantial, extent with researchers' theories and that this is especially likely to be the case in the social sciences where theories are often about phenomena at the same level of granularity as those considered in everyday

life. Instead, de Laet's eloquent formulation "science is culture in culture" (de Laet 2012, 424) seems to be more realistic. Thus, the influence between culture and science is reciprocal, they are not isolated from each other as Professor Hwang sometimes would seem to suggest. It seems that Professor Hwang has constructed his own microworld of the research theories and models he writes about. However, the similarity between the features of Hwang's microworlds and researchers' theories and models of the world in actual research, seems as argued above, at best, very weak.

Hwang's Culture Concept

Although Hwang is ambivalent about what he means by culture (Allwood 2011b), to the extent that he holds a specific culture concept that clearly differs from my culture concept, it seems that he takes a structural, reifying approach to culture. For example, he writes:

The language games played by people in their lifeworlds are constituted by the rationality of a cultural group under the influence of their collective unconscious over the history of their evolution. These language games originate from the deep structure of the culture which is an *unconscious* model. (Hwang 2006, 91; original emphasis)

Hwang (2011, 129) argues that: "It is also well-known that theorizing culture implies its reification". However, the extent to which this is necessary is a question of degrees and it seems that Hwang has chosen a fairly extreme end on the continuum that stretches from flowing, dynamic on the one side to reified, unchanging on the other side. It seems that Hwang suggests that researchers should create a microworld for cultures where it is assumed that cultures have essential features that are fairly unchanging over time and that these features are the features that should be attended to. A close-to-the-ground description of the specific culture of a society does not seem to be on Hwang's agenda of interests. However, such a close-to-the-ground description of a culture would give information about the extent to which the features of the culture assumed in a microworld conception of the culture in question, are in fact important elements of the society members' understanding. In general, Professor Hwang is somewhat ambiguous with respect to the importance of the constructing of microworlds for cultures because he also writes (2013, 114): "In fact, I am not so concerned with culture concepts as does Allwood, my real concern is how to construct theories to link with the world's various cultures, and not with cultures of an Individualistic nature only." The last words of the just cited sentence (and other statements in his 2013 paper) might imply that a claim is made that my culture concept, discussed below, is only valid for "individualistic cultures", a claim I would deny since my culture concept allows for all types of meaning content in a society irrespective of whether it is individualistic, collectivistic or something else. Since Hwang, as noted above, points out that he well recognizes that lifeworlds are affected by events and people outside of the society, he seems to differentiate between cultures and lifeworlds (which he blames me for not doing!, but which I do, as explained below).

Cultures, according to Hwang, have a deep-structure. For example, he "strongly agrees" with Greenfield (2000) when she argues for "the idea of a deep structure of culture" (2006, 90-91). Moreover, Hwang (e.g., 2011) also argues that "cultures" have "formative" periods. Thus, put together, it seems that when Professor Hwang "theoretizes about culture" he constructs a microworld where cultures are seen as consisting of a core of idea elements ("tradition", "cultural heritage") that have a deep-structure and that tend to exist over long time periods and often in a specific geographical place. He also argues (2006, 104) that "the important goals for indigenization of psychology in East Asian societies are to ascertain the deep structure of various cultural traditions, construct microworlds of scientific theory, and use these microworlds as a frame of reference for conducting empirical research on people's lifeworlds". This is not necessarily an approach usable for the IPs given that they want their research results to be easily applicable to their own society. It remains an open question how large proportion of the current meaning content of a society's culture that derives from the "cultural heritage" of that society. It also remains an open empirical question as to which extent the cultures of societies have deep structures that exist in relatively stable form over long time periods and, if so, how important such structures are for people's conduct. In order for the psychology to be "rooted in the culture of a society" it would seem necessary that it should not just be rooted in that part of the culture that derives from the tradition inherited from previous generations living in the country ("cultural heritage") but also to be rooted in those parts of the cultural understanding in the society that has more recently been imported from other societies.

Maybe in line with his microworld's perspective on cultures, Professor Hwang does not seem to mind to provide stark characterizations of cultures. For example, Hwang seems to find it plausible that there are cultures that are individualistic – the Western cultures. To me, as an adherer of a culture concept that stresses the possibility of heterogeneity and variability within cultures, this feels blunt and unsophisticated. The paper by Cross and Madson (1997) arguing, convincingly I think, that women in the US might be just as collective as most Non-westerners are, is an inspiration for doubting an approach that classifies cultures as either individualistic or collectivistic.

A further example illustrates the same tendency. Hwang (2013, 120) writes:

Fiske is an anthropological psychologist. He argued that the four elementary forms of social behavior represent the universal mind in dealing with various kinds of interpersonal relationships which can be found in cultures all over the world.

Viewed from this perspective, the Western ideal of individualism emphasizes and exaggerates only the relationships of *market pricing* or *instrumental ties* [of the four relationships communal sharing, equality matching, market, pricing, and authority ranking]. It is biased in the sense that it neglects or ignores other kinds of interpersonal relationships. (original italics, my square parenthesis)

Again, I do not find this conclusion very convincing, in fact it seems rather far-fetched!

The Relation Between Culture and Lifeworlds

I argue (e.g., 2011b) that it is useful to take a naturalistic approach to culture and to see the culture of a society simply as the *socially affected understanding, skills (and possibly) action/activities used in that group, irrespective of whether this understanding, etc., is shared between the members*. In addition, but this part is not to be discussed here, it may be useful to have a broader culture concept that also includes the artefacts of the society (old or new). An argument for including artefacts is that they give the society members "cues" for the activation and (re-)construction of their understanding. As noted above, Hwang misrepresents my position when he claims that the culture concept that I advocate refers to culture in lifeworlds. For example, he writes (Hwang 2013, 112): "Allwood (2011a, 2011b) criticized such culture concept shared by many IPists. But, it seems to me that such culture concept is exactly the same as that advocated by Allwood (2011a, 2011b) himself, in the sense that both of them refer to culture in lifeworlds" (this is also reasserted in many places in his 2011 paper).¹

I next explain why Professor Hwang is in error here. I object to this characterization of my culture concept because the *lifeworld* is a phenomenological concept deriving from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl to whom Professor Hwang also gives references in other texts (e.g., Hwang 2006). The aim of Husserl's philosophy was, at least initially, to a large extent to find apodictic knowledge (necessary knowledge that cannot be doubted since it cannot be otherwise). In this context he developed an epistemological approach that included the methodological approach not to use such assumptions in his philosophy that are possible to doubt. Such assumptions should instead be bracketed, in the sense that they should not be used in the phenomenological philosophy. An example is the assumption of an external reality that exists independently of our lived experience. This assumption is mainly what is bracketed in the bracketing of the so-called *natural attitude* (Sololowski 2000; Spiegelberg 1971).

¹ He also introduces some incorrect ambiguity about my position when he quotes me as

Allwood (2011b, 142) highlights the features of his culture concept by saying that '*meaning should be seen as a naturalistic phenomenon occurring in the world (lifeworld)*' and '*culture in a society is seen as the understanding held by the people living in that society (in their lifeworlds)*.' I mark parts of his sayings in italic and translate them into my words in the parentheses for the sake of emphasizing that he is advocating a kind of culture concept which can be named as culture in lifeworlds. (Hwang 2013, 3, Hwang's italics)

Although Professor Hwang has attempted to explain what he has done, usually square brackets "[]" are used when inserting content not part of the quotation into a quotation, but here Hwang has used round parenthesis "()" which may lead to confusion about my position. In addition, inserting new words into a quotation is only conventionally allowed when it captures the author's meaning. As should be clear from the rest of what I say, I *do not* equate "the world" and "the lifeworld", and I *do not* equate "... living in that society" with "in their lifeworlds", as would be implied by his quoting technique and what he says.

Thus, in brief, in the tradition of Husserl's phenomenology it is important *not* to make assumptions, for example about ontological issues. In connection with the term *lifeworld* Professor Hwang also cites Heidegger² who often is seen as a transition figure between phenomenology and hermeneutics and who is usually not seen to be as clear about the role of (or even as having abandoned) bracketing of doubtful assumptions in the philosophy he developed. Irrespective of whether Husserl or Heidegger is followed here, the *lifeworld* is about the world as experienced by the subject. Thus, the meaning concept implied in the lifeworld concept is meaning *as it manifests itself in experience*. However, I do not make any such limiting assumptions about meaning as part of the culture concept I suggest. Instead I suggest a broader culture concept that I described in my 2011 papers in *Social Epistemology* (Allwood, 2011 a, b).

In the culture concept I advocate meaning is seen as a naturalistic phenomenon (this assumption deviates from the phenomenological stance described above). In order to further clarify my concept of meaning, and the idea that cultural understanding is meaning content, it may help to quote my original text in Allwood (2011b) that Professor Hwang draws on:³

Meaning is obviously a complex phenomenon, but I suggest that a useful starting point is to see it as resulting from an interaction between two or more components in the world, one of which is a representation of some kind (e.g. encodings in memory, an utterance, the print of a text in a book, a code, a mental representation in the brain, etc.). Put differently, meaning may usefully be seen as the result of an interpretation of a representation, which gives rise to some effect; for example, a lived experience, an action or some understanding. In brief, meaning is seen as a naturalistic phenomenon, at least in the sense that it is dependent on local substrates (e.g. brains, print on paper, or zeroes and ones in computers). Since the local substrate on which meaning is dependent differs between actors, their held meaning content (even about the same phenomenon) can be expected to show (however small) variation. (Allwood 2011b, 143)

At the same time it may have been easy for Professor Hwang to think that my culture concept "refers to the lifeworld" since clearly it is reasonable to think that individuals will experience the world in terms of their concepts and categories. However, this is not the same as to say that people's understanding of the world has to be described in the philosophical frame of reference (phenomenology) that is attached when one speaks about the *lifeworld*.

² *Corrigendum*: An error occurred in which 'Heidegger' is misspelled 'Heiderger' on pages 106, 107 and 121 (*Social Epistemology* 27.1, 105-122).

³ Hwang (2013, 106); here he cites from an intermediate communication we had about these matters but misplaces the quotation mark that shows where the quotation he makes ends. The quote should continue to the end of the paragraph.

To conclude, Professor Hwang is wrong when he suggests that my culture concept can be reduced to the culture in the lifeworld. Instead I see culture as the understanding in a group or society (not only the commonalities in this understanding) and I see this understanding as located in the naturalistic world, in similarity to the culture concept advocated and made explicit by Atran et al. (2005). Given this definition of culture it is also somewhat baffling to note that Professor Hwang (2011, 126) calls me a *culture-nihilist*: "These are typical sermons from a culture-nihilist who plays the role of a commissary for mainstream psychology" and it is unclear why he thinks that I am a commissary for mainstream psychology. The connection between the definition of culture that I argued for in my paper (2011a) and being a commissary for mainstream psychology is somewhat hard to see!

By means of the conclusion that my culture concept "refer[s] to culture in lifeworlds" (Hwang 2013, 106), he then further indirectly suggests on page 109 that I belong to the "qualitative camp", presumably together with "most of the IPists". The other camp (Hwang's) is the camp where the culture of a society presumably is "theoretically construed". Thus he writes:

I identify myself as an IPist who sticks to the discipline of psychology in pursuing scientific knowledge. It seems to me that "literary theorists, cultural critics, cultural anthropologists," and some individual psychologists belong to the other camp which "well appreciate the value of other kinds of knowledge." The main difference between these two camps lies in their concerns focused on either *culture in lifeworlds* or *theoretical construction* based on culture in lifeworlds. Concentrating on the culture concept in lifeworlds tends to use methods of "qualitative research" to develop IP as a branch of historical-hermeneutic science (Habermas 1968). This approach may lead IPists to endless debates regarding the qualification of IPs as a branch of scientific psychology. But focusing on the construction of scientific microworlds may really solve problems faced by IPists all over the world. (original italics, 108-109)

Here Hwang sees a contrast between two camps, "historical-hermeneutic science" that tends to use methods of "qualitative research" and that of "the discipline of psychology". The first camp locates culture in the lifeworld and the second constructs microworlds. Given that Professor Hwang sees his work as constructing microworlds and that this (as noted above, according to Hwang) is done by means of "formal rationality" it is understandable that he does not want to become associated with an approach to research that may result in using "methods of 'qualitative research' to develop IP as a branch of historical-hermeneutic science" (Hwang 2013, 109). Unfortunately Hwang only works with a simplistic binary distinction here, that between *historical-hermeneutic science and scientific psychology* (also called "the discipline of psychology") of which the latter tends to mean the approach advocated by Professor Hwang. However, there are obviously more approaches to research that can reasonably be labeled scientific psychology than that advocated by Professor Hwang. As an aside, I find it ironic to thus (indirectly) be placed in the "qualitative camp", the reason being that I have published a paper (Allwood 2012)

where I argue that the distinction between the qualitative and quantitative research approach is a deeply problematic, oversimplistic and vague distinction that preferably should be avoided.

Professor Hwang's Approach to Science

A word about Professor Hwang's approach to science might be in order here. In Hwang (2006, 2010), his research approach becomes somewhat clearer. In (2006) he suggests that the philosophy of constructive realism should be used by the IPs and I have earlier critically discussed some tenets of Hwang's version of *constructive realism* (Allwood 2011b). In his 2010 article, which repeats much of what was said in 2006, Hwang argues that Popper's *deductive approach* to science, in contrast to what he calls an *inductive approach*, is what is needed for the indigenous psychologies to attain the goal of a universal psychology. He charges that many of the major approaches in the indigenous psychologies utilizes an inductive approach which he, in different places of the article, describes as having a "dubious" feasibility (2010, 3, with respect to Berry's "derived etic approach"), "subject to the dilemma of the inductive approach" (3, with respect to Enriquez "cross-indigenous method"), "His approach also implies the potential difficulty of using an inductive approach" (4, with respect to Ho's "meta-theory approach"), and "His approach is very similar to the derived etic approach advocated by Berry" (2010, 4, with respect to the approach of K.S. Yang). For example, with respect to Ho's approach, Hwang asks "To what extent should the target universe of such a mini-metatheory be expanded to include all known cultures in the world?" (4).

In brief, it seems that Professor Hwang has the same worry as Popper had about verificationism, namely that we can never verify a theory since there is no guaranty that the next culture we examine in the future ("the next swan", or item) will follow our theory about the universal mind (or whatever is proposed in our theory). For example in (2006, 79) Hwang argues, "Strictly speaking, indigenous psychologists cannot attain the goal of building theoretical models for a global psychology through an inductive approach". By giving up inductionism (a "positivistic" approach), Popper and Hempel attempted to keep the (positivistic) ambition to come close to a fully decidable science. However, Popper's deductive falsification approach has been heavily criticised in different ways (for example, experiments that seem to falsify a theory may themselves be defective in one way or another) and falsificationism and deductivism does not seem to be a realistic way to save us from the possibility of being wrong in the empirical sciences. Epistemological uncertainty may be unescapable in this context and may be a condition that is characteristic of Mankind's epistemological position. However, this conclusion does not mean that we need to end up in "historical-hermeneutic science" as Professor Hwang seems to fear. There is still room for more disciplined and stringent approaches to science. Thus, Professor Hwang's recommendation for the indigenous psychologies that

What they can do is use their creative imagination or critical rationality to construct a formal theory on the psychological mechanisms of the universal human mind that apply to various cultures, and then use it as a

framework for analyzing the specific mentalities of given cultures. (2006, 79)

may possibly be interesting advice, but it does not necessarily lead to success quicker than some version of a more inductive approach. As argued above, even if it is conceded that the inductive approach has difficulties, Hwang has not showed that his "deductive approach" (i.e. "rational criticism" of microworlds constructed by use of "creative imagination") is a superior approach to research for the indigenous psychologies. For example, it is not clear that it is a safer or quicker way to *approach* truth.

Meaning Substrates

In his new article Professor Hwang draws erroneous conclusions from my examples of possible substrates for meaning as provided above. The problem for Hwang is that I gave "a brain" and "printed text" as examples of "some sort of substrate" (2013, 115). According to Hwang "a careful differentiation between them is very crucial for us to understand the difficulty of incorporating culture into psychological research." (115). He states that, "The meaning of 'a brain' belongs to the biologicistic level [...] while 'printed text' belongs to the sociologicistic level" (115). However, here Professor Hwang misses out by not recognizing the possible diversity within academic cultures and scientific theories. There is not just one voice in the academic culture here, but many different voices, both within and between academic cultures. For example, an important message in for example cognitive science, evolutionary epistemology and some schools of the sociology of knowledge (e.g., the Strong program and Actor Network theory) is to see the different concepts mentioned above as the same in the sense that they are all seen as "naturalistic". This was also my point by using brain and text as examples of substrates for meaning content. Thus, what they have in common, I assume, is their status as naturalistic phenomena.

Moreover, as should be clear from the quotation above, it was not my intention to say that *text*, as such, is all that is needed with respect to a substrate for meaning in contexts where texts are relevant. I don't believe, as Professor Hwang says he does (in line with some writers in hermeneutics, i.e., Betti), that meaning inheres in texts as such. Instead I suggest (in line with Gadamer) that a text provides cues for interpreters of meaning, such as humans (and maybe computers). The interpreter then uses the cues from the text to construct an interpretation of the text. This interpretation can vary depending on the preunderstanding (categories, concepts) available to the interpreter. Thus, in this example both the text (seen here as systematically organized print on paper) and for example a brain, are needed as "substrates for meaning". In brief, there was no ambiguity in my fourth assumption, the problem was that Professor Hwang did not see that, understood on a more abstract level, both brains and texts have something in common, namely that that they can both be seen as naturalistic objects.

Professor Hwang's Major Argument

Professor Hwang states (2013, 106) that his "major argument in this article is: both his [CMA's] culture concept and that of most IPists' refer to culture in lifeworlds. The real challenge faced by IPists is how to construct theories or scientific microworlds in linking science to culture." Given the phenomenological associations relating to the concept "lifeworlds", described above, I am not, to start with, convinced that most IPists refer to culture in lifeworlds, but maybe other researchers, working in the IPs, can comment on this. Then Hwang writes "If we are able to construct scientific microworlds that can represent universal human mind on the one hand, as well as culture-specific mentalities on the other hand, we will be able to resolve most questions about culture raised by Professor Allwood." (2013, 106). He does not come back to this claim very explicitly so he never shows how this resolves "most questions about culture raised by Professor Allwood." In order to evaluate Professor Hwang's claim that we, by constructing scientific microworlds, "can represent universal human mind on the one hand, as well as culture-specific mentalities on the other hand" it is reasonable to ask if there is a methodology for doing this, or if it is mainly to be an intuitive enterprise? If the latter should be the case there may be a possibility that the enterprise might end up as "a branch of historical-hermeneutic science" and thus (as seen from the perspective of Professor Hwang), that the enterprise will not be part of scientific psychology.

To sum up, the main message in Hwang's paper seems to be that the important issue is linking science to culture, not the issue what a suitable concept of culture for the IPs might be, or even the issue of whether the IPs should try to evolve a common understanding of the phenomenon of culture or instead prefer the solution that each IPs will use a culture concept that is specific to their own culture and society. This is a pity I think; the issue of how culture should be defined can be seen as vital to the IPs as it cuts at the roots of the definition of the IPs, psychologies rooted in the culture of one's own society.

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