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Brief report

The measurement of values across cultures: A pairwise comparison approach

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Abstract

We examined the value orientations of Americans and Japanese, comparing Likert scale rating and pairwise comparison methods. Consistent with a recent meta-analysis of studies using rating scales (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), Americans and Japanese did not differ on individualism, and Americans scored higher than Japanese on collectivism. However, the pairwise comparisons revealed that Americans scored higher than Japanese on self-direction, an indicator of individualism, whereas Japanese scored higher than Americans on Benevolence, an indicator of collectivism. These findings suggest that cross-cultural comparisons based on Likert ratings may have been compromised by response artifacts.

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1. Introduction

Values have been of important concern for personality researchers for decades (e.g., Allport, 1961; Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999; Rokeach, 1973; Vernon & Allport, 1931). More recently, cross-cultural researchers have come to view values as an important basis for understanding cultural syndromes (e.g., Bond, 1988; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995). Up to now, the most frequently investigated value in cross-cultural research has been the construct of individualism–collectivism. Oyserman et al. (2002) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis on individualism–collectivism, and reached two conclusions. First, the construct of individualism–collectivism is multi-faceted. In some cases, the magnitudes of cultural differences shifted substantially, depending on which facets of individualism–collectivism were assessed. Second, although it has often been assumed in the literature that East Asians are collectivists and North Americans are individualists, self-reported scores on individualism–collectivism scales revealed relatively small cultural differences, especially between Japanese and Americans (e.g., $d = 0.25$ on individualism, and 0.06 on collectivism). Oyserman et al. concluded that “even when reliable scales are used, Americans do not differ much in IND from Japanese and Koreans, for COL effects remain small for Koreans, and actually ‘flip’ for the Japanese–American comparisons, with Americans reporting slightly *higher* COL than Japanese” (p. 72).

There are two notable reactions to the second conclusion of Oyserman et al. (2002). The first type of reaction was that the characterization of East Asians (especially, Japanese) as collectivists reflects the old cultural stereotypes in the mind of cross-cultural researchers rather than reality (e.g., Matsumoto, 2000). Takano and Osaka (1999), for instance, argued that the economic, political, and military situations in Japan have changed drastically since World War II, and that differences between Japan and the US in individualism and collectivism at this time are negligible. There is a similar concern that the world is becoming more and more similar in values because of intense global marketing (e.g., McDonald, Starbucks), communication (e.g., CNN, MTV), and migration/travel. Inglehart and Baker (2000) found a general trend toward a greater degree of individualism (e.g., self-expression) from 1981 to 1995 in many nations, including Japan and the US. Interestingly, however, they also found that the magnitude of Japan–US difference in self-expression and secular-rational values did not change much between 1981 and 1995 (see Hofstede, 1980, 2001; for a similar result).

The second type of reaction to Oyserman et al.’s (2002) conclusion is that their null findings are due to the methodological artifact associated with a Likert scale. In typical studies reviewed by Oyserman et al. participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with statements such as “I prefer to be direct and forthright when I talk with people.” In cross-cultural comparisons, responses to such global items are vulnerable to two types of response artifacts such as response styles (e.g., Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995) and reference group effect (e.g., Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997). For example, the findings that Japanese scored lower than Americans on both individualism and collectivism could be due to the tendency of Japanese to use the mid-point and avoid the end-point of a Likert

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