Social Sciences Made in Asia

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A profound review of the advances in applied organizational psychology in Asia reveals many interesting things. Organizational psychology as an independent discipline was introduced in Asia at the end of the 1970. Before this, a lot of work relevant to applied organizational psychology was carried out in the field of industrial psychology.

Industrial psychology had its formal beginnings in early research completed on human assessment, job satisfaction and high performance. Interestingly enough the work of Frederick W. Taylor (the father of US production management) on organizational theory was introduced in Asia's industry and enterprise about this same time.

The big impetus to the development of industrial psychology in this part of the world was after 1949 when the People's Republic of China gave a strong support to the development of psychology and worked out concrete academic and applied plans to make the science capable of service to the emerging, new and different society. The board of directors of the Chinese Psychological Society appealed to its members to "go out, aim high and achieve more" and do research that has practical implications and contribute to the national building endeavor. These undertaking had a formidable influence all over Asia, aiming at improving the rationalization of work, safety and risk control in all kinds of organizations.

Our research shows that in 1950's; the Chinese Institute of Psychology investigated the best practices, standards and operating methods for the textile industry. These standards were widely shared all over the areas. It is important to mention that by this, period Asian psychologists were studying the creative process in technical innovations, early establishing that more innovations were generated with a teamwork environment rather than in an individualistic setting. Their empirical finding, by the 1960, was that an innovation team could help faster the individual in developing his/her initiative for innovation ideas. Psychologists were also researching the challenge of motivation and how a group of individuals could be encouraged to show high performance in a sustained manner. Field experiments were carried out on assembly lines in different factories all over

the area. Again, their empirical research was showing that feeling responsible for the outcomes of the team's work was critical to the psychological state that increases motivation. Also, they researched a very hot topic these days: should innovations be organized in collaborative communities or in competitive environments? Early they came to the conclusion that communities are useful when an innovation challenge involves cumulative knowledge, continually building on previous findings and achievements. They also were impacted by their finding that a market setting seemed to be more effective when the innovation problem was best solved by broad experimentation.

In different studies of safety, accidents and loss control, they stressed the findings of the psychological and organizational factors causing the unfortunate events.

By the late' 70s, there were numerous studies pointing toward the working environment as a determinant variable for increasing efficiency and reliability within a human-machine setting. These studies included monitoring workers to evaluate fatigue, stamina, and the effects of shift work.

A review of these investigations can be found in the Acta Psychologica Sinica, and English translation in the Chinese Sociology and Anthropology up to the 1980's. For the organizational research lovers, these investigations are excellent pieces of applied knowledge within organizational contexts.

Currently, Asian organizational and psychological scientists are working, with the following questions or problems of interest: How can they assess and make use of Western organizational theory? How can they build an organizational theory suitable to the new Asian globalization realities? The integration of theory with practice is the guiding principle directing the research of current Asian social scientists. At the same time, they acknowledge the power of US research institutions and they want to learn from these academic and applied research undertakings. Finally, they are working with the following question: what are the core issues for the organizations of the future?

The Chinese Behavior Sciences Society is presently researching fifteen core problems:

1) The problem of motivation in a global context.
2) How to promote a culture consciousness.
3) How to improve solidarity in organizations
 4) The challenge of economic and psychological incentives
5) Human needs and structure of multiple intelligences
6) Alignment of the goals of the country, organizations, teams, and individuals
7) styles of leadership and management
8) Creativity, innovation and the characteristics of mental work and its intelligent management
9) The enhancement of internal and external interpersonal relationships
10) The comprehensive theory and applications of organizational design research.
11) Soft technologies for the management of human behavior
12) Assessment methods for inducing high engagement and performance
13) Psychological challenges in the distribution system of wages, salaries and bonuses. 14) Team work
15) The role of behavioral sciences in economic and social competitiveness.

Just to give the reader a little taste, in the past five years, social scientists in Asia have conducted more than 2,000 meetings and workshops in different Asian countries to discuss the problems of how to use the behavioral sciences for competitiveness and economic development purposes, as well as how to introduce the oversees academic and research experiences in their field of work. They are researching the power of democratic institutions to produce quick, visible and dramatic results.

In a firm manner, Asian scientists are producing interesting advances in organizational psychologists, addressing issues of stress in the work environment, execution measurements of quality, climate metaphor in organization theory, decision making, the creative and innovation processes, but must of all they are moving from a social-technical to a purposeful viable systems design (which is a US long-time idea pursued by the great scholar David Cohen).

Asia is taking advantage of the process of globalization and applying organizational psychology research in industry, agriculture, science,

technology and defense. They are also reforming their public and "private" management systems using organizational psychology knowledge.

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