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Personality, Polyculturalism, and Cultural Intelligence: A Cross-Cultural Survey Study

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Abstract

The ability to function effectively in intercultural contexts is increasingly important in our globalized world. This ability has been conceptualized as cultural intelligence (or CQ), and many studies have focused on the factors associated with high CQ. The present study explored personality traits and the lay theory of polyculturalism as factors that predict CQ in two cultural groups (300 Chinese, 247 Filipinos) of university students. The respondents completed a questionnaire that included scales measuring the Big Five personality factors, polyculturalism, and CQ. Hierarchical regression analyses of questionnaire responses from the two samples indicated that consistent with the previous literature, openness to experience and polyculturalism positively predicted CQ in both samples; in addition, emotional stability predicted CQ among the Chinese, and conscientiousness predicted CQ among the Filipinos. The results are discussed in terms of cultural similarities and differences in the experience of CQ.

Kepribadian, Polikulturalisme, dan Kecerdasan Budaya: Studi Survei Lintas-Budaya

Abstrak

Kemampuan untuk berfungsi secara efektif dalam konteks antarbudaya semakin penting di era globalisasi. Kemampuan ini telah dikonseptualisasikan sebagai Kecerdasan Budaya (*cultural intelligence* atau CQ). Banyak penelitian telah dilakukan untuk berfokus pada faktor-faktor yang berkaitan dengan CQ yang tinggi. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi ciri-ciri kepribadian dan teori awam (*lay theory*) tentang polikulturalisme sebagai faktor yang memprediksi CQ dalam dua kelompok budaya pada mahasiswa (300 orang Tionghoa, 247 orang Filipina). Para responden mengisi kuesioner yang mencakup skala pengukuran faktor kepribadian *big five*, polikulturalisme, dan CQ. Analisis regresi hierarki dari respon jawaban kuesioner di kedua sampel menunjukkan bahwa konsisten dengan literatur terdahulu, tipe kepribadian keterbukaan terhadap pengalaman dan polikulturalisme secara positif memprediksi CQ di kedua sampel. Selain itu, stabilitas emosi memprediksi CQ di kalangan orang Tionghoa, dan tipe kepribadian *conscientiousness* memprediksi CQ pada orang-orang Filipina. Hasil penelitian dibahas dalam hal persamaan budaya dan perbedaan-perbedaannya dalam pengalaman CQ.

Keywords: cultural intelligence, intercultural relations, openness to experience, personality, polyculturalism

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1. Introduction

As globalization has increased the extent of interaction among people from different cultures, the construct of CQ has attracted much attention among scholars who study intercultural social interactions. Cultural intelligence (commonly referred to as CQ) is conceptualized as an individual difference factor that describes the ability to

function effectively in culturally diverse environments (Earley & Ang, 2003). Most exploration of CQ has taken place in multicultural work settings (see Ang & Van Dyne, 2008, for a review), but the construct has also been studied in other contexts such as schools with international students (Presbitero, 2016b) and migrant communities (Le, Jiang, & Nielsen, 2016). Much of the existing research has indicated that CQ is an important predictor of numerous positive processes and outcomes

in culturally diverse contexts (Fang, Schei, & Selart, 2018; Huff, Song, & Gresh, 2014).

Given the importance of this construct, recent research has focused on investigating possible antecedents of CQ (Reichard et al., 2015), including personality (Presbitero, 2016a) and cognitive styles (Bernardo & Presbitero, 2018). In this study, I explore the role of a different individual difference factor that may predict higher CQ—namely, endorsement of the lay theory of polyculturalism—in two cultural samples: Chinese and Filipinos.

CQ is assumed to have motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral components, as reflected as subscales in commonly used measures of the construct (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Motivational CQ refers to the drive of an individual to engage in cross-cultural interactions despite the challenges brought about by cultural differences. Cognitive CQ refers to the collection of knowledge about various cultures including knowledge of cultural values, norms, conventions and practices. Metacognitive CQ refers to the higher-order thinking capability mainly consists of the ability to take perspective and develop mental schemas that can guide cross-cultural interactions. Last, behavioral CQ pertains to the ability to adjust both verbal and non-verbal actions to suit the needs and requirements of various cultural contexts. Research has suggested that individuals with higher CQ have greater ability to adjust and adapt in cross-cultural environments (Chen, Wu, & Bian, 2014; Huff et al., 2014; Lee, Veasna, & Sukoco, 2014; Presbitero, 2016b; Shu, McAbee & Ayman, 2017). In intercultural and/or cross-cultural work contexts, individuals with higher CQ also demonstrate better performance and effectiveness (Chen, Lin, & Swangpattanakul, 2011; Korzilius, Bucker, & Beerlage, 2017; Lee, Veasna, & Wu, 2013; Presbitero, 2017) and effective leadership (Deng & Gibson, 2009; Rockstuhl, Seller, Ang, Van Dyne, & Annen, 2011).

Most of the factors found to be significantly associated with CQ can be classified into two types: intercultural experiences and traits or abilities (Fang et al., 2018). In this study, I consider factors in the second category. Previous studies have identified a range of individual difference factors associated with higher CQ, some of which relate to cognitive abilities and styles. For example, language ability (Li, Mobley, & Kelly, 2013), self-monitoring (Koo Moon, Choi, & Jung, 2013), cognitive flexibility (Bernardo & Presbitero, 2018), context dependence (Adair, Buchan, Chen, & Liu, 2016), and social intelligence (Depaula, Azzollini, Cosentino, & Castillo, 2016) have all been shown to be positively associated with overall CQ scores. Personality, measured primarily using the Big Five personality dimensions, has been the focus of several studies of CQ. Although the results have varied, most studies have determined that

openness to experience (or intellect) is positively associated with overall CQ (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; Depaula et al., 2016; Harrison, 2012; Li, Mobley, & Kelly, 2016; Presbitero, 2016; Sahin, Gurbuz, & Koksall, 2014). As for the other Big Five personality dimensions, the results have been inconsistent. Some studies have indicated a positive relationship between CQ and agreeableness (Harrison, 2012), conscientiousness (Ang et al., 2006; Nel, Nel, Adams, & De Beer, 2015), or extraversion (Ang et al., 2006; Presbitero, 2016), but these associations have not appeared in other studies. One study found that agreeableness moderated the relationship between openness to experience and CQ (Li et al., 2016).

Aside from cognitive and personality factors, cultural orientation may be another factor associated with CQ. As mentioned above, intercultural experiences comprise the second main category of factors studied in relation to CQ (Fang et al., 2018), but cultural orientation represents a distinct set of individual difference factors separate from and not necessarily dependent on one's actual intercultural experiences. One example is cultural boundary spanning (CBS), which represents a tendency to respect the values of other people or groups and to vary one's responses based on how one perceives situational cues; Holtbrügge and Engelhard (2016) found that CBS was positively associated with CQ.

The cultural ideologies of polyculturalism and multiculturalism represent lay theories or belief systems about how cultures relate to each other (Rosenthal & Levy, 2013). Although both ideologies assume that culture is an important part of people's identity, multiculturalism emphasizes the need to respect cultural differences, whereas polyculturalism emphasizes the connections and mutual influences between cultures (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012; 2013). One study found that polyculturalism was consistently associated with CQ in two cultural samples (Australian and Chinese), whereas in another study multiculturalism had inconsistent effects (Bernardo & Presbitero, 2017).

There is also a theoretical basis for a positive association between CQ and polyculturalism, as numerous studies have documented the positive relationship between polyculturalism and intercultural attitudes or behavioral intentions. For example, endorsement of polyculturalism is positively associated with interest in and appreciation of diversity (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010; 2012), willingness to engage in intergroup contact and build friendships with people from other cultural or ethnic groups (Rosenthal, Levy, London, & Lewis, 2016) or other countries (Bernardo, Rosenthal, & Levy, 2013; Rosenthal, Ramirez, Levy, & Bernardo, 2019), and less negative attitudes toward cultural minorities and refugees (Healy, Thomas, & Pedersen, 2017; Rosenthal, Levy, Katser, & Bazile, 2015). More pertinent to the

discourse on CQ, polyculturalism has recently been shown to be associated with social phenomena related to intercultural contact. For example, there is evidence that polyculturalism is positively associated with cultural adjustment among international students (Xiao, Zhang, & Bernardo, 2019), favorable attitudes toward globalization (Bernardo, 2019), the presence of former colonizers in some postcolonial societies (Bernardo et al., 2019), and expressions of cultural fusion or cultural mixing (Cheon, 2018; Cho, Morris, Slepian, & Tadmor, 2017). Polyculturalism may also be associated with more favorable attitudes toward cultural accommodation (Cho, Morris, & Dow, 2018).

In this study, I seek to make an additional contribution to our understanding of how personality and cultural orientation are related to CQ by studying how the Big Five personality factors and the lay theory of polyculturalism predict CQ in two Asian cultural groups: Chinese and Filipinos. This is the first study to explore both factors simultaneously in a single investigation. Accordingly, it should provide valuable insight on the relative importance of the two factors in the development of CQ.

2. Methods

Participants. The sample comprised 300 Chinese students from a public university in Macau, China and 247 Filipino students from a private university in Manila, the Philippines. In the Chinese sample, 56.33% of the students were female and the average age was 19.05 years ($SD = 1.52$); in the Filipino sample, 65.18% were female and the average age was 18.60 years ($SD = 1.49$). The participants were recruited from different classes at the university; all recruits were provided with information about the nature of the study, and only those who gave informed consent received access to the questionnaire. Those who completed the questionnaire were given partial credit for a class assignment. The procedures and materials for the study were reviewed and approved by the concerned university's ethics review committee.

Measures. Three scales were used in the study. The first was the International English Big Five Mini-Markers (Saucier, 1994; Thompson, 2008), which comprises 40 traits, or eight for each of the Big Five personality factors. On this scale, participants read each trait and indicate whether that trait accurately describes them, on a scale from 1 (*inaccurate*) to 5 (*accurate*). Second, I used the polyculturalism subscale of the Lay Theories of Culture Scale (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010), which contains five items consisting of sentences that describe how cultures are connected. Participants indicated their answers on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Third, respondents completed the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Van Dyne,

Ang, & Koh, 2008), which contains 20 items describing motivations, cognitions, and behaviors related to adjusting to intercultural contexts. On this instrument, answers are given on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

In addition to the three scales, the questionnaire included some items requesting basic demographic information. For the Filipino participants, the questionnaires were presented in English, since Filipino university students are proficient in reading and writing English (Bernardo, 2008). For the Chinese participants, the questionnaires were in Chinese, using traditional orthography. The International English Big Five Mini-Markers scale was translated into Chinese by a bilingual (Chinese and English) psychology student; previously translated and validated Chinese versions of the polyculturalism scale (Bernardo et al., 2016) and the CQ scale (Bernardo & Presbitero, 2017) were used. The internal consistency coefficients of the scale (summarized in Table 1) were all 0.71 or higher, except for the polyculturalism scale for the Chinese sample, which still had an acceptable coefficient at 0.63.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics for the Chinese and Filipino samples are summarized in Table 1. No multicollinearity was found among the variables within each sample. To explore the relationships among personality traits, polyculturalism, and CQ, separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using the data from each ethnic group. For each analysis, the total CQ score was regressed to age and gender in the first regression model. After that, the Big Five traits were added in the second regression model and polyculturalism was added in the third regression model. The results of the two hierarchical regression analyses are summarized in Table 2. The final regression model explained 53% and 38% of the total variance in CQ in the Chinese and Filipino samples, respectively.

Some of the most important results were consistent across both samples. Consistent with previous studies (see Fang et al., 2018, for a summary), openness to experience was consistently and positively associated with CQ. In agreement with Bernardo and Presbitero (2017), polyculturalism was also consistently positively associated with CQ. The significant results for polyculturalism were obtained with the personality traits included in the regression models, indicating that polyculturalism can uniquely explain variance in CQ over and above the variance explained by personality traits. In the Chinese sample, the variance explained by polyculturalism was larger than that explained by any of the personality traits.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Chinese and Filipino Samples

	α	M	SD	Correlations (r)					
				(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Chinese sample ($n = 300$)									
(1) Extraversion	0.88	3.26	0.65	0.34***	0.04	0.10*	0.42***	0.18**	0.24***
(2) Openness	0.71	3.30	0.49		0.13*	0.26***	0.24***	0.19**	0.37***
(3) Emotional stability	0.74	2.58	0.54			0.19**	-0.02	-0.07	0.15**
(4) Conscientiousness	0.79	3.37	0.56				0.21***	0.06	0.16**
(5) Agreeableness	0.80	3.83	0.56					0.29***	0.26***
(6) Polyculturalism	0.63	4.52	0.57						0.38***
(7) Cultural intelligence	0.84	3.47	0.40						
Filipino sample ($n = 247$)									
(1) Extraversion	0.89	3.18	0.35	0.04	-0.02	0.10	0.11*	-0.03	0.09
(2) Openness	0.76	3.57	0.60		-0.11*	0.21***	0.16**	0.18**	0.29***
(3) Emotional stability	0.81	2.77	0.70			0.24***	0.03	-0.11*	0.06
(4) Conscientiousness	0.86	3.54	0.69				0.19**	-0.06	0.25***
(5) Agreeableness	0.76	3.93	0.56					0.15*	0.11*
(6) Polyculturalism	0.72	4.96	0.65						0.16**
(7) Cultural intelligence	0.85	3.51	0.44						

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Results of the Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for the Chinese and Filipino Samples

	Chinese sample				Filipino sample			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
	β	β	β	95% CI	β	β	β	95% CI
Age	-0.03	0.04	0.05	[-0.01, 0.40]	0.09	0.05	0.03	[-0.03, 0.05]
Gender ^a	0.08	0.09	0.07	[-0.02, 0.14]	-0.00	0.03	0.02	[-0.10, 0.13]
Extraversion		0.07	0.06	[-0.04, 0.11]		0.07	0.07	[-0.07, 0.24]
Openness		0.31***	0.27***	[0.13, 0.31]		0.25***	0.22**	[0.07, 0.26]
Emotional stability		0.12*	0.15**	[0.03, 0.18]		0.05	0.05	[-0.05, 0.11]
Conscientiousness		0.01	0.02	[-0.07, 0.09]		0.18**	0.19**	[0.04, 0.20]
Agreeableness		0.14*	0.07	[-0.03, 0.15]		0.02	0.01	[-0.09, 0.10]
Polyculturalism			0.31***	[0.14, 0.29]			0.13*	[0.01, 0.17]
R^2	0.09	0.44	0.53		0.09	0.36	0.38	
F	1.19	10.01***	13.95***		0.90	5.03***	4.97***	
ΔR^2		0.19	0.08			0.12	0.02	
ΔF		13.44***	33.64***			6.09***	4.09*	

Notes: ^aMale = 1, female = 2; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Other statistically significant findings varied between the two samples. Among the Chinese sample, emotional stability was positively associated with CQ. This result is consistent with a more specific hypothesis by Ang et al. (2006), in their study of Singaporean university students, that emotional stability should be positively associated with the behavioral subscale of CQ. For the Filipino sample, on the other hand, conscientiousness was positively associated with CQ. This finding is similar to those of Ang et al. (2005) and Nel et al. (2015), who reported a positive relationship between conscientiousness and specific subscales of CQ. I discuss these cross-cultural similarities and differences below.

4. Discussion

Given the growing interest in CQ as an ability that facilitates effective functioning in contexts that involve interactions with people from different cultures, researchers have explored various individual difference factors that could be associated with the development of higher CQ. The aim of the present study was to investigate personality factors and polyculturalism as individual difference factors associated with CQ. This was the first study to examine both types of factors together in one investigation, instead of separately.

The investigation was conducted with two Asian cultural samples (Chinese and Filipinos) to enable cross-cultural comparison. Several key results were replicated across both cultures, and these results were consistent with previous empirical work on CQ. First, regarding personality factors, openness to experience is the only one of the Big Five personality traits that has consistently exhibited a positive association with CQ (Ang et al., 2006; Depaula et al., 2016; Harrison, 2012; Li et al., 2016; Presbitero, 2016; Sahin et al., 2014). It is not surprising that openness to experience should be associated with CQ, because of its motivational and cognitive dimensions. Openness to experience is considered part of a higher-order personality factor or metatrait called *plasticity* (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002). Plasticity represents a basic motivation to interact with the external environment and to integrate novel information from within the person (e.g., from one's growth and development) along with information from the environment. Thus, openness to experience reflects a motivation to engage actively with novelty (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2005), even if only in abstract, cognitive ways (DeYoung et al. 2002). In intercultural contexts, someone high in openness to experience will be more willing to investigate the norms and practices of people from different cultures and to seek ways to more fully engage with these diverse ways of life.

The second important finding is also consistent with previous literature, as the positive association found

between the lay theory of polyculturalism and CQ was previously reported by Bernardo and Presbitero (2017). Belief in polyculturalism has been associated with greater interest in and appreciation of cultural diversity (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, 2012), as well as with other positive attitudes and behavioral intentions related to intercultural interactions. Again, the connection between polyculturalism and CQ in the present study's findings is not surprising. However, it is noteworthy that when polyculturalism was examined together with personality, the variance in CQ explained by polyculturalism was above and beyond the variance explained by personality factors. This result suggests the robust effects and the potential significance of this lay belief about cultures as a factor in shaping CQ. Only one previous study showed a relationship between polyculturalism and CQ (Bernardo & Presbitero, 2017). The results of the present study indicate the need for further research on polyculturalism and its relationship with CQ and its subdimensions.

Some results were specific to only one cultural group. Among the Chinese participants, emotional stability was associated with CQ; as noted above, Ang et al. (2006) had hypothesized such a relationship, but their study of Singaporean participants found the opposite pattern (i.e., a significant negative relationship). Ang et al. explained that unexpected result by highlighting the way in which the calmness and even-tempered aspects of emotional stability restrain the performance of behaviors that vary across social contexts. But the results could also be interpreted as consistent with the fact that among people with high CQ, integrative reactions to intercultural contact involve positive affect, instead of negative emotions such as fear, anger, or envy (Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011). Thus, it is possible that the ability to regulate negative affect in an intercultural context contributes to greater CQ.

On the other hand, for the Filipino participants, conscientiousness was associated with higher CQ. A similar finding was observed in prior studies with participants from Singapore (Ang et al., 2006) and South Africa (Nel et al., 2015). Conscientiousness has been posited as associated with the more metacognitive aspects of CQ, wherein the motivational dimension of conscientiousness is associated with the goal of succeeding in whatever task or endeavor is at hand and with an approach to success that involves thoroughness and effort.

These two culture-specific findings in the present study suggest that the personality correlates of CQ might depend in part on how intercultural adaptability is experienced or understood in different countries. In contexts where intercultural adaptation is viewed in relation to the performance of tasks (such as working for multinational companies), conscientiousness becomes

important. On the other hand, when intercultural adaptation is viewed in relation to facing unknown and potentially threatening social situations (such as the stress experienced when one enters a new cultural environment), then emotional regulation gains importance. This speculative interpretation could be tested through future studies that would stipulate or even manipulate the type of intercultural situation that participants are asked to consider when assessing their own CQ.

This last point also points to a limitation of the present study, as it did not consider deeply how CQ might be socially constructed or experienced by the participants in the two cultural samples. The scope and approach of this study also had other limitations, including the reliance on self-reports and the cross-sectional research design. Although the self-report measures used are generally considered reliable and have been used extensively in various studies, having additional data sources not dependent on self-reports would strengthen the research conclusions. Furthermore, the sample consisted of university students, many of whom may not have had extensive intercultural experience, and as such their responses to the CQ scale might not reflect reliably how effective they would be in actual intercultural situations. These limitations notwithstanding, the results represent the first set of findings to assess personality and cultural ideology jointly in relation to CQ, and the key findings also show important aspects of cross-cultural consistency across two Asian samples.

5. Conclusion

In two cultural samples (Chinese and Filipinos), the personality trait of openness to experience and the cultural ideology of polyculturalism were found to have distinct positive associations with CQ. These results are consistent with and build on previous studies that highlight the relevance of individual difference factors in understanding variations in CQ. Openness to experience represents the motivational tendency to seek novelty, whereas polyculturalism represents the understanding that cultures mutually influence each other. The study also found culture-specific relationships between particular traits and CQ, indicating a need to understand more fully how CQ is constructed and experienced in particular cultures or social groups. The findings of this study could guide the conceptualization of interventions that could help different individuals and groups to increase their level of CQ.

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