Cultural psychologists have often sought to explain cross-cultural differences in social cognition as differences rooted in the cultures’ positions on a small collection of pan-cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism-collectivism). In this paper, we argue for a paradigm shift in cultural psychology. Drawing on the arguments and data presented in the papers of this special issue, we propose to view cultures as dynamic open systems that spread across geographical boundaries and evolve through time. This alternative view links cultural differences in social cognition to cultures’ axiomatic assumptions (or cultural theories) in the relevant domains, and specifies the social cognitive principles that govern the activation and application of such cultural theories in specific contexts. This new approach captures the complexity of cultural processes, paves the way for an exciting agenda for future investigations, and provides a common language for psychologists to describe how culture affects social cognition as well as how cultural influences are mediated by basic social cognitive processes.

Recent findings from cross-cultural research have cast doubt on the universality of basic psychological processes. A variety of studies have demonstrated that how people perceive their social environment depends on their cultural background (Atran & Medin, 1997; Chiu, Morris, Hong, &
Menon, 2000; Menon, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 1999; Morris & Peng, 1994; Peng & Nisbett, 1999), and the ways individuals evaluate and regulate themselves may reflect their history of cultural learning (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Iyenger & Lepper, 1999; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Such findings have profound implications for social cognition research. Some writers have questioned whether supposedly basic psychological principles that are well demonstrated in North America (see Higgins & Kruglanski, 1996) could be generalized to other cultures (see Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998 for review). Others have developed pan-cultural conceptual tools (such as individualism-collectivism, independence-interdependence, analytic versus holistic thinking style) to account for cultural variations in basic social cognitive processes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990).

In the same way linguists have developed phonetic principles to describe phonemic variations, cross-cultural psychologists have sought to explain cultural variations in manifest social processes (emic variations) in terms of underlying pan-cultural dimensions (etic dimensions).

The etic approach characteristically reduces cultures to a set of coordinates in a hyperspace formed by a finite set of universal psychological dimensions. For example, based on the results of a cross-national survey of values in the workplace, Hofstede (1980) placed 40 nations into a 4-dimensional hyperspace. The United States is high in individualism, whereas Japan is characterized by high collectivism. A country’s coordinates on these dimensions are often correlated with the country’s ecology, history, and economic records (Hofstede, 1980) to construct nomological associations between the pan-cultural dimensions and their conceptually related variables. The initial impressive evidence that comes out from this research has helped to establish the etic approach as the paradigmatic approach to studying culture and social cognition. Following the etic paradigm, several generations of researchers have documented how people from cultures located on the different anchors of a particular pan-cultural dimension react differently to similar social situations (see Fiske et al., 1998). In short, the etic approach appears to have satisfactorily “explained” cultural differences without committing psychology to cultural relativism.

The etic approach has made significant contributions to uncovering the universal dimensions that underlie cultural variations in basic social cognitive processes. However, the etic approach is not the only viable approach to studying culture and social cognition. Through their current and previous research, the contributors in this special issue have sought to provide an alternative to the etic approach. They share the view that cultural differences can be explained in terms of socially shared axiomatic assumptions (or cultural theories) in specific life do-
mains. Whether or not culture would impact cognitions in a particular social situation depends on whether the relevant shared assumptions are available, accessible, salient, and applicable in the situation. Thus, the influences of culture on cognition are dynamic and mediated by the basic principles of social cognition. Like the pan-cultural approach, this new approach, tentatively labeled as the “dynamic constructivist approach” also seeks to explain cultural variations in social cognition by a set of universal social cognitive principles. However, in the dynamic constructivist approach, the influences of culture on cognition are circumscribed by the context of knowledge application. Thus, instead of focusing on the main effects of culture on cognitions, researchers following this approach seek to identify when well-documented cultural differences in cognitions would surface, disappear, or even reverse. Another contribution of the dynamic constructivist approach is that it attempts to describe how socially shared cultural theories are maintained and changed through social processes.

The contributors in this special issue have tried to illustrate the added value of the dynamic constructivist approach over the pan-cultural approach by (a) providing a conceptual and empirical critique of the dimensional views of cultures (Briley & Wyer), (b) connecting well-documented cultural differences in motivation and cognition to the cultural theories in the relevant domains (Hernandez & Iyengar), (c) identifying the boundary conditions of cultural effects on cognitions (Conway, Schaller, Tweed, & Hallett; Morris & Fu; Zarate, Uleman, & Voils), (d) demonstrating the effects of context on the dynamic activation of cultural theories (Briley & Wyer; Hong, Ip, Chiu, Morris, & Menon; Morris & Fu), and (e) explicating how cultural theories are developed, maintained, and changed through interpersonal communication (Lau, Chiu, & Lee; Lyons & Kashima). In this paper, we will outline the background that has led to the arguments presented in the contributions to this special issue. Our goal is to provide a historical context for readers to appreciate how the dynamic constructivist approach may offer an alternative to the etic, pan-cultural approach, and perhaps even set the stage for a major paradigm shift in the study of culture and social cognition.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PAN-CULTURAL APPROACH

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

Researchers in the pan-cultural research tradition often assume that a culture is defined by its dispositions (e.g., basic value orientation, self-construal). For example, researchers often describe the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures as neo-Confucian cultures, implying these
cultures are under the influence of the neo-Confucian cultural heritage and value collective harmony and social interdependence. In contrast, Western European and North American cultures are assumed to be under the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and place individuality and independence at the center of their conception of personhood (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1992). The pan-cultural approach is particularly useful in explaining the differences between cultures with regard to the different central tendencies on the relevant psychological measures. For example, there is impressive evidence that compared to North Americans, East Asians have a greater propensity to engage in contextualized reasoning (Peng & Nisbett, 1999), to make external attributions (Morris & Peng, 1994), to attribute causal potency to the group (Menon et al., 1999), to define the self in terms of social relations (Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995), and to be motivated by the preferences of one’s significant others (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

Despite its demonstrated utility in capturing such differences, the pan-cultural approach has been criticized for ignoring variations within cultures in the same psychological propensities. In most cross-cultural studies, such within-cultural differences are often treated as random errors and hidden behind the error stratum in the analysis of variance reported in these studies. Critics have pointed out that within-culture variations are much greater than between culture differences in most cross-cultural research (Shweder & Sullivan, 1990). Thus, pitting cultures into sweeping dichotomies might commit overgeneralization (e.g., Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

One critical issue is whether within-culture variations are really measurement errors to be treated as noise in the data. This issue resonates with the classic debate in personality research. This traditional trait approach to personality, which focuses on the effects of personality traits on behavior, has often treated cross-situational variations in behavior as noise. Challenges to this view come from the robust findings that cross-situational variations in behavior are much greater than the main effect of personality traits on behavior (Mischel, 1968). Moreover, such variations are not random fluctuations. Instead, a stable profile of discriminative responses to situations is the signature of an individual’s personality (Cheng, Chiu, Hong, & Cheung, in press; Chiu, Hong, Mischel, & Shoda, 1995; Shoda & Mischel, 1993).

The classic debate in personality research raises several possibilities for studying the culture and behavior relationship. First, it is conceivable that within-cultural variations are not random noise in the data resulting from different degrees of enculturation among individuals in the culture. If the behavioral signature of personality is context-specific, so may the behavioral expressions of cultural influences. Second, if the expressions of personality in a specific behavioral context are governed by the
basic social cognitive principles of knowledge activation (Higgins, 1996; Shoda & Mischel, 1993), cultural influences on behavior also should be amenable to the same social cognitive analysis. In a social cognitive analysis of culture, culture does not rigidly determine behavior; it does not have a uniform effect on behavior. Instead, the effect of culture on behavior is relative to the context of the behavior. When the behavioral context changes, the effect of culture on behavior may accentuate, weaken, or take a different form (see Chiu et al., 2000). The social cognitive approach also replaces a static view of culture (in which cultures are characterized by their static essences) with a more dynamic analysis of how culture or cultures influence an individual’s behavior (see Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000).

**EMPIRICAL CHALLENGES**

The pan-cultural approach also faces severe empirical challenges. First, individualism-collectivism is probably the mostly widely studied pan-cultural dimension. Critics have pointed out that the construct of individualism-collectivism consists of many conceptually independent components; for example, self-reliance versus interdependence, self-direction versus conformity, individual versus collective responsibility, and individuality versus uniformity (Ho & Chiu, 1994). When Briley and Wyer (2001, Experiments 1 and 2, this issue) factor analyzed the Triandis and Gelfand (1998) individualism-collectivism scale, they found five independent factors; they concluded that cultural differences are best conceptualized in terms of each of these constructs separately rather than in a generalized individualism-collectivism dimension.

Second, cultures that are relatively collectivistic on one of these component dimensions may be relatively individualistic on the other component dimensions. For example, there are consistent findings that Chinese value conformity more and self-direction less than do North Americans; however, Chinese also place greater emphasis on self-reliance than do North Americans (Ho & Chiu, 1994; Triandis et al., 1990). When cultures are compared on global measures of individualism-collectivism, results are often difficult to interpret. For example, Takano and Osaka (1999) recently reviewed 15 studies that directly compared Japanese and North Americans on measures of global individualism-collectivism. Although most researchers have assumed that Japanese are more collectivistic than North Americans, only one study found supportive evidence for this assumption. Most of the studies (9 studies) showed no significant cross-cultural differences. The rest (5 studies) revealed differences in the reverse direction.

To account for these findings, Takano and Osaka (1999) proposed that Japanese collectivism is context-specific-collectivistic beliefs in Japanese
society have a range of applicability, and these beliefs will guide behavior only when the context of behavior falls within the beliefs' range of applicability. This proposal is consistent with some previous findings on cross-cultural differences in social behavior. For example, when Leung and Iwawaki (1988) compared the reward allocation preferences of Japanese and Americans, they did not find reliable cultural differences either in the preference for equal distribution of the reward among group members or in a global measure of individualism-collectivism. In addition, preference for an egalitarian distribution has a negligible correlation with a global measure of individualism and collectivism in these cultures. However, stable cross-cultural differences emerged when Leung and Bond (1984) compared the reward allocation preferences of Chinese and North Americans in different relational contexts. When the allocator and the recipient were friends, Chinese allocators displayed a greater bias in favor of the recipient than did their North American counterparts. When the allocator and recipient did not know each other, such cultural differences disappeared. In short, the evidence suggests that greater predictability of cross-cultural differences in social behavior can be achieved when researchers focus on domain- or context-specific cultural beliefs than when they make predictions based on global measures of pan-cultural dimensions.

DOMAIN-SPECIFICITY OF SHARED AXIOMATIC BELIEFS

Unlike the pan-cultural approach, the dynamic constructivist approach questions the predictive utility of pan-cultural dimensions that are assumed to organize social behavior in many different domains. Instead, researchers in the dynamic constructivist tradition have tried to identify specific knowledge structures or implicit cultural theories that mediate social behavior in specific domains. Morris and Peng (1994) found that Chinese had a greater propensity to attribute social events to external causes than did North Americans, but the two cultural groups did not differ in the tendency to explain physical events by external causes. Based on these findings, Morris and Peng proposed that Chinese and Americans use different specialized implicit causal theories to interpret social and physical events.

This proposal is consistent with our previous work on the effects of implicit theories on social perception. Specifically, our studies have shown that perceivers use domain-specific implicit theories to make sense of the social world. These theories are relatively independent in the sense that individuals may hold one theory in one domain and a contradictory theory in another domain. Moreover, judgment and reactions in a particular domain are best predicted by the theory in the same domain (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995).
Extending the implicit theory approach to cultural psychology, an implicit theory may be available to one culture but unavailable in another. For example, Whorf (1956) observed that Europeans tended to dissect time into the past, present, and future; however, this theory of time was alien to Native Americans when Whorf did his research. An implicit theory also may be more chronically accessible in one culture than in other cultures. For example, the theory that social relations are organized according to authority rankings is available to both Americans and Japanese, yet this theory may be more chronically accessible to Japanese probably because it is more frequently used in their culture than in American culture. Cultures that differ in the cognitive availability or chronic accessibility of a particular theory may exhibit differences in the motivation, cognition, and behavior mediated by this theory.

The importance of experiences in the formation of elaborate shared theories is clearly articulated in the Conway et al. paper (2001, this issue). These authors propose to understand cross-cultural differences in terms of culture X situation/domain interactions instead of the culture main effect. They reviewed studies on cross-cultural differences in cognitive complexity (i.e., differentiated knowledge structures that are described by more distinct pieces of information, or beliefs that connote greater within-group heterogeneity, or thought processes that lead to those beliefs and knowledge structures, or thinking processes that consider more viewpoints). They discovered that apparent cross-cultural differences in cognitive complexity observed in one situation might fail to emerge, or even be reversed, in another situation. Nevertheless, cross-cultural diversity in cognitive complexity is pronounced in domains that people in the culture value or have more experience in, and thus have formed more complex representations about.

Several domain-specific implicit theories have been proposed to account for cultural variations in motivation, cognition, and behavior. Duty-based morality is emphasized in Chinese societies and rights-based morality in North American societies. Some authors have explained such cultural differences in terms of the dominant cultural theories about moral agency in Chinese and American cultures (Chiu et al., 1997; Chiu & Hong, 1997). They noted that in Chinese societies, it is generally believed that the social-moral reality is fixed and individuals need to accommodate their personal interests to it. In contrast, the dominant cultural belief in North America is that social-moral reality can and should be modified to accommodate individual needs and aspirations (see Su et al., 1999). These lay beliefs set up a framework to define whether moral duties or individual rights are considered to be of fundamental importance in the society’s moral code. Hong et al. (2001, this issue) extend this analysis to explore possible Chinese-American differences in cultural identity. They argue that Chinese culture fosters a
belief in a relatively fixed social world, which orients Chinese people to focus on collective duties when their cultural identity is evoked. In contrast, North Americans tend to believe in a relatively malleable social world. This belief may orient North Americans to focus on individual rights when their cultural identity is made salient.

Another well documented Chinese-American difference in social cognition is North Americans’ greater propensity to attribute a group member’s behavior to the dispositions of the individual member and the greater propensity of Chinese to attribute the same behavior to the group’s dispositions (Menon et al., 1999). Such differences may arise from the different beliefs about the locus of agency in the two cultures. Whereas North Americans tend to believe that the individual is the primary agent of action, Chinese tend to believe that the group is the more potent agent.

Hernandez and Iyengar (2001, this issue) pursue this idea further. They identify two types of motivational system: One has its origin in the person (person agency) and the other in the collective (collective agency). According to them, “personal agents perceive agency to emanate from the self and, in turn, exhibit greater intrinsic motivation toward actions perceived as self-initiated, whereas collective agents perceive agency to lie within the collective and, in turn, exhibit greater intrinsic motivation toward behaviors perceived to originate from a collective.” They then argue that many of the social behaviors or phenomena (such as cognitive dissonance, foot-in-the-door) are predicated on individual agency and are prevalent in cultures where the personal agency theory is popular (e.g., North American cultures). By contrast, in cultures where the group agency theory is popular (e.g., Japan, China, India), such social behaviors or phenomena might be less salient. Instead, social behaviors or phenomena that are predicated on group agency (e.g., conformity, social validation) should be more prevalent.

In short, the dynamic constructivist approach treats culture not as an internalized form of an integrated and highly general structure (such as an overall mentality, worldview, or value orientation), but as an internalized form of a loose network of domain-specific knowledge structures or representations that is shared widely within a culture. The social cognitive factors that mediate cross-cultural variations in social cognitions presumably include the availability and relative accessibility of domain-specific implicit theories.

**BOUNDARY CONDITIONS OF CULTURAL EFFECTS**

In the dynamic constructivist approach, domain-specific cultural theories that are widely shared and highly accessible are cognitive tools that members of the culture can adopt to guide their judgments and reac-
tions. Like other cognitive tools, the applicability of these interpretive tools is limited by a number of epistemic factors. For example, members of a culture may rely on culturally shared cognitive tools when the interpretive task requires spontaneous reactions rather than deliberate considerations. The likelihood of applying a culturally shared cognitive tool will also be high when the perceiver is under a relatively high cognitive load or when there is a need for quick decisions (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). According to this analysis, cultural differences may be particularly pronounced when spontaneous judgments are needed, or when the perceivers have less cognitive resources and a high need for closure. Under these circumstances, perceivers are likely to draw on the well learned, widely shared, highly accessible cultural theories to guide their judgments. The same analysis also suggests that cultural differences would be greatly attenuated when intentional judgments are needed, and when the perceivers have plentiful mental resources and time to make considered judgments.

Another example of the domain-specificity of cultural effects emerged in the debate over the universality of dispositional attributions. North Americans and Europeans prefer to explain social behavior primarily in terms of personal attributes and dispositions, whereas East Asians tend to give primary consideration to situational factors (Fiske et al., 1998). However, recent research suggests that such cross-cultural differences in “dispositionism” are less sweeping and subtler than originally assumed. In particular, Choi, Nisbett, and Norenzayan (1999) concluded from their review that “dispositionism” is a cross-culturally widespread mode of thinking. The East-West split in attribution, instead, lies primarily from a stronger “situationalism” or belief in the importance of the context of behavior in East Asia.

Zarate et al. (2001, this issue) argue against Choi et al. that it is premature to minimize cultural differences in “dispositionism.” Following the social cognitive principles described above, they predict that cultural differences in trait inferences should emerge when the judgment task requires spontaneous inferences. In two experiments, they examined the activation and binding of trait concepts, the two stages in spontaneous trait inferences, comparing Anglo and Latino Americans. The results revealed that Anglo Americans showed activation of trait concepts on a lexical decision task, whereas Latino Americans did not. Also, on a trait-rating task, Anglos showed greater binding (linkage) of trait concepts and/or behaviors to the actors performing the behavior than did Latinos. These findings show that cultural differences in trait inferences are more salient when the judgment task requires spontaneous responses than when it requires intentional inferences.

Other research findings corroborate this conclusion. For example, there is evidence that only when the research participants were
cognitively busy were Americans more likely than Chinese to commit the fundamental attribution error (Knowles, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, in press). Other studies show that Americans made stronger attributions to individual dispositions than did Chinese, who in turn made stronger group dispositional attributions only when the participants were under time pressure, a manipulation introduced to heighten the participants’ need for cognitive closure (Chiu et al., 2000).

In short, cross-cultural differences are particularly pronounced when perceivers have limited mental resources and have to rely on the chronically accessible cultural theories that spontaneously come to the fore in their mind.

**CONTEXTUAL EFFECTS ON DYNAMIC ACTIVATION OF IMPLICIT THEORIES**

If cultural meanings are represented in terms of widely shared domain-specific cultural theories, individuals may possess many such theories, some of which may even conflict with each other. The behaviors in a certain situation are then guided by the cultural theories that come to the mind of the individual in that situation. Like other implicit theories that can be activated by contextual cueing (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999), cultural theories also can be activated by contextual cues, like priming participants with cultural icons (Hong et al., 2000).

In attribution research, Hong et al. (2000) have demonstrated how priming highly Westernized Hong Kong Chinese with icons of Chinese culture (e.g., the Chinese dragon, Beijing opera singer) accentuates the tendency to make external attributions for social events (a tendency that has been found to be greater among Chinese than among Americans). Similarly, priming these participants with symbols of American culture (e.g., the American flag, Mickey Mouse) attenuates their tendency to make external attributions.

Other researchers have reported similar cultural priming effects on other psychological phenomena. Briley and Wyer (2001, this issue) found that cross-cultural differences found in values were accentuated when North Americans and Hong Kong Chinese were primed with their respective cultural icons. The effects were particularly pronounced in socially referenced achievement values (not being outperformed by others, and defeating others in direct competition). These values emphasize the use of others’ performance as the standard to evaluate one’s own achievement. Hong Kong Chinese participants primed with Chinese cultural icons were particularly likely to endorse such achievement values, whereas Americans primed with American cultural icons disavowed such values.
Similarly, cueing cultural knowledge also affects individuals’ momentary conception of the self (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). In two studies, Hong et al. (2001, this issue) manipulated the salience of cultural identity (being an American or being a Chinese) and measured the participants’ subsequent spontaneous self-descriptions. Hong Kong and North American participants had a similar pattern of responses when their respective cultural identity was not salient. However, Hong Kong Chinese and Chinese Americans generated more collective duties (vs. individual rights) than did North Americans when their Chinese cultural identity was activated. Similarly, North Americans and Chinese Americans generated more individual rights (vs. collective duties) than did Hong Kong Chinese when their American cultural identity was activated. These results were consistent with the contention that cultural influences are mediated by the activation of cultural theories. More important, the Chinese American participants generated more or fewer collective duties versus individual rights depending on the cultural identity primes, suggesting that cultural influences are dynamic rather than static.

Morris and Fu (2001, this issue) applied the dynamic constructivist approach to cultural differences in negotiation and conflict resolution. They noted that negotiators who have extensive experiences in two cultures might have learned the conflict frames or scripts in both cultures; however, only the most accessible frames or scripts may guide the negotiators’ judgments and actions at a given moment. Which frame would be temporarily accessible depends partly on which one is primed in the negotiation context.

In summary, culture’s effects are more dynamic than pan-cultural theorists have envisaged. When cultural cues are not present, cultural theories remain cognitively dormant and have little effect on cognition. When cultural theories are activated by cultural primes and thus become cognitively accessible, cultural theories can have profound influences on judgments or behavior.

DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF SHARED REPRESENTATIONS IN SOCIAL PROCESSES

Fiske et al. (1998) emphasize that culture and psyche are mutually constituted. In their own words, “a people’s cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral processes are shaped through their engagement in a cultural world. The psyche, then, is not a separate, autonomous set of processes; it exists and functions only in close conjunction with the culture . . . Consequently, psychological diversity is an inevitable result of people’s coordinating their responses with the prevalent, historically created and diversely organized systems of cultural meanings and prac-
A major challenge of the dynamic constructivist approach is to describe how cultural theories emerge, reproduce, and evolve as members of a culture participate in symbolic activities.

Communication is essential to the construction and maintenance of culture (Krauss & Chiu, 1998). Lau, Chiu, and Lee (2001, this issue) discuss the interface between communication and shared reality and how this interface might enhance the understanding of culture as a dynamic system of shared meanings. Specifically, they reviewed research that shows how the speaker and the listener form shared representations of the subject of conversation in the process of interpersonal communication. When the speaker produces a message for the listener, the speaker needs to estimate the listener’s knowledge. Generally speaking, the speaker will deliberately produce a less informative message when the listener is estimated to be knowledgeable in the subject of conversation. The listener can also contribute to the establishment of a shared representation by providing feedback to the speaker. Through these processes, shared meanings are constructed.

Lau et al. also contend that when members from the same community interact, widely shared representations in a community are more likely to be used in message construction and message comprehension. In addition, people who have participated in communication are more cognitively committed to the shared representations. Thus, communication could help to consolidate conventional ideas and beliefs in a culture. As Sperber (1996) puts it, “those representations which are repeatedly communicated and minimally transformed in the process will end up belonging to the culture” (p. 88).

Similarly, Lyons and Kashima (2001, this issue) contend that when culturally relevant information is circulated in a society, it tends to gravitate toward a culturally most probable form (a most widely shared form). Specifically, although narratives of events could change in any number of ways due to various contextual factors, the narratives would eventually converge to a more culturally standardized form over a number of reproductions. In their study, participants reproduced a story that contained both stereotype-consistent and stereotype-inconsistent information in 4-person serial chains (i.e., four participants passed the story along from one person to another). The authors predicted that because stereotype-consistent information was more widely shared in the culture than stereotype-inconsistent information, the stereotype-consistent information would have a high probability of being encoded and reproduced in the serial chain. This prediction was supported. Toward the end of the reproduction chain, participants generally kept stereotype-consistent information and omitted stereotype-inconsistent information. This study illustrates how culturally shared representations are maintained in communication.
CONCLUSION

Private thoughts and processes always take place in a cultural context. Thus, integrating social cognitive research with cultural psychology should throw new light on the understanding of social cognitive processes (such as attributions, self-construals, motivational orientation, and negotiation). Despite the popularity of the pan-cultural approach to culture, some of the founding scholars in cross-cultural psychology have been long aware of the dynamic aspects of cultural influences. For example, Triandis (1989) distinguished between the private, public, and collective selves and suggested that the conceptions of these selves in a culture may change when the level of affluence and availability of resources in the culture change. With increasingly frequent cultural contacts through migration, tourism, and the Internet, the rigid geographical boundaries that have separated different cultural groups are breaking down rapidly. As Hermans and Kempen (1998) noted, “globalization involves social processes that are complex and laden with tension. These processes fall squarely outside the scope of cultural dichotomies, which by their nature are oversimplifying and insensitive to the apparent tensions that are so typical of the relationships between cultural groups” (p. 1112).

A major challenge in cultural psychology is to offer psychological models that capture the dynamic nature of the cultural processes. In these models, culture would be viewed as a dynamic open system that is spreading across space and changing over time. This challenge calls for a fundamental shift in the research paradigm in cultural psychological research. Culture can no longer be treated as a static entity consisting of a collection of individuals who have been exposed primarily to the influence of one culture. Multiculturalism and globalization do not create noise in data; instead, they are substantial issues that should be given high priorities in the research agenda. In the midst of rapid cultural changes, it is important to understand how individuals react to influences from many different cultures. According to the dynamic constructivist approach, individuals can acquire cultural theories from more than one culture. Which theories guide behaviors depends on the relative accessibility of the theories in the specific behavioral context. Recent research has revealed that multicultural individuals can spontaneously change the cultural lenses that are available to them through multicultural learning, depending on which cultural theories are activated by contextual cues (Hong et al., 2000). Interestingly, as shown in the Hong et al. studies (2001, this issue), Chinese Americans do not lose their Chinese cultural identity as a result of acculturation. Instead, their Chinese identity has remained intact and can be evoked by appropriate contextual cues.

Intercultural contacts also raise new issues in cultural psychology. As Lau et al. (2001, this issue) point out, when people from different cultures meet, they may feel an immediate need to negotiate meanings and
establish mutually acceptable representations in communication. The newly established shared representations may later be incorporated into the culture (as a result of frequent use of the representations in communication) and lead to cultural changes. How culture changes as a result of inter-cultural contacts is a fascinating topic for future investigations.

The pan-cultural approach to culture and social behavior has strong appeal because of its parsimoniousness. The dynamic constructivist approach described in this paper aims to offer an alternative, albeit less parsimonious, approach to capture the complexity of cultural processes. This alternative approach views cultures as continuously changing and evolving rather than as static entities. It also assumes that cultural diversity exists in the form of loosely networked domain-specific cultural theories rather than in the form of integrated global dimensions as previously proposed. In addition, how such domain-specific cultural theories operate to affect behavior is consistent with our current understanding of the principles of knowledge activation. By incorporating the basic principles in social cognition (e.g., cognitive accessibility) into cultural psychology, the dynamic constructivist approach provides a common language for both social cognition researchers and cultural psychologists to describe how culture affects social cognition, as well as how cultural influences are mediated by basic social cognitive processes.

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