
*Being a
Non-
Western
Psychologist?*

*First Winner of the
2000 Harry and Pola
Triandis Doctoral
Thesis Award*

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The millennium celebrations were about to start on 30th December, 1999 and we were in my sister's house in Izmir, Turkey. I had been trying to familiarise myself with a new computer system to send an e-mail to Ottawa, Canada to take part in the Harry and Pola Triandis award. After I had done that my reward was going to be a trip to Ephesus, an ancient Greek city which is just 45 km from my home city. So, after I had sent my Ph.D. abstract by e-mail to Marta Young I left home with a clear conscience for an evening of cultural adventure.

I first heard about the IACCP when I was working on the Children's Value project for Cigdem Kagitcibasi in Istanbul in 1982-83. My role was collecting household data in various parts of the city but mainly in deprived areas where even finding an address was a challenge. I remember my surprise and fascination at the location of some of these houses. On one occasion I was in the oldest and particularly nicest part of the city (Uskudar); on another I was at the foot of the Bosphorus Bridge with a fantastic view of the Bosphorus. Some of these houses had obviously been made without any city planning permission. They are called "gecekondu" which can be translated as "constructed over a night". The hospitality of the families I visited was always very good. Overall, this was an extremely educating experience for me. Even though at the time I wasn't too aware that I was taking part in cross-cultural research the experience of working in an unfamiliar subculture had a big effect on me.

Apart from this particular experience, thoughts about the importance of cultural issues in psychology and particularly about the differences between Western and Nonwestern psychology were a continual part of my higher education. Soon I became aware that, for very practical reasons, applied psychologists who were responsible for the assessment and treatment of psychological problems were almost always dependent on information generated by their Western counterparts. We used to have heated arguments about how it was that some of the findings we knew from the psychological literature didn't match up with observations and research in Turkey. Can Turkey be called a collectivist culture? How could we know the criteria against which to measure individualism or collectivism reliably in a Turkish context? What are the social and ecological determinants of one culture, region or country which create differences in life experiences and which affect us as psychological beings?

At a very personal level my question was whether I should do my MA in Psychometrics, even though my preference was for Social Psychology? I decided on the former.

I started finding answers to some of these questions that were bothering me when I started my Master's degree in psychometrics. It was a hard but also an enjoyable subject to study. Soon I found a good compromise between my interest in social psychology and the topic I was studying. I had done a dissertation on the adaptation of Rotter's Locus of Control Scale for school children between 10 and 15 years old. Also, I was surrounded by academics who had adapted various psychological concepts and psychometric materials to the Turkish language and culture. Some of this was concerned with the characteristics of Turkish culture and the effect of this culture on people's behaviour. In terms of the country's politics there had been lot of interesting changes.



THE HARRY AND POLA TRIANDIS DOCTORAL THESIS AWARD

The Triandis Award is designed to enhance the quality of research in cross-cultural and cultural psychology by encouraging the development of excellent research skills among graduate students. It is named in honor of one of the founders of the field and his charming wife. One award is given every two years at the IACCP Congress. Application information for the next award will appear in the next issue of the *Bulletin*, and on the IACCP web site.

Changes in Turkey's politics produced, at a certain level, changes in the education system. A number of Semitic (Muslim) schools (18%) had gained classic state school status. This increased these children's opportunity to take the university entrance exam and so go to university rather than become a religious cleric (imam). This change was a good thing and it increased the number of people with a religious upbringing who could take part in economic and political life. It made me

wonder whether religious beliefs were in any way related to other belief systems and social representations and to the development of locus of control?

I was highly motivated to continue my postgraduate studies in the UK. This encouraged me to take up the question of cross-cultural studies from a cross-national point of view and allowed me to make comparisons between two cultures, one predominantly Christian and the other Muslim. It was the beginning of a natural experimental study. Inevitably, the question of comparability in cross-national, cross-religion and cross-language comparisons came up. The task would not be easy, but in the end I decided to use all available psychometric approaches and theories to address the problem. This was a significant learning experience. I was particularly attracted by item response theory but I wasn't able to find much in the literature on its use in a cross-cultural setting. The problem was not a shortcoming of the method but rather

ABOUT THE TRIANDIS AWARD RECIPIENT

Candan Ertubey was born in Izmir, Turkey, 1960. She did her primary, secondary, and undergraduate education in Izmir, learning French as a second language in school. She graduated from the department of psychology, Ege University, in 1982 and after spending a year in Bogazici University in Istanbul to learn English returned to Ege to work as a research assistant. She completed the Master's degree in psychometrics in 1988 at the same university. She was sponsored by the Higher Education Council of Turkey to do her Ph.D. in U.K. and was awarded her Ph.D. from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 1999. She has been working at the University of Luton, UK, where she now holds a senior lectureship.

of limited interest by cross-cultural psychologists. I think that psychologists in general, and cross-cultural psychologists in particular, want a reliable and valid methodology to answer their research questions. With the growth in technology to carry out simulations and to support our sophisticated knowledge of statistics some of these problems are becoming increasingly solvable.

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My thesis was concerned with Turkish and English adolescents' perceived control of academic events and compared classical test theory and item response theory as psychometric tools to investigate differences. I believe that there are two points that made the research important. Firstly, I've been trying to come up with a solution to the comparability problem of cross-cultural psychology using existing psychometric tools, especially item response theory (IRT). Secondly, in doing this I have come up with a result which was not really expected and which needs some explanation. It is that Turkish pupils are more Internal than their British counterparts although they are more religious and authoritarian.

I celebrated my Millennium New Year in a place that many civilisations have made their home for over 2000 years. Although, it is significant for me, in truth this is as significant as anywhere else in the world to celebrate our accumulated knowledge of culture.

ASIAN PSYCHOLOGIST

The *Asian Psychologist* is published about once a year by the Singapore Psychological Society and the Department of Social Work and Psychology, National University of Singapore on the most wonderful coated paper stock. In the editor's words: "AP strives to become a forum for Asian psychologists and for psychologists studying Asians to present their work and to exchange ideas and observations."

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