



PSYCHOLOGY INFLUENCING LIVES: ASIAN PSYCHOLOGY, PROSOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT

Ashmita Kirti*

INTRODUCTION

Psychology is the study of human behaviour. Psychological processes influence culture. Culture influences psychological processes. Individual thoughts and actions influence cultural norms and practices as they evolve, and these cultural norms and practices influence the thoughts and actions of individuals. This research explores how psychology is deeply integrated into the traditions and cultures of Asian societies, with a particular focus on South Korea. South Korea is famous for its culture, and the East Asian countries are an interesting mix of ancient tradition and cutting-edge modernity. Recently, Korea have been known for creating a massive craze among the youths across the globe through its reach by their 'K-pop industries', 'cinema industries and 'culture'. Now, the question to think about is- how is it happening? Is there any secret to their sudden boom? Or is it merely the result of their work? Why are people, especially young people, crazy about South Korea? What are they creating, and how are they creating it, to create this addictive reach into people's minds and lives?

One thing that these questions make clear here is that there is not only one factor behind the popularity of South Korea, but there are mind-blowing ways and techniques used by them, prominently, one of these ways is 'the use of psychological concepts. All these questions and beyond have been discussed in this research work. It is interesting to understand how psychology can be used as a 'cultural tool'. Thus, studying the case of South Korea becomes relevant to the topic. This research work will also help in understanding how the culture and psyche of an individual are shaped, influenced, and regulated by each other, which will give a crystal-clear picture of the relationship between society and its people. This work also aims to highlight the importance of what kind of media we consume, for example, the source of

*BA LLB (HONS.), FIRST YEAR, DR. RAM MANOHAR LOHIYA NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY, LUCKNOW.

entertainment, and how this consumption is influencing our brain, mind and perception of the world around us, which can be both positive and negative.

The integration of psychological concepts has been prevalent since ancient times, but now, due to globalisation, there has been an increase in people's awareness of psychological well-being, which is often supported by governmental initiatives, mental health education, and counselling services. Other than the educational and clinical integration of psychology, which is uniquely woven into the entertainment and cinema industries of South Korea and other Asian countries, such as China, India, and Japan, these industries have adopted psychological themes to address issues such as identity formation, trauma, social pressure, and interpersonal conflict, contributing to both artistic expression and public discourse on mental health.

The study of this topic is not only helpful for understanding the importance of psychology; it is more than that. It is important to understand how these psychological concepts are shaping the context of Asian countries, offering insight into the perceptions and perspectives of Asian societies, because psychology is more than what a person thinks and feels; it is also shaped by their surroundings. This research seeks to analyse these developments, highlighting the dynamic interaction between psychological science, cultural traditions, and rapidly globalising media industries. It becomes significant to understand the dynamic impact and prevalence of psychology in these societies. This study also reveals how the psychology in East Asian countries requires cultural adaptation of Western mental health systems due to differences in how distress is perceived, communicated, and managed, with a greater emphasis on social harmony and physical symptoms rather than individual pathology. Along with the focus on psychology in Asia, this work also briefly sheds light on the concept of Prosocial Media and its impact. The holistic approach of this research work provides a fresh perspective on psychology and its effectiveness, relevance, and goals in our everyday lives. This work aims to highlight that psychology is not only an academic aspect but is very much working in our daily lives, influencing our cognition and ultimately our lives.

PSYCHOLOGY IN ASIA

Psychology holds that human behaviour and mental processes vary with context. In simple words, culture, tradition and people, which altogether constitute the society, impact and shape psychology in different ways, which is specifically studied in:

Cultural Psychology: This is one of the branches of psychology. The title speaks for itself; it examines how a society's culture and traditions reflect and shape an individual's psychology. The main areas of focus in this field of study are personality, psychological development, mental processes, and the formation of self-identity. For instance, the impact of culture on an individual's sense of identity has been sufficiently researched and disseminated over time. Critical cultural psychology, as an area of focus, emphasises the need to acknowledge the multitude of factors that shape the experience of being from a socially sensitive perspective. The self, in the Indian notion, is not just based on human biology but exists as an entity that is intimately connected to its surroundings, the social landscape which nurtures the identity of the psyche. Cultural psychology is the study of how culture reflects and shapes the mind and behaviour of its members (*Heine, 2011*). The focus of cultural psychology is that mind and culture are inseparable, meaning that people are shaped by their culture and their culture is also shaped by them. It is important to study this phenomenon in the context of cultural psychology in Asia. Anthropologists, psychologists, and social psychologists have found that various factors impact psychology in Asian societies. The branch of psychology is named.

Asian Psychology: Asian psychology is a branch of cultural psychology that studies psychological concepts as they relate to Asian culture. Psychologists studying this concept have found that the issues are often aligned with cross-cultural psychology. Asian Psychology is the study of countries of Asia and their peoples; the way they behave, act, communicate, and what their belief system, as well as the differences between the native culture and the culture of Asian Americans, is known as "Asian Psychology."

Asian Behaviour: This specific field of study delves into how behaviour is subject to the impact and influence of culture. This branch specifically studies the Asian behaviour and how it differs from Western behaviour. This difference in individuals' behaviour is the result of differences in society. According to Shinobu Kitayama, a professor of psychology and Director of the Culture & Cognition Program at the University of Michigan, culture can have a profound impact on how people think about and perceive the world around them. Kitayama proposed that, unlike the traditional American point of view, which emphasises self-reliance and independence, Asians instead tend to feel more interdependent.

These differences in people's cognition across contexts result from various factors. Let us understand these differences in the behaviour of Asians in the context of accessing care for mental problems and well-being. Asian psychology is found to be a relatively new area of study

that gives insights into how society, its culture, tradition, beliefs, values, practices, history, cultural factors and its people regulate and shape human behaviour. Therefore, the study of Asian psychology provides culturally relevant insights that enhance our understanding of human behaviour, mental processes, health, and well-being, and highlight Asian factors that differ from those in Western settings. Recently, in the studies, it has been evident that the major influence and impact on human psychology (in the case of South Korea) is due to entertainment industries like the K-pop, drama, comics and cinema. The Korean entertainment industry intentionally uses the psychological concepts that ultimately aid in making their content more addictive and relatable to the viewers. This strategy has worked in Korea's favour, boosting its cultural economy.

These differences in people's cognition across contexts result from various factors. Let us understand these differences in the behaviour of Asians because of the various factors –

Cultural Harmony: Asian culture gives importance to others' needs and values others at the cost of their own needs, leading to a sense of strong obligation towards guests or strangers.

Collectivism: Asian culture is known for its hospitality, emphasising togetherness rather than individualism and raising the standards and societal expectations.

Family Structure: In the context of India, family structure is predominantly based on a patrilineal basis and characterised by strong, close bonds, shared responsibility, giving more importance to collectivism and not individualism. An individual acts and reacts according to the environment in which they were brought up, and it automatically becomes their obvious behaviour; Thus, supportive parents and society initiate a healthy individual who can cope with their problems and is also able to manage their emotions effectively.

‘Lookism,’ aka the Social Beauty Standards: This concept is dominantly found in the societies of South Korea, which is famously known as the beauty standards, leading to appearance discrimination, and those who experienced discrimination due to their appearance were more likely to have suicidal ideation than those who did not.

SOUTH KOREA

Recently, South Korea have been a hot topic of discussion because of its unique cultural heritage, rapid technological growth and delicious cuisine. With better policies and

psychological considerations in its application, Korea has reached the seventh heaven, making it a powerful cultural economy. Psychology has been interestingly integrated into the Korean traditions and culture, making it a dream place for everyone around the globe. The entertainment industries of Korea have gradually become the backbone of Korea's development and prosperity, a trend that has grown since 1999. This phenomenon of a sudden rise in Korea's popularity has been conceptualised as the term:

'Hallyu' means Korean Wave: The term itself is a Chinese term that means the Korean wave of pop culture and tradition. The Korean Wave (Hallyu) refers to the global popularity of South Korea's cultural economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas and movies. South Korea is one of the only countries in the world, if not the only one, that has a dedicated goal to become the world's leading exporter of popular culture. It is a way for Korea to develop its "soft power". Soft power is a popular term coined in 1990 by Harvard political scientist *Joseph Nye*. Hallyu has been a blessing for Korea, its businesses, culture and country image. Since early 1999, Hallyu has become one of the biggest cultural phenomena across Asia. Korea's strategic use of its culture has made it one of the greatest cultural powers in the world. The success of these entertainment products created a tremendous buzz about the exploding popularity of Korean culture. Now, what is interesting here is that the reasons or methods that make the hallyu effect so effective are prevailing over everyone's mind and heart. To better understand the phenomenon of hallyu, we need to look behind the strategic use of psychology that is incorporated, which makes the cultural products (like k-dramas, K-pop music, food culture) more emotionally engaging, habit-forming and even addictive.

Psychological Principles in Use in Korean Media Production –

Cliffhangers and Reward Schedule (Operant Conditioning): This strategy is used intentionally in popular K-dramas and Korean shows to make the audience more addicted to them. In this method, they often use episode end cliffhangers and emotionally unresolved story themes and plots. The audience thus becomes so attached to the storyline and relates to it, and they never know which episode will give them the emotional payoff. Thus, it makes the viewers binge-watch.

Dopamine and Emotional Highs: K-dramas are designed to elicit strong emotions, from happiness to sadness. The resulting pleasure and emotional release trigger the brain's reward system, releasing dopamine that reinforces the desire to continue watching.

Parasocial Relationships (S-O-R Paradigm): Audiences develop deep, one-sided emotional attachment to K-pop idols or fictional characters. This is especially strong due to behind-the-scenes content, fan interactions, and idol vulnerability, which encourages loyalty, emotional investment and repetitive consumption. In addition, the story that is displayed is in accordance with the culture of Asian society in general; the concepts of true love, sacrifice, and other concepts of life depicted in K-drama do not conflict too much with the concept of life that exists in Asian society in general. Studies have also found that women experience stronger parasocial relationships than men.

Emotional Contagion and Mirror Neurons: K-dramas often have a very light theme, which includes a family and conflicts related to it that feel familiar to their audiences. K-dramas are thus emotionally intense, often evoking empathy, tears, anger or nostalgia in the minds of the viewers. It has strong music, close-up shots, and expressive action of the beautiful actors, which helps in activating mirror neurons, which makes the emotions feel more personal and real. The illusion of experiencing face-to-face interaction with the characters in this spectacle then gives rise to a phenomenon called Parasocial relationships.

Aesthetic Immersion and Visual ASMR: K-dramas are known for their soothing and eye-appealing content that they provide by using soft and pastel colour palettes, soft fashion, often including aesthetically pleasing cinematography, meticulous routines like cooking or applying makeup, or slow, deliberate actions that are both calming and engaging for the viewers. Colours which can impact and change how we feel and perceive a person, and they depict a kind of emotion. Colours in K-dramas are used to convey mood, character, and symbolism, often drawing from traditional Korean culture through concepts like the Obangsaek colour spectrum and the meaning behind certain hues like red for romance or blue for sadness.

Showcases the Social Dilemmas and Mental Exhaustion: The media of Korea often includes a blend of social and mental problems or abuse that no one really talks about. For instance, in the 2021 drama True Beauty, the main message is to love oneself and improve to reach one's full potential. This drama depicted the problem of low self-esteem due to society's standards of beauty that affects one's mental well-being. These K-drama and idols' fanbase are not used just for entertainment but also for addressing the relatable problems of youth. For instance, the promotion of self-love. The use of the concept of self-love in K-pop is complex, primarily propagated through music and campaigns, but often exists in tension with the industry's strict beauty standards and pressures for perfection. The emphasis on concepts like self-love feels

like an aid to the mentally exhausted viewers, which is depicted in the drama named *'It is okay not to be okay'*.

Psychology is not just a subject for academic purposes, but it can also be used for the greater good and benefit, as we understand by analysing South Korea's case. Korea employs the unique strategic use of the psychological concepts most dominantly in their media production, which includes music, dramas, cinema, photography, and advertisement, thus culturally embedding it.

OTHER ASIAN SOCIETIES

This unique interplay of psychology can also be found in the societies and cultures of different Asian countries, like Japan and China. Each of these societies incorporates psychology in different ways in their societies, like most of the time it is prominently visible in their culture, media, tradition, lifestyle, food traditions, philosophical concepts, values, and so on. This study of the integration and play of psychological concepts becomes vital as it gives insight into how psychology not only prevails in society's culture, but it is also affected and influenced by society. In these societies, psychological interplay is more visible in their culture, tradition and social values and beliefs as discussed below:

JAPAN

Japanese Psychology: This term was coined by Amane Nishi, philosopher and bureaucrat, in 1875. Japanese psychology as concepts give more emphasis to actions and principles like Morita Therapy, Naikan, and Kaizen, which focus on accepting emotions and taking consistent, small steps to improve one's life. Other concepts include Shinrin-Yoku (forest bathing) for stress reduction and the philosophy of Kintsugi, which involves embracing imperfections. Japanese psychology has many concepts that show an incredible blend of social, cultural and therapeutic Western concepts of psychology.

Morita Therapy: This therapy is a blend of Japanese culture and Western psychological approach (like cognitive- behavioural therapy) which focuses on acceptance of emotions and taking action despite discomfort, which helps in coping with some mental dilemmas like anxiety and neurosis.

Naikan Therapy: A reflective practice focused on relationships and gratitude used for personal growth and therapy.

Kintsugi: The Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, highlighting the beauty of the break and repair. Serves as a powerful metaphor for embracing personal imperfections and viewing them as part of one's history.

CHINA

Chinese Psychology: The term “psychology” was introduced to China in 1872 by a Chinese intellectual named Zhu Fengjia, under the pen name Lay Buddhist. Chinese psychology is characterised by the influence of ancient philosophies like Confucianism and Taoism, which emphasise social harmony and self-control. Psychology here gives importance to a holistic view different from the Western way. In China, there is a unique blend of philosophical concepts with Western psychological concepts, such as the concept of yin- yang.

Concept of ‘Yin-Yang’: Originating from ancient Chinese philosophy, this duality is often represented by the yin-yang symbol, where the black (yin) and white (yang) sides contain a dot of the opposite colour, symbolising that each contains the seed of the other. The philosophy suggests that a balance between these forces is essential for harmony, and they are constantly in dynamic interaction, with one transforming into the other. This concept of Chinese culture presents one of the beautiful examples of integration of culture, value, beliefs and psychology. The concept of yin-yang represents the idea that opposite, yet interconnected forces are necessary for balance and harmony in life. In a psychological context, it can relate to personal growth, and both rest and receptivity are necessary for later action and creation.

Expression as Stigma and Shame: In Chinese societies and culture, the expression of one's weak or negative emotions or mental health problems is often considered shameful and is considered a stigma for the family. This is further discussed in the book “Chinese Religious Life”. For many, disclosing personal issues such as mental health concerns can affect views of family lineage, suitability as a spouse, or even employment status, which is named as another concept, ‘Losing Face’. The concept of stigma and shame is so rigid in Chinese culture that it impacts the mental well-being and ultimately the life of an individual. So, after studying South Korean media, we can understand how it can be manipulated and used as a tool and weapon to shape human perception ultimately. To understand this better, one must understand the concept

of “Prosocial media and its impact.” Thus, it is clear that the media is the most influential factor in social behaviour. It can be used for good or for bad in society.

PROSOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT

Prosocial media are media that have been found to enhance prosocial behaviour and increase “empathy” over the long term of use. Through any medium, whether visual or oral, prosocial behaviour can be promoted or inhibited. Thus, the power of media use is immense, which can be psychologically manipulated. The study found that the use of prosocial media has a positive impact on people’s behaviour and significantly increases empathy. Other studies have shown significant associations between watching prosocial television programs and performing prosocial acts in real life.

Prosocial behaviour is found to increase with both long- and short-term use. It can also be understood by the model of “General Learning.” The model states that an individual can learn through interaction with their environment, including media (both aggressive and prosocial). Thus, the learning takes place through general observation and interaction in daily life. Therefore, consumption of a kind of media determines what we learn.

Research evidences that the use of prosocial media enhances one’s helping nature and empathy. Thus, the researchers have identified “empathy” as the main mediator among prosocial behaviour, helping nature, and a sense of empathy. Just as exposure to aggressive media increases one’s aggressive tendencies and makes one more aggressive in behaviour, similarly, prosocial behaviour promotes prosocial behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Psychology is more than just the study of the human brain and its behaviour- that is what has been the only focus of this research work. It has been emphasised in this work that psychology is wider in its scope and its implications. The relation between the culture, tradition, or society and its influence on the psychology of that culture. It has been explored and analysed how the various psychological concepts are integrated and influenced in the various areas of a society (like in the context of Asia), as in its culture, tradition, lifestyle, thoughts, practices, beliefs, media industry, advertisement tactics, food culture and so on.

This work interestingly studies a new area of study of how psychology is integrating, influencing and is influenced in the context of the Asian culture, with a focus on South Korea. South Korea recently became a hot topic of discussion because of this sudden boon to its cultural power, which is moving forward like a wave, giving rise to an important phenomenon called the Hallyu Wave, which is the focus of this work. Very interestingly, this bloom in the prosperity of Korea is not the result of its only good policies but also due to the incredible blend of psychological concepts and its use predominantly in its media production, or to say, 'the K-pop culture'. Along with the focus on South Korea, this work also studies and explores the blend of psychology and culture in the other Asian countries, that is, Japan and China, the biggest powers. It is found in the studies that how psychology functions or integrates in an Asian society is not universal in nature, which means how psychology is perceived depends on the context where it is explored. For instance, there is a difference between Western psychology and Asian psychology.

The aim is to recognise, explore and analyse how psychology is more of a multifaceted concept, especially in the cultural context, and also aims to understand its importance, which will eventually help in understanding a society and the reasons behind the way it functions and grows. For instance, in the context of China and Japan, the influence of psychology and its concepts is predominantly in their philosophies, theories, concepts, beliefs and behavioural patterns. Thus, the study of this correlation becomes incredibly important to better understand the behind-the-scenes of societies and their people's behaviour. This way we understand how psychology is more than a subject to study but also an incredible way to know, explore and love ourselves for who we are and why we are. The essence of psychology and its significance is incredibly woven in the words of the one and only psychologist of his time- Carl Jung - "The world will ask you who you are, and if you do not know, the world will tell you."

REFERENCES

- Lehman, D. R., Chiu, C. Y., & Schaller, M. (2004). Psychology and culture. *Annual review of psychology*, 55, 689–714.
- Cultural Adaptations of Behavioural Health Interventions: A Progress Report. (n.d.). Retrieved <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3965302/>
- Madan, P. (n.d.). Critical and Cultural Psychology in India: An Overview. Retrieved <https://ijip.in/articles/critical-and-cultural-psychology-in-india-an-overview/>
- Kitayama, S. (2007). *Asian Psychology Coming of Age*.

- <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/asian-psychology-coming-of-age>
- Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study. (2023). <https://ijip.in/articles/role-of-family-structure-on-mental-health-of-adolescents-a-comparative-study/>
- Lee, H., Son, I., Yoon, J., & Kim, S. S. (2017). Lookism hurts: appearance discrimination and self-rated health in South Korea. International journal for equity in health.

Long-Term Relations Among Prosocial-Media Use, Empathy, and Prosocial Behaviour. (2014). SAGE Publication, Inc., 25, 358–368.