Generational and Intergenerational Collective Remembering: Evidence for Global Narratives, Region-Culture Influences, and National Political Cultures across 42 Societies

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What is universal, what is characteristic of national political culture, and what is regionally influenced in the “living memory” of national history for people around the world? A massive multi-generational sample (N=16,000+) collected in 2018-19, representative of 42 societies encompassing the world, is interrogated for answers. Prospects for convergence, divergence, and mutual destruction are discussed, focusing on the Great Powers of China, Russia, the United States and the European Union. Previous studies using single nation samples have shown that collective remembering takes the shape of a narrative, telling a people who they are (e.g. foundational events like independence), and where they come from (crucial transitions, involving politics/war). Powerful societies are more ethnocentric in their shared memories of world history than weaker ones, that must accept the dominant tides of time. History provides raw materials that leaders use to shape a political agenda, or narrative, for the future. In doing this, they work with recency, because recent events are remembered more than distant ones in time (and place). World War II was the most important event in lay history at the turn of the last century, but it’s influence may be fading as those who carried it pass away. This will weaken the soft power of the United States, the sustained winner of WWII. As a hegemonic power becomes less so, there will be less global political stability. Implications are that those enlightened concerning the perils of history should begin to act now, in a concerted manner, to strengthen global consciousness.

About the speaker

Professor James H. Liu (刘豁夫) is Professor of Psychology at Massey University, and was Head of its School of Psychology from 2015-2018. Previously he taught at Victoria University of Wellington for more than 20 years (and was Co-Director of its Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research). He completed a BSc in Computer Science at Illinois in 1984, and worked at Hughes Aircraft Company as a member of technical staff before finishing a PhD in Psychology at UCLA in 1992. He has 200+ publications in the areas of social, cross-cultural, and political psychology, with a specialization in social representations of history and identity politics. He has a recent interest in the impact of digital mass media on mental health and political engagement. A keen member of the Asian Association of Social Psychology (http://asiansocialpsych.org), he promotes historically embedded scholarship on cosmopolitanism and global consciousness. A naturalized citizen of two countries, he describes himself as a “Chinese-American-New Zealander”.