

# A Discussion on the Differences Between Chinese and Western Health Psychology

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## Abstract:

Since the late 1970s, health psychology has made some progress in various countries and regions of the world. With the progress of science and technology, western countries continue to deepen the related research of health psychology, and now they have been able to connect it with the fields of medical treatment, education and even computer, and the research scope has been further expanded, and the understanding of this subject has entered a new level. Compared with western countries, Chinese psychology starts late, has a low level of development and progresses slowly. The understanding of health psychology is still in the primary stage. Influenced by history and culture, Chinese research focuses on how to combine traditional medical concepts with modern health psychology, and has achieved remarkable results. If China and western countries can integrate each other's strengths, it will play an important role in promoting the development of health psychology, medicine, sociology and other related disciplines.

**Key words:** Health Psychology, Chinese and western differences, Chinese and western integration

## **1. The Definition of Health Psychology**

Health psychology is a branch of psychology that USES psychological knowledge and techniques to explore and solve problems related to the maintenance or promotion of human health, prevention and treatment of physical diseases, aiming to reveal the role of psychological factors in the maintenance and promotion of health, including understanding why people get sick and how they react after they get sick. The main research psychology in the correct it affect human health or cause some bad behavior of the disease, especially in the prevention of bad behavior and all kinds of special function should play in the disease, to explore use of psychology knowledge to improve medical and nursing system, to establish a reasonable care measures, to save health care costs and ways to reduce social cost, and puts forward Suggestions for related health decisions.

## **2. Differences in the Development of Health Psychology Between China and the Western Countries**

### **2.1 The differences between China and western health psychology's origin**

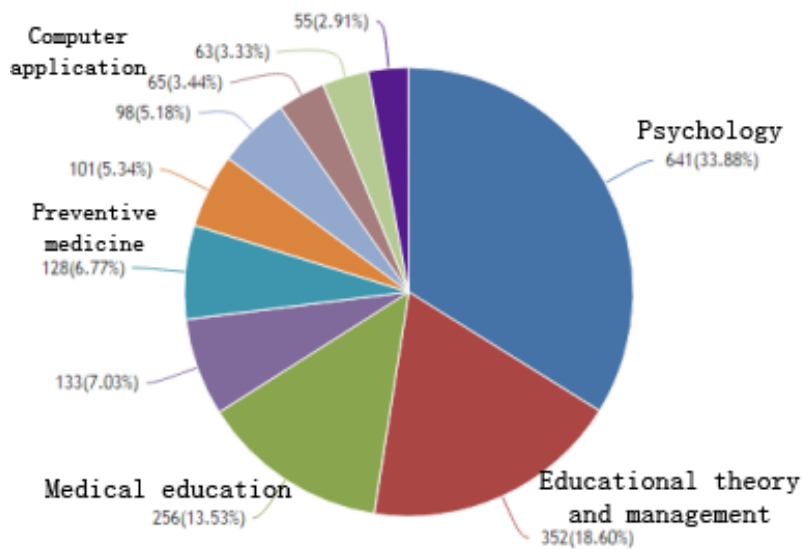
Since the late 1970s in the United States, health psychology as an independent discipline has made some progress in America, Europe and China. However, due to the differences in history and culture, the development direction and specific content are different. China has a long history and culture. Although it is a country with a relatively late start in health psychology, its related thoughts and discussions have already been mentioned in some classics: some Taoist and traditional Chinese medicine classics, such as neijing, have put forward similar views like "anger hurts the liver, happiness hurts the heart, thinking hurts the spleen, sadness hurts the lung, and fear hurts the kidney", which indicates that although the ancient people have not formed a specific and complete system, they have already had a clear concept of the importance and relevance of physical and mental health.

Relatively, the development history of Europe and the United States, although shorter than in China, but its explosive force is far more than China's. After the independence and promotion of health psychology as a discipline, some very staunch supporters believe that its development history is actually long and traceable, which can be traced back to the theory of psychiatry in the early 20th century. The 20th century has been characterised as the era when western society began to come to terms with science [Watson, 2000]. It was in this period that the scientific method began to change not only our physical world, but also our inner world. As StanleyHall, one of the founding fathers of American psychology, argued in 1923 "All the great problems of our age are becoming more and more psychological the better we understand them. " Later, Europe and the United States were the first to enjoy the fruits of the industrial revolution, and medical treatment was the second priority for the application of advanced technologies except for the military. During this period, the medical technology in Europe and the United States was rapidly improved. Thanks to the medical and health development level that has been at the forefront of the world for quite a long time, compared with other developing countries, Europe and the United States have certain advantages in the treatment of diseases themselves, so they have enough energy to pay attention to various influences brought by diseases. Under such favorable background, health psychology has finally entered the stage as an independent discipline.

## 2. 2 Differences in the development status of health psychology between China and the west

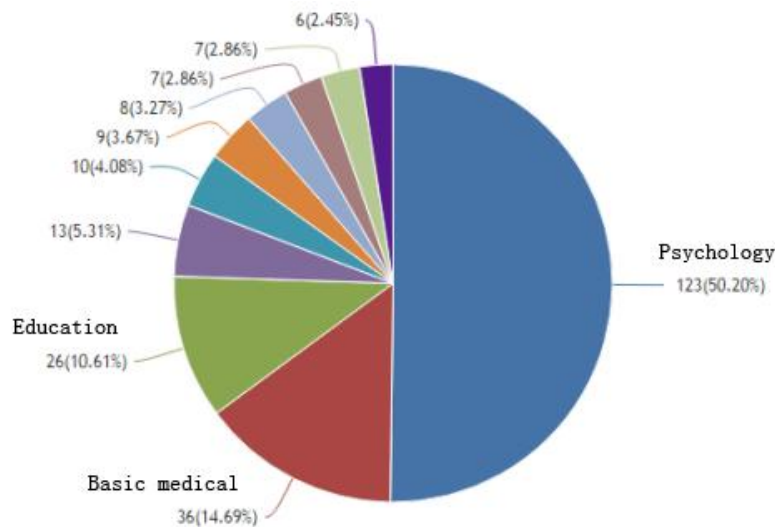
The American psychological society health psychology chapter defines health psychology as "a collection of specialized educational, scientific and occupational knowledge in the promotion and maintenance of health, prevention and treatment of diseases, identification and diagnosis of factors related to health, diseases and various disorders, and analysis and improvement of health insurance system and health policy". Through the statistics of all the European and American literatures on health psychology collected in the past ten years (table 2.2.1), it can be seen that the studies on health psychology in Europe and the United States have gradually become mature and involve many aspects. In addition to basic medicine and psychology, it also includes fields like education, sociology and even computer, which well reflects this definition.

Table 2. 2. 1



Influenced by history and culture, Chinese believes that health psychology is the product of the combination of psychology and preventive medicine, and its central task is to discuss the psychological problems related to physical diseases, focusing on the maintenance of human health rather than the treatment of diseases [Shenghu Ou. 2009]. Similarly, statistics on Chinese health psychology related literatures collected in recent ten years (table 2.2.2) show that the development of health psychology in China is still in its infancy. Although a lot of historical heritage can be used, the development status and the degree of attention is relatively poor. Relative to the United States and Europe, Chinese pay more attention to health psychology literally "health" and "psychology" two aspects, the research field of vision is limited. Due to the existence of a large number of ancient medical achievements for reference and utilization, China pays more attention to the combination of basic medicine and health psychology, namely the modernization of traditional Chinese medicine theories, and has made remarkable achievements, such as Tu Youyou and her artemisinin.

Table 2. 2. 2



### 2. 3 Summary of the development process of health psychology in China and the west

In general, although they have similar cognition of health psychology, due to their different origins and development process, there are some differences in the emphasis of health psychology development in China, Europe and America. China has a relatively early origin, but its development is always slow and the development level is low, which can be seen from the number of health psychology related papers in the past decade. Secondly, the understanding of health psychology is in the primary stage, and more attention was paid to the health care and prevention. The integrity and relevance of the research need to be improved. But it has successfully developed its own characteristics by trying to integrate health psychology with ancient theories of traditional Chinese medicine.

With the high level of development in Europe and America, the research and understanding of health psychology have entered a new stage, which is that China trying to reach. However, the independence of health psychology is not complete, and a considerable part of it is dependent on other psychology disciplines that have formed earlier [Jeffery Yen, Oriana Vaccarino. 2017]. Even if there is such a different, the origin of the two really got some similarities from the general direction: both are the result of long-term forces, ideas that germinate over time and then naturally develop into a complete discipline. [Henderikus J Stam, 2018]

## 3. Different Characteristics of Chinese and Western Health Psychology

### 3. 1 The differences of the development ways between Chinese and western health psychology

The healthy mental thought of ancient Chinese followed two ways: one was the healthy mental thought of philosophical thinkers, the other was the healthy mental thought of medical thinkers. The former was started from Confucius and his book named *The analects of Confucius*, and it could traced back to the books like *Shangshu, the Book of Changs*, many philosophical thinkers and their works throughout the ages have expounded on healthy psychology and developed successively. The latter was started from the *Huangdi Neijing*, many medical thinkers and their works throughout the ages have

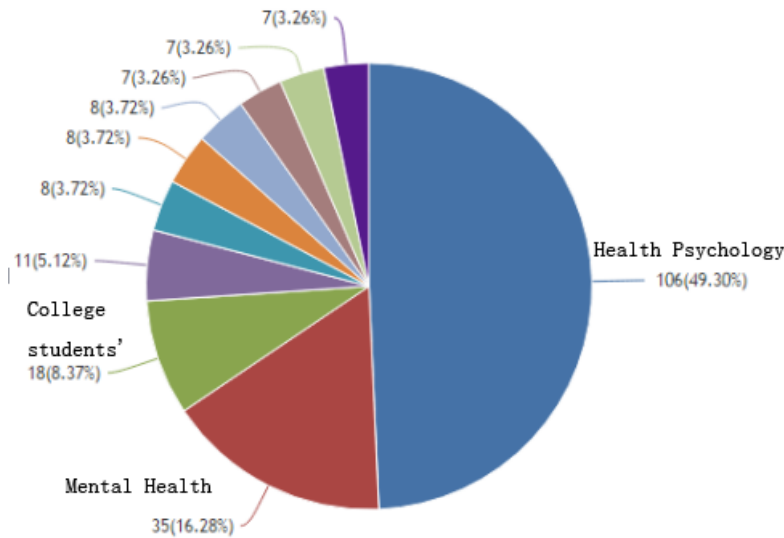
made great and valuable statements on healthy psychology[Xinyang Chi ,2011]. It should be emphasized that traditional Chinese mental health thoughts include positive and negative aspects. The former aims to improve mental literacy to maintain mental health, while the latter aims to prevent and cure mental diseases to maintain mental health. In modern times, there are still two main schools of health psychology, one of which is described above, which combines traditional Chinese medical theories to analyze the importance and relevance of physical and mental health from the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine. However, since TCM theory has long formed a complete system of its own, this school's attitude towards health psychology is more used as a reference and evidence to interpret the traditional medical views in a modern way [Yadi Gu, Junling Zhang, 2010]. The other is to adopt the established health psychology theories in Europe and the United States for local revision, which provides a large number of research tools, reference data and research directions for domestic research.

As a sub-discipline of psychology, health psychology in Europe and America has developed rapidly based on various disciplines including medicine, psychology and sociology. However, psychology was first born out of psychiatry, and the two are closely related, which has been reflected in the development history of psychology in many European and American countries, including Britain [Michael Murray,2017], Brazil [Mary Jane P Spink,2017] and New Zealand [Kerry Chamberlain,2017]. This independent development was later reflected in various subdisciplines and schools of psychology, such as behaviorism and neo-behaviorism. Influenced by this way of development, the independence of health psychology is not complete, and no influential schools and theories have been produced. Although it is nominally independent, it is actually hard to get rid of the influence of other disciplines. Intuitively, it is just a crossing point between medicine, psychology and sociology, covering a wide range but slightly complex.

### **3. 2 The differences of the research directions between Chinese and western health psychology**

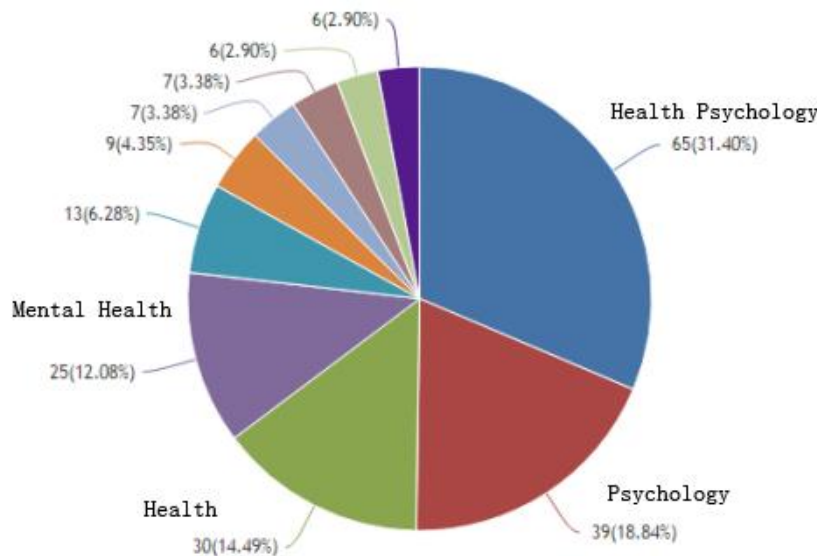
Through the literature keyword statistics can be seen that the two existing schools of health psychology in China, or the main direction of Chinese academic research at present, were focused on students. Based on China's huge population base and development status, students account for the highest proportion in the occupational distribution of China's total population and are widely concerned. They are the backbone of social life from all aspects, and they are also the most prominent influenced by physical and mental health problems. The problem is prominent, the sample size is large, and the social status is high, which is the most suitable research sample for Chinese health psychology which started late. In recent years, due to the dual psychological and physical problems of students in school, there has been an endless stream of negative news, China urgently needs to propose effective physical and mental problems prevention and solutions for this group. This includes the improvement of living and learning environment, the construction of mental health and the popularization of education, etc. , all of which need the support of a large number of targeted research results.

Table 3. 2. 1



The research direction of health psychology in Europe and America shows a significant generality around the premise of health psychology (table 3. 2. 2). The research direction of health psychology in Europe and America shows a remarkable generality around the general premise of health psychology. At the same time, it advances in education, medical treatment, system and other aspects, and there is no obvious preference in the selection of subjects. The research on specific issues from a certain perspective is very thorough, but there is a lack of research on the intermediate transitional part connecting the big theme and specific issues. The research results are more dependent on the tools and theories of other disciplines to elaborate, so that the problem can be analyzed in multiple directions. Due to the lack of space, all the tables in this paper take the data in the top ten places for analysis. However, the distribution of keywords in western countries is not concentrated, showing an extremely discrete state, which results in slightly weak data that can enter the statistical range. This also proves that the research direction in Europe and America has a very obvious divergence.

Table 3. 2. 2





On the whole, the research direction difference between China and Europe and the United States is similar to a cone. European and American research focuses on the top and bottom of the cone, while Chinese research focuses on the side of the cone. The two are complementary relations and can synthesize a complete whole. For example, mobile phone addiction and other problems of teenagers are becoming more and more serious in various countries and regions, and have even become a trigger for many physical and mental health problems, including social difficulties, manic or depression and other psychological problems, vision loss and a series of complicated symptoms caused by sleep deprivation [Wang Xiangmei, et al. , 2017]. On this issue, Chinese researches tend to explore the problems caused by teenagers' mobile phone addiction, the specific manifestations of addiction and the solutions. However, European and American studies tend to summarize all the problems existing in the current stage of teenagers and their causes. Based on this premise, they will carefully explore the causes of these problems and their correlation with each other.

#### **4. Different Research Ideas of Chinese and Western Health Psychology**

Chinese research approaches rarely combine physiological and psychological factors in the same study, or analyze the influence of subjective and objective factors at the same time. Instead, they tend to discuss problems from a distinct perspective. This is also reflected in table 2.2.2. For example, in the analysis of sleep status and influencing factors of Chinese occupational population [Fan Yuan , et al. 2018], the inductive analysis of influencing factors of sleep status is basically a social cause, including cultural level, living area, age, gender, marital status and even economic status, etc. , while the influence of psychological factors is almost negligible. The same situation is also found in the research of dietary structure and influencing factors [Lahong Ju , et al. 2018]. The main influence of residents' dietary choice is mainly derived from the change of objective conditions, such as economic level and living environment, and there is little mention of subjective tendency. On the contrary, in the study of mobile phone addiction among adolescents [Lingrui Zhang , et al. 2018], the research results tend to explain the association between individual internal conditions (low self-efficacy, anxiety and social fear, etc. ) and addiction, while the possible or significant external influencing factors are ignored. That is to say, the relevant issues of health psychology in China are explored from the perspectives of "health (medicine)" and "psychology" respectively. If we want to understand the influence of "health" and "psychology" on the same problem or the existence of each other, we often need two or more different literatures for reference research.

On this issue, European and American countries have begun to realize this and can put the two in a relatively equal position in the research results [Bianchi A, Phillips Jg. 2008]. It is also a study on mobile phone addiction, which can be explained from both objective and subjective aspects in Europe and the United States, including individual physiological or psychological reasons [Billieux J, et al. 2008], external family environment, social atmosphere and learning environment. The research perspective and overall thinking are stronger than that of China.

## 5. The Summary

Although China has been able to pay attention to the issue of physical and mental health in its early history, it is difficult to combine the traditional Chinese theory with the relatively emerging health psychology that is inclined to the western theoretical system. Meanwhile, the overall development level of psychology is also not negligible compared with Europe and America, which is related to the starting time, the degree of attention, social form and many other aspects, and cannot be made up in a short time. However, Chinese health psychology research also has many advantages, which can resonate, complement and even promote the research in Europe and America.

Europe and the United States as a psychological origin, theory system has been mature and perfect, provides China with a large number of precious resources and reference, it is an important support to shorten the development time and improve the level of psychology in China. If we can promote the mutual integration of health psychology between China and Europe and the United States, it will be a win-win situation and play a very important and positive role in the health psychology of both sides, as well as the related disciplines such as biomedicine and sociology.

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