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Research in both the social and cognitive sciences has increasingly focused on the complex dynamic between cultural meaning and practices with cognitive processes. From the sociology of science to the anthropology of religion, cultural studies have taken a cognitive turn to explore a wide range of topics including distributed cognition in technological systems, memory and religious rituals, and the neuroeconomics of decisions about risk. Cognitive neuroscientists have likewise begun to more closely examine how culture influences cognition in areas such as perception and attention, healing and placebo effects, language processing and speech disorders, and even the psychosomatics of meditation. Emerging out of this multidisciplinary interest in culture and cognition is a new understanding of the plasticity of embodiment that emphasizes change in how cultural practices, human cognition and behavior, and even the natural environment influence each other. Cultural change and neurocognitive plasticity are the result of active human agency rather than purely passive inscription by social, technological, or biological systems.

This perspective on active cognitive agency and change is in contrast to traditional ones in cultural psychology that focus on static differences in philosophical mind-sets as the basis for reductive explanations of evolutionary biology in populations. Such reductive approaches often glean from philosophical writings an “essence” of a culture or civilization and ignore the history of everyday practices. These essentialized cultural differences are then linked to neurocognitive or even genetic correlates, usually separating an imagined East from West.

Asia has thus, once again, become a key geographic and conceptual locus in nascent discussion and debate over culture and cognition. How can dynamically changing variations in the embodiment of cultural practices and neurocognitive plasticity be geographically situated without reverting to Asia as a stereotypical foil in a new-age bio-cultural Orientalism?

This problem requires greater multidisciplinary cooperation than has existed so far. Rather than simply criticize or talk past one another for their disciplinary failings, historians, anthropologists, and cognitive neuroscientists need to work more closely together in research that is both informed and sophisticated about culture as well as experimentally rigorous about cognition. This workshop will be an important first step in bringing together leading social and cognitive scientists to critically explore emerging areas of research at the intersection of culture and cognition, particularly those in which Asian cultures form an important working category.

More information [here](#).