

## Do Chinese commit neither fundamental attribution error nor ultimate attribution error?

Yunn-Wen Lien, Ruey-Ling Chu, Chun-Hui Jen, and Chia-Hua Wu

*Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University*

Morris and Peng (1994) reported that subjects with Chinese heritage weight situational factors more than dispositional factors when a killing behavior was attributed, regardless the killer's nationality. They therefore argued that Chinese committed neither (1) fundamental attribution error nor (2) ultimate attribution error. The Collectivism/Individualism distinction of culture was used to explain the results.

We pointed out that two types of situational information should be distinguished. One is situational information that might facilitate or explain the occurrence of the target behavior, such as being treated unfairly might facilitate a killing behavior. The other is inhibitory situational information, such as social norm or bystanders' pleading that might prohibit a killing behavior. Previous research has revealed that these two types of situational information might respectively lead to the discounting effect or increase the dispositional attribution. Being more sensitive to situational information therefore would not necessarily lead to the tendency toward situational attribution.

Two studies aimed at clarifying the above argument were reported in the current research. Study 1, with local Taiwanese subjects, used the same cover stories as Morris & Peng (study 3, 1994) but equated

the story content for in/out group by exchange the nationality of the killer. The results showed that Taiwanese subjects attributed the killing to dispositional factors much more than to the situational factors as we predicted, particularly for the "student cover story", and there was an interaction between attributional tendency and nationality, opposite to what have reported. We argued that Morris & Peng's findings could be better explained by the specialty of subjects and inequality of content for in/out group.

To further test whether Taiwanese treat in/out group member differently in attribution, factors that explained the loss of a candidate in Taiwan presidential election of 2000 were weighted by those who did and did not support the candidate in Study 2. It showed that out-group voters weighted dispositional factors more than the in-group voters for the failure of a candidate, which consisted with the so-called ultimate attribution error or, more general, the group-serving bias. Implications for attribution tendency of Chinese and the potential problems of cross culture studies are discussed.

**Keywords:** *attribution, fundamental attribution error, ultimate attribution error, cultural difference, group-serving bias*

