

International Psychology's Responsibility in Social Justice and Social Change

Review of *The Handbook of International Psychology (2nd edition)*, edited by Merry Bullock, Michael Stevens, Danny Wedding, and Amanda Clinton. New York, NY: Routledge, 2025. 634 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-92512-0. \$189.00, hardcover.

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The undertaking of *The Handbook of International Psychology (2nd edition)* must have been a daunting, yet very much needed task. The seemingly Sisyphean task of presenting the history and current state of psychology across the globe has been met yet again in the second edition, very much needed after twenty years since the first volume was published.

The authors are commended for their significant effort in completing the second edition of the *Handbook of International Psychology*. It is an admirable attempt to be inclusive and to represent the practice of psychology, its history, and professional psychological organizations and regulations in various countries. This edition features editors who have contributed extensively to international psychology, primarily through academia, research, and involvement in multiple roles within the American Psychological Association (APA), Division 52, and the Office of International Affairs. The extensive effort, undertaken in collaboration with psychologists and psychology professional organizations, is noteworthy, recognizing the underlying partnerships, networking, and relationship building required to include the numerous countries represented in this edition.

As any other *Handbook*, the volume can be approached in a variety of ways. If interested in a certain country or about to interact with a colleague, client or student from another region, a psychologist might find it very useful to read the relevant chapter. In this way, potentially, the book is a must-have for any mental health professional. With such intended use, it might helpful to be reminded of the need to embrace cultural humility,

while acknowledging the legacy of colonialism in psychology (Zhou, 2025). Each chapter of the *Handbook* offers a list of references and further readings as it aims at providing a general idea of the history of psychology intertwined with the history of a nation; therefore, the volume is a good starting point but by no means comprehensive in terms of unveiling the subtleties, complexities, and controversies regarding psychology in each country.

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The first chapter selected for this overview, Ecuador, located under the section dedicated to Central and South America, was written by three authors from this country. A reader might find out that in terms of training there are currently no doctoral-level programs available in Ecuador and there is no national professional organization that would promote and regulate psychological training and practice; smaller regional and thematic associations are dispersed across the country. The authors highlighted research as one of the weakest areas of psychology in Ecuador, while recognizing that persistent inequality, poverty, and violence constitute challenges where psychologists can be agents of positive change.

Cambodia, a country where psychology has been present for nearly three decades, has been described as a place where professionals “blend Western therapeutic methods with traditional mindfulness practices to enhance understanding and foster tolerance” (Ret & Phan, 2025). The authors share compelling statistical information that helps understand challenges faced by psychologists, for example the fact that “Cambodia’s mental health sector currently receives only 0.02% of the national health budget” (Ret & Phan, 2025). As in case of Ecuador, poverty constitutes a significant challenge, and partnership is seen as key in advancing the field.

Considering systemic inequalities across the globe, one might contrast the training opportunities and resources available to psychologists in the United Kingdom, where Murphy (2025) highlighted the diversity of the population, as well as the impact of imperialism and different historical trains of thought developed in the country, not shying away from topics such as eugenics and racist beliefs. The chapter painted a picture of a diversified landscape of associations and training options, while highlighting the breadth of research virtually impossible to summarize, and thus providing references to publications that may allow the reader to gain an updated, more detailed selection of current studies.

One more example of a chapter featuring a country in a distinct region might be the Dutch Caribbean. The Caribbean, well covered in the volume, includes Dutch, English, French, and Spanish-speaking countries. Dutch Caribbean history opens the chapter, discussing the relationship with the Netherlands, and how it continues to shape the professional training and regulation. Five authors representing different locations share the importance of interdisciplinary practice and flexibility to be able to work in different settings, including community-based facilities. Among challenges, they mention an aging population and climate vulnerability alongside the need for mental health specialists in the aftermath of national emergencies. Authors emphasized that cultural strengths, such as notable faith-based and spiritual resources among inhabitants might be useful to psychologists as they assist in building resilience and increasing protective factors.

This second edition of the *Handbook of International Psychology* may benefit readers by offering a brief overview, primarily of the history of psychology in each country, the development of professional psychology organizations, and, in some cases, the regulation of psychology and mental health laws and legislation. While it is understandable that, due to the number of countries included, a detailed and nuanced discussion is not feasible; however, including key factors make this second edition more valuable and helpful to the field of international psychology.

The second edition of this *Handbook*, to some extent, addresses social justice issues related to the need for mental health care in various contexts and countries. However, it often fails to mention the barriers to accessing care. One way to have made a stronger case for social justice and social change in achieving these goals could have included a framework such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) – such as SDG 3 (health and well-being) and its linkage to adequate living wages (SDG 8), inequities between and within countries (SDG 10) and the need for partnerships (SDG 17). This is only one example of a framework that could embody the goals of international psychology and displays the inclusion of interdisciplinary, macro interventions, such as policy changes, in addressing, for example, a global challenge like health and well-being (UN, 2023).

Another critique of the second edition of the *Handbook* is its lack of discussion about the positionality and power of the four editors, who represent Western mainstream psychology, as well as the colonialism and influence involved when it is imported and exported to different contexts. It also fails to address the unequal role played by voices from academia, research, psychologists, the American Psychological Association, and the Office of International Affairs, as well as the influence of ethnic and social backgrounds, in shaping Western psychology's dominant role in various countries. There is limited analysis of how Western psychology is primarily represented by voices from academia, especially psychologists, and from specific groups of North American ethnic and social backgrounds.

One way to have addressed this issue would be to include an editor from, for example, an Asian, African, or Middle Eastern country (among others) that have made substantial contributions to the field of international psychology, particularly in indigenous psychology or cross-cultural psychology (Kim et al., 2006), or those who have recognized their power and positionality and worked tirelessly to address human rights challenges. Some examples include Brigitte Khoury from Lebanon, who has worked diligently with refugees for many years and contributes to the development of psychology in her country; Pina Marsico from Italy, who also works in Brazil and discusses issues of power and positionality. Pina and Brigitte both contributed significantly to division 52 as APA presidents through their mission and visions in their roles. Another example of an excellent editor would be Nandita Chaudhary, who has extensively worked with children and indigenous populations in India. Lastly, including authors beyond psychologists—such as activists, counselors, humanitarians, individuals with lived experience of global challenges, and those from interdisciplinary fields—also would have embodied the spirit of international psychology and social justice.

According to Stevens (2007), international psychology (sometimes used interchangeably with global psychology) aims to understand and address global issues that cross national boundaries and affect multiple countries through interdisciplinary and collaborative communication. Examples of global challenges include migration, armed conflict, climate change, human rights abuses, terrorism, refugees, well-being, and mental health (Marsella, 1998). To develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding for addressing these global challenges and creating effective macro interventions, it is important to identify macroprocesses like sociopolitical and economic challenges and to develop macro interventions such as effective policies. Thus, to tackle global challenges, understanding macroprocesses like sociopolitical, economic, and technological dynamics and applying macro-interventions such as policy changes is beneficial.

In addition to understanding a country's culture and context, it is essential to analyze its historical background, structures, colonial legacy, politics, and other factors that shape the current beliefs and values of specific groups within that society. Although the second *Handbook* briefly mentioned history in some chapters, such as the chapter on Iran and its influence on psychology and touched on indigenous psychology in chapters about Saudi Arabia and the role of culture in Jordan, these discussions are inconsistent across chapters, which is a significant flaw in this edition. While exploring the history of psychology and its professional organizations in each country is interesting, it is incomplete without including the influence of culture, history, politics, and indigenous psychology in each chapter.

Cultural psychology places importance on the consideration of etic and emic approaches. An etic approach looks at applying an intervention or model of psychology to fit the local culture, whereas an emic approach creates interventions or models that fit the local context (Kim & Park, 2007). Examples of etic approaches are giving individuals mental health diagnoses using the DSM-5 because of their symptoms or experiences without considering wider systemic, structural, political, familial, and societal factors impact how and why individuals may present with those symptoms. An emic approach could use locally constructed interventions to analyze these issues and provide the most beneficial interventions, along with considering the importance of culture (Kim & Park, 2007).

Aside from focusing on a certain country or region, some readers might be interested in a given field or application of psychology. For example, a researcher might seek examples of indigenous psychology constructs in different places across the globe. In this case, the chapter on psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand offered an insight into the Māori psyche. It explains the construct of *whakapapa*, which “binds all living beings together through a common lineage that traces back to the creation of the universe and reminds Māori of the importance of honoring relationships” (Dixon et al., 2025, para. 4). Another example would be the chapter dedicated to psychology in Nigeria, where authors discussed indigenous psychotherapy, emphasizing “ancestral consciousness and familial and communal cosmology as vital elements in healing” (Onyeka Ezenwa et al., 2025, para. 12). Dozens of other references within the book discussed indigenous psychology, allowing the reader to grasp glimpses across the globe, probably also inviting further reflection based on additional resources.

Another use of the volume could be more practical or even administrative, when seeking to understand the requirements related to the practice of psychology or someone’s credentials in terms of education and training. Each of the 85 chapters contained a section with this type of information revealing the diversity of options across the globe. The fact that the editors had asked every author to answer the same questions helps with the comparative reading, for instance if a psychologist is seeking to relocate to another country or explore overseas options with a mentee or student.

In addition, the volume can be used while teaching psychology, assigning individual chapters to students or concentrating on a given region. It likely expands horizons of undergraduate students and might deconstruct some assumptions of graduate students, thus enriching and internationalizing curricula. Especially in cases of preparation for student exchange experiences abroad, an instructor or an administrative staff person might discuss the relevant chapter before and after the student’s trip. An exploration of limitations or even some biases inherent to human beings, also including chapter authors, could provide a way to foster critical thinking and provide insight in how to confront social injustices.

In fact, in terms of limitations, the main criticism of the *Handbook* probably is rooted in the fact that each author brings in their perspective on the complex field of psychology in their country, speaking from a given position of power and authority. Some statements made by authors could be objected to by their colleagues from the same country who represent different interests. For this reason, readers should be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the profiles of authors in the section Author Bios, revealed a wide variety of institutional affiliations and positions. Organized in alphabetical order, it is a helpful resource to understand the context of each chapter, as well as the richness of psychology in terms of professional histories and endeavors, from a global perspective. Some chapters were written by single authors while others by a team of psychologists, residing in the country that they are describing. A recommendation for the future editions of the volume would be to encourage a team approach, possibly with authors including both practitioners and researchers who represent various fields of psychology.

The *Handbook* certainly might be a helpful resource to psychologists, as it provides a snapshot of the state and growth of the psychology discipline across the globe. But can it also promote advocacy for social justice? Can it promote social transformation toward social and ecological justice and peace? Probably indirectly, if read with the mindset of a citizen psychologist. It is noteworthy that the new editors of the volume (compared with the first

edition), Merry Bullock and Amanda Clinton, embody and encourage this approach. In fact, elsewhere, those authors call individual psychologists, as professionals and citizens, to become engaged in policy (Bullock et al., 2023). The emphasis on this dimension transpires from the volume introduction, but it seems that the chapter authors have not been explicitly asked to expand on advocacy in psychology in their countries. The question might therefore be restated in several ways: Would it be too much to ask about the wider context of social justice and action work in each region? Why or why not? It might be that the *Handbook* is a good start and another volume is needed, where those issues, country by country, are discussed in depth.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they do not have any competing interests.

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