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978-0-521-87363-5 - Ethno-psychopharmacology: Advances in Current Practice
Edited by Chee H. Ng, Keh-Ming Lin, Bruce S. Singh and Edmond Y. K. Chiu
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Chee Hong Ng dedicates this book to
the memory of Kim Leong Ng for being a lifetime mentor.

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Foreword

This book is very important for two reasons: it is the first-ever textbook of psychopharmacology focusing on the Asia-Pacific region, and it is, as far as I know, the first internationally authored volume dealing specifically with ethno-psychopharmacology.

Both developments are remarkable. In the past few years, the international literature has been enriched by textbooks of psychiatry focusing on Latin America, Asia and Africa, which have proved to be very useful to clinicians in the respective regions, while at the same time providing the international readership with a lot of previously unavailable information. If these textbooks have been useful, even more timely may be this first “regional” textbook of psychopharmacology, which is likely to improve psychiatric practice in the Asia-Pacific region and represent a model for other regions of the world.

On the other hand, a book on ethno-psychopharmacology, which could perhaps have been regarded as a scientific curiosity a decade ago, will certainly not be perceived as such today by the vast majority of psychiatrists worldwide. Most of us live now in multiethnic environments, in which cultural variations in the expression of psychopathology can be directly observed by the average practitioner, and in which problems in communication and diagnostic approach to persons with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are being experienced on a daily basis. Increasingly widespread also is the awareness of the ethnic and cultural variations in the response to the most common psychotropic medications, which is certainly a matter of genetic polymorphisms, but also a consequence of the impact of a variety of environmental factors.

Nowadays most trials of psychotropic drugs are multicentric, and an increasing number of them are carried out in different regions of the world. However, ethnic variations in response to the tested drugs are rarely a focus of attention in these trials. Moreover, treatment guidelines produced in North America and Europe are often regarded as universally valid, and rarely adapted to other regional contexts. This is still partly due to some reluctance to accept the concept of ethnic variability,

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as if it were “politically incorrect.” I have a vivid recollection of what happened not many years ago at an international psychiatric meeting, in which a prominent expert who had briefly mentioned in his presentation the issue of ethnic variation in drug response was subtly accused in the subsequent discussion to be racist. What should be regarded as racist today, instead, is trying to transfer automatically the information acquired in specific areas of the world to all other cultures and ethnicities, even if this implies the use of doses of medications that are inappropriate or of treatment schedules that are not transferable.

This book is a real treasure of information and ideas for research in the field of ethno-psychopharmacology. I think it should be welcomed by clinicians and by researchers in psychiatry and psychopharmacology in all regions of the world. It is unique in the current scientific literature, and is likely to remain as such for many years.

Mario Maj
President Elect, World Psychiatric Association

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