

“Cultural Fit”: Individual and Societal Discrepancies in Values, Beliefs, and Subjective Well-Being

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ABSTRACT. The author examined the relationship between cultural values, beliefs, and subjective well-being (SWB) in the context of the “cultural fit” proposition with 3 diverse Chinese samples from Taiwan and Mainland China ($N = 581$). The author found that beliefs regarding the independent self, the interdependent self, active control, and relationship harmony as forming individual-level culture were consistently related to SWB. Furthermore, the author found that the magnitude of cultural fit was associated with SWB for certain groups of the Chinese people. It is most interesting that the direction of cultural fit regarding independent self was also important for SWB. Specifically, people who endorsed higher independent self but expected lower societal endorsement of such views were better off in SWB than those of the opposite combination.

Key words: cultural fit, cultural values, subjective well-being

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING (SWB; a term that is often used interchangeably with *happiness*)—researchers generally operationalize it as both a predominance of positive affect over negative affect and a global satisfaction with life (Argyle, Martin, & Lu, 1995; Diener, 1984), thus encompassing both affective and cognitive elements. More recently, because of developments in the field, researchers have started to focus on cross-cultural samples and on the influence of culture on SWB. In the present article, I will propose a “cultural fit” to conceptualize culture at multiple levels and examine its relationship with SWB.

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Culture and SWB: The Fit Between Individual and Society

Researchers can argue that the impact of culture on a person's SWB is fundamental, because culture not only provides a specific set of conceptions of SWB (Chiasson, Dube, & Blondin, 1996; Lu, 2001; Lu & Gilmour, 2004a) but also constructs particular pathways for its achievement (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997; Lu & Gilmour, 2004b; Lu, Gilmour, Kao, Eng, et al., 2001; Suh, 2000). However, a major challenge facing researchers examining the relationship between culture and SWB concerns the definition of culture itself. Recently, we have become more aware that culture exists at multiple levels. In other words, on any given attribute, the within-culture variance may be as large as or even larger than the between-culture variance. Therefore, culture at the societal level involves mainstream average tendencies but cannot involve all behaviors of all people in any culture. Conceptualizing culture at the individual level may be more appropriate and fruitful for inquiries in the field of psychology as such than for those of sociology. It is even better that taking into account both the societal and individual levels of culture may provide researchers with valuable insight into the relationship between culture and SWB.

Matsumoto (2000, p. 24) defined culture as "a dynamic system of rules—explicit and implicit—established by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors, shared by a group but harbored differently by each specific unit within the group, communicated across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time." This definition of culture is applicable to multiple levels of analysis. For the purpose of the present article, I will use the term *societal culture* to refer to the cultural contexts of the individual (the larger social milieu where the individual lives) and the term *individual culture* to refer to the individual's level of participation in the values, beliefs, and behavior tendencies of these cultural contexts.

It makes intuitive sense that individuals will, to some extent, differ from societal norms on any given dimension of culture. Researchers routinely observe individual differences in culture among people in the degree to which they adopt and practice the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior tendencies that, by consensus, define their culture. For instance, researchers have refuted cultural stereotypes of individualism–collectivism (IC) by demonstrating that at least 30% of the members of a culture do not fit the predominant individualistic or collectivistic tendencies in their culture (Triandis, 1995). Because not all individuals in a culture harbor cultural values and norms to the same degree, their individual culture might be either congruent or discrepant with the larger societal culture in which they live. In the present article, I argue that this cultural fit between one's individual culture and one's societal culture informs us in our culture–SWB inquiry in two ways.

First, researchers can interpret an individual's responses more meaningfully when they know the pattern of responses to the same construct at the broader cul-

tural level. For example, the knowledge that a certain individual values personal independence and uniqueness would be useful. However, knowing also that the society in which he or she lives values interpersonal interdependence and assimilation would give researchers a clear context in which to understand the individual's transactions with his social environment. Second, the individual's cultural fit undoubtedly has critical implications for his or her well-being. If an individual is in accord with those shared values or behaviors, his transactions with the social environment are bound to be smooth, as in a sense the societal culture resides inside him. However, if an individual does not share the societal culture, his transactions with the social environment are likely to be conflictual, distressful, confrontational, or resigned, hampering his psychosocial adjustment and SWB. My construct of cultural fit thus accounts for both the importance of person–situation interaction and the significance of cultural context in the prediction of well-being.

Ratzlaff, Matsumoto, Kouznetsova, Raroque, and Ray (2000) made perhaps the only attempt to explicitly consider the fit of the individual in his or her societal context. They proposed that the degree of discrepancy between one's personal cultural values and one's perceived societal or ideal values would affect health and well-being outcomes—but through mediating variables rather than directly. Specifically, Ratzlaff et al. hypothesized that individuals with greater cultural discrepancies would engage in greater coping strategies to manage the discrepancies. The researchers expected the coping strategies to then associate with differential mood and emotional outcomes, which in turn would have differential implications for adjustment. For instance, depression or anxiety would be detrimental to health and well-being, whereas vigor or positive affect would be beneficial to health and well-being. The researchers conceded that their study was only a pilot study that yielded data from a small convenient sample of 56 U.S. college students. Consequently, the researchers reported only Pearson correlation analyses. Nonetheless, greater discrepancies between personal and societal cultural values correlated with greater needs for coping. Different types of coping strategies then correlated differently with mood and emotional outcomes, which were in turn correlated with psychological symptomatology and SWB. Although those preliminary results supported the cultural-fit assertion, the researchers' methodology was very questionable. A small convenient sample of 56 American students was itself rather restrictive of any substantive interpretations of their results. What the researchers actually conducted were three separate sets of correlations: those between discrepancies and coping, between coping and emotion, and between emotion and well-being. Hence, the researchers didn't actually test the proposed pathway of discrepancy—coping—emotion—SWB. The effects of personal–societal values discrepancy on well-being require more rigorous scientific study.

On the other hand, my cultural-fit proposition may also help us to reconcile some emergent contradictory results regarding the culture–SWB relation. For

example, some researchers have found a positive correlation between IC and SWB (Diener & Diener, 1995; Kasri, 1997), with idiocentric individuals reporting higher well-being. Other researchers, however, have found the contrary correlation (Florsheim, 1997; Watson, Sherbak, & Morris, 1998). Instead of looking at IC or idiocentrism–allocentrism per se, the cultural-fit proposition accounts for the juxtaposition of individual culture within the larger societal culture. Specifically, if the larger cultural milieu is individualistic, idiocentric individuals may find it easier to achieve SWB. If, however, the larger cultural milieu is collectivistic, allocentric individuals may find it easier to achieve SWB. In other words, the individual culture per se does not alone determine SWB: The cultural fit between one’s individual culture and one’s societal culture may also facilitate personal SWB.

Although researchers have not yet properly empirically tested the cultural-fit proposition, taking into account the broader societal culture within which the individual lives seems to be a potentially fruitful avenue to explore. Specifically, the fit between one’s individual culture and one’s societal culture may be predictive of one’s SWB. Therefore, in the present study, I directly examined the discrepancy between one’s individual culture and one’s societal culture and its implications for SWB with diverse samples of Chinese students and adults.

Cultural Values, Beliefs, and SWB for the Chinese People

IC is by far the cultural dimension that researchers most often study in relation to SWB (e.g., Diener & Diener, 1995). Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed the independent and interdependent self-construals at the individual level to correspond with IC at the societal level. An individual’s independent view of self derives from a belief in the wholeness and separateness of his or her configuration of internal attributes; emphasizing self-actualization; expressing one’s unique configuration of needs, rights and capacities; and developing his or her distinct potential. This view represents the prototypical Western characterization of the self. In contrast, an interdependent view of self derives from a belief in the individual’s connectedness to and interdependence with others, involving fitting in with society, belonging to society, and creating and fulfilling obligations. This view represents the prototypical Eastern characterization of the self.

However, for the contemporary Chinese people, in certain domains of life the individual may nurture, develop, elaborate, and even emphasize the otherwise neglected and even suppressed independent self, to enhance adjustment to the modern life. The notion of an autonomous, initiating, striving, and achieving personhood fits well with the efficiency-emphasizing, achievement-orienting, and competition-based modern urban existence. The coexistence of the independent self and the interdependent self forms thus an adaptational advantage for the Chinese people. Indeed, recent empirical researchers have shown that both independent and interdependent selves were beneficial to SWB for the Chinese people

(Lu & Gilmour, 2004b; Lu, Gilmour, Kao, Eng, et al., 2001). In the present study, I then examined the effect of cultural fit on SWB with regard to both independent and interdependent selves.

Beliefs about interpersonal interaction directly emanate from self-construals. The independent self requires the individual to actively exercise one's agency, to seek control over the external environment, to change or influence other people in social encounters. In contrast, the interdependent self requires the individual to build and maintain harmony in interpersonal relationships, to adapt to the environment rather than try to harness it. With the coexistence of the independent self and the interdependent self, active control and relationship harmony may be equally important for the SWB of the Chinese people. Indeed, Kwan et al. (1997) demonstrated the importance of relationship harmony for SWB among Hong Kong Chinese students. Also, Chinese values of "social integration" and "human-heartedness" (synonyms of relationship harmony) were related to happiness for the Chinese (Lu, Gilmour, & Kao, 2001). Furthermore, both beliefs regarding active control and those regarding relationship harmony had inalienable roles in Chinese people's pursuit of SWB (Lu & Gilmour, 2004b; Lu, Gilmour, Kao, Eng, et al., 2001). In the present study, I then also examined the effect of cultural fit on SWB with regard to beliefs regarding both active control and relationship harmony.

Whereas Ratzlaff et al. (2000) focused only on the magnitude of discrepancy between individual and societal culture, in the present study I argued that the direction of such discrepancy may be even more important for personal adjustment in a fast-changing Chinese society. Accumulating evidence has shown that the Chinese are becoming more self-assertive because of societal modernization (Yang, 1996). Yang (1988) found that the dominant value orientation among Chinese college students was "mastery over nature" (80.7% endorsement), with "harmony with nature" (13.0%) and "subjugation to nature" (2.0%) trailing far behind. More recently, Lu and colleagues have noted the trend that Chinese people are reaching or even surpassing Western people in independent-self and active-control beliefs (Lu, 2003; Lu & Gilmour, 2004b; Lu & Yang, in press). This psychological modernizing trend is particularly salient for the young, educated, and urban residents (Lu & Kao, 2002). It thus seems that the current social milieu of cultural fusion and societal modernization may have strengthened the Chinese people's impetus to develop assertive self-expression and active control over the surrounding environment. It would be reasonable for the researcher to infer that for a Chinese person, moving with—rather than against—this historical and societal tide of modernity would promote personal well-being. More specifically, for the contemporary Chinese person, being a modernist means moving toward psychological modernization by incorporating West-originated values and beliefs, whereas being a traditionalist means holding on to traditional Chinese cultural values and beliefs. In other words, being a modernistic Chinese person may manifest itself as endorsing either (a) higher belief in the independent

self and higher belief in active control (both of which originated in the West) than the average person in one's society or (b) lower belief in the interdependent self and lower belief in harmony (both traditional Chinese beliefs) than the average person in one's society. Being a traditionalistic Chinese person may manifest itself in an opposite pattern. In essence, I reckoned that the direction of cultural fit may have different implications for SWB.

On the basis of the extant research, I proposed the following:

Hypothesis 1: A Chinese individual's beliefs in the independent self, the interdependent self, active control, and relationship harmony as aspects of individual-level culture would be positively related to SWB.

Hypothesis 2: A Chinese individual's degree of fit (or lack of discrepancy) between individual culture and societal culture regarding beliefs in the independent self, the interdependent self, active control, and relationship harmony would be positively related to SWB.

Hypothesis 3: A Chinese individual's direction of cultural fit would have differential effects on SWB: Being a modernist would promote SWB, whereas being a traditionalist would hinder SWB.

Method

Participants

Participants were 412 Chinese university students (232 women, $M_{\text{Age}} = 20.66$ years, $SD_{\text{Age}} = 2.61$ years; 177 men, $M_{\text{Age}} = 20.29$ years, $SD_{\text{Age}} = 2.30$ years; 3 people who did not specify their gender) and community adults (83 women, $M_{\text{Age}} = 35.45$ years, $SD_{\text{Age}} = 10.11$ years; 84 men, $M_{\text{Age}} = 36.25$ years, $SD_{\text{Age}} = 8.35$ years; 2 people who did not specify their gender) whom I surveyed with structured questionnaires. I recruited the community adults from several organizations and various community centers in Taiwan. In Taiwan, 465 participants (296 students and 169 adults) returned valid questionnaires. In Shanghai, Mainland China, 116 participants (all students) returned questionnaires. The completion rate was 83.35% for the Taiwan Chinese sample and 77.4% for the Mainland Chinese sample.

Instruments

Self-construals. I used Independent and Interdependent Self Scales (IISS; Lu & Gilmour, 2004b) to assess personal endorsement on views of independent and interdependent selves as conceptualized by Markus and Kitayama (1991). The short version that I used in the present study had 18 items (9 for independent self, 9 for interdependent self) that were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). I computed total scores to re-

present personal endorsement of views of the independent and interdependent selves. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability was good for both the independent self scale ($\alpha = .79$) and the interdependent self scale ($\alpha = .82$).

Active control beliefs. Lu and Gilmour (2004b) conceptually based the eight-item Primary Control Beliefs Scale on the primary-control construct proposed by Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder (1982), who emphasized "changing the world" (p. 5) beliefs. In the present study, I used 7-point Likert-type rating scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A higher total score indicated higher endorsement of active-control beliefs. In the present study, internal consistency reliability was again good ($\alpha = .86$).

Harmony beliefs. I used a short nine-item version of the Harmony Beliefs Scale (Lu & Gilmour, 2004b). Participants rated statements that were based on Chinese idioms depicting interpersonal harmony on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with high total scores indicating higher endorsement of harmony beliefs. In the present study, internal consistency reliability was good ($\alpha = .81$).

SWB. I used the Chinese Happiness Inventory (CHI; Lu, 1998) to measure perceived level of happiness, which comprised positive affect, (lack of) negative affect, and life satisfaction. I developed a short version with 10 items for the present study. Through the questionnaire, I asked respondents to check one of the four statements composing each item to represent their feelings of SWB. I converted each participant's responses into a score of 0–3, and thus a high score indicated high levels of SWB. In the present study, internal consistency reliability was good ($\alpha = .87$).

Social desirability. I included the Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) to check for potential bias in participants' responses. I blended these items into the measures of self views and beliefs. Hence, I used the same 7-point Likert-type rating scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and a higher total score indicated lower social-desirability bias.

Cultural fit. To operationalize the construct of fit, I adapted subjective and objective indices. I based the subjective fit index on the premise that there exists an *intersubjective consensus* on core cultural values in any society. According to the Cultural Meaning Theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990), people have knowledge of what their fellow members value, believe, and mean regarding the codes being followed or the games being played. Thus, it is possible for researchers to measure people's representation of what is widely shared or what most people expect an average cultural member to value. To mea-

sure this intersubjective consensus, I repeated the same measures of self-construals, active-control beliefs, and harmony beliefs, but this time I asked respondents to answer each item to best represent the opinions of “people in the society.” I used the same rating scales and anchoring points. In other words, what I actually measured was people’s perceptions of societal cultural values and beliefs. Ratzlaff et al. (2000) used the same method. I computed the *subjective fit index* by taking the absolute value of the difference between each participant’s scores regarding the individual and the “people in the society” on each item. The objective fit index is simply based on the group endorsement of core cultural values and beliefs. In the present study, I computed the *objective fit index* by taking the absolute value of the difference between the individual mean and the relevant group mean on each item.

Results

Descriptive Analysis and Scale Reliability

In the present sample, there were slightly more women ($n = 306$, 54.7%) than men ($n = 258$, 45.3%). Because 70.91% of the sample were students, the average age was small ($M = 24.90$ years, $SD = 8.77$ years), but the range was substantial (16–64 years). Among the adults, most were married (78.9%), had at least some college education (81.5%), and/or held jobs in either the civil service sector (52.1%) or the business or commerce sector (28.2%).

The three samples were obviously different in some demographic aspects. However, preliminary statistical analyses indicated that gender, marital status, and education were largely unrelated to the main research variables. I analyzed each sample separately to better use the samples’ diversity and to avoid statistical overpower from a large pooled sample.

The results of each measure conformed to a normal distributional pattern, with coefficients of skewness and kurtosis falling well within the band from +1 to -1. Furthermore, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for all scales were above .80, indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978). In conclusion, good scale reliability and normal distributions of scale scores ensured the legitimacy of further statistical analyses.

Correlation Analyses

To test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, I conducted Pearson correlation analysis between the individual-level self scores, individual-level beliefs scores, two fit indices, SWB, and social desirability. The bottommost bold row in each matrix, which Table 1 shows, is relevant to testing the two hypotheses. However, to supply complete information, I provided full correlation matrices for each of the three samples. Comparing three matrices, I could see no different patterns of

correlation among the predictors. In fact, they were all interrelated weakly to moderately in each of the three samples (see bold coefficients).

Regarding Hypothesis 1, individual culture was generally positively related to SWB (9 out of 12 significant correlations). The association was most consistent regarding independent self-construal and active-control beliefs and for the Mainland Chinese students. Even after I applied a more stringent criterion of the Bonferroni procedure to correct for the risk of Type I error from too many tests, 6 significant correlations remained. Thus, the present data largely supported Hypothesis 1.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, I found that none of the objective fit indices significantly correlated with SWB in any samples. However, the subjective fit index of independent self significantly correlated with SWB for the Taiwanese adults, and the subjective fit index of harmony beliefs significantly correlated with SWB for the Mainland Chinese students. There was no significant correlation for Taiwanese students. It seems that when measured as an intersubjective consensus on independent self and harmony beliefs, cultural fit was related to SWB for certain groups of the Chinese people, but these effects were not consistent. Furthermore, after I used a Bonferroni correction, no significant correlations remained. Thus, the present sample's support for Hypothesis 2 was quite limited.

Comparisons of Group Means

To test Hypothesis 3, I carried out a series of analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) to compare group means on SWB. Four groups deserved interest: (a) people who endorsed a high level on a particular construct and who also thought that "people in the society" would endorse a high level on the same construct (Group 1, H-H); (b) people who endorsed a high level on a particular construct but thought that "people in the society" would endorse a low level on the same construct (Group 2, H-L); (c) people who endorsed a low level on a particular construct but thought that "people in the society" would endorse a high level on the same construct (Group 3, L-H); and (d) people who endorsed a low level on a particular construct and also thought that "people in the society" would endorse a low level on the same construct (Group 4, L-L). To ensure a sufficient number of people in each group, I pooled the three samples for this analysis and used the pooled-sample means as criteria. As an example, when I examined the effects of cultural fit regarding independent self, Group 1 (H-H) comprised those who scored above the pooled-sample means on both the individual level and the societal level ("people in the society") measures. I carried out the same grouping procedure for constructs of interdependent-self, active-control, and harmony beliefs. The dependent variable was SWB for each analysis. While samples were pooled, I held country (Taiwan vs. Mainland China) and age as covariates. Social desirability correlated with SWB (see Table 1), so that I treated it too as a covariate in the analyses. Consequently, I conducted four ANCOVAs to compare group means on SWB and then—if main effects were significant—post hoc tests.

TABLE 1. The Full Matrix of Pearson Correlations Among Individual Culture, Cultural Fit, SWB, and Social Desirability for Each of Three Samples

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Taiwanese students (n = 296)</i>						
1. Ind. self	1					
2. Ind. self fit—obj.	-.24***	1				
3. Ind. self fit—subj.	-.26***	.34***	1			
4. Inter. self	.48***	-.08	-.15*	1		
5. Inter. self fit—obj.	.01	.36***	.11	-.16**	1	
6. Inter. self fit—subj.	-.15*	.18**	.52***	-.41***	.16**	1
7. Control	.53***	-.11	-.24***	.54***	-.08	-.28***
8. Control fit—obj.	-.04	.31***	.18**	-.06	.40***	.16**
9. Control fit—subj.	-.26***	.16**	.53***	-.23***	.11	.56***
10. Harmony	.36***	-.10	-.05	.65***	-.06	-.31***
11. Harmony fit—obj.	.00	.26***	.10	-.06	.46***	0
12. Harmony fit—subj.	-.08	.18**	.53***	-.19**	.14*	.61***
13. Soc. des.	.05	.05	.00	.20**	-.01	-.05
14. SWB	.18**	-.01	.03	.04	.05	.06
<i>Taiwanese adults (n = 169)</i>						
1. Ind. self	1					
2. Ind. self fit—obj.	-.04	1				
3. Ind. self fit—subj.	-.05	.00	1			
4. Inter. self	.45***	-.08	.10	1		
5. Inter. self fit—obj.	-.03	.33***	-.07	-.31***	1	
6. Inter. self fit—subj.	.06	.01	.62***	-.11	.01	1
7. Control	.54***	-.04	.00	.55***	-.16*	.01
8. Control fit—obj.	-.07	.31***	0	-.22**	.47***	.07

7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>Taiwanese students (n = 296)</i>							
1							
-.06	1						
-.40***	.27***	1					
.54***	.03	-.16*	1				
.04	.29***	.07	-.08	1			
-.24***	.16**	.56***	-.28***	.21**	1		
.16**	-.09	-.06	.14*	-.08	-.03	1	
.20**	-.03	-.03	.08	.07	.04	-.14*	1

Taiwanese adults (n = 169)

1	
-.29***	1

(table continues)

TABLE 1. —*Continued*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Taiwanese adults (n = 169)</i>						
9. Control fit—subj.	-.04	-.07	.60***	-.03	-.11	.71***
10. Harmony	.49***	-.11	-.01	.56***	-.17*	-.15
11. Harmony fit—obj.	-.12	.37***	-.05	-.14	.48***	.01
12. Harmony fit—subj.	-.04	-.06	.53***	-.10	-.01	.73***
13. Soc. des.	.01	.02	-.14	-.05	-.08	-.01
14. SWB	.25**	-.06	.20*	.11	.01	-.05
<i>Mainland Chinese students (n = 116)</i>						
1. Ind. self	1					
2. Ind. self fit—obj.	-.40***	1				
3. Ind. self fit—subj.	-.27**	-.06	1			
4. Inter. self	.42***	-.35***	-.23*	1		
5. Inter. self fit—obj.	-.29	.35***	.16	-.27**	1	
6. Inter. self fit—subj.	-.11	.06	.53***	-.24*	.25*	1
7. Control	.50***	-.06	-.19	.28**	.07	-.19
8. Control fit—obj.	-.02	.16	-.12	.01	.05	.00
9. Control fit—subj.	-.02	-.17	.48***	-.03	-.04	.48***
10. Harmony	.26**	-.04	-.10	.32**	.03	.01
11. Harmony fit—obj.	-.14	.04	.09	-.03	.17	.05
12. Harmony fit—subj.	.01	-.18	.53***	.11	-.20	.49***
13. Soc. des.	-.14	.03	.16	.02	-.02	.00
14. SWB	.29**	-.09	.00	.28**	-.06	.06

Note. Bold values are relevant for testing Hypotheses 1 and 2. Ind. = independent; Inter. = interdependent; obj. = objective; Soc. des. = social desirability; subj. = subjective; SWB = subjective well-being.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>Taiwanese adults (n = 169)</i>							
-.02	-.01	1					
.50***	-.09	-.12	1				
-.15	.44***	-.04	-.21**	1			
-.17*	.17*	.70***	-.09	-.02	1		
-.01	-.15	-.14	-.11	-.05	-.10	1	
.29***	-.05	-.01	.19*	-.15	-.11	-.20*	1
<i>Mainland Chinese students (n = 116)</i>							
1							
-.29**	1						
-.21*	-.12	1					
.41***	-.16	-.05	1				
-.17	.23*	-.06	-.09	1			
-.15	.01	.56***	-.05	.00	1		
-.08	.09	-.10	.02	-.08	-.08	1	
.28**	-.10	.09	.23*	.03	.22*	-.15	1

In terms of cultural fit regarding the independent self, ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect after I controlled for country, age, and social desirability. See Table 2. Post hoc tests made clear that people in Group 1 and Group 2 scored significantly higher on SWB than did those in Group 3 and Group 4. In terms of cultural fit regarding the interdependent-self or harmony beliefs, ANCOVA revealed no significant main effects. However, in terms of cultural fit regarding active-control beliefs, ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect after I controlled for country, age, and social desirability. See Table 3. Post hoc tests made clear that people in Group 1 scored higher on SWB than did people in Group 3 and people in Group 4. It seems that the people who endorsed higher independent-self and active-control beliefs generally fared better than did those who endorsed lower independent-self and active-control beliefs, regardless of how they perceived the stance of “people in the society” on the matter (contrasting Group 1 and Group 2 against Group 3 and Group 4 in Table 2 and Table 3). It is more important that people who endorsed higher independent self but expected “people in the society”

TABLE 2. ANCOVA Results and Post Hoc Comparisons of Effects of Cultural Fit Regarding Independent Self on Subjective Well-Being

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Post hoc comparison
Model	2.68*	3, 495				
Main effect of independent self	7.24*	3				
Group 1 (H-H)			160	14.13	5.10	1 = 2 > 3 = 4
Group 2 (H-L)			106	14.69	4.92	
Group 3 (L-H)			70	11.70	4.81	
Group 4 (L-L)			148	12.00	4.73	
Covariate effect						
Country	12.50***	1				
Taiwan			448	12.91	4.88	<i>t</i> = -4.17***
Mainland China			115	15.03	4.88	
Age	7.29**	1				
Adults			163	14.14	4.92	
Students			400	13.02	4.93	<i>t</i> = 2.43*
Social desirability	10.02**	1				
Below sample mean			264	14.23	5.12	
Above sample mean			290	12.61	4.63	<i>t</i> = 3.92***

Note. For Country, 1 = Taiwan, 2 = Mainland China. For Social desirability, sample mean = 16.87.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

TABLE 3. ANCOVA Results and Post Hoc Comparisons of Effects of Cultural Fit Regarding Active-Control Beliefs on Subjective Well-Being

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Post hoc comparison
Model	0.40*	3, 502				
Main effect of active control beliefs	7.84*	3				
Group 1 (H-H)			174	14.55	5.10	1 > 4, 1 > 3
Group 2 (H-L)			105	14.28	4.71	
Group 3 (L-H)			79	12.70	4.64	
Group 4 (L-L)			148	12.00	4.73	
Covariate effect						
Country	18.36***	1				
Taiwan			448	12.91	4.88	$t = -4.17^{***}$
Mainland China			115	15.03	4.88	
Age	4.99*	1				
Adults			163	14.14	4.92	
Students			400	13.02	4.93	$t = 2.43^*$
Social desirability	13.37***	1				
Below sample mean			264	14.23	5.12	
Above sample mean			290	12.61	4.63	$t = 3.92^{***}$

Note. For Country, 1 = Taiwan, 2 = Mainland China. For Social desirability, sample mean = 16.87.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

to endorse lower (“modernists”) were better off in SWB than those with the opposite combination (“traditionalists”; contrasting Group 2 against Group 3 in Table 2). Thus, the present data partially supported Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

In the present research, I considered the relationship between cultural values, beliefs, and SWB regarding the cultural-fit proposition with diverse Chinese samples. Two major findings deserve attention. First, in line with Hypothesis 1, individual-level cultural values and beliefs were consistently related to SWB. Second, with limited support for Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, the magnitude of cultural discrepancy was related to SWB in certain Chinese groups (Taiwanese adults and Mainland Chinese students), whereas the direction of cultural fit regarding independent-self and active-control beliefs may also be meaningful for SWB. I will discuss the implications of these findings more in the rest of the present article.

Individual Culture as Predictor of SWB

Lu and colleagues' recent series of cross-cultural studies of SWB has repeatedly shown that for the Chinese, British, and Americans alike, independent-self, interdependent-self, active-control, and harmony beliefs were all related to greater SWB (Lu & Gilmour, 2004b; Lu & Gilmour, 2006; Lu, Gilmour, Kao, Eng, et al., 2001). The findings of the present monocultural study with Chinese people from two politically, socially, and economically rather different societies (Taiwan and Mainland China) corroborated the extant findings. These robust patterns across the East–West divide and across the divides of the finer Chinese subcultures unequivocally support the utility of conceptualizing and analyzing culture at the individual level. Because by far the majority of researchers before the date of this publication has examined the relationship between ecological culture and SWB (e.g., Diener & Diener, 1995; Veenhoven, 1993), future researchers should redirect their resources to examining the relationship between individual culture and SWB. After all, as Bond (1998) argued, the central aim of introducing culture into psychology is to analyze culture scientifically or to unpack at the psychological level culture's effects on human behavior. To achieve such goals, researchers must conceptualize and analyze culture at multiple levels (individual and societal) and pay special attention to the dynamic transaction between the different levels.

Cultural Fit: Magnitude or Direction?

As indicated earlier in the present article, the only researchers who explicitly considered the fit of the individual in the societal context were Ratzlaff et al. (2000). They maintained that it was the magnitude—not the direction—of the discrepancy between individual and societal culture that was important for SWB. However, limited by their questionable methodology, they provided no direct tests either for the relationship between discrepancies and well-being or for the effects of the direction of discrepancy. Consequently, their assertion for the primacy of magnitude over direction lacked empirical grounding.

In the present study, I tested both the effects of the magnitude of discrepancy and the effects of the direction of discrepancy. What I found was rather isolated effects of magnitude of discrepancy, which were only within certain subgroups of the larger Chinese population. In contrast, I found more meaningful effects of the direction of discrepancy. When I compared four distinct groups of people with various cultural-fit patterns, I observed two intriguing phenomena from the ANCOVA results.

First, cultural fit regarding the interdependent-self and harmony beliefs apparently had no effect on SWB, whereas that regarding the independent-self and active-control beliefs did. The former beliefs are deep in the Chinese traditions, whereas the latter beliefs come from the West and only recently reached

the Chinese societies. It seems that for people in modern Chinese societies, traditionality may still prevail, but modernity holds the key to SWB. Earlier, Lu, Gilmour, Kao, Eng, et al. (2001) noted that independent-self and control beliefs were strong predictors of SWB for the Taiwan Chinese people. It makes sense that for the Chinese people living in metropolitan cities, as our participants did, an emphasis on independence, autonomy, active striving, and personal achievement will promote their adjustment to the industrial urban environment, thereby enhancing personal SWB.

Second, although I found that people who were in accord with their societal culture were generally better off in terms of SWB than those in discord, being a modernist was more advantageous than being a traditionalist. As I argued earlier in the present article, researchers must understand what constitutes being a modernist, what constitutes being a traditionalist, and what their differential effects on SWB are in the larger cultural milieus of the contemporary Chinese world.

With mounting evidence (Lu & Yang, in press), it seems that people in the developing world have no difficulty in integrating the modern Western principles with their traditional principles. For the Chinese, traditionality in terms of interdependent-self and relationship-harmony beliefs is decreasing fast, whereas modernity in terms of independent-self and active-control beliefs is increasing fast, especially among the younger and educated generations (Lu & Gilmour, 2004b; Lu & Kao, 2002). Facing the increasing cultural influence of the West and rapid social changes in their own country, Chinese people are adopting and assimilating values, beliefs, and practices from Western culture to enhance their adjustment to the modern world (Lu, 2003; Yang, 1996). In this critical time of drastic societal modernization, it seems clear that becoming a modernist and moving with the irrevocable tide of modernization—rather than remaining a traditionalist and moving against it—no doubt promotes personal well-being. This is indeed what we found in the present study.

In conclusion, the relationship between culture and SWB is complex and intricate. Future researchers undertaking cultural studies of SWB should explore dimensions other than self-construals and interpersonal beliefs. Although the cultural-fit proposition has shown modest promise for linking culture at different levels, future researchers should extend their inquiries to cultural milieus outside a collectivist society. Researchers must take the social milieus into account to understand the relationship between culture at the individual level and SWB.

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