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Interdependent Happiness: Cultural Happiness under the East Asian Cultural Mandate

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Interdependent Happiness:
Cultural Happiness under the East Asian Cultural Mandate

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Abstract

In order to examine how socio-economic status might undermine cultural happiness shared among East Asian cultural members, the concept of interdependent happiness - harmony with others, quiescence, and ordinariness - was measured using representative adults from Thailand living in both rural and urban areas. This study draws on the previous studies which show culturally shared understandings of the self as being relational and contextual among East Asians. I argue here that among Thai people, who live by traditional Buddhist practices and are experiencing rapid economic development, those with a high socio-economic status - who earn more money, are educated for a longer period of time, and hold administrative positions - would prove to have lowered interdependent happiness. The results of the study support this claim and while objective socio-economic status showed negative correlation with the interdependent happiness, it showed a negligible correlation with general happiness. These results provide the basis for the argument that within East Asian countries increased objective socio-economic status might undermine East Asian cultural well-being.

Keywords: interdependent happiness, cultural well-being, socio-economic status, Thailand culture

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1. Introduction

"In the modern West, when one thinks 'I' or 'I am,' does this necessarily imply that the 'I' so conceived must be positioned as being independent or autonomous?" -Dalai Lama (Varela 1997, 20)

Psychological studies of culture have been pointing to the significance of self as a vital psychological function for mental as well as physical health. As the impact of economic development increases, the aspect of self that is essentially cultural and thus intertwined with our very basic psychological mechanisms, calls for serious attention. This study is devoted to understanding happiness as rooted in the mode of self as interdependent (Markus and Conner 2013). The focus here is on the cultural context within Thailand, where one of the roots of interdependence is very much alive in the daily practice of people. It is hoped that this focus will highlight East Asian ways of happiness in the new era.

2. Modes of self

Self-concept, an understanding of the existence and properties of a separate self and its characteristics (Gilovich, Keltner, and Nisbett 2006), is known to be divergent across cultural contexts (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Two primary modes of self-concept are considered to be evident in guiding how we think, feel, and act in the social realm. The first is called *Independent Self-Concept*, or independent conception of the self, which we utilize when trying to choose something on our own, express our ideas, influence others around us and environment according to personal ideals, exercise our free will, and restore our individual equality. Independent self-concept is operating when we behave according to a basic notion of an individuality that is fundamentally different and unique from others.

The other, called *Interdependent Self-Concept* or interdependent conception of the self, is utilized to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships with others, find similarities with

others, adjust our behavior so that we can synchronize with others, preserve traditions, and be a part of a larger whole. Interdependent self-concept is operating when we behave according to the notion of a collective that is fundamentally connected and shared with others or with one's surrounding environment.

Past studies suggest that middle-class people use more of the independent side, while members of the working class use more of the interdependent one (Snibbe and Markus 2005). As these average differences may result in different institutions and unwritten norms, when there is a rapid change in a society, such as economic development, one aspect of the self might be at risk for the sake of the other.

3. East Asia in a changing world

To name one of these changes, rapid economic development lead by globalization (Kawachi and Wamala 2006) has been one of the largest upheavals after world war two. This upheaval brought with it both benefits and potential difficulties to non-western countries in general, and East Asian countries in particular. Allen et al. (2007) showed that within the past two decades, rich countries have become more individualistic, while relatively poor countries have become more collectivist. Today, wealth can be one factor that separates cultures between the two modes of self.

In Japan, between the 1950s and 2010, the average number of family members decreased from 5 to 3, the urban population doubled, and the percentage of females with tertiary schooling has increased from less than 1% to more than 20% (Hamamura 2011; Statistics Bureau 2010). Like Japan, the U.S. and Thailand have also changed within the past quarter century, as indicated by an increase in their GNI and in the expected years of schooling (World Bank 2012, Figures 1 and 2). These changes are of a similar kind to those that have occurred in Japan, as they involve an increase in average wealth. These changes have altered not only lifestyle preferences but also the socio-economic status of the population, thus directly affecting

how East Asians live, work, and choose their life within society. At least in the case of Japan, these changes toward more modern societal structures are further considered to have influenced people to marry later in life having first lived on their own for an extended period, to give priority to work rather than raising a child, and to live longer on their own (Muramoto 2006).

4. Socio-economic status and independence

When the level wealth within a country increases, the level of national individualism will rise (Hofstede 2001). This possible causal relationship between wealth and individualism is also true at within-country level whereby individuals with a high socio-economic status see themselves as independent (Markus and Conner 2013). High socio-economic status individuals, or those who are simply led to believe that they are rich, come to value freedom and control, behave in accordance with the notion of self-reliance, prioritize the self, and become solipsistic (Kraus et al. 2012). Although individualism is not totally destructive to the society (Allik and Realo 2004), the rising solipsism brought about by a growth in socio-economic status can undermine the interdependent self-concept and harmony orientation inherent in our identity. One of such example is the sacrifice of a type of happiness entertained by preserving harmony, quiescence, and ordinariness.

5. Happiness and culture

Contrary to the general understanding, wealth does not always lead people in a country to happiness (Inglehart et al. 2008). Particularly for the rich nations of the world, the relationship between GNP per capita and average subjective well-being (SWB) is very weak (Diener 2000). This implies that after a certain national level of wealth is achieved, people's SWB can not be explained by material wealth, and more psychological factors come into play.

People from economically developed countries with higher than expected SWB (Inglehart et al. 2008) show higher than world average individualism scores (IDV: Hofstede

2001). Economic development within a country brings a subsequent individualistic societal value orientation (Hofstede 2001), and individualistic countries are known to facilitate the connection between people's satisfaction regarding self and freedom, and SWB (Oishi et al. 1999). Therefore, independent self-concept may be the psychological factor that drives these countries to have an even higher SWB than would be expected simply from their wealth level.

However, in developed non ex-communist countries with lower than expected SWB (Inglehart et al. 2008), the IDV score is lower than the world average, indicating that these countries are the relatively collectivistic side of the developed world. What keeps these countries from being happy beyond wealth? While some argue that collectivistic cultural members are more pessimistic and modest in admitting that they are happy, others are finding evidence that pertains to the interdependent self-concept traditionally encouraged in these countries (Suh 2007).

For example, developmental psychologists have pointed out that in order to fulfill the expectations of others in their social circles, Japanese children are encouraged to nurture obedience to their close others, such as mothers and teachers, or to the rules of the school. The Japanese value "Effort;" Japanese mothers therefore want their children to acquire the skills to work hard and be responsible as early as possible, whereas American mothers want their children to become assertive (Azuma 1994). Oishi and Sullivan (2005) showed that the significantly lower happiness score among the Japanese people, compared to their European American counterparts, is explained by their perception of being unable to comply with the expectations of their parents. In fact, when East Asians look pessimistic or modest, they may well be struggling to improve themselves so as to fully meet the expectations of others, believing the self to be malleable (Heine et al. 2001). Such belief would allow them to better themselves and pursue future meaning in life (Steger et al. 2008).

These cross-cultural studies point to the existence of interdependent self-concept among East Asians and its role in their apparently low level of happiness after economic development.

On the face of it, it seems that having an interdependent self-concept is detrimental to happiness. However, independent self-concept may set the stage for a more relationally maintained, malleable point of view on happiness, therefore rendering simple comparisons of how people judge themselves to be happy misleading. As previously discussed, when the two modes of self are embedded in one's feelings, thinking, and actions, and where they provide one with the very meaning of what is good or beneficial (Markus and Kitayama 1991), then the meaning of happiness conceived naturally by lay people in a given culture can carry very different meanings. These meanings largely depend on the cultural context in which those people are situated, and thus on which mode of self they are predominantly using in their daily lives.

6. Cultural happiness

Uchida and Ogihara (2012) showed how the cultural context of independence and interdependence would differently foster divergent ways of happiness. According to their review of recent literatures regarding geographical comparisons of happiness, the meaning of happiness in the North American context is filled with positivity, is believed to increase linearly, and involves a highly aroused physical state. Such conceptions of happiness are considered to be related to reported correlates of happiness such as personal success and self-esteem.

On the other hand, among East Asians, happiness implies subsuming some negativity in life, is believed to be something contradictory, and involves a state of low physical arousal. Such conceptions of happiness are considered to be related to reported correlates of happiness such as interpersonal goal achievement, relational harmony and the sense of ordinariness, and emotional support from others.

These cultural conceptions of happiness can result in totally different social realities within a country. Where a belief in the North American type of happiness may result in the expansion of individual freedom and choice, the same reality may result in inhibiting the pursuit of the East Asian type of happiness. Uchida and Ogihara (2012) showed a negative correlation

between individual ideal actualization and happiness, supporting the key claim in their model that East Asian happiness may not be actualized in the same way as the North American pursuit of happiness. Additionally, while interdependent self-concept correlates positively with emotional well-being among Japanese people, it correlates negatively with emotional well-being in Americans (Hitokoto 2012).

If conceptions of happiness are culturally charged, then the interdependent side of our identity deserves closer scientific attention. This is because happiness rooted in the actualization of the interdependent side might be at risk, when a rapid economic development takes place in a society. Hitokoto and Uchida (2014) measured "interdependent happinesss" - composed of relational harmony, quiescence, and ordinariness - as a happiness concept familiar to those who live under the cultural mandate of interdependence. Specifically, they showed the measured score of interdependent happiness, which is comprised of items of happiness entertained by preserving relational harmony, quiescence in life, and ordinariness, significantly and positively correlates with interdependent self-construal (Takata 2000), and age among Japanese people. The authors also showed that while the subjective well-being of European American students was explained by both interdependent happiness and self-esteem, that of the Japanese students was explained more by interdependent happiness. Importantly, the effect of interdependent happiness remained after controlling for the existing psychological well-being measures that tapped into interpersonal relationships, namely positive relations with others (Ryff and Keyes 1995) or a minimalist style of well-being among Japanese people (Kan, Karasawa, and Kitayama 2009). Furthermore, using working adults from the U.S., Germany, Japan, and Korea, they demonstrated that the relative regression weight of interdependent happiness to self-esteem on life satisfaction, became larger in more collectivistic countries. Their findings were consistent with past research on the relational nature of happiness among East Asians (Kwan, Bond, and Singelis 1997; Uchida and Kitayama 2009). The findings also provided an empirical measure

that can capture the happiness type that is rooted in interdependence of the self and can thus be uncovered by the existing measures.

These results support the arguments of Uchida and Ogihara (2012) and suggest that upon comparing happiness across cultures, qualitative considerations regarding the prevalent modes of self should be added to fully capture the well-being of lay people. Even in the two East Asian countries that have experienced extensive economic development, interdependent happiness has retained significance in their SWB. In other words, cultural aspects of our happiness are very much stable and therefore deserve attention.

7. Interdependent self-concept and Thailand

Collectivistic East Asian countries are formed under the strong influences of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, or the "Three teachings", which originated in China or India. While Confucianism and Taoism transformed into everyday practice or teachings on values such as thrift and *yin and yang* beliefs on fate, Buddhism retained its religious standpoint and is still one of the largest religions in East Asia. In Japan, Buddhism is practiced by priests and religious practices, such as prayers before meals, household altars, and gravestones placed at the local Buddhist temple at which generations of family members are buried, have also became common as daily practices. In Thailand, Buddhism is practiced by priests and lay people. In fact, 94% of the Thai population is Buddhist. Thai people practice Buddhism rigorously by means of mendicancy, leaving home to become priests, and through everyday prayers.

The links between an interdependent self-concept and Buddhism can be numerous. For example, there is a shared stress on gratitude and tolerance toward people and nature (Nakamura 1994), a focus on respect and consideration (namely "*Kreng-Jai")* (Jongudomkarn et al. 2012), contextual conversation (Winskel 2010), and an inconsistency of identity (Kumar 2002). Buddhism's notion of salvation involves avoiding the mental state of "Essentialism;" that is, the assumption of a discrete fixed self and identity, independent of external environmental

influences or internal physical processes. In the Buddhist context, essentialism is considered to bring about a dichotomy of self and other, and the polarization of thoughts, emotions, and experiences as attractive or aversive - the mental state called "self-cherishing." If we self-cherish, we are considered to be indulging our stable and independent entity to cling to phenomena. This results in an endless cycle of suffering, as nothing lasts forever and therefore clinging will also fail to succeed in the long-term.

Avoidance of essentialism and self-cherishing is traditionally actualized through religious practices such as fasting and the reciting of sutras. Cognitive therapists have utilized the concept of "self-compassion" to apply the essence of Buddhist teachings to daily stress coping. Self-compassion involves the recognition that people are imperfect, will make mistakes, and will encounter difficulties as a part of shared human experience. These experiences are viewed as something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to "me" alone – an isolated, separate self (Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, and Hsieh 2008). Self-cherishing shares so much with the independent self-concept in that it dominates our first-person perspective, focuses on inner positivity and the minimization of the negatives, and has a strong inclination toward primary control of the environment. Therefore, Buddhist teachings such as self-compassion and "non-self" (*Atman*) have a direct link with the interdependent self-concept.

As discussed, the interdependent self-concept is fundamentally relational and is largely contextual. Importantly, interdependent self-concept is inconsistent with the adaption to surrounding situations and to interpersonal relationships (Church et al. 2006). Buddhist teachings, which are so widely accepted and practiced in East Asian countries, likely gave birth to the salience of the interdependent self-concept within the East Asian population. Indeed, past studies have found that Thailand and Japan share interdependent cultural features in social emotions which differ from those in the U.S. (Hitokoto et al. 2008; Naito, Wangwan, and Tani 2005; Neff et al. 2008). This offers good theoretical grounds for assuming Thailand to be an interdependent culture.

At the same time, Thailand is a good example of an East Asian country which is experiencing economic growth (World Bank 2012, Figure 1 and 2). Rapid economic development in an East Asian country is an excellent national case of a co-existence between interdependence and the emerging independence located in a single nation. This should give a pure demonstration of the impact of environmental factors, such as socio-economic status, on peoples' cultural happiness. Such a demonstration will not be perfectly done if Japanese people were used as the example since Japanese culture has been under the influence of the cultural change towards individualism for a long time (Hamamura 2011). The emerging impact of the rise of socio-economic status among East Asians would best be tested within a context where traditional interdependence and a rapid increase in individual wealth co-exist in one place.

High socio-economic status individuals would shift their meaning of happiness from an interdependent one: whether "we" are happy or not, to a more de-contexualized one, such as a general happiness about oneself: whether "I" am happy or not. However, interdependent happiness inherently involves relationally maintained local factors such as harmony among close others, quiescence based on being able to meet other's expectations on the self, and a sense of ordinariness stemming from being able to catch up with others (Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). For these reasons, I surveyed Thai adults who were living within a country experiencing rapidly changing economic development.

8. Operation of culture

Thailand, Japan, and the U.S. differ systematically according to their societal value orientations (Hofstede 2001). Societal value orientations are the five universal country differences extracted from the work value survey undertaken by Hofstede (2001). These dimensions have converged with other studies using different samples (Schwartz 1994), and have been replicated using different methods (Kitayama and Uchida 2007). Score ranges for each dimension are normalized between 0 and 100. On these dimensions, Thailand scores highest on power distance (PDI:

Japan=54; Thailand=64, U.S.=40); lowest on individualism (IDV: Japan=46; Thailand=20, U.S.=91); lowest on masculinity (MAS: Japan=95; Thailand=34, U.S.=62); and falls in the middle between Japan and the U.S. on uncertainty avoidance (UAI: Japan=92; Thailand=64, U.S.=46), and long-term orientation (LTO: Japan=80; Thailand=56, U.S.=29). These figures indicate that in terms of interdependent happiness, Thailand is culturally different to the other countries sampled and constitutes a representative collectivist culture in which an examination of the nature of the interdependent self-concept in its typical form can be undertaken.

9. Hypothesis

In this study, I report the basic findings from the Thailand survey on interdependent happiness. Since this is the initial attempt to measure cultural happiness in one of the traditionally Buddhist, interdependent East Asian countries, using a representative sample, it is important to report the basic statistics and the demographics of the measure of interdependent happiness.

As for the convergent validity of interdependent happiness, I hypothesized (H1) positive correlations among interdependent happiness, general happiness, and satisfaction with life, as these constructs all pertain to an individual's well-being. I also expected the positive correlations to not be so high as to suggest that these constructs are indistinguishable.

Next, the correlates of interdependent happiness were tested in light of individual-level socio-economic status (Hackman and Farah 2009). Based on the above discussion, those individuals with high socio-economic status should retain lower interdependent happiness. Specifically, if economic modernization has brought wealth to originally collectivistic Thai people, by means of making them earn higher incomes, gain longer school attainment, or occupy higher status jobs, their interdependent happiness will be undermined to a certain extent. Additionally, I examined whether such negative relationships between interdependent happiness and socio-economic status might vary between rural and urban regions that differ in their basic economic development.

In this study, socio-economic status is quantified in two ways: objective and subjective. Although the two are correlated they tap into different aspects of social status (Hackman and Farah 2009). Moreover, culture can be a factor in altering the impact of each on health measures (Grossman and Huynh 2013). Building on these past studies of socio-economic status and culture, I expected that the two types of socio-economic status would positively correlate with each other. I thus explored whether the two would have a similar or differing negative correlation with interdependent happiness.

Based on these perspectives I hypothesized (H2) a negative correlation between the interdependent happiness scale score and objective and subjective socio-economic status, and I explored whether the correlation is the same or different between rural and urban areas. Further, I expected that socio-economic status would only correlate negatively with interdependent happiness and not with general happiness or satisfaction with life. This is because interdependent happiness is the well-being maintained in the interdependent context whereas general happiness, or satisfaction with life, is too general a concept and fails to capture the cultural nuances that are tapped by interdependent happiness. Accordingly, I tested this discriminant validity by hypothesizing that (H3) interdependent happiness will only correlate with socio-economic status and happiness or satisfaction with life will not.

10. Method

10-1. Participants

Eighty Thai adults (41 males and 39 females with a mean age = 43.28, SD = 13.21), who were living in the metropolitan area of Bangkok (n=11), Chonburi province (n=15), Trang province (n=17), Chiang Khan province (n=17), and Uttaradit province (n=20). Over 70% of our participants were married, and on average were living with 4.98 family members. Thirty nine reported that their standard of living was “Average,” 11 reported “Poor,” and 12 reported their living standard to be “Reasonably comfortable.” Ninety Seven percent owned their house. The

average formal education in number of years was 8.89 years (SD = 5.61). The collected sample showed a higher rate of personal computer owners, internet users, and car owners than expected from the national survey taken in 2012 by the Thai National Statistics Office. Our results therefore need to be understood with the caveat that the survey may have over sampled those at the relatively wealthy end of the Thai population. Nevertheless, since the research focus was on the individual differences within such a modernizing society, the sample provided useful information about Thai adults living in this country today.

10-2. Survey

The sample list was prepared using a stratified sampling method, by first dividing Thailand into five official regions -Bangkok, middle, north, north east, and south. One sub-district was randomly chosen within each region. Subsequently, three official election districts were randomly chosen. Finally, within each of the 15 election districts, official voter lists were used to randomly choose 4 samples and 20 substitution samples from enrolled voters aged 20 to 75 years. Researchers visited each potential participant's place of residence and conducted an interview with them. Attempts were made to re-access those participants who were absent at the time the researchers called, and if this was not possible due a change in the place of residence or refusal to participate, substitution samples that had previously been randomly selected were subsequently accessed using the same procedure. As a result, three to eight samples were secured from each election district. Response rate was 57.46%.

Groups of researchers acting as interviewers carried out a questionnaire and an interview (in that order) with each resident in their homes. The researchers visited the rural residents after asking permission from the village leaders. No village leaders refused our visit. Upon visiting their place of residence and securing their agreement, a participant's house, or outside of it, was selected as the interview site.

Each interview was conducted by two to four Thai researchers, using their local language. Questionnaires were read out to the participants and subsequently their answers and

choices were recorded by the researchers. Interview questions were also read out and participants responded verbally. Responses were tape recorded with the participant's permission. Each interview lasted for approximately 20 to 40 minutes and upon finishing the questions, researchers gave each participant a small gift as a reward for participation.

10-3. Items

The Interdependent Happiness Scale consisted of nine items, with a 5-point Likert-type scale (0: Completely disagree – 4: Completely agree) each asking about the participant's harmonious interpersonal relationships, quiescence in life, and ordinariness (Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). Examples of items are: "I believe that I and those around me are happy," or "I do not have any major concerns or anxieties" (Table 1).

Happiness was measured by the item "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?" Participants indicated the extent of their happiness on a scale from 0: Extremely unhappy to 10: Extremely happy. Satisfaction with life was measured by the item: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?" Participants indicated the extent of their happiness on a scale from 0: Very dissatisfied to 10: Very satisfied.

I asked about the demographic characteristics of participants pertaining to objective socio-economic status, such as household income per year (in local currency: Thai Baht), level of education (0: No education, 1: Primary: 10th pass, 2: Higher secondary, 3: 12th pass, 4: Graduate, 5: Post-Graduate, and other), and current job (1: Farmer with land, 2: Farmer, 3: Business owner, 4: Employee, 5: Government officer, 6: Merchant, 7: Housekeeper, 8: Unemployed). Current job was re-categorized as job ranking of 1: Workers (Farmer, Merchant, Housekeeper and Unemployed), 2; Employees (Employee), or 3: Administrators (Farmer with land, Business owner, and Government officer). Categories[1] were created based on the job rankings in Thailand (Funatsu and Kagoya 2002). Employees were categorized as intermediate

[1] Because job ranking in socio-economic status studies is most validly made based on the social prestige (Hackman and Farah 2009) of all jobs in a nation, our manipulation for these categories should be considered crude at best.

because some of them may belong to a middle management position or a specialized job that cannot be counted as either in the highest or the lowest of the job rankings. Subjective socio-economic status was measured by the demographic question, “What is your standard of living?” (1: Very poor, 2: Poor, 3: Average, 4: Reasonably comfortable, 5: Very comfortable). While subjective socio-economic status questions often explicitly instruct people to take into consideration their income or education ranking in comparison to others using ladder scale, the question used in this study related to their subjective sense of poverty and comfortableness with average as a mid-point. The rating average of the subjective socio-economic status was 3.13 (*SD* = 0.88).

Other questions that had been reported in other studies were also included in the questionnaire and interview.

11. Results

Internal consistency of the Interdependent Happiness Scale was α=.73, and administering the nine items to principal component analysis yielded a single principal component (Table 1). Therefore, I summed the ratings to form a single scale score. As shown in Figure 4, the scale score was distributed with a rather high mean (28.45) compared to its possible score range (from 0 to 36), and a large number of participants answered that their interdependent happiness was high on most of the items (Table 1).

Upon breaking down the scale score by gender (2) and age group (5), I found neither main effects nor interaction between these two demographics, suggesting that the scale score did not differ by gender or age group. Interdependent happiness did not correlate significantly with age (r = .17, p = *n.s.*), but showed a slightly increasing trend towards the elder end of the group. These findings are similar to those of Hitokoto and Uchida (2014) (Table 2).

In testing the correlates of interdependent happiness, I first examined whether objective socio-economic status falls into a single component. Principal component analysis using income,

level of education, and job rank showed single principal component loadings (Table 3). Accordingly, I used the principal component score from this analysis as a measure of objective socio-economic status.

Summaries of the correlations among constructs measured in this study are presented in Table 4. As hypothesized (H1), interdependent happiness, happiness, and satisfaction with life, have significant correlation to one another, showing convergence within well-being measures. Also as hypothesized (H2), interdependent happiness correlated negatively with objective socio-economic status (r = -.32, p < .01). This indicates that the higher the objective socio-economic status of the people in Thailand, the lower their relational, quiescent, and ordinary type of happiness (Figure 4). This is possibly because high socio-economic status does not provide people with opportunities to exercise interdependent modes of self. On the one hand, upon comparison of the correlations between urban (r = -.23, p = *n.s.*) and rural (r = -.31, p < .05) residents, the negative correlations between interdependent happiness and objective socio-economic status were not statistically different. On the other hand, subjective socio-economic status did not correlate with interdependent happiness (r = -.02, p = *n.s.*). These results would suggest that interdependent happiness is a function of the objective, rather than the subjective, element of socio-economic status. Two types of socio-economic status positively correlated with each other as expected (r = .43, p < .001).

Whereas objective socio-economic status showed significant correlation only with interdependent happiness, it did not correlate with general happiness (r = .06, p = *n.s.*) or satisfaction with life (r = .03, p = *n.s.*). These results support H3 and indicate a unique relationship between interdependent happiness and objective socio-economic status that is not shared with the other well-being constructs. Although subjective socio-economic status did not significantly correlate with any of the well-being measures, its correlations with general happiness and satisfaction with life were weakly in the positive direction.

12. Discussion

In this study, I discussed the way in which today's world is facing a divide of cultures in terms of modes of self which has been triggered by rapid economic growth. In addition, I demonstrated how interdependent happiness is low among Thai adults with high socio-economic status, so as to point out the fact that culturally rooted happiness and socio-ecological environment are intertwined. These results would in turn show the individualistic countries how they are unique and special (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). Additionally the results would help the East Asian population currently undergoing rapid economic growth to recognize the nature of their traditional cultural well-being, which they have stood upon for a long time and is thus strongly intertwined with their self-concept and mental health.

The implications of this survey are important, in that they offer one demonstration of the possible effect of socio-economic status upon members of originally interdependent cultures. By measuring interdependent happiness among Thai adults who are living in the tide of culture change, the data is able to demonstrate how interdependent happiness may uniquely be hindered by the rise of socio-economic status. In this study, socio-economic status is presented as becoming wealthy, educated, and having an administrative job. During the last quarter century, increases in peoples' wealth have been witnessed all over the world (Allen et al. 2007). Our lives have definitely improved due to the benefits this increased wealth has provided us. However, the interdependent side of our selves also needs to be focused to sync with the economic development.

While objective socio-economic status was negatively correlated with interdependent happiness, general happiness and satisfaction with life were not. Interestingly, general happiness and satisfaction with life showed a non-significant positive correlation with subjective socio-economic status. As reported in past studies (Diener 2000; Hofstede 2001; Oishi et al. 1999), the concept of general happiness may, to a certain extent, increase as a result of economic

development. The causal link among happiness and wealth at the individual level can be intricate. Current data suggests that increased objective socio-economic status which accompanies subjective socio-economic status, would give rise to a small amount of one's general happiness. However, interdependent happiness might be undermined by the increase in objective socio-economic status. The findings in the above discussions should be taken tentatively, given the small number of items I used to measure general happiness.

The divergent correlations among socio-economic status and general happiness or interdependent happiness observed in this study warrant caution to the simplified comparison of countries using the levels of general happiness scores. Rather, happiness should be measured and understood within a framework of nuanced attention to the intricate cultural and socio-economic formations of happiness, with better attention paid to qualitative and group-level factors in addition to individual-level factors.

The correlational nature of this study still leaves room for the causal explanation implied in the above discussion. I speculate that heightened objective socio-economic status would result in lowered interdependent happiness, but the reverse may also be the case. Still, cultural priming study show the possible causal link from the cultural self to the interdependent type of happiness (Suh, Diener, and Updegraff 2008), and objective socio-economic conditions are considered to be precursors to cultural self (Oishi and Graham 2010). Therefore, the next step will be to show the process by which the increase in one's socio-economic status would lower interdependent happiness.

Throughout this study, I framed interdependent happiness as one culturally nuanced concept of happiness that is best achieved by preserving harmony, quiescence, and ordinariness. This does not preclude the fact that among the members of interdependent cultures, individual happiness is absent, or that among the members of independent cultures there is no room for interdependent happiness. In fact, Hitokoto and Uchida (2014) found a significant impact of both self-esteem and interdependent happiness on subjective well-being, among both Japanese

and American participants. Culture might play a role in how lay people conceptualize happiness (Uchida and Ogihara 2012). The question is therefore, what is the most efficient way to achieve happiness in the daily lives of people in different cultures. In contrast to general questions about one's individual happiness, interdependent happiness taps into the lay concept of collective happiness familiar to the interdependent mode of self, which is fundamentally shared across cultures.

The discussion above can be applied in such a way as to assist understanding of how economic development across East Asian countries is affected by their interdependent mode of self. The fact that we are now living in a world where interaction with other cultures is necessary has lead some countries, such as Japan, to face an exponential increase in mental health problems. It is therefore vital to detour the pitfall of the divide of cultures and fully understand how, and in what ways, we live a cultural life. Through such endeavor, we can find a sustainable society and maximize the benefit of living in a world where the great legacies of our past can cross over in one place and time.

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Tables

Table 1
Principal component loadings and the descriptive statistics of the interdependent happiness scale items.

Items	Principal Component Loadings [a]	*Min*	*Max*	*Mean*	*SD*
1. I believe that I and those around me are happy.	.66	0	4	3.16	1.21
2. I do not have any major concerns or anxieties.	.55	0	4	2.68	1.45
3. I generally believe that things are going well for me in general, as they are for others around me.	.72	0	4	3.48	0.87
4. I feel I am being positively evaluated by others around me.	.48	0	4	3.25	1.22
5. Although it is quite average, I live a stable life.	.66	0	4	3.01	1.26
6. I believe that my life is just as happy as that of others around me.	.48	0	4	3.05	1.40
7. I make significant others happy.	.53	0	4	3.40	1.00
8. I believe I have achieved the same standard of living as those around me.	.63	0	4	2.70	1.51
9. I can do what I want without causing problems for others.	.35	1	4	3.73	0.64

Note: a) Explained variance 32.76%

Table 2
Demographic characteristics of the interdependent happiness scale score (*N* = 80).

Gender	Age group	*n*	*Mean*	*SD*
Female	20s	8	25.88	3.48
	30s	11	26.55	7.33
	40s	7	29.00	3.96
	50s	7	29.86	6.26
	60s and above	6	26.67	8.69
Male	20s	5	30.40	5.03
	30s	13	26.00	5.64
	40s	8	30.50	4.72
	50s	11	31.55	4.91
	60s and above	4	31.00	10.00

Table 3
Principal component loadings and the descriptive statistics of the objective socio-economic status.

Indicators	Principal Component Loadings [a]	*Min*	*Max*	*Mean*	*SD*
Annual income	.82	20000	1200000	237531.65	233463.00
Level of education	.77	0	5	2.54	0.90
Job rank	.85	1	3	1: Workers = 51 2: Employees = 12 3: Administrators = 17	

Note: a) Explained variance 65.78%

Table 4
Correlations among the measures.

	Interdependent Happiness	Happiness	Satisfaction with Life	Objective Socio-economic Status	Subjective Socio-economic Status
Interdependent Happiness	-				
Happiness	.33 **	-			
Satisfaction with Life	.34 **	.42 ***	-		
Objective Socio-economic Status	-.32 **	.06	.03	-	
Subjective Socio-economic Status	-.02	.14	.13	.43 ***	-

Note: Objective Socio-economic Status is the principal component score of income, level of education, and job rank. Subjective Socio-economic Status is the assessment of own standard of living from 1:Very poor to 5:Very comfortable.
*** p<.001, ** p <.01, * p<.05.

Figures

Figure 1
Increase in GNI per capita, from 1960 to 2011 in Japan, Thailand, and the U.S.

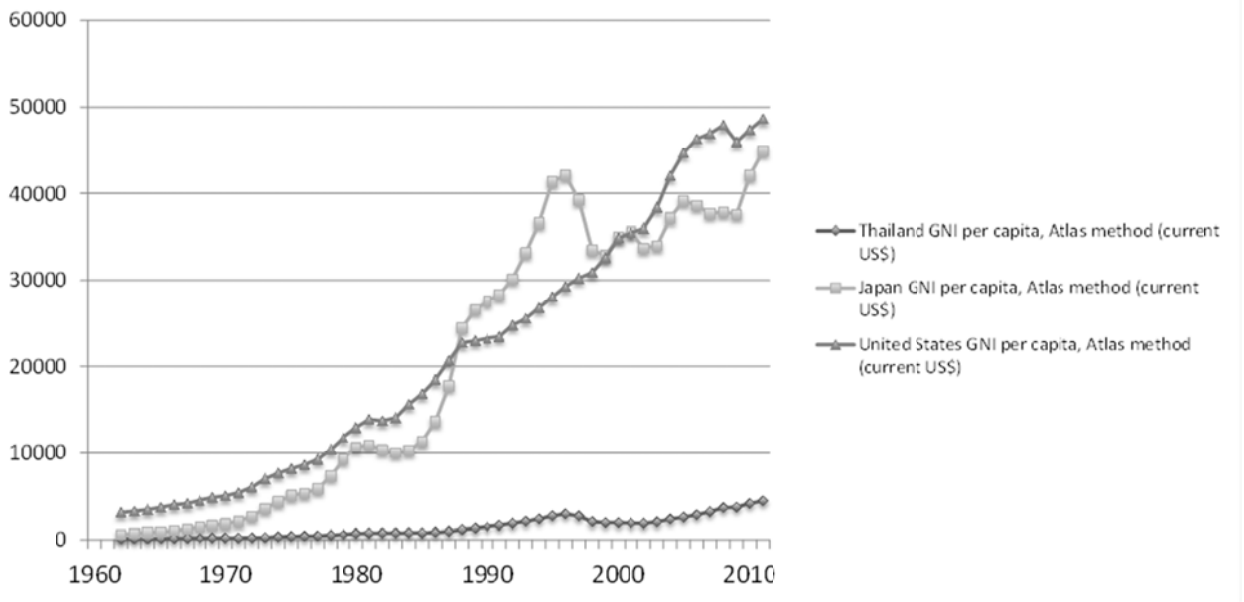


Figure 2
Increase in expected years of schooling, from 1971 to 2010 in Japan, Thailand, and the U.S.

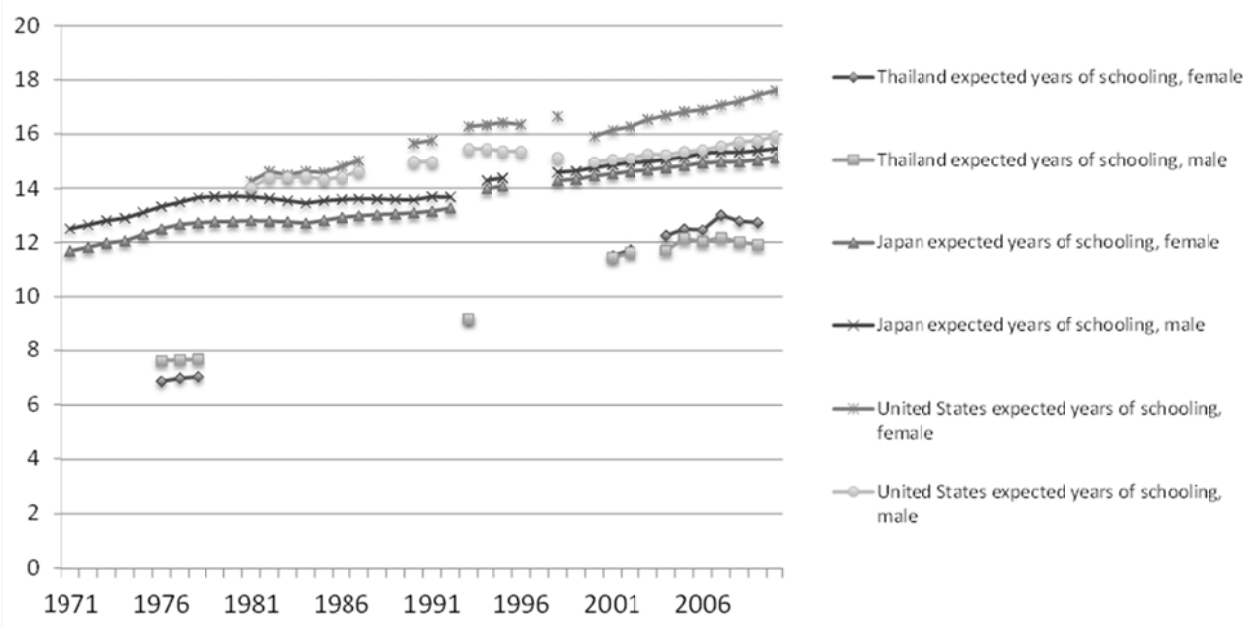
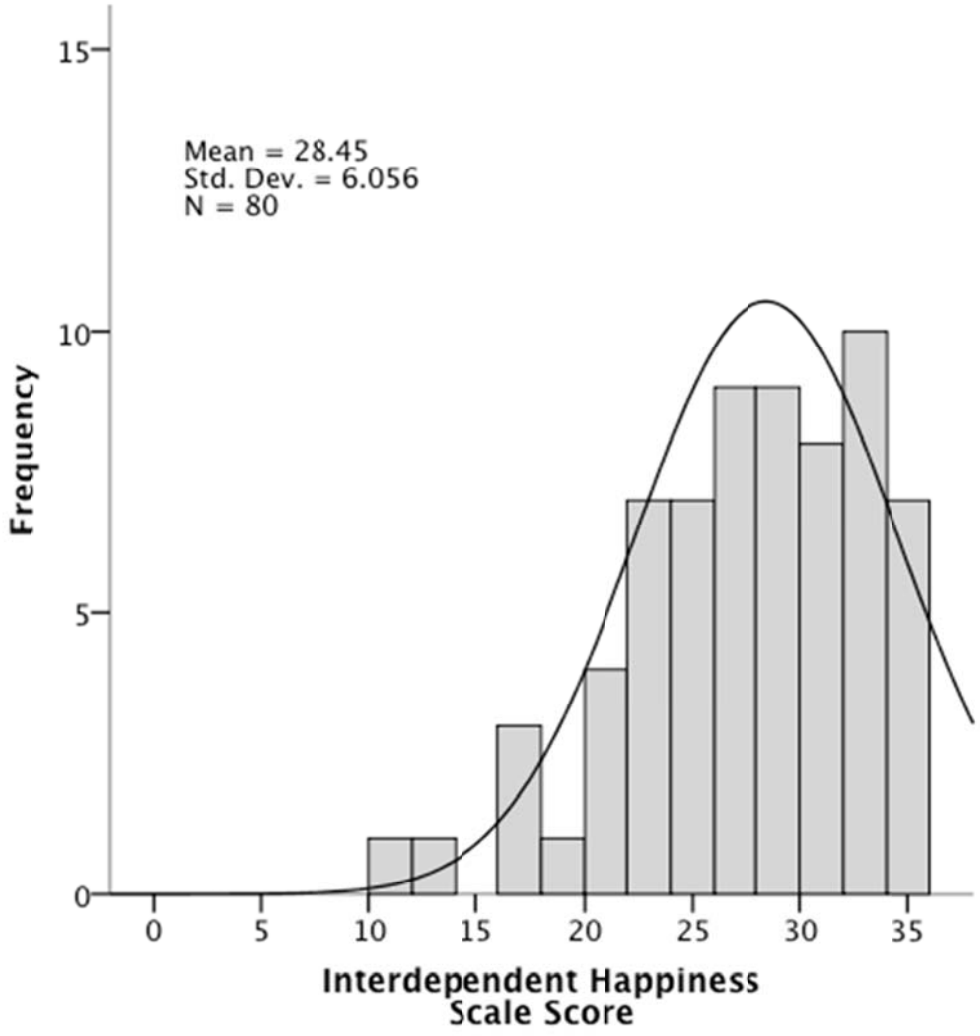
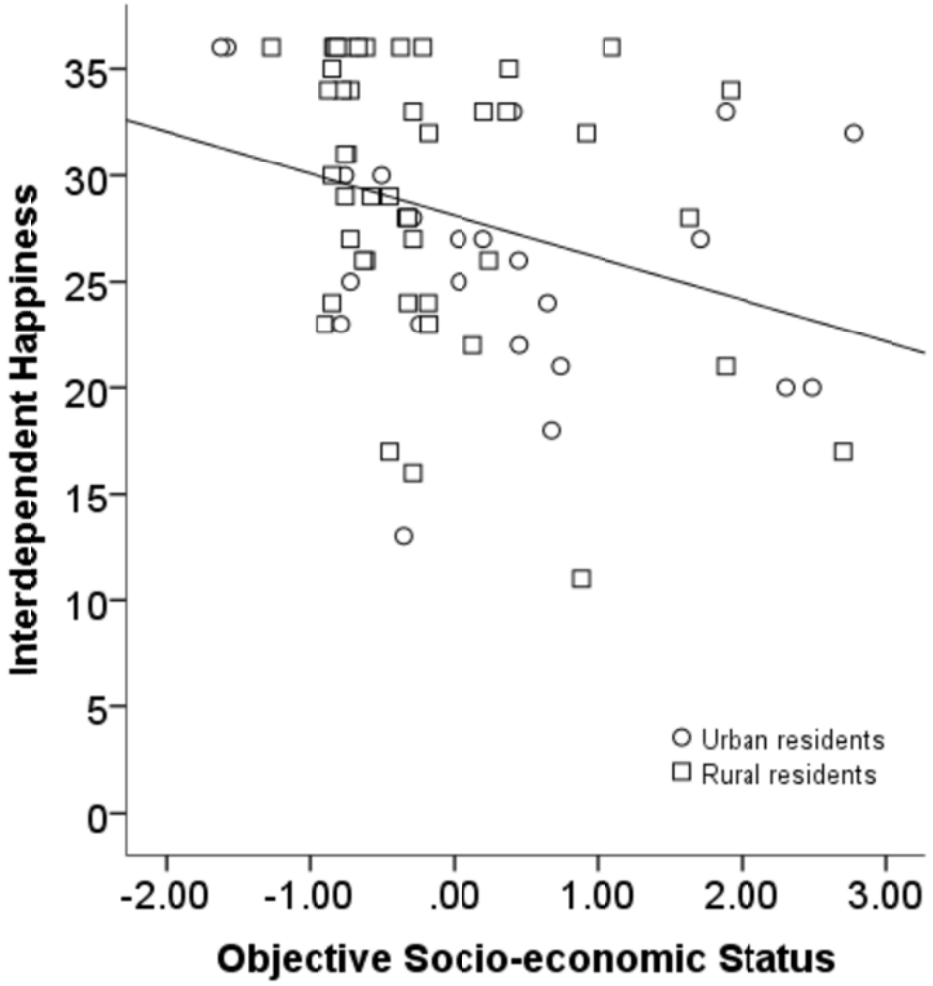


Figure 3
Distribution of the interdependent happiness scale score



Note: Normal distribution represents the estimated population distribution of the scale score.

Figure 4
Correlation between objective socio-economic status and interdependent happiness



Note: Urban residents are the participants in Bankok and Chonburi province, while rural residents are those in Trang, Chiang Khan, and Uttaradit provinces. The line is the regression line predicting interdependent happiness from Objective Socio-economic Status.

Abstract (in Japanese)

要約

東アジア圏の文化的幸福が社会経済的地位の高さによって損なわれるかを検討するため、タイ王国の都市部と地方部から無作為抽出した社会人を対象に「協調的幸福感（具体的には、他者との調和、平穏さ、人並みである感覚)」を測定した。東アジア人に関係的で文脈依存的な自己の解釈が共有されているとする先行知見を理論的基盤とし、伝統的な仏教的実践と急速な経済発展の狭間で暮らすタイ王国の人々において、高い客観的な社会経済的地位を持つ個人（例；より多くの収入、長い教育歴、および管理職地位）が、より低い協調的幸福感と対応しているか検討した。結果はこれを支持し、客観的な社会経済的地位が協調的幸福感と負の相関関係にある一方で、一般的な幸福感とは相関しないことが明らかになった。これらの結果は、客観的な社会経済的地位の上昇が東アジア的な文化的幸福感、すなわち協調的幸福感を脅かす一例を、東アジアにおいて示すものである。

Working Papers from the same research project

“ Re-examination of Development Policy from Happiness Study”

JICA-RI Working Paper No. 76

Happiness in Thailand: The Effects of Family, Health and Job Satisfaction, and the Moderating Role of Gender

Kalayanee Senasu and Anusorn Singhapakdi