



Components of Emotional Meaning: A sourcebook

Johnny J. R. Fontaine (ed.) et al.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592746.001.0001>

Published: 15 August 2013

Online ISBN: 9780191762765

Print ISBN: 9780199592746

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CHAPTER

37 Exploring the meaning of pride and shame in Hong Kong-Chinese

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592746.003.0038> Pages 482–485

Published: August 2013

Abstract

This chapter presents the findings on the meaning of two self-evaluative emotion terms, *pride* and *shame*, in Hong Kong-Chinese, and the comparison with their American English counterparts. Although individuals from the two cultural groups generally reported similar patterns of emotional features for these two emotions, some differences were also evident: particularly in terms of appraisal and subjective feelings in the case of *pride*, as well as physiological symptoms and subjective feelings in the case of *shame*. These differences can be understood by the importance of the autonomous-relational self among Hong Kong-Chinese. The findings demonstrate the extent to which culture helps shape the meaning of emotion words.

Keywords: [pride](#), [shame](#), [autonomous-relational self](#), [self-construal](#)

Subject: [Developmental Psychology](#), [Social Psychology](#)

Collection: [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

In the study of cross-cultural emotions, a lot of effort has been put into investigating the similarities/differences of various emotion aspects of individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Comparisons were usually made between participants from the United States (US) and those from China, Japan, or Taiwan (e.g., Matsumoto, 2005; Stipek, 1998), representing cultural groups that emphasize the independent and interdependent views of self, respectively (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, the question remaining is whether the observed patterns of emotion features in collectivistic cultures can be generalized to other cultures like Hong Kong, which is traditionally a Chinese society, but has undergone rapid modernization and a large exposure to the Euro-American cultures due to its history as a British colony.

The cultural framework of a society shapes the meaning and the manifestation of emotions (Markus & Kitayama, 2001). In cultures where the independent view of self is emphasized, individuals' subjective experiences are foregrounded; on the other hand, in cultures where the interdependent self is emphasized, it is

the relationship with others that is underlined. However, Kagitcibasi (2006) has postulated a family and cultural model, in which a third type of self is identified, in addition to the autonomous (independent) and relational (interdependent) selves. The third type of self-construal is the autonomous-relational self, which is a combination of relational orientation and autonomy, and is usually found in collectivistic cultures undergoing urbanization and modernization. In these cultures, psychological interdependence in the family is emphasized and preserved; however, individual autonomy becomes increasingly emphasized as it is adaptive to the changing social environment. Given the cultural background of Hong Kong, individuals in this society are more likely to possess this autonomous-relational self, and their emotional experiences will be shaped accordingly.

In order to explore the representation that individuals of Hong Kong make of different emotional experiences, two emotions, pride and shame, were chosen in the present study; and comparisons were also made between the Hong Kong-Chinese participants and their counterparts in the US. Both pride (positive emotion) and shame (negative emotion) involve self-evaluation, and require a perception of personal responsibility (Stipek, 1998); so they may demonstrate how the perception of self may shape the emotional experiences in these two cultures. Previous studies have shown that Chinese participants from mainland China regarded pride as more undesirable, and had lower frequency of this emotion than their counterparts in the US and Australia (Eid & Diener, 2001). They also reported personal achievement failures as antecedents to shame more frequently than their American counterparts (Stipek et al., 1989). The present study aims to explore the way Hong Kong-Chinese participants represent pride and shame, highlighting the differences of those experiences compared to the American participants.

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37.1 Method

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 148 Hong Kong-Chinese university students aged between 17 and 34 ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 1.68$), with 63.6% of them being female. They joined the study as part of the course requirements for an introductory psychology course. There were four data collection sessions, in which participants completed the online survey in a computer room at a local university. Each session was supervised by a research assistant and lasted for about an hour.

37.2 Results

The following comparisons of emotion features are made by following visual hypothesis testing with confidence intervals (see Chapter 5 for details). Means for which the confidence intervals were non-overlapping are referred to as significantly different. Means for which the confidence intervals were overlapping, but with the means outside the respective confidence intervals, are referred to as potentially significantly different (see illustrations in the SM figures)³. In general, the Hong Kong-Chinese participants reported similar patterns of emotion features as their American counterparts for both pride and shame. The differences of the two cultural groups in the five emotion components (Appraisal, Bodily reaction, Expression, Action Tendency, Feeling) and regulation are highlighted in the following sections.

Comparing features of pride

In terms of appraisal features, the Hong Kong-Chinese respondents evaluated pride as likely to be “pleasant for the person,” being caused by “an event that is important and relevant for the person’s goals,” and involving a situation where the person is “at the center of attention” to a significantly higher extent than did the American respondents. There was a potentially significant difference in evaluating pride as “caused by the person’s own behavior” between the two cultural groups, with a higher degree of likelihood reported by the Hong Kong-Chinese (Figure SM 1). Regarding Bodily reaction features, the Hong Kong-Chinese respondents reported a significantly higher likelihood of “feeling warm,” and a potentially significant higher likelihood of “blushing” than the American respondents. They also reported a significantly higher likelihood of “moving toward people or things” when expressing the pride emotion.

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The Hong Kong-Chinese and American respondents also reported differences in the Action tendencies for the emotion of pride (Figure SM 2). In particular, as compared with the Americans, the Hong Kong-Chinese participants reported a significantly higher likelihood of “wanting to continue what they were doing,” “hoping the ongoing situation would last or be repeated,” “feeling an urge to be active,” and “a desire to be attentive,” “to show off,” “to be seen,” “to tackle the situation,” and “to be close to people or things.” There was also a potentially significant higher likelihood for the Hong Kong-Chinese of “wanting to avoid hurt.” In terms of Feelings (Figure SM 3), the Hong Kong-Chinese participants were significantly more likely to report that the person “experienced the emotional state for a long time,” “felt good,” “at ease,” “in control,” “powerful,” “strong,” “alert,” and “dominant.” They also reported that the person was potentially less likely to “feel submissive” than their American counterparts. There was no significant difference in terms of regulation for the emotion of pride; however, it was regarded as an emotional state that was significantly more “frequently experienced” and more “socially accepted in the society” among the Hong Kong-Chinese than the American respondents.

Comparing features of shame

The feeling of shame was evaluated as stemming from an event that was “incongruent with the person’s own standards” and whose “consequences were in principle avoidable or modifiable” to a significantly greater extent for the Hong Kong-Chinese than the American respondents (Figure SM 4). The appraisals that the emotion was “caused by one’s own behavior” and the person had “sufficient resources to change the event” were also potentially more likely among the Hong Kong-Chinese respondents. For Bodily reactions, the Hong Kong-Chinese respondents reported a significantly higher likelihood of “feeling a lump in the throat,” “having stomach discomfort,” and “feeling warm”; while, concerning the Expression component, the American respondents reported a significantly lesser likelihood that the person would “frown,” “close eyes,” “show tears,” and “move against people or things” in their expressions (Figure SM 5). The Hong Kong-Chinese reported a higher likelihood of engaging in Action tendencies like “wanting to undo what was happening” and “wanting to flee” as compared with their American counterparts for the emotion of shame. For Feelings (Figure SM 6), the Hong Kong-Chinese participants reported a potentially greater likelihood that the person “experienced the emotional state for a long time,” and “felt nervous”; while the American participants reported a potentially lower likelihood of “feeling powerless” and “feeling bad.” In terms of regulation, the Hong Kong-Chinese respondents reported a significantly higher likelihood that the person would “show a weaker degree of shame than actually felt” as compared with their American counterparts.

Measure of self-construal

In addition to the online GRID questionnaire, each participant was also asked to fill in a one-page survey assessing the autonomous and autonomous-relational self (Kagitcibasi, 2006), with nine items measuring each of the two dimensions. Participants rated these items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Internal reliabilities of the two subscales were satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha as 0.85 and 0.81 for the autonomous self and the autonomous-relational self, respectively. The mean scores of the two subscales were 3.69 (SD = 0.95) and 5.15 (SD = 0.81), respectively.

37.3 Discussion

The results showed that individuals from Hong Kong and from the US exhibited similar patterns of emotional experiences in the semantic profiles of the emotions of pride and shame; however, there were also some significant differences in these experiences that could be explained by the different focus of the autonomous and relational self-construal in the two cultures.

p. 485 Based on the family and cultural model (Kagitcibasi, 2006), Hong Kong-Chinese are more likely to possess the autonomous-relational self, since Hong Kong is a traditionally collectivistic society, which has undergone a high degree of modernization and urbanization. In fact, the Hong Kong-Chinese participants scored relatively high on the autonomous-relational self, and about half-way of the autonomous self, which shows that both autonomous and relational selves were being endorsed. Although the scores of self-construal for the American participants were not available, it could be reasonably assumed that they should score higher in the autonomous self than the Hong Kong-Chinese participants (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

For the emotion of pride, the Hong Kong-Chinese participants reported that pride would be appraised as related to one's own goals and behaviors in their culture much more than their American counterparts. Since individuals from Hong Kong focus on both the autonomous and relational selves, the concept of self may encompass more than the individual him/herself, but include other people who are close to the individual. Therefore, what is relevant to oneself for the Hong Kong-Chinese individuals may carry more weight than it does for the American participants. Moreover, as the situation that causes the emotion may affect not only the individual but the close others as well, the emotion is much more empowering and experienced as much more positive to the individuals in Hong Kong. As the positive influences of the situation may affect more than the individual self, the pride emotion motivates the Hong Kong-Chinese to be active, show off to other people, try to make the situation last longer, and at the same time, be close to other people, due to the importance of others in relation to the individual self. It should be noted that in the Chinese translation of the emotion term "pride," the word carries a positive connotation, because it is a term different from a similar but pejorative word meaning "conceited." Possibly because of the positive influences of pride on the individual and others related to the individual, this emotion is regarded as much more socially acceptable, and experienced much more in the society by the Hong Kong-Chinese participants.

For the emotion of shame, given that what an individual does may affect not only him/herself, but also the close others, individuals in Hong Kong may be more sensitive to the consequences of their behavior, and appraise the emotion as caused by one's behavior and incongruent with one's own standards much more than their American counterparts. Moreover, since the negative influences of the situation may also affect the close others, the emotion is regarded as much more negative, and evokes much more nervousness, in terms of subjective feelings and physiological AROUSAL, for the Hong Kong-Chinese. However, the emotion also leads to some rather contradictory reactions among the Hong Kong-Chinese. The situation that causes the emotion is more likely to be appraised as modifiable, and individuals have sufficient resources to deal with the situation.

However, probably because of its strong repercussions to the self and others, the individuals want to escape from the emotion more by wanting to undo the situation, to flee, or by showing the emotion less to others.

This exploratory study shows that although the patterns of emotional features of two self-evaluative emotions, pride and shame, were similar for the Hong Kong-Chinese and American participants, the differences observed could be understood through the cultural construction of self as autonomous-relational among the Hong Kong-Chinese. Future research could further investigate how this view of the self of the Hong Kong-Chinese affects their emotional experiences, especially compared to individuals with a more autonomous, or relational view of the self, and shed further light on the cultural construction of emotions.

Notes

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- 3 All supplementary materials (SM) are available at the GRID website: <http://www.affective-sciences.org/GRID>. See Appendix 1 ("Availability") for further details.