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## DIALECTICAL EMOTIONS: HOW CULTURAL EPISTEMOLOGIES INFLUENCE THE EXPERIENCE AND REGULATION OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY

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Our goal in this chapter is to discuss how culture influences the experience and regulation of emotional complexity, or the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions. A growing corpus of research indicates that Western and Eastern folk epistemologies and systems of thought differ in important ways. Whereas Western folk epistemologies stress analytical thinking, constancy, and non-contradiction, Eastern folk epistemologies emphasize holism, change, and contradiction (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Nisbett et al., 2001). These beliefs about the world and the nature of knowledge influence attention processes (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001), causal attribution (Choi et al., 1999), the resolution of social contradictions

(Peng & Nisbett, 1999), and contradictory self-views (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2006). We argue these cultural differences also have important consequences for the experience of positive and negative emotions.

We begin by discussing traditional Western approaches to emotional experience, focusing in particular on the association between positive and negative emotions. Next, we discuss the ways in which dialecticism is likely to influence experiences of emotional complexity. Finally, we review evidence for cultural differences in emotional complexity and discuss its implications for psychological well-being, as well as other areas of future research.

### IS EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY POSSIBLE?

Western folk epistemologies and modes of thinking are largely rooted in Greek and Aristotelian logic (Lewin, 1935). They can be characterized as “linear” or “synthesis-oriented” because they tend to emphasize coherence, stability, and the resolution of contradiction through integration and synthesis (Lewin, 1951; Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). This perspective can be represented by three principles (Lewin, 1935; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). The first is the law of identity or the notion that if A is true now, then it is always true ( $A = A$ ). The second is the law of non-contradiction or the idea that no statement can be both true and false ( $A \neq \text{not-}A$ ). Finally, the third is the law of the excluded middle or the belief that any statement of fact must be either true or false.

From a linear perspective, contradiction is largely intolerated and inconsistencies lead to psychic tension that should be reconciled through synthesis (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). For example, cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) rests on the assumption that incongruities between one’s actions and one’s attitudes represent a conflict to be resolved. We contend that these conceptions about contradiction lead Westerners to be less likely to experience positive and negative emotions simultaneously and less likely to acknowledge and tolerate emotional complexity when it arises.

Western scientific conceptions of affect and emotion have been traditionally consistent with Aristotelian logic and the notion that negative and positive emotions are discrete, oppositional phenomena that cannot co-occur. Discrete emotion researchers assume that emotions evolved as adaptations to specific problems (e.g., Darwin, 1872/1998; Lazarus, 1991; Ekman, 1992). When confronted with novel stimuli in the environment, one fundamental decision to be made concerns whether it is threatening or advantageous to the self (see Lazarus, 1991). Threatening stimuli evoke emotions like fear to help individuals quickly escape dangerous situations. In contrast, advantageous stimuli evoke emotions like happiness and love to help individuals establish and maintain close contact with those who are beneficial to survival. Likewise, dimensional approaches to emotion and affect argue that valence is an underlying aspect of all reactions to

the environment (e.g., Russell, 1980). From this perspective, pleasantness and unpleasantness are opposite ends of a single dimension that cannot be experienced together (e.g., Russell, 1980; Russell & Carroll, 1999).

In contrast to these traditions, recent theorizing suggests that positive and negative emotions may be experienced simultaneously (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Cacioppo et al., 1999; Schimmack, 2005). Although outward behavior often appears bipolar (e.g., representing approach or avoidance), the biological systems that underlie positive and negative emotions are largely uncoupled and independent (Cacioppo et al., 1999). Recent studies have succeeded in eliciting the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions in Western populations (Larsen et al., 2001, 2004; Williams & Aaker, 2002; Schimmack, 2005). For example, the film *Life is Beautiful*, in which a Jewish man's efforts to protect his son in a World War II concentration camp are often humorous, elicited both happiness and sadness in college students (Larsen et al., 2001). Emotional complexity has also been induced with advertisements that emphasize both positive and negative aspects of a situation, such as the death of a grandmother who lived long enough to meet her granddaughter (Williams & Aaker, 2002). In our own lab, when asked to describe events in which they felt complex emotions, participants described important life events like graduation, beginning or ending a romantic relationship, and the death of loved ones (Goetz et al., 2007). Finally, research on counterfactuals suggests that even minor, relatively insignificant events can elicit co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions. For example, a win of \$3 elicited both happiness and disappointment in participants who knew they could have won \$9 (Larsen et al., 2004). Despite these exceptions, most research finds that Americans report feeling either positive or negative in their daily lives, not both (Diener & Iran-Nejad, 1986; Larsen et al., 2001). Thus although experiences of complex emotions may be possible, they are rare.

Even Western theorists who hold that emotional complexity is possible retain the assumption that co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions has antagonistic consequences (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1999; Larsen et al., 2001). Positive emotions promote approach and appetitive behavior, whereas negative emotions promote avoidant behavior. From this perspective, emotional complexity should be unpleasant, unstable, and relatively short-lived. This is in contrast to a dialectical view, in which emotional complexity should be considered natural and accepted.

#### THEORETICAL PREDICTIONS: DIALECTICISM APPLIED TO EMOTION

East Asian folk epistemologies, which are largely based on Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, can be described as "dialectical" because they emphasize the principles of change, holism, and contradiction (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). The principle of change asserts that all phenomena exist in a state of flux and are

constantly evolving. The principle of holism posits that all things are fundamentally interconnected and mutually dependent. Finally, the principle of contradiction holds that all phenomena are composed of contradictory elements that exist in a harmonious state of balance. Partly because change is constant, contradiction is constant. These principles stand in stark contrast to the linear epistemologies of the West.

We argue there are two major ways in which dialecticism influences emotional complexity in East Asian cultures. First, dialecticism makes the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions more likely. Second, dialecticism makes the experience of emotional complexity more natural and comfortable.

### **DIALECTICISM AND THE ELICITATION OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY**

Why might dialecticism lead to more complex, contradictory emotions? Evidence for this assertion comes from research showing that dialecticism, and more specifically the principle of holism, is related to more complex perceptions of the self, others, and physical events. Holistic thinking encourages individuals to adopt multiple perspectives, and perspective-taking, in turn, may be linked to greater emotional complexity. Individuals who adopt multiple perspectives, therefore, are likely to experience a larger number of distinct emotions in any given situation than individuals who are linear and one-dimensional in their approach. They are also more likely to experience contradictory emotions as they examine phenomena from multiple angles. Similarly, the dialectical principle of change encourages individuals to adopt a broader temporal perspective and to expect positive and negative emotions to recur cyclically.

Consistent with the principle of holism, dialecticism is related to more contradictory and contextualized self-views (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2006), more contextualized perception of others' behavior (Morris & Peng, 1994), and even more contextualized perceptions of physical scenes and events (Ji et al., 2000; Masuda & Nisbett, 2001). Given the close relationship between self-views, social cognition, and emotion (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Lazarus, 1991; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992), dialecticism is also likely to influence the number of emotions one experiences in a particular situation. By eliciting more emotions within any given moment (what we call "multiple emotion" experiences), dialecticism increases the likelihood that positive and negative emotions will co-occur.

In the domain of self-perception, cross-cultural scholars have found that East Asians conceptualize themselves differently depending on the context (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Suh, 2002). They also exhibit less internal consistency in their self-conceptions at any given moment in time (Choi & Choi, 2002; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). For example, Choi and Choi (2002) examined the dialectical tendency to accept seeming contradiction, and more specifically, to endorse contradictory statements about the self (e.g., How extraverted are you? versus How

introverted are you?). They found that Koreans held less consistent beliefs regarding their personality characteristics and values than did Americans. Research in our lab shows that dialecticism, as assessed with the Dialectical Self Scale (DSS; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007b), is associated with more contextualized (Chen et al., 2006) and contradictory (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004) self-conceptions. In a priming study, Chinese and American participants were asked to think about events that had positive and negative consequences for the self (e.g., moving away from home for the first time). These ambivalent experiences elicited greater emotional complexity among East Asians than Americans (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007a). Because dialectical individuals adopt multiple perspectives with respect to the self, they are also more likely to experience a broad range of emotions.

In the domain of social perception, studies show that East Asian, dialectical individuals take more possible causes of an event into account than do non-dialectical individuals (Choi et al., 1999). Whereas Americans focus on internal state and trait explanations of behavior, East Asians take both internal and external attributes into account (Morris & Peng, 1994; Lee et al., 1996; Hallahan et al., 1997). Research on the actor–observer bias also shows that East Asians are less likely to deemphasize the influence of the situation when judging others' behaviors versus their own (Choi & Nisbett, 1998). For instance, Koreans took more information into account when explaining both deviant and prosocial behaviors than Americans (Choi et al., 2003). Because dialectical individuals consider more possible explanations of an event as plausible, they are more likely to experience a broad range of emotions.

Some researchers have proposed that perspective-taking and empathic emotion may be important precursors to emotional complexity (Beach et al., 1998; Larsen et al., 2001). Given the dialectical focus on context and situation, East Asians spontaneously take the perspectives of others more than do Westerners. In recalled experiences in which they were the central figure, East Asians were more likely to take a third-person perspective than Whites (Cohen & Gunz, 2002). Even when they were not involved in the social event in question, another study found that White Americans focused more on the main characters and Chinese focused more on peripheral others (Chua et al., 2005). Dialectical individuals, who are more likely to think spontaneously about situations from other people's perspectives, are more likely to feel multiple emotions than non-dialectical individuals.

The pathways discussed thus far suggest that dialectical epistemologies are likely to lead to multiple emotions, or many emotions in response to any given event or moment. Why should a greater *number* of emotions in turn lead to greater emotional *complexity*, or the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions? First, the experience of more emotions at once creates more opportunities for positive and negative emotions to co-occur. In the next section, we discuss how East Asians are more likely to accept and acknowledge experiences of emotional complexity when they occur. Second, because East Asians may encounter

more situations that elicit emotional complexity, they may be more attuned to emotional complexity in others. Members of interdependent cultures must adapt to the needs of important ingroup members and the requirements of the situation, even if these contradict their own needs and goals. Thus East Asians may experience greater conflict between their personal goals and social norms. Perspective-taking and empathy for close others are also likely to bring to mind more conflicting goals than would otherwise arise (Beach & Tesser, 1993). Therefore, contradictory emotion arising from perspective-taking and empathy may be more common for East Asians than for Westerners.

Finally, the dialectical focus on change encourages individuals to consider events within a larger temporal context and a continual process of transformation (Ji et al., 2001). Because all phenomena are thought to change into their opposites in a never-ending process of reversal (e.g., good becomes bad, bad becomes good), positive and negative emotions are expected to alternate in a cyclical pattern. Research on the perception of change in East Asian cultures indicates that the existence of an extreme state at present suggests that the opposite state is imminent. For example, Chinese participants were more likely to predict that various phenomena would undergo a change from an initial state than were Americans (Ji et al., 2001). If all phenomena exist in a state of flux and are constantly changing, it stands to reason that both positive and negative elements will eventually occur. This also suggests that East Asians are more likely to experience opposite-valence emotions in response to an event, as no event is thought to be all-good or all-bad.

### DIALECTICISM AND TOLERANCE FOR COMPLEX EMOTIONS

Dialecticism is also likely to influence emotional complexity through beliefs about contradiction. Although “dialecticism” has a long history in both Eastern and Western philosophy and religion, as is reflected in the writings of Plato, St. Augustine, Hegel, Goethe, and Marx (Peng et al., 2006), Eastern and Western dialectics are fundamentally different (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). The main distinction lies in the relative emphasis these philosophical traditions place on tolerance for contradiction (Eastern) versus the need for synthesis (Western). In East Asia, all phenomena are thought to change into their opposites in an eternal cycle of reversal (e.g., sickness turns into health, health turns into sickness, etc.), and all forces are seen as possessing the seeds of their opposite. Consequently, no phenomenon is ever completely devoid of its antithesis (e.g., all joy contains some sorrow, and all sorrow contains some joy). The East Asian view of contradiction is best illustrated by the Yin/yang (*Tai-ji*) symbol. Yin and yang represent mutually dependent opposites that are balanced, complementary, and harmonious. From this perspective, an emotion, such as joy is less the “opposite” of sorrow, than it is its natural complement. Because the seeds of happiness exist within misery (and vice versa), both emotions are seen as co-existing within all individuals,

at all times. In contrast, the Western view of contradiction is more divisive (e.g., happy or sad, good or bad, right or wrong) and contradictory phenomena are conceptualized as largely separate and dichotomous.

Due to dialectical tolerance for contradiction, opposite-valence emotions are likely to be viewed as more closely related in East Asian than Western, linear cultures. Positive and negative emotions are not mutually exclusive in Eastern representations, nor are they necessarily antagonistic. The principles of change and contradiction suggest that it is natural and expected that positive and negative emotions occur together. Moreover, fundamental differences in the conception of opposite-valence emotions make the experience of emotional complexity less problematic for East Asians. Whereas Westerners view emotional complexity as an indicator that their inner life is conflicted and must be resolved, East Asians are likely to view it as a natural and perhaps even comfortable state. Therefore, once emotional complexity is elicited, dialectical individuals are more likely to acknowledge and accept it and they should be less likely to feel uncomfortable and make efforts to regulate it than Westerners.

#### LEVELS OF ANALYSIS IN EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY

The existence of emotional complexity and its cultural specificity can be analyzed at many levels. We divide these levels broadly into: (1) retrospective, global memories; (2) actual, global experience; and (3) actual, momentary experience.

Retrospective reports of global emotional experience are the most abundant, and hence most commonly examined with regard to the question of emotional complexity. For example, participants are often asked “How do you feel in general?” or “On average, how often do you feel the following emotions?” (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 1999; Kitayama et al., 2000). Sometimes the timeframe of this question is more specific, such as “How often have you felt the following emotions in the past month?” (e.g., Schimmack et al., 2002). Reports of recalled affect have been shown to reflect more about emotion beliefs than actual experience. In a series of studies with American participants, researchers compared actual aggregates of momentary reports from a single experience sampling study with multiple retrospective aggregates (Diener & Emmons, 1985). Results revealed that the larger the time period over which participants were asked to aggregate, the more their reports diverged from calculated aggregates based on momentary reports. In one study, participants filled out momentary, daily retrospective, and 3-week retrospective reports. While momentary reports had the highest inverse correlation of positive and negative affect ( $r = -0.57$ ), daily reports had a weaker correlation ( $r = -0.31$ ), and 3-week reports had the weakest association ( $r = -0.10$ ). Thus global or retrospective reports may tell us more about differences in lay beliefs about emotion than the actual structure of emotion. For example, while members of dialectical cultures may encode both positive and negative emotions, members of linear cultures may be biased toward

retaining only memories of positive emotions. It is also possible that members of Western cultures aggregate frequency estimates on the basis of valence, whereas East Asian cultures use different heuristics, such as arousal (Tsai et al., 2006) or engagement (Kitayama et al., 2006).

The actual, momentary experience of positive and negative emotions can be considered the gold-standard indicator of emotional complexity. Since momentary reports are closest to actual experience, they are least likely to be influenced by lay beliefs or recall bias (Diener & Emmons, 1984). However, single-moment reports pose the problem of confounding response style with actual emotional experience (Schimmack, 2001). By sampling multiple time points, response style can be controlled for and the data can answer questions about state and trait experiences (Zelenski & Larsen, 2000). For example, using within-person correlations, one can ask, "What was the average relationship between positive and negative emotions at the level of *momentary* experience?" Using between-person correlations, one can ask, "What was the average relationship between positive and negative emotions at the level of *overall* experience?" Both questions are relevant to an examination of cultural differences in emotional complexity.

#### DIALECTICISM AND EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY

One of the first papers to report cultural differences in emotional complexity asked participants to report how much positive and negative affect they tended to feel in general (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Specifically, they rated the frequency and intensity of 72 positive and negative emotions. Whereas American participants' reports showed a negative correlation between positive and negative affect, Chinese participants showed no such pattern. For Chinese women, positive and negative affect were positively correlated. For Chinese men, they were uncorrelated. The researchers also asked participants to report how they were feeling "right now." Consistent with reports of overall frequency, momentary reports revealed positive correlations between positive and negative emotions for Chinese participants. Americans, on the other hand, exhibited negative correlations. A replication of the study also found positive correlations for momentary experience among Koreans (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

These findings were some of the first to suggest that the structure of affective experience could vary across cultures. Subsequently, similar findings were reported using a list of 31 terms derived from Japanese emotions (Kitayama et al., 2000). The authors found a positive correlation between the frequency of positive and negative emotions among Japanese participants, but found a negative correlation among American participants. Together, these studies suggest that East Asians have more experiences of emotional complexity than do Westerners. Some researchers theorized that these differences were related to East Asian dialecticism (Bagozzi et al., 1999), but others argued they were the result of cultural differences in collectivism/interdependence (Kitayama et al., 2000).

A larger study sought to test possible explanatory factors for cultural differences in the structure of affect (Schimmack et al., 2002). The researchers compared two cultural dimensions: dialecticism and collectivism. College students in 38 nations were asked how frequently they had experienced four positive (affection, pride, contentment, and joy) and four negative (guilt, fear, anger, and sadness) emotions during the past month. Consistent with predictions, dialectical cultures (e.g., Hong Kong, Japan, China) exhibited less negative correlations between pleasant and unpleasant emotions, whereas non-dialectical cultures (e.g., United States, Puerto Rico, Egypt) revealed strong negative correlations. In addition, dialecticism was a better predictor of these cultural differences in complexity than was collectivism. Many collectivistic (but non-dialectical) cultures in Africa and Latin America revealed negative correlations between the frequency of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Hence dialecticism, not collectivism, appears to be related to the greater co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions.

In our own work, we found evidence to connect a direct measure of dialecticism to increased emotional complexity (Goetz et al., 2007). Participants from China and the United States were randomly assigned to describe an event in which they either felt mixed or single emotions. In addition, we administered a survey-based measure of dialecticism, the DSS (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007b). Mainland Chinese were more likely than Americans to endorse such statements on the DSS as “When I hear two sides of an argument, I often agree with both” (principle of contradiction) and “I sometimes find that I am a different person by the evening than I was in the morning” (principle of change). Although both Chinese and American participants were able to describe simple and mixed emotional experiences, consistent with dialecticism, Chinese participants reported feeling mixed emotional experiences more often than did American participants. This was true even when the mixed emotions were of opposite valence (e.g., “happiness” and “sadness”). Analysis of the dialecticism measure revealed that those high in dialecticism reported more frequent mixed emotions and those low in dialecticism reported less frequent mixed emotions. Finally, dialecticism fully mediated the relationship between culture and the reported frequency of mixed emotional experiences (Goetz et al., 2007). In a separate study, priming of dialectical concepts was related to experience of emotional complexity. Chinese and American participants were asked to think about ambivalent experiences that had both positive and negative consequences for the self (e.g., graduation). Participants in the dialectical condition experienced significantly greater emotional complexity than did those in the control condition, and the dialecticism measure mediated cultural differences in emotional complexity (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007a).

The above mentioned studies provide cumulative evidence for the influence of cultural epistemologies on the experience of positive and negative affect. Across multiple studies, the traditional inverse relationship between the frequency of positive and negative affect has been found in American samples, but not in East Asian samples. In some cases, East Asians have reported positive associations.

However, it is unclear if these cultural differences happen at the level of momentary experience or if they result from differences in recall or overall trait level experience.

Two studies have assessed momentary affect over multiple time points in an attempt to disentangle these effects (Scollon et al., 2005; Perunovic et al., 2007). The first study utilized an experience sampling methodology and had American and Japanese students report their momentary affect at multiple time points over one week (Scollon et al., 2005). Overall experience of positive and negative affect were unrelated for European American students, but were positively associated for Asian American and Japanese students. Consistent with previous research, Asians who tended to feel more positive emotions also tended to feel more negative emotions. This was especially true for the experience of pride, which was positively correlated with the experience of negative emotions in the Asian samples. Contrary to previous findings, however, there were no significant differences in emotional complexity at the state level. All cultures had strong within-person, negative associations between positive and negative affect, indicating that positive and negative affect did not co-occur. When they compared the cultural groups, the researchers did find a non-significant trend for a weaker negative association among the Asian groups (Scollon et al., 2005). These findings suggest that cultural differences in emotional complexity occur at the level of overall experience, but not the momentary level (see also Yik, 2007).

In contrast, another study found evidence for cultural differences in emotional complexity at both the state and trait levels (Perunovic et al., 2007). Rather than examine emotional complexity between individuals of different cultures, this study used a daily diary design to examine within-person variation in East Asian Canadian biculturals. Consistent with linear epistemologies, when participants identified with Western culture or recently spoke a non-Asian language, positive and negative affect were inversely associated at the state level. Consistent with dialectical epistemologies, when participants identified with Asian culture or recently spoke an Asian language, positive and negative affect were unrelated to each other. In addition, East Asian Canadians had a non-significant positive association at the trait level, whereas European Canadians had a marginal negative association (Perunovic et al., 2007). Thus, even within an individual, cultural epistemologies may influence emotional experience at least among biculturals.

#### **AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH: UNDERLYING CAUSES OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY**

Do folk epistemologies relate to the experience of emotional complexity? The research clearly shows that individuals from different cultures differ in their overall reports of emotional experience. Consistent with linear epistemologies and a conception of positive and negative as antagonistic opposites, Westerners report an inverse relationship between experiences of positive and negative emotion at both the trait and state levels (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Kitayama et al., 2000;

Schimmack et al., 2002; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004; Perunovic et al., 2007). In contrast, East Asians report either no relationship or a positive relationship between negative and positive emotion. In addition, dialecticism is positively related to the frequency with which individuals feel mixed emotions (Goetz et al., 2007). These patterns are consistent with a dialectical epistemology in which positive and negative emotions are conceptualized more as complements than as opposites.

Do these self-reports reflect actual experience, beliefs about emotional experience, or biases in encoding and recalling emotional experience? The studies reviewed here support the argument that, at the trait level, these cultural differences are not simply the result of recall bias or beliefs about emotion. Members of dialectical cultures who experienced more positive affect also experienced more negative affect (Scollon et al., 2005). However, analysis of data from multiple timepoints suggests that these cultural differences may or may not occur at the state level (Scollon et al., 2005; Perunovic et al., 2007). Clearly, more research is needed for replication and clarification of these findings.

The role of folk epistemologies in emotional complexity has received some empirical support (Schimmack et al., 2002; Goetz et al., 2007). When explicitly compared to collectivistic cultures, dialectical cultures were less likely to show an inverse relationship between positive and negative emotions (Schimmack et al., 2002). In addition, a cultural difference in frequency of mixed emotions was mediated by a measure of dialecticism (Goetz et al., 2007). However, the mechanisms by which folk epistemologies influence emotional complexity have yet to be tested. Are cultural differences in emotional complexity simply the result of differences in the actual events that occur in different cultures? One criticism of studies of emotion structure is that they often involve emotion reports in unspecified and ambiguous settings (Schimmack, 2001). In addition to missing theoretically interesting experiences, this makes it unclear what caused the emotions that participants report. Studies in Western samples suggest that special events are needed to elicit complex emotion (Larsen et al., 2001, 2004). Perhaps members of East Asian cultures experience more complexity because they are presented with more complex situations than are members of Western cultures.

Our work on this topic suggests that the meaning of an event, rather than the event itself, is important in eliciting emotional complexity (Goetz et al., 2007). After collecting descriptions of mixed (multiple emotion) and simple (single emotion) emotional events, we coded for whether the situations were social or not, for the number of people involved in the event, and for the general context of the event (e.g., academics, family, friends, and romantic relationships). There were few differences across culture in the types of events that elicited mixed versus simple emotions. However, the meanings of events appeared to differ dramatically. Chinese participants reported that events had more conflicted goal implications than did Americans. Chinese were more likely than Americans to report that an event both helped and hurt their goals. In addition, Chinese participants mentioned more possible causes of events than did American participants.

Finally, Chinese engaged in more efforts to think about the situation in a way that changed the way they felt about it than did Americans. These findings suggest that the interpretation of life events is especially germane to cultural differences in emotional complexity.

Another study in our lab tested cultural variation of emotions in a more controlled situation (Shiota et al., 2007a). Asian and European American romantic couples were invited to the laboratory and asked to engage in a series of semi-structured tasks that could elicit both positive and negative emotions. The couples teased each other, discussed a current concern in their relationship, talked about their first date, and then rated the emotions they were feeling after each discussion. Given the positive and negative aspects of these events, the discussions could readily bring about both positive and negative emotions.

For each discussion, the researchers analyzed the relationship between situationally appropriate opposing positive and negative emotions (e.g., love and contempt). Results revealed that Asian Americans experienced a greater mix of positive and negative emotions than did European Americans. After discussing a current concern, Asian Americans' reports of love, sympathy, and contempt were positively correlated, whereas European Americans' reports were negatively correlated. Likewise, after discussing their first date, Asian Americans' reports of love and contempt were positively correlated, whereas European Americans' reports were negatively correlated (Shiota et al., 2007a). Although the situations were not identical, these semi-controlled interactions suggest that the experience of mixed emotions resulted from how the participants thought about each situation, not necessarily the characteristics of the situation itself.

Based on cognitive appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Mesquita & Frijda, 1992), we argue that epistemologies influence emotional experience through the psychological meanings and interpretation of events. In accordance with the principle of holism, dialectical individuals are more likely to take multiple perspectives into account, and are less likely to discount one perspective at the expense of another (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Research on the self has shown that dialecticism is related to more complex, contradictory, and contextualized views of the self (Chen et al., 2006; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004, 2007a,b), which may in turn lead to emotionally complex reactions to self-relevant events. In addition, it is likely that the contextual attribution styles documented in East Asian individuals will likewise lead to emotional complexity.

Other theories have been put forth to explain the relationship between culture and emotional complexity. Members of collectivistic cultures may have more conflicted goal structures (Scollon et al., 2005), which may cause individuals to feel both more positive and negative emotions. In addition, collectivistic emphasis on harmony and the middle way may cause East Asians to avoid intense arousal (e.g., Tsai & Levenson, 1997; Gross & John, 1998). In avoiding extremes, however, it is unclear if this emphasis leads to neutrality and lack of emotion, or if it could create emotional balance in the form of contradictory emotions. Finally, cultural norms about the value and function of emotions such as

pride and shame may create emotional complexity (e.g., Goetz & Keltner, 2007). In collectivistic cultures, the experience and expression of pride can elicit negative responses in others and negative emotions in the self. In contrast, an emotion like shame can elicit forgiveness and positive reconciliation behaviors. In one study of cultural values and beliefs, researchers (Eid & Diener, 2001) examined norms for experiencing eight emotions, including pride and guilt, across four cultures (United States, Australia, Taiwan, and China). While pride was considered both acceptable and desirable in the United States and Australia, norms in China and Taiwan were indifferent and even negative toward pride. Guilt was very undesirable in all countries except for China.

In summary, East Asians may be more likely than Westerners, at least at the aggregate level, to experience positive and negative emotions at the same time. In addition, East Asian individuals who experience positive emotions often are also likely to experience negative emotions more often. In contrast, Westerners who experience positive emotions often are less likely to experience negative emotions. These cultural differences appear to be related to dialectical epistemologies and beliefs about the nature of contradiction and change. How do individuals react to experiences of emotional complexity? Is emotional complexity uncomfortable and distressing? Or is emotional complexity perceived as a natural part of life? In the next section, we discuss the downstream effects of cultural epistemologies on emotional complexity.

#### REGULATION OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING

In addition to influencing actual experience of emotional complexity, cultural epistemologies are likely to influence the beliefs people have about the relationship between positive and negative emotions. According to the dialectical principle of contradiction, opposites are not so much opposites as complementary parts of a whole. From this perspective, without sadness happiness does not exist. Without anger, one cannot know love and compassion. Tolerance for contradiction is likely to influence the interpretations people place on their emotional complexity.

In contrast, a linear perspective sees co-activation of positive and negative emotions as incongruous and unnatural. Such a state may indicate confusion, indecision, and generally a need for more emotional processing and regulation (Festinger, 1957). Researchers have suggested that complex emotions should be unstable and short-lived because they cannot clearly drive behavior (Cacioppo et al., 1999). In contrast, the dialectical perspective on emotional complexity is generally one of acceptance (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Positive and negative emotions are expected to occur together and emotional complexity is considered a natural outcome of the existence of contradiction in the world. As such, emotional complexity is viewed as more comfortable, more acceptable, and in

less need of regulation. Given the dialectical aversion to extremes, emotional complexity may even be considered more desirable than emotional polarity (e.g., Tsai & Levenson, 1997).

Research shows that individuals with dialectical epistemologies are more likely to accept contradiction in their emotional experiences (Williams & Aaker, 2002; English et al., 2007). In one study, European and Asian American students were presented with advertisements pretested to evoke equal mean levels of happiness and sadness in both cultures (Williams & Aaker, 2002). Participants rated their attitude (bad–good) toward the advertisement and indicated how much they were feeling discomfort and other specific emotions (e.g., happy, sad). European and Asian Americans reported feeling similar levels of mixed emotion. However, European Americans reported feeling more discomfort than did Asian Americans in the mixed emotion condition. They also had more negative attitudes toward the advertisement overall (Williams & Aaker, 2002).

In our work (English et al., 2007), American and Chinese participants were asked to describe a series of complex and simple emotional experiences. Americans' descriptions of complex emotional experiences varied dramatically from their descriptions and responses to simple emotional experiences. Americans reported that, in comparison to simple emotions, they were less comfortable with complex emotions. In contrast, Chinese were no less comfortable with complex than simple emotions. Participants then rated the degree to which they expressed and sought to control their emotions. Participants' descriptions of their emotional experiences were also coded for mention of effort to suppress emotional expression. Although there were no cultural differences in self-reported emotional expression, there was a culture by type of emotion interaction for suppression. American participants mentioned more efforts to suppress complex than simple emotions, whereas Chinese participants mentioned more efforts to suppress simple than complex emotions (English et al., 2007). This finding suggests that expression of complex emotion may be more acceptable to Chinese participants.

Recent research also suggests that dialectical individuals are more likely to perceive contradictory emotions in other's facial expressions (Shiota et al., 2007b). The authors showed photographs of prototypical expressions of amusement, anger, sadness, embarrassment, and fear to Japanese and American participants. Participants were asked to rate the intensity of emotions the individuals in the photographs were experiencing. In order to test for perception of contradictory emotions, a discrepancy score was calculated between the intensity of the target emotions (e.g., happiness) and the intensity of opposing, contradictory emotions (e.g., anger). Overall, Japanese participants tended to have smaller discrepancies between target and contradictory emotions than did American participants (Shiota et al., 2007b), suggesting that Japanese participants perceived more emotional complexity in the photographs than did Americans.

Interestingly, the use of validated prototypical emotion displays with “target” emotions allowed the authors to ask very specific questions about the nature of emotional complexity. In this context, they were able to test two mechanisms that

could lead to emotional complexity. One possible route to emotional complexity could be moderation or blunting of the “target” or primary emotion in the photograph. Another possible route could be facilitated experience of “opposites” of the target emotion. Either of these routes would result in more emotional complexity with the metrics discussed so far (e.g., a smaller negative correlation or a smaller discrepancy between positive and negative emotions). The results suggest that when looking at negative emotion targets, emotional complexity among Japanese participants was driven by moderation. For embarrassment and happiness, however, it was driven both by moderation of the target emotion and by enhancement of the opposite emotions (Shiota et al., 2007b). Hence both mechanisms appear to be important to emotional complexity among Japanese.

In sum, a growing body of research suggests East Asians are more comfortable with emotional complexity than are Westerners. More research is needed to explain the underlying mechanisms and to address the possible link between dialectical epistemologies and the experience and regulation of emotional complexity. In addition to questions about the immediate implications of emotional complexity, it is unclear what relation emotional complexity has with overall psychological well-being. Is emotional complexity a bad thing? Does it cause individuals to have lower overall well-being? We address these questions in the following section.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

To our knowledge, no research has specifically addressed whether cultural variation in emotional complexity has implications for psychological well-being. However, a significant body of research has examined cultural variations in well-being, including the role of contradictory self-views and dialecticism. We draw on this research here to make predictions for the implications of emotional complexity on overall well-being.

Dialectical epistemologies have important implications for cultural differences in self-evaluations and psychological well-being. In particular, the tendency to tolerate contradictory feelings toward the self and one’s life in general can give rise to cultural variation in self-reported psychological well-being. The cross-cultural literature documents a fairly robust and pervasive tendency for East Asians to report lower levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, and more negative affect, anxiety, and depression than do Westerners (Diener & Diener, 1995; Heine et al., 1999; Kitayama et al., 2000). A large number of potential explanations for these findings have been examined by cross-cultural scholars. Our research shows that dialectical epistemologies account, in part, for the observed cross-cultural differences in self-reported well-being (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). In the following section, we review evidence on this topic and examine whether these findings reflect true underlying differences in well-being. Rather than being indicative of psychological maladjustment, we believe that these cultural differences are due to dialectical epistemologies which encourage East

Asians to endorse contradictory statements (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life” versus “I am dissatisfied with my life”). Indeed, the co-occurrence of positive and negative self-attitudes and emotions may actually be less problematic for members of dialectical cultures.

### SELF-REPORTED DIFFERENCES IN WELL-BEING

How does dialecticism give rise to cultural variation in self-reported well-being? As outlined earlier in this chapter, a principal consequence of naïve dialecticism is that East Asians more comfortably acknowledge and accept psychological or “natural contradiction,” in Piagetian terms (Piaget, 1980). Psychological contradiction is said to exist when two or more opposing phenomena (e.g., self-love and self-hatred) do not easily co-exist within the psyche, even though they are not logically incompatible. In Western cultures, discrepancies in one’s emotions, cognitions, or behaviors are thought to give rise to a state of tension (Lewin, 1951), disequilibrium (Heider, 1958), or dissonance (Festinger, 1957), which activates a need for consonance (Festinger, 1957). When presented with conflicting information about an attitude object, including the self or one’s life, Americans tend to examine both sides of the contradiction, and then search for synthesis and the resolution of incongruity (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). Because Americans are motivated to emphasize and elaborate positive aspects of themselves (Heine & Hamamura, 2007) and to provide internally consistent responses to psychological measures, their global scores on various psychological instruments tend to be higher than those of East Asians.

As a result of dialectical epistemologies, East Asians are less motivated to exhibit internal consistency in their emotions, cognitions, and behaviors (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Choi & Choi, 2002; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). The cognitive tendency to accept psychological contradiction leads members of dialectical cultures to emphasize and elaborate negative aspects of themselves and to endorse indicators of psychological ill health (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). Although East Asians and Americans tend not to differ in their rating of positively keyed items, such as “How satisfied are you with your life?” they often differ significantly in their tendency to endorse negatively keyed items, such as “How dissatisfied are you with your life?” Because members of dialectical cultures are inclined to see both perspectives (good and bad), they are more likely to acknowledge negative aspects of themselves and their lives. Moreover, in collectivist/interdependent countries, the cultural norm is to characterize the self in a self-effacing manner, whereas in individualist/independent societies, the cultural mandate is to present oneself in a self-enhancing light (Heine & Hamamura, 2007). East Asians generally describe themselves in less positive terms (Bond, 1986; Heine et al., 1999) and exhibit greater self-discrepancies, e.g., between the actual and ideal self (Heine & Lehman, 1999) and the public and private self (Triandis, 1995). In contrast to the Western, unitary self, members of dialectical cultures possess multiple selves that may stand in opposition to one another.

### TRUE UNDERLYING DIFFERENCES IN WELL-BEING

Do these cultural differences in self-reported well-being reflect true underlying differences in maladjustment or dialectical epistemologies? Recently, Hamamura et al. (2007) examined whether the East Asian tendency to endorse negatively keyed items and contradictory statements was due to their dialectical epistemologies. They asked European-heritage and East-Asian heritage participants to rate themselves on 60 adjectives. They found that ambivalent or contradictory responding on the personality measure was correlated with participants' responses on the DSS. The tendency to endorse opposing or contradictory statements was correlated with participants' responses on the DSS (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007b), and cultural differences in contradictory responding were mediated by dialecticism. Contradictory responding is more than simply a "response style" however; it reflects a fundamental epistemology and way of understanding reality.

These findings have important implications for the manner in which psychologists measure psychological and emotional well-being across cultures. Much like research on emotional complexity, research conducted in our lab suggests that psychological constructs such as "self-esteem" and "well-being" may actually be two-dimensional constructs among members of dialectical cultures (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). That is, positive self-esteem (well-being, etc.) may be conceptually and empirically distinct from negative self-esteem (well-being, etc.). If so, Western measures of psychological well-being may not be appropriate for use with East Asian cultures. A number of scholars have pointed to the dangers of using linear-individualist measures when assessing the self-esteem and psychological well-being of dialectical cultures (Kitayama & Markus, 1999; Suh, 2002; Cross et al., 2003; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004), noting that these instruments may lead to inaccurate or invalid cross-cultural comparisons.

In addition to having distinct meanings in various cultures, East Asians and Americans are motivated to emphasize different affective experiences and aspects of well-being. Whereas Americans seek to maximize positive emotions and feelings of self-worth, members of dialectical cultures are motivated to maintain a balance between positive and negative emotions. East Asians value less intense positive affect, such as calm (Tsai et al., 2006), and favor interpersonally engaging emotions, such as guilt, shame, and respect (Kitayama et al., 2006), which are important to the maintenance of group harmony in collectivist societies. In accordance with the dialectical tendency to tolerate contradiction, East Asians also possess more realistic and balanced self-appraisals and well-being judgments (Kitayama & Markus, 1999). Whereas self-esteem scores are highly skewed in American samples (e.g., among European Americans, Latinos, and African Americans), estimates of self-worth more closely approximate a normal distribution among East Asians (Diener & Diener, 1995).

Although dialecticism is associated with lower *self-reported* psychological well-being, this finding may be largely due to dialectical epistemologies (Hamamura et al., 2007). In actuality, the co-occurrence of positive and negative

emotions may be less troubling and detrimental to an overall sense of well-being among East Asians. Based on the cross-cultural literature on the self, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that emotional complexity is less problematic for East Asians. In Western cultures, the possession of a consistent self-concept is typically associated with psychological well-being (Baumgardner, 1990; Campbell, 1990; Suh, 2002). East Asians place less emphasis on the consistency of the self. Because they are more dialectical, and perhaps because they are more interpersonally flexible (by adapting to the needs of ingroup members and the requirements of the situation), the link between cross-situational consistency and psychological well-being is attenuated among East Asians. Suh (2002) found that identity consistency is less strongly related to psychological well-being among Koreans than Americans. Similarly, Cross and colleagues (Cross et al., 2003) have shown that self-concept consistency is less central to psychological well-being for individuals who are highly relational-interdependent in their self-construals.

Very little research has examined the direct association between emotional complexity and psychological well-being across cultures. In our lab, we have found that emotional complexity is related to lower life satisfaction among East Asians and Americans. Notably, however, this association was weaker for Chinese participants ( $r \approx -0.30$ ) than for European American participants ( $r \approx -0.60$ ) (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007a). As outlined earlier, Chinese participants are more comfortable with complex emotions and are less likely to suppress these emotions, relative to Americans (Goetz et al., 2007). Finally, although East Asians exhibit greater ambivalence toward a variety of attitude objects (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004; Wonkyong et al., 2006), attitudinal ambivalence is less highly correlated with emotional complexity among East Asians. Wonkyong et al. (2006) primed people's conflicted evaluations about a variety of social issues (e.g., abortion, capital punishment, etc.) through a repeated expression paradigm and then examined the extent to which they felt "torn" or mixed emotions about the issues. There was a strong association between attitudinal ambivalence and emotional complexity among European Canadians, but a significantly weaker correlation among Asian Canadians. Although preliminary, these results suggest that attitudinal ambivalence and emotional complexity are less troubling for members of dialectical than non-dialectical cultures. We see this as an area of research that is ripe for further investigation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Emotional complexity is something we have all felt at some time or another. Whether it was the intense ambivalence felt at college graduation or the blend of happiness and jealousy when a friend outperformed us, life events present many opportunities for complex emotions. Research in this chapter suggests that beliefs about the nature of contradiction, interconnections, and change in the world relate to the subjective experience of complex emotions. Individuals from dialectical

cultures that tolerate contradiction report feeling emotional complexity more frequently, are more comfortable with emotional complexity, and may be less likely to regulate it. These findings raise questions about emotional co-occurrence, as well as the role of culture in emotional experience.

Although recent theorizing about emotion has shifted toward acceptance of the possibility of emotional co-occurrence, there remains an underlying belief that positive and negative emotional mixes are inherently unstable states that represent indecision or a state to be resolved (Cacioppo et al., 1999). This is consistent with lay and scientific theories of emotion that assume a large role for emotion in determining behavior (e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; Ekman, 1992). Perhaps in Western cultures that value autonomy and choice, this relationship has been overemphasized. There are other determinants of behavior, such as societal expectations and social roles, and these may have a stronger influence than Western scholars have been willing to concede in emotion research. East Asian cultures are highly interdependent and have "tight" social norms that define clear, agreed upon standards for social behavior (Triandis, 1995). Therefore, in contrast to individualistic cultures, definite, simple emotions may not be needed to motivate social behavior. Indeed, polarized and strong emotional experiences may be considered threatening and undesirable (e.g., Tsai et al., 2006).

If the emotion-behavior link is more tenuous when social prescriptions are strong, one can theorize about other cultures in which emotional complexity is more stable and less problematic. There are many situations in which individuals have little control over their behavior or the environment in which they live. Consequently, people may have to tolerate greater emotional complexity if they live in cultural milieus in which they can exert less control over their environment. For example, Snibbe and Markus (2005) have found that working-class Americans with less education emphasize changing oneself to fit the environment, whereas those with more education emphasize changing one's environment to fit oneself. Perhaps emotional complexity is more acceptable for working-class Americans than it is for middle class Americans. In sum, emotional complexity may be more acceptable in general when emotions do not drive behavior and emotional complexity may promote adaptive functioning like behavioral flexibility. Emotional complexity may serve to prime many possible behaviors. This priming may allow for more flexible behavior and responses to situations. In addition, in situations in which one's inner state must be subjugated to norms or situational demands, emotional complexity may serve as a helpful way to tolerate negative and unchangeable aspects of life (Larsen et al., 2003).

Although we argue that emotional complexity is more likely and more acceptable in East Asian cultures, it is unclear whether emotional complexity among East Asians can be considered comfortable. We have argued, and the data support, that East Asians are less uncomfortable with emotional complexity than are Americans. However, it remains to be seen whether emotional complexity represents a desirable state. Our own data suggest that complex emotional experiences

are more uncomfortable for Americans than are simple emotional experiences, but Chinese participants showed no differences. In their study of Asian and Caucasian Americans, Williams and Aaker (2002) found a similar pattern. However, do East Asians find emotional complexity to be an overall comfortable state? This is a question only more careful data collection and analysis can answer.

The research reported here suggests many new areas of research at the intersection of culture and emotional complexity. We have proposed that dialectical epistemologies and conceptions about contradiction are central to the experience and regulation of emotional complexity. However, only two studies have found direct evidence for a mechanistic link between dialecticism and emotional complexity. Future studies can increase understanding of the role of culture in emotional complexity with greater focus on possible pathways of influence. Under what conditions – cultural or situational – is emotional complexity likely to arise? In addition, future studies can provide insight by expanding research beyond subjective experience. By examining cognitive appraisals, expressive and regulatory behavior, as well as social consequences, one can gain insight into the broader emotion process. Finally, the implications for emotional complexity on well-being are largely unexplored.

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