

Pressure of China: interactions of Normative Traditional value, perceived pressure, intimate relationship and leisure

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Abstract:

Traditional Chinese expectations and beliefs are mainly influenced by the Confucian ethics. It emphasized family loyalty, social expectations, and filial responsibilities, which shaped the mindset and social relations of the Chinese people for thousands of years. These normative values are still the main factors today, affecting how people view pressure, anxiety, relaxation, and intimate relationships among individuals in a rapidly modernizing China (Huwae, 2017). Grasping these influences is very important for solving the problems of well-being that Chinese individuals are facing today. This study aims to explore the dynamics between perceived pressure, Chinese traditional norms, leisure, and intimate relationships. Through the examination of these factors, we aim to give a better understanding of the connection between culture and mental health problems in contemporary Chinese society.

Keywords: Contemporary China, norms, perceived pressure, intimate relationship, leisure, traditional value

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese norms hold the constricting and pressuring ideas that shape the individual behavior and the well-being of people. Firstly, Traditional Chinese norms introduce people to a hierarchical social system that is very strict. The normative moral value of filial piety and respect as well as the conformance to the expectations of the superiors such as the elderly, the teachers, the managers, the youth generation who are the subordinates are forced to do so. This hierarchical structure is the cause of the conflicts between the personal free will of the subordinates and the demands imposed by those in authority, which is

the reason for the negativity of well-being (Ikeda & Takemoto, 2016). Secondly, Chinese culture is adopted. Chinese culture is of a collectivist kind, which means that people are very much a part of the community and the group interests are put above personal desires. Despite the fact that a collectivist culture brings about group coherence and social harmony, it also requires the individual to suppress his or her personal feelings and opinions in order to conform with the group norm, which can be a further cause of internal stress and conflict (Huwae, 2017)

Traditional Chinese norms contain constrictive and pressuring constructs that influence individual behavior and well-being. Firstly, Traditional Chinese

norms introduce a strict social hierarchy. subordinate - the youth generation, are obliged to conform to the expectations from the superiors, such as the elderly, teachers, managers, in order to comply with the normative moral value of filial piety and respect, this hierarchical structure often leads to conflicts between the personal free will of subordinates and the demands imposed by those in authority, negatively affecting well-being (Ikeda & Takemoto, 2016). Secondly, Chinese culture embraces a collectivist approach, where that individuals are deeply integrated into the community, and group interest were promoted above personal desires. Although collectivist culture promotes group coherence and social harmony, it also demands individual to suppress personal feelings and opinions in order to comply with group norm, which can further contribute to internal stress and conflict (Huwae, 2017)

In addition to these social pressures, the belief in authoritarian and legalist values encourage superiors to push subordinates with pressure. This approach can be traced to the legalist philosophy, which belief that strict control is necessary to uphold moral standards and societal stability. It advocates for the use of rigid laws and severe consequences to ensure compliance and discipline within society. (Witzel, 2012). This translates into a leadership style where Superiors tends to set unattainable goals aiming to push the subordinates, believing that the fear of failure or punishment will motivate subordinates to work harder (Rindova & Starbuck, 1997). While this approach may lead to short-term gains, it often results in long-term negative consequences, such as burnout, reduced morale, and a decline in overall organizational innovation (Hirst, Van Knippenberg, & Zhou, 2008)

From the subordinates' perspective, fulfilling expectation aren't only practical requirement, but also moral obligations. Confucianism is a philosophical system that emphasizes cultivation of virtue and to maintaining harmony and order in community xiao (filial piety) is the most important virtue in considered by Confucianist (Sarkissian, 2010). It can be seen as a form of in-family reciprocal action - the parents are the most significant contributor for raising the child, therefore they are superior and respected. The child must devote themselves to repay their parents. Part of repaying filial piety is were seen as reaching of the filial duty (Chen, 2016) This system also views family as the prototype for social organization, where the principles of family living are extended to the broader society. (Hwang, 1999). Hence, The reciprocal part of Chinese social norm applicable in more social areas, but under the name of "face and favor" (Hwang, 1987, p.948). The model describes that individual would consider the social gain first (face gain) when allocating social resource-

es (favor giving). In which, favoring authority in close proximity would often result in more face gain compared to favoring a subordinate.

Other than moral values, these traditional norms are also driven in the older generation's experiences with poverty and the negative reinforcement they received from those hardships. Before China opened its market in 1978, it was one of the poorest country in the world along with lowest life expectancy (Zuliu, 1997). This prolonged experience of poverty ingrained a strong desire among the older generation to escape material deprivation, leading them to prioritize the accumulation of wealth as a means of securing stability and avoiding the hardships they endured. (Saunders & Lujun, 2006). And during the mass communist propaganda during Maoist era, it was widely promoted that the material wealth must come before expressive value, and the only way to attain material wealth is through hard labor (Yang & Stening, 2012). As a result, the elderly generation often imposes high academic and career standards on their children, driven by the fear of returning to poverty and the hope of securing a stable material income for the family (Cao, 2020). This persistent focus on material wealth reflects a survival instinct elder, which continues to affect the younger generations today.

In Chinese culture, the practice of traditional norms often leads to significant pressure and adverse consequences. The combination of moral expectations and an authoritarian work culture creates a pervasive sense of pressure that profoundly impacts individuals' well-being. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), pressure arises when individuals encounter situations they perceive as beyond their coping abilities. It is relevant in the context of Chinese traditional norms - as expectation are often too high to achieve. Suh and Oishi (2002) highlight that China ranks among the lowest in life satisfaction and positive affect, suggesting that the immense pressure to meet societal and familial expectations contributes to widespread dissatisfaction. This is the result of an already compounded problem of the cultural stigmas around mental health which in turn leads to the underreporting of negative emotional symptoms, as noted by Clarke et al. (2009). Furthermore, Tan and Yates (2011), the tight family demands have placed a lot of pressure on people to perform well academically and in their jobs. This can eventually lead to stress and burnout. Besides, Hirst et al. (2008) argue that the commonly found authoritarian work culture in numerous Chinese organizations is devoid of necessary stress management and burnout awareness, thus pressuring people to overwork without the needed assistance. These factors together create an atmosphere where the pressure is not only common but also cemented into the normative acts and moral values of the society, which in turn results

in significant mental health challenges for individuals. Despite the challenges and pressures associated with traditional Chinese values, many of these traditional values remains to be widely accepted and practiced in modern society. One significant reason for this persistence is that these values are deeply embedded in the cultural and social attitude in Chinese life - They are the accepted norm and are not questioned. Researches have shown that 70-80% of the people are still holding on to essential traditional values such as filial piety, respect for the elder, and living with the community, as stated by Zuo and Wen (2017). These norms are sometimes buttressed by societal mechanics like social competition (排面) and the phenomenon of the 'face' (面子), where the individual is required to keep the social status and honor by conforming to the accepted behaviors and values. (Zuo & Wen, 2017). Moreover, Not only are these values viewed as duties, but they also find a connection with the bigger cause of upholding the Confucian virtues which comprise ren (仁, benevolence), yi (义, righteousness), li (礼, propriety), zhi (智, wisdom), and xin (信, trustworthiness). While these values may at times hinder individual freedom, they are also seen as the means to social harmony and personal fulfillment. Therefore, they provide a structured and esteemed way of life which many find comforting and meaningful in a complicated and chaotic world (Chan & Young, 2012).

Hence, in this study, the effect of perceived pressure different aspects of an individual's life especially leisure and intimate relationships in Chinese society will be the primary focus. These aspects of life are greatly affected by perceived pressure and are the areas where the clash between the traditional expectations and modern desires for autonomy and self-expression is most evident.

The effect of perceived pressure on both leisure activities and intimate relationships were well established. The relationship between high pressure perceived from socio-economic demands and heavy workloads and the neglect of leisure activities is a common case. As per Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory, people are more likely to give up leisure and focus on meeting immediate demands when they are under significant external pressures. This, however, will not be the case if it continues for a long time as it will have a negative effect on mental health and overall well-being. Supporting this, Newman, Tay, and Diener (2014) found that the presence of leisure activities is a major factor in subjective well-being. This means that if leisure activities are not present due to the perceived pressure, then the negative impacts will be very far-reaching.

In traditional Chinese norm, authoritarian leadership style is often involved. It focused on strict control and the set-

ting of high, often unattainable goals which often oppose the concept on leisure. As previously mentioned, Leaders who abide by such principles usually prefer work and productivity to personal well-being thus the working environment impedes leisure and relaxation. This tension is manifested in the way authoritarian leaders ban activities that are perceived as destructive or self-indulgent thus reaffirming a culture where leisure is of little concern. For instance, Peterson and Pang (2006) found that participants with high authoritarian personalities were less inclined to contemplate or even meditate and preferred activities that are along their rigid worldview of conflict. An example of this would be traditional Chinese authoritarianism as it grew, the acknowledgment of hard work and success was even more difficult. Li (2009) depicts how Confucian values have traditionally sacralized work and family obligations at the expense of leisure activities. The outcome is that the authoritarian work environment promotes such a culture that the people have no option but to thrive for their superiors' attainable expectations, service over their own free time and mental health thus eventually making them unappreciative of leisure and its benefit

Perceived pressure can also lead that breaks down of intimate relationships. Extreme stress can cause emotional withdrawal, diminished communication, negatively affect the intimacy between partners, hence, the underpinnings of the relationship can be easily affected. Randall and Bodenmann (2009) highlight that stress is a significant predictor of relationship dissatisfaction, particularly when individuals lack the coping resources to manage external pressures effectively. These findings align with research by Bodenmann et al. (2006) where that stress within a relationship can lead to a vicious cycle where the strain further exacerbates relationship difficulties, ultimately reducing relationship satisfaction.

intimacy relationship is also influenced by traditional Chinese norms, as the emphasis on obedience and the suppression of personal desires under Chinese traditional norm conflicts with modern view on intimacy Firstly, traditional norm can lead to a lack of open communication and emotional intimacy between partners, as traditional Chinese values, such as hierarchical control, may extend upon marriage relationships, leading to reduced self-disclosure and communication between partners (Liu, Bell, and Zhang 2019). This suppression of personal expression and the prioritization of control in relationships reflect the broader cultural emphasis on authority, often resulting in strained and distant intimate relationships. Secondly, intimate relationship requires freedom and personal space to initiate, but the cultural emphasis on hierarchy and obedience means that parents and teachers frequently intervene in the personal decisions of young adults, including

those related to dating and marriage. For instance, Ahn et al. (2008) found that conflicts between Korean American students and their parents over dating and marriage were intensified by a gap in cultural values, where parents' traditional expectations clashed with the students' desires for personal autonomy in their relationships. Such conflict is the result of the disparity in ideas between the generations. The Western ideal of free love and individual autonomy is in direct contrast to the Confucian ideals of duty, modesty, and the regulation of personal behavior according to social norms. For example, Cheng et al. (2012) point out that Western culture exposure among the youth in China, Taiwan, and Vietnam has caused a drift from the traditional Confucian values, such as more permissive attitudes toward premarital sex and women taking the initiative in romantic relationships.

In short, the traditional Chinese norms, which are deeply rooted in traditional ethics and have been reinforced by the experiences of poverty, still impose a great deal of pressure on the individuals, thus, influencing the various aspects of personal life. This pressure is most evident in the areas of leisure and intimate relationships, where the demands of conformity and obedience are often in conflict with modern aspirations for autonomy and self-expression. Given the widespread influence of these traditional values on perceived pressure, it is important to scrutinize their specific impact on attitudes towards leisure and intimate relationships. In this regard, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1 - Perceived pressure negatively correlates to leisure attitude

H2 - Perceived pressure negatively correlates to intimacy behavior and relationship wellbeing

H3 - Belief in traditional Chinese value predicts perception of pressure

H4 - Belief in traditional Chinese value correlates to negative leisure attitude

H5 - Belief in traditional Chinese value correlates to lesser intimacy behavior and relationship wellbeing

2. Method

Participants

The study was conducted using an online survey distributed through snowball sampling via QR code, which resulted in the participation of 257 respondents, comprising 122 males and 133 females. The mean age of the participants was 32.13 years, with a standard deviation of 38.76. This demographic data was collected to ensure a diverse representation of the population.

Measures

Four main scales were translated into Chinese, and uti-

lized in this study to assess various constructs:

1. Asian Values Scale (AVS-R): This scale consists of 25 items and measures key dimensions of traditional Chinese values, including family recognition through achievement, conformity to norms, filial piety, humility, social harmony, and collectivism. (kim et al, 2004)

2. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10): Developed by Cohen, Kamarch, and Mermelstein (1983), this 10-item scale was used to assess the participants' perceived stress levels. The scale captures the frequency with which respondents experience stress and their ability to handle stress-inducing situations.

3. Intimacy Behavior and Relationship Wellbeing: This was measured using a combination of a score rating intimacy behavior scale, which ranges from least to most intense (Ersheng et al., 2011), and the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4) developed by Ronald (2007), which measures the overall satisfaction in intimate relationships.

4. Leisure Attitudes Scale-Short Version (LAS-SV): Based on Teixeira and Freire (2013), this scale measures three dimensions of leisure attitudes: positive affect, cognitive engagement, and effort in leisure activities.

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete the online survey, which included the consent form and the aforementioned scales. The survey was designed to evaluate the relationship between perceived pressure, traditional Chinese values, leisure attitudes, and intimacy behavior. The data collection focused on examining these variables in the context of work culture and social norms, particularly under the influence of traditional Chinese values and the associated pressures.

3. Results

The correlation was calculated using Pearson's r , and revealed several significant findings:

1. Perceived Pressure and Leisure Attitudes: A negative correlation was found between perceived pressure and leisure attitudes ($r = -0.193$, $p = 0.002$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This indicates that individuals who experience higher levels of perceived pressure tend to have a more negative attitude toward leisure activities.

2. Perceived Pressure and Relationship Wellbeing: Perceived pressure was also negatively correlated with relationship wellbeing ($r = -0.384$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 2. Higher stress levels were associated with lower satisfaction in intimate relationships.

3. Traditional Chinese Values and Perceived Pressure: Contrary to expectations, a negative correlation was observed between belief in traditional Chinese values and perceived pressure ($r = -0.193$, $p = 0.002$). This finding

suggests that adherence to traditional values may serve as a buffer against stress, potentially due to a sense of coherence and acceptance, which provides a counterbalance to the pressures experienced.

4. Traditional Chinese Values, Leisure Attitude, and Intimacy Behavior: No significant relationship was found between belief in traditional Chinese values and either leisure attitudes or intimacy behavior/wellbeing, thus not supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5.

5. Leisure Attitudes and Relationship Satisfaction: A strong positive correlation was identified between leisure attitudes and relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.554$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between leisure attitudes and intimacy behavior ($r = 0.326$, $p < 0.001$). These results highlight the importance of positive leisure attitudes in fostering healthy and satisfying intimate relationships.

These findings contribute to the understanding of how traditional Chinese values and perceived pressure interact with leisure attitudes and intimate relationship dynamics, offering insights into the complex interplay of cultural norms, stress, and personal well-being.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In the discussion of perceived pressure, the findings demonstrate that pressure is negatively correlated with both leisure attitude and relationship well-being, which supports the validation of hypotheses H1 and H2. A reverse relationship between pressure and leisure attitude ($r = -.193$, $p = .002$) suggests that people who maintain a positive attitude of leisure activities tend to experience a lower level of perceived pressure. It matches the research by Xie, Schaubroeck, and Lam (2008), which reveals that the internalization of traditional values can fill in the gap of stress and; thereby, resistance of emotional exhaustion and good health. Likewise, the negative correlation between pressure and relationship well-being ($r = -.384$, $p < .001$) conveys that the high perceived pressure effect relationship adversely. This is in line with the findings by Shi et al. (2020), which hypothesize that authoritarian leadership and the pressures accompanying it can strain personal relationships, by not allowing emotional support and communication. In combination, these correlations highlight the necessity of leisure and supportive relationships as buffers against the negative impacts of perceived pressure, underlining how traditional values and societal expectations can affect psychological resilience and well-being.

The found inverse correlation between belief in traditional norms and perceived pressure ($r = -.193$, $p = .002$) implies that individuals who truly agree with these norms will be somewhat immune to the psychological stress arising from the internalization of these social values due to their

congruence with the social norms. Such internal coherence probably gives individuals a rigid structure that helps them deal with social roles and expectations in a more efficient way, which, in turn, causes less cognitive dissonance that usually occurs when conflicting societal demands. Along this line, Xie, Schaubroeck, and Lam (2008) revealed that adherence to traditional values was found to be a reason for lower emotional exhaustion and better health in employees where they also perceived fairness and control in the workplace, especially in the Chinese workforce. Thus, it is suggested that traditional values may increase the psychological resilience of people by creating an inner sense of stability and coherence with the societal norms and thereby, limiting the experienced pressure. Thus, individuals who discharge these values conformity may not only adjust well to societal expectations but also enjoy social validation and a decrease in stress which will lead to even greater well-being.

The discovery of the non-conformity predicting the perceived pressure in Chinese society points to a new dimension of the cultural dynamic that is in sharp contrast with the cultural norms of the West. In China, the Confucian values and the collectivist principles that have been ingrained in the psyche of the people make the expectation of individuals to conform to the societal norms very strong. Non-conformity most of the time will bring about social disapproval and a significant increase in the perceived pressure. The effect of this cultural expectation is seen in the concept of “求同伐异” (seeking similarity and rejecting differences), still deviation from the established norms is met with resistance, as it is considered to be against social. For example, Tinsley & Weldon (2003) found that in normative conflicts, moral lesson shaming and moral lesson teaching are the common responses to deviations from social norms. This indeed reflects the cultural priority of preserving harmony and repelling behaviors that might disrupt it. This out-of-the-box thought is in stark contrast with the Western cultures where non-conformity is usually associated with a high status and personal autonomy. In China, the pressure that is involved with the conformity can exacerbate stress and anxiety levels for those who deviate from the expected societal norms which in turn reflects the cultural specificity of the perceived pressure in this context.

While the findings clearly exhibit negative correlations between perceived pressure, leisure attitude, and relationship well-being, this study comes with the caveat of a near-confounding situation. For instance, Socio-economic pressure, is one of the many things that affect well being, especially in the economies that grow fast like China. The pressure to attain financial success may not only contribute to stress but also limit the time and energy available

for leisure activities and staying in touch with loved ones. Additionally, the overwhelming amount of workload, which may be from highly authoritarian work environments, can moreover be a further cause to perceived pressure. Hirst et al. (2008) exemplify that authoritarian work cultures, with poor stress management practices, can lead to impossible workloads that leave little room for personal well-being.

Besides, there is a dire need for more social support for those who do not comply or cannot comply with the conventional norms. People in this group might suffer from more stress and be socially isolated as a result of their non-conformity, thus it is crucial to develop support networks that provide acceptance and validation outside of conventional frameworks. Community programs, and peer support groups along with counseling services can be created to help these individuals deal with the pressures of societal expectations and at the same time establish belongingness and well-being. By accepting and striving to meet the needs of the individuals who deviate from the common norms, these interventions can foster the emergence of a more inclusive society, which respects, on the one hand, the cultural heritage and, on the other hand, the individual diversity.

The findings of this study have several important applications, and especially within the sectors of workplace management, mental health, and relationship counseling in the Chinese society. Perceived pressure was hurtful in leisure attitudes and relationship well-being therefore, it is evident that cultural sensitivity is the key to such interventions. One example would be the incorporation of stress management programs that are in tune with the traditional values of employees, as well as offering support systems that help manage high expectations alongside personal well-being, in organizations in China. Besides, relationship counseling could involve talking about the pressure of conforming to traditional norms, thus, couples would be able to find a way out of the dilemma between societal demands and personal wishes for autonomy and intimacy. By noting the buffering function of conformity to traditional values against stress, mental health professionals can also design interventions that strengthen cultural coherence and individual well-being.

This study gives significant contributions, but it also has some drawbacks. To begin with, the sample, although heterogeneous, does not necessarily reflect the whole Chinese population, thus the findings cannot be generalized. The use of self-reported data may also lead to some response biases, for example social desirability bias, where participants may be inclined to underreport stress or overreport adherence to traditional values. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study did not allow for any

causal assertions to be made; the correlations observed cannot establish the directionality of the relationships between variables. Another limitation is the possible impact of unmeasured confounding variables, e.g. socio-economic status, which might influence perceived pressure not depending on traditional values.

Therefore, future research must research the issues by longitudinal designs to study the cause-effect relationships between the traditional values, pressure, leisure attitudes, and well-being in relationships to the tune of time. Besides this, it would be significant to look at the role of socio-economic factors closely, specifically the way of living conflicts with the cultural values to be the reason for stress and well-being respectively. Future projects may also investigate how traditional values are relevant to the different demographic groups in China, for instance, the rural and urban populations to see how these values function in different contexts as a result of the river of life. In addition, the cross-cultural analyses can give the further explanation into the role of traditional values and the experienced pressure in different cultures, leading to a better understanding of the global health's mental.

To summarize, the study reveals a complicated interrelationship between traditional Chinese values, perceived pressure, and their influence on leisure and intimate relationships. Although conformity to traditional norms can ensure a certain degree of consistency and less stress, it is also linked to many serious problems, especially when it comes to conflicts with the modern wishes for autonomy and fulfillment. The results certainly emphasize the significance of the culturally when dealing with mental health and promoting well-being in China, where the values still have the dominant role in influencing the life of the individuals. Interventions can be more effective if they recognize both the protective and constraining aspects of these values and thus help individuals cope with the challenges of modern life while still retaining cultural integrity.

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