Suppression and Interpersonal Harmony: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between Chinese and European Americans
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Suppression and Interpersonal Harmony: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between Chinese and European Americans

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Based on Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) theory, this study was conducted to examine whether the association between emotional suppression and interpersonal harmony would be moderated by cultural group (i.e., Chinese and European Americans) and an Asian cultural value (i.e., emotional self-control). A total of 451 college students (205 Chinese and 246 European Americans) participated in this study. As expected, results indicated that the association between emotional suppression and interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for Chinese but not significant for European Americans. Similarly, when emotional self-control was examined as a moderator, the results still confirmed our hypotheses. That is, the association between emotional suppression and interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for those with stronger endorsement of emotional self-control but not for those with weaker endorsement of emotional self-control. Furthermore, we examined whether the above results could be replicated when forbearance (a construct similar to suppression) and distress disclosure (a construct opposite to suppression) were examined. The results showed the same pattern for forbearance and distress disclosure when cultural group or emotional self-control served as the moderator. The convergence of findings increased the robustness of our results. Finally, our data suggest that individuals from Eastern, interdependent cultures (e.g., Chinese) tend to value emotional suppression to preserve interpersonal harmony; individuals from Western, independent cultures may or may not necessarily suppress their emotions for this purpose. A comprehensive understanding of the different meanings of a specific strategy (i.e., emotional suppression) in different cultural contexts is important to promote effective cross-cultural counseling.

Keywords: emotional suppression, forbearance, distress disclosure, interpersonal harmony, emotional self-control

Over the past two decades, emotional suppression has been consistently associated with negative health outcomes (Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Levenson, 1993). However, some scholars have questioned whether this conclusion is universal. Therefore, a few studies have begun to pay attention to how culture influences the relationship between suppression and negative health outcomes. For example, Soto, Perez, Kim, Lee, and Minnick (2011) found that emotional suppression was associated with adverse psychological functioning for European Americans but not for Chinese.

Since 2003, this line of research studies has slowly begun expanding to the examination of associations between emotional...
suppression and negative social outcomes (Butler et al., 2003; Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009; see details later). Still, some scholars challenged these research findings because they focused on only homogenous samples and ignored cultural variability. Thus far, the empirical findings have been largely from studies conducted with American samples in a Western, independent culture (e.g., Butler et al., 2007). Indeed, little attention has been paid to possible contributions from individuals in different cultures (e.g., in an Eastern culture). From a cultural perspective, these social consequences may be moderated by cultural group or cultural value (Butler et al., 2007). In the present study, we attempted to address this gap in the literature by exploring whether the association between emotional suppression and a positive social goal (i.e., affinity for interpersonal harmony) would be moderated by cultural group (i.e., Chinese from Taiwan and European Americans from the United States) and a specific cultural value (i.e., emotional self-control).

**Suppression, Culture, and Interpersonal Harmony**

Based on Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) theory on culture and self, people from Western, independent cultures (e.g., American culture) tend to value free and open emotional expression. Wierzbicka (1994) further indicated that when European Americans engage in suppression, it is in an effort to protect the self (but not to preserve relationships). Coincidentally, Rothbaum and Rusk (2011) also indicated that, in Western cultures, children are raised to foster autonomy and value goals of seeking independence, self-assertion, and environmental mastery. Emotional expression is a strategy that fits with the pursuit of these goals (e.g., Mesquita & Albert, 2007). Thus, this socialization process in Western cultures implies that emotional expression is a healthy way to maintain well-being. Conversely, emotional suppression may imply a sense of being inauthentic to the self and in relationships with others.

In contrast, according to Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) theory, those from Eastern cultures (e.g., Chinese culture) tend to value emotional self-control, emotional restraint, and emotional suppression in pursuit of interpersonal harmony. Wierzbicka (1994) further indicated that Asian cultures encourage suppression to preserve relationships (but not to protect the self). Similarly, Rothbaum and Rusk (2011) indicated that, in Eastern cultures, children tend to be raised to foster interpersonal harmony. Emotional suppression may be a strategy that fits with the goal to maintain interpersonal harmony. Thus, this socialization process implies that emotional suppression is an appropriate way to maintain interpersonal harmony in Eastern cultures.

From the above discussion, it is obvious that culture plays a central role in shaping the meanings or purposes of emotional experiences (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). From the Western, independent cultural perspective, emotionally expressive behavior is essential to maintain social bonds because it communicates one’s emotions and needs to others (Srivastava et al., 2009). Conversely, emotional suppression may disrupt social functioning and have negative social consequences. If people suppress their emotions, they may miss opportunities to establish close relationships with others. For example, suppression is positively associated with poor interpersonal functioning (Gross & John, 2003); relationship dissatisfaction and increased thoughts about breaking up a romantic relationship (Impett et al., 2012); and lower levels of social support, closeness, and social satisfaction (Srivastava et al., 2009).

However, the negative social costs of suppression found in Western, independent cultures may or may not apply to those from Eastern, interdependent cultures (Rothbaum & Rusk, 2011). Specifically, whereas Western cultures value free and open emotional expression, Eastern cultures (e.g., Chinese culture) value emotional self-control and restraint (suppression; e.g., Butler et al., 2007; Soto, Levenson, & Ebling, 2005). From the Chinese cultural perspective, free expression of emotions, especially negative ones, may cause temporary disruptions in group harmony. Chiang (2012) indicated that Chinese culture encourages emotional suppression in situations where it is important to preserve relationships. Indeed, Asian culture considers emotional self-control as a valuable emotion-regulation strategy to maintain interpersonal harmony. In addition, suppression may have some positive functions in Eastern cultures. For example, it may initially allow individuals to have time to reappraise the events that elicited emotions in the first place and to formulate the proper response.

Recently, results from a qualitative study found that Chinese people suppressed both negative and positive feelings in order to maintain interpersonal harmony (Chiang, 2012). For example, six reasons for suppressing negative emotions were identified: (1) maintaining harmonious relations, (2) avoiding the consequences of emotional expression, (3) controlling impulse rationally to prevent hurting others and allowing time to process what was going on, (4) adhering to moral mannerisms, (5) viewing emotion expression as useless, and (6) not knowing how to express emotion. Similarly, there were four reasons for suppressing positive emotions: (1) avoiding showing off too much, (2) worrying about others’ jealousy, (3) considering others’ feelings (e.g., do not want to make others feel bad or upset), and (4) not being accustomed to expressing feelings. As one can see, most of the above reasons are related to preserving relationships with others. These results confirmed Wierzbicka’s (1994) observation that Asians tend to engage in suppression to preserve relationships (but not to protect the self). However, European Americans are more likely to engage in suppression to protect the self (but not to preserve relationship harmony; Wierzbicka, 1994). Due to the above cultural differences, we expected that suppression would positively associate with interpersonal harmony for Chinese but that this association would be weakened for European Americans; that is, cultural group would moderate the association between emotional suppression and interpersonal harmony.

In addition to cultural group, we proposed that emotional self-control (a cultural value) could be another moderator. The reason is that cultural values are an important part of culture to provide guidance for people to exhibit appropriate behaviors (Matsumoto, Yoo, Nakagawa, & Multinational Study of Cultural Display Rules, 2008). Cultural values may be a better moderator than cultural group for the link between suppression and social goals (Butler et al., 2007). Empirically, in 2007 Butler et al. conducted the first study to illustrate that cultural group and values serve as moderators for the link between suppression and social goals (Butler et al., 2007).
cultural group (e.g., European Americans and Asian Americans) was examined instead of cultural values.

Furthermore, Butler et al. (2007) found that experimentally elicited suppression led to negative social outcomes (e.g., the partner’s withdrawal, disinterest, and even hostility) for women with more European values, but these negative effects were reduced for women with more bicultural Asian European values. From their results, Butler et al. further speculated that suppression may have even fewer negative social effects for Asians living in Asia. Recently, English and John (in press) conducted the first study that used non-U.S. samples to examine the link between suppression and social outcomes. They indicated that, similar to European Americans, suppression was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction for Asian Americans and Chinese from China. However, they did not examine whether this association would be moderated by cultural groups or cultural values. That is, it is unknown whether the magnitude of this negative association would be significantly different across the three groups or cultural values. Thus, more studies are needed in this area. Following the same reasoning above (with cultural group as a moderator), we expected that suppression would be positively associated with interpersonal harmony for those reporting stronger endorsement of emotional self-control (an Asian cultural value). However, this association would be smaller or absent for those reporting weaker endorsement of emotional self-control.

**Forbearance, Distress Disclosure, Culture, and Interpersonal Harmony**

In this study, we also examined constructs that were similar (i.e., forbearance) and opposite (i.e., distress disclosure) to suppression to see whether our results would demonstrate the same pattern. If a similar pattern was found, our confidence in our conclusions would increase. Forbearance refers to the minimization or concealment of concerns in order to maintain social harmony and not burden others (Moore & Constantine, 2005). In addition, H. S. Kim, Sherman, and Taylor (2008) concluded that Asian individuals are more reluctant than European Americans to explicitly ask for support from others. Accordingly, Chinese individuals may be reluctant to share personal problems with others, for fear of creating interpersonal conflict or of causing others to worry about them (Yeh, Arora, & Wu, 2006).

Thus far, from a limited amount of available studies, the associations between forbearance and health and social outcomes were inconsistent. For mental health outcomes, forbearance was not significantly associated with psychological distress among Chinese international students (Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012). However, forbearance was negatively associated with depression among refugee immigrants (Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rumens, 1999) but positively associated with depression among Korean Canadians who were successfully acculturated (Noh & Kaspar, 2003). For social outcomes, the only study we could locate found that forbearance was not significantly associated with interpersonal relationship harmony among African, Asian, and Latin American international students (Moore & Constantine, 2005). These inconsistent results imply the need to look for culture-related variables (e.g., cultural values) as moderators of the association between forbearance and outcomes. To some degree, forbearance implies a tendency to suppress one’s need for help in order to maintain interpersonal harmony. Thus, while suppression implies suppressing one’s emotions, forbearance implies suppressing one’s needs. The social goal for these two strategies, however, is the same (i.e., to achieve interpersonal harmony). For this reason and the above inconsistent results on forbearance and outcomes, the same pattern of results found for suppression would be expected for forbearance with either cultural group or emotional self-control as moderators.

Distress disclosure refers to one’s tendency to disclose personal distressing information. In general, distress disclosure has been associated with positive health and social outcomes such as low depression (Kahn & Garrison, 2009) and low loneliness (Wei, Russell, & Zakalik, 2005). However, most studies on this topic have been based on predominantly European American samples, and only a few studies have focused on those of Asian heritage. For example, for European Americans, the more upsetting events were, the more often they were shared; but this was not the case for Asian Americans (S. H. Park, Brody, & Wilson, 2008). In a way, distress disclosure (i.e., disclosing distressing feelings) is opposite to suppression (i.e., restraining emotional expression). Thus, the same patterns found for suppression, but in the reverse direction, would be expected for distress disclosure, with either cultural group or cultural value serving as the moderator. If our data displayed the same pattern for a similar construct (i.e., forbearance) and a reversed pattern for an opposite construct (i.e., distress disclosure), then the robustness of our findings would increase.

In conclusion, there were three sets of moderation hypotheses. First, the relation between suppression and interpersonal harmony would be significantly positive for Chinese or for those with stronger emotional self-control but would be absent for European Americans or for those with weaker emotional self-control. Second, the relation between forbearance and interpersonal harmony would be significantly positive for Chinese or for those with stronger emotional self-control but would be absent for European Americans or for those with weaker emotional self-control. Third, the relation between distress disclosure and interpersonal harmony would be significantly negative for Chinese or for those with stronger emotional self-control but would be absent for European Americans or for those with weaker emotional self-control.

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

Participants included 205 Chinese undergraduate college students at a large public university in Taiwan and 246 European American undergraduates at a large public university in the United States. Among the Chinese, there were 92 (45%) males and 113 (55%) females; their ages ranged from 18 to 25 ($M = 20.03$ and $SD = 1.26$); and there were 19 (9%) freshmen, 79 (39%) sophomores, 52 (25%) juniors, 51 (25%) seniors, and 4 (2%) other. Among the European Americans, there were 76 (31%) males and 169 (69%) females; their ages ranged from 18 to 38 ($M = 19.23$ and $SD = 1.78$); and there were 143 (58%) freshmen, 61 (25%) sophomores, 28 (11%) juniors, and 13 (5%) seniors (one person did not respond to these questions).

We recruited college students who were enrolled in psychology courses in Taiwan and in the United States. Individual packets containing each questionnaire were completed by small groups of
students who had signed up for one of several data collection time slots. The participants were informed that this project was related to affect regulation. No personally identifiable information was collected, and participants were assured anonymity of their responses. All participants were volunteers and received research credits toward a course grade for participating in the study.

Measures

All students in Taiwan completed a Chinese version of the survey, and all students in the United States completed an English version. Chinese versions for suppression, emotional self-control, and interpersonal harmony were obtained from the original developers. The Chinese version of the forbearance measure was adapted from Wei et al. (2012). Finally, based on the three steps suggested by Brislin (1970), the Chinese version of the distress disclosure measure was translated for this study.

Emotional suppression. Emotional suppression was measured by the Suppression subscale of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003). This four-item subscale measures the tendency to restrain emotional expression. A sample item is “I keep my emotions to myself.” Participants rated their answers using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicated a greater tendency to restrain emotion expression and use suppression as an emotion regulation strategy. The coefficient alpha for the Suppression subscale score was .84 for European Americans (Soto et al., 2011), .69 for Chinese in Hong Kong (Soto et al., 2011), and .72 for Chinese in Taiwan (Hsieh & Stright, 2012). In the present study, the coefficient alpha was .75 for Chinese and .73 for European Americans. Evidence for validity was provided by a positive association with depression and a negative association with life satisfaction for European Americans and no significant associations with depression and life satisfaction for Chinese (Soto et al., 2011).

Forbearance. Forbearance was measured by the forbearance subscale of Moore and Constantine’s (2005) Collectivistic Coping Styles Measure. This four-item subscale was used to assess the tendency to avoid burdening others by disclosing personal issues and concerns. A sample item is “I kept the problem or concern to myself in order not to worry others.” Participants were asked to what degree they agreed with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not Used) to 5 (Used Often). High scores indicated greater use of forbearance as a coping strategy. Previous studies showed a coefficient alpha of .95 among African, Asian, and Latin American international students (Moore & Constantine, 2005). In this study, coefficient alphas were .64 for Chinese and .69 for European Americans, respectively. Validity of the forbearance scale was supported by a negative association with seeking psychological help among Asian American students. For European American students, emotional self-control was negatively correlated with adherence to Asian values.

Distress disclosure. Distress disclosure was measured by the Distress Disclosure Index (DDI; Kahn & Hessling, 2001). This 12-item scale assesses the tendency to disclose personal distressing information such as distressing thoughts, personal problems, and unpleasant emotions. A sample item is “I typically don’t discuss things that upset me.” Participants were asked to what degree they feel comfortable sharing personally distressing information with others. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Coefficient alphas in previous studies ranged from .92 to .95 among Caucasian college student samples (Kahn & Hessling, 2001) and Asian college students (Chen & Danish, 2010). In this study, the coefficient alpha was .94 for Chinese and .94 for European Americans. With regard to validity, Kahn and Hessling (2001) found that the DDI positively associated with self-disclosure and negatively associated with self-concealment in a Caucasian sample. Among Asians, Chen and Danish (2010) found that distress disclosure positively correlated with acculturation level and negatively correlated with adherence to Asian values.

Emotional self-control. Emotional self-control was measured by the emotional self-control subscale of the Asian American Values Scale—Multidimensional (B. S. K. Kim, Li, & Ng, 2005). This eight-item subscale measures the tendency to impose self-control over expression of emotions. A sample item is “One should not express strong emotions.” Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). High scores indicated a greater amount of self-control over one’s emotions. Coefficient alphas for emotional self-control were .82 among Asian American college students (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005) and .80 for European Americans (Y. S. Park & Kim, 2008). In this study, the coefficient alpha was .71 among Chinese and .83 among European Americans. With regard to validity, B. S. K. Kim et al. (2005) found that emotional self-control was negatively related to positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help among Asian American students. For European American students, emotional self-control was negatively correlated with open communication styles (e.g., Y. S. Park & Kim, 2008).

Interpersonal harmony. Interpersonal harmony was measured by the Harmony Enhancement subscale of the Harmony Scale (Leung, Brew, Zhang, & Zhang, 2011). This 13-item subscale measures the extent to which participants view interpersonal harmony as an important social goal. A sample item is “Maintaining interpersonal harmony is an important goal in life.” Participants were asked to rate items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicated greater importance of promoting harmonious relationships among individuals. Coefficient alpha for the Harmony Enhancement subscale was .80 among Chinese individuals from Hong Kong and .74 among Australian individuals (Leung et al., 2011). In this study, the coefficient alpha was .76 among Chinese and .74 among European Americans. With regard to validity, Leung et al. (2011) found positive relations between harmony enhancement and two conflict styles: integrating (i.e., searching for common ground to engage in problem solving) and compromising (i.e., promoting relationships to encourage concessions that arrive at a mutual agreement) across both groups.

Results

Preliminary Analyses and Descriptive Statistics

We first examined measurement invariance for each scale. Researchers have indicated that item parceling would create more
reliable manifest indicators (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Thus, we adopted item parceling and considered at least three indicators to create a latent variable. For suppression and forbearance, we kept four items as indicators because both are four-item scales. However, for distress disclosure (12 items), emotional self-control (eight items), and interpersonal harmony (12 items), we created four parcels for each scale by first ranking factor loadings and then successively pairing items with the highest and lowest factor loadings in each parcel to equalize the average loadings across parcels (Little et al., 2002). Then, the freely estimated model (i.e., freely estimated factor loadings) and the equal model (i.e., factor loadings constrained to be equal) were conducted. A corrected chi-square difference test between these two models was used to see whether the factor loadings were invariant between two groups. As can be seen in Table 1, for each scale the results indicated a reasonably good fit. The nonsignificant result from the chi-square difference test between the freely estimated and equal models indicated that the factor loadings were invariant for Chinese and European Americans.

Next, we examined the missing data. Missing data were from 0.00% for the measure of harmony enhancement to 0.05% for the measure of suppression. The result from Little’s missing completely at random test was found to be nonsignificant, χ²(117, N = 451) = 119.86, p = .41, suggesting that the missing cases were not significantly different from the nonmissing cases. Based on Schlomer, Bauman, and Card’s (2010) recommendation, the full information maximum-likelihood estimation method was used in the analyses.

Finally, means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. The mean scores for suppression, forbearance, and distress disclosure were comparable between Chinese and European Americans but emotional self-control and interpersonal harmony were not. For emotional self-control, the mean score for Chinese (M = 3.76 and SD = 0.78) was significantly higher than that for European Americans (M = 3.21 and SD = 0.90), t(449) = 6.76, p < .001. Cohen’s d of 0.64 indicated a medium effect. However, for interpersonal harmony, the mean score for Chinese (M = 3.60 and SD = 0.42) was significantly lower than that for European Americans (M = 3.75 and SD = 0.41), t(449) = −3.87, p < .001. Cohen’s d of 0.37 indicated a small effect. Furthermore, as seen in Table 2, for Chinese, interpersonal harmony was significantly and positively associated with suppression, forbearance, and emotional self-control, as well as significantly and negatively associated with distress disclosure. Conversely, for European Americans, interpersonal harmony was not significantly associated with any of these variables (i.e., suppression, forbearance, distress disclosure, and emotional self-control).

### Examining Cultural Group as a Moderator

#### Suppression
A multiple-group SEM approach was conducted to examine the interaction effect. The factor loadings for the latent variable of suppression and interpersonal harmony were constrained to be equal across two groups. The freely estimated model (i.e., the path was freely estimated) and the equal model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Scaled χ²</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>RMSEA (CI)</th>
<th>Δχ²(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03 [.00, .11]</td>
<td>9.11 (4)</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>Equal model</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.79</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06 [.00, .11]</td>
<td>9.11 (4)</td>
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<td><strong>Forbearance</strong></td>
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<td>Freely estimated</td>
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<td>9.84</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>.07 [.02, .14]</td>
<td>9.08 (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal model</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.07 [.03, .12]</td>
<td>9.08 (4)</td>
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<td><strong>Distress disclosure</strong></td>
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<td>.35</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>.02 [.00, .11]</td>
<td>3.47 (4)</td>
<td>.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal model</td>
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<td>.42</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01 [.00, .08]</td>
<td>3.47 (4)</td>
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<td>Freely estimated</td>
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<td>11.84</td>
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<td>.98</td>
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<td>5.96 (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freely estimated</td>
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<td>.44</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00 [.00, .10]</td>
<td>2.22 (4)</td>
<td>.70</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00 [.00, .06]</td>
<td>2.22 (4)</td>
<td>.70</td>
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Note. N = 451. For the freely estimated model, the factor loadings are freely estimated; for the equal model, factor loadings are constrained to be equal. Criteria for acceptable fit have ranged from CFI ≥ .90 and SRMR and RMSEA ≤ .10 to the more conservative criteria of CFI ≥ .95, SRMR ≤ .08, and RMSEA ≤ .06 (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999). CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CI = 90% confidence interval.

* Alphas based on four parcels of distress disclosure are .94 for Chinese and .94 for European Americans. Alphas based on four parcels of emotional self-control are .71 for Chinese and .84 for European Americans. Alphas based on 4 parcels of interpersonal harmony are .78 for Chinese and .77 for European Americans.
(i.e., the path was constrained to be equal) were conducted to examine whether the path from suppression to interpersonal harmony would be significantly different between Chinese and European Americans. A corrected chi-square difference test between these two models was used to examine whether the path was significantly different.

The result for the freely estimated model was scaled $\chi^2(46, N = 451) = 58.43, p = .01, \text{CFI} = .98, \text{RMSEA} = .04, 90\% \text{ CI} [.00, .06]$, $\text{SRMR} = .05$, and the equal model was scaled $\chi^2(47, N = 451) = 63.89, p = .05, \text{CFI} = .98, \text{RMSEA} = .04, 90\% \text{ CI} [.00, .06]$, $\text{SRMR} = .06$. The significant result from the chi-square difference test, $\Delta \chi^2(1, N = 451) = 5.20, p = .02$, indicated that the path coefficient was significantly stronger for Chinese than for European Americans. Specifically, the path coefficient from suppression to interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for Chinese ($b = 0.33, \beta = .31, p < .001$) but not significant for European Americans ($b = 0.02, \beta = .02, p = .77$).

**Forbearance.** The same interaction pattern was found. The result for the freely estimated model was scaled $\chi^2(46, N = 451) = 68.28, p = .005, \text{CFI} = .97, \text{RMSEA} = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [.02, .07]$, $\text{SRMR} = .07$, and the equal model was scaled $\chi^2(47, N = 451) = 76.33, p = .004, \text{CFI} = .96, \text{RMSEA} = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [.03, .07]$, $\text{SRMR} = .08$. The significant result from the chi-square difference test between these two models, $\Delta \chi^2(1, N = 451) = 11.09, p < .001$, indicated that the path coefficient was significantly different between the two cultural groups. Specifically, the path coefficient from forbearance to interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for Chinese ($b = 0.28, \beta = .27, p = .003$) but was not significant for European Americans ($b = -0.08, \beta = -.08, p = .31$).

**Distress disclosure.** The same result pattern was also found. The result for the freely estimated model was scaled $\chi^2(46, N = 451) = 45.05, p = .51, \text{CFI} = 1.00, \text{RMSEA} = .02, 90\% \text{ CI} [.00, .04]$, $\text{SRMR} = .03$, and the equal model was scaled $\chi^2(47, N = 451) = 49.48, p = .37, \text{CFI} = 1.00, \text{RMSEA} = .02, 90\% \text{ CI} [.00, .05]$, $\text{SRMR} = .06$. The significant result from the chi-square difference test between these two models, $\Delta \chi^2(1, N = 451) = 4.66, p = .03$, showed that the path coefficient was significantly different across the two cultural groups. To be precise, the path coefficient from distress disclosure to interpersonal harmony was significantly negative for Chinese ($b = -0.21, \beta = -.21, p = .008$) but not significant for European Americans ($b = 0.04, \beta = .04, p = .64$).

**Examining Emotional Self-Control as a Moderator**

Furthermore, a latent variable interaction analysis in Mplus was conducted. According to Marsh, Wen, and Hau’s (2004) recommendation, an unconstrained four-match approach was used to examine the interaction effects of emotional self-control and suppression (forbearance or emotional self-control) on interpersonal harmony. We followed their suggestions of (a) all multiple indicators should be used and (b) each multiple indicator should be used only once in the formation of the multiple indicators of the latent variable interaction factor. In our example, we had four indicators for suppression (i.e., $S1$, $S2$, $S3$, and $S4$) and four parcels for emotional self-control (i.e., $E1$, $E2$, $E3$, and $E4$). Thus, we created four interaction indicators (i.e., $S1 \times E1$, $S2 \times E2$, $S3 \times E3$, and $S4 \times E4$) for the latent variable interaction factor. The same formation was applied to the latent variable interaction factor for Forbearance × Emotional Self-Control and the latent variable interaction factor for Distress Disclosure × Emotional Self-Control.

**Suppression.** The results for suppression indicated a reasonable good fit, scaled $\chi^2(98, N = 451) = 184.26, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .94, \text{RMSEA} = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [.03, .05]$. A significant interaction of suppression with emotional self-control on interpersonal harmony was found ($b = 0.25, p = .02$). The simple effect analysis indicated that the association between suppression and interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for those with stronger emotional self-control ($b = 0.62, p < .001$), but was not significant for those with weaker emotional self-control ($b = 0.12, p = .60$).

**Forbearance.** The results for forbearance also indicated a reasonably good fit, scaled $\chi^2(98, N = 451) = 165.01, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .95, \text{RMSEA} = .04, 90\% \text{ CI} [.03, .05]$. A significant interaction of forbearance with emotional self-control on interpersonal harmony was also found ($b = 0.16, p = .01$). The simple effect analysis indicated an interaction pattern similar to...
that reported for suppression. Specifically, the association between forbearance and interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for those with stronger emotional self-control \((b = 0.23, p < .001)\) but was not significant for those with weaker emotional self-control \((b = -0.10, p = .47)\).

**Distress disclosure.** Similarly, the results for distress disclosure showed a reasonably good fit, scaled \(\chi^2(98, N = 451) = 152.31, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .98, \text{SRMR} = .05, \text{RMSEA} = .04, 90\% \text{CI [.02, .05]}\). A significant interaction of distress disclosure with emotional self-control on interpersonal harmony was also found \((b = -0.23, p = .008)\). The simple effect analysis indicated that the association between distress disclosure and interpersonal harmony was significantly negative for those with stronger emotional self-control \((b = -0.35, p = .02)\) but was not significant for those with weaker emotional self-control \((b = 0.10, p = .28)\).

**Discussion**

Overall, all three sets of hypotheses were confirmed. First, as expected, cultural group was a significant moderator for the association between suppression and interpersonal harmony. Specifically, this association was significantly positive for Chinese but not for European Americans. Likewise, a cultural value of emotional self-control was also a significant moderator for this association. Specifically, the association between suppression and interpersonal harmony was significantly positive for those with stronger endorsement of self-control but not for those with weaker endorsement of emotional self-control. Second, constructs that were similar to (i.e., forbearance) and opposite to (i.e., distress disclosure) suppression were replicated in the above results. Thus, our results are somewhat robust because the pattern of the moderation results was the same whether we used cultural group or cultural value as a moderator. Likewise, the pattern of the moderation was also the same whether a construct that was similar to (i.e., forbearance) or opposite to (i.e., distress disclosure) suppression was examined.

There are at least three important contributions from our results to advance the literature on suppression and social outcomes. First, theoretically, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that individuals from Eastern cultures (e.g., Chinese) would value emotional suppression for interpersonal harmony; individuals from Western cultures may not necessarily hold this value. To our knowledge, this theoretical notion (i.e., suppression is for interpersonal harmony) has never been tested empirically. Hence, our study is the first to show this effect. Consistent with existing theories on culture and suppression, these findings underscore the importance of considering cultural factors to understand the cultural meaning behind emotional suppression.

Second, empirically, our results advance literature to show suppression to be associated with the positive social goal of interpersonal harmony. These findings are important because results from previous studies have linked suppression to poorer social functioning, including lower social support, relationship satisfaction, and interpersonal closeness (e.g., Gross & John, 2003; Srivastava et al., 2009). However, most previous empirical studies on suppression have not taken a cultural perspective and have instead focused on predominantly Western samples. As Butler et al. (2007) noted, depending on the specific cultural context, suppression can be tied to positive, rather than negative, social goals. Our results empirically demonstrated that suppression was linked to the positive social goal of interpersonal harmony among Chinese but not European Americans. Moreover, Butler et al. made a groundbreaking contribution by showing that cultural values moderated the link of suppression with self-protective social goals. However, no empirical studies have expanded this line of research to prosocial goals. Our study advances the literature by showing that cultural group and value act as moderators for the association between suppression and interpersonal harmony (i.e., a prosocial goal).

Third, methodologically, this study is one of few studies that expanded their samples to outside the United States in the research on suppression and outcomes. Some scholars have argued that studies of ethnic groups within the United States do not permit strong inferences about cultural differences due to varying levels of acculturation (e.g., Phinney, 1996). Butler et al. (2007) also encouraged researchers to expand their samples beyond the United States to, for example, Chinese in Asian countries. Thus far, there have been a couple of published cross-cultural studies on suppression (e.g., Soto et al., 2011; Su et al., 2013), but they have focused on psychological, rather than social, outcomes. The present study advances this line of studies to not only focus on social outcomes but also examine the moderation effects of cultural group and value. Research in this area is important to contribute to multicultural counseling. In particular, the Asian population grew faster than any other race group in the United States between 2000 and 2010, and the Chinese population was the largest Asian group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Likewise, Chinese international students increased about 190% from 2007 to 2012 (Institute of International Education, 2012). Practitioners need to pay attention to the cultural strengths of suppression to maintain interpersonal harmony because suppression in particular has been viewed as unhealthy in Western culture in general and in counseling theories specifically.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Some limitations deserve attention. First, this is a cross-sectional study. Due to the nature of the correlation data, we cannot determine a cause–effect relationship. For example, concerning the association between emotional suppression and interpersonal harmony, they may impact each other. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine this possibility. Second, the current study is limited to self-reported data. Thus, we do not know whether our results can be replicated if other types of data (e.g., observational data) are collected. Third, the current study is limited to a comparison between Chinese and European Americans. It is still unknown whether this result applies to different Asian groups. Therefore, the research sample can be extended to other Asian groups such as Japanese, Koreans, or South Asians (who share the common Asian cultural value of emotional self-control) to see whether the results would be the same.

There are three future research directions. First, Chiang (2012) indicated that Chinese individuals have different reasons for suppressing positive and negative emotions. Future studies can examine whether the reasons behind suppressing positive and negative emotions are different between Chinese and European Americans. Moreover, future studies can examine the association between
suppression of positive emotion and positive social goals, as well as the association between suppression of negative emotion and positive social goals. Next, future studies can explore other social contexts as moderators. For example, whether individuals will suppress their emotion may depend on relationship quality or on the extent to which the relationship is hierarchical in nature (Chiang, 2012). Moreover, in Chinese culture, the critical question is not whether it is generally better to suppress or express emotion. Rather, the question is when, where, and with whom it is advantageous to suppress rather than express one’s emotions. Finally, previous studies have documented gender or age differences in suppression and expression. For example, Durik et al. (2006) indicated that norms concerning emotional expression and gender roles are different across ethnicities. Nolen-Hoeksema and Aldao (2011) showed that the use of suppression increased with age for women but not for men. So, future studies might explore whether the current results vary across different gender or age groups.

Counseling Implications

There are some implications for counseling theories, training, and practice. First, most Western counseling theories emphasize emotional expression and assume that emotional expression is a healthy affect regulation strategy and that emotional suppression is unhealthy or dysfunctional. However, Asian clients who come to therapy may view suppression as necessary to maintain interpersonal harmony. The current study provides evidence that emotional suppression relates to a positive social goal (i.e., interpersonal harmony) for Chinese but not European Americans. When Asian clients enter therapy with interpersonal conflicts as their presenting concern, practitioners should take into consideration cultural differences related to emotional expression. For example, if counselors do not consider cultural differences, a typical intervention would be to encourage Asian clients to fully express emotions to others to enhance interpersonal relationships. In contrast, if cultural differences are considered, in the Asian culture, emotional suppression (instead of emotional expression) serves as a functional coping strategy toward a positive social goal (i.e., maintaining interpersonal harmony).

Second, encouraging Asian clients to completely express their emotions to others may not be congruent with Asian clients’ cultural values and life experience. As a result, emotional expression may conflict with their collectivistic needs to maintain interpersonal harmony. Practitioners can express their understanding of the importance of maintaining interpersonal harmony to their Asian clients and acknowledge clients’ desire to suppress their emotions for positive relational reasons. Moreover, it may depend on when, where, and with whom they feel comfortable suppressing or expressing their emotions (Chiang, 2012). Practitioners can help clients to differentiate emotional regulation strategies under different conditions and increase their flexibility regarding when, where, and with whom to suppress their emotions.

Third, practitioners can take great care to ensure that Asian clients feel safe discussing their emotions. If Asian clients already have a tendency to suppress negative and positive emotions in daily life, it is highly likely that they would suppress emotions in session as well. So, it might be important to reassure them that the counseling session is a safe place to express their emotions. Practitioners may even take some time at the offset to emphasize the importance of emotion expression in session and check with clients to see whether they suppress emotions to maintain a harmonious therapeutic relationship. If practitioners observe their clients hesitating to express intense emotions, it would be helpful to understand the reasons behind their suppression of emotions rather than view it as their being resistant or guarded.

Last, practitioners can understand that it may take Asian clients some time to get used to showing or expressing their emotions in front of a stranger (i.e., a practitioner). Practitioners and Asian clients can discuss interpersonal harmony present in the counseling room. Open discussion with Asian clients about their view of emotional suppression might also be a good place to start in addressing emotional issues. When Asian clients suppress their emotions, it might be beneficial to check whether they are attempting to maintain harmonious relationships.

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