

Ai acknowledgement

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Introduction

Culture fundamentally shapes an individual's beliefs, behavioral patterns, value orientations and everyday social interactions (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). The individualism and collectivism classification which was successively proposed and refined by classic scholars in the field including Hofstede (2001), Triandis (1995), and (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), is the most influential core analytical tool on this field. They are the ones who argue cultures differ significantly in the values that promote autonomy, social relationship and personal identity (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

The framework divides cultures into two broad cultural orientations which are individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). While this framework has gained widespread recognition, it has also faced extensive criticism which has shown four types of trends including globalization have blurred cultural boundaries and undermined the framework core assumption of a country based binary division (Oyserman et al., 2008; Schwartz, 2006). Furthermore, cultures within individual countries are highly heterogeneous and individual values are shaped to a greater degree by situational factors (Oyserman et al., 2008).

This paper critically sorts through the core evidence that underpins the existence of two cultural categories which is individualism and collectivism in contemporary societies. It sequentially evaluates past empirical studies that support the applicability of these two cultural orientations and examines the limitations of the classical analytical frameworks widely adopted in academia and argues that this dimension remains a valid framework for understanding cultural differences, which should be revised into an analytical dimension characterized by dynamic overlap rather

than a fixed set of cultural classifications.

Defining Individualism and collectivism

Individualism and collectivism are core dimensions in cross-cultural psychology, used to explain differences in social values, social relationships, and self-perception across different societies (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hofstede (2001) provided an influential framework for comparing individualism and collectivism across national cultures, while Triandis (1995) developed the psychological distinction further. The core connection of the two constructs (Gallyamova & Grigoryev, 2022) proposed their boundaries of application, stating that the two must not be regarded as fixed traits of entire populations.

The core of individualism is to encourage individuals to develop an independent identity separate from the groups they belong to while upholding values such as personal success, self-expression, and freedom of choice (Triandis, 1995). For example, in societies dominated by individualism, educational and workplace environments generally prioritize creativity, independence, and individual performance (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995).

Collectivist cultures' core values are the preservation of social relationships, the fulfillment of social obligations and the attainment of group harmony. Individuals living in such cultures typically define their sense of self through their bonds with family, friends, and communities. The interdependent self-construal put forward was developed precisely to explain the identity construction logic that prevails in the culture contexts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Further

verifies that collectivist orientation shapes individuals cooperative behaviours , levels of trust, and decision-making that prioritizes group interest (Westjohn et al., 2022).

While this binary classification framework has some explanatory power, cultural values naturally fall along multidimensional and context- dependent, and individuals within the same society may hold different orientations due to differences in their upbringing, age ,educational background, and personal experiences (Gallyamova & Grigoryev, 2022; Oyserman et al., 2008). For example, a young adult in Malaysia simultaneously pursues personal academic and career advancement while actively taking on family responsibilities and cultural obligations. Cross- cultural interactions under globalization have further led to the widespread coexistence of these two sets of values. Therefore, we should treat the two orientations as flexible cultural dimensions for understanding social behavior, rather than rigid labels that define all individuals.

Evidence for the Existence of Individualistic Cultures

Study opens by positing that individualistic culture persists in many contemporary societies. It draws on the classic definitions of Hofstede (2001) and Triandis (1995) to delineate this culture's core, addresses criticisms of ambiguous cultural boundaries, and cites recent empirical evidence demonstrating that it still exerts a profound influence on four key domains such as education, the workplace, health, and digital communication.

This study first uses organizational and workplace research as the core source of strong evidence for the cultural influence of individualism. Individualism guides workplace employees to prioritize personal achievement, career advancement, and personal responsibility, which gives rise to aligned organizational practices including performance-based rewards, merit-based

promotion, and flexible work arrangements. A COVID-19 study found that individuals living in highly individualist societies valued personal freedom more and responded differently to public health policies (Huang et al., 2022). While that study focuses on health behaviors, it confirms that individualism remains an extremely influential contemporary cultural orientation, and is by no means an outdated historical concept.

The authors of this paper argue that educational practices can serve as supporting evidence for the existence of individualist cultures. Education systems across the United States, Canada, Australia and the UK promote independent learning, critical thinking and personal achievement in accordance with the relevant cultural values. Educational outcomes cannot be solely attributed to culture, as economic development, government policies, and access to educational resources also play a role in student performance (Hofstede, 2001).

The influence of digital technologies and social media is taken as main evidence in studies of shifts in values in modern society. It shows how online platforms can help people to create identities, express opinions, and build personal brands. The rise of internet celebrities, digital content creators and entrepreneurs confirms that the attention given to self-expression is increasing. These behaviors align particularly well with individualist values, but their interpretation must be approached with caution. Platforms that operate across cultures cannot

distinguish whether the driving forces behind relevant behaviors stem from cultural values or the inherent design of the technology itself.

Individualism remains fully relevant to contemporary reality, and is inherently a cultural orientation with dynamic attributes. A cross-cultural study notes that individualism or collectivism is a multi-dimensional cultural orientation that adapts to evolving social contexts, and individuals' relevant levels of this orientation fluctuate alongside environmental changes (Gallyamova & Grigoryev, 2022). Similarly, based on behavioral data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, that individualism still deeply shapes people's perceptions of responsibility and continues to play an active role (Xiao, 2021).

Although past research on the cultural orientation of individualism has accumulated a large body of empirical support, it carries a core limitation in multicultural societies shaped by globalization and migration, individuals often switch between value systems, upholding individualism in workplace settings while adhering to collectivism in family contexts. As such, contemporary individualism is not a fixed social attribute, but a flexible orientation. Recent studies have not only confirmed its continued existence, but also revealed that it has grown increasingly dynamic and dependent on specific contexts.

More recently, cross-cultural research has provided further support for the flexibility of individualism and collectivism. Klein et al. (2024) studied 5.900 young people from seven countries and considered individualism and collectivism as individual differences, not as characteristics of entire nations. Their findings suggested that these cultural orientations are related to different kinds of emotion regulation, providing evidence that cultural values continue to influence psychological processes in contemporary populations. Crucially, the study also

shows variation between individuals within a society. This runs counter to the assumption that people automatically adopt the dominant cultural orientation of their nation, and instead suggests that at the individual level individualism and collectivism may co-exist. As such, contemporary evidence attests to the continued relevance of individualistic and collectivistic orientations, but also to the fact that their expression is subject to individual and cultural contexts (Klein et al., 2024).

Evidence for the Existence of Collectivistic Cultures

Society's continuous globalization and cultural exchanges, there is a large amount of evidence that collectivist cultures still exist in today's society. It defined their core as emphasizing interdependence, cooperation, group harmony, and the priority of collective goals (Triandis, 1995). These cultures have taken root in a wide range of settings across many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. While they have undergone evolution, recent research still confirms their core social influence.

Collectivist cultures place a high value on familial and social relationships. In collectivist cultures, people generally define themselves in terms of social relationships rather than individual achievements. In their seminal, foundational work, they argued that the interdependent self-construal is characterized by the centrality to the person's identity of maintaining harmonious relationships and fulfilling social obligations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The theory has almost practical relevance even many decades after its introduction. The study confirmed that the collectivist cultural orientation positively correlates with higher interpersonal trust and stronger cooperative behaviors, confirming that these values continue to shape social

relationships in contemporary societies (Westjohn et al., 2022).

The influence of collectivist values can be verified through people's responses to collective challenges, and the public crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a typical context for relevant research. At the individual level, found that the more collectivist an individual's orientation is, the more willing they are to comply with COVID-19 public health measures, motivated by a sense of obligation in protecting the well-being of others (Plohl & Musil, 2021). At the societal level, found that societies with higher levels of collectivism have higher general societal support for compliance with health guidelines and acceptance of temporary restrictions on personal freedoms. Thus collective action is still a strong force in social behaviour even today, especially in situations where a collective effort is needed to solve common problems (Huang et al., 2022).

Collectivist values are widely prevalent in two kinds of settings, education and organizations. Educational institutions in East Asia value cooperation, reverence for teachers, and a tension between the collective good of the group and the individual's academic progress. Collectivist cultures are ones in which organizations rely heavily on working together, consensus and loyalty to the organization over the long term. Such practices are based on a cultural orientation to social harmony and collective responsibility. The global economic competition has pushed many of these groups into individual performance oriented systems but collectivist values are still held and often exist side by side with individualistic practices.

The existing research evidence supporting collectivist culture urgently calls for critical interpretation: rapid urbanization, migration and digital communication are transforming traditional collectivist societies. Local younger generations maintain strong family ties, yet also

value personal autonomy, career development, and self-expression. point out that these two sets of values are multi-dimensional constructs that vary both across societies and within the same society, and can never be summed up by a single national label (Gallyamova & Grigoryev, 2022).

A recent empirical study points out that collectivist culture still exists in contemporary society. Its core values, including family commitment, cooperation, social responsibility, and collective well-being, continue to shape people's behaviors in many parts of the world to this day. However, collectivism is not a fixed, uniform stereotypical feature. It is a dynamic orientation that can adapt to socioeconomic and technological conditions and to coexist with individualism. It is not a set of categories, but a model of culture in constant change.

Conclusion

Sufficient existing research evidence shows that the two classic cultural types of individualism and collectivism still coexist in contemporary society. Recent relevant studies indicate that these two cultures continue to influence various behaviors across the fields of education, the workplace, social relationships, cooperation, and decision-making. Globalization, immigration, technological progress, and multiculturalism are reshaping their boundaries, rendering their original dividing lines no longer clear.

Although the individualism-collectivism cultural analysis framework has limitations, such as oversimplifying cultural diversity and ignoring internal cultural differences within a single society, the authors of this paper suggest that it is still an effective means of comprehending

macro-level cultural differences. In using this framework we need to avoid the misuse of absolute binary categorization and recognize the complexity and evolutionary nature of culture.

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