

How Taiwanese women view the function of positive role models of flourishing: a qualitative
interview study

Master thesis

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Abstract

Within the growing field of positive psychology, most studies were conducted in Western countries resulting in the neglect of collectivistic perspectives of mental well-being. Moreover, little attention has been brought to studies concerning the function of (positive) role models. In order to better understand the connection between role models and mental well-being, this study focused on the function of positive role models of flourishing from collectivistic perspectives. A multiple case study design with unstructured interviews was conducted with four Taiwanese women between the ages of 25 to 29 years. During the interviews the role models' influence on the interviewees' concepts of flourishing were discussed. The interviews were analysed by the use of the cross-case method. One major finding was that the role models of the interviewees were of positive nature and acted as a motivational and mostly advisory force to the interviewees. With regard to the definition of flourishing, the individualistic dimensions of Keyes' (2005) framework are emotional and psychological well-being. Within the current study, they were emphasised more than the collectivistic dimension social well-being (Keyes, 2005) by the interviewees. Therefore, the interviewees' perspectives seemed to be a mixture of both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. This intertwining of perspectives can be explained by the Western-oriented attitudes of the interviewees and the Western influence of Taiwan. Future research should elaborate on the mixture of cultural perspectives of different samples among Taiwanese people in order to discover whether the intertwining holds true for different groups of the society.

Key words: individualism, collectivism, cultural perspective, flourishing, role models, Taiwan, multiple case study, cross-case method

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

How Taiwanese women view the function of positive role models of flourishing

In the field of intercultural studies, references to the concepts of collectivism and individualism are often made. Collectivism and individualism are shaped by components of subjective cultures such as *inter alia* moral concepts, standards, shared beliefs, and the same language (Triandis, 1995). The main theme within individualistic cultures is autonomy (Triandis, 1995), resulting in the individual's need for independence (Lechuga, 2012) and the prioritisation of oneself and one's close family members (Knoop & Fave, 2012). Within collectivistic cultures, the main topic is connection (Triandis, 1995), resulting in the individual's need for interdependence and the urge to fit in (Lechuga, 2012). Emphasis is set on relationships within one's society and different communities (Knoop & Fave, 2012). Next to different cultural cognitions (Triandis, 1995), individualism and collectivism can further be categorised into different structures.

Pinto (2000) categorised elementary differences among cultures based on their principles of interaction and communication. Thereby, he established a cultural continuum, with the Fine-mesh structure (F-structure) of a culture on the one end, the Mixed structure (M-structure) in-between, and the Coarse-mesh structure (C-structure) on the other end (Pinto, 2000). The F-structure constitutes group-oriented cultures with strong rules and obligations. In accordance with Maslow's (1998) pyramid of basic human needs, Pinto (2000) discovered that courtesy, valued behaviour, esteem of others and the avoidance of the loss of prestige are the most basic needs among people from the F-structured cultures. The C-structure represents rather general, loose rules and principles. Their basic needs are the desire for wealth, membership of a social community, self-respect and inventiveness (Pinto, 2000). Consequently, the principles of F-structured cultures are collectivistic cultures alike, whereas the principles of the C-structured cultures are similar to individualistic cultures. The M-structure is a mixture of characteristics of both cultures.

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

Lockwood, Marshall, & Sadler (2005) also found a difference between individualistic/C-structured and collectivistic/F-structured people concerning the influence of role models. They conducted a cross-sectional study wherein participants from both East Asian (collectivistic states) and Western European (individualistic states) cultures were asked to rate how much they were motivated by both six positive and six negative role models. A positive role model is a person who accomplishes something with great success and is able to give others a strong impetus to strive for the same (Lockwood et al., 2005). For example, a person who was studying the same programme as the participant and now has a successful career. A negative role model is a person who failed in a situation and constitutes an example of unwanted circumstances that should be avoided. For instance, a person who studied the same programme but did not get any job offered so far. The outcome of the study showed that East Asian individuals were more motivated by negative role models to avoid unwanted situations, whereas Western European individuals were more motivated by positive role models to achieve wanted circumstances (Lockwood et al., 2005). Therefore, Lockwood et al. (2005) concluded that the motivation and preference of role models differ among individualistic/C-structured cultures and collectivistic/F-structured cultures.

Even though the mentioned researchers examined these different cultural approaches, especially in the field of psychology studies were often conducted among individualistic cultures which hold a rather independent and self-focused perspective (Kristjansson, 2010). This focus is called *conceptual individualism* and is regarded to be a bias since it neglects the norms, opinions, and perspectives of collectivistic cultures. According to Richardson and Guignon (2008), this bias is also apparent in positive psychology, which sets its focus on mental well-being, the quality of life and one's resources (Seligman, 2010). As a result of the predominantly individualistic emphasis, little is known yet about *collectivistic* concepts of mental well-being, joy and the quality of life (Becker & Marecek, 2008). In order to decrease

the gap between the amount of research on individualistic and collectivistic cultural factors and to avoid the bias of conceptual individualism, several researchers suggested putting more emphasis on studies within positive psychology about the collectivistic cultural perspective of mental well-being (Knoop & Fave, 2012; Hendriks et al., 2019). Moreover, by conducting more research in the collectivistic perspective, an added benefit might be that the positive psychological treatment for interdependent people could be improved, which might lead to improved mental well-being overall.

Moreover, the core aim of positive psychology is to enhance mental well-being up to the state of flourishing. A flourishing person is an individual who scores high on emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). The emotional well-being of an individual includes the dimensions *experience of positive emotions*, which can be considered as *happiness* (Keyes, 2005). *Life satisfaction* further belongs to emotional well-being (Keyes, 2005). Psychological well-being includes six different dimensions which focus on a positive attitude about oneself (*self-acceptance*), *positive relations with others*, the feeling of continued development (*personal growth*), to hold a *purpose in life*, the ability to manage one's needs (*environmental mastery*), and *autonomy* (Ryff & Keyes, 1999). The construct of social well-being focuses on five dimensions; on the curiosity for a meaningful society (*social coherence*), a positive and accepting attitude concerning human differences (*social acceptance*), a positive attitude concerning a group's potential to grow (*social actualisation*), the feeling of being valued for one's actions by the society (*social contribution*), and the feeling of belongingness to and support from a social group (*social integration*) (Ryff & Keyes, 1999). This general framework of flourishing originates from an individualistic perspective, whereas other studies specify the collectivistic perspectives with regard to mental well-being. Examples for these studies will be outlined in the following.

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

Pflug (2009) conducted a qualitative study in which he asked individualistic German and collectivistic South African participants to write an essay about the question “What is happiness to you?” and analysed it thematically. In the context of Keyes’ (2005) framework, Pflug (2009) perceived “happiness” as a description of “flourishing” and not as the dimension of emotional well-being (Keyes, 2005). Pflug (2009) found a difference between both the individualistic and collectivistic perspectives, since the German participants described result-oriented and individual-oriented definitions of flourishing. The South African participants were more likely to relate the definitions to satisfaction and the importance of social relationships. Moreover, the German participants put emphasis on the role of autonomy, whereas the South African participants valued social integration in one’s group. Consequently, the individualistic participants described flourishing in terms of psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005) with the value of independence and the connection with others. On the contrary, the collectivistic participants described flourishing more likely in terms of social well-being and mixed it partly with emotional well-being in terms of satisfaction with life (Keyes, 2005).

With regard to social well-being among collectivistic people, Diener, Diener, and Diener (2009) concluded that it may be enhanced by the great value of social relationships in terms of achieving aims of the group and supporting other group members. Similarly, Lu and Gilmour (2004) found the importance of social well-being (Keyes, 2005) among East Asian people concerning mental well-being. They compared the views on flourishing of North American and East Asian individuals in a qualitative study and found a difference among the individualistic and collectivistic perspectives. The North American participants focused on the pursuit of happiness and one’s own responsibility to flourish. On the contrary, the East Asian participants mentioned their duties within a collective, the harmony among communities’ members, and the achievement of the group’s welfare as main factors of happiness. Hence, to adapt the definition to the concept of flourishing (Keyes, 2005), the

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

North American participants put emphasis on psychological well-being in terms of autonomy and purpose in life, whereas the East Asian individuals viewed happiness mainly as a matter of social well-being.

The previous outline of the studies shows that within the collectivistic/F-structured context some researchers have examined the function of role models and the definition of mental well-being from the perspective of East Asian people. A majority of these studies compared the individualistic and collectivistic perspectives to each other. However, the study of the perspectives of people from collectivistic cultures who are Western-oriented and might hold M-structured cultural perspectives (Pinto, 2000) has not been conducted yet. Therefore, the focus of the current study lies on the function of role models and the connection to the concept of flourishing of East Asian – more precisely Taiwanese – people, who have made experiences living in Germany.

Since flourishing is the core of positive psychology and holds a positive nature, emphasis will be made on the positive influence of role models on the concept of flourishing. Thus, the aim of the current study is to examine the positive role models of Western-oriented Taiwanese people with regard to flourishing. It is expected that participants mention aspects of *emotional* and *psychological* but mostly *social well-being*. This is based on the mentioned studies and the social-oriented nature of collectivism.

Methods

Study design

A qualitative and exploratory multiple case study design with unstructured interviews was used. The interviews were analysed with the cross-case method. Hereby, each interview is handled as a case study, resulting in the comparison of the different findings of the interviews (Ragin, 1997). Subsequently, the data can be aggregated stepwise into different topics and dimensions. This method was chosen because it facilitates the generalisation

progress of the results of the multiple cases (Ragin, 1997). Ethical approval was obtained by the ethical committee of the University of Twente (request number. 200337) with the restriction to conduct the interviews only via Skype or telephone due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Participants

Four female Taiwanese adults were recruited of which all agreed to participate. Inclusion criteria were being 18 years or older, being originally from Taiwan, and being female in order to gather information of individuals of a collectivistic culture and to avoid an influence of gender differences on the results. Moreover, all of them were supposed to have lived in a Western country already. Therefore, the sampling method was purposive. Due to a high school exchange programme, one of the participants was known to the researcher, the others were unknown as they were acquaintances of a family member of the researcher. Since face-to-face interviews were circumvented due to the Covid-19 restriction, it was possible to recruit participants who were living in both Taiwan and in Germany at the time of the data collection.

The age range of the interviewees of the sample was 25 to 29 ($M = 27.75$; $SD = 2.67$). All of them were female. Their occupations were a marketing specialist, a SEO specialist, a sales manager, and a student, who was working part-time in a restaurant. Moreover, all of them have lived in Germany for at least half a year; two of the participants were currently living and working in Germany, the other two were currently living and working in Taiwan.

Data collection

A pilot study was conducted with a lay person, who was not working in the field of psychology. Therefore, it was possible to determine whether the questions were comprehensible and whether the structure of the interview would give new insights to the field of positive psychology.

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

The data collection was carried out in April 2020. The interviews were unstructured and open-ended. The duration of the interviews varied between 27 minutes to 57 minutes, with a mean duration of 42 minutes. Three interviews were conducted via Skype; one interview was carried out via the phone due to a bad Wi-Fi connection. The participants were instructed to find a quiet room without any interruptions. Three interviews were conducted in English and one interview was conducted in German, since the participant felt more eloquent in the German language. Therefore, the interview was translated into English by the researcher and checked by a bilingual speaker. The quotes of the interview will be in English.

Before the interviews started, the purpose of the study was explained. The anonymity of personal data, the participants' right of withdrawal, and the recording of the interviews were outlined. Due to the online environment of the interviews, oral confirmed consent was obtained from the interviewees.

Subsequently, each interview started with a photo-exercise, in which the participants were asked to select a photo from their phone that meant a lot to them and to describe the reason for their choice (see Appendix A for Interview Guide). Using this exercise, aspects of flourishing and the meaning of happiness of the participants were outlined. Next, the participants were asked to describe people who resembled these flourishing characteristics so that connections between the role models and the definition of flourishing could be made. Open questions and probes such as *“Could you describe that person a little bit more, please?”* or *“What do you mean by that?”* helped to understand the interviewees' statements and the context of their answers.

Data analysis

Before analysing the data by the use of the cross-case method, each interview was transcribed verbatim. Personal information was anonymised to prevent any identification of the interviewees. Subsequently, each interview was read carefully to obtain a general

overview of the meaning of the material. For the coding process the interviews were inserted into the programme Atlas.ti 8.0 (Atlas.ti, n.d.).

The units of analysis were both words and sentences. In each interview, the statements were sorted based on their meaning and based on the aim of the study. Therefore, the approach was both inductive and deductive, since topics that emerged during reading were taken into consideration, while the concepts of flourishing were also emphasised. Accordingly, the topics of the materials were analysed according to the emergence of any patterns among them. Statements were grouped and combined into themes. The relationships among these themes were further analysed by sorting them into a table with descriptions in order to prevent any overlap of codes and to have a better overview of the topics that emerged. After analysing each interview and modifying the table of codes, each interview was checked again whether all codes were obtained, in order to establish the final coding scheme (see Table 1).

To examine interrater reliability, the final coding scheme was shared with another researcher of the University of Twente. She analysed one interview with the final coding scheme. The interrater reliability (Cohen's kappa = 0.78) can be considered to be moderate (McHugh, 2012).

Results

Overall, the interviewees seemed to be approachable and to enjoy talking about their positive role models of flourishing. The photo exercise in the beginning of the interviews was helpful in order to set a foundation for the positive focus throughout the interviews and appeared to decrease the tension of the interview environment. This atmosphere made it possible for the researcher to explore different topics out of interest and to learn more about the interviewees' culture and perspectives.

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

In the following, each interview will be outlined in more detail to understand the similarities and differences among the interviewees' perceptions of flourishing and the related role models.

Interviewee 1

The first interviewee was 29 years old and was working as a sales manager. At the time of the interview she was living in Taiwan. She had previously lived in Germany as an exchange student for half a year. The interviewee viewed her best friend as her role model of flourishing. Some years ago, that friend acted as an advisor to the interviewee by showing her that the interviewee was not acting according to her own values but was rather living a life in which she was trying to make her parents happy. Taking the pieces of advice of her role model into account, the interviewee became more aware of the urge to change her priorities. Subsequently, the function of her role model was shifting to become more motivational; the interviewee started to see how her friend was living an independent life and was motivated to act accordingly. Therefore, she changed her life rapidly by moving to another city, living on her own and putting her own decisions first.

The main topic that emerged with regard to her definition of happiness was the theme of autonomy. Being in control of things and making one's own decisions seemed to be most important to the interviewee because it made her feel independent in her own decisions; *"So, I started to make more decisions for myself. And after doing so I started to feel 'Wow, this is the real life (...)' . My life – my happiness. It is not my life – my parent's happiness."*

Conclusively, due to the advice of her role model, the interviewee started to become more autonomous and experienced more personal growth. Since she started to act according to her own values and desires, the level of self-acceptance and satisfaction in life rose as well.

The interviewee often referred to happiness as a matter of a positive mindset; *"you are what you think, right? So if I think positive about myself then I start becoming like that. It is*

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

like a magnet, something good will come to you when you're having a positive attitude". She related this attitude to the lifestyle of minimalism; by cleaning out the closet, she would feel like she was cleaning her mind as well. In this way, she would only focus on the things she necessarily needed in her life and abandoned the things that took too much place and brought too much negativity. By starting to act according to the principles of minimalism, it became easier for her to focus on the positive things in life.

With regard to relationships with others, the interviewee mentioned that she had trusting relationships and strong connections with her role model but also with other friends. The topic of being influenced by them appeared often. The influence of her friends, especially of her role model, made her adapt her perspective similar to the group's point of view. She experienced that this would help her to become part of a group; *"You have to adjust yourself to get (...) into the group quickly. So maybe that's why my thinking is changing quickly, because of the environment"*. Hence, adopting the perspectives of a group seemed to be connoted positively, since that helped her to shift into the more self-determined and positive mindset.

Interviewee 2

The second interviewee was 29 years old and worked as a marketing specialist in Germany, where she has been living for eight years. She mentioned her mother to be her role model. When describing her, the interviewee was more likely to mention motivational factors of her role model to act accordingly. Examples for that are to be loyal to friends and family members, to help others and to become financially independent; *"my mum has always been a superwoman to me because (...) she will always support me and is that kind of person who is never selfish, she doesn't concentrate on the negative but sees the positive things"*. Additionally, she stated that she was not sure whether she would be able to become as courageous as her mother, showing that the interviewee was looking up to her role model.

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

The aspects which were used to describe her mother were also the main factors of the definition of flourishing for the interviewee. She described a hierarchy of her own happiness, with her family and friends as foundation. Hence, positive relations and connections with other people were most important to her in order to flourish. In this context, the interviewee mentioned that her role model motivated her to value close relationships; *“my mum visits my grandma at least once a month and she supports her (...) I think that is why it motivates me that I should be like that and that’s why I have a good and very strong connection and bond with my sister and my very close friends”*. She also valued health to be part of this foundation as she experienced that she could not enjoy life when being sick.

When the foundation of the hierarchy of flourishing was covered, the interviewee mentioned that financial independence was considerably important for her to become happy. Her role model taught her *“that you always need to be independent, like moneywise (...) – no matter how rich your boyfriend is going to be”*. By being *“a free man”*, she would be able to travel and get the things she desired. Travelling and the curiosity for new things was therefore another factor of her pursuit of happiness. Additionally, she mentioned that autonomy in general was important for her to flourish, since she wanted to be in control of her own life. The interviewee did not want to act according to someone’s guidelines but rather be *“[my] own boss”*.

The factors of feeling comfortable within one’s skin and not having to pretend to be someone else were mentioned with regard to the importance of self-confidence when it comes to aspects of flourishing; *“you would feel very comfortable in the situation and environment (...) and you can be really who you are, you don’t need to play a role.”*

Interviewee 3

The third interviewee was 28 years old and was working as a SEO specialist. During the time of the interview she was living in Taiwan, but she had also lived in Germany as an

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

exchange student for half a year before. She chose her mother as her role model with regard to flourishing and described her as both an advisor and a motivator in terms of being less selfish and being kind to others by understanding their suffering and offering them help. During her teenage years, her role model further explained the importance of financial independence, which became an important factor of the interviewee's vision on flourishing.

The main topic that emerged with regard to the interviewee's aspects of flourishing was the social contribution by acting kind to others. It was of great importance for her *"to help those people who are in need"*, since she experienced helping poor families together with her boss during a charity event. She mentioned that she found that it was important to donate money when one is in the financial situation to share part of one's income. Next to that, she wanted to explore different ways of giving help to others as for instance helping older people or cutting someone's hair. The interviewee claimed to still be in a learning process of considering things not in the materialistic way, which was reinforced by her mother's behaviour and body of thought, since her mother set the focus on acts of kindness rather than on wealth.

Furthermore, the interviewee said *"I think happiness really depends on how you manage your mindset"*. She claimed that a focus on the positive things in life and the way of thinking positively both count as factors of feeling happy. Again, she mentioned that this view was motivated by the attitude of her role model. The interviewee further mentioned that shifting into positive thinking has helped her in the past to avoid a negative spiral of thoughts and to cope with problems.

Moreover, the interviewee claimed that she experienced personal growth due to the motivation of her role model by becoming more selfless. She connected her self-development by setting goals, which seemed to be important for her in order to feel more positive; *"I try to enhance myself because I set a goal for myself and sometimes (...) whenever I feel down or*

sad I just think that I still have a goal to achieve. And whenever I achieve the goal, it would make me quite happy because I am enhancing (...) my ability". Hence, aims in life acted as a form of motivation to develop further and to flourish by this process.

Another main topic during the interview was the matter of financial independence. Due to a talk she had with her mother in her teenage years, she shifted her way of thinking and started to earn her own pocket money, in order to become financially independent. The interviewee realised that this was a way of mastering the environment since she was not relying on somebody else and that she *"could do everything that I want and anything that makes me happy"*. Similar to interviewee 2, she mentioned that by being financially independent, she could finance things, which could bring her even more happiness in the end.

Interviewee 4

The fourth interviewee was 25 years old and was a full-time student in Germany for five years. Next to her studies, she was working as a waitress in a Taiwanese restaurant. As her role model she chose both her grandfather and grandmother. They acted only motivationally and did not give advice on how to behave or how to change. Her grandparents were working as farmers and were able to appreciate the *"simple life"*. Moreover, they were supportive of their family and seemed to be happy within their living conditions.

The main topic when it comes to the definition of flourishing of the interviewee was related to the simple lifestyle of her grandparents; *"If you really want to be happy, (...) it doesn't depend on the materialistic [things]. You should rather be satisfied with little things and you can be happy with them"*. The interviewee stated that her whole family was acting according to this vision; enjoying and being satisfied with the smaller things in life. She gave the example that taking *"a nice picture of my cat"* would be enough to experience joy.

Subsequently, she mentioned a rather reciprocal nature of help to be an aspect of flourishing because she did not want to be in need the whole time without being able to give

something back; *“I think I'm happy when I know that I can somehow help someone else or [when] someone needs me (...) I feel happy”*.

Furthermore, the interviewee mentioned that being open and curious for new things in life could bring her happiness, since she was able to discover new places and would thereby get new insights. She stated enjoying travelling especially with her friends; however, she did not believe that the connection with her friends would be pivotal in order to define flourishing. She rather enjoyed keeping the balance between being in regular contact with others and spending time alone; *“so it is good to see my friends and spend time with them but if it is too often then I do not feel particularly good either, so I feel happy when I am with friends once a week, but if it's too much, it's kind of a lot of stress for me”*.

Conclusion of the interviews

All interviewees considered the role models to have a positive influence on their own behaviours. The participants were positively motivated to adapt visions and manners of their role models and to adjust their developmental actions accordingly. Three of the four role models were considered to be in an advisory position to the interviewees and the role models had strong social ties to the interviewees (e.g., mother, best friend).

Since the interviewees differed in the topics regarding to their definitions of flourishing, not all aspects of Keyes' positive mental health framework (2005) were covered throughout every interview (see Table 1). Most prominent aspects of flourishing mentioned by the interviewees were having a positive mindset, supporting others by offering help, being independent and experiencing a personal development. The other aspects were more likely to be treated with subjective emphasis of some interviewees and thereby did not cover the perspectives of all interviewees equally. Overall, many aspects of the dimensions of Keyes' framework (2005) were described to be important ingredients of flourishing. However, only the aspects of emotional and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005) were covered fully

throughout the study, whereas social well-being (Keyes, 2005) was only mentioned partly.

These findings indicate that the overall picture of the narratives seemed to include individualistic aspects rather than collectivistic aspects of flourishing.

Coding scheme

Table 1

Description of each code with related quotes, the overview of the frequency of references among each Taiwanese interviewee (I) ($n = 4$), and the total reference frequency

| Code | Description | Quote | I1 | I2 | I3 | I4 | Total |
|-----------------------------|--|---|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Function of role models | Interviewee's role model gives advise/is advisor | "She also taught me that (...) I had to put myself in other shoes and to see things from their spot." | 7 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 19 |
| | The way of living of role model is motivating/role model as motivator | "She motivates me to always support my family and friends." | | | | | |
| <i>Emotional well-being</i> | | | | | | | |
| Positive affect/happiness | Interviewee has cheerful/positive feelings, feels alive, positive memories | "So if I think positive about myself then I start becoming like that. It is like a magnet, something good will come to you when you're having a positive attitude." | 9 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 24 |
| | Interviewee is able to enjoy small things in life (not focusing on materialistic things) | "You should rather be satisfied with little things and you can be happy with them." | | | | | |
| Life satisfaction | Interviewee is satisfied with life/situation | "I am satisfied with this decision because it changed me a lot." | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| <i>Psychological</i> | | | | | | | |

THE FUNCTION OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS OF TAIWANESE WOMEN REGARDING FLOURISHING

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| well-being | | | | | | | |
| Autonomy | Interviewee decides on her own, can make things on her own/being alone; she feels as if she is in control | “That’s what I choose for myself. That is not about my parents. So, I started to make more decisions for myself.” | 10 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 15 |
| | Interviewee focuses on herself, puts herself first, knows what she wants | “I know what I want and what I don’t want. This is the whole concept for me.” | | | | | |
| Personal growth | Interviewee experiences a development and change(s) in life, sees how she is growing; sees a learning process in own development | “It took me more than 4 years to change to who I am now.” | 7 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 14 |
| Positive relations with others | Interviewee describes experiencing warm, social connections with other people, explains aspects and values of friendship | “I took him like a little brother and my mum took him like a little son. And he visited also my mum and sister in T., so he is pretty close to us.” | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| Purpose in life | Interviewee likes to try out something new, is open for new things in life; likes to travel to new places; is curious for new things | “I just think that I still have a goal to achieve. And whenever I achieve the goal that would make me quite happy.” | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| | Interviewee has goals/ future plans | | | | | | |
| Environmental mastery | Interviewee has ability to manage own finances without any help/is financially independent | “If I am financially independent that would mean that I could do everything that I want and anything that makes me happy.” | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| Self-acceptance | Interviewee is able to act normally around others; | “You can be really who you are, you don’t | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 |

Additional information about the interviewees. I1: female, 29 years old, sales manager; I2: female, 29 years old, marketing specialist; I3: female, 28 years old, SEO specialist; I4: female, 25 years old, full-time student

Discussion

Main findings

The aim of this study was to examine the function of positive role models of Taiwanese women with regard to flourishing. The results demonstrated that all interviewees had positive role models in their lives, which acted as a motivational and mostly an advisory force. Moreover, with respect to the concept of flourishing, the interviewees put most emphasis on positive affect, social contribution, personal growth, and autonomy. Overall, all aspects of emotional and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005) were mentioned, while only three of the five social well-being aspects (Keyes, 2005) seemed to be of importance to the interviewees. Therefore, the collectivistic sample defined the concept of flourishing in a rather individualistic way (Triandis, 1995; Lechuga, 2012). This might be a crucial contribution to scientific research in the field of positive psychology in order to adapt positive psychological interventions which are in line with these perspectives among individuals from Taiwan.

One major finding of the study was that all interviewees evaluated their role models' impact as motivational which gave them the impetus to strive for the same ideals and attitudes. For most interviewees, the role model was viewed as an advisor who guided the behaviour of the interviewees affectively in terms of becoming independent or being supportive to others. Their role models were of a positive nature, since the interviewees described the way of thinking and the behaviour of their role models as desirable and wanted circumstances. Therefore, the outcome of the current study is not in line with the findings of Lockwood et al.'s (2005) cross-sectional study which concluded that people of collectivistic cultures were more likely to be motivated by negative role models. The discrepancy of the results could have several explanations. First, Lockwood et al.'s (2005) sample was larger and it not only included participants from Taiwan but also other East Asian countries, which might have been a better representative of a collectivistic perspective than in the current study. Second,

Lockwood et al. (2005) did not ask about flourishing but rather about success which was conceptualised with eagerness. The concept of flourishing is rooted in positive psychology and has a more positive connotation than success, which can be perceived more ambiguously as both positive and negative. This might result in a rather positive association of role models with regard to flourishing but a rather negative association with regard to success.

Additionally, the interviewees were asked to think of a positive role model during the interviews, which might have made them biased to avoid thinking of a negative role model in general. Hence, comparing both studies should be done with caution since the different methods might have influenced the different outcomes.

In the current study, two of the four role models were the mothers of the interviewees and the other two also had a close connection with the interviewees. By enacting the role of a motivator, the interviewees were not compelled to behave in the way of their role models, but rather displayed an intrinsic motivation to act similarly. D'Ailly (2003) found that Taiwanese students who were raised by autonomous-oriented mothers or teachers were more likely to adapt an intrinsically motivated learning attitude in school. The autonomy-oriented style concerns the way of deciding for oneself how to deal with a problem or a situation. Consequently, by giving the students more independence, their behaviour was more self-determined. Moreover, according to Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, and Ryan (1981), children who were taught by autonomy-oriented teachers were more likely to become more self-confident. Relating this to the findings of the current study, the interviewees seemed to be intrinsically motivated to expand their mindsets by the influence of their role models. The actions of their role models might have enhanced their self-determined and independent perspectives and supported a self-confident way of thinking. However, the relation between the studies has to be considered cautiously, since the participants of d'Ailly's (2003) and Deci

et al.'s (1981) studies were children and the motivation was rather focused on their learning behaviour in school than on flourishing.

The other main finding of the current study was that the interviewees indicated rather individualistic descriptions of the concept of flourishing, since all dimensions of emotional and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005) were covered in the interviews. Surprisingly, social well-being (Keyes, 2005) was mentioned only partly, even though it is considered to be of most collectivistic nature. These findings are partly in line with Lu (2001) who asked Taiwanese participants in a qualitative study to answer the question "What is happiness?" In her study she demonstrated that many individualistic aspects of the dimensions emotional and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005) such as personal growth, positive affect, purpose in life, and environmental mastery were covered in the narratives of the sample. Moreover, in Lu's (2001) study, harmony among group members was mentioned in terms of social well-being (Keyes, 2005) since it was connected with group obligations and contributions. This factor occurred in the interviews of the current study in terms of positive relations with others of the dimension psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005) because it was focused more on the individual's feelings than on the support of a social group. As a result, the current sample's perspective was more individualistic compared to Lu's (2001) sample. A reason for that might be that the course of time between the studies brought more Western influence to Taiwan, resulting in a tremendous influence of the current sample's world views. Generally, the current sample was Western-oriented since all of the interviewees have lived in Germany already, which might have led to the adaption of individualistic perceptions.

Relating this explanation to Pinto's (2000) structures, both the C- and the F-structure were covered by the codes of the interviews. Positive affect, personal growth and autonomy could be related to the C-structure since they are focused on the individual, whereas social contribution is more group-oriented. Hence, the current sample seems to belong to the M-

structure (Pinto, 2000) as they showed different perceptions and values in their interviews. This illustrates –as Pinto (2000) already noticed – that the perspectives of the C- and the F-structure can be intertwined within a cultural perspective. Thus, the current sample adapted both views due to the intercultural experiences and the interest in Western countries.

Even though the current sample showed a greater tendency towards the adaptation of individualistic perspectives, the importance of social well-being (Keyes, 2005) was still mentioned. This not only contradicts the clear separation of individualistic and collectivistic perspectives of Lu and Gilmour's (2004) samples but also shows differences to the mixture of perspectives of Pflug's (2009) narrative study. Albeit both studies found a mixture of both collectivistic and individualistic perspectives, in the current study it seems to be inverse; the individualistic perspective was covered more than the collectivistic views. This matter was already examined by Lu et al. (2001) who undertook British and Taiwanese self-construals with special regard to the subjective concepts of flourishing. They concluded that the interdependent self-construal of young, educated and urban-residential Taiwanese was influenced by the Western visions, leading to a "coexistence of contrasting self-systems" (Lu et al., 2001). This outcome might explain the low reference rate to social well-being (Keyes, 2005) in the current study. Since the interviewees were all motivated to study in a Western culture, were young and lived in urban areas, their Western influence might have shaped their views tremendously. In this way, the independent self-construals might have been nurtured and incorporated into their own matter of thought.

Strengths and limitations

The current study was the first study which examined the function of positive role models of flourishing of Taiwanese women. It gave new insights into the collectivistic perspectives of flourishing and the adaptation of Western visions. Since the study design was explorative and interviews were conducted, it was possible to dig deeper into the topics and to

gather rich information. Of particular value was the photo exercise in the beginning of the interviews, since it seemed to diminish the interviewees' tension. Consequently, they shared much information and sometimes referred back to the picture during the interviews in order to support their thoughts.

The first limitation concerns the generalisation of the study. Even though the homogenous nature of the sample made it possible to compare the interviewees, the outcomes cannot be used to generalise for the Taiwanese society. The perspectives of different age groups, men, less educated people or people who have never been in a Western country might differ tremendously.

A second limitation is the structure of the interviews. The interviewees were first asked to define flourishing in their own words and then to think of a role model who resembled their definition of flourishing. In this way, they might have been biased in attributing parts of flourishing to their role models, which they would not attribute inherently. However, this problem was not observed by the researcher during the conduction and analysis of the interviews. Moreover, since the interviewees were asked to choose *positive* role models, their focus was not directed to negative role models at all so that the interviewees were biased in the nature of the role models from the beginning. Albeit the interviewees did not mention any aspects of negative role models throughout their interviews, the results might have been different if they would not have been asked into one direction.

Additionally, new codes have emerged in the last interview, which means that saturation has not been achieved. Thereby, topics might have been neglected and stayed undiscovered. Nonetheless, the amount and extent of the codes seemed to be sufficient to set a (interim) conclusion to the study.

A fourth limitation is that the interviews have been conducted in both English and German, hence, not in the mother language of both the interviewees and the researcher (only

one person in German). Phrases might have been misinterpreted or not correctly translated, which could have had an impact on the analysis of the results. However, during the interviews the language levels seemed to be sufficient enough to use the interviews for the analysis because it was possible to hold reciprocal conversations.

Recommendations for future research and practical implications

Based on the findings and on the limitations of the study, several recommendations can be made for further research. First, further research is recommended to continue examining the nature of role models in collectivist samples with regard to flourishing and both possibly related positive and negative role models in a non-biased way. Therefore, studies should be conducted in which participants will be asked explicitly whether they hold both positive and negative role models when it comes to flourishing in order to not neglect one form of role models within the research. Additionally, one could ask only for role models without asking about the definitions of flourishing before in order to gather non-biased attributes of the role models. The function of role models could be discovered without existing attributes in mind and might lead to another conclusion than in the current study.

Since this study was explorative, it cannot be used to generalise the results to the Taiwanese society. Conclusions can only focus on the current sample and eventually on Taiwanese women, who are similarly Western-oriented. In order to understand the function of (positive) role models of flourishing within the Taiwanese society, a recommendation is to conduct more interviews with people of different age groups, all genders, different educational backgrounds, and people from different areas in order to set conclusions on a broader sample. This could be helpful to regard flourishing in Taiwan from different perspectives and could be of importance when applying positive psychology in Taiwan.

Additionally, the study showed a mixture of both collectivistic and individualistic values. Future studies should be conducted in terms of the influence of Western countries on

the perspectives of collectivistic societies. Hereby, purposive sampling could help to search for both Western-oriented Taiwanese people and Taiwanese people who are not interested in or not in contact with Western countries. By asking them about their definitions of flourishing and the related role model, the results might provide insights into whether there is a difference in perspectives due to the influence of Western countries. This would be helpful in understanding the different perspectives of Taiwanese people when it comes to the mixture of cultural perspectives and would be a contribution to the work in the field of intercultural studies.

Conclusion

The interviewees of the current study all had positive role models, which made them act according to their own values in a more independent style. Flourishing was also perceived from rather individualistic perspectives and only partly covered collectivistic views. Hence, when talking about the function of positive role models of flourishing, a mixture of both individual-oriented and group-oriented cultural factors were examined, whereas the individualistic factors were more prevalent among the interviewees. Future studies are recommended to further investigate the broader perspectives of a heterogeneous Taiwanese sample about their role models of flourishing and to examine differences and similarities of their cultural perspectives to the current Western-oriented sample.

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APPENDIX A**Interview guide**

1. I'd like you to go through your picture on your phone and search for a picture that is meaningful for you.

- Probe: It does not matter whether you took it or whether you are in the picture, it should be a picture which you like to look at and which gives you a good feeling.

2. Please describe the picture to me.

- Probe: Can you tell me more about the person? When was it taken? Why did you chose this picture specifically?

3. You mentioned Would you call these things factors of happiness? What is happiness to you?

- Probe: Can you explain that a bit more please? What do you mean by ... ? Is there anything else you think of when you want to define happiness?

4. Now you described your own definition of happiness to me. Is there a person you know who might resemble these characteristics of happiness?

- Probe: Who is the person? What is he/she doing? How is he/she living a happy life?

5. Does the person motivate you somehow in the way you live? If yes, how?

- Probe: Could you explain that a little bit more, please? Are there other motivational factors?

6. Is there anything else you'd like to add which you think is still important to mention?

7. Do you have any questions?