Gain face, but lose happiness? It depends on how much money you have

Xin-an Zhang,¹ Peng Tian¹ and Nicholas Grigoriou²
¹School of Management, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China, and ²Monash College, Guangzhou, China

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of face consciousness on happiness and the moderating role of financial situation on this relationship. We first examined our hypotheses in study 1 in a particular setting of consumption, and replicated our findings in study 2 in a more generalized setting of interpersonal situations. The two studies produced essentially consistent results. We found individuals high on face consciousness tend to be less happy, and the negative association between face consciousness and happiness is ameliorated by their financial situation. These results revealed the importance of face consciousness as an individual difference in predicting happiness. The implications of these findings for future research are discussed.

Key words: face consciousness, financial situation, happiness, subjective well-being.

Introduction

People in every society have the desire for a favourable social image. This social motive is defined by the concept of ‘face’ in Confucian society, which plays a critical role in interpersonal interaction. The Chinese writer Lin Yu-Tang described the role of face in Chinese society as ‘the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated’ (Hu, 1944, p. 867). An old Chinese saying similarly describes the importance of face by stating: ‘a man needs his face, just like a tree needs its bark’. While individuals who gain enough face are usually seen as successful, those who fail to maintain a minimal level of face might experience serious consequences, which could even lead to suicide (Ho, 1976). The pursuit of face is often the core of many Chinese people’s life (Bond & Lee, 1981; Ho; Hu; Hwang, 1987).

Given the fact that face is one of the most important life goals for Chinese people, it naturally raises the question of whether the pursuit of face obstructs or facilitates their pursuit of happiness, since prior research has consistently demonstrated that happiness, or subjective well-being (SWB), is related to what people pursue in their life (Emmons, 1986; Headey, 2008; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). It has been indicated that certain kinds of life goals, such as commitment to family and friends, and social or political involvement, can promote happiness, while some other life goal, such as material gains, are detrimental to happiness (Headey, 2008). In the present study, we conceptualize face consciousness as an individual-difference variable that refers to the extent to which an individual values face and takes it as an important life goal to pursue, that is, individuals with strong face consciousness are more likely to be motivated to enhance, to maintain, or to avoid losing face in relation to significant others in their social life (Bao, Zhou, & Su, 2003; Chan, Wan, & Sin, 2007, 2009). Based on this conceptualization, we examine the association between face consciousness and happiness. We further propose that this association could depend on individuals’ financial situations, such that possessing enough money allows individuals with high level of face consciousness to become happier, since money is an all-purpose social resource that can be used in exchange for face. Two separate investigations – one, in particular, in consumption setting, and the other, in general, in interpersonal situations – were conducted to examine these hypotheses.

The study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). To our knowledge, this is the first study in the field of psychology to examine happiness from the perspective of face as one of the most popular concepts in Asian Confucian society. The results contribute not only to research that links individual-difference variables and SWB (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003), but also to the emerging research field of indigenous psychology (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006), since face is the key to explaining much of the complexity of social interactions in Asian societies (Kim & Nam, 1998). By examining the joint effects of face consciousness and financial situation on both cognitive and emotional components of happiness, the study suggests that for individuals with high levels of aspirations to gain or maintain their face, money, or financial things would be used as a more powerful resource in exchange for happiness.
**Face and happiness**

Face is an indigenous concept deeply rooted in the Chinese Confucian culture and predominates in regulating interpersonal behaviour in the East Asia (Hwang, 1987, 2000; Leung & Chan, 2003). Researchers have long recognized the importance of face in understanding East Asian social culture. Extant literature has observed face from a number of different perspectives, including face and ‘guanxi’ (Park & Luo, 2001), face as a source of business advantage in China (Tsang, 1993), face as a negotiation tool (Brunner, Chen, Sun, & Zhou, 1990), and face as a means of conflict resolution (Tardif, 1998; Tjosvold, Hui, & Sun, 2004).

There are two distinct types of meanings for the word ‘face’ in the Chinese language (Hu, 1944). The social meaning of face ['mian' (面)] refers to a function of one’s social standing for the prestige and honour that accrues for a person as the result of success and possibly ostentatious behaviour before others (Bond & Lee, 1981), whereas the moral meaning of face, ‘lian’ (脸) represents the confidence of society in the integrity of the ego’s ‘moral character’ (Hu, p. 45). Following a review of empirical studies on social incidents that induce a feeling of gaining or losing face, Hwang (2006) concluded that the moral aspect of face is, in general, much more basic and necessary for most people with Confucian values.

The universality of face was argued by Goffman (1956) as being based on the need to avoid, what he terms, ‘fluster’ in social interactions. To keep social interactions running smoothly and effectively, people involved in interactions are required to convey minimally-acceptable public images of themselves, and likewise, assist other people in maintaining their social identities as well. At the conceptual level, the Western counterpart of face, either described as ‘an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes’ (Goffman, 1955, p. 213), or as ‘a claimed sense of favourable social self-worth that a person wants others to have of her or him’ (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, p. 187), is more close to the social aspect of the Chinese concept of face.

Although there might be considerable variation among the conceptualization of what constitutes face and the rules governing face behaviour, people’s concern for face is invariant (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Goffman, 1959; Ho, 1976). People in all societies might have experienced the feeling of gaining or losing face because of positive or negative social evaluations, and they have to show a regard to face if they do not want to declare their social bankruptcy (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Thus, face consciousness reflects the desire that people want to enhance, maintain, or protect their face as to present themselves in a favourable way in social encounters (Bao et al., 2003; Chan et al., 2007, 2009).

**Face and happiness**

We propose that the pursuit of face could result in loss of happiness because individuals high on face consciousness have an excessive concern with the impression they make on others (Chan et al., 2009; Ho, 1976; Joy, 2001; Kim & Nam, 1998), which is typically accompanied by a low level of psychological well-being (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Emmons, 1991; Kasser & Kasser, 2001; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003). The negative relationship between concern with impressing others and happiness has been reliably demonstrated across various operationalizations of happiness (Leary, 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). For instance, one might experience social anxiety when one desires to make a particular impression on others, but at the same time, doubt if he/she can successfully do so (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). In addition, when one believes that he/she has been perceived in undesirable ways by others, he/she might experience decreased self-esteem and increased depression (Leary). The negative association between an excessive concern over one’s image and happiness has been particularly evidenced when the image concern induces materialistic thoughts at the same time, because this concern could distract people from other meaningful activities of life and overly concentrate their attention on gaining or protecting their face through showing off possessions or buying luxury goods (Christopher & Schlenker; Srivastava, Locke, & Bartol, 2001).

Another reason that individuals high on face consciousness might be at the risk of suffering a low level of happiness is because they often have a strong desire to avoid potentially negative evaluations that could result in loss of face, thus they are more likely to place themselves under the stress of living up to social expectations or requirements (Ho, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). For example, Schlenker and Weigold (1990) reported that a fear of negative evaluation is negatively associated with self-esteem and is positively associated with social anxiety and shyness. Similarly, Mak and Chen (2006) found that face-protecting behaviour, as assessed by Zane and Yeh’s (2002) Loss of Face Questionnaire, is a significant predictor of psychological distress for Chinese Americans. Taking together the earlier-mentioned discussions, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Face consciousness is negatively related to SWB.

**Interactive effect of face consciousness and financial situation on happiness**

To fully investigate the effect of face consciousness on happiness, we further propose that an interaction of face consciousness and financial situation exists in predicting happiness. In particular, we propose that financial situation,
which refers to how much money an individual can use to deal with various life requirements, will mitigate the relationship between face consciousness and happiness, such that, for individuals who are becoming financially better off, the negative effect of face consciousness on happiness might be reduced to a lesser extent or even in an inverse direction.

Financial situation is relevant to the effect of face consciousness on happiness because it is a critical resource that can be used in satisfying individuals’ desire for face (Ho, 1976; Richins, 1994; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Zhou, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2009). The exchange of financial matters for face or similar things, like social status, can be seen from consumer-learning literature. For instance, Belk, Bahn, and Mayer (1982) found individuals learn most consumption decoding skills during their time at grade school, and after that, they perceive the acquisition of some kinds of products or brands of goods as instrument to successful social role enactment; that means that one might be judged by others, and judge others, through consumption that depends primarily on their own financial situation. Further, research on the effect of wealth on the impression formation process has consistently revealed that individuals with better financial situations are perceived more positively in certain situations (Christopher & Jones, 2004; Christopher & Schlenker, 2000; Dittmar, 1992; Dittmar & Pepper, 1994). For example, affluent individuals are usually seen as having more personal ability, more sophisticated qualities, and a more desirable lifestyle than non-affluent ones (Christopher & Schlenker), no matter whether they acquire wealth through external means (e.g. inheritance) or internal means (e.g. entrepreneurial success) (Christopher et al., 2005b).

It has also been suggested that financial situation represents a primary resource through which individuals can claim face before others, since face can be described in quantitative terms. To increase one’s face, an individual has to demonstrate social performance beyond others’ expectations about him/her. To avoid losing face, an individual also has to maintain his/her social performance above a level considered acceptable (Ho, 1976). Given the exchangeability of financial situation to face in social activities, we can infer that managing one’s face becomes a less difficult job for rich individuals, whereas a more difficult job for individuals who are in financial hardship. For example, being rich can prevent individuals from difficult life circumstances, such as being not able to meet day-to-day basic needs, and then help them avoid losing face (Adler & Snibbe, 2003). Further, one can also gain face by spending money on luxury goods to present a wealthy appearance before others (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

If financial situation influences one’s capability to manage his or her face, the desire for face should be easier to satisfy for rich individuals than for poor individuals. Thus, we can expect rich individuals will derive a higher level of happiness from the satisfaction of their face desire than poor individuals will, since perceived desire satisfaction contributes to happiness (Crawford Solberg, Diener, Wirtz, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002; Plagnol & Easterlin, 2008). In addition to this intrapersonal process, a parallel interpersonal process that makes rich individuals feel happier can be expected. That is, in today’s materialistic world, being rich is usually seen by other people as an important indicator of personal success (Richins, 1994; Richins & Dawson, 1992), and the social evaluation for rich individuals is often more desirable than that for poor individuals (Christopher & Jones, 2004; Christopher & Schlenker, 2000; Dittmar, 1992; Dittmar & Pepper, 1994). The discrepancy in feedback about rich and poor individuals’ social performance might result in rich individuals feeling better about themselves, thus making rich individuals happier than their poor counterparts.

The theoretical argument for the interactive effect of face and financial situation can also be based on the value-as-a-moderator theory regarding the interacting effects of value priorities with resources or activities in predicting happiness (Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999). The value-as-a-moderator theory proposes that people gain a sense of happiness out of specific life outcomes or resources congruent with their values. For example, individuals with high power-orientation values should gain more happiness out of power-related activities, such as making a lot of money or achieving high status than those with low power-orientation values. In support of value-as-a-moderator theory, Oishi et al. (1999) found higher correlations between value-congruent domain satisfaction and global life satisfaction than those between value-incongruent domain satisfaction and global life satisfaction. Recently, Malka and Chatman (2003) also found a significant interaction of extrinsic work orientations and annual income in predicting happiness.

Face consciousness reflects the priority of face in an individual’s value structure. In line with the value-as-a-moderator theory, resources or activities being able to help individuals gain face or prevent them from losing face should have more meaning and importance for individuals high on face consciousness in determining their happiness. Stated alternatively, a person’s face consciousness might interact with some congruent resources and contribute an additional amount of happiness beyond those brought by these resources and face consciousness themselves. Given the particular relevance of financial situation in successfully managing one’s face, it is natural to infer that financial situation matters more for people high on face consciousness than for those low on face consciousness. From this perspective, it is suggested that individuals high on face consciousness will derive more happiness from their own financial resources than individuals low on face consciousness. In other words, a positive interaction can be expected between individuals’ financial situations and face consciousness, which will ameliorate the negative effect brought by face...
consciousness on happiness. Taking together the earlier-mentioned discussions, we therefore posit:

Hypothesis 2: The negative correlation between face consciousness and happiness is weaker among individuals who are relatively rich than among those who are relatively poor.

**Methods**

**Empirical design**

As our discussion mentioned earlier indicates, we suggest that face consciousness is negatively associated with happiness, and this negative relationship is moderated by individuals’ financial situations. To test these hypotheses, we conducted two empirical investigations. In study 1, we examined the effect of financial situation on the relationship between face consciousness and happiness by using Bao et al.’s (2003) scale of face consciousness, which was designed for use in the particular setting of consumption. In study 2, we replicated study 1 and extrapolated our findings to a more generalized level by adopting Cheung et al.’s (1996) scale of measurement, which was designed for use in interpersonal situations.

We chose to examine our hypotheses first in the consumption setting, because face is particularly relevant to consumption. Individuals usually regard consumption more as a chance to deliver a favourable social image than an activity in its own right, if they have strong desire to manage their face (Tse, 1996; Yau, 1988). For example, Li and Su (2007) found that due to heavy influence of face, Chinese individuals usually mimic consumption of his/her social groups and have to buy name brands or high-price products. Bao et al. (2003) reported similar results by examining the influence of face consciousness on individuals’ decision-making styles. They found that face consciousness positively affects individuals’ ‘brand-conscious and price-equals-quality’ orientation and negatively affects ‘price-consciousness and value-for-money’ orientation, reflecting the fact that individuals high on face consciousness tend to pay more for brands that friends approve of. More recently, Liao and Wang (2009) indicated that face consciousness is distinct from materialism and serves as a mediator in the relationship between materialism and brand consciousness. Taken together, these studies suggest that for individuals with high levels of concern for their face, consumption and possessions is an often-used means through which they can improve, maintain, or protect their face.

It must be noted that although consumption is of particular relevance to face, our findings are not limited to the consumption setting as indicated in study 1, since in these earlier theoretical sections, we have argued our hypotheses in a more generalized sense; in study 2, we have lent further support to these hypotheses using an alternative measurement with higher generalizability.

**Study 1**

**Methods**

**Participants**

The participants in the first study consisted of 319 undergraduate students from a major university in east China. The use of students as participants is very common in SWB research (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Diener & Oishi, 2000; Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Robak, Chiffriller, & Zappone, 2007). The respondents majored in a range of disciplines, including management, economics, physics, mathematics, and engineering. One hundred and seventy five (55%) were male; the other 145 students (45%) were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, with an average of 20.9 years ($SD = 1.5$).

**Measures**

**Happiness.** We followed Diener’s (1994) framework in measuring happiness, or SWB, in which happiness is conceptualized as consisting of one cognitive component of life satisfaction, as well as two emotional components regarding the presence of positive affects and the lack of negative affects. We measured the cognitive life satisfaction by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS consists of five items (e.g. ‘In most ways, my life is close to my ideal’), which were rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 7 (‘strongly agree’). The two emotional components of SWB were assessed with the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS consists of 10 positive emotion adjectives and 10 negative emotion adjectives. Participants were asked to indicate how often they had experienced each of the 20 emotions during the current academic year using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (‘very slightly or not’) to 5 (extremely). The consistency reliability for SWLS was 0.92, 0.91 for the positive affect subscale, and 0.84 for the negative affect subscale.

**Face consciousness.** We measured face consciousness with four items developed by Bao et al. (2003) for consumption research. This scale was originally developed and examined using university students, which was identical to the setting of the present study. The scale items included: ‘It is important that others like the products and brands I buy’, ‘Sometimes I buy a product because my friends do so’, ‘Name-brand purchase is a good way to distinguish people from others’, and ‘Name products and brands purchases can bring me a sense of prestige’. All items were rated on a
seven-point Likert scale. The consistency reliability of the scale was 0.71. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed the single-factor solution of the scale with an acceptable fit level ($\chi^2 = 7.72$, d.f. = 2, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.09, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.98, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.95).

**Financial situation.** We calculated the real amount of disposable money that each participant had as the measure of financial situation. Participants were asked to report their annual income according to four categories: money from family, money from internship, money from the university (e.g. scholarship), and money from other sources. The sum of the four categories, minus the tuition for the current academic year, was calculated as the disposable income or actual money that the participants owned, which ranged from 800 to 40,000 RMB, which ranged from $820 to $5000. The average was 6815.50 RMB ($820, SD = 3603.78). Considering some extreme high values would make the distribution of income moderately positively skewed, we further calculated the 10-based log value of disposable money in the following analyses to prevent the potentially large impact that they might have had on the results (Hodson, 1985; Malka & Chatman, 2003).

**Control variables.** Diener et al. (2003) suggested that shared variance with some broad personality dimensions should be controlled when examining whether a narrower trait uniquely predicts SWB. In the present study, two such broad personality traits, that is, extraversion and neuroticism, were controlled, since these two dimensions provide primary links between personality and SWB (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener et al.). We measured these two personality dimensions by using Goldberg’s (1999) International Personality Items Pool (IPIP) scale, with 10 items for each dimension. Items were responded to on a five-point Likert scale. The consistency reliability for extraversion was 0.90, and 0.92 for neuroticism.

**Procedure.** The scales used in the present study — the face consciousness scale, the SWLS, the PANAS scale, and the two controlled dimensions of the IPIP scale — were originally developed in English. They were translated and back-translated following the procedure recommended by Brislin (1970). Specifically, the first author translated the items into Chinese, and the translated version was back-translated to English by a bilingual colleague. Discrepancies in the translation were carefully inspected and corrected to ensure translation equivalence of all the items.

The survey was administrated to students during scheduled class time at the end of the 2005–2006 academic year. Questionnaires were distributed by either the first author or by the instructors of the participating courses, and it typically took students approximately 10 min to complete the questionnaires. No information about the study was provided prior to the questionnaire session.

**Results**

We used Harman’s single-factor test to test for common-method variance. The factor analysis produced neither a general factor nor a single factor that accounted for the majority of variance, thus failed to identify common-method variance as a problem. Then, zero-order correlations were computed to determine whether face consciousness was negatively related to happiness. As shown in Table 1, the only indicator of happiness that did not correlate significantly with face consciousness was positive affect ($r = -0.06$, not significant). Face consciousness was positively related to negative affect ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), whereas negatively related to life satisfaction ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$). These results suggested that individuals high on face consciousness tend to be less happy in general.

We further examined whether the negative effects of face consciousness on various happiness indicators were due to its shared variance with the two broad personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism. We used partial correlation analysis in the present study, as it yields the same findings as hierarchical multiple regression, where certain variables are controlled when entering a new one to predict a criterion (Pedhazur, 1997). The results indicated that the correlations between face consciousness and various happiness indicators remain significant after controlling for the variance attributable to extraversion and neuroticism. The partial correlation of face consciousness with life satisfaction was $-0.12$ ($p < 0.05$), with 0.16 negative affect ($p < 0.01$). These results suggested that face consciousness has unique effects on happiness that are not accounted for by other broad personality traits.

To test the moderator role of financial situation in the relationship between face consciousness and various indicators of happiness, we used hierarchical regression analyses, with all variables entered in three steps (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Step 1 included four control variables consisting of sex, age, extraversion, and neuroticism. Step 2 included two main effect variables of financial situation and face consciousness. In step 3, we entered the interaction term of financial situation with face consciousness. In accordance with Cohen et al. (2003), we centred the two main effect variables before computation of the interaction term to facilitate plotting of the interactive effects (Echambadi & Hess, 2007). We further tested for multicollinearity between main effect variables and the interaction term by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) values, and found all of them were below the cut-off criterion of 5 (Studenmund, 2000), thus the results were not affected by multicollinearity.
As seen in Table 2, the four control variables included in step 1 accounted for a significant portion of variance in predicting all happiness indicators ($\Delta R^2 = 0.14$ for life satisfaction, 0.18 for positive affects, and 0.14 for negative affects; $p < 0.01$ for all), indicating that extraversion and neuroticism are two strong predictors of SWB, as shown in previous research. After controlling for the effect of extraversion and neuroticism, adding face consciousness and financial situation in step 2 yielded a significant increment in variance for all happiness indicators, except positive affect ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.01$ for life satisfaction; $\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.01$ for negative affect). Further, a significant portion of the incremental variance in step 2 was due to face consciousness ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$ for negative affect). These results were consistent with previous correlation analyses, strengthening our argument that the effects of face consciousness on happiness are unique and not due to other broad personality traits related to both of them.

Testing the moderator role of financial situation, we added the interaction term of face consciousness with financial situation in step 3. Although adding this interaction term did not yield a significant increment in variance in predicting positive affect, it was significant in predicting life satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01, p < 0.10$) and negative affect ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01, p < 0.05$). The $R^2$ produced by the interaction terms were within the typical range for moderator effects in non-experimental studies (Champoux & Peters, 1987), and as predicted, we observed a positive interaction for life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.10$), although a negative interaction for negative affect ($\beta = -0.11, p < 0.05$).

Following Cohen et al.’s (2003) procedures, we also computed two standardized regression slopes and their significance for individuals with high ($+1$ SD) and low ($-1$ SD) levels of financial situations, and plotted these slopes for each happiness indicator. Figure 1 illustrates a strong and negative relationship between face consciousness and life satisfaction for people with bad financial situations ($\beta = -0.39, p < 0.01$). However, for people with good financial situations, there was little relationship between them ($\beta = -0.03$, not significant). Conversely, Figure 2 illustrates a strong and positive relationship between face consciousness and negative affect for people with bad financial situations ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$), and a non-significant relationship between them for people with good financial situation ($\beta = 0.05$, not significant). These Figures further support the moderator role of financial situation on the negative association between face consciousness and happiness by illustrating the nature and form of the interaction of face consciousness and financial situation.

**Discussion**

We found strong evidence for our hypotheses in the consumption setting in the present study. Face consciousness

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**Table 1**

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<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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$N = 319, p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. Numbers in parentheses are alpha coefficients. Sex: male = 0, female = 1.
was negatively related to life satisfaction, whereas positively related to negative affect. Further, the effect of face consciousness on happiness should be unique, since we controlled for the potentially shared variance between face consciousness and two broad personality traits in the analyses. Moreover, we observed a positive interaction of face consciousness with financial situation in predicting life satisfaction, whereas a negative interaction in predicting negative affect, suggesting the negative effect of face consciousness on happiness might be mitigated by being financially better off.

However, we found no support for the expected interactive effect of financial situation with face consciousness in predicting positive affect. This suggested that no matter whether an individual has enough disposal money, the negative influence of face consciousness on positive affect remains the same.

A major limitation of the present study comes from the items we used to measure face consciousness. The four items of Bao et al.’s (2003) scale are primarily focused on consumption, thus might not be able to fully capture the meaning of this sophisticated construct. Another limitation of this study is the use of student sample. Although student samples have been widely used in happiness studies, the student sample used in the present study still represents a threat to the generalizability of our findings. To address these two limitations, we conducted a second study using a more generalized measurement of face consciousness, together with an adult sample, to provide a constructive replication of these findings.

### Study 2

#### Methods

**Participants**

Participants in the current study were 65 men and 59 women (n = 124). Among them, 59.7% were married and

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### Table 2: Results of regression analyses testing the interacting effects of face consciousness with financial situation (study 1)

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<th>Life satisfaction</th>
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<th>Negative affect</th>
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<td>0.17**</td>
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<td>-0.25**</td>
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<td>Financial situation</td>
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<td>0.14**</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
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<td><strong>Interaction term</strong></td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<td>4.88**</td>
<td>3.41***</td>
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<tr>
<td>df1, df2</td>
<td>4313</td>
<td>2311</td>
<td>1310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 319. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.10.
40.3% were single. In terms of age, 0.8% of the participants were below the age of 20, 25.8% were 21–30, 46.8% were 31–40, 25% were 41–50, and 1.6% were older than 51 years. In terms of educational level, 48.4% of the participants had a university or higher degree, 46% graduated from junior universities or technical secondary schools, and 5.6% graduated from high school.

Measures

Happiness. We used the same instruments as used in study 1 to measure happiness, including the five-item SWLS scale ($\alpha = 0.88$), and the 20-item PANAS scale ($\alpha = 0.92$ for positive affect, and $\alpha = 0.91$ for negative affect). Participants responded to the SWLS on a five-point Likert-type scale, with 1 representing ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 representing ‘strongly agree’, whereas when answering the PANAS items, respondents followed a five-point scale ranging from 1 (‘very slightly or not’) to 5 (‘extremely’).

Face consciousness. We measured face consciousness by the 11-item face scale adopted from the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI). This scale was developed in a more generalized setting beyond consumption, and aimed to cover Chinese people’s concern for maintaining face and social behaviours that enhance face and avoid losing face in their social life (Cheung et al., 1996). A sample item from this scale is: ‘I am usually very particular about the way I dress because I do not want others to look down on me’. Participants were asked to rate on a true–false scale, with the higher score indicated higher face consciousness. The consistency reliability of the scale was 0.67 after deleting the two most irrelevant items. The CFA results for a single-factor solution were marginally acceptable ($\chi^2 = 227.57$, d.f. = 44, RMSEA = 0.11, CFI = 0.89, NNFI = 0.88).

Financial situation. Participants rated their current financial situations subjectively via the following five dimensions: (i) the degree to which they felt they have less or more money than they need [range = 1 (‘much less than’) to 5 (‘much more than’)]; (ii) the scores they felt they could get in terms of money they had, if the poorest person around them got a score of 0, and the richest person got 100; (iii) the degree to which they felt their families were better off than average [range = 1 (‘much worse than average’) to 5 (‘much better than average’)]; (iv) the degree to which they felt pressure in terms of financial issues [range = 1 (‘very heavy’) to 5 (‘little’)]; and (v) the degree to which they felt they were better off financially than most others [range = 1 (‘much worse than average’) to 5 (‘much better than average’)]. The final score of perceived financial situation was calculated by averaging all the $z$ scores of the five items. The consistency reliability of the scale was 0.83, and the results of the CFA supported the scale of materialism was adopted (Richins, 2004), and its consistency reliability was 0.82 in this study. Besides materialism, we also controlled for the influence of major demographic variables, including sex, age, educational level, and marital status in the analyses.

Results

A similar Harman’s single-factor test was performed to examine whether common-method variance was present. Neither a single factor nor a general factor was identified that accounted for the majority of variances. After that, we run the same analyses for study 2 as in study 1. The means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables examined in this study are presented in Table 3.

The hierarchical regression results, as shown in Table 4, provided evidence for the negative association between face consciousness and happiness. In step 2, face consciousness remained significant in predicting life satisfaction ($b = -0.18$, $p < 0.10$), after the influence of demographic variables, materialism, and perceived financial situation were partialled out. These results again supported our hypothesis that face consciousness is negatively related to happiness.

Consistent with study 1, the moderation effect of financial situation on the relationship between face consciousness and happiness was demonstrated in step 3. The addition of the face consciousness $\times$ financial situation interaction term explained an additional 6% of the variance in the regression of life satisfaction score ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.10$), and positive affect ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.10$), after the influence of demographic variety, materialism, and perceived financial situation were partialled out. These results again supported our hypothesis that face consciousness is negatively related to happiness.

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for life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$), whereas a negative interaction for negative affect ($\beta = -0.26, p < 0.01$). The VIF values in the regression suggested that these results were not affected by multicollinearity.

We further computed the standardized regression slopes and their significance on high (+1 SD) and low (−1 SD) levels of financial situation. We plotted these slopes and found that they were quite similar to those in study 1. The graphical depiction of the interaction shown in Figure 3 indicated that face consciousness had a strong and negative effect on the life satisfaction score ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.01$) for individuals who subjectively perceived themselves as poor, whereas it had a non-significant effect for individuals who

Table 3  Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between all variables examined in study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Life satisfaction</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive affect</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative affect</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-0.24**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Face consciousness</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>(0.67)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Financial situation</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>(0.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Materialism</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>(0.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sex</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Age</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Educational level</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Marital status</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 124$. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. Numbers in parentheses are alpha coefficients. Sex: female = 0, male = 1. Age: below 20 = 1, 21–30 = 2, 31–40 = 3, 41–50 = 4, 51–60 = 5, above 60 = 6. Educational level: high school or lower = 1, junior university = 2, university = 3, graduates or above = 4. Marital status: single = 0, married = 1.

Table 4  Results of regression analyses testing the interacting effects of face consciousness with financial situation (study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>β</th>
<th>Life satisfaction</th>
<th>Positive affect</th>
<th>Negative affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Step 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.16***</td>
<td>-0.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>0.16***</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face consciousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction term</td>
<td>X*Z</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM²</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>29.40**</td>
<td>12.93**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df1, df2</td>
<td>5118</td>
<td>2116</td>
<td>1115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 124$. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.10$.}

Figure 3  Life satisfaction as a function of face consciousness and financial situation (study 2).
perceived themselves as rich ($\beta = 0.06$, not significant). However, a converse pattern was observed in Figure 4, where face consciousness had a strong and positive effect on negative affect for self-perceived, poor individuals ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$), whereas a non-significant effect was found for self-perceived rich individuals ($\beta = 0.00$, not significant).

**Discussion**

Consistent with the findings presented in study 1, the results from study 2 indicate that face consciousness is negatively related to the happiness indicators, and this negative relationship is moderated by financial situation in a more generalized setting. The effect of face consciousness on happiness is not due to the shared variance between face consciousness and materialism, since it remained significant after we controlled for the influence of material values. Further, although we did not find the interactive effect of face consciousness with financial situation in predicting positive affect, the results of the moderation analyses suggest that financial situation could mitigate the negative effect of face consciousness on life satisfaction, as well as the positive effect on negative affect.

**Figure 4** Negative affect as a function of face consciousness and financial situation (study 2).

One purpose of the present research was to examine the influence of face consciousness considered as an individual-differences variable on happiness. We first proposed that face consciousness would be negatively associated with happiness, and then proposed the negative association of face consciousness with happiness would be moderated by financial situation. To examine the hypotheses, we first conducted study 1 in a consumption setting using a university student sample, and then replicated this study in a more generalized setting using an adult sample in study 2. These two studies produced essentially consistent results, and taken together, supported our hypotheses that for poor individuals, whether measured by objective, disposable money or by subjective perceptions about their financial situations, their happiness levels were negatively contingent on face consciousness, whereas for rich individuals, face consciousness had little effect on their happiness.

Our findings are consistent with the view that an excessive concern with impression made on others is detrimental to happiness (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Kasser & Kasser, 2001; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Kim et al., 2003; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). In general, individuals high on face consciousness tend to be less happy, as they are less satisfied with life and experience less positive affect, whereas more negative affect. Furthermore, our results supported the value-as-a-moderator theory by revealing that face consciousness is an especially strong predictor of a low level of happiness for individuals with bad financial situations, but not for individuals with good financial situations. These results suggest that people with a high level of face consciousness might retain their happiness by becoming better off.

It is important to note that we used different measurements of face consciousness across two studies, but obtained similar results. These two measurements represent two different research settings. The Bao et al. (2003) scale, which we used in study 1, reflects individuals’ concern over their face in the particular setting of consumption, whereas the CPAI face scale, which we used in study 2, reflects individuals’ face concern at a more generalized level of interpersonal situations. We believe that this discrepancy in the operationalization of face consciousness does not produce theoretical inconsistency between the results of study 1 and those of study 2, because both Bao et al.’s scale and the CPAI face scale – although designed for use in different, specific settings – measure the same motives of individuals to value face and take it as an important life goal to pursue.

Our findings are of particular relevance to the research knowledge regarding the relationship between materialism and happiness. In studies reported from Western individualistic societies, materialism has been seen as a steady predictor of unhappiness. Our research suggests that face consciousness could be a deeper-level variable, underpinning the relationship between materialism and happiness, because some recent studies have indicated that it is not materialism itself, but deep motives behind individuals’ materialistic values that lead to a lower level of happiness (Srivastava et al., 2001). In other words, some kinds of motives might work as the root cause that makes materialists unhappy. This research demonstrated that face consciousness, whether measured by Bao et al.’s (2003) scale in study 1, or by the CPAI scale in study 2, might be a motive that enables individuals to put excessive importance...
on money and possessions in order to improve or protect their face, but at the same time, reduces their happiness.

It is important to note that our two samples are all drawn from a collectivistic society, which might have biased our findings. This is because, in a collectivistic society like China, people are highly dependent on each other and they interact more frequently than those in individualistic societies. As a result, Chinese people usually have stronger desire to manage their face (Bao et al., 2003; Li & Su, 2007), which might increase the importance of money to them, because having enough money can help them gain face through buying visible and luxurious products, or at least avoid losing face by keeping them away from the embarrassment of being unable to meet daily life requirements. Indeed, the correlation coefficient between face consciousness and materialism, which reflects the importance of money to an individual, is as strong as 0.37 ($p < 0.01$) in study 2, suggesting that face consciousness induces people place higher importance on money and possessions (Liao & Wang, 2009). Thus, it might be the case that the moderating effect of financial situation on the relationship between face consciousness and happiness is partly due to the particular importance place on money by Chinese people in managing their face. Apparently, a replication in individualistic societies is needed to clarify this concern.

The present research contributes to the knowledge of happiness research, primarily because it demonstrates the importance of face consciousness, developed from Eastern societies as an individual-difference variable in predicting various indicators of happiness. Since the concept of face has been argued by many researchers as the key concept in understanding the complexity of much people’s behaviour in Confucian societies (Bao et al., 2003; Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944; Kim & Nam, 1998; Tse, 1996), our results suggest that face consciousness could play a role in explaining the differences between the East and the West in happiness research.

Diener, Diener, and Diener’s (1995) seminal work demonstrated that individualism is a strong predictor of happiness across nations. They found people in collectivist societies reported lower level of SWB than those in individualist societies, even after potential covariates, such as the income levels of nations, were controlled. Diener et al. (1995) suggested that the positive correlation between individualism and SWB is because individualist societies provide more freedom, and people are more likely to attribute success to themselves. Our findings that face consciousness is negatively related to happiness could explain this phenomenon. Given the fact that face concern is much more salient in collectivist societies than in individualist societies (Bao et al., 2003; Goffman, 1955; Ho, 1976; Hwang, Francesco, & Kessler, 2003), we believe that the stress of maintaining a minimal level of face at least partly contributed to the lower level of happiness in collectivist societies. We suggest future research to extend our findings and provide additional evidence supporting this explanation.

Our findings that financial situation ameliorates the negative effect of face consciousness on happiness suggest that one way for individuals in a collectivistic society, like China, to improve their level of happiness is to become financially better off. The 2004 report of the National Well-Being Index supports this notion by revealing that Chinese people in the wealthier Taiwan society are happier than those in the relatively-poor mainland China, although people from these two societies have the same cultural roots (Inglehart, 2004). However, the amelioration effect brought on by financial situation might disappear if individuals’ levels of happiness go beyond a certain degree; our findings suggest that the interactive effect of face consciousness and financial situation applies only to negative affect and life satisfaction, but not to positive affect. It is possible that becoming rich might work only to save people from suffering some bad emotional experiences, but not necessarily bring good ones.

The present research is also of interest because it has implications for the value-as-a-moderator theory. Malka and Chatman (2003) stated that previous studies examining the value-as-a-moderator theory have only focused on the interacting effects of resources, with values on the cognitive life satisfaction, but have not examined their effects on the emotional components of SWB. The present research examined how the joint effect of face consciousness and money influences various happiness indicators, including both the cognitive and emotional components of SWB. Our results supported the value-as-a-moderator theory for the cognitive component of happiness, but not for the emotional component of happiness. The interaction term of face consciousness with financial situation was not significant in predicting positive affects across both studies, suggesting that the value-as-a-moderator theory might be better applicable in predicting cognitive life satisfaction and negative affect than in predicting positive affect. We argue that the results might be due to the fact that money is valued more in hard situations, often characterized by negative affect, than it is valued in easy situations, often characterized by positive affect (Lim, Teo, & Loo, 2003). In other words, it is because money is a resource of more importance in taking away unhappiness from people than it is in bringing people happiness. Future research is encouraged to investigate how and why this difference happens.

As stated earlier, given all our participants in the two studies were drawn from the same Confucian society, care should be taken in generalizing these results. Because individuals’ levels of face consciousness are particularly salient in Confucian societies, the negative relationship between face consciousness and happiness might be weaker in...
individualist societies. The potential effects of common-method variances should also be noted, given all our data were collected from a single source. Although the results of Harman’s single-method test did not identify it as a problem, future research is encouraged to remedy common-method variances early from the research-design step (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Another limitation of our research was related to the scales we adopted to measure the construct of face consciousness, that is, whether the four-item scale we used in study 1 or the 11-item scale used in study 2 treated face consciousness as a simple, unidimensional construct. However, many researcher have suggested that face consciousness should be a multidimensional construct, consisting of distinct dimensions, such as a desire to gain face and a fear of losing face (Ho, 1976; Hwang et al., 2003). Future research might benefit from examining the effects of different dimensions of face consciousness on happiness, as these dimensions reflect distinct motives for one to manage his/her face and can be associated with happiness in different ways.

Future research might also benefit from examining potential mediators of the face–happiness relationship. For instance, because individuals high on face consciousness have a stronger desire to live up to social expectations or requirements (Goffman, 1955; Ho, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1988), it might be the case that they are more susceptible to interpersonal influence. Given the link between susceptibility to interpersonal influence and self-esteem and life satisfaction (e.g. Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005), susceptibility to interpersonal influence appears to be a potential mediator in the face–happiness relationship. Such investigations would shed further light on how individuals high on face consciousness tend to have lower levels of happiness.

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