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Happiness, according to lyubomirsky, king, and diener (2005)

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Happiness, according to Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005), is associated with and precedes numerous successful outcomes. According to the researches conducted by United Nations Development Program, the subjective feeling of happiness, or more formally Subjective Well-Being (SWB), serves as a critical indicator for quality of life - health, longevity, income and social skill.

Among many potential antecedents of SWB, political and social scientists have long debated for the important research question of whether democracy can bring happiness. Extensive research question has investigated this question empirically, sampling from different areas of the world, such as Latin America (Granham & Pettinano, 2001), North America (Álvarez-Díaz, González, & Radcliff, 2010) and Europe (Böhnke, 2007). Despite numerous researches conducted, the results are far from conclusive. While many studies have supported the positive impact of the level of democracy, some studies obtained contradicting results. For example, Fosu (2013) have found that in Africa, politically accountable governments are linked to more chance of political disorder, which may in turn reduces citizens' well-being. Likewise, in the context of Switzerland, Dorn, Fischer, Kirchgässner, and Sousa-Poza (2007) have concluded that democracy does not significantly affect well-being of the citizens.

We argue that one important reason causing these inconsistencies is that the definition of democracy varies across countries, especially among non-western countries. In the specific context of China, Tianjian and Jie (2010) have proposed that, probably influenced by powerful propaganda, the majorities in the country agree on the Confusion model of democracy, characterized by strong support for the governing regime. Such divergence in the definition of democracy may confound the effects of the objective measurement of democracy (e.g. the Democracy Index) on SWB. In this sense, the application of subjective measurements of democracy is preferable in that it effectively takes into account the variations of the personal definition of democracy.

The current study investigates the impact of subjective measurement of democracy (i.e. perceived level of democracy of the nation) on individual's SWB, using a sample of Chinese residents. We have chosen to conduct the current research with a Chinese sample based on two reasons. First, Asian countries are generally under-representative in previous researches; therefore, researches conducted in these countries are necessary to supplement the existing findings. More importantly, the definition of democracy is especially controversial in this authoritarian country, thus weakening the appropriateness of the objective measurement of democracy.

Another important contribution of the current research is that it empirically tests how the impact of democracy on SWB varies among different demographic groups. The detection of the boundary of such effect could potentially suggest its mechanisms.

The current study utilizes the Chinese dataset from World Value Survey (WVS) Wave 6, which consists of the responses from a representative Chinese sample. The interviews, which were conducted in 2013 with strict compliance to the protocol of WVS, have been proven methodologically sound in various researches. The hypotheses were tested with linear regression. An important issue of such cross-sectional analysis was the potential endogeneity of the effects; we have thus applied a novel method that are based on heteroscedasticity measurement to estimate the degree of endogeneity and remove its confounding effects. The results have confirmed our hypothesis that the perceived level of democracy is positively related to individual SWB, and that the income level positively moderates such effect. However, surprisingly, we have also found that the social class negatively affect the relationship between perceived level of democracy and individual SWB. The potential explanation as well as the implications of the findings were discussed. Last, we pinpoint two directions for future researches: (1) longitudinal studies could be carried out to theoretically avoid the endogeneity problem and replicate the current findings; (2) more researches are needed on how social policies would affect SWB in non-western context.

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