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Foreign language peace of mind: a positive emotion drawn from the Chinese
EFL learning context. *Applied Linguistics Review* , ISSN 1868-6303.

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Foreign language peace of mind: A positive emotion drawn from the Chinese EFL learning context¹

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Abstract: This study presents a new positive emotion construct, 外语平和心态 (*waiyu pinghe xintai*) or Foreign Language Peace of Mind (FLPOM), drawn from the Chinese cultural tradition. It is a low-arousal positive (LAP) emotional state (e.g., calmness, peacefulness) and a state of internal harmony. Three sub-studies were conducted. In Study 1, a measurement scale of FLPOM was developed and validated. In Study 2, the FLPOM scale was administered to Chinese English as a Foreign Language learners along the Chinese Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) scale which can potentially reflect slightly more high-arousal positive (HAP) states (e.g., joy, enthusiasm) to test the discriminability of FLPOM from FLE. Study 3 examined the extents to which FLPOM and FLE predict Chinese learners' language proficiency. Correlation and discriminant validity analysis confirmed that FLPOM and FLE were related but discriminable emotion constructs. Stepwise regression analyses revealed that FLPOM was a stronger predictor of Chinese learners' self-perceived FL proficiency than FLE. Possible implications on FL teaching and learning in the Chinese context were provided.

Keywords: foreign language peace of mind; foreign language enjoyment; cultural variation; inner peace; harmony; self-perceived FL proficiency

1 Introduction

Researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) have traditionally been interested in the cognitive factors linked to successful learning of a new language (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). There is thus an abundance of studies on aptitude, working memory, the relationship between form and function, the nature of the mental lexicon, the role of input and output, the contexts of language learning. A smaller but still substantial niche of SLA researchers have focused on social psychological variables such as learners' attitudes and motivation to learn the second language and psychological variables such as personality traits. It is only relatively recently that interest has started to grow in the role of learners' positive emotions (Prior, 2019). A paper by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) introduced Positive Psychology to SLA researchers and thus provided an impetus to researchers to explore areas that had remained in

1. Pre-print of Zhou, Li, Dewaele, J.-M., Lochtmann, K. & Xi, Yiheng (2021). Foreign language peace of mind: a positive emotion drawn from the Chinese EFL learning context. *Applied Linguistics Review* <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0080>

Received May 15, 2021; accepted November 13, 2021; published online November 25, 2021

the shadows. Positive Psychology offered a theoretical basis and an established methodology that appealed to researchers as well as teachers (MacIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer, 2016). Suddenly, researchers who had been studying Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) for years realized that this exclusive focus on a negative emotion meant they had been paying attention to only one side of the coin. Moreover, the focus on FLCA meant that the pedagogical implications of their studies were about ways to alleviate or combat FLCA. This led to a degree of frustration among practitioners who realized that beyond some relatively simple strategies, relatively little could be done to significantly reduce learners' FLCA. By taking a more holistic approach to learners' emotions, it soon emerged that while teachers could do little to make anxious learners less anxious, they could boost their positive emotions and help them manage their FLCA (Dewaele, Chen, Padilla, & Lake, 2019). In other words, FLCA was not the "enemy" but its negative effect could be countered by making learners enjoy the class. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) developed the concept of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) which became the most studied positive emotion in the following years (Dewaele & Li, 2020). Positive Psychology also led to a realization among SLA researchers and practitioners that the goal of teaching a FL was not just linguistic but also psychological. A teacher does not just transfer linguistic knowledge and skills but also needs to nurture learners' well-being and resilience (Dewaele et al., 2019).

In the current paper we argue that individuals' perception and expression of emotions are shaped by the cultural context in which they live and communicate. For example, individuals oriented to Chinese culture show favouritism towards low or moderate positive emotional experiences, as opposed to the hedonistic view of well-being valued in Western or individualist cultures (Lu, 2008). Therefore, the way FLE is conceptualized and operationalized may bypass another positive but culture-specific emotion among Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, Foreign Language Peace of Mind (FLPOM). FLPOM reflects an emotional state of inner peace and harmony, which is found to be more in line with the subjective well-being valued in Chinese culture (Lee, Lin, Huang, & Fredrickson, 2013). We propose to develop a new FLPOM construct to describe Chinese EFL learners' affective well-being and to examine the extents to which FLE and FLPOM predict Chinese learners' self-rated proficiency.

2 Literature review

2.1 Positive psychology in SLA

Drawing on Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) argued that positive emotions would enable foreign language learners to better notice and absorb language input leading to quicker progress. Following this injunction, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) included both FLCA and FLE in the same research design. They developed a new 21-item FLE scale that focused on the private and social aspects of enjoyment in the FL class. A total of 1746 foreign language (FL) learners from around the world –with a majority of Westerners– contributed quantitative and qualitative data about their classroom emotions. The findings revealed a moderate correlation between FLE and FLCA, suggesting that they were distinct dimensions rather than opposite ends of the same dimension. The crucial implication was that FLE and FLCA are not in a seesaw relationship; in other words, a

reduction in FLCA does not imply an increase in FLE. Level of mastery in the FL turned out to be strongly linked with higher levels of FLE and lower levels of FLCA. One of the less reported findings of the study was that significant differences existed for FLE and FLCA linked to broadly defined cultural groups. North American participants scored highest on FLE and lowest on FLCA, South Americans, Arabs and Europeans occupied a middle position, while Asian FL learners reported the lowest levels of FLE and the highest levels of FLCA. Analysis of the qualitative data on the most enjoyable episodes in the FL class revealed that learners did occasionally enjoy high arousal activities but many mentioned low arousal activities that involved some degree of autonomy and quiet collaboration with peers. Teachers were frequently mentioned as a source of FLE, especially when they were positive, encouraging, well-organized, enthusiastic, funny and trustworthy.

In the years that followed, the FLE scale has been administered, adapted and translated in various cultural contexts. The FLE scale was translated into Chinese by Li (2018) and Li, Jiang and Dewaele (2018). The authors validated the new 11-item scale using data of more than 2000 Chinese EFL learners using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses complemented with item analysis, reliability and validity tests. An independent translation of the FLE scale was validated in Jin and Zhang (2019, 2021) keeping 16 items of the original FLE scale. The authors collected data from over 300 Chinese EFL students. Finally, Jiang and Dewaele (2019a) used the original English version of the FLE scale with 564 Chinese EFL learners, complemented by qualitative material, and concluded that the uniqueness of the FLE in the Chinese context resided only in details that could be attributed to the Chinese educational context.

A good understanding about learners' FL emotions matters because they have a direct effect on FL performance. A recent meta-analysis of studies across the world suggested that a moderate positive correlation ($r = .36$) exists between FLE and academic achievement in the FL (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2021) while a similar meta-analysis revealed a moderate negative correlation between FLCA and academic achievement ($r = -.39$) (Botes, Greiff, & Dewaele, 2020).

One could wonder whether there are in fact other positive emotions that FL learners experience in specific cultures only. Extensive research in psychology has shown that culture shapes the ways people perceive and express emotions (Turner & Stets, 2005; Wierzbicka, 1994). As stated by Lutz (1988), emotion is not only biologically determined, but also critically affected by sociocultural context. Psychologists distinguish between two fundamental dimensions of emotions: *valence* (positive vs. negative) and *arousal* (high vs. low) (Larsen & Diener, 1992). Arousal is used to measure individuals' physiological activation level in a certain emotional state (Barrett, 1996), which is one of the most prominent emotional factors that reflect cultural differences (Lim, 2016). Numerous studies have showed that western culture places a higher value on high-arousal emotions, e.g., joyful, enthusiastic, annoyed, whereas eastern culture stresses low-arousal emotions, e.g., calm, relaxed, depressed (Chen et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2013; Lim, 2016; Yu, Zhang, Nunes, Deng, & Levesque-Bristol, 2020). A fitting example is Tsai, Knutson, & Fung's (2006) cross-cultural investigation of how cultural factors shape people's ideal affect (how people want to feel), which found that European Americans and Chinese Americans value HAP affects (i.e., excited, elated) more than Chinese people do; by contrast, Chinese and Chinese Americans

value LAP affects (i.e., peaceful, calm) more than European Americans do.

The concept of self-construal is frequently used to explain the cultural difference in the arousal level of ideal emotions. Specifically, westerners tend to construe self as independent and separate from others, which is termed independent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), and because of this western culture is labeled as individualism (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). In individualist cultures, individuals are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions, and by doing so influence others and the society (Triandis, 2001). Evidently, externalized high-arousal emotions are more effective to achieve so. By contrast, easterners tend to construe self as connected to and dependent on others and the society, which is termed interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Eastern culture is thus labeled as collectivism (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Lu (2008) indicated that East Asians exhibit a tendency of self-criticism and self-effacement, which cultivates a social-oriented self considerate to the needs of others and the community and thus helps to achieve stability and harmony. Hence, cultures diverge in emotional arousal as western culture values high-arousal emotions while eastern culture relies more on low-arousal emotions.

Before introducing the concept of enjoyment into SLA, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) made a careful evaluation of its scope and meaning. Enjoyment is linked to the positive emotion, *joy*, which arises when individuals “experience desirable outcomes related to personal success and interpersonal relatedness” (Reeve, 2005, p. 316). The emotion of joy from which enjoyment derives has been established as a HAP affect (Lim, 2016; McConnell & Shore, 2011). Therefore, we suggest that that FLE is characterized by a slightly higher arousal than the Chinese culture-specific positive emotion that features low-arousal positive (LAP) states. None of the items in the original FLE scale reflect the distinctive positive state of internal harmony sensitive to Chinese culture.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016) defined enjoyment as a positive state in which individuals believe that the challenges they face align with their coping capacity, so that they feel neither overwhelmed nor under-challenged. In this regard, enjoyment is seen as “pleasure taken one step further” and indicative of “a function of progression or challenging limits” (Boudreau, MacIntyre, & Dewaele, 2018, p. 153). According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), enjoyment arises when individuals “not only meet their needs, but exceed them to accomplish something new or even unexpected” (p. 217), or in Li, Jiang, and Dewaele’s (2018) words, when “breaking through homeostatic limits and stretching beyond oneself” (p. 184). Dewaele and Li (2021) described FLE as a positive activating emotion, consciously avoiding the term “high arousal” because that would incorrectly imply continuous excitement and exuberance, which only reflect the upper end of the scale of enjoyment. In fact, none of the items in the CFLES (see appendix 2) reflect high arousal but rather intense satisfaction with various aspects of the FL class and the behavior of peers and teacher. One could argue that individuals oriented to Chinese culture may have slightly different understanding on what is enjoyable. Studies on subjective well-being (SWB) may give us a glimpse of cultural variation in desired positive state. Lu and Gilmour (2004) investigated culture-oriented SWB by asking Chinese and American university students to write essays under the title of “what is happiness”. The groups seemed to agree on happiness as a mental state of satisfaction and contentment. However, the Chinese accounts seemed more solemn, reserved and introspective, and emphasized a state of “harmonious homeostasis” as evidenced by the usage of words,

such as “harmony”, “balance”, “fit”, which were nowhere to be found in the American accounts. The American accounts were “emotionally charged, upbeat, and unmistakably positive” and emphasized striving for personal fulfillment and material gratification (Lu & Gilmour, 2004, p. 286–288).

To sum up, contrary to the western view of well-being featuring self-direction, personal achievement, and hedonistic impulses, the Chinese culturally oriented conception of well-being stresses a dialectical balance, the philosophical and cultural depth of which will be discussed in the next section. Therefore, we propose that the emotion of enjoyment marked by a tendency to challenge limits and break through homeostasis may not fit the Chinese cultural context as regards perceptions of positive psychology.

Thus far, we have argued that the construct of enjoyment may be different from the Chinese culture-specific preference for low-arousal states and harmonious homeostasis. It is thus necessary to investigate positive emotions that involves LAP affective states and internal harmony in the Chinese FL learning context. We believe that building an ideal emotion construct that fits a specific cultural context can maximize the value of positive emotions, that is, building physical, psychological and social resources and boosting learning outcomes (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Next, we will discuss the cultural and philosophical milieu of the low-arousal and harmonious emotion and how it can be integrated into the Chinese EFL learning context.

2.2 Emotion in Chinese philosophy and culture

American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841/2000, p. 262) said that “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm”, whereas ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, believed that “If people can be clear and calm, heaven and earth will come to them” (Cleary, 1989, p. 2). Throughout Chinese history, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the three most influential schools of thought that have molded traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, all value a mental state of peacefulness (a LAP emotional state) and harmony (a state of homeostasis or balance).

Confucianism represents the mainstream ideology that underlies Chinese social conventions and codes of conduct. Confucianism upholds *benevolence* as its utmost ethical ideal, which requires people to suppress personal desires, be altruistic, and serve the collective in order to be a morally refined person (*junzi*) (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). Confucianism also stresses maintaining harmony and balance in one’s affective state, such that harmony is essential for settling the mind and heart in order that one’s spirit has its entrustment and one’s life has the whereabouts (*anxin liming*). Harmony is also closely connected with happiness as a happy life is one with harmony inside and harmony with other people and with nature (Li, 2020). Taoism stresses the importance of maintaining harmony and balance both within an individual and between the individual and the surroundings (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). Taoism advocates a simple, peaceful lifestyle and mental state which can be achieved through being desireless and maintaining internal harmony (Lee et al., 2013). In *Tao Te Ching*, a chief classic of the Taoists, the state of harmonious homeostasis (*Tao*) is explained:

The *Tao* never does anything, yet through it all things are done. If people could center themselves in it, the whole world would be transformed by itself, in its natural rhythms. People would be content with their simple,

everyday lives, in harmony, and free of desire. When there is no desire, all things are at peace (translated by Mitchell, 1988).

Buddhism reveals to the general public that laying at the end of all existence is suffering. It teaches people to eradicate the root of suffering, i.e., craving for pleasure or material goods, in order to be free from suffering and achieve salvation or *Nirvana*, a state of peacefulness, stability, and complete cessation of craving (Mitchell, 2002).

Chinese socioculturally oriented conception of positive emotion is also reflected in various facets of its traditional culture. Humans experience *seven emotions*, including joy, anger, sadness, pleasure, love, greed, and hatred, any one of which, when in excess, can cause impairments and diseases, regardless of being positive or negative (Wang, et al., 2006). To summarize, the Chinese conception of ideal emotion values internal peacefulness and harmony and downplays the role of material gratification, physical comfort, and personal achievement.

The first attempt of conceptualizing the state of peacefulness and harmony was made by Lee et al. (2013) who introduced a new emotion construct, *peace of mind* (POM), to describe the affective well-being valued in Chinese culture. POM refers to an emotional state of inner peace and harmony. Inner peace captures LAP emotional states (e.g., peacefulness, calmness, and serenity), whereas harmony captures a state of balance or homeostasis which exists both within an individual and between an individual and his or her surroundings. The two dimensions are reciprocally connected, such that individuals can either gain inner peace through harmonization or attain harmony through fostering inner peace. Therefore, they are integrated into a coherent and homogeneous process (Lee et al., 2013). POM emphasizes self-control and emotional regulation, as opposed to HAP emotional states or the hedonistic views of well-being which are found to be more valued in individualist cultures (Lu, 2008). Yu et al. (2020) found that POM is strongly predicted by individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017), compared to vitality, a HAP emotion. They indicated that POM is one of the emotions that encompass *eudaimonia*, a way of living that focuses on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). An individual governed by POM can be seen as an integrated self with "life energy" at the disposal of the self; this "life energy" takes a latent or dormant form, as opposed to an activated or aroused form (Yu et al., 2020). Therefore, POM entails a stable, homeostatic and well-regulated state of mind. It is worth noting that the value of inner peace has also been touched upon in western psychological studies. For example, Haskins (2010) found that inner peace training leads to higher psychological quality (i.e., creativity) shown in classroom activities in primary and secondary schools.

Within the framework of Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which posits that positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and in doing so build personal resources, FLPOM may broaden by creating the urge to maintain focus on the task and play down external distractions or stimuli. Furthermore, we propose that FLPOM may improve the conservation of learners' personal resources, because it emphasizes emotional stability and harmony both within oneself and between one and one's surroundings, which can lead to relatively high stability of personal resources and comparatively low susceptibility to resource loss. For example, FLPOM can help build and conserve individuals' psychological resources, such as psychological resilience or

self-efficacy, because a stable and balanced state of mind encourages individuals to play down external stimuli, especially negative ones (e.g., negative feedback) and protects them against stress or psychological strain. POM can also help build and conserve social or interpersonal resources because the state of harmony cultivates a socially conscious self which is self-effacing and considerate to the needs of others and the community, thereby achieving an environment-person fit in collectivism cultures. The advantage of FLPOM in conserving learner resource may differentiate itself from general positive emotions.

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in POM as an indicator of psychological well-being in collectivist cultures. Fascinating insights have been provided into the positive effect of POM on promoting work and academic outcomes, including academic motivation and achievement (Datu, 2017), academic engagement (Datu, Valdez, & King, 2018), organizational citizenship behavior (Ariyabuddhiphongs & Pratchawittayagorn, 2014), and work performance (Anjum, Ahmed, & Karim, 2014). Datu (2017) examined the relationships between POM and academic motivation and achievement in high school students in Philippines, known as a collectivist culture. POM was observed to be positively linked with students' autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and academic achievement. Interestingly, autonomous motivation mediated the relationship between POM and academic achievement, which may help us understand the mechanism that underlies the effect of POM. Datu et al. (2018) identified a strong link between POM and academic engagement.

These two studies, to our knowledge, are the only empirical studies that addressed POM in the educational context, both of which were based on students' emotional experiences in an ordinary environment free from external stimuli or threats. Considering that the FL classroom is a rather challenging and even threatening environment where learners are hypersensitive and intense emotions can easily be provoked, learners' emotional perceptions and experiences may be vastly different from those in an ordinary context, and how these differences may affect learners' language achievement remains speculative. As a concept drawn from traditional cultural and philosophical values, POM still has relevance to the Chinese culture-specific affective well-being in modern days. We contend that traditional social values can guide or educate young generations in a subconscious way owing to their impact on the overall social norms. For example, overt conflicts may disrupt harmony and in order to achieve it, people must observe the culturally-valued ritual propriety or "*li*" (礼) in Chinese (Triandis & Gelfand, 2012), which emphasizes maintaining self-control and avoiding overt expression of thoughts and emotions. A direct (confrontational) or intense approach to emotional ventilation (both positive and negative) tends to be interpreted as threatening or even aggressive by others. Instead, low and moderate emotional experiences are favored (Lu, 2008). Individuals in a specific cultural context tend to adhere to the established cultural values and cultivate a culture-specific self-concept, in order to achieve an environment-person fit, which can help them thrive in a specific context.

The present study thus answers the call in Dewaele and Li (2020) to go beyond FLE and FLCA and to explore other emotions that FL learners may experience.

2.3 The current study

A new emotion construct, FLPOM, will be presented to describe FL learners' emotional experience of peace of mind in the Chinese educational context. The objectives are: (a) To

develop a FLPOM scale and validate it; (b) To validate the relatedness and discriminability between FLPOM and FLE; (c) To test and compare the predictive powers of FLPOM and FLE on Chinese learners' self-perceived FL achievement. Three sub-studies were designed accordingly.

In Study 1, an FLPOM scale was developed with items generated based on conversations with experts, teachers and students and on relevant scales addressing peaceful and harmonious feelings. The drafted scale was then validated with respect to construct validity, convergent validity and internal consistency.

In Study 2, the new FLPOM scale, combined with an FLE scale, was administered in Chinese FL learners. Correlation and discriminant validity analyses were used to test the relatedness and discriminability between FLPOM and FLE. The first research question was addressed:

RQ 1: Are FLPOM and FLE related but discriminable emotion constructs in the Chinese FL learning context?

In Study 3, data on Chinese learners' self-perceived FL achievement were collected beside FLPOM and FLE. Stepwise regression analyses were used to test the predictive power of FLPOM on self-perceived FL achievement and then compare it with that of FLE.

RQ 2: What is the predictive power of FLPOM on Chinese learners' self-perceived FL achievement?

RQ 3: How do FLPOM and FLE compare in predicting Chinese learners' self-perceived FL achievement?

3 Study 1: Development and validation of the FLPOM scale

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Participants

Two samples were obtained for Study 1, which comprised 599 students enrolled in one of four senior high schools in Beijing (North China), Jiangsu (South China), and Anhui (Middle China). They were two independent and separate samples used for the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the FLPOM construct, respectively. The first sample consisted of 158 participants (46 males, 112 females), with an average age of 16.8, ranging from 15 to 21. The second sample consisted of 441 participants (161 males, 280 females), with a mean age of 16.5, ranging from 15 to 21.

3.1.2 Instrument

The concept of POM was carefully evaluated first. POM is a positive emotional state that indicates inner peace and internal harmony which are reciprocally connected and integrated into a coherent process (Lee et al., 2013). We, therefore, viewed it as one homogeneous and coherent state and predicted a single-dimension structure for the new construct, which means that each item was phrased to capture both inner peace and internal harmony.

Before formulating the items, we conducted conversations with several SLA researchers on relevant emotional experiences in FL learning. Some key words and events that might mirror the emotion of POM were elicited and phrased into complete statements. Besides, we

consulted some existing scales addressing peaceful and harmonious feelings, including *Peace of Mind Scale* (Lee et al., 2013), *Diamond Scale of Nonviolence* (Mayton, 2014); *Viterbo Serenity Inventory* (Floody, 2014), and rephrased some of their statements so that they fit the predicted single-dimension structure and EFL learning context. To ensure the content validity of the items, we invited two university English lecturers to answer the edited items and provide modifications. Besides, 6 students from the target high schools were invited to answer the items, after which we explained to them the content of each item and asked them to evaluate the extents to which the items were related to their relevant emotional experiences. Several items were dropped in this process and some others were reformulated in order to avoid being misinterpreted by EFL learners. In doing so, 12 items were devised which comprised key emotion words, including peace, harmony, balanced, comfort, free, calm, steady, settled, unhurried, and tranquility. These words were repeatedly phrased into different statements. According to DeVellis (2016), redundancy is not a bad thing in scale development because the content that is common to the seemingly redundant items will summate across items, which can help increase the internal consistency and capture the phenomenon of interest.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Exploratory factor analysis

An EFA using maximum likelihood method with orthogonal (varimax) rotation was run to uncover the factor structure underlying the FLPOM scale. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy ($KMO = 0.93$) and Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1,769$; $df = 66$; $p < .0001$) suggested the EFA was possible. As indicated by the scree plot of eigenvalues, two factors were extracted. The first factor accounted for 49.93% of the total variation with an eigenvalue of 5.99, and received high loadings ($> .50$) from 10 items. The second factor accounted for 16.64% of the total variation with an eigenvalue of 2.00. However, the second factor received high loadings from only 2 items and one of them generated cross-loadings, both of which are signs of over-factoring (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Therefore, only items with high loadings on the first factor were retained, suggesting a single factor structure. Principal component analysis with orthogonal (varimax) rotation was run, which also revealed a single factor structure with only minor variations in factor loadings. According to Dörnyei (2008), a factor structure is valid when different factor analysis methods produce essentially the same results. Two items with the lowest loadings were further deleted. An 8-item and single-factor FLPOM scale (see Appendix 1) was determined, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Items of the FLPOM scale

FLPOM	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Item-scale correlation
1. My mind is free and at ease in the English class.	3.63	.81	.78	.83**
2. I have peace and harmony in my mind when learning English.	3.51	.88	.83	.89**

3. I am patient and unhurried in the English class.	3.41	.88	.86	.89**
4. My mind remains steady in the process of studying English.	3.43	.91	.77	.84**
5. I feel peace and comfort in the English class.	3.43	.86	.85	.92**
6. I am able to find inner peace and harmony when experiencing stress or pressure in English learning.	3.26	.90	.76	.83**
7. I have an inner sense of tranquility and harmony in the English class.	3.42	.87	.85	.91**
8. In English learning, I learn from my mistakes and move forward.	3.52	.91	.71	.77**

3.2.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

A CFA was run to test the construct validity and convergent validity of the single-factor FLPOM model generated by the EFA.

The construct validity was assessed with the normed chi-square (χ^2/df) statistic and a set of goodness-of-fit indices, including the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), comparative fit index (CFI), and the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI). Cutoff criterion for the goodness of fit (RMSEA and $SRMR \leq .08$, CFI , TLI , and $IFI \geq .95$) were adopted (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The results of CFA indicated a proper fit between the proposed model and the observed sample ($\chi^2/df = 3.335$, $p < .001$; $RMSEA = .073$; $CFI = .987$; $TLI = .980$; $IFI = .987$; $SRMR = .019$).

The convergent validity was assessed with factor loading (λ), average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 2, the factor loadings of all the observed variables were larger than .70, which suggested that the latent variable well explained the items. The calculated AVE was .709, well above the suggested threshold (.50), and CR was .951, indicating an ideal convergent validity for the model. In other words, all the items were converging on the same latent variable.

Table 2: Convergent validity indices for the FLPOM model

	Path	λ (factor loading)	AVE	CR
Item 1	← FLPOM	.813		
Item 2	← FLPOM	.900		
Item 3	← FLPOM	.880		
Item 4	← FLPOM	.810	.709	.951
Item 5	← FLPOM	.938		
Item 6	← FLPOM	.764		
Item 7	← FLPOM	.904		

3.2.3 Internal consistency analysis

Internal consistency of the FLPOM scale, as measured by Cronbach alpha coefficient, was satisfactory (.951), which indicated high reliability.

4 Study 2: The relatedness and discriminability between FLPOM and FLE

4.1 Methods

4.1.1 Participants

The sample for Study 2, which comprised 400 Chinese senior high school students (138 males, 262 females), was obtained through resampling randomly from the student population in the same four senior high schools as Study 1. The participants had an average age of 16.5, ranging from 15 to 21.

4.1.2 Instruments

The FLPOM scale developed in Study 1 was administered. Participants were asked to indicate their experiences related to peace of mind in learning English. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .946, which indicated high consistency. The mean score was 3.5 ($SD = .77$).

The Chinese Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES) (Li et al., 2018), a validated Chinese version of the FLE scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), was used. The scale contains 11 items and 3 dimensions (FLE-Private, FLE-Teacher and FLE-Atmosphere) (see Appendix 2). Participants were asked to indicate their experiences related to enjoyment in learning English. The Cronbach alpha for the scale was .905. The mean score was 3.7 ($SD = .64$).

4.2 Results

4.2.1 The relationship between FLPOM and FLE

A Pearson correlation analysis was run to test the relationship between FLPOM and FLE. Table 3 showed a significant positive correlation ($r = .708, p < .0001$), which means the two variables share 50.1% of variance. This represents a large effect size (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). It suggests that participants with high levels of FLE also scored high on FLPOM. FLE and FLPOM are closely related positive emotion constructs and both tend to co-occur.

Table 3: The means, variances, reliabilities and correlations of the observed variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. FLE	3.739	0.637	0.905	0.708***	0.286***
2. FLPOM	3.481	0.769	0.708***	0.946	0.354***
3. Self-perceived proficiency	6.783	1.442	0.286***	0.354***	----

Note. $N = 400$; *** $p < .001$; Consistency coefficients are on the diagonal.

4.2.2 The discriminability between FLE and FLPOM

A CFA was run to assess the discriminant validity of FLPOM or the discriminability between FLE and FLPOM. As shown in Table 4, the calculated *AVE* for FLPOM and FLE was .710 and .688, respectively, both larger than the threshold of 0.5 and the the square of the correlation coefficient for FLPOM and FLE ($r = .708$, $r^2 = .501$). Therefore, the discriminability between FLPOM and FLE was established.

Table 4: The discriminant validity indices for FLPOM and FLE

	Path	λ (factor loading)	<i>AVE</i>	<i>CR</i>
Item 1	← FLPOM	.812		
Item 2	← FLPOM	.887		
Item 3	← FLPOM	.889		
Item 4	← FLPOM	.830		
Item 5	← FLPOM	.916	.710	.951
Item 6	← FLPOM	.769		
Item 7	← FLPOM	.897		
Item 8	← FLPOM	.720		
FLE-Private	← FLE	.793		
FLE-Teacher	← FLE	.800	.688	.868
FLE-Atmosphere	← FLE	.891		

Besides, we used two competing models to validate the discriminability of FLPOM from FLE. In Model 1, FLE was used as the only latent variable to which all the observed variables were linked. In Model 2, FLE and FLPOM were used as two independent latent variables to which their respective observed variables were linked. The results showed that the goodness of fit of the two-factor model (Model 2) ($\chi^2/df = 2.889$, $p < .001$; $CFI = .979$; $TLI = .971$;

SRMR = .028; *RMSEA* = .069) was far superior to that of the single-factor model (Model 1) ($\chi^2/df = 13.024$, $p < .001$; *CFI* = .729; *TLI* = .692; *SRMR* = .104; *RMSEA* = .173). The improvement of goodness of fit reached significance ($\Delta\chi^2/df = 17.444$, $p < .001$). Therefore, FLPOM and FLE are well discriminable.

5 Study 3: The predictive powers of FLPOM and FLE on self-perceived FL proficiency

5.1 Methods

5.1.1 Participants

Study 3 used the same sample as Study 2, which consisted of 400 Chinese senior high school students (138 males, 262 females).

5.1.2 Instruments

The FLPOM scale and the CFLES (Li et al., 2018) were used again. The internal consistencies for FLPOM ($\alpha = .946$) and FLE ($\alpha = .905$) were satisfactory. Data on learners' self-perceived FL proficiency were elicited with the following question: How would you rate your current overall English proficiency. The mean of self-rated proficiency was 6.78 ($SD = 1.44$) on a 10-point Likert scale. Self-ratings are measures that SLA researchers rely primarily on in assessing learners' language proficiency (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019b; Liu, 2018; Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak, & Bielak, 2016). Zhang, Dai and Wang (2020) argued that despite possible deficiencies (e.g., social desirability), self-ratings are necessary especially when objective ratings are not available. Gullifer et al.'s (2021) empirical examination of the latent structure of objective and subjective proficiency measures suggested that learners are generally able to accurately judge their FL performance through subjective measures. From a statistical perspective, both the independent and dependent variables in the study were likely to be affected by social desirability. However, the study focused on the pairwise linear relationships between the measured variables, that is, the co-variance between FLE/FLPOM and self-perceived proficiency, rather than the level of a certain variable. Therefore, the possible influences of social desirability or bias were most likely to be counteracted in the process, without severely impairing the accuracy of the observed relationships.

5.2 Results

5.2.1 Normal distribution test

One assumption of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis is normal distribution. Therefore, prior to multiple regression analysis, we used Jarque-Bera test to determine the normality of the sample data. The test statistic was 273.3, and the probability that the chi-squared value was greater than this test statistic was 0.000; that is, the sample data did not have the skewness and kurtosis matching a normal distribution. Normality was rejected.

5.2.2 Heteroscedasticity test

Another assumption of the OLS regression is homoscedasticity, i.e., the variance of the error term remains constant. We performed a Breusch-Pagan test, which is used to confirm

heteroscedasticity in a linear form. The null hypothesis of constant variance was accepted with $\chi^2(1) = 0.80$ and $p = 0.3722 > 0.05$. Non-heteroscedasticity was detected and served as a prerequisite for the OLS regression analysis.

5.2.3 Nonparametric test

Previous tests showed that the data on self-perceived proficiency did not match normal distribution but conformed to the assumption of homoscedasticity. Prior to the OLS regression analysis, we further used the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between different levels of FLE and FLPOM on self-perceived proficiency. As presented in Table 5, the differences between different levels of FLE on the mean rank of self-perceived proficiency reached statistical significance ($p = 0.028 < 0.05$); the differences between different levels of FLPOM on the mean rank of self-perceived proficiency also reached statistical significance ($p = 0.000 < 0.001$). That is, difference levels of FLE and FLPOM led to significant differences in self-perceived proficiency. A multiple regression analysis is thus possible.

Table 5: The nonparametric test results of FLE and FLPOM on self-perceived proficiency

Test statistics: a,b,c		
Chi-squared	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i>
217.979	180	0.028
a. Kruskal Wallis test		b. FLE
Chi-squared	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i>
84.759	32	0.000
a. Kruskal Wallis test		c. FLPOM

5.2.4 Multiple regression analysis (OLS)

Stepwise regression analyses were run to test the predictive powers of FLPOM and FLE on self-perceived language proficiency which was used as the dependent variable in Model 1–3.

In Model 1, FLE was used as the independent variable. Table 3 shows that FLE had a significant positive effect on self-perceived proficiency ($\beta = .29, p < .001$), and explained 8.2% ($R^2 = .082$) of the variance in self-perceived proficiency.

In Model 2, FLPOM was used as the independent variable. FLPOM also had a positive effect on self-perceived proficiency ($\beta = .35, p < .001$) and explained 12.5% ($R^2 = .125$) of the variance. The variance explained by Model 2 was 4.3% higher than that by Model 1, suggesting that FLPOM had a stronger effect on self-perceived proficiency than FLE.

In Model 3, both FLE and FLPOM were entered as the independent variables. As shown in Table 6, the regression effect of FLE on self-perceived proficiency became insignificant ($\beta = .07, p = .285$) after FLPOM was controlled for, whereas the effect of FLPOM remained significant ($\beta = .30, p < .001$) after FLE was controlled for. Model 3 in which both FLPOM and FLE were entered explained 12.8% ($R^2 = .128$) of the total variance of the outcome variable, 4.6% higher than Model 1 ($R^2 = .082$) in which FLE was entered, and only 0.3% higher than Model 2 ($R^2 = .125$) in which FLPOM was entered. Besides, As presented in Table

6, the VIF for FLPOM, FLE were both less than 10 (FLE = 2.01, FLPOM = 2.11) and the tolerance greater than 0.1 (FLE = 0.50, FLPOM = 0.47). Additionally, the correlation coefficient between FLE and FLPOM was less than 0.8 ($r = .708$), so there was no serious problem of multicollinearity. Therefore, Model 3 had a substantially stronger explanatory effect over self-perceived proficiency than Model 1 and only a marginally stronger effect than Model 2. These results reinforced the finding that FLPOM was a robust predictor of self-perceived proficiency, compared to FLE.

Table 6: The regression effects of FLPOM and FLE on self-perceived FL proficiency

Independent variable	self-perceived FL achievement		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
FLE	.29***		.07
FLPOM		.35***	.30***
R^2	.082	.125	.128
Adjusted R^2	.079	.123	.123
R^2 change	.082	.043	.003
F	35.44***	56.98***	29.07***
t	5.95	7.55	1.07 (FLE) 4.58 (FLPOM)
VIF	1.09	1.14	2.01 (FLE) 2.11 (FLPOM)
<i>Tolerance</i>	.918	.875	.50 (FLE) .47 (FLPOM)
<i>Correlation</i>	.708***		

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

6 Discussion

In the present study, we propose that the concept of FLE may not overlap completely with the unique LAP and harmonious emotional state valued in Chinese culture.

Study 1 presented the development of the construct and measure of FLPOM based on Chinese cultural orientations. FLPOM is reflective of a culture-specific emotional state of inner peace and internal harmony in the Chinese EFL learning context. The two seemingly independent states are integrated into a coherent process in which one state can be attained through fostering the other. The FLPOM measurement scale is based on a single-factor structure and included 8 items reflecting learners' emotional arousal related to inner peace and harmony. Validity and reliability analyses confirmed the FLPOM scale had a valid factor

structure and high internal consistency.

Study 2 addressed the first research question pertaining to the relatedness and discriminability between FLPOM and FLE. Correlation analysis revealed a strong correlation between FLPOM and FLE. That is, learners with high levels of FLPOM also enjoyed FL learning a lot. Although FLPOM and FLE differ in arousal level and an emphasis on harmony, both of them are concerned with learners' positive emotions about their own progress, their peers and their teacher. Thus, a high correlation between FLPOM and FLE is to be expected. Discriminant validity analysis confirmed that FLPOM and FLE were empirically discriminable emotion constructs. FLE is positive activating emotion which can be marked by a higher physiological activation level and an inclination towards challenging ones' limits and breaking through homeostasis, whereas FLPOM is an emotional state featuring a low arousal level and harmonious homeostasis. Thus, we propose that FLPOM and FLE are distinct positive emotions, both conceptually and empirically, in the Chinese FL learning context.

Study 3 attended to the second and third research questions regarding the predictive powers of FLPOM and FLE on Chinese learners' self-perceived FL proficiency. Firstly, regression analysis showed that FLPOM was a significant predictor of Chinese learners' self-perceived proficiency. This echoed previous findings on the role of POM in ordinary educational contexts in collectivist cultures (Datu, 2017; Datu et al., 2018), which also justified the introduction of FLPOM into the Chinese FL learning context. Secondly, the regression model in which both FLPOM and FLE were entered revealed a more striking finding, that is, FLE failed to predict self-perceived proficiency after the effect of FLPOM was controlled for, whereas FLPOM remained a significant predictor of self-perceived proficiency after FLE was controlled for. The explained variances of language proficiency showed that the combined explanatory effect of FLPOM and FLE was only marginally higher than that of FLPOM, if not considered negligible, but was substantially larger than that of FLE. We thus speculate that the effect of FLE on Chinese learners' language proficiency confirmed in both the present and previous studies (Li, 2018; Li et al., 2019) may be largely mediated by FLPOM, which needs to be verified in future studies using mediation analysis. When cultural variations in emotions are factored in, FLPOM may be the key positive emotion that drives Chinese learners to achieve well.

The research findings have both theoretical and practical implications. First, this culture-specific investigation is a response to the recent call on FL learners' emotional experiences beyond FLE and FLCA (Dewaele & Li, 2020). It provided a cross-cultural perspective to the conceptualization of subjective well-being in FL emotion research. Second, pedagogical implications can be elicited for FL education in Chinese high schools. FL teachers should realize that Chinese EFL learners who rate themselves as proficient may feel slightly more comfortable with LAP emotions than with the potentially more arousing FLE. We thus recommend that teachers focus on building a relaxed and comfortable classroom climate and culture where learners can experiment with the new language without fear of the reactions of peers and teacher when they make mistakes (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Classroom learning atmosphere could also benefit from greater teacher autonomy in teaching plans, classroom activities and student assessment. This is relevant in the Chinese educational context where an examination-oriented culture has been identified (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019a). A diversified evaluation mechanism is recommended as an alternative. Besides, researchers

and clinical practitioners have found that mindfulness training can effectively enhance individuals' sense of peace of mind, reflected in an increased present-focused awareness, heightened attention and states of equanimity and balance (Davis & Thompson, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Liu et al., 2015). Therefore, it may be worth a try to incorporate mindfulness training or mindfulness-based interventions using techniques such as meditation, tai chi and yoga into students' curriculum, which may help students develop a calm and well-regulated state of mind as well as creates a sense of relaxation in the classroom. Learners should be aware of that a peaceful and balanced mind is the key to well-being, which will help them achieve more efficient and sustainable language development.

The current study is not without limitations. First, we acknowledge that self-perceptions of language proficiency, although having been widely used in relevant studies, may not be the most accurate indicator of learners' language proficiency due to social desirability or other random factors, such as questionnaire fatigue. More objective measures, when conditions allow, should be operationalized as the criterion variable to indicate learners' language proficiency in future studies. Second, we acknowledge that the results of comparing the values of "points" (e.g., mean, variance) between two closely related psychometric variables are practically always affected by deviations resulted from human factors which seem to be unavoidable in social science research. The deviations may impair the accuracy of the comparative results of "point" values. However, a silver lining can be found when a third relevant variable is introduced and linked to the two target variables, respectively. Then it turns into a comparison between the values of "lines" (e.g., correlation, regression). In this case, the deviations of the two target variables can be counteracted by the same deviations caused on the third variable, as the third variable is influenced concurrently with the target variables by the deviations. Therefore, the comparison between "line" values is considered more accurate than that between "point" values. Considering this, we did not focus on the mean levels of FLE and FLPOM. Instead, we introduced a third variable, self-perceived FL proficiency, and linked it to FLE and FLPOM, respectively. The results obtained from comparing the predictions for FL proficiency were then used to differentiate the two emotions and to understand the cultural orientations to them, which could also provide more practical implications for FL education in China. Third, the cross-sectional research design adopted might not accurately reflect the causal relationship between learners' experienced emotions and their language achievement. Longitudinal or time-lagged research designs are highly recommended in future studies. Fourth, the data collected for the three sub-studies could have possibly suffered from repeated participation and thus the practice effect, because we did not intentionally block the participants of one study from participating in the other. However, the repeated response rate must not have been very high as we surveyed four schools, each with 2000 to 3000 students.

Research on positive emotions in SLA is still in its early stages. More efforts, especially those adopting a cross-cultural perspective, are needed to investigate learners' experiences and perceptions of positive emotions within different cultural and educational contexts. We agree with the call in Dewaele and Li (2020) for more research using sophisticated statistical techniques like mediation analysis to investigate complex interactions between multiple variables. Another important question could be how FLPOM fits within Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory and whether its role in promoting academic outcomes may be

linked to mechanisms beyond the scope of the broadening and building effects of general positive emotions.

7 Conclusion

The current study introduced a new emotion construct, FLPOM, in the Chinese FL learning context based on Chinese cultural orientations. FLPOM is indicative of a LAP emotional state and a state of internal harmony, which distinguishes it from FLE marked by a HAP state valued in western culture. The findings suggested that FLPOM and FLE were parallel but distinct emotion constructs. FLPOM turned out to be a stronger predictor of Chinese learners' self-perceived FL proficiency than FLE.

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Appendix 1. The Foreign Language Peace of Mind scale

Instructions: The following statements are related to “peace of mind” in learning English. Please select a number from 1 to 5 to indicate to what extent the statements are consistent with your personal experiences.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither degree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree

(Item English)

1. My mind is free and at ease in the English class.
2. I have peace and harmony in my mind when learning English.
3. I am patient and unhurried in the English class.
4. My mind remains very steady in the process of studying English.
5. I feel peace and comfort in the English class.
6. I am able to find inner peace and harmony when experiencing stress or pressure in English learning.
7. I have an inner sense of tranquility and harmony in the English class.
8. In English learning, I learn from my mistakes and move forward.

(Item Chinese)

1. 英语课上，我的内心是轻松自在的。
2. 在英语学习中，我的内心感到平静、和谐。
3. 英语课上，我从容耐心，不慌不忙。
4. 学英语的过程中，我的心态一直很平稳。
5. 英语课上，我感到平静、舒适。
6. 当英语学习带来压力时，我能够找到内心的宁静与和谐。
7. 英语课上，我的内心有一种安定感、和谐感。
8. 在英语学习中，我会从错误中学习并向前看。

Appendix 2: The Chinese Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES) (Li et al., 2018)

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Strongly Disagree/ Disagree /Undecided/ Agree /Strongly Agree

(Item English)

1. I don't get bored.
2. I enjoy it.
3. I've learnt interesting things.
4. In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments.
5. It's a positive environment.
6. It's fun.
7. The teacher is encouraging.
8. The teacher is friendly.
9. The teacher is supportive.
10. There is a good atmosphere.
11. We form a tight group.

(Item Chinese)

1. 我不厌倦英语学习。
2. 我享受英语学习。

3. 学英语的过程中，我学到了很多有趣的事情。
4. 在班里，我为自己的英语成绩感到自豪。
5. 周围英语学习的氛围很好。
6. 学英语很有趣。
7. 老师总是鼓励我们。
8. 老师很友善。
9. 老师总是支持我们。
10. 我身边有很好的英语学习氛围。
11. 我们有紧密的学习小组。