



## **Emotional Disposition and Leadership Preferences of American and Chinese MBA Students**

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This article reports results from an exploratory study examining the relationship between American and Chinese MBA students' emotional intelligence, constructive thinking ability, emotional creativity, and leader behavioral preference. Data analyses indicated a significant, positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the desirability of transformational leadership. No such relationship was found with constructive thinking ability, and emotional creativity actually exhibited a negative association. Moreover, there were significant differences found between the American and Chinese samples on emotional intellect and emotional creativity, with Americans scoring higher on the emotional intelligence scale but the Chinese exhibiting higher scores on the emotional creativity measure. Further, significant differences were found as to the desirability of transformational leadership. The American sample exhibited a higher mean preference score for transformational leadership as compared to the Chinese students, while the Chinese sample perceived passive leadership as more acceptable as compared to the American students.

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Those fascinated by the leader–follower connection have long explored the various factors that influence such a multifaceted relationship. In recent years, there has been substantial interest in the influence of personality within the leadership dyad (Bono & Judge, 2004) and numerous outcomes associated with leaders (Judge & Bono, 2000) and, to a lesser extent, followers (Wofford, Whittington, & Goodwin, 2001). Consequently, measures of nonintellectual intelligence have emerged at the vanguard of the personality polemic as “scholars have a strong and continuing interest in the dispositional bases of leadership” (Bono & Judge, p. 901). This is

fitting since “personality represents an integration of one’s multiple intelligences” (Bass, 2002, p. 106). For example, Bass’ (1985) conceptualization of transformational leadership has shown an association with dispositional and/or cognitive constructs such as emotional intelligence (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006), aspects of constructive thinking ability (Humphreys & Zettel, 2002), and creativity (Shin & Zhou, 2003).

Having said that, leaders and followers are part of a single interconnected system and the followers’ perspective is often neglected (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). In particular, we are unaware of any study specifically investigating the emotional structures of followers and the ensuing relationship to preference of exhibited leader behaviors, even though individual needs, emotions, cognition, and schemas clearly do impact follower perception of leadership (Casimir & Li, 2005) and responsiveness (Wofford et al., 2001) to specific leader behaviors.

Moreover, there is currently an ardent debate concerning the universality of effective and/or desirable leadership behaviors. Whereas transformational leadership has been presented as a universal theory (Bass, 1997), with a modicum of partial support from the GLOBE study of leadership across cultures (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997), others have claimed transformational behaviors would be undesirable (Shafer, Vieregge, & Youngsoo, 2005) and ineffective (Walumbwa, Lawler, Avolio, Wang, & Shi, 2005) in selected other cultures, particularly China.

Furthermore, since China is beginning to emerge as a significant player on the world economic stage (Humphreys, 2007), it is clear that leadership scholars must escalate the investigation of leader–follower effects created by the vast differences in personal social values, and the ensuing emotional construction, in relation to the West (Shafer, Fukukawa, & Lee, 2007). Although such culturally bound disparity is beginning to erode to a degree (Davis, 1997), there is still momentous divergence in the way Chinese followers identify concepts such as leadership (Alves, Manz, & Butterfield, 2005).

Therefore, this article presents an exploratory examination of the emotional disposition of Chinese and American MBA students and their leadership preferences from the full range of leader behavior (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Specifically, we tested these disparate cultural groups based upon the relationship between emotional intelligence, constructive thinking ability, emotional creativity, and the perceived desirability of active transformational leadership versus passive leadership behaviors.

### **Transformational Leadership and the Full Range of Leader Behavior**

Burns (1978) envisioned transforming leadership at one end of a continuum and transactional leadership at the other (Bass, 1985). According to his model, transformational leaders have an understanding of their followers’ needs and attempt to structure leader–follower interaction to appeal to those needs. He believed these leaders appealed to their followers through a sense of moral obligation and that transactional leaders only appealed to their followers’ self-interests.

Bass (1985), however, expanded Burns’ (1978) work by incorporating a broader range of processes and description of the behaviors that divide transactional and transformational leaders. Further, Bass’ (1985) notions challenged Burns’ assumption that transformational and transactional leaders were at opposite poles. Burns believed these leadership behaviors to be mutually exclusive. In Bass’ (1985) paradigm, transformational leadership is not a substitute for transactional leadership but a complement (Howell & Avolio, 1993).

Bass (1985) asserted the key to a transactional style of leadership is the exchange between leader and follower. An active transactional leader typically employs a style of contingent reward (e.g., reward for performance) whereas a passive transactional leader tends to practice the avoidance of corrective actions (managing-by-exception) as long as goals are met. Bass (1985) also included leader abdication (*laissez-faire*) in his paradigm to complete the continuum or full range of leader behaviors (Avolio & Bass, 1991) from most active (authentic transformational) to most passive (*laissez-faire*).

In contrast, transformational leader behavior does not depend upon a transactional exchange relationship (Bass, 1985). Instead, transformational leaders produce a unifying cogency by altering their followers' goals and beliefs. Bass (1985) stressed transformational leaders achieved this by exhibiting behaviors consistent with (a) individual consideration (accurately diagnosing follower needs to optimize individual potential), (b) intellectual stimulation (promoting logic and rationality), (c) inspirational motivation (expressing important purposes to symbolically focus follower efforts), and (d) charisma or idealized influence (providing a sense of mission, instilling pride and trust in and among the group).

There is a prevalence of literature indicating that transformational leadership can lead to numerous constructive organizational and follower outcomes (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Yammarino, Spangler, & Bass, 1993). Acknowledging this, there is growing realization that follower values can influence receptivity to perceived leader behaviors and must be included to adequately examine constructs such as personality within the leader–follower dyad (Howell & Shamir, 2005).

For example, Wofford et al. (2001) have presented findings that transforming leadership may be more effective in certain situations because “some followers are more susceptible to the efforts of a transformational leader than are other followers” (p. 203). Additionally, Ehrhart and Klein (2001) have suggested leader behaviors deemed motivating by individual followers are very much driven by a follower's disposition (i.e., personality and values). As a result, the notion of multiple intelligences (Riggio, Murphy, & Pirozzolo, 2002) has been at the forefront of this discussion of the importance of such leader and follower dispositional characteristics. In particular, transformational leadership has been shown to be associated with emotional intelligence (Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000), as it is thought to contribute to the rapport between transformational leaders and followers (Bass, 2002).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

While intelligence theorists have described various forms of intellect, arguably, the concept of emotional intelligence has had the greatest influence upon the field. Salovey and Mayer (1990) have been credited with first defining emotional intelligence. In essence, they viewed emotional intelligence as “the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (p. 189).

Goleman (1995), however, popularized the construct, defining emotional intelligence “as the capacity for recognizing one's own emotions and those of others” (as cited in Luthans, 2002, p. 69). Thus, “an emotionally intelligent individual is able to recognize and use his or her own and others' emotional states to solve problems and regulate behavior” (Huy, 1999, p. 326). Emotional intelligence advocates have offered the concept as a means to reduce turnover, create more effective teams, enhance creativity, and enhance person–organization fit, although

empirical data supporting these assertions have been limited (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002), and some have questioned its validity (Decker, 2003). There is, however, some evidence to support the view that emotional intelligence may be a superior predictor of performance and general life success than the traditional intelligence quotient (Lam & Kirby, 2002), and a reasonable case can be made for investigating the construct in organizational research (Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2003).

Much of the academic debate surrounding emotional intelligence has focused on leadership (Barling et al., 2000; Luthans, 2002). The salient literature clearly assumes that emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective (Goleman, 1998; Sosik & Megerian, 1999) even as empirical support has been mixed (Sivathan & Fekken, 2002). The focus on leadership, with the exclusion of followers, however, is again unfortunate and researchers are beginning to explore this void. For example, Humphreys, Weyent, and Sprague (2003) found that emotional intelligence of followers influenced their organizational commitment. In addition, Jordan, Ashkanasy, and Hartel (2002) proposed a model showing employee emotional intelligence as a moderating variable between emotional and behavioral reactions and perceptions of job insecurity. One of the behavioral responses they focused on was follower coping, a key element of Epstein's (1991) concept of constructive thinking, which has been linked to transformational leadership (Atwater & Yammarino, 1993) and emotional intellect (Humphreys et al.).

### **Constructive Thinking Ability**

Constructive thinking assumes there are individual differences in thought existing along a span from very constructive to very destructive. Good constructive thinking is the ability to solve everyday problems with a minimal cost in stress (Epstein, 1993). Epstein (1990) believed that people incorrectly assumed their behavior was driven by reason. In contrast, he suggested we are often directed automatically by an experiential system, determined in part by emotional variables (Epstein, 1998). Epstein (1991) described the reason behind constructive thinking as follows:

If emotions and, to a large extent, behavior, are determined automatically by the functioning of the experiential conceptual system . . . , then the effectiveness with which the experiential system operates should play an important role in determining a person's success in everyday living. This raises an interesting question. Is it possible that one could obtain a measure of the overall effectiveness of the experiential system in a manner analogous to the use of intelligence tests to measure the effectiveness of the rational system? If so, what is it that would have to be measured? The answer is that one would have to sample a person's typical automatic thinking. (p. 101)

There are two dimensions of automatic thinking: content and process. Content refers to specific components of an individual's personal theory of reality. Process refers to how the system actually operates. Epstein (1991) illustrated these two variables with the following examples. The statement, "When I fail a test, I feel that I'm a total failure and that I will never amount to anything," is a poor response to both content and process. The content is overly pessimistic and the process is one of gross overgeneralization. When the response is more like, "When I do well on a test, I feel I'm a success and that I will succeed in any endeavor," the content is positive but the process is an overgeneralization. A constructive response for both dimensions could be, "When I fail a test, I realize it's only one test, and I learn from the experience without getting upset." This statement demonstrates positive content and process. In actuality though, even very intelligent people can think destructively yet have great difficulty in changing their cognitive

patterns. Thus, intellectual intelligence and constructive thinking are separate constructs (Epstein, 1991), as the intelligence of the experiential system determines an individual's place along the constructive thinking continuum.

Constructive thinking ability has been investigated in many environments. Studies have shown significant relationships between constructive thinking and physical and mental health (Epstein & Katz, 1992), success in social relations (Katz & Epstein, 1991), and satisfaction (Epstein, 1990; Scheurer & Epstein, 1997). Moreover, in leadership studies, aspects of constructive thinking have predicted performance (Atwater, 1992) and commitment (Humphreys et al., 2003) and exhibited a relationship with transformational leader self-perception (Humphreys & Zettel, 2002).

In addition, although constructive thinking ability and emotional intelligence are discrete constructs, they are nonetheless related in the overriding concept of emotional disposition. Also within this emotional perspective is the emerging concept of emotional creativity.

### Emotional Creativity

“Emotions and creativity have long been associated in popular conception. Yet, the relationship between emotions and creativity remains fraught with ambiguity” (Averill, 2004, p. 230). Whereas emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize and regulate emotions, emotional creativity envelopes individual differences in the ability to experience new or unique emotions (Averill, 1999).

Averill (1999) asserted emotional creativity encompassed four criteria: (a) novelty (a response may be novel in comparison to past behavior or typical societal behavior), (b) effectiveness (to be considered creative, a response must not only be novel but also be beneficial to the individual or group), (c) authenticity (a creative response must reflect one's own values and beliefs about the world—an expression of self), and (d) preparedness (long-term emotional preparation based upon understanding one's own emotions and sensitivity to the emotions of others). “On a descriptive level, the overlap between the concepts of emotional intelligence and emotional creativity is considerable. The major difference is the potential for novel responses in the case of emotional creativity. On a theoretical level, the relation between emotional intelligence and emotional creativity is less clear” (Averill, 2004, p. 232).

Averill (1999) viewed the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional creativity in the same stead as cognitive intelligence and cognitive creativity. That is to say that a certain degree of intellect is needed in any domain for creativity to exist, yet that intellect does not assure creativity. “Thus, people who are emotionally creative must also be to some degree emotionally intelligent. The reverse, however, is not necessarily true” (Averill, 2004, p. 232). In addition, there has been evidence to suggest a relationship between emotional intelligence and self-perceived creativity (Chan, 2005).

Further, this viewpoint is based on the idea that emotions are constituted and regulated by social expectations and norms and can change at the social level (Harre & Parrott, 1996). In view of that, cultural context must be explored (Jung & Avolio, 1999; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001), especially considering the explosive changes within a country like China.

### The Cultural Context: China and America

The examination of context within the leader–follower relationship is important as “different environmental conditions impact the nature of the leadership challenge” (Gibbons, 1992, p. 15). Frankly, many established leadership concepts have been developed in the United States with Americans in mind (Adler, 1997). The majorities have defined individual personality motives from a Western point of view (Hofstede, 1980), despite evidence that perceptual thought appears to be influenced by cultural dimensions (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001; Mueller & Clarke, 1998). Thus, examinations of perceptual and dispositional aspects must begin considering contextual applicability outside Western cultures and organizations (Casimir, Waldman, Bartram, & Yang, 2006). This is particularly true when addressing personality variables, as the Western concept of personality may be alien to an Eastern mode of thinking (Chao, 1990). Such dichotomous differences make intriguing fodder for researchers and hold enormous implications for practitioners as globalization inexorably expands.

Dissimilar to archetypal American characteristics, Hofstede (1993) labeled the Chinese as a collective and long-term oriented society whose citizens accept a large power distance and seek to avoid uncertainty. As compared to American followers, existing research has indicated significant differences in the way Chinese employees perceive concepts such as leadership (Alves et al., 2005), organizational change (Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001), the self-concept (Kurman, 2001), negotiation (Palich, Carini, & Livingstone, 2002), decision making (Weber, Ames, & Blais, 2004), intent to turnover (Hsu, Hsu, Huang, Leong, & Li, 2003), social responsibility (Shafer, Fukukawa, & Lee, 2007), and the pursuit of organizational goals (Oishi & Diener, 2001). Many of these differences are clearly the result of China’s collectivist history (Hofstede, 1993) and Confucian value system (Casimir et al., 2006; Lew, 1998) which have shaped some specific culturally driven aspects of personality (Shenkar & Ronen, 1987) that are beginning to appear in the literature (e.g., Liu, Friedman, & Chi, 2005; Ma & Jaeger, 2005).

Due to their collectivist nature, Chinese followers are intent on the maintenance of harmony within group processes (Satow & Wang, 1994). They tend to exhibit durable organizational commitment and subordinate personal goals for group objectives (Earley, 1994), with relationships being more important than explicit technical abilities. In addition, they more easily accept the leader’s vision and authority than many in Western society (Casimir & Li, 2005; El Kahal, 2001). In large part, this is due to the accepted power distance within Chinese traditions. This power distance, as well as paternalism (leaders lead and followers obey), impacts the Chinese implicit attitude (expectations) towards leadership, thereby challenging the accepted view of the full range of leader behavior and the desirability of transformational leadership (Casimir et al., 2006; Walumba et al., 2005).

In addition, “although traditional cultural values are relatively stable and persistent (Hofstede, 1991), changes in such values may occur over time, and may be precipitated by changes in social, political, and economic environments” (Shafer, Fukukawa, & Lee, 2007, p. 268). While substantial cultural differences undoubtedly still exist, China’s opening in the late 1970s, coupled with extraordinary economic growth in successive years, has created a somewhat blended environment of Confucian values and market-oriented philosophy (Redfern, 2005). Further, evolving culture and value systems must influence personality and perception (Liu et al., 2005; Ma & Jaeger, 2005), and follower satisfaction is clearly a key to future organizational performance (Barrett, 1999). Accordingly, an investigation of how the emotional disposition of future American and Chinese business leaders relates to leader behaviors certainly is warranted.

### Summary and Hypotheses

Consistent with prior investigations using the current personality and leadership variables, we anticipate replicating many of these relationships based upon social identification and implicit theories of leadership, even though our study is focused on leader behavior preferences instead of post facto behaviors exhibited. Adding the sample from mainland China, however, complicates our expectations substantially. For example, the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership appears rather consistent in the literature (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). In contrast, a topical study by Leung (2005) indicated that emotional intelligence in leadership may be counter productive in a Chinese context. The author went so far as to refer to it as emotional blackmail, suggesting “an emotionally intelligent leader . . . contributes to the creation of ineffective, bad citizens in an organization” (p. 192). Likewise, while we can find no studies specifically focused on emotional creativity and constructive thinking ability with a mainland Chinese sample, the theoretical relatedness demonstrated in our review leads us to expect a similar divergence.

Further, the inclusion of the desirability of the full range of leader behavior creates even more conceptual uncertainty. While the behaviors associated with transformational leadership are appealing to many Western followers, leadership in China tends to exhibit paternalistic and autocratic behaviors (El Kahal, 2001) which are congruent with Confucian follower values and the Chinese perception of exemplary leadership. Chinese leaders tend to not trust followers and use legitimate power as a primary means of influence (Casimir et al., 2006), as opposed to the referent power attributed to transformational leaders. Yet, paradoxically, there has been evidence that Chinese followers prefer leaders with certain charismatic dimensions (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Further complicating the relationship between these variables, particularly leadership preferences, are the rapidly changing ideas held by China’s younger, more affluent citizens. They tend to be less deferential to leadership and more individualistic than their predecessors (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Yu, 1997). One could conclude that in the current situation, these individuals might actually prefer a more passive engagement with leadership. Or, it could suggest that because of this broad, societal shift, future leaders “may well need to rely on developing approaches such as transformational leadership to earn the respect of his or her subordinates” (Walumbwa et al., 2005, p. 4). Of course, as previously reviewed, this shift could also alter the Chinese landscape as to emotional creativity, influencing emotional intelligence and changing the subsequent leadership schematic. The coping skills needed to excel in such an environment could also be enhanced and evidenced by superior constructive thinking ability.

Although conceptual clutter obviously abounds, based upon the literature and personal experience in the People’s Republic of China, we explored the relationships between emotional intelligence, constructive thinking ability, and emotional creativity and polar preferences from the full range of leader behavior. Since there seems to be support for the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership (Barling et al., 2000), we proposed the following hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub><sup>a</sup>: Emotional intelligence is positively correlated with the desirability of transformational leadership.
- H<sub>1</sub><sup>b</sup>: Emotional intelligence is negatively correlated with the desirability of passive leader behavior.

The relationship between constructive thinking ability and transformational leadership is not clear as empirical results have been mixed. However, a strong relationship between emotional intellect and constructive thinking has been shown (Humphreys et al., 2003). Therefore, we reasoned the following:

- H<sub>2</sub><sup>a</sup>: Constructive thinking ability is positively correlated with the desirability of transformational leadership.
- H<sub>2</sub><sup>b</sup>: Constructive thinking ability is negatively correlated with the desirability of passive leader behavior.

The relationship between emotional creativity and transformational leadership simply does not currently exist in the literature. However, since transformational leadership has been thought to encourage general follower creativity (Shin & Jhou, 2003) and emotional creativity shares a supposed link with emotional intelligence (Averill, 2004), we speculated the following:

- H<sub>3</sub><sup>a</sup>: Emotional creativity is positively correlated with the desirability of transformational leadership.
- H<sub>3</sub><sup>b</sup>: Emotional creativity is negatively correlated with the desirability of passive leader behavior.

As previously discussed, the comparison of the American and Chinese samples has been fraught with contradiction in the literature, and this confusion is exacerbated by the rapid changes occurring in China and, undoubtedly, in the Chinese psyche. Therefore, we cannot comfortably offer directionality to the emotional disposition differences. As this is an exploratory study, however, we will take license and offer our conjecture. Since we believe the concept of emotional intelligence is based upon Western ideas and understanding of emotions and personality, our expectation is as follows:

- H<sub>4</sub>: American MBA students will score significantly higher on the emotional intelligence measure than will the Chinese MBA students.

Although constructive thinking ability has shown a relationship with emotional intelligence, it seems to not be as heavily determined by Western perspectives and ideals. One could make the case that automatic thinking to reduce stress in everyday living might be more universal. Based upon the conceptual relationship with emotional intellect, however, we made the assumption that the relationship outcomes will be similar.

- H<sub>5</sub>: American MBA students will score significantly higher on the constructive thinking measure than will the Chinese MBA students.

Finally, since no evidence exists concerning emotional creativity differences between American and mainland Chinese samples, any proposition is nothing more than speculation. An important facet of emotional creativity is the ability to think in novel ways in comparison to group norms. Based upon the collectivist history of China, it is conceivable that such atypical thought and behavior would prove more difficult than in Western society. For that reason, we predicted the following:

- H<sub>6</sub>: American MBA students will score significantly higher on the emotional creativity measure than will the Chinese MBA students.

Finally, although there are divergent opinions in the literature, based upon the cultural differences and values and upon personal experience, we agree with others (e.g., Casimir et al., 2006) that the cultural contexts of China will indeed appreciably impact leadership preference, although we admit empirical evidence is limited. Shafer, Vieregge, and Youngsoo (2005) found a modicum of difference in American and Chinese perceptions of transformational behaviors. Also, Littrell (2002) published findings indicating an enhanced desire for freedom in the Chinese

leader–follower relationship that could be interpreted as a desire for less influential and intrusive leadership styles. Hence, we suggested the following:

- H<sub>7</sub>: American MBA students will perceive transformational leadership as significantly more desirable than their Chinese cohorts, whereas Chinese MBA students will exhibit a significant preference for passive leader behavior as compared to the American MBA students.

## Method

### *Subjects*

Data were obtained in the third and fourth quarter of 2006 from MBA students at medium-sized universities in the Southwest United States and in the Northeast of the People's Republic of China. Of the approximately 150 students available, 75 returned surveys, but 5 were missing significant responses. Therefore, 70 surveys were used for analysis (39 Chinese and 31 American). Based upon self-reported demographic data, the majority of the students were in the 28 to 35 age bracket. The overall sample was 66% male and 34% female, with the subsamples exhibiting somewhat similar characteristics (Chinese sample: 69% male, 31% female; American sample: 61% male, 39% female).

Also, all surveys were written and completed in English. The Chinese students were specifically chosen for the lead author's course (taught on the mainland) due to their English language skills (both reading and writing). Their demonstrated proficiency across a full academic semester suggested standard versions of the data collection instruments were preferable to the methodological issues surrounding back translation (interested readers should see Small, Yelland, Lumley, Rice, Cotronei, & Warren, 1999).

### *Instruments and Measures*

*The full range of leader behavior.* Preferences for leader behaviors were measured using an adapted version of Bass and Avolio's (1995) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X – short form). The students were asked to indicate the desirability of behaviors exhibited by their leader on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*frequently, if not always*). Typical items ranged from: "I want a leader who treats each of us as individuals with different needs, abilities, and aspirations" (transformational/individual consideration) to "I want a leader who is absent when needed" (*laissez-faire*). For the purpose of the current study, the transformational leader behaviors were subsumed (Avolio & Bass, 1999) into one heading of active transformational leadership ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). In addition, the leadership dimensions of management-by-exception and *laissez-faire* behaviors ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ) were also combined to create a generic passive leadership variable representing the polar opposite of transformational leadership on the full range continuum of leader behavior.

*Emotional intelligence.* Carson, Carson, and Birkenmeier's (2000) Emotional Intelligence Survey was used to determine relative emotional intellect. They developed their measure by initially administering 269 positively- and negatively-worded items to represent the five emotional intelligence components, derived from Goleman's (1995) work, to determine which best represented the dimensions of emotional intelligence. This resulted in a five-factor solution

(empathetic response, mood regulation, interpersonal skills, internal motivation, and self-awareness) and a 30-item self-report questionnaire measuring an individual's ability to comprehend the emotions of both others and self and use this understanding to guide thought and behavior. Students rated these items on a five-point scale to indicate their degree of agreement. The subsumed results produced a summation of individual emotional intellect. Typical items were: "I am keenly aware of the feelings of other people" and "I can regulate my moods so that they don't overwhelm me." The current sample produced an overall internal reliability coefficient of 0.89.

*Constructive thinking ability.* Constructive thinking was established using the global scale of Epstein's (1993) Constructive Thinking Inventory (CTI). The CTI is a 108-item self-report that measures automatic constructive and destructive thinking. Students rated these items on a five-point scale to indicate the degree to which they believed them to be true or false. People with high global scale scores are flexible thinkers who can alter their ways of thinking as appropriate for the situation presented. They can be both optimistic and pessimistic as determined by the situation. Typical items are: "I am the kind of person who takes action rather than just thinks or complains about a situation" and "I am tolerant of my mistakes as I feel they are a necessary part of learning." The current sample exhibited an internal reliability coefficient of 0.83.

*Emotional creativity.* Emotional creativity was measured using Averill's (1999) Emotional Creativity Inventory (ECI). The ECI is a 30-item self-report questionnaire that measures an individual's ability to experience and use new emotions. "Of the 30 items that make up the ECI, 7 pertain primarily to emotional preparedness; 14 to novelty; 5 to effectiveness; and 4 to authenticity" (Averill, 2004, p. 336). Although the instrument is still undergoing testing, there is some evidence it is a valid measure (Gutbezahl & Averill, 1996). Students rated these items on a five-point scale to indicate their degree of agreement. The subsumed results produced a summary indicator of individual emotional creativity. Typical items are: "I can experience a variety of different emotions at the same time" (novelty) and "My emotions are almost always an authentic expression of my true thoughts and feelings" (authenticity). The current sample produced an overall internal reliability coefficient of 0.76.

## Results

All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level using SPSS. Hypotheses 1 through 3 were tested using Pearson product moment correlation. The interrelationships among the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations Among Nationality, Emotional Intelligence, Constructive Thinking Ability, Emotional Creativity, and Preference for Transformational and Passive Leadership

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Nationality	-					
2. Emotional intelligence	.40**	-				
3. Constructive thinking ability	.12	.53**	-			
4. Emotional creativity	-.44**	.16	.04	-		
5. Transformational leadership	.67**	.36**	.05	-.33**	-	
6. Passive leadership (laissez-faire and management-by-exception)	-.50**	-.46**	-.27*	.36**	-.55**	-

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Hypothesis 1a was accepted; the measure of emotional intelligence was positively correlated with transformational leader preference. Further, hypothesis 1b was also accepted since emotional intelligence was negatively associated with passive leader perceptions.

Hypothesis 2a was rejected as the constructive thinking measure exhibited no significant relationship with the desire for transformational leadership. However, hypothesis 2b was accepted since constructive thinking ability negatively correlated with the most passive forms of leadership from the full range (i.e., management-by-exception and laissez-faire behavior).

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were also unsupported due to our construction of the statement based upon our conjecture. While we suggested emotional creativity would be positively related to transformational leadership preference and negatively related to the desirability of passive forms of leadership, the reverse appeared to be true in this sample. Thus, hypotheses 3a and 3b were rejected.

Hypotheses 4 through 7 were tested using  $t$  tests to compare group means. We proposed the American MBA students would score significantly higher than their Chinese peers on the measure of emotional intellect. This was confirmed ( $t = 3.62$ ;  $p = .001$ ), so hypothesis 4 was accepted.

Hypothesis 5 speculated that the American sample would score significantly higher than the Chinese group on the global CTI. No significant difference was found ( $t = .94$ ;  $p = .351$ ), however, so hypothesis 5 was rejected.

Hypothesis 6 read that the American students would score significantly higher than their Chinese counterparts with respect to their emotional creativity. The reverse was true with the current sample, however, as the Chinese students scored considerably higher on this measure ( $t = -3.80$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Thus, hypothesis 6 was rejected.

Lastly, hypothesis 7 involved the broad question of preferred leadership styles. The American sample exhibited a mean preference score of 4.38 for transformational leadership, as compared to 3.73 for the Chinese students ( $t = 7.08$ ;  $p = .000$ ), while the Chinese sample perceived passive leadership as more acceptable with a mean of 7.34 versus the 5.76 of the American students ( $t = -5.21$ ;  $p = .000$ ). These results are significantly different; therefore, hypothesis 7 was accepted.

In addition, to further examine the differences presented by the cultural samples, regression models were examined for preference for transformational leadership and passive leadership. Based upon the findings of the exploratory study, the variables of nationality, emotional intellect, constructive thinking, and emotional creativity were entered into a backward regression ( $F$ -to-remove  $\geq .100$ ) to exclude criterion to determine which of the indices would provide the best analytical models. For desirability of transformational leadership, nationality alone was the best predictor, accounting for over 44% of the observed variance. For the passive leadership preference measure (management-by-exception and laissez-faire), the best predictive model was a combination of nationality and follower emotional intelligence (33%).

### **Discussion, Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research**

As predictable with exploratory efforts, the findings of this study are confounding in some areas but illuminating in others. First, the study adds to the leadership literature by showing that the perceptual desirability of transformational leadership may differ significantly due to cultural effects. While clearly too early to make overly definitive statements, this finding does lead us to agree with others (e.g., Alves et al., 2005; Casimir et al., 2006) that leadership studies must earnestly account for cultural context, particularly the philosophical foundations and perceptual lenses of cultures substantially alien to Western frames of reference. Further, we have contributed to the growing realization that follower dispositional personality characteristics may influence this complex relationship as well, although not necessarily as we anticipated in degree and/or tendencies.

The support for the connection between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership was expected and is consistent with the common findings of prior studies. These results offer some added support to the import of emotional intelligence and leadership broadly defined. More particularly, though, this study bolsters the emerging significance of follower emotional intellect and the perception of desirable leadership.

In reality, the mixed results with constructive thinking ability, based on the limited research available, also mirror previous studies. Our findings, that constructive thinking did not significantly correlate with transformational leadership preference but did negatively correlate to passive leadership, might imply that followers with better coping skills may not covet inspiration but still desire leader involvement. While we find some intuitive logic in this conjecture, clearly, more exploration should be undertaken from the follower perception of leader behavior and various dimensions of personality.

Further, our somewhat offhanded speculation that coping skills, a key element of constructive thinking ability (or practical intelligence), could be more universal than emotional intellect, appears to have some validity. Again, although this perspective makes sense to us, much greater scrutiny must be applied before such sentiments should be stated with any degree of certainty.

Also, since no previous work had assessed the relationship between emotional creativity and leader behavior, the negative correlation with transformational leadership, as well as the lack of any significant relationship with emotional intellect, makes a contribution simply by the reporting of these initial findings. The results, though, seem to be inconsistent with what we know about these variables and should be further clarified by future research. For example, based upon the conceptual relationship with emotional intelligence and emotional creativity, we assumed there would be a positive relationship, but none was exhibited. Even more unexpected

was the Chinese sample scoring significantly higher than the American students on the emotional creativity scale. We had assumed that collectivist tendencies and the heritage of Confucian values would make novel thinking much more difficult. Based upon this sample, though, the Chinese students were significantly better at experiencing new thoughts and emotions and we find ourselves without an adequate explanation. Clearly, future researchers should delve into this matter further. Our preliminary conjecture attributes many of the unforeseen findings to the strength of the divergence of the American and Chinese samples, which we believe is the greatest contribution of our investigation.

While we agree the explosion of change within China is incredible (Humphreys, 2007) and that such societal shifts will undoubtedly alter the emotional and cognitive disposition of its citizens (Walumbwa et al., 2005), the apparent emotional disparity and subsequent conflicting behavioral expectations when compared to the West are nonetheless stark. We view such manifest differences as incredibly fertile ground for future research, even as we acknowledge the many limitations of this investigation.

Indeed, it is the examination of the prospective limitations that may prove most valuable to future efforts. For example, even though MBA students from both cultures rated the desirability of transformational leadership higher than more passive behaviors as expected, the strength of the difference, and the acceptance of truly disengaged leaders, between the two samples is acute. Is this finding due to implicit schemas created by cultural traditions? We believe this to be the case. If so, it is conceivable then, based upon follower disposition and values toward self-confident, authoritarian leaders, some Chinese followers might actually prefer narcissistic leadership (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) to the idealized influence we associate with transforming leaders. Although a bit of a theoretical leap, future research should likely pursue this avenue. What is certain is that leadership behaviors and preferences must be studied with more fervor in relation to follower dispositional variables and their contextual environment, especially culture.

Of course, others will assume the results could be attributed to methodology, and this must be considered. This study suffers from all of the standard limitations of self-report measures (Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2004), particularly in China (Shenkar & von Glinow, 1994), although such appraisals are necessary to assess perceptual constructs, as “self-views do matter” (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007, p. 92). We do know that there is a global tendency to respond to surveys in a socially desirable way (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Further, there has been evidence suggesting that Americans tend to demonstrate more extreme responses on Likert-type scales than do the Chinese (Roster, Albaum, & Rogers, 2006). While this holds great intuitive appeal to us because of Chinese moderation, the extreme differences in our results were manifested on some measures and not others and not in a consistent direction. Although the American students did exhibit more polar ratings on emotional intellect, there was no difference using the constructive thinking inventory, and the Chinese students showed more extreme responses to emotional creativity. Does culture influence response degree on some emotional aspects and perceptions and not others? We think not but do view such questions as appropriate and essential for future study. Moreover, both samples responded in rather extreme fashion, but at opposite poles, as to leadership acceptance. Accordingly, future investigations using observation and multiple-source behavioral responses in mainland Chinese leader–follower samples should commence.

### Conclusion

This article presents findings from an exploratory study assessing the emotional disposition (emotional intellect, constructive thinking ability, and emotional creativity) of followers and their perceived directional preferences for leadership in contrasting cultural contexts. While we think our findings add to the literature and provide many possibilities for future research, such studies addressing intercultural applicability hold practical implications as well. In a world of globalization, determining the leader behaviors needed to motivate and satisfy individual followers with varying emotional and personality characteristics, created by dissimilar cultural traditions, could become a paramount organizational core competency.

Finally, we present a word of caution; the results should be considered guardedly. This investigation was a preliminary exploratory study in the attempt to build parameters and guidelines for future work in this domain. Our sample was drawn from single universities in the U. S. and the People's Republic of China. Clearly, larger sample sizes and different organizations and industries should be sought. A larger replication within American and Chinese industry with more sophisticated research design and techniques (e.g., path analysis) is needed before authoritative inferences can be offered with confidence.

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