

## Chinese Conception of Happiness

From Paul T. P. Wong

Hi Louse,

From my experience and my research, traditionally the Chinese concept of happiness is harmony and serenity oriented, different from the Western concept of happiness and wellbeing. I hope that this list can give me some feedback whether my position on a different kind of mature happiness for Asians, as described in this paper [see link below], can be justified. I am also arguing that my studying the traditional Chinese characters of happiness, such as 安樂 (Ān lè), 心平氣和 (Xīnpíngqìhé), 自心和悅 (Zì xīn hé yuè), 心滿意足 (Xīn mǎn yì zú) suggest that Chinese happiness comes from cultivation of inner tranquility and harmony.

My conception of happiness based on indigenous Chinese psychology --

<http://www.drpaulwong.com/mature-happiness-and-global-wellbeing-in-difficult-times/>

Best

Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D., C.Psych. ([www.drpaulwong.com](http://www.drpaulwong.com))

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President, [Meaning-Centered Counselling Institute Inc.](#)

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**From Rosemarie**

**Anderson** <[Rosemarie.Anderson@sofia.edu](mailto:Rosemarie.Anderson@sofia.edu)>

Dear Paul and all,

Based on my recent translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, I agree with your conclusions. The text invites being in harmony with all that is and especially the natural world, which includes people and community, and responding to what presents itself to oneself and not trying to do everything and everything perfectly, which are Western norms. I am not so sure I would call this state of harmony "inner" but relational. What is emphasized in the *Tao Te Ching* is harmony in my/our relationship to all that is.

Know I lived and taught in Asia for several years in the late 1970s. I felt right at home despite the language challenge at first.

Warm regards,  
Rosemarie

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**From Grant J. Rich** <[optimalex@aol.com](mailto:optimalex@aol.com)>

Ah, I wish I could chime in but alas I have been in a rooming house for a year sans my books ... impermanence is indeed a hard lesson.

Reading a vaillant effort about a BC activist now; existential therapy seems in order these days!

Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux as Camus taught us!

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Consulting Psychologist  
National Board Member, NCBTMB  
PO Box 21551  
Juneau, AK 99802

Website: <http://rich.socialpsychology.org/>

Book Website (Rich, Gielen, & Takooshian, 2017)

<http://www.infoagepub.com/products/Internationalizing-the-Teaching-of-Psychology>

Book Website (Rich & Sirikantraporn, 2017)

<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781498554831/Human-Strengths-and-Resilience-Cross-Cultural-and-International-Perspectives#>

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From **Paul T. P. Wong** <[dr.paul.wong@gmail.com](mailto:dr.paul.wong@gmail.com)>

Appreciate your response. To make things simpler, may be I can reframe my question: Can we differentiate experience of happiness between East and West according to the following dimensions because of the different values and culture norms that shape their feelings.

(1) Passive (calm) ----- Active (excited)

(2) Interdependence (getting along) -----  
Independent (getting ahead)

(3) Self-transcendence (spiritual-character development & maturity) -----  
----- Self-actualization (ability development & success)

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From **Grant J. Rich** <[optimalex@aol.com](mailto:optimalex@aol.com)>

yes Paul, speaking at least from my year in Cambodia, 1 and 2, seemed generally true, perhaps less so number 3, but perhaps since most of my experience was with Cambodia University students (age/ambition/social class) that may have different values/mindset than say, elderly rural Cambodians in general?

getting along and not losing face or blowing steam in anger was prized.

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From: 汪凤炎 <[fywangix8069@163.com](mailto:fywangix8069@163.com)>

Dear Professor Louise,

I have no in-depth study on happiness, but I am very happy to learn from you. If you have specific ideas, please send them to me. If I have a good idea, I will tell you in time. In addition, as long as it is sent to me by email, I can usually receive it. Thank you!

Best

Fengyan

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From Louise Sundararajan

Dear Paul,

Before you make your East and West comparisons, you need to spell out what it is that you are comparing. Are you comparing emotion concepts, well-being, or spirituality, or philosophy of life across cultures? For instance, if you are doing emotion concepts, then you are lumping "happiness" (樂), which is an emotion, with "well-being" (幸福感), which is more of an appraisal of flourishing than emotion per se. If we stick to emotion concepts, then the Chinese have two kinds of happiness--joy (喜) and happy (樂)--the former is stimulus-dependent that is in keeping with the Western notion of emotion as stimulus-response, the latter is not stimulus-dependent (see Sundararajan, 2015). But if your focus is on wellbeing, then you need to do the East and West comparison along that line, see the paper (in Chinese) by Fengyan Wang, attached. On the other hand, if you do your comparison cross levels and domains, comparing the Chinese notion of wellbeing with the Western notion of stimulus-dependent happiness, then the result is an artifact of skating on the semantic ice.

Reference

Sundararajan, L. (2015) *Understanding emotion in Chinese culture: Thinking through psychology*. New York, NY: Springer SBM.

That's my 2 cents,

Louise

[Spiritual Happiness\\_精神幸福感.pdf](#)

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**Sent:** Tuesday, June 12, 2018 8:57 PM

From Paul T. P. Wong <[drpaulwong@gmail.com](mailto:drpaulwong@gmail.com)>

Thanks every one, especially Louise, for you feedback. I will take some time to digest the information.

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From: **Bond, Michael [MM]** <[michael.bond@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:michael.bond@polyu.edu.hk)>

There are fascinating strands to this conversation, stimulated by Paul and his on-going, open-minded quest to figure out how best to live. I am grateful for his and Louise's extraction of themes from Chinese philosophical texts, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian.

1. Do we wish to describe an ideal world, or the world-as-lived by its individual members?
2. If the latter, how do we proceed from the philosophical to the psychological?
3. When we borrow from the philosophical literature, can we translate these concepts and claims into clean measures and testable hypotheses?
4. What kind of empirical overlap would we find among these many, varied-seeming measures, and especially would the extracted, "Eastern" measures show distinction from the "Western-developed" measures? If yes, what does the inclusion of these "new" concept-measures do for us in predicting which outcomes?
5. Can our constructs and their associated measures be distinguished into various outcome measures [is there more than one outcome or are there many desired outcomes, even if differently valued by different persons, of different cultural backgrounds, at different stages of the life cycle? [We must remember C. W. Morris' (1956) Ways to Live and its 13, somewhat overlapping ways to live, i.e., who is judging the best way which is...?]
6. Can we distinguish processes from outcome[s], so that we can build and test models showing how which outcome is reached?

These are some of the questions that have emerged for me in preparing a presentation for Paul's INPM meeting in this early August. Separately, I am thinking about the concept of "ethical leadership", a BIG issue in business-school faculties and the Business Faculty where I now teach "cross-cultural management" – what is a Chinese ethics of leadership? [how] does it differ from the "Western"? do Chinese and "Westerners" endorse these measured ethicalities differently or not?

How is ethical leadership, however assessed, get done in different cultures?

As always, with both these issues, I am asking myself whether other important worldviews and models for life on earth are being overlooked, esp., the Islamic,

With regards, michael

**Michael Harris Bond, PhD**

Visiting Chair Professor (OB and HRM)

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Link to Department website and current c.v.: <http://www.polyu.edu.hk/mm/bond>

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From: **Paul T. P. Wong** <[dr.paul.wong@gmail.com](mailto:dr.paul.wong@gmail.com)>

After reflecting all the feedback from the IP group, I come up with 5 dimensions in the conceptual space of cultural differences of happiness, which have considerable empirical support.

Five dimensions of cultural differences in the conceptual space of happiness:

(1) Emotional preference

Low arousal (calm) -----High arousal (excitement)

(2) Cognitive style

Dialectic/holistic -----Binary/analytic

(3) Relational orientation

Collectivist/Interdependent -----Individualist/Independent

(4) Motivational driver

Intrinsic (character/competency development) -----Extrinsic (Money, power, fame)

(5) Worldview

Religious/spiritual----- Secular/natural

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On Wed, Jun 20, 2018 at 9:35 PM, Louise Sundararajan <[louisesundararajan@gmail.com](mailto:louisesundararajan@gmail.com)> wrote:

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**From:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com) <[iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)> on behalf of Dr. Louise Sundararajan <[louiselu@frontiernet.net](mailto:louiselu@frontiernet.net)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 17, 2018 2:52 PM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

From: **Paul T. P. Wong** <[dr.paul.wong@gmail.com](mailto:dr.paul.wong@gmail.com)>

Hi Louise,

I finally have the graph for the above topic. Can you forward it to your list?

Thanks as always,

Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D., C.Psych. ([www.drpaulwong.com](http://www.drpaulwong.com))

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**Sent:** Tuesday, July 17, 2018 5:52 PM

From: **Paul T. P. Wong** <[dr.paul.wong@gmail.com](mailto:dr.paul.wong@gmail.com)>

Hi Louise,

I finally have the graph for the above topic. Can you forward it to your list?

### Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness



Thanks as always,

Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D., C.Psych. ([www.drpaulwong.com](http://www.drpaulwong.com))  
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On Tue, Jul 17, 2018 at 6:48 PM, Maureen O'Hara <[mohara@nu.edu](mailto:mohara@nu.edu)> wrote:

This is very interesting Paul. Is there a mapping of societies based on this scheme?

Maureen O'Hara Ph. D.  
Professor of Psychology  
Lead, BS in Organizational Behavior  
National University  
[11255 N. Torrey Pines Road](#)  
[La Jolla, CA 92037](#)  
760 889 9493 (mobile)  
858 642 8464

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**From:** [Maureen O'Hara](#)

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 17, 2018 6:48 PM

## Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

### 1) Emotional Preference

Low arousal (calm) ← → High arousal (excitement)

### 2) Cognitive Style

Dialectic/Holistic ← → Binary/Analytic

### 3) Relational Orientation

Collectivist/Interdependent ← → Individualist/Independent

### 4) Motivational Driver

Intrinsic (character/competency development) ← → Extrinsic (money, power, fame)

### 5) Worldview

Religious/Spiritual ← → Secular/Natural

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On Tue, Jul 17, 2018 at 9:31 PM, Paul T. P. Wong <[dr.paul.wong@gmail.com](mailto:dr.paul.wong@gmail.com)> wrote:

Thanks Maureen:

I do hope that cross-cultural researchers will measure these dimensional differences in wellbeing.

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**From:** [Paul T. P. Wong](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 3:34 PM

Here is another idea I have regarding the differences between East and West in happiness and wellbeing (see the attached figure)

The lowest level of subjective wellbeing (SWB) is the common denominator for all people, because it is simply a general sense of life satisfaction and pleasant feelings.

At the next level of psychological wellbeing, the West has Aristotle, the East has Confucius.

At the level of spiritual wellbeing, the West has Christianity and the East has Buddhism & Daoism.

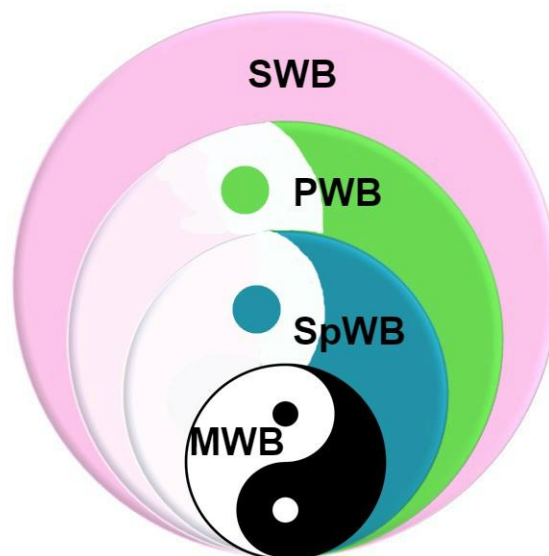
At the level of mature wellbeing in times of adversity, the West has Christianity & Stoicism, the East has Buddhism & Daoism.

At the optimal level of mature well being (MWB), it is a place of nothingness -- no coming and no going, no East and no West, no worries and no excitements; it is a sacred space of complete harmony, tranquility and contentment.

Is this a helpful way to conceptualize happiness and wellbeing?

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## A Hierarchical Model of Happiness and Well-being





On Thu, Jul 19, 2018 at 4:54 PM, Michelle Brenner <[brennermichelle@hotmail.com](mailto:brennermichelle@hotmail.com)> wrote:

**From:** [Michelle Brenner](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 4:54 PM

Just to add to your conceptual space of happiness.

in regards to the spiritual wellbeing ; Christianity is not the full west. I am Jewish, and I think it is more usefull to distinguish between The Creator view and you can give a name to the Dao/Buddhist view. The Creator view then includes indiginous people who are not Christian or Jewish but all have in their heritage a belief and practice of the Creation view.

In times of Adversity again, for the west, The Creator view . Stoicism is not the full western view, it is Greek. In Japan they are very stoic in times of adversity, so I would leave that word out. The Creator offers much variety in response to adversity.

Kind regards Michelle

**Michelle Brenner**

Holistic Conflict Resolution Consultant

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**From:** [Paul T. P. Wong](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 4:59 PM

Thanks for your input. Western civilization owes a great deal for Greek philosophers. That's why Aristotle is identified with Western culture.

My East and West designation is just a short-hand to indicate that culture matters. Do you have a better idea to accomplish this goal in a graph?

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**From:** [Michelle Brenner](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 6:00 PM

well I dont agree that the Greek should be offered the lead role of the west. My suggestion is to use the term The Creator, or your graph is ethnocentric towards Christian and is leaving out a wealth of history and heritage. The Creator offers a more inclusive view, and still offers a counter view to the East.

kind regards Michelle

***Michelle Brenner***

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Nature Forest Therapy Guide Certified with ANFT

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**From:** [Dr. Gayle Morse](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 6:27 PM

Creator offers consideration of many indigenous views Not all but many who are decidedly not Christian or Buddhist. (western or eastern). Rather than a continuum we may have a triangle...Ha!

Thank you for your thoughts on this.

Gayle

Gayle Skawen:nio Morse, PhD

Associate Professor, Licensed Psychologist

President, Society of Indian Psychologists (2017-2019)

Past Chair, Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest (BAPPI-2016)

Fellow: American Psychological Association - Division 45- Society for the Psychological Study of Culture Ethnicity and Race

Editor: Journal of Indigenous Research

Revised APA Multicultural Guidelines just launched: Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological **Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality. 2017**

**On APA website:** <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/multicultural-guidelines.aspx>

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**From:** [Paul T. P. Wong](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 7:57 PM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

Thanks Gayle:

We are all the same in spite of our cultural difference, because we all had the image of God in us. That is why at the lower level of SWB, we are all the same, and at the highest level we are all the same. Only at the intermediate level, our experiences are shaped by our distinct cultures. East and West just a convenient way to indicate cultural differences as is common done in cross-cultural psychology.

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**From:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com) <[iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)> on behalf of Paul T. P. Wong <[dr.paul.wong@gmail.com](mailto:dr.paul.wong@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** Thursday, 19 July 2018 8:59:32 PM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

Thanks for your input. Western civilization owes a great deal for Greek philosophers. That's why Aristotle is identified with Western culture.

My East and West designation is just a short-hand to indicate that culture matters. Do you have a better idea to accomplish this goal in a graph?

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**From:** [Kiran Kumar Salagame](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 11:15 PM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

Dear Paul, Brenner, Gayle and all,

This is an interesting conversation. I wish to add my few cents here.

The five dimensions identified by Paul is useful to examine cross-cultural aspects.

But I think the diagram with concentric circles associated with different levels of well-being has problems. Just as West is not all Christianity, East is not all Buddhism or Daoism.

India has its two major traditions Vedic and Jaina dated back to 5000 BCE by recent carbon dating studies. Buddhism came into existence in 500 BCE. Put together these three ancient traditions have many schools within them and some have a theistic worldview and others non-theistic and naturalistic. They differ on the fundamental belief about the existence of a Creator. We have all shades of views on this subject.

An alternative way of looking at this issue which is prevalent in India is to understand happiness and well-being at two levels viz, empirical/transactional and transcendental level. The source of former is external and material world and the source of the latter is a state that is beyond the ordinary states. I am attaching a soft copy of a paper that deals with this distinction. Hope you will find it informative.

Kiran

[Happiness and well-being in Indian tradition.pdf](#)

S. K. Kiran Kumar, Ph.D.  
Professor (Retired)  
Department of Studies in Psychology  
University of Mysore  
Manasagangotri  
Mysore, 570006  
India

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**From:** [Paul T. P. Wong](#)

**Sent:** Friday, July 20, 2018 1:02 AM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

Thank you so much Kiran for your input. I cited Christianity and Buddhism as two major religions in the West and East respectively for the purposes of illustrating the dominant influences of religions in our experiences and conceptions of happiness. Buddhism actually originated from India. I apologize for not being able to name all the religions and cultures in my figure.

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---

**From:** [Kiran Kumar Salagame](#)

**Sent:** Friday, July 20, 2018 1:23 AM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

That's fine. No issues. After all, Buddhism has spread to more countries across the globe like Christianity as compared to other traditions of India.

S. K. Kiran Kumar, Ph.D.

Professor (Retired) Department of Studies in Psychology  
University of Mysore, Manasagangotri  
Mysore, 570006, India

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**From:** [Paul T. P. Wong](#)

**Sent:** Friday, July 20, 2018 7:55 PM

**To:** [iptaskforce@simplelists.com](mailto:iptaskforce@simplelists.com)

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

Thanks for your understanding, Kiran.

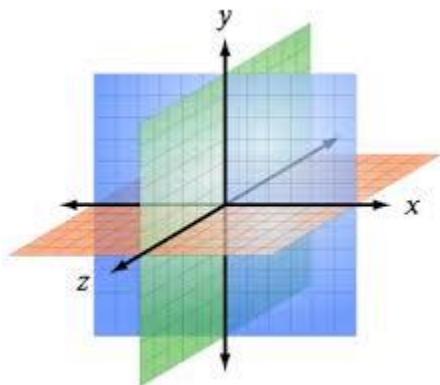
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**From:** [Paul T. P. Wong](#)

**Sent:** Monday, July 23, 2018 3:30 PM

To complete my hierarchical model of happiness, I propose that the apex or the optimal level of mature happiness can only be represented by a point of intersection of all possible dimensions or lines, both horizontally and vertically. Therefore, there is no more East or West, Male or Female, Rich or Poor, etc. It is a space of nothingness and perfect calmness -- no breadth, no length, no depth, no height, no coming, no going, no up, no down, yet it is a innermost sacred place of all attunement, inclusiveness and harmonious integration. Very few have achieved this level of happiness -- I can think of the historical Buddhah, Lao-tze, Apostle Paul, and St. Francis of Assisi. (See the attached image of point of intersection)



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**From:** [Joseph Trimble](#)

**Sent:** Monday, July 23, 2018 4:49 PM

Good day all. Perhaps the attached forthcoming book chapter may be useful in this conversation.  
Best wishes,  
--Joseph

*Joseph E. Trimble. PhD  
Distinguished University Professor  
Professor of Psychology  
Western Washington University  
Bellingham, WA USA  
Web - <http://pandoracii.wvu.edu/trimble/>*

**From:** <iptaskforce@simplelists.com> on behalf of "Paul T. P. Wong" <dr.paul.wong@gmail.com>  
**Reply-To:** "iptaskforce@simplelists.com" <iptaskforce@simplelists.com>  
**Date:** Monday, 23 July 2018 at 12:31 pm  
**To:** Paul Wong <drpaulwong@gmail.com>  
**Cc:** "iptaskforce@simplelists.com" <iptaskforce@simplelists.com>  
**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

To complete my hierarchical model of happiness, I propose that the apex or the optimal level of mature happiness can only be represented by a point of intersection of all possible dimensions or lines, both horizontally and vertically. Therefore, there is no more East or West, Male or Female, Rich or Poor, etc. It is a space of nothingness and perfect calmness -- no breadth, no length, no depth, no height, no coming, no going, no up, no down, yet it is a innermost sacred place of all attunement, inclusiveness and harmonious integration. Very few have achieved this level of happiness -- I can think of the historical Buddhah, Laotze, Apostle Paul, and St. Francis of Assisi. (See the attached image of point of intersection)

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**From:** iptaskforce@simplelists.com <iptaskforce@simplelists.com> on behalf of Paul T. P. Wong <dr.paul.wong@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 24, 2018 6:58:11 AM

**To:** iptaskforce@simplelists.com

**Subject:** Re: IP-- Graph: Five Dimensions of Cultural Differences in the Conceptual Space of Happiness

Thanks so much Joseph for your chapter. I will definitely include it in my research on global wellbeing.

Best

Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D., C.Psych. ([www.drpaulwong.com](http://www.drpaulwong.com))

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