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BEYOND HAPPINESS: MEANING, PSYCHOLOGICAL RICHNESS, AND MUNDANENESS IN CHINESE ADOLESCENTS' WORTH-LIVING LIFE

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Abstract

Background: Adolescent well-being is often discussed in terms of happiness, distress, or academic pressure. However, adolescents may also be navigating a deeper existential question: what makes life feel worth living? Recent theorizing suggests that a good life may involve not only happiness and meaning, but also psychological richness—experiences that are interesting, varied, and perspective-changing. Yet little is known about how meaning in life and psychological richness operate together among non-Western adolescents.

Methods: Drawing on two psychometric studies conducted with the same sample of 1,794 tenth-grade students from 24 secondary schools in China, this presentation integrates evidence from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire and the Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire. The sample was designed to reflect socioeconomic diversity and included adolescents from ethnically diverse regions. Analyses included confirmatory factor analysis, reliability estimation, item-level homogeneity analysis, and convergent validity testing. The MLQ study

examined the presence of and search for meaning in life, while the PRLQ study assessed psychological richness and its associations with meaning, happiness, gender, and perceived social status.

Results: *The findings suggest that Chinese adolescents' experience of a worth-living life cannot be reduced to a single dimension of well-being. First, the MLQ supported a two-factor structure, distinguishing the presence of meaning from the search for meaning. Second, the PRLQ showed strong reliability and meaningful associations with presence of meaning, search for meaning, and happiness, indicating that psychological richness is related to, but distinct from, both meaning and happiness. Third, item-level analyses revealed theoretically important tensions: the final MLQ items concerning unclear purpose and searching for meaning showed irregular response patterns, while the final four PRLQ items formed a separate factor interpreted as life mundaneness.*

Conclusion: *Together, these findings point toward a new framework for understanding adolescent well-being: a worth-living life may involve direction, experiential texture, and protection against existential monotony. For Chinese adolescents, meaning gives life direction, psychological richness gives life texture, and mundaneness may reveal where life feels repetitive, empty, or developmentally unresolved. This integrated perspective moves beyond conventional models of happiness and highlights the need for culturally and developmentally sensitive approaches to measuring and supporting adolescent flourishing.*

Keywords:

Adolescent Well-Being, Meaning in Life, Psychological Richness, Life Mundaneness, China, Psychometrics, Worth-Living Life