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Psychological Connotation of Grievance Emotion and Scale Development

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Abstract

From a cultural psychology perspective, this study explores the psychological connotation of the weiqu emotion in Chinese society and develops a Weiqu Tendency Scale to measure the weiqu trait. Study 1 analyzes the psychological structure of weiqu based on semi-structured interviews (N=16). Building on Study 1, Studies 2 and 3 first determine the initial items of the scale, finalize the scale items through item analysis and exploratory factor analysis (N=300), and examine its reliability and validity (N=463). The final formal scale comprises two dimensions: weiqu perception and weiqu expression. This scale facilitates the advancement of research on the weiqu emotion and enriches the understanding of indigenous cultural emotions and modes of interpersonal interaction.

Full Text

The Psychological Connotation of Weiqu and Scale Development

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Abstract

From a cultural psychology perspective, this research explores the psychological connotation of weiqu—a culture-specific emotion in Chinese society—and develops the Weiqu Proneness Scale to measure weiqu as a trait. Study 1 examined the psychological structure of weiqu through semi-structured interviews (N = 16). Building on these findings, Studies 2 and 3 generated initial scale items, finalized the scale through item analysis and exploratory factor analysis (N =

300), and tested its reliability and validity ($N = 463$). The final scale comprises two dimensions: weiqu perception and weiqu expression.

This scale advances research on weiqu and enriches understanding of indigenous emotions and interpersonal interaction patterns in Chinese culture.

Keywords: weiqu, indigenous psychology, emotion, interview, scale development

Emotions are shaped and constructed by sociocultural processes and represent outcomes of social life within cultural frameworks. Weiqu is recognized as a common and unique emotion in Chinese society, deeply rooted in cultural soil and frequently depicted in classical and contemporary literature. Dictionary definitions characterize weiqu as feeling hurt when receiving undeserved blame or treatment. Psychological research has begun to explore this emotion, defining it as a suppressed sense of sorrow and grief experienced by subordinate parties in relationships after being let down. Recent prototype analysis reveals central features including sadness, feeling misunderstood, being unable to speak one's mind, and unfairness, with peripheral features such as anger, venting, and suppression. Integrating these perspectives, weiqu can be understood as a negative emotion arising from unfair treatment in interpersonal relationships where individuals feel powerless and can only endure.

Weiqu possesses cultural uniqueness. China is an ethics-based society where ethics constitute relationships themselves, creating a relationship-oriented nature in Chinese social interaction. This orientation fosters positive expectations of mutual understanding while simultaneously emphasizing obligations through ethical norms, promoting conflict suppression to maintain harmony. When negative events occur—such as unfair treatment or misunderstanding—these positive expectations are violated. Under the subtle constraints of ethical norms, relationship maintenance takes priority, and compromising, suppressive responses may catalyze the unique experience of weiqu.

As a prevalent indigenous emotional experience, weiqu profoundly impacts psychological states, behavioral responses, and social relations, yet no rigorous measurement tool exists to quantify this culturally colored emotion. Drawing on emotion appraisal theory, which posits individual differences in emotional experiences, this research aims to develop the Weiqu Proneness Scale (WPS) to measure weiqu as a trait. Following established scale development procedures, Study 1 employed qualitative methods to explore weiqu's psychological connotation, while Studies 2 and 3 conducted item determination and psychometric validation.

Study 1: Exploring the Psychological Connotation of Weiqu

Study 1 used interviews to explore the psychological connotation of weiqu. While prototype analysis provides a framework for identifying general features,

its feature-word approach may oversimplify complex psychological phenomena. Qualitative interviews can better account for cultural, individual, and contextual complexities.

Participants

Given weiqu' s prevalence across Chinese culture, participants of diverse ages, genders, occupations, and education levels were selected to maximize sample coverage. Sixteen participants were interviewed (8 females; Mage = 27.50, SD = 6.50, age range 18-44). Detailed demographic information appears in Appendix 1.

Materials and Procedure

An initial interview protocol was developed based on the Component Process Model of emotion and refined through pilot interviews with two psychology students. The final semi-structured interview covered cognitive appraisal, feelings and reactions, and expression/action tendencies (full protocol in Appendix 2). Interviews lasted 0.4-2 hours and were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke' s (2006) procedures in NVivo 12 Plus. Two researchers independently coded the data, then discussed and resolved discrepancies to achieve consensus.

Results

Coding yielded 60 nodes encompassing 1,658 references. The top 10 nodes included being mistreated, powerlessness, unfulfilled wishes, being misunderstood, sadness, positive expectations, being wronged, significant others, inability to understand, and having bitterness one cannot express. These nodes were organized into 14 sub-themes and 4 themes: social norms, social relationships, psychological cognition, and behavioral reactions. Coding results with examples appear in Table 1 ; detailed results and complete examples are in Appendices 3 and 4.

Study 2: Scale Development and Exploratory Analysis

Study 2 developed the Weiqu Proneness Scale based on dimensions extracted in Study 1.

Participants

An online questionnaire was administered to 321 Chinese adults via Credamo. After screening for attention checks and response time, 300 valid responses remained (64.67% female; Mage = 31.73, SD = 7.90, age range 18-58).

Materials and Procedure

Based on Study 1' s results, a 50-item initial scale was developed (Appendix 5) using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Participants responded to all items and reported demographic information.

Item Analysis

Item analysis using the 27% high-low group discrimination test and item-total correlation revealed that Item 50 failed to reach significance ($p = .28$) and showed no significant correlation with total scores ($r = -.05$, $p = .35$). All other items demonstrated significant discrimination ($ps < .001$) and positive correlations with total scores ($rs > .41$, $ps < .001$). Item 50 was removed, retaining 49 items.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the remaining 49 items. The KMO value was .975, and Bartlett's test was significant, $\chi^2(1176) = 12748.50$, $p < .001$, indicating suitability for factor analysis. Parallel analysis and minimum average partial test both suggested a 4-factor solution. However, all reverse-scored items (46–49) loaded on a single factor, suggesting method effects. Following recommendations, reverse-scored items were removed, and a 3-factor solution was examined. Items were retained based on: (1) factor loading $> .65$, (2) no cross-loading, and (3) at least 3 items per factor. The final scale comprised 15 items forming two dimensions (the third factor was removed due to insufficient items). Factor loadings appear in Table 2.

The two factors were named “Weiqu Perception” and “Weiqu Expression.” The perception dimension reflects individuals' sensitivity to negative treatment (e.g., unfairness, being wronged) and the intensity of weiqu feelings. The expression dimension describes emotional expression and regulation responses to these experiences.

Study 3: Reliability and Validity Testing

Study 3 validated the psychometric properties of the WPS developed in Study 2.

Participants

Through snowball sampling in central and southwestern China, 644 questionnaires were collected. After screening, 463 valid responses remained (71.7% female; $Mage = 22.88$, $SD = 5.86$, age range 17–62). Two months later, 184 participants who provided email addresses were invited for retesting, yielding 62 valid retest responses (72.58% female; $Mage = 23.84$, $SD = 4.96$, age range 18–42).

Materials and Procedure

Participants completed the following measures in random order, followed by demographic questions. Retest participants completed only the WPS after two

months.

Weiqu Proneness Scale: The 15-item WPS with two dimensions, 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Descriptive statistics appear in Table 4 .

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire–Anger Subscale: Used to test discriminant validity given weiqu’s association with anger. The Chinese version contains 6 items ($\alpha = .88$).

Brief Big Five Inventory (BFI-44): Used to test discriminant validity. The Chinese version contains 5 dimensions with 3 items each. Cronbach’s alphas were: conscientiousness .64, extraversion .74, agreeableness .52, openness .86, and neuroticism .80.

Satisfaction with Life Scale: Measures cognitive component of subjective well-being. The 5-item Chinese version ($\alpha = .91$) was used. Weiqu proneness was predicted to correlate negatively with life satisfaction.

Scale of Positive and Negative Experience: Measures affective component of well-being with 6 positive and 6 negative items (5-point scale). The Chinese version showed good reliability (positive $\alpha = .94$, negative $\alpha = .89$). Weiqu proneness was predicted to correlate negatively with positive affect and positively with negative affect.

Flourishing Scale: Measures psychological well-being. The 8-item Chinese version ($\alpha = .92$) was used. Weiqu proneness was predicted to correlate negatively with flourishing.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA using the lavaan package indicated good model fit for the two-factor model (Table 3), with standardized path coefficients shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. The two-factor model demonstrated superior fit compared to a one-factor model ($\Delta AIC = 364.10$), supporting the two-factor structure.

Correlations Among Subscales

The WPS total score correlated strongly with both subscales ($r = .95$ and $.91$, $ps < .001$), while the subscales intercorrelated at $r = .72$ ($p < .001$), supporting structural validity.

Discriminant and Criterion Validity

The WPS showed moderate positive correlations with anger, indicating related but distinct constructs. Correlations with Big Five dimensions were low to moderate, with regression analyses showing that personality explained 35% of variance in total WPS scores, 30% in perception scores, and 36% in expression scores, demonstrating relative independence. The WPS correlated negatively

with life satisfaction, positive affect, and flourishing, and positively with negative affect, supporting criterion validity (Table 4).

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency was excellent: $\alpha = .94$ for the total scale, .92 for perception, and .89 for expression. Two-month test-retest reliability using ICC was significant and strong for all scales (Table 5).

Discussion

From a cultural psychology perspective, three studies explored weiqu' s psychological connotation and developed a validated measurement tool. The WPS provides a quantitative instrument for studying how individuals perceive and express weiqu, advancing understanding of this indigenous emotional experience.

Constructing Weiqu' s Psychological Connotation

Qualitative findings revealed two core aspects: psychological feelings/cognition and behavioral reactions, embedded within unique cultural attributes of social norms and relationships. According to cultural emotion theory, emotions are triggered by culturally meaningful events that generate experiential and behavioral responses. In Chinese society, relationships entail inherent trust and dependency, creating positive expectations. When individuals experience unfairness or misunderstanding, these events violate expectations and damage relational affection, producing feelings of sadness, lack of recognition, and unfulfilled wishes. The ambiguous nature of these events makes attribution difficult. Confucian ethical norms constrain responses, promoting suppression and compromise to maintain harmony. When cultural expectations are violated, 隐忍 (yinren; forbearance) and compromise become primary responses, while accompanying negative feelings must be regulated internally, resulting in bitterness that cannot be expressed and a sense of powerlessness.

These findings align with previous research emphasizing violated expectations and central features like feeling misunderstood and unable to speak one' s mind. This study extends prior work by deepening understanding of weiqu' s generation mechanism from a cultural perspective: weiqu must be understood within relational contexts where violated cultural expectations and ethical constraints are key catalysts. Weiqu can thus be defined as a frustrated emotion arising in social interactions with significant others when individuals experience unexpected mistreatment or misunderstanding and feel unable to comprehend or change the situation.

Qualitative results reflect weiqu' s distinct indigenous characteristics. Although English terms like "wronged" or "aggrieved" are sometimes translated as weiqu, their connotations differ. Wronged and aggrieved apply to broader unfairness contexts, whereas weiqu centers on interpersonal relationships with attributes of

betrayed investment and broken expectations. This underscores weiqu' s unique cultural coloring.

Scale Development

The WPS demonstrates strong psychometric properties. Both dimensions and the total scale show high internal consistency and test-retest reliability. CFA supports the two-factor structure, and discriminant validity is established through moderate correlations with anger and relative independence from Big Five personality traits. Criterion validity is evidenced by negative correlations with well-being indicators, confirming weiqu' s nature as a negative emotion with documented adverse mental health effects.

Limitations and Future Directions

First, future research should validate the scale across contexts. Weiqu appears in diverse settings—from rural suicide cases to healthcare contexts—suggesting that examining specific populations and situations could deepen cultural understanding and inform targeted interventions. Second, while this study links weiqu to negative well-being outcomes, the mechanisms and specific consequences require further exploration. Finally, cross-cultural research should examine how similar events evoke different emotional responses across cultures, particularly comparing weiqu with “wronged” and “aggrieved.”

Conclusion

Wei-qu is a frustrated emotion arising in social interactions with significant others when individuals experience unexpected mistreatment or misunderstanding and feel unable to comprehend or change the situation. The Wei-qu Proneness Scale, comprising perception and expression dimensions, demonstrates good reliability and validity, providing a robust tool for assessing weiqu proneness.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Participant Information

[Participant demographic table would appear here]

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol

Purpose: To explore the conceptual connotation of weiqu

Warm-up questions: Could you briefly introduce your major or occupation? What have you been doing recently?

1. **Cognitive Appraisal:** What comes to mind when you see the word “weiqu” ? How do you understand what weiqu means?
2. **Feelings and Reactions:** Have you experienced weiqu in your life, studies, work, or relationships? Can you elaborate? What were your feelings at the time? How long did they last? What other emotions did you feel alongside weiqu? How did they differ?
3. **Expression and Action Tendencies:** What do you typically do when experiencing weiqu? What did you want to do versus what did you actually do? Why didn’ t you act on your initial impulse? Would your feelings have changed if you had?
4. **Third-party Perspective:** What kind of people frequently experience weiqu, and who doesn’ t? Have you observed weiqu in others? What are your thoughts on sayings like “just endure the weiqu” ?

Appendix 3: Thematic Coding Distribution

[Thematic coding table would appear here]

Appendix 4: Interview Excerpts

[Interview excerpt table would appear here]

Appendix 5: Initial Weiqu Proneness Scale Items

[Initial scale items would appear here]

Appendix 6: Final Weiqu Proneness Scale

Please read each statement carefully and select the option that best describes you. There are no right or wrong answers; respond honestly.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly disagree; 4 = Neutral; 5 = Slightly agree; 6 = Agree; 7 = Strongly agree

1. Many people have mistreated me.

2. Others are always too harsh on me.
3. I often receive undeserved blame and treatment.
4. I often feel others don' t understand me, which makes me sad.
5. I often face unwarranted accusations.
6. I often feel weiqu.
7. I often feel my goodness goes unappreciated.
8. I am often wronged by others.
9. I often want to ask: “Why me?”
10. After unfair treatment, I often swallow my anger.
11. Even when things feel extremely unfair, I usually tell myself to endure it.
12. I don' t want to express my dissatisfaction directly for fear others will think I' m being dramatic.
13. When I want to defend myself, I often feel unable to speak.
14. Facing unfairness, I often feel powerless.
15. I often suppress my feelings.

Appendix 7: Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire—Anger Subscale

[Scale items would appear here]

Appendix 8: Brief Big Five Inventory

[Scale items would appear here]

Appendix 9: Satisfaction with Life Scale

[Scale items would appear here]

Appendix 10: Scale of Positive and Negative Experience

[Scale items would appear here]

Appendix 11: Flourishing Scale

[Scale items would appear here]

Appendix 12: Correlation Matrix

[Correlation table would appear here]

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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