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Research Article

Self-Construal and Nonverbal Emotional Expressivity: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between Korea and Japan

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Abstract

Nonverbal emotional expressivity is a central component of interpersonal communication and cultural psychology. It reflects how emotions are conveyed through facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal channels. Previous cross-cultural research has often contrasted Western individualism with Eastern collectivism, overlooking meaningful cultural variation within East Asia. Although both Korea and Japan share collectivistic orientations, they differ substantially in their emotion socialization practices and interpersonal norms. The SOA (Subjective, Objective, Autonomous) model of self-construal conceptualizes three dimensions: the Subjective Self (SS) reflects active self-expression in interpersonal contexts, the Objective Self (OS) reflects sensitivity to others' evaluations, and the Autonomous Self (AS) reflects self-determination based on internal values. This model provides a useful framework for examining how cultural differences relate to nonverbal emotional expressivity. In this study, we hypothesized that (H1) Korean participants would report higher SS and Affective Communication Test (ACT) scores than Japanese participants, (H2) SS would positively predict ACT in Korea but not in Japan, and (H3) OS would be negatively associated with ACT. A total of 388 undergraduates (Korea: n = 199; Japan: n = 189) completed the Self-Construal Scale and the ACT. Correlation, independent-samples t-test, and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Results supported H1 and H2 but not H3. SS predicted higher expressivity only among Korean participants, while OS showed no significant association with ACT. Koreans scored higher on SS, AS, and ACT, whereas Japanese participants scored higher on OS. These findings indicate that Korea reflects expressive collectivism that emphasizes emotional sharing to strengthen intimacy, whereas Japan reflects restrained collectivism that values emotional moderation to preserve harmony. This distinction refines cross-cultural theory by highlighting intra-East Asian diversity in self-construal and emotional expression, and underscores the importance of considering cultural nuances when interpreting emotional behaviors.

Keywords

Self-Construal, Nonverbal Emotional Expressivity, Expressive Collectivism, Restrained Collectivism, Cross-Cultural Psychology

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1. Introduction

Self-construal refers to the psychological representation of how individuals perceive themselves and position themselves in relation to others and society, which is a construct that develops through social interaction [1-3]. This internal framework exerts sustained and wide-ranging influences on cognition, emotion, and behavior, playing a pivotal role in various psychosocial domains, including interpersonal relationships, emotional expressivity, and decision-making processes [4, 5]. Moreover, self-construal often varies across cultural contexts. For instance, the contrast between independent self-construals typically observed in individualistic cultures and interdependent self-construals in collectivistic cultures serves to highlight such cultural variability [2, 3]. Therefore, self-construal serves not only as a lens for self-understanding but also as a key construct for interpreting culturally influenced patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior.

In the field of cultural psychology, self-construal has long served as a central theoretical framework for understanding cross-cultural variation in social behavior. In particular, the dichotomy between independent self-construals—typically found in individualistic cultures—and interdependent self-construals—common in collectivistic cultures—has provided a foundational basis for comparative studies between Western and Eastern societies [3, 4]. Thus, self-construal is not merely a framework for understanding the self, but also a key construct for interpreting culturally influenced patterns of behavior. While this binary model has advanced our understanding of cultural influences on values, emotions, and interpersonal styles, recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted its limitations [6-8]. Contemporary cultural identities are not monolithic, and empirical studies have shown that self-construals can vary even within the same cultural group depending on social context or social roles [9, 10]. In fact, self-construals are not static traits but are culturally constructed and dynamically shaped through reciprocal interactions between individuals and their sociocultural environments [8]. Considerable variability also exists within interdependent cultures in how self-construals are expressed and function [7]. These findings suggest that the binary model of independence versus interdependence is insufficient to capture the complexity and fluidity of self-construal, particularly in East Asian contexts. Nonetheless, much of the literature remains centered on the dichotomy between Eastern and Western cultures, often neglecting variation within East Asia [11]. Such oversimplifications hinder a precise understanding of how self-construal operates across closely related, yet distinct, cultural contexts.

In response to the limitations of traditional binary models, Han et al. [11] proposed a novel framework to capture the multidimensional nature of self-construals within cultural contexts. The model, known as the SOA model (Subjective Self, Objective Self, Autonomous Self), conceptualizes self-construal along three distinct but interrelated dimensions. Subjective Self (SS) refers to the tendency to actively express and adjust one's goals and intentions within interpersonal contexts. Rather than passive adaptation, individuals high in SS engage in relational agency by conveying their emotions and intentions proactively to exert influence in social interactions. Objective Self (OS) reflects heightened sensitivity to others' perspectives, social norms, and external expectations. Individuals high in OS are more likely to regulate their behavior based on perceived social evaluations, positioning themselves as socially responsive beings. Autonomous Self (AS) emphasizes self-determination and independence from social influence, with behavior guided primarily by internal standards and personal beliefs. While conceptually aligned with the traditional notion of independent self-construal, AS highlights an autonomy-centered orientation to self-regulation. The definitions of SS, OS, and AS are grounded in the theoretical foundations proposed by Han et al. [11] and Inumiya et al. [12]. Consistent with prior findings, Koreans tend to report higher levels of SS, whereas Japanese individuals tend to score higher on OS [5, 12, 13], suggesting that these cultural contexts differentially foster distinct dimensions of self-construal.

Beyond self-understanding, self-construals also influence how emotions are expressed and managed in social interaction. In this context, the SOA model offers a theoretically grounded means of examining the link between cultural values and nonverbal emotional expressivity, which refers to the capacity to convey emotions through facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and body language [14].

Nonverbal expressivity plays a key role not only in emotion transmission but also in impression formation, social coordination, and emotional attunement [15]. This is especially true in cultures where verbal expression tends to be constrained, making nonverbal communication a vital means of conveying internal emotional states [16]. Within this framework, each dimension of self-construal is expected to relate differently to nonverbal emotional expressivity. SS is expected to be positively associated with the Affective Communication Test (ACT), as individuals high in SS are likely to engage in relational agency by actively communicating their emotional intentions through facial expressions and gestures [17]. This tendency is reinforced in Korean culture, where emotional expressivity is socially endorsed as a means of fostering intimacy and empathic connection [18]. In contrast, OS has been theoretically linked to lower levels of nonverbal emotional expressivity due to its association with emotional regulation and suppression. Finally, AS emphasizes autonomy-centered self-regulation and may enable context-dependent emotional regulation, allowing individuals to express or withhold emotions depending on situational demands [12, 13, 17]. Yet, empirical evidence directly linking AS to nonverbal emotional expressivity is lacking. Importantly, cultural research further supports these expectations. Lee and

Matsumoto [17] found that Japanese participants endorsed stricter emotional display rules than Koreans, particularly in socially demanding contexts, reflecting stronger cultural norms for emotional restraint. Complementing this, through electrophysiological methods, Kraus et al. [19] demonstrated that Japanese participants exhibited distinct neural responses when suppressing emotions, suggesting that suppression is not only normative but may also serve adaptive functions in Japan. Taken together, these findings highlight that Korean culture promotes open emotional expression, whereas Japanese culture emphasizes restraint, thereby reinforcing our hypotheses. The present study provides an empirical test of how the SOA model relates to nonverbal emotional expressivity. Crucially, nonverbal emotional behaviors are not culturally neutral but are shaped by culturally prescribed display rules, which are normative guidelines that determine the appropriate contexts, modalities, and intensities of emotional expression [20, 21]. These rules are internalized through early socialization and function as regulatory mechanisms that align emotional displays with culturally valued relational goals. For instance, a smile may convey politeness, embarrassment, or discomfort depending on the sociocultural context [22, 23]. While direct eye contact may signal sincerity in Western societies, it can be interpreted as confrontational or disrespectful in East Asian contexts [24, 25]. Although earlier research often characterized Western cultures as emotionally expressive and Eastern cultures as emotionally suppressive [20, 26], such dichotomies overlook meaningful within-region variation, particularly among collectivistic East Asian societies [11]. More recent studies reveal substantial variation in emotion socialization practices and display norms between Korea and Japan [27]. Korean interpersonal culture emphasizes empathic emotional sharing, whereas Japanese norms stress emotional restraint and contextual attunement.

Taken together, prior research suggests that SS should facilitate nonverbal emotional expressivity, whereas OS may constrain it through heightened sensitivity to social norms and evaluations. Because previous findings regarding AS are lacking, AS was included in the analysis on an exploratory basis without a directional hypothesis.

Based on this theoretical background, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Korean participants, who are expected to report higher levels of Subjective Self (SS), will also report higher levels of nonverbal emotional expressivity compared with Japanese participants.

H2: In South Korea, SS will serve as a significant positive predictor of ACT, whereas this association will not be observed among Japanese participants.

H3: Objective Self (OS) will be negatively associated with nonverbal emotional expressivity, such that individuals higher in OS will report lower levels of ACT.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Procedure

The study employed a survey design to collect data. An online survey was created using Google Forms and distributed to participants through in-class announcements. Specifically, the researcher visited undergraduate classes in person and provided a verbal explanation of the study, including its purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. Students were informed that participation was voluntary, that their responses would remain confidential, and that their decision to participate would not affect their academic standing. Those who agreed to participate provided informed consent and completed the questionnaire at their convenience. The estimated completion time was approximately 10-15 minutes. Responses with more than 30% missing data were excluded from the final analysis. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee (Approval No. P240002, April 2, 2024) and conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study.

2.2. Participants

The final sample consisted of 189 Japanese undergraduate students (97 male, 92 female; M = 19.11 years, SD = 1.22) from private universities in the Kanto region of Japan and 199 Korean undergraduate students (117 male, 82 female; M = 20.77 years, SD = 1.57) from private universities in Seoul, South Korea.

2.3. Measures

The questionnaire consisted of two sections: (1) Self-Construal, measured using the Self-Construal Scale (SCS; [12]), and (2) Nonverbal Emotional Expressiveness, measured using the ACT [28]. The order of the two sections was consistent for all participants, and the survey was provided in both Japanese and Korean, allowing participants to respond in their native language.

2.3.1. Self-Construal Scale (SCS)

The Self-Construal Scale (SCS; [12]), which was developed based on the SOA model, measures how individuals define and perceive themselves in relation to others. The scale consists of 18 items assessing three dimensions of self-construal: SS, OS, and AS, with six items per subscale. Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). SS reflects the tendency to assert oneself and influence others (e.g., “I try to be self-assertive and competent”), OS captures sensitivity to social roles and external expectations (e.g., “I feel uncomfortable when I stand out more than others”), and AS emphasizes self-sufficiency and independence (e.g., “Being independent and self-sufficient is important to me”). While a prior study [5] examined the relationship between self-construal and non-

verbal emotional expressiveness using only SS and OS, the present study expands this approach by incorporating AS, thereby enabling a more comprehensive analysis encompassing all three dimensions of the SOA model. This three-dimensional framework was adopted to overcome the limitations of the conventional dichotomy between independent and interdependent self-construals and to better capture the diversity of self-construals within collectivistic cultures. The Japanese and Korean versions of the SCS used in this study were originally developed and validated by Inumiya et al. [12] and have been applied in multiple cross-cultural studies. In particular, studies by Han et al. [11] and Inumiya et al. [12] involving university students in Japan, Korea, and China confirmed a stable three-factor structure through principal component analysis and maximum likelihood estimation. Although these studies demonstrated conceptual validity and structural stability of the SOA model across East Asian contexts, they did not explicitly conduct formal tests of measurement invariance across cultural groups. Thus, in the present study, the SCS was applied based on the prior evidence of structural validity, and an exploratory assessment of measurement invariance was additionally undertaken. Although the model fit indices obtained in this study (CFI =.82, RMSEA =.096) did not fully meet conventional criteria (CFI ≥.90, RMSEA ≤.08), they were considered marginally acceptable for exploratory purposes. However, the results should be interpreted with caution. Given that the model fit did not fully meet conventional thresholds, interpretations based on measurement equivalence should be considered exploratory. Furthermore, given the lack of prior formal measurement invariance testing, the slightly lower fit indices observed may partly reflect cultural variations in the measurement properties of the SCS, rather than deficiencies in the model itself.

In the current study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for the SCS was as follows: for the Japanese sample, SS: α =.73, OS: α =.58, AS: α =.75; for the Korean sample, SS: α =.87, OS: α =.79, AS: α =.70. Notably, the reliability of the OS subscale was relatively low in the Japanese sample. In fact, the internal consistency of the OS subscale in previous studies (e.g., [12, 13]) was approximately α =.77, which falls within the acceptable range and indicates moderate reliability.

In addition, the original scale development study indicated relatively low inter-item correlations for the OS subscale (range =.22 to.58, M =.36), suggesting that the construct itself may inherently exhibit only moderate internal consistency. Therefore, the lower reliability observed in the present study is not unexpected and may reflect the inherent characteristics of the OS dimension rather than a measurement flaw.

This may partly explain the suboptimal model fit observed in this study. It is also possible that this reflects sociocultural shifts among contemporary Japanese university students, where the emphasis on the OS may have weakened compared to previous generations, although this remains a speculative interpretation that requires further empirical validation. This interpretation remains tentative and should be verified through future studies employing larger and more diverse samples.

To evaluate whether the low reliability of the OS subscale impacted the results, we conducted supplementary item-level analyses by recalculating Cronbach's alpha after removing one or two items that contributed most to the low score. The alpha coefficients increased to.61 and.70, respectively. Notably, the analyses using these reduced-item versions yielded results that were nearly identical to those using the full six-item OS subscale in terms of associations with nonverbal emotional expressiveness (ACT). These findings suggest that the lower reliability of the OS subscale did not significantly bias the main results. Therefore, to maintain theoretical consistency and comparability with prior studies, the original six-item version of the scale was retained for all analyses.

2.3.2. ACT

The ACT was selected because it is one of the most widely used and validated self-report measures of nonverbal emotional expressiveness and it captures observable emotional behaviors relevant across cultural contexts (e.g., facial expression, gestures, and eye contact).

In a previous study, a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the measurement invariance of the ACT across Japanese and Korean samples. The results supported configural and metric invariance (CFI =.897, TLI =.894, RMSEA =.072, SRMR =.060). Although these fit indices were not reported in the published manuscript, the analysis conducted by the authors confirmed that the factor structure was consistent across languages.

The Japanese version used in the present study was translated by Daibo [28] and has been widely adopted in previous Japanese studies on emotional expressiveness. Based on the invariance findings, the same versions of the ACT were employed in this study for both Japanese and Korean participants. Internal consistency (Cronbach's α) was also confirmed for both language groups, with α =.74 for the Japanese sample and α =.72 for the Korean sample, further supporting the ACT's suitability as a reliable measure of nonverbal emotional expressiveness in cross-cultural contexts.

2.4. Data Analysis

To examine bivariate associations among the key constructs, we computed Pearson correlations among SS, OS, AS, and ACT. We also conducted independent-samples t-tests to compare Japanese and Korean participants on these variables. To assess whether self-construals predicted ACT, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses using the total sample, as well as separately for Japan and Korea, for descriptive purposes. For the total sample, Step 1 included age, gender, and culture (dummy-coded; 0 = Japan, 1 =

Korea). Step 2 added SS, OS, and AS. Step 3 added the interaction terms with culture: SS × Culture, OS × Culture, and AS × Culture. For the country-specific models, Step 1 only included age and gender (because culture is constant within each subsample), and Step 2 added SS, OS, and AS. ACT served as the dependent variable in all models. We reported unstandardized coefficients (B) with standard errors and 95% confidence intervals, standardized coefficients (β), model R^2 and ΔR^2, and F-change tests for stepwise improvements. Multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors (VIF). All statistical tests were two-tailed with α =.05. In exploratory follow-up analyses, we also tested gender-related two-way and three-way interaction terms; however, none were statistically significant (see Results).

3. Result

Based on the internal consistency values reported in the Method section, all scales were considered sufficiently reliable for subsequent analyses. In the total sample, SS was negatively correlated with OS (r = -.55, p <.001) and positively correlated with AS (r =.17, p <.01) and ACT (r =.27, p <.001). A small but significant positive correlation was also found between AS and ACT (r =.10, p <.05), whereas the correlation between OS and ACT was nonsignificant (r = -.08, p >.05). In the Japanese sample, SS showed a strong negative correlation with OS (r = -.48, p <.001). However, no significant correlations were found between SS, OS, or AS and ACT (r = -.03, p >.05; r = -.04, p >.05; r =.10, p >.05). In the Korean sample, SS was negatively correlated with OS (r = -.34, p <.001). A significant positive correlation was observed between SS and ACT (r =.28, p <.001). and a weak positive correlation emerged between OS and AS (r =.19, p <.05). However, the correlation between AS and ACT was not significant (r = -.02, p >.05). (See Table 1)

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics and correlations between Self-Construal and ACT.*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
Total (N = 388)						
1 SS	3.46	(1.21)	—			
2 OS	4.31	(0.98)	-.55***	—		
3 AS	3.80	(0.81)	.17**	-.08	—	
4 ACT	4.62	(1.16)	.27***	-.08	.10*	—
Japan (n = 189)						
1 SS	2.71	(0.77)	—			
2 OS	4.77	(0.84)	-.48***	—		
3 AS	3.53	(0.71)	.05	-.07	—	
4 ACT	4.35	(1.07)	-.03	-.04	.10	—
Korea (n = 199)						
1 SS	4.18	(1.12)	—			
2 OS	3.89	(0.90)	-.34***	—		
3 AS	4.06	(0.82)	-.09	.19**	—	
4 ACT	4.87	(1.18)	.28***	.07	-.02	—

Note. SS: subjective self; OS: objective self; AS: autonomous self; ACT: Affective Communication Test score (nonverbal emotional expressivity); *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001

Independent-samples t-tests revealed significant cultural differences across all variables. Koreans scored significantly higher than Japanese participants on SS, t(386) = 15.20, p <.001, d = -1.53. By contrast, Japanese participants scored significantly higher than Koreans on OS, t(386) = 9.95, p <.001, d = 1.01. Additionally, Koreans scored significantly higher than higher than Japanese participants on AS, t(386) = -6.73, p <.001, d = -0.68—and ACT: t(386) = -4.61, p <.001, d = -0.47. (See Table 2)

Table 2. *Results of t-tests for differences between Japanese and Korean in Self-Construal and ACT scores.*

	Japan (*n* = 189)	**Korea (*n* = 199)**	***t*-value**
SS	2.71 (0.77)	4.18 (1.12)	15.20***
OS	4.77 (0.84)	3.89 (0.90)	9.95***
AS	3.53 (0.71)	4.06 (0.82)	-6.73***
ACT	4.35 (1.07)	4.87 (1.18)	-4.61***

Note. SS: subjective self; OS: objective self; AS: autonomous self; ACT: Affective Communication Test score (nonverbal emotional expressivity); *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001

Table 3. *Hierarchical multiple regression results predicting ACT.*

	B	**95% CI**		**SE**	***β***	***R*²**	***ΔR*²**
		LL	**UL**				
Step 1						.121	.121***
Age	.087	.010	.164	.039	.123*		
Gender	.549	.330	.768	.111	.237***		
Culture	.424	.170	.677	.129	.183**		
Step 2						.157	.036***
Age	.056	-.021	.134	.039	.080		
Gender	.601	.379	.824	.113	.259***		
Culture	.235	-.073	.543	.157	.102		
SS	.224	.101	.346	.062	.234***		
OS	.167	.031	.303	.069	.141*		
AS	.115	-.028	.257	.072	.081		
Step 3						.169	.012
Age	.046	-.032	.124	.040	.065		
Gender	.549	.315	.782	.119	.236***		
Culture	.321	.005	.638	.161	.139*		
SS	.000	-.230	.230	.117	.000		
OS	.080	-.138	.298	.111	.067		
AS	.175	-.041	.391	.110	.123		
SS*Culture	.314	.038	.589	.140	.238*		
OS*Culture	.120	-.168	.408	.146	.071		
AS*Culture	-.105	-.391	.182	.146	-.054		

Note. SS: subjective self; OS: objective self; AS: autonomous self; ACT: Affective Communication Test score (nonverbal emotional expressivity); *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with ACT as the dependent variable and age, gender, culture, SS, OS, AS, and their interaction terms (SS × Culture, OS × Culture, AS × Culture) as predictors (See Table 3). Step 1, in

which age, gender, and culture were entered, was significant, $F(3, 384) = 17.55$, $p < .001$, explaining 12% of the variance ($R^2 = .12$; Table 1). Gender ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) and culture ($\beta = .18$, $p = .001$) were significant positive predictors of ACT, as well as age, although with a smaller effect ($\beta = .12$, $p = .028$). Step 2, in which SS, OS, and AS were added, significantly improved the model, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, F-change(3, 381) = 5.49, $p = .001$—increasing the explained variance to 16% ($R^2 = .16$). SS ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$) and OS ($\beta = .14$, $p = .016$) significantly predicted ACT, whereas AS was not significant ($\beta = .08$, $p = .114$). Step 3, in which the interaction terms were included, did not significantly improve the model: $\Delta R^2 = .01$, F-change(3, 378) = 1.85, $p = .138$. However, the SS × Culture interaction was significant ($\beta = .24$, $p = .026$), suggesting that the positive association between SS and ACT was stronger in Korea than in Japan. All VIF values were within acceptable limits (maximum VIF = 6.86), indicating no multicollinearity. Finally, additional analyses were conducted to test gender-related two-way and three-way interactions (e.g., Gender × Self-construal, Gender × Culture × Self-construal). None of these were statistically significant, indicating that gender did not moderate the relationships between self-construals, culture, and ACT. To examine whether the relationship between SS-construal and nonverbal emotional expressiveness (ACT) varied by culture, an interaction term (culture × SS) was included in the regression model. The interaction effect was statistically significant ($\beta = .26$, $p = .006$), indicating that the strength of the association between SS-construal and ACT differed across Japanese and Korean participants. Simple slope analyses revealed that, as expected SS-construal positively predicted ACT among Korean participants ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) but not among Japanese participants ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .668$). As illustrated in Figure 1, Korean participants with higher SS-construal reported greater nonverbal emotional expressiveness, whereas the relationship was nonsignificant for Japanese participants. These findings tentatively suggest that the influence of SS-construal on emotional expressiveness may be more culturally pronounced in Korean contexts. By contrast, the interaction effects between culture and OS-construal, as well as between culture and AS, were not statistically significant. Specifically, for OS, neither the interaction term ($\beta = .08$, $p = .284$) nor the simple slopes for Japanese ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .644$) and Korean participants ($\beta = .08$, $p = .279$) reached significance. Similarly, for AS, both the interaction term and group-specific slopes were nonsignificant ($p > .05$). These results indicate that the predictive effects of objective and AS-construal on ACT did not significantly differ across cultural groups, and that the role of these self-construal dimensions in explaining nonverbal emotional expressiveness appears consistent regardless of cultural context.

Taken together, these findings underscore the cultural specificity of SS-construal in predicting nonverbal emotional expressiveness while suggesting that objective and autonomous dimensions may function more uniformly across contexts.

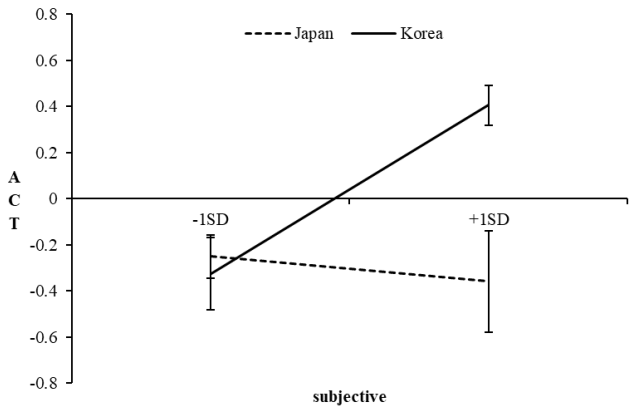

Figure 1. *Interaction between Subjective Self and Culture (Japan vs. Korea) in predicting nonverbal emotional expressiveness (ACT).*

4. Discussion

This study compared the relationships between the three dimensions of the SOA model (SS, OS, and AS) and nonverbal emotional expressivity (ACT) across two cultural contexts: South Korea and Japan. As expected, SS showed a positive and culturally moderated effect on ACT, such that higher SS was associated with greater expressivity particularly among Korean participants (H1). These findings support H1 and highlight that the role of SS in emotional communication is more salient in the Korean cultural context. In contrast, OS did not exhibit the expected negative relationship with ACT, and no cultural variation was observed in this association (H2), indicating that the influence of OS on nonverbal expressivity may be relatively stable across cultures. Finally, Korean participants demonstrated higher overall levels of nonverbal emotional expressivity than Japanese participants (H3), supporting the prediction that cultural norms in Korea encourage more open emotional expression. Consistent with previous findings [11, 12], Korean participants scored higher on SS and AS, whereas Japanese participants scored higher on OS, reaffirming that the self-structure in these cultures reflects divergent value orientations—relational expressivity in Korea and social harmony in Japan.

As predicted, SS was positively associated with nonverbal emotional expressivity (ACT), but this association was culturally contingent (SS × Culture interaction). Simple slope analyses revealed that SS significantly predicted ACT among Korean participants ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) but not among Japanese participants ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .668$), indicating that the hypothesized relationship was partially supported, with the effect of SS emerging as significant only in Korea.

These results support Han et al.'s [11] conceptualization of the SS as embodying "relational agency"—the capacity to convey one's emotions and intentions proactively to shape

interpersonal dynamics. In Korean culture, emotional expression is socially endorsed as a means of fostering intimacy and empathy [17]; thus, individuals high in SS are more likely to engage in expressive nonverbal behaviors that enhance relational connectedness.

In other words, SS functions as a psychological mechanism of the expressive self, facilitating the coordination and maintenance of relationships through emotional expressivity. Such cultural endorsement likely explains the strong positive association between SS and ACT observed among Korean participants. Although the possibility of differential social desirability in self-reports of emotional expressivity cannot be entirely ruled out, it is more plausible that the observed difference reflects genuine cultural norms surrounding emotional expression in Korea, where expressivity is socially valued [17].

By contrast, in Japan, where reading the atmosphere (*kuuki wo yomu*) and maintaining social harmony are highly valued, overt emotional expression is often socially constrained, even among individuals high in SS [29]. Because direct emotional expression may risk interpersonal tension or face threat [17, 30-32], Japanese individuals tend to regulate the intensity, timing, and modality of nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures, according to contextual appropriateness. As posited by the display rules framework [18, 33], emotional expression serves not merely as self-expression but as a means of managing social appropriateness.

Therefore, in Japanese culture, high SS may enhance internal emotional awareness but not necessarily result in overt expressivity; rather, it may manifest as subtle and restrained nonverbal forms. This interpretation aligns with previous findings that Japanese emotion regulation emphasizes social appropriateness and contextual modulation over overt expression [34, 35].

In this sense, SS appears to strengthen self-awareness and agency in emotional communication across both cultures; yet, the behavioral forms and social meanings of nonverbal expression are shaped by distinct cultural display rules. In Korea, where emotional sharing functions as a socially approved means of promoting empathy and intimacy, SS tends to manifest as overt and affectively rich expressive behavior. In contrast, in Japan, the same dispositional tendency is moderated by social harmony norms, leading to more temporally and contextually calibrated expressions. Thus, while SS facilitates the motivation for emotional expression across cultures, the mode of nonverbal expressivity, whether overt or restrained, is shaped by culturally grounded norms of emotional appropriateness.

Differing from the emotion-facilitating role of the SS, the OS, which reflects sensitivity to others' perspectives and social evaluation, was expected to exhibit an inverse association with nonverbal expressivity. However, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Although a weak positive correlation between OS and ACT was observed in the total sample, the direction of this relationship contradicted the prediction, and no significant cultural interaction emerged. Several interpretations may account for this finding. First, OS represents a self-construal characterized by heightened sensitivity to social expectations and others' appraisals. Rather than functioning as a mere suppressor of emotion, OS may motivate individuals to regulate the form, intensity, and timing of nonverbal expressions, such as facial movements, gestures, and tone of voice, according to social appropriateness. This interpretation is consistent with the SOA model's conceptualization of OS as reflecting attentiveness to external evaluations [11] and aligns with findings by Matsumoto [18] and Lee and Matsumoto [17], which demonstrated that emotional display rules are strongly internalized in Japanese culture. In this sense, OS can be tentatively understood as a mechanism of social modulation of expressivity rather than a direct inhibitory force. Such modulation entails not the complete suppression of affective expression but its calibration to socially acceptable and relationally appropriate levels, potentially functioning as an adaptive strategy to avoid interpersonal discomfort arising from excessive expressivity.

Second, the null finding may reflect a conceptual divergence between the constructs captured by OS and ACT. ACT primarily measures the frequency and intensity of nonverbal expression, whereas OS is more closely associated with qualitative regulation and social appropriateness in emotional communication. Thus, individuals high in OS may not uniformly suppress emotional expression; rather, they may flexibly adjust its intensity, frequency, and timing to match situational demands. Therefore, apparent low expressivity among individuals with high OS may not represent inhibition per se, but rather contextually attuned and socially calibrated expression. These findings converge with the literature on emotion socialization [36], which emphasizes that social sensitivity can promote adaptive emotional regulation rather than mere suppression. Accordingly, OS may facilitate social attunement, which is a culturally embedded regulation process that manifests as subtle and restrained expressivity aimed at maintaining social harmony and relational appropriateness. Consequently, the weak correlation between OS and ACT may reflect a discrepancy between measurement and behavior. While ACT captures the quantitative level of expressivity (i.e., frequency and magnitude), OS may operate at a qualitative level by shaping stylistic modulation and contextual nuance in emotional display. This divergence does not simply represent a psychometric limitation but rather underscores distinct functional emphases in emotional behavior, specifically quantitative expressivity versus qualitative regulation. Future research should investigate this possibility through item-level analyses of ACT responses or through behavioral observation methods to capture the contextual modulation of nonverbal expression more precisely.

Finally, consistent with prior research, emotion suppression in East Asian cultures is not necessarily maladaptive but may serve as a culturally sanctioned regulatory strategy to

maintain social harmony [31]. Within this cultural framework, OS may facilitate adjusted nonverbal expressivity, which is a socially attuned form of emotional regulation that balances expressivity and propriety. Thus, rather than dampening emotion outright, OS may reflect an adaptive regulatory mechanism that preserves social appropriateness through culturally calibrated nonverbal behavior. In contrast to the SS and OS, the AS showed no significant association with nonverbal emotional expressivity (ACT). This result can be interpreted in light of the differing levels of psychological processes captured by the two constructs. ACT reflects a social-behavioral level of expressivity, encompassing externally observable emotional behaviors such as facial expressions, tone, and gestures that convey affect and elicit interpersonal responses [26, 27]. In contrast, AS represents internal autonomy and self-determination, which refers to the tendency to act in accordance with internal values and beliefs rather than external expectations [12]. Therefore, AS is more closely related to value-based regulation, which involves the cognitive and motivational processes that determine why and when emotions are expressed rather than how frequently or intensely they are displayed. Individuals high in AS may evaluate the appropriateness and necessity of emotional expression by integrating situational demands with internal standards. Consequently, they may not exhibit consistent behavioral patterns of either active expression or suppression. The regulatory function of AS likely operates at a higher-order cognitive level, influencing the timing and contextual conditions under which emotions are expressed rather than directly determining the behavioral intensity of expressivity. Hence, AS may be more involved in decisional appraisal of appropriateness rather than in the behavioral enactment of expression, which could explain its weak linkage with ACT. This interpretation aligns with Han et al. [11] and Inumiya et al. [12], who conceptualized the AS as an autonomy-centered self-regulation system grounded in internalized values, and with Deci and Ryan's [37] self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy functions as a higher-order basis for emotional regulation rather than a direct behavioral determinant.

Hypothesis 3, which concerned cross-cultural differences in nonverbal emotional expressivity, was supported. Korean participants reported significantly higher ACT scores than Japanese participants, reflecting cultural norms that emphasize emotional expression as a means of fostering intimacy and empathy. The elevated ACT scores in Korea suggest that emotions are conveyed more openly and directly through facial, vocal, and gestural channels. Within Korean society, emotional expression functions as a social medium that maintains warm interpersonal bonds and fosters mutual trust. Overt nonverbal expression is thus regarded as a socially desirable and prosocial behavior. In this cultural context, expressive nonverbal behavior reflects not individual openness but a relationally oriented communication mode that strengthens emotional resonance and social connectedness. In contrast, Japanese culture is characterized by the pervasive concept of *meiwaku*, which refers to a sensitivity to avoiding causing discomfort or burden to others and constraining direct emotional expression. Japanese individuals tend to perceive overt emotional display as potentially disruptive to others' affective states or relational harmony. Accordingly, even when emotions are experienced, they are often regulated from the perspective of interpersonal consideration. Nonverbal cues, such as facial expression and tone of voice, are adjusted to align with social appropriateness and contextual expectations [18]. This *meiwaku* consciousness represents a form of socially oriented self-regulation that gives rise to Japan's characteristically restrained and context-dependent nonverbal expressivity [3, 34]. Although both cultures value relational harmony, they diverge in the means by which this is achieved. Korean culture prioritizes harmony through emotional sharing, whereas Japanese culture emphasizes harmony through emotional restraint. These normative distinctions define the culturally sanctioned range of nonverbal behavior and therefore explain why Korean participants demonstrated higher nonverbal expressivity than Japanese participants. Ultimately, the elevated ACT scores among Koreans are better understood not as indicators of personal openness but as reflections of culturally grounded norms that promote emotional sharing and empathy through nonverbal channels.

To capture this cultural heterogeneity, the present study introduces two complementary constructs as a conceptual framework for understanding cultural diversity in emotion regulation within collectivistic contexts: expressive collectivism and restrained collectivism. These constructs are newly proposed in this study as an integrated framework that bridges collectivistic value orientations and self-construal theories to explain cultural variations in emotional expression. This framework builds upon prior cultural psychology research suggesting that even within collectivistic societies, norms and modes of emotional expression vary considerably across cultural contexts [17, 18, 25, 38]. Expressive collectivism refers to a relational orientation within collectivistic cultures in which individuals pursue social harmony and relational cohesion through open emotional expression and sharing. In such contexts, emotional expression is considered a socially sanctioned means of fostering empathy, intimacy, and mutual understanding among group members [3, 20]. Restrained collectivism, on the other hand, also values harmony and relationship maintenance but achieves these goals through emotional moderation and suppression. Individuals adhering to this pattern regulate or withhold emotional expression to avoid disrupting social balance or causing discomfort or *meiwaku* to others, reflecting culturally embedded display rules emphasizing propriety and relational sensitivity [18, 29].

Although both constructs share the collectivistic emphasis on relational interdependence, they differ in their expressive strategies, specifically in whether emotions are managed

through sharing or through restraint, to sustain social harmony. Together, these constructs provide a nuanced account of how collectivistic values are enacted through distinct emotional regulation norms in East Asian cultures.

Specifically, expressive collectivism refers to a form of collectivism that strengthens relational bonds and emotional resonance through open emotional sharing. Emotional expression is viewed as a primary means of maintaining relationships and fostering mutual understanding—a pattern particularly salient in Korean culture. In contrast, restrained collectivism emphasizes the maintenance of social harmony through emotional moderation and restraint—a characteristic tendency of Japanese culture. While both cultural orientations prioritize relational centrality, they diverge in the strategies employed to manage emotion: sharing versus restraint.

In Korea, expressive collectivism manifests through culturally endorsed norms of emotional sharing, whereby open facial, vocal, and gestural expressions function as socially valued behaviors that promote intimacy and empathy. Thus, the higher ACT scores among Korean participants reflect culturally sanctioned communicative practices that facilitate emotional resonance and relational cohesion, rather than individual-level openness.

Conversely, lower expressivity among Japanese participants does not necessarily indicate suppression; rather, it represents a culturally adaptive regulatory strategy. Restrained collectivism in Japan reflects a cultural emphasis on emotional control and moderation to sustain social stability and relational balance.

This tendency is expressed through subtle and restrained expressivity, which is a communication style characterized by finely tuned modulation of intensity, timing, and modality in emotional display [18]. Consistent with this interpretation, through physiological evidence, Kraus et al. [19] demonstrated that emotional suppression in Japanese participants served not as a maladaptive inhibition but as an adaptive mechanism supporting social harmony. These findings support the notion that emotional restraint in Japanese culture constitutes an internalized and culturally normative form of emotion regulation aimed at maintaining equilibrium in interpersonal relationships.

Overall, the present study proposes that cross-cultural differences in emotional expressivity should not be conceptualized merely along a suppression-expression dichotomy, but rather as culturally differentiated strategies for achieving relational harmony. This theoretical perspective provides a more nuanced account of emotion regulation in collectivist societies, moving beyond the conventional East-West dichotomy toward an intra-cultural understanding of how collectivistic values shape emotional life. Future research should further operationalize and empirically test the constructs of expressive and restrained collectivism, employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to validate their cross-cultural applicability and psychological mechanisms. Future studies should develop and validate psychometric instruments to quantitatively assess expressive and restrained collectivism, which would allow for empirical testing of this proposed perspective across different cultural contexts. Furthermore, alternative methods such as scenario-based assessments, qualitative narrative approaches, or cross-cultural interviews may complement psychometric development and help to validate the concept prior to scale construction.

Taken together, the present study holds theoretical significance in that it highlights intra-East Asian cultural variation, which is a dimension often overlooked in prior research that has predominantly focused on East-West comparisons [11]. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that even within collectivistic societies, the social norms governing emotional expression and the functional dynamics of self-construal can differ markedly across cultures.

In addition to these future directions, the limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, because ACT was assessed using a self-report measure, discrepancies may exist between self-perceived expressivity and actual expressive behaviors or observer evaluations. Subsequent studies may incorporate behavioral indices or observer-rated data to obtain a more comprehensive assessment of nonverbal emotional expressivity. Second, as the present study employed a cross-sectional design, causal inferences regarding the relationship between self-construals and expressivity cannot be drawn. Longitudinal or experimental approaches are needed to clarify the causal pathways linking changes in self-construals to emotional expressivity. Third, the sample consisted solely of university students, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include participants of diverse ages, generations, and socioeconomic backgrounds to explore potential within-culture variations.

In conclusion, understanding and respecting culturally shaped self-construals and emotional expression styles are essential for enhancing the quality of interpersonal relationships. Future studies should examine whether the expressive-restrained collectivism continuum proposed in this research can be observed in other collectivist societies beyond East Asia, thereby extending the theoretical scope of this perspective. Experimental vignette studies or culturally adapted emotion-recognition tasks that manipulate display-rule contexts may also provide more direct empirical validation of the proposed perspective.

Abbreviations

SS	Subjective Self
OS	Objective Self
AS	Autonomous Self
SCS	Self-Construal Scale
ACT	Affective Communication Test

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Author Contributions

Youngsun Yuk: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft

Eiko Matsuda: Methodology, Resources, Validation, Writing - review & editing

Kiyoshi Ando: Supervision, Project administration, Writing - review & editing

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study have been reported in this manuscript and are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography

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Research Field

Youngsun Yuk: Self-construal, nonverbal emotional expressivity, expressive collectivism, restrained collectivism, emotion suppression, emotion expression, cross-cultural psychology, cultural comparison

Eiko Matsuda: Sleep disorder, nightmare, dreaming, cognitive, behavioral therapy, personality traits, stress

Kiyoshi Ando: Self-disclosure and health, impression management, persuasion and compliance, loss and bereavement, critical incident stress of journalists, guilt and other self-conscious emotions