



**DOES WEST "FIT" WITH EAST? IN SEARCH OF A CHINESE  
MODEL OF PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT**

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## **Does West “Fit” with East? In Search of a Chinese Model of Person–environment Fit**

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# **DOES WEST “FIT” WITH EAST? IN SEARCH OF A CHINESE MODEL OF PERSON– ENVIRONMENT FIT**

## **ABSTRACT**

Extant theorizing of person–environment (PE) fit is culture-bound in that it focuses predominantly on PE fit phenomena in the Western worlds. We enrich the PE fit literature by exploring the interpretations of PE fit in a dominant Eastern context (Chinese) with a qualitative study. We interviewed 30 Chinese working adults with diverse backgrounds. Findings suggest an integrated Chinese model of PE fit that constitutes five dominant PE fit themes (i.e., competence at work, harmonious connections at work, balance among life domains, cultivation, and realization). In addition, our study finds empirical evidence of both psychological time and diachronic time with regards to PE fit. With respect to cultural grounding, we reason that Confucian relationalism, selfhood, and appropriateness are particularly helpful in explaining our findings. Other implications and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** person-environment fit, cross-cultural management, Chinese Confucianism, psychological time, diachronic time

Person–environment fit research, especially with its focus on personal affective outcomes, is definitely a Western tradition, dominated by an emphasis on the individual and on personal satisfaction/gratification. These are clearly not universal values and so at least one other environmental variable, national culture, must enter the equation for person–environment fit research. It must but it has not. (Schneider, 2001: 148)

More than one decade after Schneider (2001) sounded this note of caution with his typical perspicacity, the intersection between culture and PE fit still receives little research attention. Addressing this point in their review of the PE fit literature, Lee and Ramaswami commented that “efforts to provide a cultural perspective on fit have been rather scant or invisible” (2013: 223). Similarly, Lee and Antonakis urged scholars to “reexamine possible cultural biases in basic assumptions undergirding fit theories” (2012: 26) because failure to consider culture in theorization “provides an incomplete view of fit” (2012: 26). Bridging culture and PE fit theories “makes good conceptual and practical sense” (Schneider, 2001: 150) on both theoretical and practical grounds. Conceptually, culture influences the three essential parameters of PE fit: conception of a person (e.g., Ho, 1995; Hwang, 2011a; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the interpretation of an environment (e.g., Weick, 1995), and the underlying assumption of relations between a person and an environment (e.g., Hwang, 1987, 2012; Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Thus, PE fit is inherently a culture-embedded construct, and theorizing must reflect this. On practical grounds, PE fit is a useful framework that underlies a majority of human resource management (HRM) practices (Lee & Ramaswami, 2013). Deeply contextualized knowledge about PE fit can greatly help managers to design, assess, and deliver these HRM practices in culturally effective manners.

To date, only a few empirical studies explicitly incorporated culture into the heart of their inquiries (e.g., Lee & Antonakis, 2012; Li, 2006; Nyambegera, Daniels, & Sparrow, 2001; Parkes, Bochner, & Schneider, 2001; Westerman & Vanka, 2005). For the most part, these studies deductively tested the validity of extant (Western) PE fit theories in non-Western contexts and treated culture as a boundary condition of extant PE fit theories (Lee & Antonakis, 2012; Lee & Ramaswami, 2013). However, results of those studies have shown that the current PE fit theories can, at best, only partially explain fit phenomena in non-Western contexts (e.g., Lee & Antonakis, 2012; Li, 2006; Westerman & Vanka, 2005). This speaks to a theoretical void in that the field needs a contextualized understanding of how PE fit is interpreted beyond Western cultures.

As contextualization greatly helps researchers understand culture-embedded constructs (Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Tsui, 2006, 2007, 2012), we seek to contribute to this theoretical void by exploring the PE fit in the Chinese context. A Chinese context is a particularly fruitful vantage point from which to gain new theoretical understandings of PE fit, and this is the case for three reasons. First, China has gained international economic significance by being the second-largest economy in the world (Jones, 2010). Ties between China and the rest of the world, as evidenced by foreign direct investments in China (Luo, Xue, & Han, 2010), have increased at unprecedented rates. Thus, understanding how Chinese employees interpret PE fit is a timely agenda for both China and the world with which it increasingly engages. Second, the West and China represent two of the world's dominant cultural systems (Eisenstadt, 1986; Jaspers, 2003). It is likely that Chinese cultural assumptions could inform alternative interpretations of the person (P), the environment (E), and the interactions of P and E (PE fit). Third, cultural anthropologists and comparative philosophers (e.g., Dumont, 1981; Jullien, 2011) have consistently asserted that in-depth explorations and understandings of alien cultures constitute an

effective approach to understanding one's own culture. Therefore, to explore PE fit in this context may yield or strengthen new perspectives that, in turn, promote reexaminations of Western culture's underlying assumptions about PE fit.

For these reasons, the present study addresses a fundamental research question of PE fit in a Chinese setting: *How do Chinese individuals interpret their experiences of PE fit?* Using a qualitative approach, we answer this research question by identifying dominant themes of PE fit underlying informants' interpretations of experience of PE fit in the workplace. A theme is an internally coherent and encompassing idea that helps individuals make sense of their experience of PE fit. "Theme" has been used by fit scholars (Shipp & Jansen, 2011) to describe fit narratives that individuals craft of their perceived PE fit experiences. In other words, fit narratives are crafted with a particular theme in mind that reflects an individual's motives. For example, in focusing on a desire for more time with their family members, employees may craft a fit narrative that evolves around the theme of work and family balance, which enables employees to make sense of their PE fit. Therefore, PE fit themes reveal the underlying motivation for why individuals think they fit.

As a culmination of these efforts, we offer a Chinese model of PE fit that is substantiated by Chinese indigenous literature and that presents a holistic picture of how Chinese individuals experience PE fit. Overall, this study seeks to contribute to the PE fit literature in the following ways. First, we respond to the call for explorations of PE fit phenomena beyond Western worlds (e.g., Lee & Antonakis, 2012; Lee & Ramaswami, 2013; Schneider, 2001) by using a central Eastern culture as the foundation. To do this, we adopt a qualitative approach, which has long been considered necessary for—but absent from—the PE fit literature (e.g., Billsberry, Ambrosini, Moss-Jones, & Marsh, 2005; Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993; Edwards & Billsberry,

2010; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Second, to advance theories of PE fit in general, we offer a contextualized Chinese model of PE fit that can shed light on extant Western PE fit models (Edwards, 2008; Judge, 2007; Whetten, 2009). Finally, and on a related note, because we construct Chinese PE fit concepts “from the ground up,” the results of these efforts may strongly inform how West meets East in terms of new PE fit concepts and theories.

We structure the paper as follows. First, we offer a brief description of Western PE fit concepts and cultural assumptions, and argue for possible Chinese PE fit cultural assumptions. Second, we elaborate on the current study’s methods, including those for the sample, the interview protocol, and the data analysis. Third, we elucidate our findings about Chinese PE fit themes. Fourth, we propose an integrated Chinese model of PE fit based on our findings and the Confucian conceptions. Finally, we discuss how our findings advance extant PE fit theories and inform cross-cultural managerial practices.

## **WESTERN AND CHINESE MODELS OF PE FIT**

Given that the differences between Western and Eastern cultural systems appear to be substantial as previously mentioned, we believe that experiences of PE fit may vary significantly between the two systems. In this section, we first briefly describe the current concepts and cultural assumptions of PE fit at work. We then draw on Confucian conceptions to describe possible Chinese cultural assumptions that could underlie how Chinese individuals interpret PE fit.

### **Current Western Concepts and Cultural Assumptions of PE Fit**

Extant PE fit researchers studying how people experience PE fit generally consider two concepts: supplementary fit and complementary fit (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Supplementary fit operates under the psychological processes of the similarity–attraction

paradigm (Schneider, 1987), which focuses on similarity. One is said to have supplementary fit “when he or she supplements, embellishes, or possesses characteristics which are similar to other individuals in this environment” (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987: 269). Several prevailing themes of PE fit, such as person-organization fit, person-group fit, and person-person fit, follow the concept of supplementary fit. They all emphasize how the focal person and the environment are similar to each other regarding such characteristics as values, goals, and personality.

The second concept of PE fit is complementary fit, which operates under the psychological process of the need fulfillment paradigm (Edwards, 1991; Maslow, 1954; Porter, 1961), notable for its emphasis on differences. Complementary fit is said to exist “when the characteristics of an individual serve to ‘make whole’ or complement the characteristics of an environment” (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987: 271). Examples of current themes of PE fit that follow the concept of complementary fit include demands–abilities fit and needs–supplies fit. Demands–abilities fit occurs when employees’ abilities, knowledge, and skills are commensurate with what the job requires; and needs–supplies fit is achieved when employees’ needs, desires, or preferences are met by what the job offers (Edwards, 1991). Both of these themes focus on how the person and the environment could complement each other.

While supplementary and complementary concepts of PE fit are distinct, a core commonality is that both operate under the Western cultural assumption of individualism (see Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2007; Hsu, 1971; Sampson, 1988). Individualism preaches that individuals are independent. When they interact with each other, they see self-interest in themselves. Individualism also amounts to advocacy of the position that individuals’ needs and values not only should receive precedence but also should be fulfilled. Therefore, individuals are often deemed to be entities who, separate from the environment, frequently

compare their personal possessions with what the environment can offer.

### **Possible Chinese Cultural Assumptions of PE Fit**

Because research often characterizes Chinese as focusing on interpersonal relationships (Hsu, 1971; Hwang, 2000), it is likely that Chinese employees may approach P, E, and the constellation of P and E from a deeply relational angle. To determine the Chinese theoretical roots that are most relevant to understanding PE fit, we considered several streams of Chinese indigenous literature and reasoned that two Confucian conceptions are particularly relevant: relationalism and selfhood. Relationalism describes a general sense of the relationship between a person and the environment and how people should interact with each other to reach harmonious relationships. Selfhood is a core concept within relationalism that explains how people are situated at the center of relationships and how people evolve over time. In the following, we elaborate on what relationalism and selfhood mean and how they could serve as underlying cultural roots for Chinese PE fit.

**Relationalism.** The core idea of Confucian relationalism is *ren* (Hwang, 2012). The richness of the term *ren* is apparent when it is translated into a variety of English terms, such as “kindness,” “benevolence,” “humanity,” and “human-heartedness” (see Chan, 1955). In addition, the Chinese ideogram for *ren*, or 仁, comprises one part signifying a person and another part signifying the number two, so the ideogram essentially points to an interpersonal realm (Chan, 1955). In Confucian legacy, *ren* denotes a kind of perfect virtue regarding self–other harmonious relationships based on the self’s adaptability to others’ requests.

**Selfhood.** Selfhood is a prominent subject under relationalism and it has two focuses: first, the self and its interactions with others (Ho, 1995, 1998; Hwang, 2012), and second, the transformation of this relational self over time (Ho, 1995; Hwang & Chang, 2009; Tu, 1985,

2012). Under relationalism, the self is construed as relational, or a center of relationships (Ho, 1995, 1998; Hwang, 2012; Tu, 2012), so that a person is “intensely aware of the social presence of other human beings” (Ho, 1995: 177). Moreover, the self is neither independent from others (i.e., the self under individualism) nor defined by its membership in certain groups (i.e., the self under collectivism), but the self is meaningful primarily in relation to others (Ho, 1995, 1998; Hwang, 2012; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Under the notion of the relational self, individuals should consider how their own acts influence other individuals, and frequently assess where they are in the relational context. Confucianism ethics also stresses family (i.e., filial piety) because “family is an inseparable part of one’s life, and relationship between parents and children are construed as one’s own flesh and blood” (Hwang, 1998: 227). Besides family members, the development of positive relationships can involve friends, coworkers and supervisors.

In addition to treating the self as the center of relationships, selfhood treats the self as a dynamic mix of constantly evolving aspects (Tu, 2012). From a comparative perspective, selfhood emphasizes transformation in contrast to much of classical Greek philosophy’s focus on reality (Jullien, 2011). The evolution of the self takes place through self-cultivation (Ho, 1995; Hwang, 2011b; Hwang & Chang, 2009; Tu, 1985, 2012), which relies on lifelong learning geared toward the achievement of becoming fully human. This transformation requires self-transcendence that takes place in and is fertilized by self–other interactions (Tu, 2012).

In sum, the West and the East hold distinct cultural assumptions that we argue could characterize these two vast regions’ distinct overall approaches to PE fit. Therefore, extant PE fit theories, which are primarily based on individualism, may not sufficiently explain PE fit phenomena in settings involving cultural systems which differ from those in the West. Our study, in examining how Chinese people experience PE fit, explores predominant Chinese themes of PE

fit. In the following section, we elucidate our study's sample, data collection, interview protocol, and data analyses.

## **METHODS**

### **Sample**

Our aim has been to enrich PE fit theory by answering the research question of how Chinese individuals interpret their experiences of PE fit; thus we conducted a qualitative study (Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We chose to study working adults in Taiwan, where Confucian cultural precepts remain strongly in place (Hwang, 2012; Matzger, 1988). In the early stages of the data collection, we sought to ensure a diverse sample to match the fact that current literature has examined PE fit from various types of samples. Thus, we used a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). In the later stages, when we sought to clarify and examine the emerging theoretical model, we used a theoretical sampling strategy (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We approached the informants through personal contacts and considered this approach appropriate and necessary. This is because under the Chinese-Confucian culture, it has been documented that personal contacts help gather the quality information that informants may not be willing to share with an unfamiliar interviewer (Tsang, 1998; see also Hwang, 1987). We interviewed a total of 30 Chinese informants representing a diverse range of industries (e.g., banking, media, retail, transportation, and service industries), occupations (e.g., engineering, human-resource, marketing, sales, and journalism occupations), job ranks (e.g., front-line staff, supervisor, department manager, and general manager), and demographics (average age of 35.6 years, ranging from 23 to 57; 53% were male; average work tenure was 11.5 years).

### **Data Collection and Interview Protocol**

Four interviewers (three authors and one research assistant) engaged in the data collection. A majority of the interviews took place outside of informants' workplaces during off time. Interviews lasted an average of approximately one hour and were recorded and transcribed verbatim within a week of the interviews. The interviewers met frequently during the data-collection period to discuss recently conducted interviews fully, to analyze the data tentatively, to tweak the interview questions when necessary, and to plan for the follow-up interviews. This process continued for fifteen weeks and stopped when we found evidence of theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the informants. Moreover, because this study explores informants' naturalistic interpretations of "fit" on the basis of the informants' own perspectives and words, we did not provide any definition of PE fit to informants. As for the interview protocol that we followed, it contained three parts. In the first part, we set out to gain a general picture of informants' work and allowed informants to naturalistically bring up those environmental aspects that were most meaningful personally. We asked informants an initial question: "What do you do in a typical workday?" We asked several follow-up questions: "What are your job duties?" "What percentage of your workday is allocated to each of your duties?" and "Who are the people you typically interact with throughout the day?" Once equipped with the responses to these questions, we grasped many aspects of informants' workplace environment that might be related to the informants' PE fit.

In the second part of the interview protocol, we addressed informants' specific PE fit experiences. We adopted principles of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Gremler, 2004), instructing informants to describe how certain events influenced their experience of fit. We asked questions such as "Of the incidents you described as being daily events, which ones

have prompted you to think about fit?” We probed with further questions such as “What happened?” “What did you or others do?” “How did you feel?” and “How did you react to it?” This approach helped informants avoid vague responses and cite concrete and specific examples that would help us understand their interpretations of PE fit. In this part of the interview protocol, we also asked, “Beyond your work circle, what other incidents have influenced your experience of fit at work?” Typically, informants referred to family, friends, health, or leisure. We encouraged informants to identify as many incidents as possible by asking, “Could you share another incident with me?”

In the third part of the interview protocol, we sought to help informants consolidate their specific cited incidents under abstract and encompassing labels, which helped us further label our themes. We thus employed the technique of cognitive mapping (Bagozzi & Dabholkar, 2000; Billsberry et al., 2005) and asked, “What does ‘fit’ mean to you?” Typically informants mentioned many aspects of PE fit. We then further probed the topic: “Could you elaborate on what you mean by this aspect?” or “How does this aspect differ from other aspects?” As an example of how responses from this part of the interview protocol would help us identify themes, one informant mentioned several incidents reflecting how easy her job was and how everyone could easily experience fit in her job. When asked what “fit” meant to her, she pondered the matter over before responding, “Fit is being competent at work. Fit is being able to perform a job and fulfilling the job’s requirements.” Her definition (i.e., fit as competence at work) and similar definitions from other informants helped us characterize and label one of the five identified themes.

### **Data Analysis**

We analyzed our data to identify the theoretical categories (i.e., themes, first-order codes,

and second-order codes) of PE fit. Our primary data were collected in the second part of the interview protocol. In the present study, the unit of analysis was an episode, which was an internally coherent story, event, or specific activity that informants employed to explain their experience of fit. This unit of analysis was consistent with the unit (i.e., incident) we referred to in our interviews. Evolving around episodes, our data analysis went through two stages. The objective of the first stage was to identify major PE fit themes based on the episodes collected, and the objective of the second stage was to identify first- and second-order codes within each theme.

*Stage 1: Identifying major PE fit themes according to episodes.* Stage 1 of the data analysis occurred during the data-collection process. For every few interviews conducted, the interviewers met to exchange ideas. On the basis of early interviews, we found that Chinese PE fit evolved around multiple provisional themes. For instance, an informant provided one episode about how he and his colleagues reciprocally supported each other for work-related matters (provisional theme 1) and another episode about how his personal capabilities fit his job's requirements (provisional theme 2). With these and other provisional themes noted, we set out to identify a parsimonious set of themes by minimizing the differences within the themes but at the same time maximizing the differences between the themes. In this stage, each of the interviewers independently conducted line-by-line open coding and created provisional themes emerging from the data (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In an interactive fashion, we discussed the themes, revisited the data, collected new data, and conducted subsequent data analyses.

We stopped collecting new data when we agreed upon five themes and when additional data collection did not suggest new themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We eventually collected a total of 649 episodes. An interviewer re-coded all episodes according to the five identified

themes, so that each episode was assigned exclusively to one and only one theme. All episodes were later sent to the other three interviewers, who independently assessed their agreement on the assignment of the episodes. We calculated the inter-rater reliabilities (Perreault & Leigh, 1989) among the three interviewers, and the results indicate a high-level of agreement (.98, .97, and .99). After the four interviewers discussed the disagreements, we discarded 38 episodes that had irreconcilable disagreements, resulting in a total of 611 usable episodes for further analysis. These five themes were *in-vivo* coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as competence at work, harmonious connections at work, balance among life domains, cultivation, and realization. Table 1 presents the number and percentage of informants providing episodes of each theme and the number and percentage of episodes offered for each theme.

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 Insert Table 1 about here  
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***Stage 2: Identifying first-order codes and second-order codes within PE fit themes.***<sup>1</sup> In this stage, we closely inspected the episodes to identify the first-order codes and second-order codes within each theme (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We used the qualitative-data analysis software NVivo 9.0. To identify provisional first-order codes, we analyzed each episode line-by-line (i.e., open coding; Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analysis was conducted in such a way as to maximize between differences across codes and minimize within differences within each code.

We then sought to identify second-order codes to explain the provisional first-order codes (i.e., axial coding; Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by carefully comparing the provisional first-order codes *within* themes. In forming the provisional second-order codes, we

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<sup>1</sup> Table 2 depicts the theoretical categories (i.e., themes, first-order codes, and second-order codes) of the current study.

simultaneously scrutinized the provisional second-order codes *across* themes in an attempt to find a common underlying framework among the second-order codes across the themes. For these analyses, we focused on informants' descriptions about P, E, the interactions between P and E, and informants' evaluations of PE fit. For instance, one theme that would later be described as one of the five themes we identified was competence at work. We found that this theme focused on first comparing the personal capabilities (i.e., P) with work demands (i.e., E), then matching the two entities (i.e., the interaction between P and E), and finally evaluating PE fit by how much the personal capabilities fulfilled work demands (i.e., the evaluation of PE fit). Another theme, harmonious connections at work, focused on first accounting for a person and other persons at work, then identifying reciprocity relationships, and finally evaluating PE fit by the extent to which two persons could harmoniously work together. After a series of exercises, we found that we could best comprehend the second-order codes of each theme as a *process* to find the experience of PE fit. The process followed a common underlying framework of input, throughput, and output. Specifically, informants first focused on locating the P and E to be compared (input), then undertook a matching or interactive process to interpret how P and E interacted with each other (throughput), and finally evaluated their PE fit (output).<sup>2</sup>

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 Insert Table 2 about here  
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We continue now with a Findings section, including a brief overview of our findings, detailed descriptions of each theme, and a brief summary. We follow this section by proposing a

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of *when* the input-throughput-output process was identified, we did not ask for the fit components (input, throughout, and output) first and thus we did not have the informants assess their fit in the output stage. Instead, as mentioned previously in the Data Collection and Interview Protocol section, we first prompted the informants to identify any event, story, or aspect of their environment that led them to think about fit. Based on this information, we probed further with more questions and encouraged them to share more details of the events. Via this probing process, we prompted informants to make sense of what they meant by "fit" (Weick, 1995). We then analyzed those episodes and finally identified the input-throughput-output model to delineate how Chinese individuals interpreted PE fit.

more integrated model we call the Chinese Model of PE Fit.

## **FINDINGS**

We identified five themes of Chinese PE fit: competence at work, harmonious connections at work, balance among life domains, cultivation, and realization. In this section, to provide an overall picture of how the themes relate to each other, we refer readers to our Chinese model of PE fit (see Figure 1), which integrated our findings. We highlight several critical points in the model and then elaborate on each of the five themes in detail (see Figures 2A–2E).

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 Insert Figure 1 and Figures 2A–2E about here  
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### **Overview**

We propose a Chinese model of PE fit to illustrate how the five themes we identified constitute an integrated view of how Chinese individuals approach PE fit at work. In this model, we differentiate the themes by two criteria: content (on the left hand side of Figure 1) and domain (on the right hand side of Figure 1). For content, the theme could be primarily either task-related (e.g., work demands) or relation-related (e.g., colleagues, spouse). For domain, the theme could relate primarily to either work domain or other life domains (e.g., family, friends, health, and leisure). These two criteria permit the categorization of (1) cultivation, competence at work, and realization as themes regarding one’s work tasks in the work domain, (2) harmonious connections at work as a theme regarding one’s relations in the work domain, and (3) balance among life domains as a theme regarding one’s relations with other life domains.

Overall, two themes (i.e., competence at work and harmonious connections at work) are similar to what the current PE fit literature focuses on. In particular, competence at work is akin to demands–abilities fit and harmonious connections at work are akin to person–person fit and

person–group fit. However, each differs from extant PE fit literature in several ways that we will elaborate on the Discussion section. Moreover, the other three themes are either relatively underdeveloped in (i.e., balance among life domains) or substantively different from (i.e., cultivation and realization) extant Western definitions of fit.

We also evaluate Chinese PE fit against the current understanding of fit, which generally defines fit as congruence. We find that, first, two themes (i.e., cultivation and realization) are anomalies insofar as Chinese individuals could experience a sense of PE fit when incongruence occurs (top of Figure 1). Second, we reason that Chinese PE fit is a feeling of appropriateness, which is a Confucian conception referring to doing what is fitting (bottom of Figure 1). We surmise that when Chinese individuals say they fit, they are more likely experiencing a sense of doing appropriate things than a sense of congruence. We will further explore these points in the section entitled A Chinese Model of PE Fit.

In the following, we elaborate on each theme with an overview of the theme, followed by explications of the theme using the input–throughput–output process. For how the input–throughput–output process could help explain PE fit, we note that what informants consider themselves to be determines how they perceive the environment and their interplay with the environment (input), how they interpret their interaction with the environment (throughput), and how they evaluate their experience of PE fit (output).

### **Competence at Work**

Competence at work emerged as a theme of PE fit, indicating the process through which informants found their work demands fulfilled by personal capabilities. We explain this theme through three second-order codes: sources for matching (input), confirmation of match (throughput), and job-fulfillment (output).

***Sources for matching (input).*** Informants compared one environmental source (i.e., work demands) with one personal source (i.e., work capabilities) to explore scenarios in which they perceived whether they are competent. Environmental work demands refer to work requirements, such as work standards, required tasks, and supervisor expectations; personal work capabilities refer to an individual's work abilities, knowledge, and experiences. For instance, a TV reporter noted, "My job requires that I report live at the scene of breaking news. There are several personal attributes relevant to this task. For example, voice expression is certainly essential, and so is attractive physical appearance. Verbal comprehension should be important as well, but composure under stress is more important. It helps you put together critical information on the spot under time pressure."

***Confirmation of match (throughput).*** With the environmental and personal sources laid out, informants evaluated the extent to which he or she had a job match. Confirmation of a job match could come from either informants' own evaluation of themselves (self affirmation), others' evaluation of the informants (other approval), or both. The TV reporter stated, "I have a B.A. in journalism. My educational background provides me knowledge and skills for tasks like news writing and interviewing, all of which are necessary for being a reporter. My internship experiences have also helped develop my confidence in being a TV reporter." The reporter affirmed that there was a job match between his work demands and his personal capabilities. The comments from a sales deputy manager in the shipping and transportation industry reveal how confirmation came from his clients as well as from him: "My outgoing personality helps me a lot in communicating with my clients. I am also a good listener—I usually know what the clients really want. Once I understand their needs, the best strategy naturally occurs to me. In fact, my clients often times confirm that I have what it takes to be a sales representative."

***Job-fulfillment (output)***. Informants experienced PE fit, reflected as competence at work, when the work demands were fulfilled by his or her capabilities. As an example of PE fit induced by job-fulfillment, the TV reporter contended, “I perform up to this job’s required standards, which include reporting news stories from appropriate angles and putting together well-written news pieces.” A research associate in an investment bank vividly described how he performed his job, leading him to sense a job fit: “When I present my proposals to my new clients, they always go from being distant to opening their notebook and jotting down ideas because in the end, they think my presentations are valuable and useful. That’s why I feel that I fit my job.” This informant experienced fit because, from his perspective, his presentation abilities satisfied his work demands (i.e., engaging clients).

### **Harmonious Connections at Work**

Work is inevitably social. We found that, with social interactions at work, informants experienced fit when they could smoothly coordinate or affectively connect with others at work (e.g., supervisors, subordinates, coworkers, and customers). We therefore labeled this phenomenon of PE fit harmonious connections at work. We elaborate on this theme via three second-order codes: interpersonal interactions (input), identification of reciprocity (throughput), and social compatibility (output).

***Interpersonal interactions (input)***. “Interpersonal interactions,” in this study, refers to the actual encounter-based social experiences that individuals have with other persons in workplace settings. This type of interpersonal relationship incorporates a focal person (P) and other persons (E). Our data suggest that the individuals with whom informants interacted included supervisors, coworkers, customers, subordinates, and suppliers. Informants often affirmed that harmonious connections at work were critical when it came to having work done. A manager of a bank noted

that good connections could “get you insider tips and make your work successful.” Therefore, in order to ensure harmonious connections, informants strove to manage their interactive experiences by staying adaptive and malleable. For instance, the interactions between one informant—an IT employee in a bank—and his supervisor exemplify a harmonious work relationship: “Before a project is to commence, my supervisor always lets me know what he wants and asks for my opinion. If he thinks my idea is better, he’s very open and willing to adopt it. Our goal is to get the work done nicely and efficiently.” This excerpt shows that remaining adaptive and malleable in an interaction was critical for this informant because it allowed the two parties to continue their interactions under harmonious conditions.

*Identification of reciprocity (throughput).* Through interactions with persons at work, informants sought to identify a reciprocal relationship. Our data revealed two approaches to identifying this reciprocity: informants enacted the reciprocity and/or anticipated reciprocity. Specifically, when enacting reciprocity, informants observed unselfish sharing, unsolicited help, prompt responses, or shared workplace objectives in their teams, all of which provided evidence of reciprocity recognized in Chinese society (Chen & Chen, 2004; Hwang, 1987; Yang, 1995). When anticipating future reciprocity, informants envisioned whether the current reciprocity would carry over into future correspondences (Shipp & Jansen, 2011). One informant, a marketing research associate, commented on enacting reciprocity: “I believe team spirit is critical. It can overcome all odds. My teammates and I work collectively toward the same goal, share work tips, solve difficult problems together, and even complain together.” These comments strongly suggest an atmosphere of workplace camaraderie leading toward results agreed upon by all. A project manager’s statement characterized anticipating reciprocity: “CEO’s decision is very critical to the vision and development of a company. So when our CEO says something in our

company meetings that matches my goals, I feel I can see a future by following him.”

*Social compatibility (output).* We found that the forms of reciprocity for social interactions were precursors to informants’ final evaluations of fit experience, which addressed two types of social compatibility: instrumental compatibility and expressive harmony. Instrumental compatibility refers to how two people coordinate with each other on task-related matters. It concerns how two people resolve work problems together and similarities in the two people’s work styles. With instrumental compatibility, people know each other by their role (e.g., supervisor, subordinate) and understand their connections in term of roles and tasks (e.g., “We are compatible because we coordinate smoothly at work”). The following comments by a job-bank vice president exemplify instrumental compatibility: “My manager and I both worked for multinationals before joining this local company. Being managers of multinationals speaks to a certain work style; thus we both enjoy working with each other as we understand why the other acts a certain way.”

The second type of social compatibility that informants experienced in this study was expressive harmony, which refers to people’s affective connections with one another at work. This type of fit encompasses such circumstances as personal bonding among workplace colleagues, friendships outside of work, and the presence of similar values. With expressive harmony, people know each other as individual persons and understand their connections by affections (e.g., our connections are harmonious because we enjoy each other’s company). Describing his experiences with a difficult colleague, the sales deputy manager discussed how the two of them had gradually developed quality workplace connections: “When I joined this company, I met a very difficult colleague to get along with. However, as a rookie, I needed to ask her for lots of help. I heard that she liked to play badminton, so I used the game as a means to

bridge the gap between us and to build positive interactive experiences. Eventually, I found over time her attitude changed and she started to proactively help me. This completely transformed our relationship into a positive one.” This example vividly illustrates how mutual affection can take root through interpersonal interactions over time.

### **Balance among Life Domains**

Individuals are multi-dimensional in nature in that they engage in multiple domains (e.g., work, family, friendship, health, and leisure) and allocate available resources across those domains. The Chinese informants in our study experienced fit when their work and other life domains supported each other. We thus termed this theme of fit as balance among life domains. We explain this theme based on three second-order codes: multiple-domain engagement (input), inter-boundary balancing (throughput), and symbiotic cycle (output).

*Multiple-domain engagement (input).* We found that informants were resource allocators who had to deal with multiple domains in their lives and distributed their limited resources (e.g., energy, time, and money) across those life domains (e.g., work, family, friendship, health, and leisure). On the basis of whether the domains involved other people, we made a distinction between other-centric and self-centric life domains. The former focuses on the balance between individuals and their important others such as family and friends; the latter focuses on the balance between individuals and their immediate concerns such as health and leisure. Among the other-centric life domains, family was the topic most frequently mentioned by informants. To spend more time with her family, a senior public relations manager, who quit her job as a copywriter in an advertising company, mentioned that “family members were very critical to my decision to quit my previous job.” Among the self-centric life domains, health and leisure were the most important for informants. For instance, an HR specialist had recently transferred from a

high-tech manufacturer to a traditional business company, where she was working at the time of the interview. She found that her lifestyle had changed dramatically for the better: “I’d been working overtime, but now I only need to spend half of my time on work, leaving the other half for whatever I want. Now I can learn yoga and photography.” Thus, multiple-domain engagement suggests that people are in the center of multiple relationships and they distribute resources among the many life domains to reach a balance among them.

*Inter-boundary balancing (throughput).* Boundaries separate life domains from one another in general. In the current study, expanding boundaries not only made informants aware that a clear boundary is challenged (i.e., boundary awareness) but also prompted informants to ponder how they might negotiate the contours of these domains (i.e., boundary negotiation) in an effort to obtain inter-boundary balance. Informants could be sensitized with challenged boundaries either by others or by themselves. The HR specialist who had quit her job in exchange for more leisure time and better health noted how her friends had warned her that her previous job had created imbalance in her life: “My friends told me that I should consider quitting my job because they felt that the job had been having too many bad effects on my life. I did not quit the job right away, but their comments indeed planted a seed in my mind. I developed this growing awareness of how the work was influencing my life.” In her case, others’ words sensitized her to the imbalance in her life. The TV reporter provided an example of how individuals could self-sensitize themselves in the presence of an unclear boundary: “I have to pay attention to news even on my days off. This has a negative impact on the quality of my life and leisure time. I figure I don’t have a life of my own. I really hope my work and my leisure time can be two separate areas in my life.”

Upon becoming aware of unclear boundaries, informants began to negotiate a more

balanced life. For self-centric domains, informants' boundary negotiations took place intrapersonally. Among informants, one approach to restoring or establishing a personal life balance was to withdraw from work. For instance, a vice president from a bank noted that "working under a great deal of pressure was damaging my health." To regain his health, he decided to scale back his work and to perform only the minimum amount required. However, for other-centric domains, informants' negotiations involved other people and, thus, took place interpersonally. For instance, an IT senior manager's wife expressed her disappointment in the long hours he spent working, which she considered to come at the expense of his potential quality time with their children. The manager noted, "To me, the balance is dynamic. It is not possible for both of us [i.e., his wife and he] to be satisfied at any given time. Sometimes, I spend more time on work. Other times, I focus more on my family. It's like a scale. Sometimes one side gets heavier or too heavy, and that's when my wife and I have to sit down and communicate with each other."

*Symbiotic cycle (output).* From our interviews, we found that the level of perceived fit was associated with negotiation results. A symbiotic cycle was achieved when informants perceived a post-negotiation balance between their work and other life domains. Specifically, informants experienced fit when work supported other life domains and when other life domains supported work. The senior public relations manager discussed how her work failed to remain in balance with her family domain and how she later achieved balance: "A main reason I left the advertising company was that my husband had told me that we were like colleagues. We did not have much quality time, because we were both in the advertising business and everything we talked about had to do with business. I laughed, but I knew he was spot on in his assessment. I didn't think there was a good fit [in the previous job]. My current job has a good fit."

## **Cultivation**

The theme of cultivation describes how Chinese individuals experience PE fit while involved in the process of learning novel experiences to reach a positive personal transformation. As will be shown, with the theme of cultivation, informants could experience fit in the throughput and output stages. This is different from the three aforementioned themes, where informants could experience PE fit only in the output stage. We explain this theme through three second-order codes: novel experiences (input), different me (throughput), and broader horizons (output).

*Novel experiences (input).* The process of the theme, cultivation, commenced with informants acknowledging that people are imperfect (imperfect person) but that people can better themselves through new experiences (novel experiences). In describing their novel experiences, informants used a variety of phrases such as “fresh,” “new,” “different,” “diverse,” “challenging,” and “intellectually stimulating.” Informants had novel experiences thanks to various surrounding triggers (environmental stimulators), among which were the informants’ own tasks, other people at work, and professional training programs. An HR training specialist noted, “One great thing about this place is my colleagues. One colleague of mine is outstanding. I can work with him and learn from him.”

The informants stated that, when having a novel experience, they would leave themselves wide open to what they might learn (i.e., they embraced an exploratory frame of mind) or selected very specific objectives for personal fulfillment (i.e., they embraced a developmental frame of mind). Most informants with exploratory frames of mind had not settled on any specific personal goals. In this sense, they had a liberal view of things to be learned at work and often stated that they wanted to try out different things, reinvent themselves, or challenge themselves

in some other way. When further pushed to probe their specific personal concerns, the informants often had a difficult time thinking of any detailed answers. It was natural for inexperienced employees to adopt exploratory frames of mind when having novel experiences, but it was also possible for experienced employees to do so, as well. For instance, a senior accounting associate who had been working in the same organization for 22 years enjoyed learning new and different things every day. She shared her thoughts on her enthusiasm: “My colleagues are now working on a new project. I know it’s not my responsibility, but I do learn a lot from asking them about how it works. I may not have the chance to take part in projects like it, but who knows? If someday my colleagues take a day off or they’re too busy, I can offer the team my help because I’m familiar with what they’ve been doing.” This informant was keen to learn just about everything she could.

In contrast, informants could adopt a developmental frame of mind and attempted to learn about a specific topic that might help them achieve a personal goal. For instance, a sales representative in the personal care industry shared his transition from adopting an exploratory to a developmental frame of mind. In his early career, he had enjoyed working because everything was fresh and new to him. He noted, “It was a simple feeling that I was new and I wanted to learn more. I felt fortunate as long as I had new tasks to do. Everything was new and interesting to me.” Later, he envisioned himself as soon becoming a key account manager, so his learning strategy changed accordingly. He started to evaluate whether the tasks that his supervisor assigned to him and how his supervisor evaluated his work were effectively facilitating his efforts to become a key account manager. On one particular occasion, his supervisor asked him to arrange a meeting with an important client. He noted, “My supervisor did not ask me to join the meeting. He would have invited me if he’d really wanted to help me develop my potential.

Doing minor routine work would not prepare me for a key account manager position. What I really wanted to learn was how my supervisor interacted and negotiated with the client.” This quote shows that the informant’s personal goal (i.e., being a future key account manager) directed his attentions and expectations regarding the specific areas in which he should hone his skills.

*Different me (throughput).* During the cultivation process, informants repeatedly asked themselves (internal dialogues) whether they had changed or would change into a better person (different me). They used various phrases to describe positive personal changes such as “improvement,” “progress,” and “personal growth,” all referring to a sense of PE fit. Internal dialogues began with inquiries into the qualities of the informants’ changes and were followed by responses to the inquiries. These internal dialogues enabled informants to recognize themselves and helped them fully understand the changes in themselves. The sales representative commented on this type of dialogue: “To evaluate my experience of PE fit, I keep searching for answers to the following question: Am I more capable than I was two years ago? The answer is no because I’ve spent plenty of time on daily routines.” Through the iterative internal dialogues, he realized: “I’m not sure whether these routine tasks are really preparing me to become a future key account manager. I’m afraid that these tasks can’t develop my capabilities.” Through this process of clarification, he asked questions, provided answers, proposed possible explanations, and evaluated his PE fit.

Informants considered this type of PE fit in a temporal context. They evaluated whether they had undergone a positive change (retrospective temporal frame) or whether they would undergo a positive change (prospective temporal frame). With retrospective temporal frames, informants evaluated their own personal changes over time (i.e., from the past to the present).

For example, the bank IT technician recalled, “I wasn’t familiar with the financial knowledge required for handling the computer programs I was assigned to write. I was trying to understand all the rules, regulations, and procedures; my coworkers also helped me with basic knowledge. Since starting this job at this bank, I’ve learned a lot.” In the IT technician’s case, he adopted a retrospective temporal frame and noticed a positive change in himself by comparing the present with the past. In contrast, with prospective temporal frames, informants anticipated changes between the present and the future. The HR specialist who had adopted a prospective temporal frame noted, “After working in this company for three years, I started to ask myself was there anything else I could learn? Any new challenge here for me to learn? If yes, then I’d consider myself a fit.” From her comments, it is clear that the HR specialist deliberated over whether there would be a positive change between her current self and her future self.

In sum, this evaluation of PE fit via self-cultivation involves a series of internal dialogues where individuals ask themselves whether or not they have changed and whether or not they were expecting to change. On a temporal level, this evaluation involves a comparison between two “selves” at two time points—one retrospectively, and the other prospectively. And in general, people who take the evaluation experience PE fit when they reach a clear conclusion that their latter selves will be better than their former selves.

***Broader horizons (output).*** Informants who felt that they had become a different person tended to hold a broader perspective of who they were (self-understanding) and of their acquired personal capabilities’ potential applications (personal capability). This broadness of perspective helped plant in the informants a keen sense of PE fit. Informants going through the cultivation process acquired a realistic self-understanding of their current capabilities, of their true objectives, and of realistic future developments. With several years of work experience as a

recruiting specialist, one informant tried her best to familiarize herself with various products made by more than twenty different units in her new company. She noted, “We have so many different job openings associated with those different products. I’ve been trying my best to understand as many details of the products and openings as possible. I’ve learned this knowledge from many sources. I frequently ask myself, Am I learning enough? Am I learning the right things? After all this, I’m realizing that I can become an HR expert in my company. I can help come up with some useful HR strategies. Although strategic planning isn’t one of my current job duties yet, I now know I’m capable of doing this since I’ve developed a good understanding of all the products and jobs.” These comments show that her continuous efforts to familiarize herself with a wide array of recruitment knowledge gradually helped her clarify what she was capable of and what she foresaw herself as being.

The cultivation process also solidified in informants a sense of fit when they found that their personal capabilities (as acquired through the process itself) were applicable not only to task-related areas but also areas of life beyond the workplace. Put differently, the effects of cultivation could transcend the task of growing familiar with workplace requirements, extending firmly into other life domains. For example, the bank IT technician stated, “This job not only develops my programming abilities, but also gives me opportunities to acquire financial knowledge. I appreciate such opportunities. Sometimes my friends call me, not to ask for programming advice, but to ask for financial advice. Responding to their questions makes me feel that I fit this job pretty well because I’ve learned a lot of stuff that I can use to help people.” This technician then went on to note, “My supervisor often talks to me about how to interact with our customers. She suggests that I should refrain from rejecting unreasonable requests out of hand. Rather, I should carefully examine the customers’ underlying needs. Such thinking helps

me a lot in both work and non-work domains.” These comments reveal the extended benefits of self-cultivation stemming from an application of acquired workplace capabilities to informants’ lives outside their narrowly defined workplace duties. This extended application provided the informants a sense of PE fit.

### **Realization**

This theme, realization, describes how Chinese individuals experience fit while they are reformulating their approach to work, with the goal of realizing a positive environmental transformation. As will be shown, this theme is similar to cultivation in that informants could experience the fit of realization in the stages of throughput and output. Moreover, this theme is very similar to the theme of cultivation in that they both depict a process from individuals interacting with the environment, through individuals iteratively monitoring the change process, to individuals making differences to the subject being transformed. However, the two processes address two different types of transformation: cultivation focuses on self-transformation (i.e., the changes within an individual) and realization focuses on environmental transformation (i.e., the changes in the environment). For the current study, we have elaborated on this theme via three second-order codes: transformable spaces (input), because of me (throughput), and making differences (output).

*Transformable spaces (input).* Informants who wanted to realize personal ambitions (person realizing aspiration) identified potential work spaces to be transformed and then subsequently adopted corresponding, tailored plans for the transformation. This interplay between informants and their environment helped them problematize related challenges and conceptualize approaches to the reformulations. In describing transformable spaces, informants suggested a variety of metaphors and phrases such as “adjustable area,” “paintable space,” and

“stage to realize a person’s dream.” For an example of the identified space, the sales representative noted that some marketing data previously mistreated by his colleagues could have been highly useful if better organized. For another example, the senior manager, who supervised dozens of R&D engineers, felt that rookie engineers often “focus on their professions so much that they pay no attention to the rest of the world.” He was concerned that “when R&D engineers care about nothing but their professions, they seldom become innovative.” These two informants each identified a space that needed to be transformed.

To solve the problems identified, informants adopted tailored action plans and supporting measures that would facilitate a reformulation of the problems. The informants did so either to ensure the effective and efficient execution of their duties or to address personal goals relating to work. As an example, the sales representative came up with a new approach to analyzing the previously mistreated marketing data and eventually made far greater use of the data. As another example, in order to strengthen engineers’ innovativeness, the senior manager developed a game plan: “In my daily conversations with those engineers, I immersed them in a variety of life topics ranging from literature and music to art. I also initiated an internal training camp to help nearly forty engineers understand patent and innovation practices. They are not just engineers, but a group of smart people who generate innovative products for our company.” The senior manager was reformulating his approach to his job on the basis of personal concerns (i.e., the country’s future).

***Because of me (throughput).*** After identifying a transformable space and a corresponding measure, informants implemented their own action plans to realize the transformation and then started to experience fit. The informants considered the implementation of their action plans to be a living experiment because the informants engaged in several iterative trials and carefully

monitored how those trials transformed the environment. Such evaluations also helped the informants assess how much of the change was “because of me,” a line of inquiry that fostered their sense of fit. Similar to cultivation, with a retrospective temporal frame for realization, informants evaluated changes between the past environment and the present environment. For instance, a chief editor was responsible for revising her company’s webpage. Rather than making minor changes for layouts and styles only, she decided that the revision should involve creating a new form of media. This new media, rather than focusing on commercial markets, would focus exclusively on modern art and dramas, in keeping with the company’s cultural and creative roots. She noted, “I knew the editors [her subordinates] might not be familiar with what I had planned. I communicated with them on what the new media was about and I started to tweak their writings in each article they wrote and instructed them to try the new flavors, so to speak. It took me some time to find an effective way to communicate with the editors.” She had been working on this project for some time, and in retrospect, she felt that “the new webpage had been improving every day. I basically created a new editorial website based on my imagination.” The chief editor later revealed that she had developed a sense of PE fit after acknowledging her experiments’ critical role in the positive changes.

Similar to cultivation, with a prospective temporal frame, informants anticipated changes between the present environment and the future environment. For instance, the senior public relations manager recalled, “When I graduated, all I wanted was to find a job—any job that would pay a good salary. One of the many nameless advertising companies out there quickly hired me to be a copywriter. Two or three years later, I started to think of doing something for the advertising industry. I then worked for different big-name companies because only big-name companies could have a larger impact.” This manager had concluded that widely reputable

companies fit her better than indistinguishable brandless companies because, in the former, she could anticipate coming changes in the advertising industry owing chiefly to the greater opportunities she would have to make a difference in such a job.

***Making differences (output).*** Informants experienced fit while implementing the living experiments, and yet this sense of fit could grow even stronger if the informants felt that they had positively affected their environment (environmental impact) and that they had imprinted their identity on the transformation process (imprinting identity). An example of environmental impact can be found regarding the job-bank vice president, who recalled how her unit's team spirit blossomed owing to a clever plan she hatched: "Every year, my company makes a T-shirt that we [the employees] wear only once or twice a year—for special annual events. One year, I decided to inject new meaning into this seemingly meaningless T-shirt. I used it as a tool to combat blue Mondays. I asked everyone in my unit to wear the company T-shirt when attending Monday-morning meetings. At first, everybody was upset about this change. I just kept reminding my colleagues that they represented the company when they wore the T-shirt. Over time, this plan worked; the T-shirt made them feel energetic on Mondays. They even voluntarily wore the T-shirt on other weekdays for team-based events. I magically created cohesiveness with a T-shirt!" In this case, the vice president had a positive impact on her colleagues by successfully fostering their team spirit.

Informants' sense of PE fit grew more solid when they felt that their identity was imprinted during the process of the environmental transformation reflecting who they were. The senior manager, who fostered his engineer subordinates' development of creativity by incorporating artistic topics into conversations and by offering the subordinates an internal training workshop about innovation, noted the following: "Engineers in other units may not

appreciate what I have done, but I'm still doing it.... It'll be devastating if people in this leading company don't open their minds and think creatively. The future of our country can't be promising if we only engage ourselves as an OEM [original equipment manufacturer] to the exclusion of creating our own brand names. Changing these engineers' mindsets is a mission of my life." This manager gained reassurance regarding his personal identity by formulating a general strategy to make the entire industry more creative.

We emphasize that the retrospective and prospective temporal frames found in our themes of cultivation and realization serve as empirical evidence to support Shipp and Jansen's (2011) theoretical assertion of psychological time with regard to PE fit. Psychological time refers to how people evaluate the current situation in comparison to past and/or future situations. Although early PE fit researchers have advocated the possibility of a temporal frame for fit (e.g., Chatman, 1989), very little research has empirically tested the hypothesis of psychological time. In the Discussion section, we elaborate further on how our findings of this temporal perspective advance PE fit theories.

### **A CHINESE MODEL OF PE FIT**

We surmise that Confucian relationalism and selfhood described previously can go far in clarifying our Chinese model of PE fit (Figure 1). In this section, we also discuss the relations among the five themes.

#### **Relationalism, Selfhood, and the Chinese Model of PE Fit**

We summarize three points to elucidate how relationalism and selfhood could explain our Chinese model of PE fit. First, relation-related fit (i.e., harmonious connections at work and balance among life domains) can be a foundation for formations of task-related fit. We find that, in addition to task-related fit, Chinese individuals consider relations a prominent theme of PE fit.

Based on relationalism and selfhood, people—who are, by definition, in multiple relationships—will not be able to function properly at work without properly interacting with others. Moreover, Confucianism stresses that family is a top priority (Hwang, 1988), so maintaining good relationships with family members allows a person to fully engage at work without worrying about the family.

The informants' assertions reveal why harmonious connections at work and balance among life domains could serve as foundations of task-related themes. The sales deputy manager, who used badminton to build a positive relationship with a difficult colleague, almost completely lost touch with his work spirit in the unpleasant relationship. He claimed, "I nearly gave up and started feeling reluctant to go to work in the morning." In addition to affections, smooth coordination between informants and their colleagues was another critical factor in how well the informants completed their work. The bank manager stated, "Harmonious connections constitute the most fundamental factor in the successful completion of work. As a newcomer, you need someone to tell you how things are done. Because people have more tolerance for newcomers, mistakes by them are relatively acceptable. If good personal connections between the newcomers and experienced employees take shape at this stage, there'll be more people at work willing to help the newcomers out in the future. Old hands can help newcomers adjust to and perform their work better." In this same regard, the senior manager perceived the importance of family: "I have two kids and I have to work twelve hours a day. But with the support and understanding of my family, I can bring my abilities and aspirations into full play." In his interview, the bank vice president stated that he had come to emphasize health more than work, and that this mentality was accompanied by a significant loss of enthusiasm for his work: "Nothing compares to health. I saw people who were sick or run down. I myself was sick for a long period of time. I won't

work for better pay at the cost of my health. So I only do the minimum necessary. Health is more important than money.”

Second, we find it is possible that Chinese people who practice self-cultivation and self-transcendence likely perceive PE fit when incongruence (as defined by the Western PE fit literature) is present. They can experience incongruence because when Chinese people practice self-cultivation and self-transcendence, there are always things to learn. For example, the recruiting specialist might have experienced incongruence of job fit when she was learning multitudes of products from more than twenty units of her company. Besides, they can experience incongruence because people may have difficulty in realizing their aspirations. For example, the job-bank vice president might have experienced incongruence between her goal and her subordinates' goal when her subordinates opposed her idea of wearing the company T-shirt on Mondays. However, because Chinese individuals know that they are preaching what they have been taught to do since birth (i.e., self-cultivation and self-transcendence), they will view the pieces of incongruence as part of the process necessary for them to reach PE fit.

A good example of this “incongruent-yet-fit” phenomenon can be found in statements made by the HR training specialist: “My supervisor asked me whether I'd like to try a job task for which I lacked adequate experience. He said that it would be a good learning opportunity because I could get involved in all kinds of human resources practices including compensation, benefits, insurance, and the design of standard operation procedures. I had opportunities to do things I'd never done before. I was so lucky to have these opportunities to learn more.” The chief editor discussed the difficulties she had experienced while trying to achieve her goals: “I tried to start an editing team according to this vision I had of what an editing team should be like, but the editors in this editing team were neither supportive of nor committed to my plan. Our goals

weren't aligned. I was like a big fish in a small pond, but constructing this pond fulfilled my aspirations." This informant still experienced a sense of PE fit even when she felt incongruence between her own work goals and those of her team members.

Finally, we surmise that when Chinese individuals say they fit, they are experiencing feelings of "appropriateness" and not so much the feeling of congruence as suggested by the Western literature. Appropriateness is a Confucian conception that is described as doing what is fitting. Wen defined appropriateness as "acting in a proper and fitting manner, given the specific situation" (2009: 153). Specifically within the context of relationalism and selfhood, appropriateness is achieved when individuals interact with others in a manner that is perceived as appropriate, including self-perfection, self-transcendence, and adapting to others in relationships. In this sense, appropriateness could explain why Chinese individuals see the themes of competence at work, harmonious connections at work, and balance among life domains as fit (because people interact with others to reach the mutually beneficial and satisfactory relationship taught by Confucian relationalism and selfhood). Appropriateness could also account for why Chinese people perceive the themes of cultivation and realization as fit, even when they experience incongruence (because people practice self-perfection and self-transcendence as recommended by Confucian relationalism and selfhood). Therefore, we surmise that Chinese PE fit is the sense of the appropriateness of doing proper things, as suggested by relationalism and selfhood.

### **Relations among the Chinese PE Fit Themes**

Our Chinese model suggests that when it comes to PE fit, Chinese individuals take a holistic view of personal relationships in connection with the workplace, family, friends, health, leisure, self-cultivation, aspirations, and other important matters. This finding echoes the current

call to examine multi-dimensional theories of fit (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006), which posit that, in reality, people interact with various parts of their environment simultaneously. A core function of multi-dimensional theories of PE fit is to clarify the relationships among fit dimensions. Jansen and Kristof-Brown's partial dependencies model posits that all fit dimensions are related to each other to some extent. Although it is beyond the scope of our current study to empirically test the relationships among the themes, we anticipate that our fit themes will correlate with each other to some extent, and that some negative correlations are possible. For example, if people spend a substantial amount of time trying to ensure that they have a sufficient number of adequate interactions with the surrounding environment for the purpose of establishing harmonious work connections, balance fit may decline. However, it remains for future empirical research to explore how much and in what forms various fit themes are associated with each other.

Another interesting issue about the relationships among the five themes is how likely an individual is to experience different themes simultaneously. Put differently, if one experiences theme A, how likely is one to experience theme B at the same time? A perusal of our current study's data shows that for each fit theme, the number of informants mentioning it ranged from 26 to 30 out of 30 informants: 24 informants mentioned all five themes, 5 informants mentioned four themes, and 1 informant mentioned three themes. These figures reveal that a majority of informants considered all five fit themes, meaning that the co-occurrence rates were very high. These findings serve as a preliminary step in the effort to show that Chinese PE fit could be multi-dimensional in nature as the Western model of PE fit.

## **DISCUSSION**

The field of PE fit has been calling for research on cultural effects for more than a decade

(Schneider, 2001), but to this day, there has not been a thorough investigation of how individuals outside of Western cultures interpret PE fit. Our work provides a reconsideration of the current PE fit literature by offering an alternative, contextualized Chinese model of PE fit using a qualitative approach. We have found and elucidated five themes of Chinese PE fit and have discussed possible integrations of these themes into a Chinese model of PE fit. By doing so, our work further advances the theoretical progress being made in regards to PE fit. Therefore, in the following sections, we discuss how our findings add to the current PE fit literature and enhance PE fit theories.

### **Western and Chinese PE Fit Models**

*Individualism vs. relationalism.* Current PE fit research by and large addresses two underlying psychological processes. The similarity–attraction paradigm (Schneider, 1987) explains why P and E supplement each other, whereas the need–fulfillment paradigm (Edwards, 1991; Maslow, 1954; Porter, 1961) explains why P and E complement each other. Both processes embody Western assumptions about individualism involving individuality and self-interest (see Bellah et al., 2007; Sampson, 1988). Individualism promotes the exercise of a person’s needs and values. It advocates that individuals should be independent and their interests should receive precedence. Although non-Western cultures can practice individualism, our findings suggest that people from Chinese cultures also interpret their experiences of PE fit on a different assumption: that of relationalism. Individuals in Chinese contexts focus on not only the self but also others while pursuing appropriateness and mutual satisfaction. Essentially, relationalism generally prevents one from accumulating PE fit experiences exclusively on the basis of the perspective that the self is a separate entity distinct from others or the environment. With the dominance of individualism in the current literature regarding cultural issues in organizational behavior,

collectivism has been a major subject of discussion in the context of Eastern culture. Research on relationalism is rare. Extant literature founded upon the individualistic assumptions (e.g., “I get what I want”) assumes people are independent from the world around them. As such, individualism is not context-driven as is relationalism. Therefore, extant PE fit theories do not sufficiently explain PE fit phenomena in cultural settings that, like Chinese settings, are not exclusively individualistic in their outlooks. Thus, our findings offer a unique alternative foundation for PE fit theories.

*Western vs. Chinese themes of PE fit.* There appear to be similarities between the five themes of Chinese PE fit identified in this study and current understandings of PE fit, but the differences between the two are important. We detail the similarities and dissimilarities below.

Competence at work is akin to demands–abilities fit in that they both indicate a comparison between what a job (E) requires and what an individual (P) possesses regarding ability, knowledge, and experience. However, there are two critical differences. First, before experiencing a sense of fit, Chinese individuals look to affirm the existence of a job match from both their own perspective and others’ perspective. These two types of affirmation reflect Chinese individuals’ awareness of the other and, importantly, of the self as being meaningful only in relation to the other. Second, individuals experience PE fit with more than a mere perception of job match: Chinese individuals perceive whether they fulfill a particular job’s requirements. This is different from currently accepted definitions of demands–abilities fit, because according to our findings, Chinese individuals do not experience fit until they actually fulfill job requirements by performing their duties satisfactorily.

Harmonious connections at work might be viewed as comparable to the current PE fit categorizations that pertain to other individuals at work such as person–person fit and person–

group fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). However, we argue that those fit types are founded on individualism and treat persons as independent entities. The fit types compare pre-defined personal attributes such as personal values, goals, and personality traits with one another. By contrast, our current study shows that Chinese individuals regard themselves as being at the center of multiple connections. When interacting with other people, they are adaptive and follow such virtuous *ren* practices as kindness and benevolence in order to foster reciprocity and harmony in relationships.

The concept of balance among life domains might be viewed as similar to the concept of work and family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) in that they both focus on a person's resource allocation. However, current formulations of work and family conflict are often based on resource conservation theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which refers to how work, by taking time away from family, affects people's schedules, plans, responsibilities, and psychological and physical well-being (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). Balance among life domains, however, is based on relationalism. Balance is a positive result after individuals discuss how to balance their lives on the fronts of time allocation, job choice decisions, health, and etc. with others (family or friends). Therefore, the concept of balance among life domains and the concept of work and family conflict appear to differ from each other regarding their respective theoretical groundings and basic definitions.

The theme of cultivation does not coincide with current understandings of PE fit, but could be confused with the concept of learning. Li (2012) noted that the essential meaning of learning in Western culture is to know the external world in order to master the world or to express personal creativity. By contrast, Chinese–Confucian culture endorses an alternative perspective. As Li explained, “For Confucius, the most important purpose of human life is to self-perfect, or

self-cultivate, socially and morally. It is the person's self, not the external world, that is the object of his or her intellectual attention, contemplation, practice, and living. The self is the project for the person to work on, to improve, to refine, and to accomplish. Because no one is born with this approach to life, one must learn to self-perfect" (2012: 37). Thus, under Chinese–Confucian culture, learning is a necessary journey one takes when transforming the self, a theme that the current study has termed “cultivation.” Our study's informants seemed to have subconsciously acquired this duty-based assumption of cultivation; in fact, they often looked surprised and confused when trying to respond to our interview question about why cultivation was important. A bank teller, for instance, responded to the question: “Why not? The question is quite silly, isn't it? Cultivation is good for us. There is no reason to oppose the idea that cultivation is a good thing.” In other words, cultivation is righteous on its face, without any need for justification, whereas failure to engage in cultivation requires highly compelling justification. Therefore, in Confucian culture, one feels a sense of fit when practicing inner transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Similar to cultivation, realization is rooted in the duty-based tradition of Chinese Confucianism. Although informants often used such words as achievement (e.g., “The success of my plan made me feel that I really achieved something”), our data show that realization is more than a psychological need (e.g., Atkinson & Feather, 1966; McClelland & Liberman, 1949). As Tu (2012) mentioned, the realization of a transcendent self helps Chinese people fulfill expectations of Confucian humanism. To be a *Junzi*, or a superior man, one should not only possess a noble character but also appropriately harness this nobility to realize one's best

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<sup>3</sup> A recent conference presentation (Jansen & Shipp, 2013) regarding PE fit narratives in the face of change used a Western sample and showed that people could anticipate a good fit through development. This type of fit could be perceived as similar to our theme of cultivation, because both focus on “learning new things.” However, we emphasize that Jansen and Shipp's finding represents a Western individualistic tradition of learning to better one's ability, whereas our theme of cultivation represents a Chinese-Confucian tradition of self-perfection to achieve personal transformation. We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to discuss those findings.

potential. The Confucian classic, *The Great Learning* offers a clear explanation of this humanistic expectation: “When the self is cultivated, the clan is harmonized. When the clan is harmonized, the country is well governed. When the country is well governed, there will be peace throughout the land” (translated by Muller, 2010). This statement implies that realization is not just about completing something to satisfy a personal desire for achievement: realization is more fully about realizing one’s usefulness as one strives to transform one’s family, society, or country in a positive way. Such realization enhances one’s sense of meaningfulness, one’s interpersonal relationships, and the clarity of one’s self-identity. Insofar as Confucian humanism has become the fundamental assumption for how various modern organizations work in many Chinese cultures (Tu, 2012), opportunities to practice realization tend to facilitate the emergence of PE fit experiences.

To conclude the comparisons between Western and Chinese PE fit models, we assert that the Western PE fit model and our proposed Chinese PE fit model are based on different value assumptions, and share only a few similar themes. We further assert that, owing to these differences, our integration of Confucian perspectives of relationalism and selfhood into the PE fit literature can greatly enrich PE fit theory.

### **Advancing Theories of PE Fit**

*The qualitative approach and the contextualization of PE fit in Chinese settings.* The present research fills a theoretical void in the intersection between culture and PE fit literature by contextualizing fit in a dominant Eastern culture. We have used qualitative research to contextualize PE fit and, thus, to help extend PE fit theories, which have previously been criticized for their elusiveness (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990) and for their theoretical stagnancy (Edwards, 2008; Judge, 2007). PE fit researchers have argued that the majority of the extant PE

fit research is full of researcher-generated concepts (Bretz et al., 1993) that have caused a theoretical deconstruction of the construct of fit (Edwards & Billsberry, 2010). Edwards and Billsberry contended that “[t]he legacy of these studies is a mass of findings involving many individual factors (personality, values, goals, etc.), even more environmental factors (jobs, organizations, vocations, etc.), and a myriad of dependent variables (job satisfaction, tenure, staff turnover, etc.)” (2010: 477). This observation may help explain why extant PE fit research remains elusive more than two decades since Rynes and Gerhart first observed this attribute. One way to solve this problem of elusiveness is to adopt qualitative approaches to exploring the nature of individuals’ own mental models of PE fit (Billsberry et al., 2005). In-depth interviews can contextually incarnate the meanings of PE fit by providing important cues from narratives of the context (Tsui, 2006, 2007, 2012). Our study has helped clarify the domain of PE fit by applying an in-depth interview technique to an investigation into how Chinese people interpret fit; and our study’s findings have brought to light several novel themes heretofore unexplored in the extant fit literature. For instance, our study is instrumental in incorporating the themes of cultivation, realization, and balance among life domains into the realm of PE fit. Specifically, the topic of balance is traditionally treated as another research domain because it tackles work attitudes beyond the immediate work context (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). However, our study identifies that work and family issues are embedded in Chinese individuals’ construction of PE fit. This finding helps clarify the domain of PE fit.

***Temporal perspectives of PE fit.*** The concept of time has been a defining element in PE fit literature since its early development in organizational research (e.g., Chatman, 1989), but has received surprisingly little attention until recently. Elaborating on PE fit from a temporal perspective, Shipp and Jansen noted, “The lack of theorizing is especially apparent in the

temporal domain, where fit research has remained largely silent on the topic for more than a quarter of a century” (2011: 76).

The current PE fit literature has addressed time from two perspectives: clock time and psychological time. The former refers to the actual passage of time and the latter refers to perceptions of the past and future at the current moment. PE fit research operating on the concept of clock time examines the change of fit over multiple points in time (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1997; DeRue & Morgeson, 2007; Roberts & Robins, 2004; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). By contrast, although early person–situation interactionists suggested that researchers consider a person’s past and future perceptions when conducting comparisons between attributes of a person and attributes of an environment, little research (for an exception, see Caplan, Tripathi, & Naidu, 1985) has focused on psychological time. Based on the concept of psychological time, Shipp and Jansen’s (2011) theoretical article illustrated two constructs of retrospected fit and anticipated fit: the former refers to perceived PE fit that occurred in the past and the latter refers to anticipated PE fit that will occur in the future. Our study provides empirical evidence of the existence of the two constructs of psychological time. Specifically, with the themes of cultivation and realization, we find that Chinese individuals experience fit within two types of frames: a retrospective temporal frame, where Chinese individuals evaluate P-and-E changes that have taken place between the past and the present; and a prospective temporal frame, where Chinese individuals anticipate P-and-E changes that will take place between the present and the future.

In addition to clock time and psychological time, the two themes of cultivation and realization suggest another temporal perspective: diachronic time. Diachronic time refers to evolutionary perceptions at multiple times (Barley, 1990). With a diachronic approach, research could analyze transformations of PE fit focusing on the evolutionary or developmental

connotations of fit.<sup>4</sup> Our current study's themes of cultivation and realization rest on diachronic time because they characterize how the person and the environment change and because they focus on the developmental meaning of the change attached to the person (e.g., broader horizons) and to the environment (e.g., environmental impacts). Therefore, we emphasize that the psychological time of PE fit described in Shipp and Jansen (2011) focuses on *how* people in the West compare their fit perceptions at different points in time. In contrast, in addition to *how*, the psychological time shown in our study has another layer of time construction that is diachronic: it also focuses on *why* people in the East compare fit perceptions at different points in time.

To summarize, with respect to time, our study contributes to the current PE fit literature by (1) finding empirical evidence to support Shipp and Jansen's (2011) theoretical proposition of psychological time, and (2) proposing a new temporal perspective, diachronic time, for use in the field of PE fit. We encourage future research to continue investigating how different time perspectives evolve for the experience of PE fit.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The field of PE fit has recognized that individuals' experience of PE fit may vary according to their particular cultural setting. To learn about how individuals in the East understand PE fit, we use a dominant Eastern sample (Chinese) and collect interview data. On the basis of this qualitative method, we develop a Chinese model of PE fit that is substantiated by the Chinese value assumption of Confucian relationalism and that cannot be fully justified by the Western value assumption of individualism. For example, we identify three Chinese PE fit themes (i.e., balance among life domains, cultivation, and realization) that are either underdeveloped in or absent from Western PE fit literature. Even competence at work and

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<sup>4</sup> The diachronic approach differs from longitudinal investigations of PE fit because it does not merely examine historical trends (Barley, 1990).

harmonious connections at work, similar to Western PE fit themes in certain regards, are distinct from their Western counterparts in various other regards. As discussed previously, those distinctions are meaningfully rooted in Confucian relationalism and selfhood. However, we acknowledge that whether our findings are replicable in other cultural settings or whether they are unique to Chinese contexts, is an empirical question. We encourage future research to apply qualitative modes of inquiry to exploring PE fit phenomena in other parts of the world.

We find an interesting correspondence between our assertion of “incongruent-yet-fit” and Lee and Ramaswami’s (2013) interpretation of incongruence. Lee and Ramaswami reviewed PE fit from the perspective of cultural differences and raised an intriguing speculation regarding how individualists and collectivists are likely to perceive incongruence differently:

When the P and E components do not match, it is likely that the behavioral consequences will differ across cultures. People in collectivist cultures will focus on the P side of the equation (i.e., oneself) and may try to adjust themselves to the E component (i.e., to “improve oneself”) so as to achieve fit.

As a result, unlike individualists, collectivists are less likely to “blame” the environment for creating a misfit (2013: 231).

Our findings are consistent with Lee and Ramaswami’s (2013) arguments in that they both support the assertion that Chinese individuals are less likely than their Western counterparts to perceive misfit. However, our findings deviate from Lee and Ramaswami’s arguments in three ways. First, Lee and Ramaswami surmised that learning (or P’s adjusting to the requirements of E) is a behavioral consequence of misfit, whereas we assert that learning (or learning to cultivate the self) is a defining element of fit. Second, Lee and Ramaswami understood PE fit from the perspective of one improving *oneself*, our findings suggest an additional perspective to

understanding PE fit from the perspective of one proactively improving the *environment* in order to realize personal aspirations. Finally, Lee and Ramaswami approached misfit based on Western definitions, but with our Chinese model of PE fit, we understand misfit according to the concept of appropriateness, which is much more reflective of feelings of “fit” in Chinese contexts. We, therefore, promote future research that further delineates the meanings of misfit as they correspond to diverse cultural settings.

Although our study identifies meaningful themes of PE fit in Chinese contexts, researchers have yet to develop psychometrically sound measures for the fit themes. With these measures, researchers would be able to test critical theoretical questions regarding the validity of the themes, the themes’ incremental validity above and beyond the current PE fit measures (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), the relationships among the themes (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001), the interactions among the themes (Chang, Chi, & Chuang, 2010; van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011), the themes’ antecedents and consequences, and the boundary conditions or mediating mechanisms for the effects of the themes. Examining those issues could help shed light on a theoretically sound Chinese model of PE fit.

### **Managerial Implications**

Good HR practices are considered to be culture-specific (Gomez-Mejia & Welbourne, 1991; Hofstede, 1980; Ramamoorthy & Carroll, 1998). Our Chinese model of PE fit would help managers design culturally compatible HR practices in Chinese contexts. For example, because the theme, competence at work, suggests that Chinese employees care about earning approval from others in the workplace when forming their PE fit, we suggest that organizations frequently honor Chinese employees who can and do fulfill their job requirements and provide those employees with feedback from customers, if applicable. Moreover, because the theme,

harmonious connections at work, serves as a foundation for task-related fit, organizations may design training programs for improving team management, interpersonal skills, and the like; the objective would be to strengthen interpersonal connections and harmony among Chinese employees. In addition, since family plays a significant role for Chinese individuals, organizational support geared toward increasing work and family balance (e.g., flexible time, shared work, and fewer working hours) should be emphasized in order to increase PE fit perceptions. Finally, people who exercise self-cultivation and realize their aspirations can experience a sense of PE fit; thus, we recommend that organizations create cultivation and realization opportunities for Chinese employees by offering such programs as job rotation, mentoring and empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

In answer to the call for researchers to examine PE fit in non-Western contexts, we used a qualitative method to investigate how individuals in a Chinese cultural setting interpreted PE fit. Our findings suggest that culture indeed plays a role: Chinese individuals tend to experience PE fit from a relational rather than individualistic perspective, and Chinese PE fit could be better comprehended as appropriateness instead of congruence. As the field has accumulated a mass of understandings of PE fit that are theory-driven (Edwards & Billsberry, 2010), our qualitative design offers a novel opportunity to approach working adults' fit experiences embedded in cultural contexts. Future research should further explore this "less traveled" road to review, revise, and eventually enrich the theorization of PE fit, the well-documented yet still less-understood phenomenon.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Number (Percentage) of Informants and Number (Percentage) of Episodes by Theme<sup>a</sup>**

Themes	Number (percentage) of informants providing episodes	Number (percentage) of episodes offered
Competence at work	30 (100.0%)	193 (31.6%)
Harmonious connections at work	29 (96.7%)	132 (21.6%)
Balance among life domains	26 (86.7%)	75 (12.3%)
Cultivation	29 (96.7%)	93 (15.2%)
Realization	28 (93.3%)	118 (19.3%)

<sup>a</sup> The final sample of this study consisted of thirty informants. This number was the basis for calculating the percentages of informants providing episodes. The percentages of episodes offered were calculated on the basis of the total number of episodes: 611.

**TABLE 2**  
**Theoretical Categories and Illustrative Quotes<sup>a</sup>**

Themes and Second-order Codes	Illustrative Quotes
<i>Competence at work</i>	
Source for matching	<p>The sales deputy manager in the shipping and transportation industry identified the relevance of his <b><u>personal knowledge to his job requirements</u></b>: “My college’s major in shipping and transportation management is familiarizing me with all the knowledge I need to know.”</p> <p>The sales representative in the personal care industry identified the relevance of <b><u>his personal abilities to general expectations of a sales job</u></b>: “I am as competent as any other sales professional, particularly in social and communication skills.”</p>
Confirmation of match	<p>A sales representative in an international trade company found <b><u>approval from others</u></b>: “Language ability and domain knowledge in international trade are central to my work. I have to write emails in foreign languages to contact my clients abroad about shipping dates and other such details. Clients’ feedback is very positive when I communicate everything clearly with them.”</p> <p>A hotel general manager <b><u>self-affirmed</u></b> her competent: “I am good at making judgments based on my market insights. This strength helps me excel in my current job.”</p>
Job-fulfillment	<p>The training specialist described how <b><u>her capabilities fulfilled her job requirements</u></b>: “A senior manager once told me that I provided precise and insightful observations on trainees’ team performance in training sessions. At that moment, I felt that I had performed in line with the standards because I was a competent observer who provided constructive feedback.”</p>
<i>Harmonious connections at work</i>	
Interpersonal interactions	<p>A sales deputy manager in the finance industry noted how <b><u>he interacted with other people at work</u></b>: “Interpersonal relationships are essential to my work. To properly serve any new customer who walks into my bank, I have to coordinate with six or seven colleagues. Delays from any of them would result in problems that would make my service incomplete. If I fail to maintain good relationships with these colleagues, the subsequent fragmented services would soon become a nightmare.”</p>
Identification of reciprocity	<p>The senior public relations manager shared how she <b><u>enacted reciprocity</u></b>: “Because I’m leading a new department in this organization, I spend a lot of time building shared understandings between our department and other departments. Now it pays off. Our department gradually earned a reputation of being able to improve our organization. Other departments have begun acknowledging that we can really help when they need us.”</p> <p>The IT senior manager shared how he had <b><u>anticipated reciprocity</u></b> with a work team in a previous company he had joined: “I knew the team’s vision because I was deeply involved—I knew every detail. That team had every condition necessary for actualizing our vision. I believed in that team and that we would have a bright future. So when that team was headhunted by another company, I decided to follow that team to the company.”</p>

Social compatibility	<p>The bank IT technician had <b>expressive harmony</b> with his colleagues: “Our team has a cordial atmosphere. Most of us joined this team at the same time, and we’ve gone through so many things together. We’re so attached to each other that we hang out together outside work on a regular basis.”</p> <p>The senior public relations manager explained <b>instrumental compatibility</b>: “I often seek colleagues’ help when I encounter a problem. At least one or two of my senior colleagues would have similar experiences. Working is like the construction of a big mansion. You cannot just build it on your own.”</p>
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*Balance among life domains*

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Multiple-domain engagement	<p>An IT vice president stated that one is expected to <b>allocate available resources to different life domains</b>: “Regardless of position rank, everyone has to maintain a balance between work and family life after having his or her own family. He or she has to meet the needs of work and family.”</p>
Inter-boundary balancing	<p>A general manager in the shipping and transportation industry was <b>aware of the boundary</b> between work and family: “My family generally is very supportive of my work. The only potential issue is my daughter. She thinks that I’m too busy to be with her. If you were to ask her opinion, she might express dissatisfaction with my work.”</p> <p>The marketing research associate found his girlfriend’s perspective critical to his balance among <b>other-centric domains</b>: “Of course, I am interested in expatriate jobs. I always dream of working abroad. However, I have to consider my girlfriend’s opinion. I have to balance my work with my personal life.”</p> <p>The senior public relations manager negotiated flexibility at work to gain balance among <b>self-centric domains</b>: “Since I’m at the management level now, I don’t want to stay in the office all day long. I asked my boss for a little privilege: I don’t have to clock in every morning, and I can telecommute from home if necessary.”</p>
Symbiotic cycle	<p>The job-bank vice president shared how her <b>work supported family life</b>: “Now I’m allowed to leave on time. I used to travel a lot, leave at midnight, or answer business calls at home. My current job offers real relaxation after work. Without being 24/7 on call, I now enjoy evening time and weekends.”</p> <p>The hotel general manager mentioned how her <b>family supported work</b>: “My family loves my company more than I do. They give me 100% support in all capacities.”</p>

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*Cultivation*

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Novel experiences	<p>The hotel general manager adopted a <b>developmental frame of mind</b>: “Now I’m in charge of [this hotel chain in] Taiwan, but I’m eager to pay more attention to our hotels in other Asia-Pacific regions. Running one of them is a reasonable next step for my career. I always expect to learn more about the global hotel market because, as I just said, international issues are one of my weaknesses.”</p> <p>The senior public relations manager kept an <b>explorative frame of mind</b> in looking for her first job, “When I was fresh out in the market, I totally had no idea about what I should do. The only certain thing was that I wanted to get into a company that offers lots of learning</p>
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Different me	<p>opportunities.”</p> <p>The senior public relations manager showed her <b>internal dialogue</b> experience with a <b>retrospective temporal frame</b>: “Becoming a CD [i.e., creative director] is an important experience to me for understanding how much I’ve learned. When I was a copywriter, I always wondered why my clients just couldn’t appreciate my ideas and why my CD often asked me to meet clients’ needs. Becoming a CD now prompts me to reexamine my past and myself, and it makes me realize that I was so naïve. Now I see things differently. Now I’m convinced that my clients know better than me. They’re responsible for millions or even billions of dollars in marketing budgets. They’re demanding because they hire us to help them sell their product, not to experiment with our ideas.”</p> <p>The hotel general manger shared her <b>internal dialogue</b> experience with a <b>prospective temporal frame</b>: “My career path is always guided by the question of ‘What should I learn next?’ A few years into my career, I gradually realized that my educational background had become a disadvantage to my getting a promotion. I decided to overcome my disadvantages by fully utilizing my company’s job-rotation system. First, I strove to become a receptionist in the front desk, where I had plenty of opportunities to polish my language skills. Then I aimed at running the hotel booking system. After learning all I needed to know, I wanted to work in the sales department. I started to compete for management positions when I felt that I lacked leadership experience.”</p>
Broader horizons	<p>A project manager showed how his learned <b>personal capability</b> made him approach work differently than before: “Studying details of the manufacturing process has made me a different project manager. Most of the project managers don’t fully understand the manufacturing process; thus, they’re very likely to make promises they can’t keep to clients. I don’t make these mistakes, which place unnecessary pressures on the manufacturing end. When communicating with other clients, I now know what the limit is and what the right way is.”</p> <p>A medical technologist supervisor noted how her learning experience made her <b>self-understand</b> her capabilities: “After the promotion, I started to coordinate with people outside my profession [medical technologist]. I learned a lot from these new experiences. I have to contact doctors, radiologists, and pharmacists. Now I’ve started to grasp why they do what they do, what the meaning of my profession to them is, and how my job can help them do their job better. This learning experience has made me feel that I’m not a cog in the wheel anymore.”</p>

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*Realization*

Transformable spaces	<p>The job-bank vice president shared her experience in <b>diagnosing an environmental problem to realize personal aspirations</b>: “My company needs a change. The company was once successful, but as it’s expanded, it’s needed new rules and standards. Therefore, I’ve started to set new rules. My first rule is quite simple but fruitful. I told employees in my unit, If you need to leave your seat for more than five minutes, write down where you’re going, and when you’ll be back. This new rule immediately disrupts the office climate and initiates a</p>
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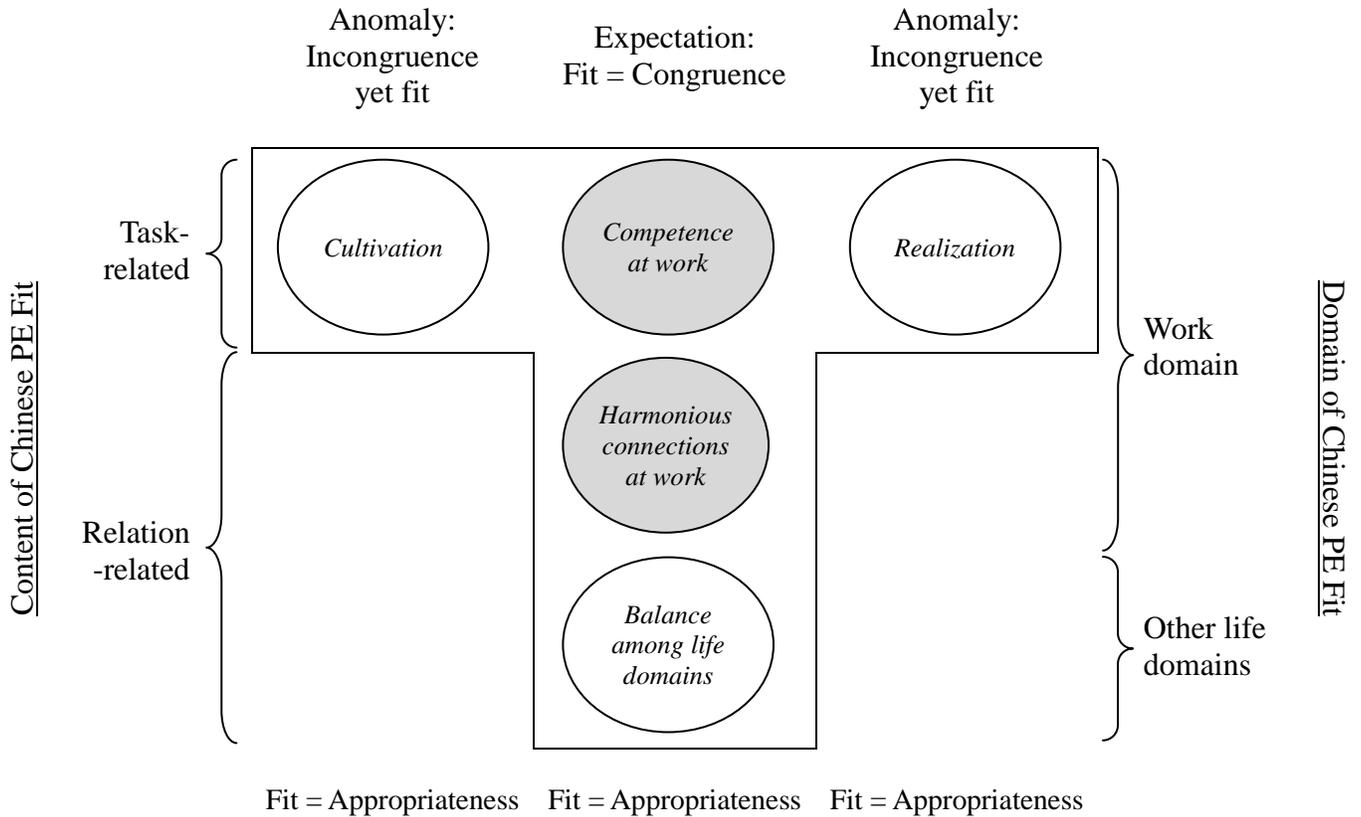
Because of me	<p>series of unanticipated changes.”</p> <p>The sales representative in the shipping and transportation industry shared his <b><u>living experiments</u></b> with a <b><u>retrospective temporal frame</u></b>: “My client’s warehouse in Japan was damaged by the Tohoku earthquake. I helped him find a temporary storage place through my colleagues in our Japanese branch. Initially, we didn’t communicate well because each branch is fully responsible for its own profits, so allowing my client to use the Japanese storage meant that they would lose profits. I patiently communicated with each stakeholder to try to find a mutually satisfactory solution. The negotiations turned out to be successful. My client appreciated my efforts, I increased my charge fees, added more value to my work, and did not upset my Japanese colleagues.”</p> <p>The general manager in the shipping and transportation industry shared her <b><u>living experiments</u></b> with a <b><u>prospective temporal frame</u></b>: “Recently, I wanted to implement a project to change operations. I decided to talk personally with first-line workers. My company had never had a general manager talking to front-line workers before. This is still an ongoing project and I’m still thinking how I can make our talks more comfortable and beneficial for everybody involved.”</p>
Making differences	<p>A general manager in the industrial design industry recalled how he had had a <b><u>positive effect on the organization</u></b>: “I was an engineer when I joined this company. I designed a method to schedule production. I went to the factory to observe the work flow and eventually proposed a plan to explain how the scheduling could be improved. The supervisor in the manufacturing unit didn’t believe it was possible since I’d been there for just ten months. Three months later, my colleague told me that my approach had been adopted and that it was not only feasible but also effective. It was good to know that I could make a difference to my company.”</p> <p>The senior public relations manager saw her <b><u>imprinted identities</u></b> on her work project: “I’m planning a new branch of a hotel. The location is special, so we need to communicate with the government. We tried to infuse the branch with a friendly atmosphere and a natural environment. I am completely responsible for this project and I literally came up with and wrote the whole thing. I feel I fit because I’m actually creating something by hand.”</p>

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<sup>a</sup> The terms in bold and underlined refer to this study’s first-order codes. The terms here do not follow the exact wording of the first-order codes in the main text for reasons concerning natural sentence flow in the paragraphs above.

**FIGURE 1**  
**A Chinese Model of PE Fit<sup>a</sup>**

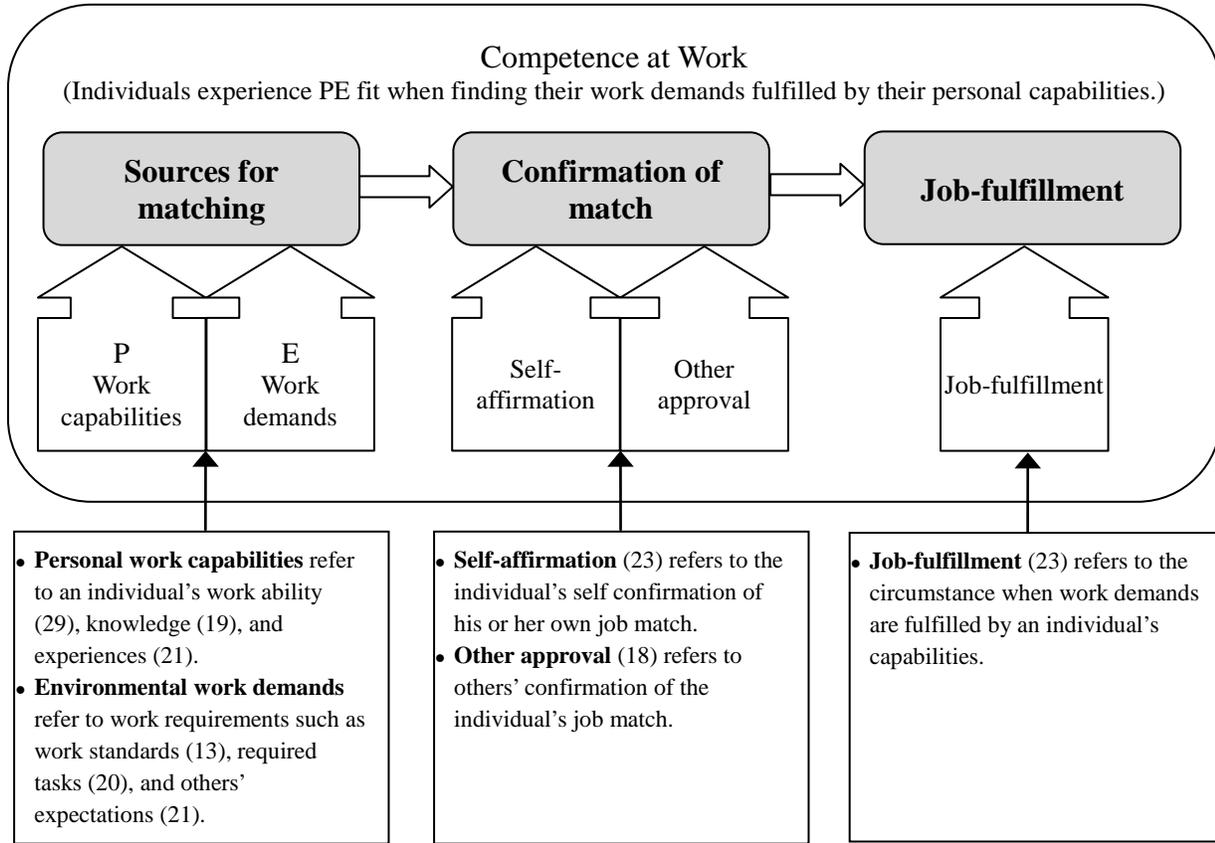
Evaluating Chinese PE Fit through a Western Lens



Positioning Chinese PE Fit through a Chinese Lens

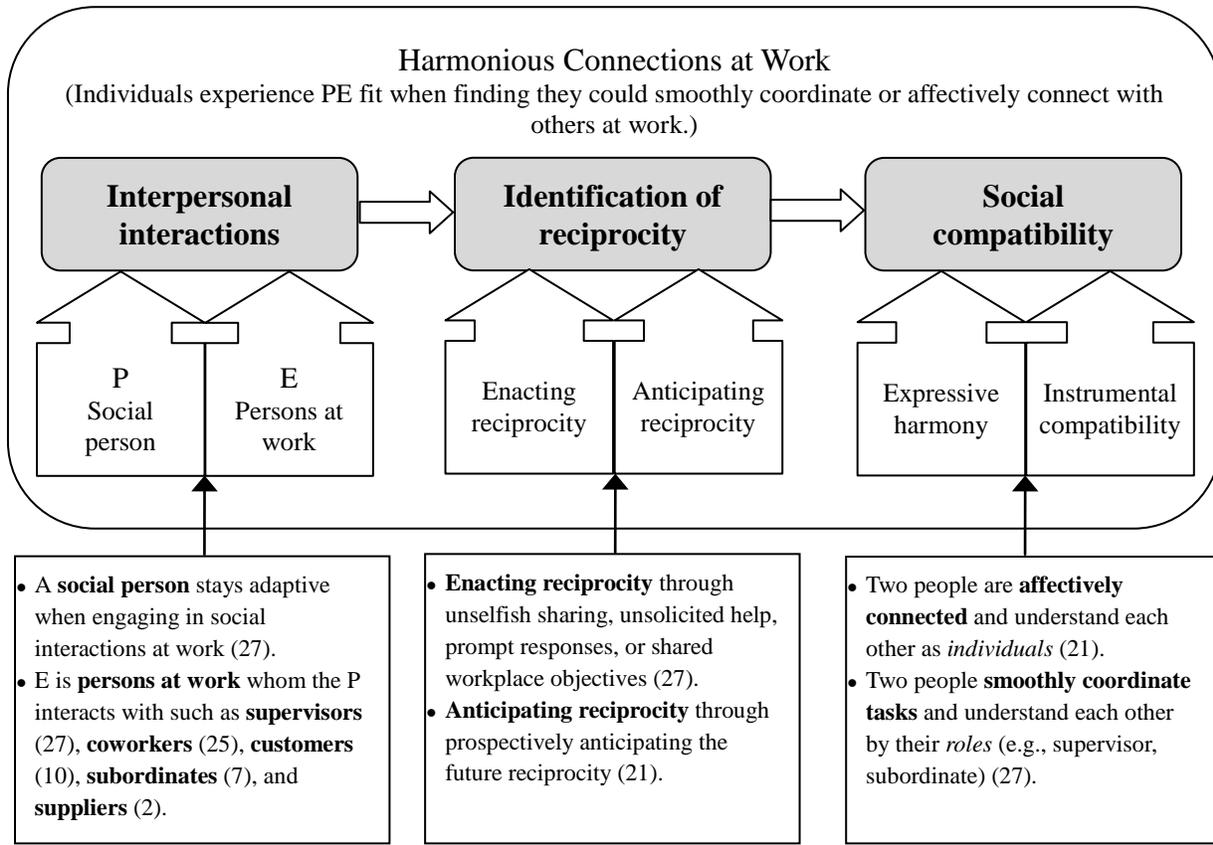
<sup>a</sup> PE = Person–Environment. Circles refer to the five Chinese PE fit themes identified in the current study. Grey circles refer to Chinese themes that are nevertheless similar to themes in Western PE fit.

**FIGURE 2A**  
**Conceptualization and Data Structure: Competence at Work<sup>a</sup>**



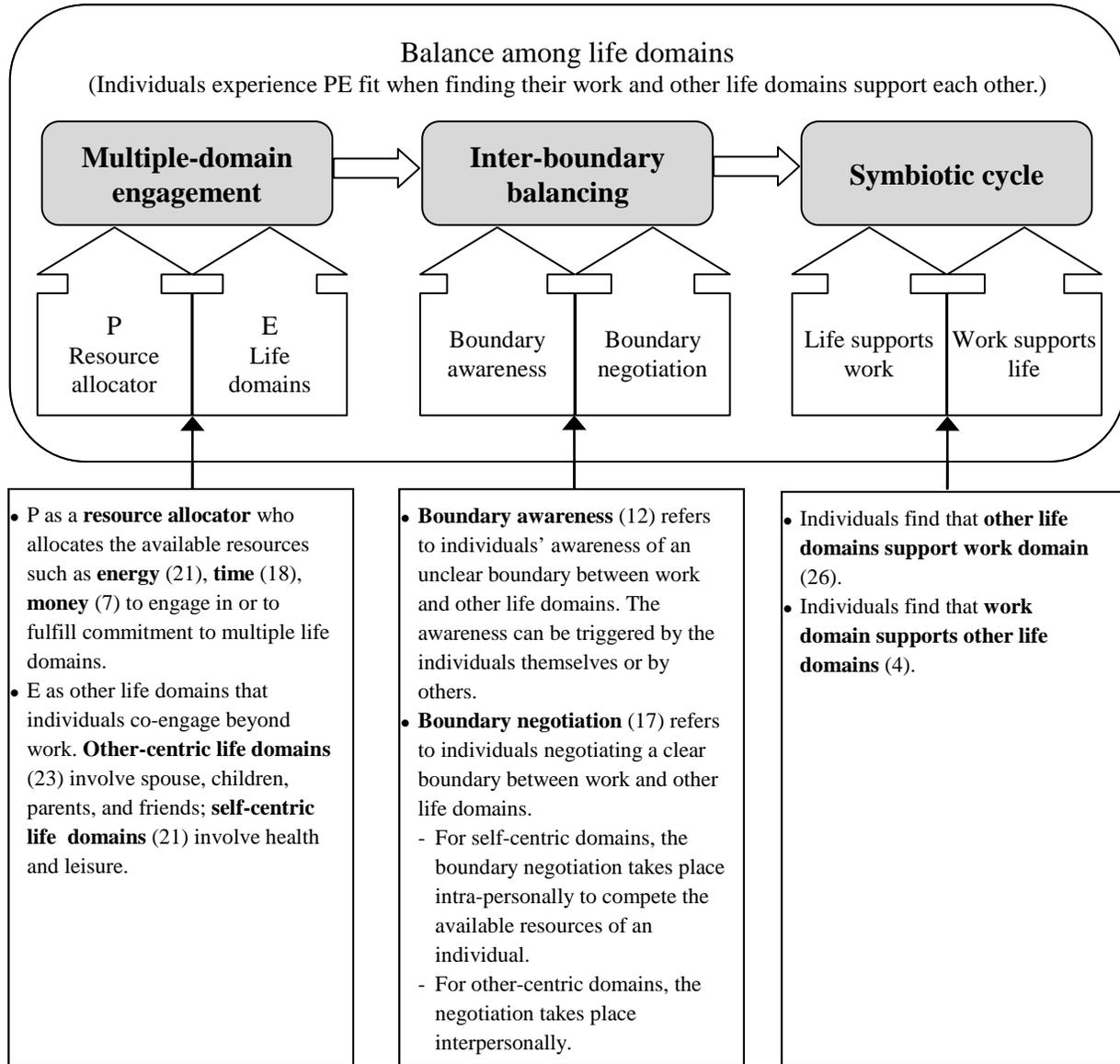
<sup>a</sup> P = person, E = environment. The grey boxes refer to the second-order codes, which reflect the input-throughput-output process. The arrow boxes refer to the first-order codes. The white boxes refer to the descriptions of the first-order codes. The numbers in the parentheses are number of informants mentioning the respective terms.

**FIGURE 2B**  
**Conceptualization and Data Structure: Harmonious Connections at Work<sup>a</sup>**



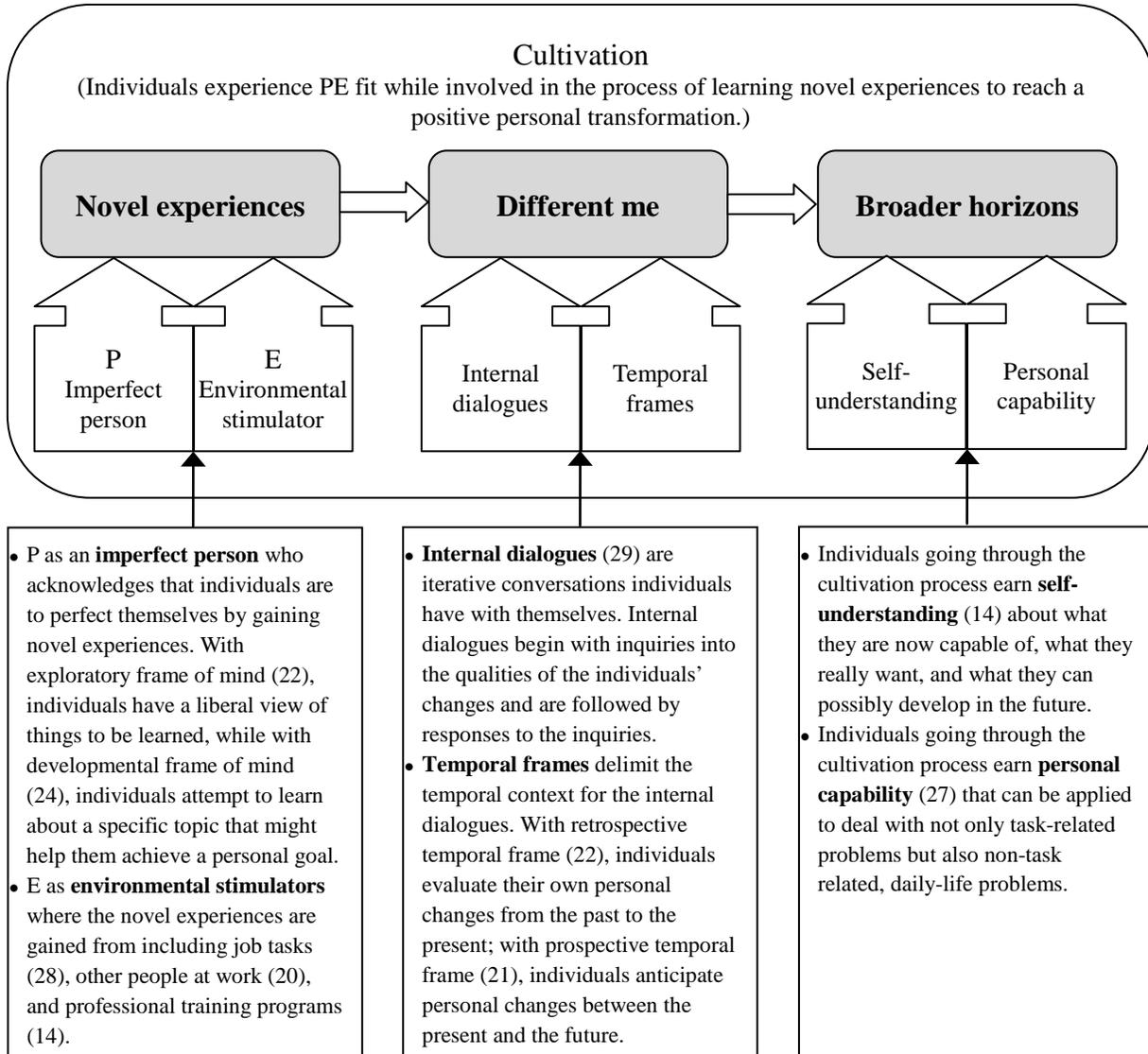
<sup>a</sup> P = person, E = environment. The grey boxes refer to the second-order codes, which reflect the input-throughput-output process. The arrow boxes refer to the first-order codes. The white boxes refer to the descriptions of the first-order codes. The numbers in the parentheses are number of informants mentioning the respective terms.

**FIGURE 2C**  
**Conceptualization and Data Structure: Balance among Life Domains<sup>a</sup>**



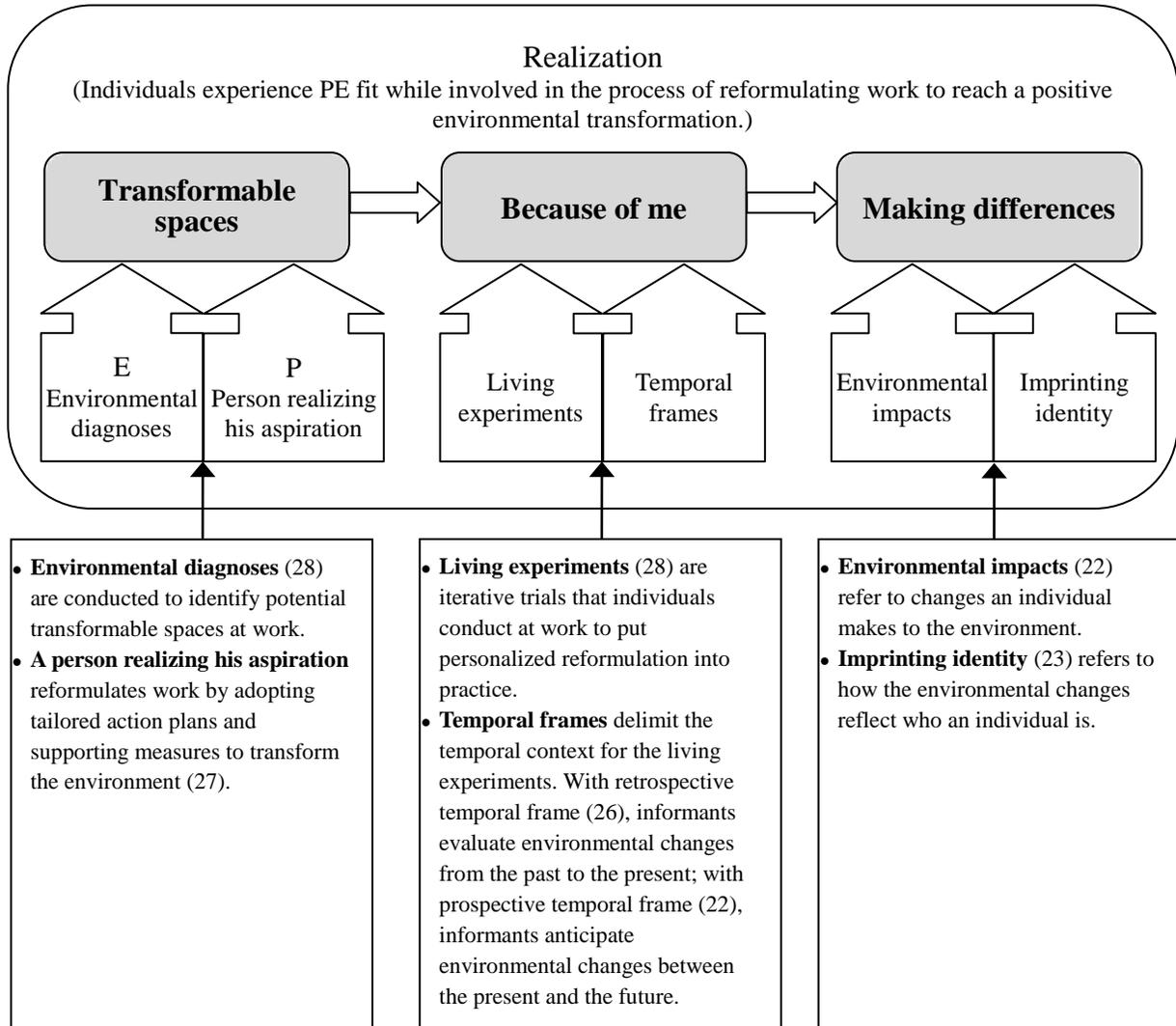
<sup>a</sup> P = person, Eo = other-centric life domains, Es = self-centric life domains. The grey boxes refer to the second-order codes, which reflect the input-throughput-output process. The arrow boxes refer to the first-order codes. The white boxes refer to the descriptions of the first-order codes. The numbers in the parentheses are number of informants mentioning the respective terms.

**FIGURE 2D**  
**Conceptualization and Data Structure: Cultivation<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> P = person, E = environment. The grey boxes refer to the second-order codes, which reflect the input-throughput-output process. The arrow boxes refer to the first-order codes. The white boxes refer to the descriptions of the first-order codes. The numbers in the parentheses are number of informants mentioning the respective terms.

**FIGURE 2E**  
**Conceptualization and Data Structure: Realization<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> P = person, E = environment. The grey boxes refer to the second-order codes, which reflect the input-throughput-output process. The arrow boxes refer to the first-order codes. The white boxes refer to the descriptions of the first-order codes. The numbers in the parentheses are number of informants mentioning the respective terms.

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