

Bright sides of dark personality? A cross-cultural study on the dark triad and work outcomes

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Abstract

The current study compared the relationships between the dark triad traits and various work outcomes across a Chinese ($N = 239$) and a United States ($N = 240$) employee sample. The results of multigroup structural equation modeling analyses generally revealed a “dark” pattern across the two countries for psychopathy. Machiavellianism was generally “brighter” in China compared to the United States. Narcissism seemed to display a somewhat “brighter” pattern in the United States compared to China, as narcissism was more positively related to voice behavior and work engagement, and more negatively related to exhaustion and boredom at work in the United States than in China.

KEYWORDS

cross-cultural comparisons, dark triad, personality, work outcomes

Practitioner points

- As cultures may shape the meaning of a construct, validation of the dark triad scales should be conducted before they are used in different cultures.
- For employees working in a multinational or multicultural environment, providing trainings on personality and culture may help them attain mutual understanding and collaboration.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The dark triad (DT) traits model refers to a constellation of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, sharing a common core of “self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness” (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, p. 557). Although the number of studies about the DT traits has increased over the years, most of the research in this field is still dominated by samples from individualistic cultures, and mostly from the United States (Robertson et al., 2016). Little is known about whether the DT

traits in collectivistic cultures (prevalent in eastern countries, such as China) function in the same way as in individualistic cultures (prevalent in Western countries, such as the United States; Hofstede, 2011). As Huang and Liang (2015) suggested, personality and culture mutually influence each other and both seem to be important keys to explain human behaviors. Therefore, the current research uses a US and a Chinese sample to investigate the potential upsides and downsides of the DT at work in both countries. This is done by examining the links between the DT traits and a wide range of employee work-related outcomes. Our

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line of inquiry, thus, aims to contribute to the existing literature of personality and organizational psychology by addressing a cross-cultural perspective within the study of DT traits at work.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Individualism versus collectivism

Markus and Kitayama (1991) have proposed that individualistic versus collectivistic cultures differ in terms of independent versus interdependent self-construals. People from individualistic cultures tend to be self-oriented and see themselves as distinctive from others, whereas in collectivistic cultures, people regard themselves as being more connected with each other. These cultural differences in self-construals, in turn, impact people's cognitions, emotions, motivations, and behaviors. Based on this theory, we argue that culture (individualism vs. collectivism) will influence not simply the expression but also the meaning of the DT traits at work, thus resulting in different relationships between the DT traits and a range of work outcomes across cultures.

2.2 | Narcissism

Narcissists can be described as sociable, self-focused people, and often have a strong self-view of superiority, which fits with the values of individualism in the United States, such as independence, self-achievement, and self-promotion (O'Boyle et al., 2012). This kind of personality-culture fit suggests that the expression of narcissism may be tolerated, accepted, or even cultivated in individualistic cultures. In an individualistic culture, employees high on narcissism thus will be more likely to be engaged in their work, speak up, and promote themselves at work. These tendencies will be associated with increased job satisfaction, and job performance. Furthermore, the fit of narcissism within an individualistic culture can be expected to fulfill narcissists' desires at work, which may also help suppress negative work attitudes and behaviors. Thus, if narcissists work in an individualistic (vs. collectivistic) culture, they may be less likely to become exhausted at work, intentionally harm others, or quit their current jobs. In contrast to individualistic cultures, collectivistic cultures emphasize the importance of social harmony and group goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The expression of narcissism (e.g., pursuing self-goals and job promotions) might therefore be less tolerated in these cultures. In sum, while in individualistic cultures, narcissists may express dominant and socially desirable values, in collectivistic cultures, narcissists may be less likely to be motivated and engaged at work, but rather more likely to show negative work attitudes and behaviors (e.g., stronger turnover intention).

Hypothesis 1 – *the correlations between narcissism and positive outcomes are more strongly positive among US than Chinese employees, whereas the correlations between narcissism and negative outcomes are more strongly negative among US than Chinese employees.*

2.3 | Machiavellianism

Machiavellians are able to build strong networks, gain trust and get help from other people, and manipulate them to achieve their own goals (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Because collectivistic cultures are more relationship-oriented, Machiavellians in such cultures will have more opportunities to utilize social resources from their environment and to subtly manipulate others to succeed, compared to an individualistic culture. In fact, the concept of Machiavellianism is rooted in Chinese intellectual history (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), such that in 500 BC, ancient Chinese General Sun Tzu proposed in his book *Art of War* to use deceitful tactics to achieve success, such as "impulse control, situational adaptation, alliance building, and reputation maintenance" (Jones & Paulhus, 2011, p. 254). Hence, in a collectivistic culture, Machiavellianism might be more functional than in an individualistic culture. It thus may be expected that in a collectivistic culture, employees high on Machiavellianism are more likely to express their tendencies to pursue success at work by flexibly using different tactics, which may be associated with an increased job performance and job satisfaction. Machiavellians' strong needs for success may be fulfilled accordingly, implying fewer negative behaviors or attitudes at work (e.g., harmful behaviors and emotional exhaustion).

Hypothesis 2 – *the correlations between Machiavellianism and positive outcomes are more strongly positive among Chinese than US employees, whereas the correlations between Machiavellianism and negative outcomes are more strongly negative among Chinese than US employees.*

2.4 | Psychopathy

Individuals with a high level of psychopathy are described as being callous, impulsive, tending to disregard social regulations and feeling remorseless when harming others (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Muris et al. (2017) meta-analytically found that psychopathy was positively related to various psychosocial problems in Western cultures. These findings were confirmed in a Chinese context (Shou et al., 2017). Thus, psychopathy seems to be the most maladaptive trait among the DT traits cross-culturally, which suggests that any effect of the cultural environment on the relationships between psychopathy and work outcomes might become less pronounced. In other words, it can be expected that cultural differences will hardly influence psychopaths' behaviors or attitudes and that such features of psychopathy imply that the maladaptive functions of this trait are observed cross-culturally. Specifically, in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures, psychopathy is likely to be equally maladaptive, that is to be negatively related to positive work outcomes (e.g., job performance), and positively related to negative work outcomes (e.g., counterproductive work behavior [CWB]).

Hypothesis 3 – *The correlations between psychopathy and work outcomes are similar between US and Chinese employees.*

TABLE 1 Sample demographics

	US	China
Total N	240	239
Age (SD)	35.81 (10.84)	34.47 (8.65)
Gender		
Male	42.5%	42.3%
Female	57.5%	57.7%
Marital status		
Unmarried	37.1%	33.5%
Married/living together	58.3%	64.0%
Divorced/separated	4.6%	2.5%
Education		
Technical school/ secondary education	30.9%	32.6%
University/college degree	61.0%	56.1%
Postgraduate degree or higher	8.1%	11.3%
Occupational sectors		
Industries	15.5%	22.1%
Business	30.5%	30.9%
Education and public services	27.5%	26.9%
Culture and entertainment	6.7%	2.9%
Others	18.3%	17.2%
Contract types		
Full-time	79.6%	95.0%
Part-time	16.7%	3.3%
Project-based	3.8%	1.7%
Job types		
White-collar	95.61%	94.29%
Blue-collar	4.39%	5.71%
Ethnicity	80.8% White American 10.0% Black/African 4.6% Asian American 3.8% Hispanic and Latino American	99.2% Han 0.8% Others

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Participants and procedure

We collected data in two different ways. Network sampling (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014) in 2017 resulted in a sample of Chinese employees and the use of the MTurk platform in 2018 resulted in a sample of American

employees. Participants were asked to fill out an online personality questionnaire once they had registered. One week later, they received a work outcome questionnaire via their registered email addresses. To ensure the Chinese and US samples were comparable, strata sampling (Anglim et al., 2017) was used to match the two samples in terms of sample size and demographics. First, age was categorized into three groups: lowest (20 years old in the US sample and 21 years old in the Chinese sample)–28 years old, 29–35 years old, 36–oldest (68 years old in the US sample and 61 years old in the Chinese sample). By crossing gender and these age groups, six strata were formed. These participants were allocated into the six strata according to their gender and age. To make sure the numbers of participants were equal across the two samples, all participants for the smaller-sized group were kept, whereas for the larger group, the same number of participants were randomly sampled. After this matching procedure, the final US sample equaled $N = 240$ and the final Chinese sample equaled $N = 239$. Sample demographics for each country are reported in Table 1, including age, gender, marital status, educational level, occupational sector, contract type, job type, and ethnicity.

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | English and Chinese scales

We used all the original English scales to measure the DT traits and work outcomes in the US sample. The details of the scales are provided below. For the translation of the scale items into Chinese, we invited six experts (all had a master's degree in psychology and were fluent in both English and Chinese) to translate the English scales into Chinese and back translate them into English. We conducted measurement invariance tests for each scale, including configural invariance, metric invariance, scalar invariance, and strict invariance. For all scales, configural invariance was achieved across the two samples. The scales for which metric invariance, scalar invariance, and strict invariance could not be achieved, we freely estimated some item loadings, item intercepts, or item residual variances to form partial invariance (see the Supporting Information for more details about the measurement invariance results).

3.2.2 | DT

The Short Dark Triad scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) was used to measure narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Eight items measured narcissism (e.g., "People see me as a natural leader"), seven items indicated Machiavellianism (e.g., "I like to use clever manipulation to get my way"), and seven items measured psychopathy (e.g., "I like to get revenge on authorities"; the item "I enjoy having sex with people I hardly know" was removed from this study, because we thought this item was not suitable for the Chinese culture). Participants could use a 5-point Likert scale to respond, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's α reliabilities for

these traits were .72, .69, and .80 for the Chinese sample, and .84, .87, and .85 for the US sample, respectively.

3.2.3 | In-role performance

In-role performance was measured with the three-item individual task proficiency scale (Griffin et al., 2007). An item example is, "I carry out the core parts of my job well" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's α reliabilities were .92 for the Chinese sample and .84 for the US sample.

3.2.4 | Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)

OCB was measured with a three-item scale from Goodman and Svyantek (1999). One item example is "I help my colleagues with their work when they return from a period of absence" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's α reliabilities were .83 for the Chinese sample .84 for the US sample.

3.2.5 | Voice behavior

We measured voice behavior with a six-item scale developed by Botero and Van Dyne (2009). An item example is "I develop and make recommendations to my supervisor concerning issues that affect my work" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). It had good Cronbach's α reliabilities of .91 for the Chinese sample and .94 for the US sample.

3.2.6 | Work engagement

Work engagement was assessed with eight items from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2006). An item of this scale, for example, is "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (0 = *never*, 6 = *always*). Cronbach's α reliabilities for the Chinese and US samples were .90 and .95, respectively.

3.2.7 | Job satisfaction

We measured job satisfaction with a three-item scale from Seashore et al. (1982). One item example is "In general, I like working at my company" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's α reliabilities for the Chinese and US samples were .92 and .97, respectively.

3.2.8 | CWB

CWB was measured with eight items from Spector et al. (2010). An item example is "I insult someone about their job performance"

(0 = *never*, 6 = *always*). Cronbach's α reliabilities of CWB were .89 and .94 for the Chinese and US samples, respectively.

3.2.9 | Turnover intention

Turnover intention was assessed with the three-item turnover intention scale (Seashore et al., 1982). An item example is "I often think of leaving my organization" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's α reliabilities were .70 and .79, for the Chinese and US samples, respectively.

3.2.10 | Workaholism

Workaholism was measured with seven items from the Dutch Work Addiction Scale (DUWAS; Schaufeli et al., 2009). An item example is "I find myself continuing work after my co-workers have left" (1 = *almost never*, 5 = *almost always*). Cronbach's α reliabilities for the Chinese and US samples were .72 and .79, respectively.

3.2.11 | Boredom at work

Boredom at work was operationalized with the seven-item Dutch boredom scale (Reijseger et al., 2012). An item example is "I feel bored at my job" (0 = *never*, 6 = *always*). Cronbach's α reliabilities were .87 and .93 for the Chinese and US samples, respectively.

3.2.12 | Exhaustion

Exhaustion was assessed with the four-item exhaustion subscale from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2001). One item example is "During my work, I often feel emotionally drained" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's α reliabilities for the Chinese and US samples were .76 and .89, respectively.

3.2.13 | Task avoidance

We measured task avoidance with the five-item scale developed by Nurmi et al. (2003). An item example is "What often occurs is that I find something else to do when I have a difficult task in front of me" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach's α reliabilities for the Chinese and US samples were .68 and .90, respectively.

3.3 | Analytical strategy

To compare the relationships between the DT traits and work outcomes across the US and Chinese samples, we adopted a multigroup structural equation modeling (SEM) approach and conducted path

coefficient comparisons for each DT trait and each work outcome between the United States and China. Specifically, we created the corresponding latent variables based on configural, metric, and scalar invariant or partially invariant measurement models. Since we used latent variables for all of our analyses and the measurement errors were taken into account as part of the model, strict invariance was not a prerequisite (Gregorich, 2006). Therefore, we did not use the strict invariant measurement models to form latent variables. Furthermore, we extracted the latent variable scores of the invariant or partially invariant measurement models for each DT trait and work outcome. To control for cultural response bias, we performed a z-transformation for these latent variables in each sample (Fischer, 2016). Z-transformation is also helpful for comparisons between different variables when response scales differ from each other (Fox, 1997). Next, we included all three DT traits in one multigroup SEM model and let them predict each work-related outcome. Furthermore, as these work-related outcomes were not independent of each other, we also performed multigroup SEM analyses for work performance (including in-role performance, OCB, voice behavior, work engagement, CWB, and task avoidance) and work attitudes (including turnover intention, workaholism, boredom at work, exhaustion, and job satisfaction), respectively. The corresponding results did not differ from our main results (please see the Supporting Information for more details and plots).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Descriptive statistics

Latent mean differences, the corresponding effect sizes, and the intercorrelations for all latent variables are provided in Table 2 for the Chinese and the US samples separately. The intercorrelations among all observed variables before and after matching are reported in the Supporting Information.

4.2 | Hypothesis testing

4.2.1 | Narcissism

Hypothesis 1 proposed that the correlations between narcissism and positive outcomes are more strongly positive among US than Chinese employees, whereas the correlations between narcissism and negative outcomes are more strongly negative among the US than Chinese employees. The results in Table 3 showed that the correlation differences were only significant for two positive outcomes and two negative outcomes. Specifically, the positive correlation between narcissism and voice behavior ($\Delta B = 0.30^{**}$ [0.12, 0.48]; $p < .01$) as well as the positive correlation between narcissism and work engagement ($\Delta B = 0.24^*$ [0.05, 0.42]; $p < .05$) were both significantly higher in the United States than in China. Furthermore, narcissism was more negatively related to exhaustion ($\Delta B = -0.34^{**}$ [-0.53, -0.15]; $p < .01$) and boredom at work ($\Delta B = -0.20^*$

[-0.39, -0.01]; $p < .05$) in the United States than in China. Thus, these findings provided partial support to Hypothesis 1.

4.2.2 | Machiavellianism

Hypothesis 2 stated that the correlations between Machiavellianism and positive outcomes are more strongly positive among Chinese than US employees, whereas the correlations between Machiavellianism and negative outcomes are more strongly negative among Chinese than US employees. The results in Table 3 showed that Machiavellianism was more positively related to four positive work outcomes in China than in the United States. The results were as follows: OCB ($\Delta B = 0.36^{**}$ [0.56, 0.17]; $p < .01$), voice behavior ($\Delta B = 0.46^{**}$ [0.65, 0.27]; $p < .01$), work engagement ($\Delta B = 0.55^{**}$ [0.74, 0.35]; $p < .01$), and job satisfaction ($\Delta B = 0.47^{**}$ [0.66, 0.27]). Machiavellianism also showed significantly more negative correlations with three negative work outcomes in China compared to the United States. The findings were as follows: CWB ($\Delta B = -0.26^{**}$ [-0.44, -0.08]; $p < .01$), boredom at work ($\Delta B = -0.48^{**}$ [-0.67, -0.28]; $p < .01$), exhaustion ($\Delta B = -0.48^{**}$ [-0.68, -0.29]; $p < .01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2, for the largest part, was supported.

4.2.3 | Psychopathy

Hypothesis 3 stated that the correlations between psychopathy and work outcomes across the Chinese and the US samples are equal. The results in Table 3 showed a generally consistent relationship pattern between psychopathy and work outcomes across the US and China (i.e., negative correlations with positive outcomes and positive correlations with negative outcomes). In terms of correlation strength, psychopathy showed nonsignificant correlation differences across the two samples with all but one negative work outcome (i.e., task avoidance) and one positive work outcome (i.e., job satisfaction). Specifically, psychopathy was more positively related to task avoidance in the United States than in China ($\Delta B = 0.24^*$ [0.03, 0.45]; $p < .05$). Psychopathy was more strongly and negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($\Delta B = -0.28^{**}$ [-0.48, -0.07]; $p < .01$) in China than in the United States. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was confirmed for the most part.

5 | DISCUSSION

Adopting a cross-cultural perspective, the present study demonstrates that the maladaptive and adaptive functions of Machiavellianism and, to a somewhat lesser extent, narcissism, differ between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In contrast, as expected, psychopathy seems to be maladaptive across the two cultures. We proposed that such differences may involve differences between these two cultures in independent versus interdependent self-construals.

TABLE 2 Latent factor intercorrelations among all variables for the United States and China

	ΔM	d	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Narcissism	-0.07	0.12	(0.83/0.72)	0.26**	0.46**	-0.17*	0.03	0.05	0.18**	0.05	0.19**	-0.08	0.28**	0.03	0.13	0.01
2. Machiavellianism	-0.71**	0.98	0.52*	(0.87/0.69)	0.08	0.25**	0.24**	0.38**	0.34**	0.23**	-0.18**	-0.04	0.22**	-0.19**	-0.09	0.03
3. Psychopathy	-0.41**	0.56	0.47**	0.65**	(0.85/0.80)	-0.36**	-0.29**	-0.30**	-0.15*	-0.30**	0.38**	0.12	0.09	0.28**	0.27**	0.16
4. In-role performance	0.52**	0.58	-0.07	-0.14*	(0.84/0.92)	-0.34**	0.71**	0.62**	0.40**	0.32**	-0.49**	-0.07	0.12	-0.33**	-0.22**	-0.20**
5. OCB	0.38**	0.38	0.12	-0.20**	-0.28**	0.61**	(0.84/0.83)	0.66**	0.44**	0.32**	-0.40**	-0.10	0.16*	-0.30**	-0.04	-0.18**
6. Voice behavior	0.08	0.07	0.31**	-0.04	-0.10	0.55**	0.65**	(0.94/0.91)	0.53**	0.42**	-0.47**	-0.16*	0.23**	-0.34**	-0.24**	-0.14*
7. Work engagement	0.87**	0.73	0.31**	-0.11	-0.08	0.43**	0.51**	0.62**	(0.95/0.90)	0.55**	-0.32**	-0.34**	0.36**	-0.45**	-0.24**	-0.20**
8. Job satisfaction	0.54**	0.40	0.15*	-0.19**	-0.14*	0.40**	0.47**	0.48**	0.76**	(0.97/0.92)	-0.42**	-0.58**	0.17*	-0.46**	-0.24**	-0.06
9. CWB	0.54**	0.56	0.39**	0.41**	0.56**	-0.47**	-0.24**	-0.11	-0.03	-0.16*	(0.94/0.89)	0.31**	0.03	0.58**	0.41**	0.28**
10. Turnover intention	-0.15	0.15	0.01	0.26**	0.31**	-0.34**	-0.32**	-0.38**	-0.53**	-0.71**	0.37**	(0.79/0.70)	0.05	0.39**	0.29**	0.16*
11. Workaholism	-0.14**	0.33	0.19**	0.29**	0.15*	0.08	0.12	0.04	0.08	-0.11	0.24**	0.26**	(0.79/0.72)	-0.01	0.07	0.11
12. Boredom at work	1.25**	1.30	-0.01	0.35**	0.36**	-0.42**	-0.42**	-0.44**	-0.60**	-0.60**	0.48**	0.63**	0.15*	(0.93/0.87)	0.41**	0.33**
13. Exhaustion	-0.08	0.17	-0.06	0.35**	0.28**	-0.26**	-0.29**	-0.38**	-0.54**	-0.58	0.34**	0.64**	0.38**	0.72**	(0.89/0.76)	0.35**
14. Task avoidance	-0.54**	1.20	0.22**	0.29**	0.45**	-0.50**	-0.35**	-0.29**	-0.21**	-0.34**	0.57**	0.49**	0.22**	0.56**	0.52**	(0.90/0.68)

Note: $N_{US} = 240$; $N_{China} = 239$. $\Delta M = M_{US} - M_{China}$. Correlations for the US sample are shown below the diagonal, whereas correlations for the Chinese sample are shown above the diagonal. Reliabilities ($\alpha_{US}/\alpha_{China}$) for both samples are shown in the parentheses on the diagonal.

Abbreviations: CWB, counterproductive work behavior; OCB, organizational citizenship behavior.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3 Multigroup SEM results of the dark triad traits and work outcomes between the United States and China

	Narcissism			Machiavellianism			Psychopathy		
	US	China	ΔB [95% CI]	US	China	ΔB [95% CI]	US	China	ΔB [95% CI]
In-role performance	0.09 [-0.05, 0.23]	-0.06 [-0.19, 0.07]	0.15 [-0.04, 0.34]	0.10 [-0.06, 0.26]	0.29** [0.18, 0.41]	-0.19 [-0.38, 0.01]	-0.45** [-0.61, -0.29]	-0.35** [-0.48, -0.22]	-0.09 [-0.30, 0.11]
OCB	0.35** [0.15, 0.52]	0.17* [0.04, 0.30]	0.18 [-0.01, 0.36]	-0.12 [-0.27, 0.04]	0.24** [0.13, 0.36]	-0.36** [-0.56, -0.17]	-0.37** [-0.52, -0.21]	-0.39** [-0.52, -0.26]	0.03 [-0.18, 0.23]
Voice behavior	0.47** [0.15, 0.52]	0.17** [0.05, 0.29]	0.30** [0.12, 0.48]	-0.08 [-0.23, 0.07]	0.38** [0.27, 0.49]	-0.46** [-0.65, -0.27]	-0.27** [-0.43, -0.12]	-0.41** [-0.53, -0.28]	0.13 [-0.06, 0.33]
Work engagement	0.50** [0.37, 0.63]	0.26** [0.13, 0.39]	0.24* [0.05, 0.42]	-0.23** [-0.39, -0.08]	0.31** [0.20, 0.43]	-0.55** [-0.74, -0.35]	-0.16* [-0.32, -0.01]	-0.30** [-0.42, -0.17]	0.13 [-0.07, 0.33]
Job satisfaction	0.32** [0.18, 0.46]	0.20** [0.07, 0.33]	0.12 [-0.07, 0.31]	-0.24** [-0.40, -0.08]	0.22** [0.11, 0.34]	-0.47** [-0.66, -0.27]	-0.14 [-0.30, 0.02]	-0.41** [-0.54, -0.28]	0.28** [0.07, 0.48]
CWB	0.15* [0.03, 0.27]	0.06 [-0.07, 0.19]	0.09 [-0.09, 0.27]	0.04 [-0.10, 0.18]	-0.22** [-0.33, -0.10]	0.26** [0.08, 0.44]	0.46** [0.32, 0.60]	0.37** [0.25, 0.50]	0.09 [-0.10, 0.28]
Turnover intentions	-0.21** [-0.34, -0.07]	-0.16* [-0.30, -0.02]	-0.05 [-0.24, 0.15]	0.16 [-0.00, 0.32]	-0.03 [-0.15, 0.10]	0.18 [-0.02, 0.39]	0.30** [0.14, 0.46]	0.20* [0.06, 0.34]	0.11 [-0.11, 0.32]
Workaholism	0.10 [-0.04, 0.24]	0.27** [0.13, 0.41]	-0.17 [-0.37, 0.02]	0.30** [0.14, 0.46]	0.17** [0.05, 0.29]	0.13 [-0.07, 0.33]	-0.09 [-0.25, 0.08]	-0.05 [-0.19, 0.08]	-0.04 [-0.25, 0.18]
Boredom at work	-0.28** [-0.41, -0.15]	-0.08 [-0.22, 0.05]	-0.20* [-0.39, -0.01]	0.28** [0.12, 0.43]	-0.20** [-0.32, -0.08]	0.48** [0.28, 0.67]	0.31** [0.16, 0.47]	0.33** [0.20, 0.47]	-0.02 [-0.22, 0.19]
Exhaustion	-0.31** [-0.44, -0.18]	0.02 [-0.12, 0.16]	-0.34** [-0.53, -0.15]	0.37** [0.22, 0.53]	-0.11 [-0.23, 0.01]	0.48** [0.29, 0.68]	0.19* [0.04, 0.34]	0.27** [0.13, 0.40]	-0.08 [-0.28, 0.13]
Task avoidance	0.02 [-0.11, 0.15]	-0.08 [-0.23, 0.06]	0.10 [-0.09, 0.30]	-0.00 [-0.15, 0.15]	0.03 [-0.10, 0.15]	-0.03 [-0.23, 0.17]	0.44** [0.29, 0.59]	0.20* [0.06, 0.34]	0.24* [0.03, 0.45]

Note: The results were based on the multigroup SEM models in which for each work criterion, all of the three dark triad traits were included. We also performed multigroup SEM analyses for work performance (including in-role performance, OCB, voice behavior, work engagement, CWB, and task avoidance) and work attitudes (including turnover intention, workaholism, boredom at work, exhaustion, and job satisfaction), respectively. These analyses did not change the corresponding results (please see the Supporting Information for details and the plots).

Abbreviations: B, path coefficient; CI, confidence interval; CWB, counterproductive work behavior; OCB, organizational citizenship behavior; ΔB , path coefficient differences between the US and China.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

The stronger positive relationships of narcissism with voice behavior and work engagement as well as the stronger negative relationships with exhaustion and boredom at work among US versus Chinese employees provide support for the idea that narcissism is more adaptive in an individualistic rather than a collectivistic culture. This finding may be explained by the self-focused nature of individualism in the United States which allows narcissists to work toward their own goals, speak up on their own behalf, and be themselves, whereas the interpersonal focus of collectivism in China may restrict narcissists to do so to the same extent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Machiavellianism shows more positive and stronger relationships in China than in the United States with positive work outcomes, namely OCB, voice behavior, work engagement, and job satisfaction. It also shows more strongly negative associations with three negative work outcomes (i.e., CWB, boredom at work, and exhaustion) in China than in the United States. These findings add support to the potential upsides of Machiavellianism in collectivistic cultures, such that the social relatedness in the Chinese collectivistic cultures offers more chances for Machiavellians to use the advantage of being social “chameleons” at the workplace. In other words, rather than hindering them, their Machiavellianism is, in fact, an asset because it entails the use of different tactics in different situations with the aim of fulfilling their work goals (O’Boyle et al., 2012).

As expected, psychopathy appears to be a “dark” trait both in the United States and in China. Interestingly, psychopathy is more strongly (negatively) correlated with job satisfaction in China than in the United States, and more strongly (positively) related to task avoidance in the United States than in China. Although we expected that this would be a universal phenomenon, it seems that the inability of psychopaths to bypass their work responsibilities and the associated frustration is more intense in China than in the United States. As suggested by O’Boyle et al. (2012), psychopaths are willing to take risks and sacrifice others for their personal goals. They also lack the responsibility to fulfill their job duties. In a collectivistic culture where collective interests and interpersonal relationships are valued, psychopaths’ self-interested and irresponsible behaviors may be constrained, perhaps leading to less task avoidance yet lower job satisfaction.

5.1 | Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, only self-rated scales were used to measure the DT traits and work outcomes. Thus, it is not clear yet to what extent individuals’ response styles or other characteristics may affect the true scores of their DT traits, work outcomes, as well as the relationships between DT traits and work outcomes. In future research, other-rated measures (e.g., peers, subordinates, supervisors) and objective measures could also be considered to capture individuals’ scores more accurately on traits and work outcomes. Second, employee work outcomes extend beyond the outcomes that we measured in the current study. Thus, future research may address links between the DT traits and other outcomes, such as team performance and impression management.

Third, we only included two samples from the United States and China in the current study. Samples with larger numbers of participants from these two and other countries may be recruited in future research to replicate our results. Finally, including direct measures of cultural dimensions (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism) can provide an empirical validation of our proposal that these dimensions explain the differences that we have found between the two countries.

5.2 | Practical implications

Globalization and internationalization facilitate employees, teams, and organizations to work in a multinational and multicultural environment. It is, therefore, crucial to provide people with workshops and trainings (e.g., cross-cultural awareness training and culture assimilator training) on personality and cultures (Salas et al., 2008). In addition, to ensure DT personality tests assess individuals fairly, validations of these personality tests (e.g., differential item functioning, predictive validity, internal and external construct validities) need to be assessed before they are applied into practice within another culture.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of the article at the publisher's website.

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