

# Fate Belief, Social Class, and Mental Health: A Study Based on the Taiwan Social Change Survey

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The current study aimed to investigate how attitudes toward fate influence the mental health of individuals and whether there were preferences and trends of attitudes toward fate in Taiwan. Based on the 2015 and 2020 Taiwan Social Change Survey, we found three attitudes toward fate: (1) traditional fate behaviors, (2) negotiable fate, and (3) fate control. In addition, individuals tend to prefer negotiable fate to the other two attitudes, and fate control declined from 1984 to 2020. Furthermore, the positive relationship between negotiable fate and mental health can be mediated via three basic psychological needs fulfillment (autonomy, relatedness, and competence). On the other hand, the results revealed that social class moderated the relationship between negotiable fate and mental health. For those with lower social class, negotiable fate was positively correlated with mental health, whereas for those with higher social class, negotiable fate was not correlated with mental health. These findings provide insights that may build a bridge between negotiable fate and mental health in current Chinese society. Implications and limitations are discussed.

**Keywords:** *fate control, mental health, negotiable fate, social class, traditional fate behaviors*

## Extended Abstract

On April 11, 2021, the BBC reported extensively on a phenomenon in which the snack “Kuai Kuai” (乖乖) was placed next to computers or machines in Taiwan. The article was titled “The ‘good luck’ snack that makes Taiwan’s technology behave.” The report suggested that saying the name of the snack reveals its “meaning,” thereby allowing the equipment to operate smoothly. Research in Western settings has mostly linked such superstitious behavior to low education and socioeconomic status, poor self-regulation, or beliefs related to external control. However, in Taiwan, Kuai Kuai can be found in high-level professional workplaces that require high levels of self-control and commitment, such as laboratories and hospitals, where they are placed in hope that patients will behave well. Thus, the Kuai Kuai phenomenon seems to show that fate need not be viewed as uncontrollable. Instead, individuals exercise self-control by investing in the belief that it is “better to

believe it exists than to believe it does not” and “man proposes, but God disposes,” negotiating with fate in a manner similar to a contract.

Therefore, this article explores the characteristics and implications of various fate beliefs in Taiwan, particularly “negotiable fate,” to understand their effect on psychological health. We explore several hypotheses by examining corresponding items in the Taiwan Social Change Survey and investigating changes and fluctuations in fate beliefs (traditional fate beliefs, fate control, and negotiable fate) in Taiwanese society. Furthermore, we explore the culturally specific belief in negotiable fate and its positive impact on psychological health via the mediating role of basic psychological needs fulfillment. Finally, we investigate the moderating effect of negotiated fate on psychological health with a competitive hypothesis approach. That is, the effect may differ according to social class, either enhancing (for those in high social classes)

or buffering (for those in low social classes) the effect.

## Method

**Participants:** The participants were drawn from two groups. To examine the association between belief in negotiated fate and psychological health, the first group of participants was selected from the Taiwan Social Change Surveys in 2015 (Wave 7) and 2020 (Wave 8). This survey uses a stratified random sampling method that ensures the results are representative of Taiwan; 3,214 participants answered all of the major questions. The participants' average age was 47.10 years ( $SD = 16.41$ ), and 50.44% of them were female. To examine traditional fate beliefs and fate control, the second group of participants was drawn from the surveys conducted in 1984 (Wave 1) through 2020 (Wave 8); the number of participants varied from 13,158 to 18,138, depending on the item.

## Measurements

**Fate beliefs:** This study considered nine items on three dimensions of fate beliefs, namely traditional fate behavior (four items; sample item: "performing events such as weddings, funerals, business openings, and housewarming ceremonies should be done on auspicious dates"), fate control (two items; sample item: "as long as one is willing to endure hardships, they will surely succeed"), and negotiable fate (three items; sample item: "You should deal with what fate has given you to make the best of things"). The participants rated the items on a 4-point Likert scale. The total score for each dimension was used in this study. For all dimensions, the higher the score, the higher the participant's fate belief.

**Basic psychological needs fulfillment:** The Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale (9 items) assessed the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) based on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert scale. The total score of all nine items was used in the analysis. A high score indicated greater satisfaction of psychological needs.

**Psychological Health:** The Chinese Health Questionnaire (12 items) assessed the psychological health of the Taiwanese population (Cheng & Williams, 1986). The participants rated each item on a 4-point Likert scale, and their total scores were used in the analysis. Higher scores indicated better psychological health.

**Social class:** Social class was measured with a single item that asked the participants to indicate their perceived social status on a 10-point scale, with 1 representing the lowest and 10 representing the highest social status.

## Results

First, exploratory factor analysis revealed a three-factor solution for the fate beliefs measures: traditional fate behavior, fate control, and negotiable fate. In addition, comparison of the means for each fate belief revealed a significantly stronger preference for negotiable fate than the other two fate beliefs.

Second, regression analysis indicated that negotiable fate and fate control positively predicted psychological health, whereas traditional fate behaviors negatively predicted psychological health. In addition, the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) were positively correlated with negotiable fate but were not correlated or only weakly correlated with the other two fate beliefs, indicating a unique relationship between negotiable fate and basic psychological needs. In addition, we used Model 4 of the Process 4.1 software developed by Hayes (2022) to conduct multiple mediation analyses. Negotiable fate was set as the independent variable, psychological health as the dependent variable, the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, competence) were set as the mediating variables, and the control variables were survey year, gender, age, traditional fate behavior, and fate control. The 95% confidence intervals of the 10,000 bootstrapping estimations of autonomy, relatedness, and competence did not include 0. However, reverse mediation effects were also tested by analyzing the following path: basic psychological needs  $\rightarrow$  negotiable fate  $\rightarrow$  psychological health. The results showed that the

mediating effect of negotiable fate was not significant (the confidence intervals included 0), highlighting the robustness of our hypothesized path: negotiable fate → basic psychological needs → psychological health.

The moderating effect of social class on the effect of negotiable fate on psychological health was analyzed with Model 1 of Hayes Process 4.1 software, while controlling for survey year, gender, age, traditional fate behavior, and fate control. The results showed a significant interaction effect between negotiable fate beliefs and social class,  $b = -0.05$ ,  $p = .008$ . Follow-up simple slope analyses indicated that for individuals in the lowest social class (-1 SD), negotiable fate positively predicted psychological well-being,  $b = 0.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, for individuals in the highest social class (1 SD), negotiable fate was not related to psychological well-being,  $b = 0.02$ ,  $p = .80$ . Thus, our findings demonstrated the moderating effect of social class, which has a greater positive impact on the relationship between negotiable fate and psychological health for those in the lowest social class.

## Discussion

Consistent with previous research findings (Au et al., 2011, 2012), this study found a discriminant factor structure for the three fate attitudes: traditional fate behavior, negotiable fate, and fate control. Moreover, negotiated fate was found to be the most preferred among Taiwanese individuals. This study further explored the impact of fate attitudes on psychological health, a topic that has been relatively neglected in the literature. The results indicate that traditional fate behavior negatively predicts psychological health, whereas fate control positively predicts psychological health, which is consistent with the internal vs. external self-regulation perspective. Interestingly, this study also found a positive association between negotiable fate and psychological health, which can be mediated by basic psychological needs satisfaction (autonomy, relatedness, and competence), thereby promoting individual psychological health. However, the other two fate beliefs (traditional fate behaviors and fate control) did not show this mediating effect. These findings correspond to the dual attitudes of “doing one’s best while also accepting fate” in Chinese culture. From a broader perspective,

Chinese society does not consider internal and external control to be binary. Rather, it accommodates and selects the advantages of both, striving for internal control while maintaining respect for external control.

This study found that individuals from low social classes can enhance their psychological health through negotiable fate, whereas negotiable fate is less related to psychological health among those from high social classes. These results are consistent with recent research by Au and Savani (2019), who found that activating negotiable fate can improve coping performance and sense of meaning for individuals facing difficult situations. Together with our findings, these results indicate that negotiable fate can help individuals adjust to adversity by accepting their fate while also allowing room for negotiation and compromise. Accordingly, this study found that negotiable fate is not only the most preferred fate belief among the general public in contemporary Taiwanese society but also a unique mechanism for enhancing psychological health. Furthermore, for individuals from low social classes, negotiable fate has the positive effect of “helping in a time of need.”

This study has some limitations that provide future research directions. First, negotiable fate was only included in the Taiwan Social Change Survey in 2015 and 2020. As the survey is conducted every five years, only two waves of data have been accumulated so far. To explore the dynamic and long-term trends of belief in fate and its relationship with mental health, data from subsequent waves of the survey need to be analyzed. In addition, because the current analysis focuses mainly on individual-level variables, future research could incorporate information at the social and national levels, such as economic growth rate, unemployment rate, and national average income to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between belief in fate and mental health. Finally, if future surveys have a sufficient sample size and coverage, age-period-cohort analysis could be used to investigate how the association between belief in fate and mental health is affected by the age, survey year, and birth cohort of the participants. Furthermore, as this study primarily relied on survey methods, future research could use experimental approaches to induce belief in fate and investigate possible causal directions and mechanisms.