“Why should people in one part of the globe have developed collectivist cultures, while others went individualist? The key is how culture is shaped by the way people traditionally made a living, which in turn is shaped by ecology. In East Asia it’s all about rice. Rice requires massive amounts of communal work. Not just backbreaking planting and harvesting, which are done in rotation because the entire village is needed to harvest each family’s rice.”

- Robert M. Sapolsky -

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Cultural Dimensions: Collectivism/Individualism (G. Hofstede)

Collectivist Cultures
Include (but are not limited to) most Latin-American, Southern European, Middle-Easterner, Asian, African countries, tribal communities around the world.

Individualistic Cultures
Include (but are not limited to) most Western societies: English-, German speaking countries, Scandinavian countries, other central and northern European countries.
Individualistic Cultures: I

Self-concepts are based on personal traits rather than social roles ("I am kind" vs "I am a good son" typical of collectivist societies)

Focus is on personal priorities and self-realization. People emphasize individual freedom and achievements

Independence and self-reliance are highly valued. People are expected to take care of themselves and a few loved ones and to take responsibility for the outcomes

Private life is important and unlikely to be "intruded" by other members of the groups individuals belong to
People in individualistic cultures (typically Western societies) appear to be happier than those in collectivist cultures.

Confrontation is accepted, people are encouraged to express their opinions and to be assertive.

Happiness is reserved for those who are successful or perceive themselves as such.

Work is seen as a key factor to happiness in terms of pleasant feelings, satisfying judgments, self-validation.
Collectivist Cultures: WE

Group oriented (family, extended family, tribe, organization, etc). The group takes care of individuals, individuals are loyal to the group they belong to.

Collective interest is more important than personal interest. The focus is on preserving harmony and respecting hierarchy within the community.

Members of collective cultures are highly likely to practice extreme self-control, since they are fully aware that their words and actions have an impact on others.

One’s identity and reputation is defined in terms of social roles (“I am a good son”).

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Cultural Dimensions: Collectivism/Individualism (G. Hofstede)

Collectivist Cultures: WE

Relationships are usually formed within the group members belong to, often inaccessible to outsiders.

Non-verbal communication is common and aimed at preventing a “loss of face” (public humiliation and embarrassment) from happening.

Selflessness and conformity are valued, personal achievements are likely to be portrayed as a result of external factors rather than personal merit.

Communication does heavily rely on context. “I” is a not commonly used word.

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The Globe study (House & Javidan, 2004) makes a distinction between Institutional and In-group Collectivism:

In-group Collectivism is “the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families”. Societies that score high on In-group Collectivism and (relatively) low on Institutional collectivism can be found in Latin America, in Eastern Europe, in Sub-Saharan Africa, in the Middle East, in Latin Europe.

Institutional Collectivism is “the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action”. Nordic countries (Nordic cluster) are an example of societies that score high on Institutional Collectivism and low on In-group collectivism.
In individualistic societies, the main tool of social control is guilt (note: guilt cultures are also known as dignity cultures).

"Guilt is a feeling that arises when we violate the absolute standards of morality within us, when we violate our conscience. A person may suffer from guilt although no one else knows of his or her misdeed; this feeling of guilt is relieved by confessing the misdeed and making restitution. True guilt cultures rely on an internalized conviction of sin as the enforcer of good behaviour, not, as shame cultures do, on external sanctions. Guilt cultures emphasize punishment and forgiveness as ways of restoring the moral order".

(Paul Hiebert)
In collectivist societies, the main tool of social control is shame (there are however significant differences between face cultures and honor-shame cultures. See next slide for details).

“Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism, an acute personal chagrin at our failure to live up to our obligations and the expectations others have of us. In true shame-oriented cultures, every person has a place and a duty in the society. One maintains self-respect, not by choosing what is good rather than what is evil, but by choosing what is expected of one. Personal desires are sunk in the collective expectation. Those who fail will often turn their aggression against themselves instead of using violence against others. By punishing themselves they maintain their self-respect before others, for shame cannot be relieved, as guilt can be, by confession and atonement. Shame is removed and honour restored only when a person does what the society expects of him or her in the situation”.

(Paul Hiebert)
A 2010 study suggest that while in Confucian-based collectivist societies people behave modestly in order to preserve harmony within the group, "honor based collectivism does not highlight modesty but rather emphasizes the public nature of self-worth and the need to protect and maintain honor through positive presentation of oneself and in-group members".

Shame/face societies are typical of the Confucian-Asia cluster.

Honor-shame societies are typical of the Mediterranean region, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, South-East Asia, Eastern Europe.

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Hofstede, Geert (2001). *Culture's Consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA


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