

cultures. The growing globalisation and cultural pluralisation of societies and enmeshment in a cyberworld that transcends time, distance, place, and national borders call for broadening the scope of cross-cultural analyses. The issues of interest center on how national and global forces interact to shape the nature of cultural life.

## INTRODUCTION

The present article addresses human functioning in cultural embeddedness from the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory. To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances. Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three modes of agency: direct personal agency; proxy agency that relies on others to act on one's behalf to secure desired outcomes; and collective agency exercised through group action. In personal agency exercised individually, people bring their influence to bear directly on themselves and their environment in managing their lives. In many spheres of life people do not have direct control over the social conditions and institutional practices that affect their everyday lives. Under these circumstances, they seek their well-being and valued outcomes through the exercise of proxy agency. In this socially mediated mode of agency, people try to get those who have access to resources, expertise or who wield influence and power to act at their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire. People do not live their lives autonomously. Many of the things they seek are achievable only through socially interdependent effort. Hence, they have to pool their knowledge, skills, and resources, provide mutual support, form alliances, and work together to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own.

Successful functioning requires an agentic blend of these different modes of agency. The relative contribution of individual, proxy, and collective modes to the agentic mix may vary cross-culturally. But all of these agentic modes need to be enlisted to make it through the day, regardless of the culture in which one happens to reside. People's efforts to manage their everyday lives cannot be reduced to polarities that arbitrarily partition human agency into individual and collective forms. Cross-cultural variations are differences in relative emphasis in agentic patterning rather than cultural exclusivity of agency to individual or collective modes.

Among the mechanisms of human agency none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects by one's actions, otherwise one has little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Self-efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes. They affect whether individuals think in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways; how well they motivate themselves and persevere