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Disregard for Outsiders

A Cultural Comparison

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The place of outsiders—strangers and otherwise irrelevant others—in the cultural logic of a society holds likely consequences for social perception. The authors begin by describing how outsiders are viewed in Western, Japanese, and Chinese societies. Comparing the three groups, it is proposed that the Chinese are most strongly disposed to disregard or ignore those outside their networks of affiliation and practical involvement. To test this claim experimentally, we assessed the incidental memory of Canadians, Japanese, and Chinese students for social targets of differing situational relevance to the perceiver. As expected, the Chinese showed greater memory advantage than the other groups for primary over nonprimary targets, but only when provided with an explicit justification for exclusive attention.

Keywords: *social memory; selective attention; strangers*

Perception of the social world requires conceptual organization (Sellars, 1997). Without the categories, distinctions, and assimilative reductions whereby the social field is habitually structured in experience, we would be faced with an indeterminate reality that provides no bearings—no meaningful position from which to act and interact (Bourdieu, 1977). One of the defining features of urban life today is the extent to which the milieu consists of persons who share no involvements or ties whatsoever. The modern metropolitan moves in a sea of "contemporaries" rather than "consociates" (Schutz, 1967), vague and peripheral persons whose subjectivity attracts no attention, interest, or concern. Simmel

(1971) famously characterized the relational status of such persons as a synthesis of physical nearness and psychological remoteness. The category of the stranger or unfamiliar other is central to the conceptual habitus of city dwellers everywhere, but its deeper meaning within the cultural matrix of a society differs around the world. In this article, we suggest that this deeper cultural significance holds important implications for social interest, specifically, the tendency to attend to persons with whom one has no attributive connection or practical engagement. We compare three broad cultural populations in this regard— Canadians, Japanese, and Chinese. We argue that ethnographic portraits of the Chinese point to a greater tendency, relative to the two other groups, to disregard those in the social field who fall outside the orbit of affiliation or involvement. To confirm this difference, we compare the three ethnic groups using an experimental procedure designed to gauge attention to social targets of differing situational relevance. We begin with a brief discussion of the cultural casting of unfamiliars in Western, Japanese, and Chinese societies.

Western Egalitarianism and the Masked Stranger

Whatever their cultural, historical, and economic differences, the societies of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe were all profoundly influenced by the revolutionary egalitarianism of the Enlightenment. The assertion that all individuals are of inborn dignity and equal moral status—and hold the same rights accordingly—ran through the political and ethical treatises of writers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Paine. The transformative legacy of their ideas for the structure and ideology of Western societies continues to be felt today. Aside from the codification of egalitarian principles into laws, policies, and other institutional forms, the moral force of the commitment to basic equality is sustained in both informal practices and popular culture. As an example, consider the commonplace device in Western literature, drama, and film of the protagonist who is not what she seems to be. That is, she appears masked or misrepresented by accidental or imposed circumstances only to be revealed in her true identity near the end of the narrative. Such characters serve as allegorical reminders that a person's value and significance should not be confused with role, class, status, social connections, or outward appearance. Similarly, the archetypal Western theme of the friendship or romance that transcends a sharp and vigorously defended social divide supports the egalitarian belief that it is one's individuality, not one's social position, function, or assigned identity that matters in authentic human relations. Consistent with this notion, employees in Western countries, who view their work as mere financial necessity rather than the source of valued identity, often adopt an emphatically role-distanced style and demeanor that proclaims to others that "I am not my job!" (Goffman, 1961).

How is the ideological commitment to egalitarianism expressed in the attitude toward strangers? To begin with, it has long been noted that modern pluralistic Western societies are *other-directed* in that their citizens are vigilantly attuned to the thoughts, preferences, and actions of others as guides to right or valued conduct (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney, 1961). The lack of explicit class and status lines puts strangers ambiguously within this wide circle of concern, or at least not categorically outside of it. Furthermore, the egalitarian distrust of role, status, and outward appearance as evidence of character and genuine individual identity supports the belief that those whose surface characteristics mark them

as unrelated to one's present concerns may reveal themselves to be important nonetheless. Strangers, then, occupy an intriguing space of potential but unknown relevance and value in Western social life. They can be ignored without social cost in most instances, but their true value, identity, and significance cannot be discerned at a glance. For this reason, they tend to attract a modicum of interest and attention, even in highly impersonalized urban settings such as subways and shopping malls. How does this compare with the position of strangers in Japanese and Chinese social life?

The Japanese Stranger as Generalized Moral Gaze

Any account of Japanese patterns of social behavior must accommodate the vertical structuring of relationships in that society (Nakane, 1970). The binding commitments of hierarchy established early within the household (*ie*) and kinship group (*dozoku*) are reproduced to various degrees in all institutional forms. This "contingency logic" of mutual dependency and reciprocally defined identities (Lebra, 2004) is moralized around spatial metaphors of inside and outside, above and below, back and front, and the correlated dimensions of power, obligation, formality, and purity. At first blush, the stratifying force of such a culture suggests a dismissive and oblivious view of those standing outside the bounds of affiliation. Nakane (1970) suggests as much in describing Japanese social behavior.

> The consciousness of "them" and "us" is strengthened and aggravated to the point that extreme contrasts in human behavior can develop in the same society, and anyone outside "our" people ceases to be considered human. Ridiculous situations occur, such as that of the man who will shove a stranger out of the way to take an empty seat, but will then, no matter how tired he is, give up the seat to someone he knows, particularly if that someone is a superior in his company. (p. 20)

Further consideration, however, reveals that the stranger or anonymous contemporary is not without moral significance in Japanese culture. This is due to the inclusive nature of Japanese deontic commitments, which are taken as applying equally to all Japanese, not only those within one's own social frame. Smith (1983) points to the remarkable frequency with which the Japanese themselves comment on the uniformity of their society. This self-perception, he argues, does not imply blindness to the considerable diversity and individuality that exists in Japan, but, rather, is a matter of moral focus or emphasis. That is, all individuals are considered to be equally constrained by and realized within a common social order organized around principles of hierarchy, reciprocity, formality, and harmony. The moral and practical boundaries of this order apply to everyone; they are not conditional on perspective, position, or choice. Even the marked generation gap in contemporary Japan is more revealing of the accountability of the young to the principled normative commitments of parents and grandparents than of a pluralistic recognition of separate and incommensurable worldviews. These commitments constitute the basic *grammar* of Japanese society, the core of which has survived more than 60 years of social transformation, economic development, and Western influence. The individuality of character and style that is cultivated and at times even celebrated pertains mainly to the distinctive or diacritical manner in which culturally sanctioned, collectively valued ends are pursued through means of

institutionalized identities and skilled hobbies (Reischauer, 1977). Other aspects of indi-viduality are given scant attention beyond criticism and censure where they happen to threaten social harmony (Hendry, 2003). Thus, implicit in the Japanese understanding of other Japanese is the bracketing out of irrelevant individuality and amplification of the shared moral awareness that results from socialization within a tight and rank-sensitive social structure. This assumption of fundamental uniformity explains why the judgment of the indefinite "person" (*hito*) is a matter of great concern to the Japanese. As Kuwayama (1992) points out,

> Japanese parents often appeal to the imagined reactions of hito in order to sensitize their chil-dren to the opinions and feelings of others. In Japanese, hito is the most abstractly conceived category of persons. It does not indicate any specific individual . . . This referential ambiguity makes hito function as a powerful source of sanctions across diverse situations. (p. 143)

Anonymous others, then, are far from irrelevant to the social concerns of the Japanese. Face-to-face interaction with them may well be avoided because of ignorance of their back-ground and social position, and the resulting lack of a relational frame for appropriate conduct. But they remain objects of interest nonetheless. In fact, a person lacking a clear social identity may attract greater interest—curiosity, excitement, suspicion, or fear—in many Japanese contexts (Doi, 1981). This is less so for the Chinese.

The Obscurity of the Chinese Outsider

Fei (1992) describes the defining feature of Chinese society as its "differential mode of association." Individuals move simultaneously within multiple social spheres, each with its own ethical prescriptions for personal and collective relations. Fei's contrast of Confucian thought with Western egalitarianism in this regard is striking:

> In a society based on a Western organizational mode of association, people in the same orga-nization apply universal moral principles to themselves and so regard each other as equals. This kind of thinking, however, is exactly what Mencius most opposed. He said, "That things are unequal is part of their nature . . . If you reduce them to the same level, it will only bring confusion to the empire." (p. 79)

Thus, moral discriminations and normative patterns are situation-centered. There is no binding ethical inclusiveness or solidarity that transcends the separate social spheres, as was described for the Japanese. This leaves Chinese strangers entirely outside the moral space of both formal and informal social relations. They hold neither judgmental nor prag-matic relevance. As Hsu (1971) puts it,

> [The Chinese] can afford not to be curious or anxious about [strangers]; he is unlikely to have the urge to improve or help them; they are no threat to him unless they engage in physical acts of aggression against him. He can even afford to ignore them completely. He can meet them or he can leave them. Hence the Chinese, throughout all their history, have developed . . . few secondary groups outside of their kinship boundary. (p. 30)

Bond (1991) offers a similar characterization:

> These differences arise mainly from an indifference to strangers and those who are not con-
> nected by blood or long association . . . Chinese are reluctant to talk with strangers and will
> rarely initiate a conversation with someone they do not know. They communicate mainly with
> people they know, and within this circle of acquaintances, with family members in particular.
> Given that Chinese social needs are met by these existing associations, they see no need to
> interact with others. They ignore other people . . . The Chinese response is always based on
> the nature of a preexisting, specific relationship. Strangers have no place in this social logic.
> (pp. 36-57)

Consistent with this aloofness is the extensive reliance on go-betweens or intermediaries
(*zhongjian ren*) when engaging with outsiders in both formal and informal contexts.

The following report serves as a dramatic illustration of the Chinese orientation toward
outsiders. On December 18, 2006, *China Daily* reported on the decision of Shanghai
government officials to deploy teams of volunteers trained to smile at strangers. The offi-
cials felt that, without exposure to appropriate models, the populace would fail to present
a friendly and welcoming face to the thousands of tourists expected in Shanghai during
World Expo in 2010. A few months earlier, the report adds, a similar effort to foster warmth
among strangers was thwarted when volunteers offering "free hugs" to strangers in Beijing
were detained by police for questioning.

Given its distinctive history, economy, and demographics, Hong Kong differs from
the mainland in many cultural respects. However, the basic social fabric of familism and
shifting *guanxi* networks is much the same (Stockman, 2000). Reviewing the relevant
empirical literature, Leung (1996) describes Hong Kong culture as a "amoral, utilitarian
ethos" dominated by the pursuit of upward mobility and financial prosperity. Consistent
with this characterization, a 1985 survey revealed that 85% of Hong Kong respondents
agreed that the most important goal in life is to make as much money as possible without
breaking the law (Lau & Kuan, 1985). This pragmatic materialism leaves even less time
and interest for dealing with those beyond the margins of one's kin and practical networks.
The central concern with face management becomes a further impediment to effective,
practical communication with strangers, who are avoided and ignored accordingly. The
formal distance that separates one from strangers would make the rare effort at conversa-
tion too constrained, indirect, and ritualistic to serve any practical function. This tendency
is captured by Agassi and Jarvie (1969) in their colorful portrait of Hong Kong society:

> The only people with whom one can properly establish communication are those one knows
> intimately. In this the society is personalist: in order to communicate with someone you must
> know him well enough to be able to ignore his social persona. Where communication may
> become necessary one had better see to it that one deals with those one knows, one way or
> another. (p. 145)

Furthermore, the social personae of strangers are not in most cases immediately clear
or certain. Attending to and engaging with such indeterminate others would be seen as
presumptuous, risky, and worrisome by the "high-context" Chinese (Gudykunst & Kim,
1992; Hall, 1976)—with little expectation of substantive or phatic benefit.

It would appear, then, that strangers not only stand outside the shifting "relative demarcations" (Wang, 1994) of Chinese social networks, but have no moral presence or practical significance and attract little interest accordingly. Although not invisible, they are barely attended to when noticed at all.

The above cultural descriptions support the general claim that the Chinese are less likely than are both Westerners and Japanese to attend to those perceived to be unfamiliar and irrelevant to one's immediate social concerns. At the extreme end, these would be strangers situated on the periphery of the social field, although relevance is best viewed as a continuum reflecting degree of affiliation or involvement. The contrast between Westerners and Japanese is less clear-cut in this regard, and we see no reason to claim that one of these groups is more attentive on the whole to irrelevant others. We sought to test our hypothesis of distinctive Chinese disregard by comparing Canadian, Japanese, and Chinese students on their tendency to remember the details of differentially relevant social targets. Incidental memory was used to index prior attention to those details. Relative to the other groups, the Chinese were expected to attend less to, and therefore show weaker memory for, social targets that were not of primary relevance.

Method

Participants

The total sample included 240 participants across three nations. The Canadian sample consisted of 80 (40 women and 40 men) students of Western European ethnic background enrolled at the University of Toronto. The Hong Kong sample consisted of 80 (40 women and 40 men) students of Chinese ethnicity enrolled at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (majority) or the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (minority).[1] The Japanese sample consisted of 80 (40 women and 40 men) of Japanese ethnicity enrolled at the University of Tokyo.[2] The mean age was 19.66 years (range = 17 to 24) with no significant (α = .05) disparity across gender or ethnicity. Participants were tested individually and received a modest cash payment in exchange for their time.

Procedure

Textual content was presented in English to Canadian and Hong Kong participants, all of whom were sufficiently competent in reading at the level required by the procedure, and in Japanese for Japanese participants. Considerable care was taken with the English-to-Japanese translation, including back-translation checks and adjustments. The consent form invited the participant to take part in a study of social perception. No hint was given that a memory test would be involved. Testing was conducted on a desktop computer. The procedure consisted of three parts, each described in turn below.

Value ranking. Relying on real-world social identities of differential relevance to participants would have made it difficult to conduct well-controlled cross-cultural comparisons. The use of known classes, types, or categories of persons to represent ordered levels of relevance presupposes that the sociocultural significance of each class, type, or category is

similar for Canadian, Chinese, and Japanese students. Such invariance is highly unlikely. We therefore adopted an alternative approach of manufacturing levels of social relevance ad hoc. This was accomplished by providing the participant an opportunity to form a social tie on the basis of endorsed values. First, Schwartz's (1992, 1996) 10 universal values (power, hedonism, achievement, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security) were listed on the monitor screen. The list order was randomized for each participant. Appearing alongside each value was Schwartz's (1996) single-sentence definition (e.g., hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself). The participant was asked to select the value that is "the most important to you as a guiding principle, aim, or focus in your life." After the prime value was selected using the mouse, it disappeared and the remaining nine reappeared on the screen without gaps. The participant then selected the most important of the remaining values. This method of successive selection continued until all 10 values had been effectively ranked. The complete rank-ordered list, described as a *value profile*, appeared on the screen for the participant to examine. Afterward, two new rank-ordered lists of the same 10 values were presented side-by-side. These were described as the value profiles of two other students—identified only as AW and LH—who were the same age, gender, and ethnicity (Western European Canadian, Chinese, or Japanese) as the participant. The participant was asked to inspect the two profiles "to try to get an overall sense of what's important to each [student] in his/her life." The two lists were covertly tied to the participant's own value profile. One profile reproduced the participant's own choices with the exception that the participant's third- and fourth-ranked values had been transposed, as had the eighth- and ninth-ranked values. The other profile was created by reversing the order of the participant's own profile before making the above transpositions. This resulted in two profiles that were clearly similar and dissimilar, respectively, to the participant's own profile. The minor transpositions were used to avert suspicion that the correspondence was contrived. The left–right order of the similar and dissimilar value profiles was determined randomly for each participant, as was the assignment of the names AW and LH to the profiles. After viewing the profiles, participants were asked to indicate which of the two students they would prefer to live with for a year.

The above procedure provided a rational basis (personal values) for making a choice that would render one student more *connected* and relevant than the other to the participant's thoughts and concerns in the situation. Accordingly, the chosen student was deemed the primary target and the unchosen student the secondary target. Another purpose of the value ranking was to provide a rough projection of cultural orientation that might help in interpreting any demonstrated differences in social attention. Although the 10 values are too broad and general to index the tendency for social disregard, they at least provide a crude portrait of cultural differentiation.

Memory set. Participants then learned that they were about to view the results of a word-association exercise that had involved the chosen student, the unchosen student, and a third student, NS, who was described as the same gender, ethnicity, and age as the other two. NS was included as a target of tertiary relevance, one with no connection to the prior activities and concerns of participants. This target was intended to represent the complete irrelevance and marginality of a stranger. Participants received one of two sets of viewing instructions. In the directed attention condition, they were told that (a) the results would give them an

opportunity to learn more about the student they had chosen and (b) their task was to try to learn more about this student from the responses he/she gave. In the undirected attention condition, they were told that (a) the results would give them an opportunity to learn more about the three students involved in the exercise and (b) they were free to attend to whatever interested them in the results. The differences were aimed at creating one condition where the task explicitly provided a reason or justification for exclusive attention to the primary target and another condition where no such reason was provided. This allowed us to examine whether a heightened Chinese tendency for disregard, if confirmed, requires a purposive *warrant* for its expression. That is, any distinguishing degree of exclusivity may be limited to contexts of social perception that provide a focus defined by one's immediate practical purposes (e.g., searching for a friend in a crowd, vigilance for a threatening person, monitoring of one's child in a large playgroup, etc.). Alternatively, the proclivity for exclusive attention may extend to situations where there is no practical justification beyond the greater preexisting relevance of certain types of persons for the individual.

The group exercise was described as involving a tester who read aloud a series of common nouns. Participants were told that, for each noun, each of the three students (AW, LH, and NS) had been required to speak the first associated common noun that came to mind. The students' order of responses had been varied across trials and no student had been allowed to give the same response as another to a test word. There were 32 trials (test words). Participants were told that they would be presented with the complete results one trial at a time.

The results of each trial—the test word and the three responses—were presented to participants for 2 seconds with 1 second of blank screen between presentations. The order of presentations was randomized for each participant. Each response word was identified by who had said it (e.g., *AW: popcorn*). The vertical order of the three responses was determined randomly by the computer program for each presentation. The responses themselves were randomly selected for each presentation from a larger set of six common nouns that were all clearly associated with the test word.[3] The remaining three were used as foils in the memory test, described below. All nouns were 1 to 4 syllables in length.

Recognition memory test. Social attention was assessed indirectly as recognition memory for the responses of the three targets. Greater interest in and attention to any particular target should be reflected in better memory for that target's responses. The first and last six presentations were not used in testing as a guard against primacy and recency effects. Memory for the content of the remaining 20 presentations was tested in 60 forced-choice test trials (20 original test words × 3 student responses). The sequence of the trials was randomized for each participant. On each trial, a previously viewed test word appeared above two of its six associated nouns. One of the two nouns had been presented previously as a student's response to the test word; the other had not been seen before. The participant was required to decide which was the student's response, guessing if necessary. To support memory, the student was identified in the question (e.g., *What was AW's response?*). This task reduces to a simple old–new discrimination, controlling for response criterion through the use of forced choice. Anything more specific, such as remembering which of two previously viewed responses had been made by a particular student, would have been too demanding in the present context. The test consisted of 20 trials for each of the three

students. The number of correct choices (0-20) for each indicated how well the participant remembered the responses of the primary, secondary, or tertiary target.

Afterward, participants were debriefed on the nature and purpose of the study. The entire session lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Results

Recognition Memory

Preliminary analyses revealed that although women showed slightly better memory than men overall, gender did not qualify any of the other results. Because the factorial design was perfectly balanced on gender, this result justified dropping it as a factor from the analyses reported below. Similarly, whether participants chose the student with the similar versus dissimilar value profile as the primary target (84% chose the similar target) made little difference for the pattern of results. Specifically, eliminating those who chose the dissimilar target did not change this pattern. Accordingly, the choice variable was also dropped from the analyses reported below.

To compare memory performance across groups, we conducted a 3 (ethnic group: Western European Canadian, Chinese, Japanese) × 2 (attention: undirected, directed) × 3 (target: primary, secondary, tertiary) ANOVA, with the last variable modeled as a repeated factor. The cell means are graphed in Figure 1. The results revealed significant effects for ethnic group, $F(2, 234) = 14.73$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$; attention, $F(1, 234) = 22.23$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$; target, $F(2, 468) = 181.15$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .44$; target × ethnic group, $F(4, 468) = 4.76$, $p = .0009$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$; target × attention, $F(2, 468) = 105.13$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$; and target × ethnic group × attention, $F(4, 468) = 4.37$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. The significant three-way interaction qualifies all other effects and was decomposed to reveal the pattern of simple effects.

We began by testing the target × ethnic group interaction separately for participants in the two attention conditions. The interaction was not present in the undirected condition, $F(4, 234) = .75$, $p = .56$. Only the main effects for target, $F(2, 234) = 5.53$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, and ethnic group, $F(2, 117) = 4.88$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, were significant here. Specifically, the Japanese showed better memory ($M = 78\%$) on the whole than did both the Canadians ($M = 73\%$), $F(1, 117) = 7.54$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and the Chinese ($M = 73\%$), $F(1, 117) = 7.11$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, whereas the latter two groups did not differ. Also, the responses of the primary target were remembered better ($M = 77\%$) than those of both the secondary target ($M = 74\%$), $F(1, 117) = 7.02$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and the tertiary target ($M = 73\%$), $F(1, 117) = 8.69$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, whereas memory for the latter two targets was similar, $F(1, 117) = .18$, $p = .67$. Most important, the absence of interaction reflects the invariance of the pattern of primary target dominance across the three groups.

A different picture emerged in the directed attention condition. The target × ethnic group interaction was highly significant, $F(4, 234) = 7.95$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, as were the main effects for target, $F(2, 234) = 265.24$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .69$, and ethnic group, $F(2, 117) = 12.59$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. As in the undirected condition, the overall memory of the Japanese ($M = 74\%$) was superior to both the Chinese ($M = 63\%$), $F(1, 117) = 24.61$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$, and, albeit less clearly, the Canadians ($M = 70\%$), $F(1, 117) = 3.34$,

Figure 1
Recognition Memory for Target Responses as a Function
of Ethnic Group, Attention, and Target Relevance
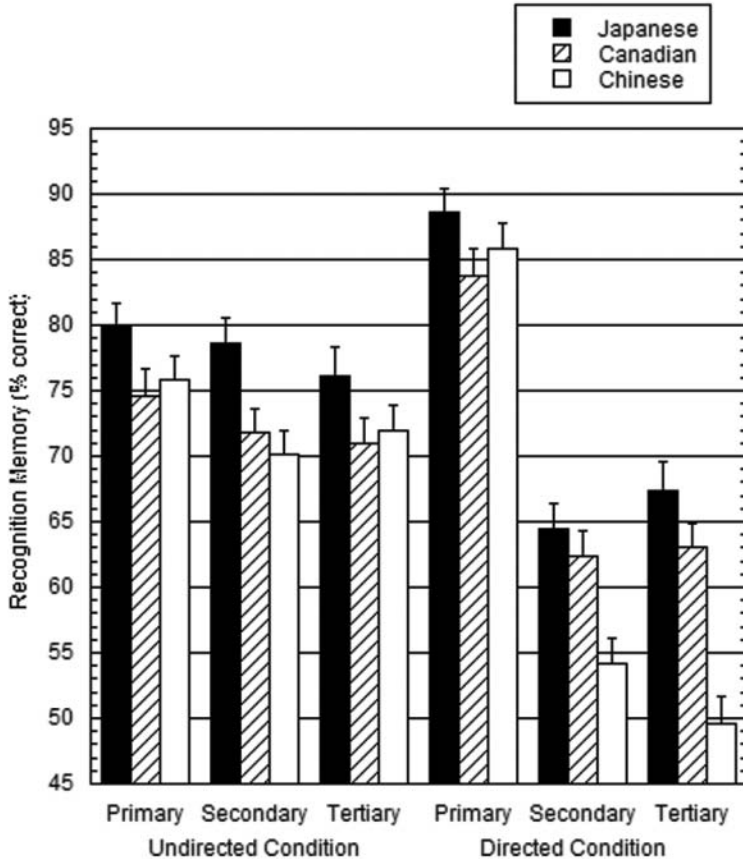
Note: Standard errors are shown above the means.

$p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Also, the Canadians showed better memory overall than the Chinese, $F(1, 117) = 9.82$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. The target × ethnic group interaction, however, pointed to a more complex and interesting pattern underlying these gross differences. The interaction was due to a differently shaped memory profile across targets for the Chinese than for both the Canadians, $F(2, 234) = 12.31$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, and the Japanese, $F(2, 234) = 11.11$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. The shape of the memory profile was similar for the latter two groups, $F(2, 234) = .42$, $p = .66$. Although all three groups remembered the responses of the primary target better than those of both the secondary and tertiary targets, this difference was clearly greater for the Chinese. Specifically, simple effects testing confirmed that the memory advantage of the primary over the secondary target was greater for the Chinese (86% and 54% for primary and secondary targets, respectively) than for both the

Canadians (84% and 62%), $F(1, 117) = 11.46$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and the Japanese (89% and 65%), $F(1, 117) = 6.19$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Similarly, the memory advantage of the primary over the tertiary target was greater for the Chinese (86% and 50% for primary and tertiary targets, respectively) then for both the Canadians (84% and 63%), $F(1, 117) = 20.67$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, and the Japanese (89% and 67%), $F(1, 117) = 19.35$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. There was no memory advantage for the secondary over the tertiary target, $F(1, 117) = .07$, $p = .79$, with the equivalence holding similarly across groups, $F(2, 117) = 3.20$, $p = .07$. Examination of the 95% confidence limits around the cell means revealed that the only performance not significantly greater than chance (50% correct) was the memory of Chinese participants for the responses of the tertiary target in the directed condition. Remarkably, in this particular case, memory provided no evidence that the responses had been viewed at all!

The Chinese, then, remembered the responses of the primary target as well as did both other ethnic groups in the directed condition. However, they showed weaker memory than the other groups for the responses of both the secondary and tertiary targets. This pattern is consistent with a greater tendency for exclusive attention to the primary target by the Chinese in the directed condition.

Language and Memory

The use of English materials with Hong Kong Chinese participants deserves some critical consideration. Might the distinctive performance of that group stem from the fact that their preferred language was in most cases Chinese and not English? Were they handicapped relative to the other groups by the imposed language of the memory set? Such an explanation cannot easily accommodate the asymmetry of the results, with the Chinese diverging from the Canadians and Japanese in relative disregard only in the directed condition. Nor could it provide a straightforward account of their comparable memory for the primary target but weaker memory for the nonprimary targets in that condition. One more involved possibility is that Chinese participants exposed to the English memory set were motivated for linguistic reasons to conserve their attentional resources when an exclusive focus on the primary target was justified by the task instructions. Such conservation would have impaired memory for the nonprimary targets only. To address this possibility and, more generally, the significance of language for the critical memory results, we created a Chinese-language version of the procedure. We then tested a new gender-balanced sample ($N = 30$) of Hong Kong Chinese participants in the directed condition of the study. We compared the memory results of the original group of Chinese participants in the directed condition, all of whom had completed the procedure in English, with those of the new group. This was accomplished by conducting a 2 (language: Chinese, English) × 3 (target: primary, secondary, tertiary) ANOVA, with the last variable modeled as a repeated factor. The results were clear. There was no difference across languages in gross memory for the targets, $F(1, 68) = 1.00$, $p = .32$. More important, there was no difference across languages in the distinctive memory profile for the three targets, $F(2, 136) = 1.48$, $p = .23$. In short, Chinese participants in the critical, directed condition showed virtually identical memory performance in Chinese and English. Thus, their relative disregard for nonprimary targets in that condition cannot be attributed to the language of presentation.

Table 1
Relative Preferences for Schwartz's (1992) 10 Universal Values by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group		
Western European Canadian	Hong Kong Chinese	Japanese
Self-direction[a]	Self-direction[a]	Self-direction[a]
Achievement[ab1]	Security[a]	Security[ab]
Security[ab]	*Universalism*[ab1]	*Achievement*[bc12]
Stimulation[bc1]	*Achievement*[bc2]	*Stimulation*[cd2]
Universalism[c1]	Benevolence[cd]	*Conformity*[cd1]
Benevolence[c]	Hedonism[de]	Benevolence[d]
Hedonism[d]	*Stimulation*[def3]	Hedonism[d]
Tradition[de1]	*Tradition*[efg1]	*Universalism*[d2]
Power[ef]	*Conformity*[fg2]	Power[e]
Conformity[f3]	Power[g]	*Tradition*[e2]

Note: Values appear in order of group preference (highest to lowest). Values within the same column with the same superscript letter were not differentially preferred by that group at $p < .05$. Values in italics are those for which significant group differences were found. For these values, different superscript numbers across columns indicate significant differences in preference.

Value Ranking

The ipsative nature of the ranked values prohibited the use of standard linear models such as MANOVA and ANOVA. To appropriately test for group differences in rankings, an exploded logit model was used (Allison & Christakis, 1994; Chapman & Staelin, 1982). The ranking for security was arbitrarily chosen as the reference category against which all other values were compared in calculating parameter estimates (differences in log odds). Dummy interaction variables were created to represent differences in parameter estimates across groups. An omnibus Wald test for the entire set of interactions revealed significant differences across groups in value preferences, $\chi^2(18) = 96.15$, $p < .0001$. Table 1 shows the 10 values ordered from most to least preferred for each ethnic group, according to the conditional parameter estimates. Significant group differences were as follows. Achievement was preferred more by the Canadians than by the Chinese, $\chi^2(1) = 4.49$, $p = .03$, with the Japanese falling in between and not differing significantly from either group. Stimulation was preferred more by the Canadians than by the Japanese, $\chi^2(1) = 4.81$, $p = .03$, who themselves showed greater preference for this value than did the Chinese, $\chi^2(1) = 6.10$, $p = .01$. Universalism was preferred less by the Japanese than by both the Canadians, $\chi^2(1) = 8.86$, $p = .003$, and the Chinese, $\chi^2(1) = 14.72$, $p = .0001$, the latter groups not differing significantly. Tradition also was preferred less by the Japanese than by both the Canadians, $\chi^2(1) = 7.12$, $p = .008$, and the Chinese, $\chi^2(1) = 9.11$, $p = .003$, the latter groups not differing significantly. Finally, conformity was preferred more by the Japanese than by the Chinese, $\chi^2(1) = 14.04$, $p = .0002$, who themselves showed greater preference for this value than did the Canadians, $\chi^2(1) = 5.11$, $p = .02$.

Although the above pattern of differences is interesting in its own right as a comparative portrait of culturally emphasized values, it provides no insight into the distinctive disregard shown by the Chinese in the directed condition. The Chinese fell above or below both of

the other groups in their value orientation only insomuch as they showed less preference for stimulation—defined as the desire for excitement, novelty, and challenge in life. This value holds no obvious relation to social interest.[4] In summary, then, the analysis of gross values confirmed the cultural separation of the three groups in respect to value orientations, but shed little light on the distinctiveness of Chinese social attention.[5]

Discussion

We began this article by briefly examining Western, Japanese, and Chinese views toward outsiders. Comparative consideration generated the hypothesis that the Chinese are most clearly disposed to disregard or ignore those who appear to be irrelevant to their affiliations and involvements. We are unaware of any empirical study of this hypothesis in the psychological literature. As a first step toward confirmation, we designed an experiment capable of producing social targets differing in their level of situational relevance. The artificiality of this strategy was justified by the need to conduct a relatively pure initial test of group differences. The use of naturalistic, descriptively rich materials would have weakened our ability to draw tight inferences relating social attention to target relevance. Ecological validity was sacrificed for experimental rigor and control. Admittedly, this trade-off should be reversed in future research by examining cross-cultural patterns of social disregard in situ. For present purposes, however, the conservatism of the testing strategy was apropos the unexplored and uncertain nature of the phenomenon. The relative purity of the experimental results provides an unambiguous and compelling warrant for further investigation. We turn now to those results.

The analysis of memory for target responses revealed that all groups attended more to the primary than the secondary and tertiary targets, in both attention conditions. Even when not provided with a practical reason for focusing on the responses of the student they had chosen to live with, participants showed greater interest in that student. This confirms the successful creation of a special connection with the primary target, and more generally, the effective manipulation of situational relevance across targets. Furthermore, the attentional dominance of the chosen student over the other targets was greater in the directed than the undirected condition for all groups, as would be expected. When given no explicit reason to focus on the primary target, participants showed less selective attention, remembering more of the responses of the secondary and tertiary targets. The crucial result, however, was the greater disparity between memory for the primary and the other targets for the Chinese than for the Canadians and Japanese in the directed condition. As predicted, the Chinese were more likely to disregard those who were neither tied to them through past choice nor pertinent for immediate practical purposes. They showed the most exclusive social attention, to the extreme that they did not attend at all to the responses of the tertiary target. Important, however, this difference appeared only in the directed condition, where the instructions gave all participants sufficient reason to focus on the primary target. That is, the Chinese showed no more selectivity than the other groups when there was no task-related justification for doing so. This asymmetry suggests that the greater Chinese tendency to disregard irrelevant others is expressed only when attention is channeled by the telic context of social perception. Such channeling, it should be recognized,

is more often the case than not. Strangers are most often encountered while we are engaged in purposive activity, while we are busy *doing something* as a means to an end rather than idly surveying the surrounding milieu. Thus, the greater Chinese disregard of marginal or irrelevant others can be expected to find frequent expression in the rapid flux of urban life. The results, however, also suggest that this cultural distinction is absent in situations where attention is not preempted by strategic concerns, but is free to encompass the social field without practical constraint. Thus, it does not reflect an inflexible and generalized narrowness in social interest. So, for example, the Chinese may be less likely than Canadians or Japanese to take close notice of unfamiliar passersby when engaged in discussion with a friend, but no different from those groups when walking alone and unrushed.

There is no reason to suppose that Chinese disregard for outsiders manifests a broader tendency toward focal exclusivity in perception. In fact, the Chinese have been characterized as more naturally disposed than Westerners toward peripheral awareness and *holistic* perception of complex stimuli in a number of nonsocial contexts (Nisbett, 2003). Thus, our arguments pertain to Chinese social behavior only; they should not be misread as claims about how the Chinese experience the world in general. The same perceptual or cognitive dispositions need not—and often do not—apply uniformly across the length and breadth of the cultural lifeworld. One distinct social domain to which disregard for outsiders might extend, however, is ingroup–outgroup relations. That is, the Chinese might also be distinctively exclusive in attending to those with whom they share a social identity, disregarding those with whom they do not. The dynamics of this possible expression, including those arising from instances where the practical relevance and feature-based similarity of a social target are at odds, are deserving of future investigation.

The tendency of the Japanese to remember target responses slightly better on the whole than did the other groups requires some mention. Recall that the textual materials were presented in Japanese to the Japanese, whereas the Chinese and Canadians received English text. As mentioned, the translation required substitution of many of the English nouns by suitable Japanese alternatives. These substitutions may have been responsibility for the superior performance of the Japanese. Motivational differences are another possibility. In any case, the crucial results in the study were the group differences in memory profile across targets, not differences in overall performance. The general superiority of the Japanese, whatever its source, is irrelevant for interpreting the greater disregard of nonprimary targets relative to the primary target by the Chinese.

Psychologists are often faulted by other social scientists for overlooking social-structural, political, and demographic explanations when comparing behavior across groups. An obvious candidate to consider here is population density. Perhaps those living in highly crowded urban areas become less socially distractible over time and are therefore better able to disregard outsiders when otherwise engaged. Although plausible, this possibility does not offer a competing explanation of the results. The 2006 population density of Tokyo was more than double that of Hong Kong overall, which was in turn roughly one-and-a-half times that of Toronto.[6] This ordering does not align with the group differences found. A second demographic concern is the exclusive sampling of university students to test what were described as culturally conditioned differences in the behavioral tendencies of

individuals. The privileged status and distinctive subculture of university students imply that they do not occupy a modal position within the intracultural spectrum that describes any national or ethnocultural group. This same commonality, however, allows for cultural comparisons that highlight the significance of *subjective culture* rather than disparities in socioeconomic and demographic conditions. Thus, reliance on student samples is a double-edged sword: the loss in cultural typicality is often offset by cleaner and more conservative behavioral comparisons.

We end by drawing attention to the relevance of the findings for the tradition of East-West contrasts that continues to dominate the cross-cultural psychological literature. Recall that the distinctive profiles of the three ethnic groups on basic value preferences did not account for the demonstrated differences in social disregard. The former level of description was simply too coarse to capture the specific cultural characteristic described by the latter. Clearly, then, no appeal to even grosser, more polysemous constructs such as individualism and collectivism, independence and interdependence, or egocentrism and sociocentrism, could have generated the comparative insights that motivated this research. The Japanese and Chinese are equally "interdependent," whatever that is taken to mean exactly in the abstract, in their social relations. This equivalence, however, is mute for revealing the substantive differences in how outsiders fit into the distinctive cultural lifeworld of each society. More generally, we suggest that the explication of culture *on the ground*—the concepts, beliefs, practices, and social forms that constitute a way of life and system of meaning—requires greater ethnographic differentiation than that provided by a handful of stock binary labels that have outlived their utility for advancing psychology's cultural turn. We hope that the present study, whatever its limitations as an entry point into a complex phenomenon, illustrates the advantages of a higher-resolution approach.

Notes

1. Preliminary testing revealed that participants from the two Hong Kong universities did not differ significantly on any of the dependent variables. Their institutional affiliation is therefore ignored in the analyses reported.

2. Exact parity across national samples was achieved by running participants until each ethnic group × gender × experimental condition cell contained $n = 20$ useable observations.

3. A strict English-to-Japanese translation of the test words and responses (all common, short, single-word English nouns) would have created overly complex Japanese semantic equivalents in many cases. Therefore, it was necessary to replace many of the English nouns with Japanese alternatives. To create a memory set that was comparable on the whole to the English version, only common Japanese nouns of 2 to 4 *hiragana* syllables were used.

4. One might argue that those who value social novelty would show greater interest in strangers and others outside the orbit of practical concern. However, this is a debatable and hardly obvious implication not worth pursuing here.

5. Again, the results for Chinese participants did not depend on the language of presentation. The value preferences of the supplementary participants ($N = 30$) who completed the procedure in Chinese did not differ from those of the original participants who completed the procedure in English: omnibus Wald test $\chi^2(9) = 5.96$, $p = .74$.

6. Tokyo = 13,786/km^2 (www.toukei.metro.tokyo.jp/tnenkan/2006/tn06qyte0510b.htm); Hong Kong SAR = 6,272/km^2 (www.britannica.com/new-multimedia/pdf/wordat089.pdf); Toronto = 3,972/km^2 (www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/popdwell/Tables.cfm); all retrieved May 21, 2008.

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