

Wishing for Change in Japan and Canada

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Abstract Japanese and Canadian university students were compared on the changes they wanted in their lives. Contrary to their characterization as self-effacingly relational and group-minded, Japanese were no more likely than Canadians to wish for social or collective goods. Rather, Japanese were more likely than Canadians to wish for money or material goods, and less likely than Canadians to wish for better family relations, increased self-understanding, and improved academic performance. Whether these findings reflect dissimilar cultural priorities, unequal opportunities and constraints, or both, is discussed.

Keywords Desired changes · Wishes · Cultural differences

1 Introduction

What we want is as revealing of our cultural commitments as what we actively pursue. The objects and ends we desire for ourselves and others involve discriminations of moral, aesthetic, and practical value, reflecting both the character of our society and our place within it (Bourdieu 1984). Furthermore, desires often presuppose or project a particular way of life in their complex relations to action. There are several reasons for this. First, even wishes, the most passive of desires (Ehrlichman and Eichenstein 1992; Heckhausen and Kuhl 1985), are embodied in social practices such as prayer, confession, and diary-

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keeping. Second, although wishes are often unrealistic in that one can wish for anything, however fantastical, they often translate into *purposes* that require some investment of time and effort. For example, wishing upon a star involves engaging in a particular sequence of actions in a certain kind of situation. That is, there are conditions of satisfaction for the act to occur. Similarly, wishing to win the lottery does not transform into a different kind of mental state, such as hoping or planning, when one takes the effortful step of buying a ticket. It remains a wish. Third, the objects of our desire are often defined in part through the means of their realization (Dewey 1939). For example, a twelve-year-old who dreams of winning the Nobel Prize in Literature would not be content with a ceremony, medal, diploma, and cheque for 10 million kronor. Implicit in her dream is an idealized narrative of the development of literary competence, the production of a body of work, laudatory critical reception, artistic impact, and so on. Her end presupposes particular means. Desires, then, cannot be divorced from the practices and activities that constitute the cultural life in which they are defined.

Taxonomic study of the content of desires has focused on their most rationally unconstrained form—open-ended wishes. Thomas (1923) inaugurated this approach in arguing from biographical evidence for four fundamental kinds of wishes: desire for new experience, security, social response, and recognition. Less than a decade later, the analysis of wishes merited an entire chapter in a popular social psychology textbook (Krueger and Reckless 1930). In the years that followed, the strategy of asking research participants to make “three wishes” (Jersild et al. 1933) became an established method for exploring gender, socioeconomic, psychiatric, and developmental differences in motivation and adjustment (Ables 1972; Brook and Gordon 1979; Cobb 1954; Guarnaccia and Vane 1979; Horrocks and Mussman 1973; Kokonis 1974; Milgram and Riedel 1969; Speer 1939; Wheeler 1963; Wilson 1938; Winker 1949; Winkley 1982; Witty and Kopel 1939; Zeligs 1942). In contrast, there has been very little cross-cultural research on the content of wishes (Chiu and Nevius 1989; Vandewiele 1980, 1981). One reason for this paucity is the prevailing assumption that desires are straightforwardly derivative of *values*, a construct which has received close theoretical and empirical attention over the past three decades. Comparative research on values has sought to distinguish what is universal from what is culturally particular in the qualities that people see as important or take an interest in (Hofstede 2001; Inglehart 2006; Morris 1956; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992, 2006). The investigation of “basic” values has contributed much to our understanding of social diversity and grown into a leading orientation in cross-cultural psychology. As Leung and Bond (2004; see also Bond et al. 2004) have noted, however, knowing an individual’s allegiance to generalized abstractions such as “tradition” or “equality” is insufficient for understanding the direction of their lives. Minimally, we must also know their abiding beliefs about how the world, especially the social world, works. Equally, wishes and other forms of desire cannot be reduced to values. Although one can prize what one already has if it is rare and sought-after within one’s reference group (Bourdieu 1984), it would be wrong to say that one *desires* it. Desire is premised on absence or deficit (King and Broyles 1997; Milgram and Riedel 1969). The obvious exception of wanting more of something one already has in abundance for the purpose of acquiring what one does not yet have, as in the case of exchange, is best seen as a second-order or derivative desire. It is the originating desire that counts in identifying what is lacking. In this regard, desires reflect both the strictures and affordances of the physical, social, and cultural environment and the individual’s adaptation to that environment (Witty and Kopel 1939). The latter relevance explains the common psychiatric practice of asking patients, especially children, to describe their wishes (Winkley 1982).

More generally, wishes have a double cultural significance. On one hand, they represent the mediation of others in the recognition and articulation of conscious desire (Lacan 2002). Individuals can only wish for that which others have enabled them to imagine, express, and value. In this respect, wishes reflect goods that are socially recognized and sanctioned. Furthermore, the prevalence, persistence, and intensity of sanctioned wishes, taken together, indicate the extent to which a society fails to fulfil the desires it promotes. The dreams of the homeless and destitute are clear examples of such exigent but unmet desire. On the other hand, wishes can express organismic or constitutional imperatives that are not sanctioned and legitimized by the social and cultural milieu. The sexual fantasies of clerical celibates are an example of such forbidden desire. In this respect, wishes can reveal the mismatch between the individual's intrinsic urgings and a society's ability to give them form, content, and direction. The interpretive duality of wishes as cultural indicators, then, presents an inherent ambiguity: on the whole, they reflect both what is valorized by a society and what is unsatisfied, thwarted, or denied by that society's moral and economic regime.

Bearing this complexity in mind, we sought to examine the desires of a sample of Canadian and Japanese university students. Behavioral and attitudinal contrasts of Japanese with those from Western countries have figured prominently in cross-cultural psychology over the past three decades. These comparisons have most often been situated within a broader program of contrasting those cultures described as emphasizing the independence, autonomy, and uniqueness of the individual with those described as emphasizing the interdependence, mutual governance, and social identity of individuals (Fiske et al. 1998; Geertz 1984; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Oyserman et al. 2002; Sampson 1989; Shweder and Bourne 1984). This program of research has generated valuable insights, revealing the cultural determination and relativity of many phenomena once considered to be innate or universal. At the same time, the binary conception of a cultural system as predominantly individuating or relational, egocentric or sociocentric, and independent or interdependent, has been criticized as blind to more complex psychosocial realities (Ewing 1990; Hollan 1992; Lindholm 1997; Spiro 1993). In this regard, Rosenberger (1989, 1992) has questioned the purely social characterization of the Japanese, arguing for a distinctive reciprocity or mutual constitution of private and public identity in that culture (see also Lebra 2004; Shimizu 2000). Such balance contrasts with the tendency of some theorists to downplay the significance of Japanese private identity and individuality. As Miller (1997) points out, the individual is not, in fact, devalued in Japan. To the contrary, a rich tradition of emphasis on originality, self-direction, and autonomy exists in that culture (Kashima 2001; Schooler 1998; Yamazaki 1994). This assessment fits with Oyserman et al.'s (2002) meta-analytic conclusion that Japanese are not, broadly speaking, more collectivistic than Westerners, as is often been claimed (see also Dale 1986, 1988; Matsumoto 1999, 2002; Mouer and Sugimoto 1986; Takano and Osaka 1999).

What do these doubts about the reality of Japanese collectivism suggest about the cultural construction of desire in that society? Do Japanese want more "social" goods than those in Western countries, as many would assume, or does this merely reflect a prevailing mythology? Are Japanese desires defined more by relationships, collective experience, and mutuality of benefit? And what would such differences indicate about the dialectic of self and society, both in Japan and in the West? Does relatively greater desire for a particular good in any society imply greater emphasis on that good in its culturally normative conception of a worthy life, greater difficulty in acquiring the good, or both? As a first step toward answering these questions, we examined the wishes of a sample of Canadian and Japanese university students. To highlight the gap between reality and possibility, we

defined wishes as desired *changes* to one's existing state-of-affairs. By focusing on change, we hoped to lead our participants to consider who they are, what they have, and the condition of others and the world around them in articulating their strongest desires.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were 102 students (51 women and 51 men) of Western European ethnicity at the University of Toronto in Canada, and 103 students (40 women and 63 men) of Japanese ethnicity at Sapporo University in Japan. The mean age was 18.72 years (range of 18–23) with no significant difference between nationalities, $t(203) = 0.49, p = .63$. Mother's and father's highest level of education was measured on an 8-point scale ranging from elementary school to university.¹ The greater of the two parents' levels was used as an indicator of socioeconomic status (SES). Canadians were significantly higher on this indicator than Japanese (means of 7.27 and 5.97, respectively), $t(203) = 6.06, p < .0001$.

2.2 Procedure

Questionnaires were presented in English to Canadian participants and Japanese to Japanese participants. Considerable care was taken in translation, including back-translation checks and adjustments. Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of several parts, four of which are relevant here. In the first part, participants were asked, "If you had [unlimited] power to change the state-of-affairs that defines your life right now, what would you change?" The question was elaborated to invite the widest range of desiderata: material things, achievements, experiences and states-of-mind, knowledge, recognition, relationships, solutions to problems and shortcomings, influence on the lives of others or conditions in the world, and so on. It was made clear that the changes in question could apply directly to the participant or to other people or things. Participants were asked to report the *six* most important changes they wish they could make right now. To reduce self-censoring, importance was specified as *personal* importance, irrespective of what others might think. Participants were instructed to describe each desired change in a sentence, in descending order of importance.

Second, participants indicated the extent to which they were, through their efforts and actions, actively trying to realize each of the changes reported. Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from *not trying at all* to *trying very hard*. It was made clear to participants that one cannot reasonably "try" to bring about some kinds of changes, and for these a low effort rating was appropriate. The effort ratings were included to confirm the motivational significance of the changes reported. If wishes represent more than idle or fleeting fantasy, as we argue, and relate to substantive commitments and practices in the lives of participants, they should be associated with effortful action to the extent that such action is at all relevant to their fulfilment or realization. Moreover, wishes of greater personal importance should be associated with greater effort, and equally so for Canadian and Japanese participants.

¹ The original 10-point scale was collapsed at the high end (postgraduate education) to accommodate the dissimilar professional licensing requirements in Canada and Japan.

Third, participants were asked to list the six changes they thought the average student of their age and gender at their university would report in completing the same task. As before, each change was described in a sentence, in descending order of importance.² This allowed us to compare response patterns for self and average peer so as to address the influence of self-presentational concerns on the former. Presumably, any tendency to provide socially desirable but insincere responses would apply less (if at all) to describing what the average peer desires than to disclosing one's own desires. Responses in both conditions would reflect normative cultural commitments, but subject to different performative pressures. Where nationalities differ in the same direction on both self- and peer-referenced responses, a strong case can be made that the difference reflects more than just dissimilar social concerns in the testing situation.

Fourth, participants ranked Schwartz's (1992, 1996) ten universal values (*power, hedonism, achievement, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security*) on the personal importance of each as "a guiding principle, aim, or focus in your life." Each value appeared alongside Schwartz's (1996) single-sentence definition (e.g., *hedonism*: pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself). This ranking task was included to examine differences in basic values across national samples and their relation to differences in desired changes. The former, we expected, would not account for the latter.

3 Results

3.1 Coding and Preliminary Analyses

Japanese responses were translated to English by bilinguals familiar with the idiomatic aspects of both languages. Participants reported a wide range of desired changes. To reduce the variety to a comprehensive set of categories that allowed for reliable comparative analysis, closely related and repeatedly reported changes accounting for at least 5% of the total set of responses were grouped together under a common description. This strategy produced a final list of 27 content categories. Two coders then independently assigned each reported change to one of these categories. If the indicator was not a clear example of any content category, it was assigned to a *miscellaneous* category. If the coder could not make sense of the reported change from the information provided, it was assigned to an *uninterpretable* category. The coders agreed in their assignment for 93% of Canadian and 95% of Japanese changes, a remarkable level of consistency for a 29-category coding scheme. All disagreements were resolved through discussion.

In the self-reference condition, 2.93% of changes were classified as miscellaneous. A Mantel-Haenszel test of general association, controlling for gender, revealed that Canadians and Japanese did not differ significantly in the tendency to report such changes, $\chi^2(2) = 3.51, p = .17$. The same equivalence held for the 0.98% of changes classified as miscellaneous in the peer-reference condition, $\chi^2(1) = 0.31, p = .58$. An additional 0.41% of changes reported in the self-reference condition were classified as uninterpretable.

² There was evidence that six changes were enough to reflect the primary desires of participants. Supplementary investigation revealed that, on average, participants assigned 37% of the combined personal importance of the six changes to the one they judged as most important and only 7% to the one they judged as least important. Corresponding figures in the peer-reference condition were 33% and 7%. These numbers suggest that asking participants to report more than six changes would have generated many that were peripheral to their life concerns.

Mantel–Haenszel testing revealed that Canadians and Japanese did not differ in the tendency to report such changes, $\chi^2(1) = 0.10$, $p = .75$. In the peer-reference condition, 0.89% of reported changes were classified as uninterpretable. Japanese reported more such changes (1.78%) than Canadians (0%), $\chi^2(1) = 12.11$, $p = .0005$, in this condition. The reason for this isolated difference is unknown. Nonetheless, the minuscule relative frequencies for this category and the fact that none of the Japanese reported more than one uninterpretable change in the peer-reference condition ensures that the difference has little bearing on the results reported below.

To help interpret how much participants were trying to realize the desired changes they reported, we examined whether personal effort was objectively relevant to those changes. To accomplish this, two judges independently rated the extent to which an individual's effort could contribute to bringing about each change reported. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from *effort could not contribute at all* (1) to *effort could contribute a great deal* (5). Analysis of the joint rating frequencies yielded a high level of interrater reliability, Fleiss-Cohen-weighted $\kappa = 0.91$, with no significant difference in reliability for Canadian and Japanese changes, $\chi^2(1) = 0.32$, $p = .57$. All discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

3.2 Comparing Canadian and Japanese Desired Changes

Given the large number of content categories, participants rarely reported more than one instance of any particular category within the set of six. This justified analyzing responses in terms of the likelihood of reporting at least one instance of a given category as a function of the explanatory variables of interest. Table 1 shows all content categories in order of combined sample prevalence in the self-reference condition. The ten most prevalent categories for each nationality are listed in Table 2. Prevalence was compared across samples for each of the 27 categories using repeated measures logistic regression. Specifically, the log odds of reporting at least one instance of a given category rather than none was modelled as a function of nationality (Canadian, Japanese), the repeated factor of reference (self, average peer), the Nationality \times Reference interaction, and the covariates of gender, age, and SES.³ The method of generalized estimating equations (GEE; Diggle et al. 2002) was used to produce efficient parameter estimates and standard errors in a context of correlated within-subject responses. To restrict familywise Type I error across the 27 parallel models to 5%, a Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .002 was used in testing the significance of the predictors.

The results revealed that men and women did not differ significantly on any of the change categories, controlling for age and SES. Reference emerged as significant for 12 of the 27 content categories. Specifically, participants were *less* likely to report at least one instance of the following categories when describing the changes they desired than when describing the changes they thought the average peer desired: *more money or material goods*, *more satisfying friendships*, *better romantic life*, *better lifestyle*, *better academic performance*, *improved local conditions*, and *greater social recognition or approval*. Conversely, participants were *more* likely to report at least one instance of the following categories when describing the changes they desired than when describing the changes they thought the average peer desired: *better world for all*, *greater social skills*, *betterment of significant other(s)*, *greater courage or initiative*, and *going back or forward in time*.

³ Preliminary modeling confirmed that the covariates did not interact significantly with the main predictors (i.e., homogeneity of covariance) for any of the 27 categories.

Table 1 Change categories in order of overall prevalence

	Canadian (<i>n</i> = 102)	Japanese (<i>n</i> = 103)	Combined
1. More money or material goods	29 (53)	56 (75)	43 (64)
2. Greater physical attractiveness or fitness	28 (40)	40 (38)	34 (39)
3. Better world for all	35 (19)	31 (15)	33 (17)
4. More right-mindedness	23 (12)	27 (17)	25 (14)
5. More intelligence	37 (10)	7 (20)	22 (15)
6. More satisfying friendships	25 (31)	17 (44)	21 (38)
7. Better romantic life	25 (53)	17 (41)	21 (47)
8. Greater mental or physical well-being	19 (20)	22 (20)	20 (20)
9. Greater nonsocial skills or abilities	14 (12)	25 (10)	20 (11)
10. Greater social skills	16 (6)	20 (9)	18 (7)
11. More understanding of others or the world	14 (6)	21 (16)	18 (11)
12. Greater discipline, organization, or efficiency	18 (25)	17 (17)	17 (21)
13. More free time	17 (24)	16 (20)	16 (22)
14. Realization of career goals	14 (15)	17 (25)	16 (20)
15. Betterment of significant other(s)	20 (3)	11 (4)	15 (3)
16. Better family relations	25 (20)	5 (8)	15 (14)
17. A satisfying job	23 (11)	6 (11)	14 (11)
18. Greater courage or initiative	16 (5)	12 (3)	14 (4)
19. Better lifestyle	1 (28)	26 (35)	14 (32)
20. Residence elsewhere	17 (8)	9 (6)	13 (7)
21. More self-understanding	18 (15)	6 (10)	12 (12)
22. Superhuman power (other than time travel)	4 (3)	18 (6)	11 (4)
23. Going back or forward in time	11 (2)	12 (3)	11 (2)
24. Greater self-esteem	19 (11)	3 (3)	11 (7)
25. Better academic performance	13 (56)	6 (17)	9 (37)
26. Improved local conditions	11 (17)	8 (20)	9 (19)
27. Greater social recognition or approval	5 (26)	13 (17)	9 (21)

Column values represent percentage of participants with one or more responses in the change category. Values in parentheses represent corresponding percentage in the average peer condition

With the exception of the last category, the overall pattern of differences suggests greater willingness to admit desires that are morally laudable than to attribute them to others, coupled with less willingness to admit desires that might be seen as either self-seeking or as implying that one is not liked, loved, or respected enough by others, than to attribute them to others. This is clearly a self-enhancing pattern, in line with the social desirability of the content categories. Importantly, Canadians and Japanese were highly similar in the form and degree of self-enhancement, as reflected in the absence of a significant Nationality \times Reference interaction for 25 of 27 content categories. The two exceptions will be described below.

The GEE score statistic for nationality, the primary predictor in the logit models, was significant for 5 of 27 content categories. For the category *more money or material goods*, the predicted odds (adjusted for gender, age, and SES) of reporting at least one instance (rather than none) in the set of six changes were 2.53 times greater for Japanese than for Canadians, $\chi^2(1) = 13.85$, $p = .0002$; for *better family relations*, the predicted odds were

Table 2 Ten most prevalent change categories by nationality

	<i>Canadian</i>	
	1. More intelligence	37 (10)
	2. Better world for all	35 (19)
	3. More money or material goods	29 (53)
	4. Greater physical attractiveness or fitness	28 (40)
	5. Better family relations	25 (20)
	6. More satisfying friendships	25 (31)
	7. Better romantic life	25 (53)
	8. A satisfying job	23 (11)
	9. More right-mindedness	23 (12)
	10. Betterment of significant other(s)	20 (3)
	<i>Japanese</i>	
	1. More money or material goods	56 (75)
	2. Greater physical attractiveness or fitness	40 (38)
	3. Better world for all	31 (15)
	4. More right-mindedness	27 (17)
	5. Better lifestyle	26 (35)
	6. Greater nonsocial skills or abilities	25 (10)
	7. Greater mental or physical well-being	22 (20)
	8. More understanding of others or the world	21 (16)
	9. Greater social skills	20 (9)
	10. Superhuman power (other than time travel)	18 (6)

Column values represent percentage of national sample with one or more responses in the change category. Values in parentheses represent corresponding percentage in the average peer condition

2.85 times greater for Canadians than for Japanese, $\chi^2(1) = 15.07, p = .0001$; for *more self-understanding*, the predicted odds were 2.40 times greater for Canadians than for Japanese, $\chi^2(1) = 11.99, p = .0005$; and for *better academic performance*, the predicted odds were 7.85 times greater for Canadians than for Japanese, $\chi^2(1) = 17.64, p < .0001$. For *better lifestyle*, the main effect for nationality, $\chi^2(1) = 22.76, p < .0001$, was qualified by a significant interaction with reference, $\chi^2(1) = 21.76, p < .0001$. Decomposition of this interaction revealed that Japanese were more likely than Canadians (41.19 times the predicted odds) to report this category in the self-reference condition, $\chi^2(1) = 12.96, p = .0003$, but not in the peer-reference condition, $\chi^2(1) = 1.90, p = .17$. Finally, for the category *more intelligence*, the Nationality \times Reference interaction was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 26.08, p < .0001$, in the absence of a significant main effect for nationality. Decomposition revealed that Canadians were more likely than Japanese (10.35 times the predicted odds) to report this category in the self-reference condition, $\chi^2(1) = 24.60, p < .0001$, but not in the peer-reference condition, $\chi^2(1) = 2.40, p = .12$.

3.3 Comparing Canadian and Japanese Values

To appropriately test for group differences in ipsative value rankings, an exploded logit model was used (Allison and Christakis 1994; Chapman and Staelin 1982). The ranking for *security* was arbitrarily chosen as the reference category against which all other values were compared in calculating parameter estimates. Dummy interaction variables were created to represent group and gender differences in estimates. Age and SES was included as covariates in the model. Wald testing revealed that men and women differed

Table 3 Relative value preferences by nationality

	Canadian	Japanese
	<i>Achievement</i> ^a	Security ^a
	<i>Self-direction</i> ^a	<i>Self-direction</i> ^{ab}
	Security ^b	<i>Achievement</i> ^{bc}
	Stimulation ^{bc}	Stimulation ^{cd}
	Benevolence ^{bc}	Benevolence ^{cd}
	Universalism ^c	Universalism ^{cde}
	Power ^d	Hedonism ^{cde}
	Hedonism ^d	<i>Conformity</i> ^{de}
	Tradition ^{de}	Power ^c
	<i>Conformity</i> ^c	Tradition ^f

Values appear in order of group preference (highest to lowest). Values in 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

significantly in their value preferences, $\chi^2(9) = 24.93$, $p = .003$, as did Canadians and Japanese, $\chi^2(9) = 61.83$, $p < .0001$. The overall effect for gender was due to men ranking *power* as more important than women, $\chi^2(1) = 13.22$, $p = .0003$. No other gender differences were significant. The overall effect for nationality was due to Canadians ranking *achievement* and *self-direction* as more important than Japanese, $\chi^2(1) = 28.79$, $p < .0001$, and $\chi^2(1) = 4.30$, $p = .04$, respectively, and *conformity* as less important than Japanese, $\chi^2(1) = 18.56$, $p < .0001$. No other nationality differences were significant. Table 3 shows the ten values ordered from most to least preferred by each nationality, according to the conditional parameter estimates.

3.4 Comparing Canadian and Japanese Desired Changes While Controlling for Values

Can the above differences in basic values account for those found in the reporting of desired changes? To examine the potential redundancy of the two sets of differences, the six repeated-measures logit models that had yielded significant main and/or interactive effects for nationality were re-estimated with the rankings for *achievement*, *self-direction*, and *conformity* included as covariates alongside gender, age, and SES. The added variables effectively controlled for the three values on which Canadians and Japanese differed and tested for group differences in the reporting of change categories as before.

The results were clear. The GEE score statistic for nationality and/or the Nationality \times Reference interaction remained significant at the Bonferroni-corrected level of $p < .002$ for all six modified models. Furthermore, decomposition of the two models with interactions revealed the same pattern of simple effects as before. In short, controlling for group differences in values did not eliminate any of the significant differences originally found in the reporting of desired changes. This supports our argument that the changes that people desire in their lives cannot be inferred in any obvious way from their endorsement of abstract, generalized values.

3.5 Effort

To confirm that participants were committed to the changes they wished for, a mixed or multilevel model was used to predict participants' 1–7 effort ratings from the first-level variables of personal *importance* (represented by the 1–6 ordinal position of the reported change within the set, with changes listed earlier assumed to be more important than those

listed later, consistent with the task instructions), the objective *effort-relevance* of the change (the agreed 1–5 rating of the judges), and the second-level variables of nationality, gender, age, and SES. As before, the latter three predictors served as covariates. All interactions among the three primary predictors were included in the initial model. As none emerged as significant ($\alpha = .05$), all were dropped from the final model. Results for this model revealed significant effects for: importance, $\gamma = -0.19$, $t(1023) = -6.08$, $p < .0001$, with more important changes (those appearing earlier in the list) associated with more reported effort, as expected; effort-relevance, $\gamma = 0.41$, $t(1023) = 10.45$, $p < .0001$, with higher objective relevance associated with more reported effort, as expected; and nationality, $\gamma = 0.73$, $t(200) = 4.84$, $p < .0001$, with Canadians reporting greater effort on the whole ($M = 3.68$) than Japanese ($M = 2.93$). The reasons for this last difference are unknown. One possibility is that Japanese are more modest or restrained than Canadians in rating how hard they are trying to bring about the changes they desire most in their lives. More importantly for our purposes, the lack of difference between Canadians and Japanese in the confirmed associations of importance and effort-relevance with reported effort, as reflected in the nonsignificant interactions (slope shift indicators) in the initial model, suggests that desired changes have much the same motivational significance in the two societies.

4 Discussion

We began this article by arguing that desires are equally ideological and practical: they are articulated and sustained through cultural practices that affirm and reproduce a communal way of life. In this regard, desires reflect the ethos of a person's time and place—his or her situated cultural orientation. This significance permits us to now ask: What sort of orientation is evident in the changes desired by the Japanese participants in our study? Relative to their Canadian counterparts, are they more collectivistic, relationship-oriented, or other-focused in what they wish for, consistent with what many inside and outside Japan have claimed from the time of the Meiji Restoration to the present day (Matsumoto 2002)? The answer is clearly no. Only 3 of the 10 most prevalent change categories for the Japanese were inherently “social” or “collectivistic” in nature (better world for all, more understanding of others or the world, greater social skills), as opposed to five for the Canadians (better world for all, better family relations, more satisfying friendships, better romantic life, betterment of significant others). Of course, it might be argued that self-focused changes such as more money or material goods, greater physical attractiveness, and superhuman power are often desired for their social dividends and that this is more the case for Japanese than for Canadians. Although such a difference is entirely possible, it would be rather odd for it to hold in the absence of a relatively greater Japanese tendency to wish for overtly social goods.

Comparing nationalities on each of the 27 content categories also failed to confirm the stereotype of the “group-oriented” Japanese. The Japanese were more likely than Canadians to wish for more money or material goods and better lifestyle (self-reference condition only), and less likely than Canadians to wish for better family relations, more self-understanding, better academic performance, and more intelligence (self-reference condition only). The failure to find parallel differences in the peer-reference condition for better lifestyle and more intelligence leaves it unclear whether Japanese and Canadians really do differ in their desire for these kinds of change or merely in their self-presentational concerns about reporting them. Even if these two ambiguous differences are

included in the overall profile of cultural separation, the Japanese do not appear to show any greater desire for self-evidently social goods.

It is tempting to read the above differences as evidence of greater institutional and normative emphasis on particular kinds of goods in one society than the other. As discussed earlier, however, it is just as possible that a difference in desire reflects equivalent valuation and sanctioning of a particular kind of good in the two societies, but greater difficulty in acquiring it in one than the other, due to economic, political, social-structural, or physical constraints. There is some evidence for applying this interpretation here. In a recent study (Tafarodi et al. in press), Japanese and Canadian university students were equally likely to mention having a lot of wealth or assets when describing their vision of a good life; and Canadian students were more likely than Japanese to mention financial security and comfort. Minimally, this pattern suggests that material wealth is no less important to Canadians than Japanese. The greater tendency of the Japanese to wish for it here, then, might stem instead from more acute anxiety and uncertainty about economic prospects in Japan than Canada, at least for students at the two universities sampled. This would reflect the fears of a recessionary Japanese generation that grew up in the “lost decade” of the 1990s, the gradual recovery that followed, and the subsequent global financial crisis. Statistically controlling for SES as we did in comparing nationalities would not address this wider context.

The study by Tafarodi et al. (in press) also revealed that Japanese and Canadian students were equally likely to mention good relationships with family members when describing an ideal life. Therefore, the greater tendency of Canadians than Japanese to wish for better family relations in the present study might indicate either a higher degree of alienation or conflict within Canadian families or more stringent ideals of what constitutes desirable family relations.

The greater likelihood of Canadians than Japanese to wish for increased self-understanding can be considered in light of the finding elsewhere that Japanese students are less likely than Canadians to claim that they know themselves better than anyone else knows them and equally likely to claim that they understand the reasons for their actions better than anyone else understands them (Tafarodi et al. 2004). This combined pattern of findings suggests that Canadians are more desirous than Japanese of deeper self-understanding not because they feel more ignorant about themselves, but because self-understanding is in some sense more important to them.

The final clear-cut difference (parallel across reference conditions) was the greater tendency of Canadians than Japanese to wish for better academic performance. This finding, when juxtaposed against the greater tendency of Canadians than Japanese to mention successful career and equal tendency to mention being highly educated when describing a good life (Tafarodi et al. in press), suggests greater concern by Canadians with academic performance as a means of career advancement, greater perceived difficulty in earning high marks, or both.

The theoretical distance of the present study from the well-established tradition of mapping societies in regard to basic or universal values was confirmed in the finding that the values on which Canadians and Japanese differed did not account for the observed differences in what they wished for. This lack of predictive redundancy should not be taken to suggest that one can desire that which one does not value, but, rather, that one often values that which one does not desire. The path from value to desire is a highly uncertain one, mediated by a host of social, cultural, and psychological sources of promotion and inhibition.

The discussion thus far has highlighted difference while ignoring the considerable commonality in Canadian and Japanese wishes. To begin with, it is worth noting that Japanese and Canadians were similar in the extent to which they reported trying harder to bring about those changes that were more important to them, and those for which effort was more objectively relevant. This not only supports our claim that wishes are far from motivationally inert, but also suggests that they are related to intention and action in much the same way across cultures. The higher overall mean effort reported by Canadians, while unexpected and unexplained, does nothing to contradict this associative equivalence. With regard to the content of reported wishes, it is notable that much the same pattern of similarities and differences was found for participants' reports of their own wishes as for those they attributed to the typical peer. The response frequencies in the two reference conditions did differ in a self-enhancing fashion, but these within-subject differences had bearing on group comparisons in only 2 of 27 cases. The negligible extent of interaction across content categories suggests highly similar self-presentational reporting concerns for Canadians and Japanese on the whole. It is equally notable that a set of only 27 content categories was sufficient for capturing the variety of open-ended descriptions that students provided. This sufficiency, as reflected in the small number of indicators relegated to the miscellaneous category, was equal for Canadian and Japanese responses. By itself, this finding suggests a fair amount of common ground. Of course, it could have been that each nationality tended to refer to categories that the other did not. This, however, was not the case. Canadians and Japanese shared 4 of their 10 most prevalent categories, with only 5 of the remaining (unshared) 12 reported by less than 10% of the other national sample. This amounts to substantial overlap in the most commonly reported categories, enough to justify summarizing what Canadians and Japanese *jointly* desire.

Examination of the nine categories reported in the self-reference condition by at least one-fifth of the combined sample reveals two that pertain directly to social relations (more satisfying friendships, better romantic life), two to attractiveness and well-being (greater physical attractiveness or fitness, greater mental or physical well-being), two to competency (more intelligence, greater nonsocial skills or abilities), one to material wealth (more money or material goods), one to collective welfare (better world for all), and one to moral character (more right-mindedness). The heterogeneity of this profile, ranging from moral to prudential to acquisitive concerns, hints at the cross-cutting vectors of aspiration and desire that characterize the "millennial generation" of university students around the world. Steeped in a global popular culture that promotes self-expression and consumerist individualism, tethered to incessantly streaming information and entertainment technologies, longing for lasting approval and acceptance in an age of increasing social fragmentation and dislocation, deeply cynical of institutional authority and tradition, and competitively anxious about their place in a doubtful economic future, today's university students are pulled in more directions than perhaps any generation before them (Gergen 1991). The complexity of their pattern of desires is consistent with this "centrifugal" state of mind.

In summary, Canadians and Japanese were separated by unambiguous differences in desire for only 15% (4 of 27) of the derived categories. The limited extent and specific content of these differences casts further doubt on the starkly collectivistic portrait of the contemporary Japanese, adding to the growing suspicion that it may be more a persistent stereotype than a fair cultural characterization. Or, at least, such a portrait does not appear to accurately describe the *northern* Japanese represented in this study. The selective homogeneity of participants in this study, however, does recommend interpretive caution. University students are more alike around the world than almost any other segment of the population, sharing a common lifestyle and globalized youth culture (Held and McGrew

2007). The similarity of their desires cannot be safely generalized to other demographic groups. At the same time, students often form the vanguard of change in their respective societies, boldly expressing the cultural transformations and realignments that are underway. In this regard, it can be said that what educated young Japanese wish for today is destined to give shape to the cultural commitments that define the Japan of tomorrow. And that Japan, our findings suggest, looks remarkably like the West.

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