Emotion

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Standing in the Glory or Shadow of the Past Self: Cultures Differ in How Much the Past Self Affects Current Subjective Well-Being

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Research in the past 2 decades has made great strides in understanding cross-cultural differences in the correlates and causes of subjective well-being. On the basis of past findings on the cross-cultural differences in temporal perspectives of the self, the present research examined a cross-cultural difference in individuals' subjective well-being as a function of how positively they viewed their present and past selves. Study 1 showed that both European and Asian Americans had higher subjective well-being when they viewed their present selves more positively. However, positive evaluations of the past self were accompanied by higher subjective well-being only among Asian Americans. Study 2 showed that when induced to think positively (vs. negatively) of the present self, both European and Asian Americans judged their current lives more favorably. However, when led to view the past self positively (vs. negatively), only Asian Americans made more favorable judgments about their current lives.

Keywords: subjective well-being, cross-cultural differences, temporal perspectives, the self, the present (vs. past) self

We may be through with the past, but the past ain’t through with us. —A memorable quote from the movie Magnolia (1999)

One can choose to learn or run from the past. Which choice will deliver a better life? The answer depends on whom you ask.

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to people’s evaluations of their lives. It refers to a broad category of phenomena including evaluation of personal happiness (or positive affect) and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). Happiness, the affective component of SWB, is a valued goal in many countries. A national survey with 7204 college students in 42 countries (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1988) found that life satisfaction is one of the most important life goals across cultures. For example, the mean importance ratings of SWB to students in the United States, Singapore, Japan, and Indonesia were 6.39, 6.25, 6.02, and 6.16, respectively, on a 7-point Likert scale, for which 7 meant extraordinarily important and valuable. Past research has revealed both marked differences as well as similarities in the correlates and causes of SWB between European Americans and people from Asian cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995; Kim, Chiu, & Zou, 2010; Kim & Cohen, 2010; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999). Extending this literature, in the two studies reported in the present article, we examined how European and Asian Americans’ judgments about their current SWB are similarly and differently connected to how they view the present and the past selves.

Temporal Perspectives on the Self

In the present research, we examine a possible cultural difference in making SWB judgments: People from European American cultures discount the past when making evaluations of their current lives, whereas people from Asian cultures respect the past when evaluating their current lives. As we argue below, this proposed cultural difference arises in part from the way the self is perceived in Asian and European American cultures—whether the present self is intertwined with, or separated from, the past.

It is well documented that among individuals of European cultural heritage in North America, the past self is often perceived to be of little direct relevance to one’s current life. First, these individuals often disconnect a person’s past from the present

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(Briley, 2009; Briley & Aaker, 2006; Ji, Guo, Zhang, & Messervey, 2009). For example, European Canadians perceive past (vs. present) information about a person as being less relevant to explaining the person’s present situation (Ji et al., 2009).

Second, when these individuals access information about the past self when evaluating their present self, they often do it for strategic self-enhancement purposes (Oishi, 2002; Ross, Heine, Wilson, & Sugimori, 2005; Wang, 2004; Wang & Conway, 2004). Instead of systematically sampling and integrating information about the past self into the judgments of the present self, these individuals may selectively discount unfavorable information (Hyman & Faries, 1992) or prioritize favorable information about the past self for the purpose of affirming the present self (Wang & Conway, 2004). For example, they weigh positive (vs. negative) past events more when judging their current subjective well-being, feel closer to pleasant (vs. unpleasant) past events, more readily recall pleasant (vs. unpleasant) past events (Ross, Heine, Wilson, & Sugimori, 2005), and may even derogate and depreciate their past selves to elevate, and hence, feel better about their present selves (Ross & Wilson, 2003; Wilson & Ross, 2001).

In addition, European Americans seldom recruit information about the past self for the purpose of directing their present and future selves (Briley, 2009; Hyman & Faries, 1992). For example, many European Americans view their autobiographical memories as descriptive mental traces of their past selves and do not view such memories as being important for directing or guiding their current lives or selves (Hyman & Faries, 1992). Furthermore, European Americans often associate indulging in past glory or staying in the shadow of the past as a personal weakness and focusing on the present along with looking toward the future as a personal strength (e.g., “Forget the past and look forward to what lies ahead”; Philippians 3:13).

Conversely, the past self is perceived to be just as relevant as the present self to one’s current life in Asian cultures. First, in comparison with North Americans, Asians have a greater tendency to consider their present selves as being reflective of and connected with their past selves (Briley, 2009; Briley & Aaker, 2006; Ji et al., 2009; Morris & Peng, 1994; Wang & Conway, 2004). For example, the Chinese (vs. Canadians) consider past information about a person to be more relevant in understanding that person (Ji et al., 2009). Similarly, Chinese news reporters tend to explain the behavior of a Chinese assailant on the basis of the history of the assailant, whereas American news reporters tend to do so on the basis of the personal attributes and characteristics of the assailant (Morris & Peng, 1994). These findings suggest that “[C]hinese people] may be more likely to perceive the past self as part of the present self” (Ji et al., 2009, p. 767).

Second, the past self is more valued and respected among East Asians (vs. European Americans), because they more strongly believe that they can benefit from reflecting on and learning from past experiences (Briley, 2009; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Wang & Conway, 2004). For example, the Chinese (vs. Americans) are more likely to derive moral lessons from past information (Wang & Conway, 2004). Moreover, Chinese (vs. American) teachers are more likely to talk about students’ past mistakes for the purpose of improving students’ future performance (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Asians (vs. Americans) are also more likely to think about and reflect on the past (Brislin & Kim, 2003; Wang & Conway, 2004).

Hypotheses and Overview of Studies

Despite the cultural differences in the temporal perspectives on the self just reviewed, there is no direct evidence that Asians and European Americans would assign different weights to the past self when they evaluate their current SWB. In the present article, we reported two studies that were carried out to fill this gap. Many studies have found a link between positive perception of the present self and SWB (Diener & Diener, 1995; Oishi et al., 1999; Suh, 2002). Therefore, we hypothesize that for both European and Asian Americans, having a more positive perception of the present self would be linked to higher SWB. We further hypothesize that positive perception of the past self would be connected to higher SWB only among Asian Americans. We tested these hypotheses in two studies. In Study 1, we obtained self-evaluations of the participants’ present and past selves, and correlated these measures with several SWB measures. In Study 2, we manipulated participants’ perceptions of their present or past selves to examine their effects on SWB.

Study 1

Method

The participants were 48 (24 women) European American and 30 (19 women) Asian American (24 women) students at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, who received course credit for their participation. They were between 18 and 25 years old (M = 19.77 years, SD = 1.34). We used Asian Americans instead of Asians in their native country to represent participants with an Asian background because we manipulated the temporal perspectives of self-evaluations through the tenses of the self-description items, and English is a common language with tenses among Asian Americans from different heritage cultures. All Asian American participants were fluent in English.

We measured evaluations of the present and past selves by the extent to which participants attributed positive traits to their present and past selves. Because past research found that European Americans assigned greater importance to independence-related traits and Asians assigned greater importance to interdependence-related traits (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Kim, 2011; Kim, Chiu, Peng, Cai, & Tov, 2010; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005; Tam, Leung, Kim, Chiu, Lau, & Au, in press), we included both independence-related (intelligence, assertiveness, attractiveness, uniqueness, independence) and interdependence-related traits (sociability, trustworthiness, modesty, relationship quality) in the measure, and each trait was represented by 2 to 4 items (e.g., smart, intelligent, bright, and competent for the trait of intelligence). The measure consisted of 29 items. We created two versions of the measure: one for measuring evaluations of the present self and one for measuring evaluations of the past self. In the present self version, the items were presented in the present tense (e.g., I am helpful). In the past self version, the items were presented in the past tense (e.g., I was helpful). The participants were randomly assigned to respond to one version of the measure. They indicated their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater agreement with the item or more positive self-evaluations.

We included two measures of SWB. First, we measured participants’ cognitive evaluations of their current lives by having them
fill out the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), one of the most frequently used scales for measuring individuals' SWB. The SWLS consists of five items (e.g., “I am satisfied with my current life”). The alpha coefficient of the scale was .89 for European Americans and .75 for Asian Americans in the current study. Second, we measured the emotional component of life satisfaction by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they were experiencing each of four pleasant emotions (joy, pride, love, affection). The alpha coefficient of the scale was .72 for European American participants and .76 for Asian American participants. For comparison purpose, we also assessed the extent to which participants were experiencing each of four negative emotions (sadness, shame, anger, fear). The alpha coefficient of the four negative emotions was .75 for European American participants and .77 for Asian American participants.

Finally, to verify our assumption that the past self-evaluations and current self-evaluations are more strongly connected among Asian (vs. European) Americans, we also included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in our measure (α = .90 for European American participants and .91 for Asian American participants).

Results and Discussion

We separated the scoring for the independence- and interdependence-related items to create four self-evaluation measures: present independent self (16 items, α = .86), past independent self (16 items, α = .97), present interdependent self (13 items, α = .91), and past interdependent self (13 items, α = .97). We performed a Culture (a between-subjects factor: Asian or European Americans) × Temporal Perspective (a between-subjects factor: present self or past self) × Trait (a within-subjects factor: independence- or interdependence-related traits) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the four measures. Both Asian and European American participants evaluated themselves more favorably on the interdependence-related traits than on the independence-related traits, F(1, 74) = 4.76, p < .05, ηp² = .06 (for Asian Americans, MINDEPENDENT = 5.35, SD = .90; MINTERDEPENDENT = 5.60, SD = 1.03; F(1, 30) = 5.28, p < .05, ηp² = .15; for European Americans, MINDEPENDENT = 5.29, SD = 1.06; MINTERDEPENDENT = 5.52, SD = 1.12, F(1, 47) = 5.41, p < .05, ηp² = .10). This difference did not interact with culture and temporal perspective (Fs < 1.00). The main effect of culture on self-evaluations was also nonsignificant (for Asian Americans, M = 5.47, SD = .91; for European Americans, M = 5.40, SD = 1.03; F(1, 77) = .10, ns).

The differential effects of the past-self and present-self evaluations on SWB across cultures were identical for interdependent and interdependent traits. To simplify subsequent analyses, we took the mean of the independence- and interdependence-related measures for each temporal perspective.

Consistent with our assumption regarding the connection between the past self and current self-evaluation, higher self-esteem was associated with more positive perceptions of the present self (r = .51, p = .05) and the past self (r = .54, p < .05) for Asian Americans. For European Americans, higher self-esteem was associated with more positive perceptions of the present self only (r = .81 for the present self, p < .001; r = −.01 for the past self, ns).

To test our hypothesis, we performed a general linear model (GLM) on the life satisfaction measure (SWLS) with Culture (a between-subjects factor: European or Asian American), Temporal Perspective (a between-subjects factor: the present or past self), Self-Evaluation (coded as a mean-centered continuous variable), and all the interaction terms as predictors. The predicted three-way interaction was significant, F(1, 71) = 9.32, p < .01, ηp² = .12. As expected, for the present self, the main effect of self-evaluation was significant, F(1, 46) = 23.10, p < .001, ηp² = .34, but the Culture × Self-Evaluation interaction was not, F(1, 46) = 2.12, ns. More positive evaluations of the present self were related to higher levels of life satisfaction for both Asian Americans (r = .63, p < .01) and European Americans (r = .66, p < .001). For the past self, the Culture × Self-Evaluation interaction was significant, F(1, 25) = 11.41, p < .01, ηp² = .31. As illustrated in Figure 1a, more positive evaluations of the past self were related to higher levels of life satisfaction only for Asian Americans (r = .75, p = .001 for Asian Americans; r = −.28, p > .10 for European Americans).³

We repeated the same analysis with pleasant emotions as the dependent measure. The hypothesized three-way interaction was significant, F(1, 71) = 4.28, p < .05, ηp² = .06. For the present self, the main effect of self-evaluation was significant, F(1, 46) = 11.10, p < .01, ηp² = .19, but the interaction of culture and self-evaluations was not, F(1, 46) < 1.0, ns. More positive evaluations of the present self predicted more pleasant emotions for both Asian Americans (r = .51, p < .05) and European Americans (r = .52, p < .01). For the past self, the interaction of culture and self-evaluation was significant, F(1, 25) = 5.74, p < .05, ηp² = .19. As illustrated in Figure 1b, more positive evaluations of the past self were related to more positive emotions only for Asian Americans (r = .55, p < .05, for Asian Americans; r = −.13, ns, for European Americans).

¹ We did not replicate the past finding that Asians make more favorable self-evaluations on interdependent (vs. independent) traits, whereas European Americans make more favorable self-evaluations on independent (vs. interdependent) traits. We suspect that the presence of an acquiescence response set (the tendency to agree with all positive self-description items) may have diluted the cultural differences in mean level of self-evaluations on different traits in the present study. Nonetheless, the focus of the present study was not on the cultural differences in the mean levels of self-evaluations on different types of traits, but on the predictive relationships between evaluations of the past and present selves with current SWB.

² We performed a Culture (a between-subjects factor: Asian or European Americans) × Temporal Perspective (a between-subjects factor: present self or past self) × Self-Evaluation on Interdependent Traits (coded as a mean-centered continuous variable) × Self-Evaluation on Independent Traits (coded as a mean-centered continuous variable) general linear model (GLM) on SWB. The Interdependent Traits × Independent Traits interaction did not interact with Culture, and did not moderate the Culture × Temporal Perspective interaction, Fs(1, 66) < 2.25, ns.

³ Out of the 31 Asian American participants in Study 1, 18 were born in an Asian country. In Study 2, 59 out of the 81 Asian American participants were born in an Asian country. In Study 1, the place of birth (United States or Asian countries) did not moderate the effects of temporal perspective or self-evaluation on SWB, Fs < 3.50, p > .05. In Study 2, the place of birth also did not moderate the effects of any independent variable, Fs(1, 73) < 3.50, ns.
We found a similar pattern of results with the negative emotions, although the Culture \times Temporal Perspective \times Self-Evaluation interaction was not significant, $F(1, 71) < 1.00, ns$. For the present self, there was a nonsignificant negative correlation between positive self-evaluation and the negative emotions for both Asian Americans ($r = -.17$) and European Americans ($r = -.15$). For the past self, a nonsignificant negative correlation was found between positive self-evaluation and the negative emotion for Asian Americans ($r = -.15$), but a nonsignificant positive correlation for European Americans ($r = .26$). The nonsignificant results for the negative emotions could have resulted from the low intensity of the negative emotions that the participants currently experienced during the experiment ($M = 3.44$ for Asian Americans and $2.86$ for European Americans). The low intensity of the negative emotions is not surprising because the participants were not reminded of any events of negative self-attributes during the experiment.

In summary, for Asian American participants, both the past self and the present self predicted their current SWB and the magnitude of pleasant emotions they currently experienced. In contrast, for European American participants, only the present self predicted their current SWB; they did not connect the past self to their current subjective well-being.

**Study 2**

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate and extend the findings from Study 1 in three different ways. First, we manipulated participants’ perceptions of past and present self to establish a causal relationship between self-perceptions of past and present self and SWB.

Second, in Study 1 we did not provide any specific temporal reference for the past self, and participants from the two cultural groups could have interpreted the temporal reference differently. However, this limitation does not undermine the validity of our results. Because the Asians are higher on long-term orientation than are European Americans (Hofstede, 2001), Asian Americans (vs. European Americans) might have made past self-evaluations on the basis of the self in the more distant past. If this is indeed the case, the association of the past self with current life satisfaction should be weaker among Asian Americans than among European Americans, which is opposite to our hypothesis and the results. Nonetheless, to further address this limitation, in Study 2 we fixed the temporal reference in the items measuring evaluations of the past self.

Third, we sought to extend our results from the evaluations of the self to the evaluation of social relationships. The quality of one’s social relationships has been shown to be an important factor affecting people’s SWB (Diener & Oishi, 2005; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997; Oishi & Koo, 2008; Oishi, Koo, & Akimoto, 2008). Thus, we induced the participants to think positively or negatively about their past and present social relationships by instructing them to think about having a relatively large or small number of close friends.

**Method**

The participants were 148 European American (73 women, mean age = 19.15 years, $SD = .91$) and 81 Asian American undergraduates (42 women, mean age = 21.60 years, $SD = 2.58$) recruited from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. To manipulate participants’ evaluations of their social relationships, we had the participants fill out a 6-item questionnaire concerning their social relationships (e.g., “How many friends do you feel comfortable sharing important personal problems with?”; “How many friends do you feel comfortable asking about personal matters deeply?”). Following a procedure used in past research (Schwarz, Bless, Bohner, Harlacher, & Kellerbenz, 1991; Schwarz, Hippler, Deutsch, & Strack, 1985), we had half of the participants respond to these measures using a low-frequency 5-point scale with 0, 1, 2, 3, and more than 3 friends as the anchors. The mean response of the participants in this condition across items was at the 4.46th scale point ($SD = 0.54$), indicating that most participants had three or more close friends on campus. Responding to the items using this low-frequency scale would thus lead the participants to think that they scored at the upper range of the scale and hence had relatively good social relations.

The remaining half of the participants responded to the same questions on a 5-point high-frequency scale, with under 10 friends, 11–13, 14–16, 17–19, and more than 20 friends as the anchors. The mean response of the participants in this condition across items was at the 1.79th scale point ($SD = 0.79$), indicating that most participants felt that they had fewer than 16 close friends on campus. Responding to the items using this high-frequency scale would thus lead the participants to think that they scored at the lower range of the scale and hence had relatively poor social relations.

We crossed the perceived quality of social relations manipulation with the temporal perspective manipulation (the present vs. past). Half of the participants in each perceived quality condition answered the questions about their present social relations (e.g., “In these days, how many friends do you feel comfortable sharing important personal problems with?”), and the remaining half answered the questions about their past social relations (e.g., “In your

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**Figure 1.** Correlations of past versus present self-evaluation with current life satisfaction and current pleasant emotions, Study 1.
high school years, how many friends did you feel comfortable sharing important personal problems with?

Following the manipulations, the participants completed the Diener et al. (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The alpha coefficient of the scale was .88 for European American participants and .86 for Asian American participants.

Results and Discussion

The culture and temporal perspective manipulations did not have any effect on the social relationship ratings in both the high-frequency rating condition (Fs < 1) and the low-frequency rating condition (Fs < 1).

To test the hypothesis, we performed a Culture (a between-subjects factor: European Americans or Asian Americans) × Temporal Perspective (a between-subjects factor: the present or past self) × Perceived Relational Quality (a between-subjects factor: positive or negative social relationship) ANOVA on SWLS. We found a main effect of culture, $F(1, 221) = 27.18, p < .001$. That is, European Americans reported higher levels of subjective well-being ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.02$) than did Asian Americans ($M = 4.33, SD = 0.93$).

More important, the predicted three-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 221) = 4.45, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$. For European Americans, Temporal Perspective × Perceived Relational Quality interaction was significant, $F(1, 144) = 5.10, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$. As shown in Figure 2a, European Americans reported higher life satisfaction when they were led to think about their current social relationships favorably ($M = 5.47, SD = 0.77$) than when they were led to think about their current social relationships unfavorably ($M = 4.77, SD = 1.08$), $F(1, 77) = 12.19, p = .001$. However, those in the Positive Past Relational Quality condition ($M = 4.91, SD = 0.98$) were not more satisfied with their current lives than those in the Negative Past Relational Quality condition ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 67) < 1.00, ns$.

For Asian American participants, only the main effect of perceived relational quality was significant. Regardless of temporal perspective, those who were led to think about their social relationships favorably reported higher life satisfaction ($M = 4.51, SD = 1.06$) than did those who were led to think about their social relationships unfavorably ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.80$), $F(1, 77) = 4.20, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$. As shown in Figure 2b, similar to the European American results, Asian Americans in the Positive Present Relational Quality condition ($M = 4.23, SD = 1.14$) tended to report higher life satisfaction than did those in the Negative Present Relational Quality condition ($M = 4.00, SD = 0.74$). However, unlike the European American results, Asian Americans in the Positive Past Relational Quality condition ($M = 4.76, SD = 0.94$) reported higher life satisfaction than did those in the Negative Past Relational Quality condition ($M = 4.11, SD = 0.85$), $F(1, 42) = 5.67, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .12$.4

In summary, replicating Study 1 results in another important life domain (social relationships), we found that Asian Americans’ SWB was affected more by their past social relationships, whereas European Americans’ SWB was affected primarily by their present social relationships.

General Discussion

Cross-cultural research on subjective well-being has identified many similarities and differences in the predictors of life satisfaction and positive affect. This research has linked positive evaluations of the self to higher SWB in both Asian and European American contexts (Diener & Diener, 1995; Oishi et al., 1999; Suh, 2002), suggesting that positive self-evaluations are important to subjective well-being in both cultural contexts. However, because past research has focused on the link between SWB and evaluations of the present self, these findings might have obscured how cultures may differ in the weights they assign to evaluations of the past self when judging satisfaction with current life.

On the basis of past findings on the cross-cultural differences in temporal perspectives, we hypothesized and found support for Asian Americans’ greater attention to evaluations of the past self.

4 In Study 2, we also measured the extent to which participants experienced 6 emotions (joyful, happy, pleasant, sad, depressed, angry). We created a measure of positive affect by taking the mean of the 6 items, with the negative emotion items reverse scored ($\alpha = .75$ for European American participants and .85 for Asian American participants) and performed a general linear model (GLM) on positive affect with Culture, Temporal Perspective, Perceived Relational Quality, and their interactions as predictors. Unlike Study 1, the interactions of perceived relational quality with culture or temporal perspective were not significant, $Fs < 3.10, ns$. The reason for this inconsistent result is unclear. Nonetheless, in Study 2, we changed the independent variable from evaluations of the global self in the present and the past to evaluative perceptions of present and past social relationships. It is possible that although evaluations of one’s social relationships are strongly connected to life satisfaction (a more cognitive measure of subjective well-being), in comparison with evaluations of the global self, evaluations of one’s social relationships are less strongly related to affect. Thus our manipulation of evaluations of one’s social relationships in the present and the past affected subjective well-being only. This possibility merits future research.
when making evaluations of their current life. European Americans, focusing on the here and now, base evaluations of their current selves, made life satisfaction judgments on the basis of appraisals of their present and past selves. This pattern of results was found for appraisals of the independent self and the interdependent self (Study 1), and for appraisals of personal qualities (Study 1) and social relations (Study 2). Moreover, we found the same results when evaluations of the present and the past selves were measured as individual differences (Study 1) and experimentally induced (Study 2).

These results have important implications for understanding cultural differences in the way individuals attain satisfaction with their current lives. For example, Asian Americans may be more culturally prepared to gain life satisfaction through nostalgic indulgence in past glory and lose life satisfaction from recalling unpleasant past life experiences. In addition, both pleasant and unpleasant past events may have stronger lingering effects on the SWB of Asian Americans (vs. European Americans). On the one hand, this tendency prepares Asian Americans to learn from their past experiences and supports a self-improvement orientation (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). On the other hand, Asian Americans may also be more inclined than European Americans to indulge in past glory or to be haunted by the past and struggle to move forward. In the social domain, Asian Americans may value past positive social relations more (as their current life satisfaction is partly contingent on these social relations). They may also find it harder to forgive and forget social harms inflicted by people in their social network.

In contrast, European Americans tend to disconnect the past self from the evaluations of their current lives. As past research has shown, they may even selectively access positive memories of the past self to enhance appraisals of the present self (Ross & Wilson, 2003; Wilson & Ross, 2001). Thus, European Americans are less motivated and prepared to learn from the past (Briley, 2009; Hyman & Faries, 1992). Indeed, memories of past failures in a certain ability domain may prime them to switch their focus and invest their efforts in a different domain (Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001), and this practice may further reinforce the disassociation between the past self and the present self. Nonetheless, this practice also prepares European Americans to let bygones be bygones and move on to new life projects despite past failures. Because European Americans do not indulge as much in past glory, they may more readily set higher goals after accomplishing their current goal. In the social domain, European Americans may be more ready to forgive and forget past grudges.

In conclusion, our results suggest that whereas European Americans let bygones be bygones, Asian Americans keep bygones alive in their current lives. There are important implications to this cultural difference for understanding cross-cultural differences in nostalgia, persistence, goal-setting, and transcultural counseling. These implications merit future research attention.

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