Modesty in self-presentation: A comparison between the USA and Japan

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Japanese participants in Study 1 exhibited a self-effacing tendency when no reason for their self-evaluation was provided. However, they exhibited a self-enhancing tendency when they were offered a monetary reward for the correct evaluation. In Study 2, Americans, especially American men, exhibited a self-enhancing tendency whereas Japanese exhibited a self-effacing tendency when no reason for making the evaluation was presented. This cultural difference disappeared when participants were provided with a monetary reward for correctly evaluating their performance level. These results support the view that the modesty observed in self-evaluation among Japanese participants is a ‘default strategy’ to avoid offending others.

Key words: culture, default strategy, independence, self-construal, self-effacement, self-enhancement.

Introduction

Studies by cultural psychologists (e.g. Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a) show that the general human inclination to perceive oneself in a positive light, or to engage in self-enhancement, once regarded as a robust and universal finding (Alicke, 1985; Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995; Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994), actually is not as commonly observed in East Asian cultures as it is in the West. For example, Heine and Lehman (1999) compared European Canadians, Asian Canadians, and Asians and found the better-than-average effect only among European Canadians. Asian Canadians did not show the better-than-average effect, and Asians even showed a self-effacing tendency, presenting themselves as less qualified and competent than others (see Heine, 2008, for more studies reporting similar findings).1

Advocates of the cultural specificity of this self-enhancement tendency generally attribute these differences to the differential nature of human-construal processes across cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). According to Markus and Kitayama’s work, Westerners construe the self as an independent entity, which is internally driven and operates independently from others in the society, and are motivated to excel as independent agents and to see themselves in a positive light. In contrast, East Asians share an interdependent construal of the self, according to which the self is meaningful only in terms of its relations with others, and they are motivated to accommodate themselves to the states and needs of others. Thus for East Asians, how well their views of themselves fit within the social context is more important than how much they excel in comparison with others. To facilitate this process of accommodation, East Asians are assumed to be often motivated to focus attention on their shortcomings (Heine et al., 1999).

In response to these and other studies by the cultural psychologists demonstrating cultural-specificity of self-enhancement, advocates of the universality of self-enhancement have provided evidence demonstrating that East Asians do engage in self-enhancement. Brown and Kobayashi (2002), for example, demonstrated that Japanese see themselves and their friends as better than unrelated others on traits that are important to them, while they consider themselves and their friends not as good as others on traits they view as unimportant. Similarly, Cai, Sedikides, Gaertner, Wang, Carvallo, and Xu (2011) and Sedikides, Gaertner, and Vevea (2005) demonstrated that even East Asians would tactically engage in self-enhancement on personally valued dimensions. Furthermore, findings using measures of implicit self-enhancement suggest positive implicit self-esteem among Japanese participants (Yamaguchi et al., 2007). On the other hand, advocates of the cultural specificity of self-enhancement have provided more evidence in support of their argument (Heine, 2005; Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Heine, Kitayama, & Hamamura, 2007). The dispute over whether self-enhancing tendency is universal or culturally specific has not yet been resolved.

The purpose of this study is to propose a third approach to this dispute. We propose that the relative paucity of self-enhancement and the self-effacing tendency sometimes observed in East Asians is considered to be a ‘default
strategy’ used to avoid accruing a negative reputation. This proposition is partly in line with the argument of cultural psychologists, such as Markus and Kitayama (1991b) and Nisbett (2003), who argued that the lack of self-enhancement among East Asians is a reflection of the culturally shared beliefs about human nature. According to this view, East Asians do not want to see themselves as being superior to others around them, because they prefer to be similar to others around them and do not want to be distinct from them (Kim & Markus, 1999).

In contrast to this cultural agent view of humans, Hashimoto and colleagues see humans as ‘cultural game players’ who pursue their own goals in a social environment by responding appropriately to anticipated responses from those around them. Cultural specificity in the behaviour of cultural agents is assumed to be a reflection of internalized goals and preferences that are culturally shared. According to Hashimoto and colleagues (2011), what makes cultural game players behave in a culturally specific manner is not internalized goals and preferences. Rather it is the collectively produced incentives, that is, a set of anticipated responses from others, that makes them behave in a culturally specific manner. Such cultural game players differ from ‘cultural agents’ in terms of the critical role that the expected reactions of other people play in efforts to achieve personal goals (some of which could be internalized cultural values and preferences). Culturally shared beliefs about human nature (and the nature of the society) are indispensable when it comes to anticipating responses from other people in the society, because people make inferences about how others would behave using intersubjectively shared beliefs (Zou, Tam, Morris, Lee, Lau, & Chiu, 2009).

Hashimoto and colleagues (2011) further argue that some of the routine decision rules that most often invite positive consequences and attenuate negative consequences become ‘default’ strategies (see also, Yamagishi, Jin, & Kiyonari, 1999). A default strategy is a decision rule people use when it is not clear what kind of decision rule should be used. Which decision rules get included in the default category in a particular social domain depends on the nature of the social relations in a particular society. For example, in collectivistic societies where groups are typically closed to outsiders (Greif, 1989, 1994; Yamagishi, Cook, & Watabe, 1998), those who are excluded from their current relationships may have difficulty in finding alternatives, and therefore the cost of being excluded is high. Thus, in such societies, the best decision rule to use in most social situations is to avoid inciting negative responses from others, that is, any behaviour that might offend others. ‘Be modest’ and ‘avoid any social risks of making people upset’ are prudent behavioural principles that work best in most social situations in such societies. This strategy is thus used as the default response mode unless it is clearly understood that such a strategy is not relevant.

Always being modest may be a reasonable strategy to reduce the risk of being disliked and eventually excluded from a current relationship. Nevertheless, it has its own costs. By not being aggressive enough in a situation in which one needs to assert oneself, one fails to get what s/he wants. Whether or not to adopt the modesty principle as a default strategy will ultimately depend on the balance between these two types of errors in decision-making (as in the realm of statistical decision-making). The balance is between the cost of being ostracized from one’s own community and the cost of failing to fulfill one’s wishes by not being aggressive enough. In a collectivist society, the balance tips toward the former cost because finding alternative relationships is difficult. In a society in which the cost of offending others is not so high, the balance shifts toward the latter cost.

Suzuki and Yamagishi (2004) conducted an experiment among Japanese participants to demonstrate that this logic of error management (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Yamagishi, Jin, & Kiyonari, 1999) operated in the self-effacing evaluation of one’s own competence even in total anonymity. As their study was published in Japanese, and is not easily accessible to non-Japanese speakers, we will first present a detailed overview of their study. Participants in their study, who were all Japanese natives, first took a bogus intelligence test, called the ‘Integrated Cognitive Ability (ICA) Test.’ Then they were asked to judge whether their performance was above or below the average performance level in their own university. Seventy-two percent of the participants judged their performance as below the school average. This result was in sharp contrast to the better-than-average effect often observed among Americans (Alicke, 1985; Alicke et al., 1995; Dunning et al., 1989). A clear self-effacing tendency emerged despite the fact that all of the participants were assured of the complete anonymity of their judgements.

The self-effacing tendency observed in the above protocol (control condition), however, was completely reversed in another condition (bonus condition). In this bonus condition, participants were told that they would be paid 100 yen (about one US dollar) if their judgement was accurate.
Through this manipulation, participants were actually provided with a reason for making the judgement — to earn extra money — though the amount of money offered as an incentive was small. This situation contrasted with the control condition in which participants were not provided with any reason for making the judgement. In this bonus condition, 69% (36 of 52) of the participants judged their performance to be above the school average. A self-enhancing effect like that in the American study appeared.

Based on these findings, Suzuki and Yamagishi argued that the self-effacing tendency observed in the control condition in their experiment was a reflection of the usage of the default strategy of being modest. For people living in collectivist social settings in which minimizing the cost of being disliked and the risk of potentially being excluded from current relationships is regarded as essential, ‘always be modest unless it is clear that modesty is no longer required’ is the best error management strategy. Assurance of anonymity is not sufficient to convince those who have adopted the modesty principle as their default strategy that such a strategy is no longer needed, in the same manner as citizens living under a strict dictatorship typically do not express their true opinions even in their responses to an ‘anonymous’ questionnaire. One does not earn any benefit by expressing one’s true opinion in an anonymous questionnaire, while the costs associated with such responses being known or revealed is potentially huge and serious. The balance in such situations tips in favour of not expressing true opinions that might upset others.

In this paper, we first present results of a study with non-student participants that successfully replicated Suzuki and Yamagishi’s (2004) findings while using different tasks (Study 1). Then we present the results of Study 2 in which cultural differences in self-enhancement/effacement observed in the control condition disappeared in the bonus condition.

Study 1

Study 1 was embedded in a large research project called the Games and Culture Study conducted by Yamagishi and his colleagues (2011). One hundred and eight people (51 male and 57 female non-students, all ethnic Japanese over 20 years old with a mean age of 47.1 years old, ranging from 21 to 69 years old in February, 2008) were initially recruited via a newspaper advertisement from residents of North Ward of Sapporo (pop. 1.9 million), Japan. Most of them (with some dropouts in later waves) participated in all six waves of the study (February 2008, April 2008, November 2008, March 2009, November 2009, and August 2010), each of which lasted from four to six hours per session. We used data from the second, fourth, and the fifth waves of the Games and Culture Study. 2

The purpose of Study 1 is to replicate the results of Suzuki and Yamagishi’s (2004) findings that the self-effacement tendency observed in the control condition would be reversed in the bonus condition by using new tasks and non-student participants. Two different tasks on which participants judged their performance level were used. The first task was the Embedded Figure Test (EFT; Kuhnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001; Study 2), and the second task was a trustworthiness judgement task.

Default judgements

Embedded figure test. One hundred participants took the embedded figure test, which was adopted from Kuhnen et al. (2001). About 11 months later, the same participants were brought back to the laboratory, asked to remember the EFT test they took in a previous session, and then judge whether they thought their performance on the test was above or below the mean of all the participants in their age range (20s and 30s, 40s, 50s, and above 60). No specific reason for asking this question was given.

Trustworthiness judgement task. Ninety-nine participants judged trustworthiness of target faces based on video clips of 38 game players who had participated in a past trust game experiment. The targets of judgement were students who had participated in a trust game and acted as trustees. Participants were shown 38 pairs of game player’s faces (one of whom behaved in a trustworthy manner and the other in an untrustworthy manner) video recorded at the moment they made their decisions, and judged which one was more trustworthy than the other. In a post-experimental questionnaire of this judgement task, participants were asked to self-evaluate how well they could judge the behaviour (trustworthy vs. not trustworthy) of the game players — whether their judgemental accuracy level was above or below the average level of all the participants who had also taken part in this trustworthiness judgement task. Responses to these above/below average questions constituted the control condition. The above/below judgement in EFT was not related to the same judgement in the trustworthiness judgement task, $\chi^2(1) = 1.65$, ns.

Bonus judgements

The experimental conditions concerning the presence/absence of bonus were manipulated as a within-participant factor. That is, the same set of participants was brought back to the laboratory eight months after they made the self-evaluation judgements. Participants were again asked to remember how they performed on the EFT and to judge if their performance level was above or below the stated age-specific mean performance level. They were told that...
they would be paid 300 yen (about $3) if their answer was correct, under the pretence of ascertaining that they had correctly remembered how well they performed. Similarly, participants were asked to remember how well they performed on the trustworthiness judgement task and then were asked to judge if their accuracy level was above or below the mean accuracy level of all participants. As in the EFT study, they were told that they would be paid 300 yen if their answer was correct.

Results

Embedded figure test. As shown in Figure 1, 64% (55 out of 86) of the participants in the control condition answered that their performance level on EFT was below the age-specific mean, which was significantly different from 50%, or the percentage expected among the unbiased participants, $\chi^2(1) = 6.70, p < 0.01$. Participants clearly exhibited a self-effacement tendency. On the other hand, the majority of participants in the bonus condition (59%, or 51 out of 86) answered that their performance level was above the age-specific mean, and the difference from 50% was marginally significant, $\chi^2(1) = 2.98, p < 0.09$. The difference in the two conditions was highly significant, McNemar’s $\chi^2(1) = 16.67, p < 0.0001$. As shown in Figure 1, the same pattern was observed for those whose actual EFT score was high (above the mean score of all participants) and low. As in Suzuki and Yamagishi (2004), a reversal of self-enhancement/effacement effect in self-evaluation occurred as a function of providing participants with a specific reason for making the self-evaluation judgement. No gender difference was significant.

Trustworthiness judgement task. Eighty-four participants made the self-evaluation judgement on their accuracy of the targets’ trustworthiness in both conditions. Among these 84 participants, 68 (81%; significantly more than 50%, $\chi^2(1) = 32.19, p < 0.0001$) in the control condition answered that their performance level was below the average performance level of all participants. Clearly, these participants exhibited a self-effacing tendency when asked about their judgemental accuracy level when they were provided with no explicit reason for making this assessment. In sharp contrast, the majority (52 out of 84, or 62%; significantly more than 50%, $\chi^2(1) = 4.76, p < 0.05$) of the participants answered that their accuracy level in the trustworthiness judgement task was above the average accuracy level, showing the presence of a self-enhancing effect. The difference in these two conditions was highly significant, McNemar’s $\chi^2(1) = 30.86, p < 0.0001$. Thus, the reversal of the self-enhancement/effacement tendency emerged again in the bonus condition as a function of providing participants with a specific reason for making a self-evaluation judgement. No gender difference was significant. The same pattern was observed among those whose actual performance was high (i.e. with a positive within-participant correlation) or low (with a negative within-participant correlation) as shown in Figure 2.

Discussion. The effect of providing a reason for making a performance judgement (i.e. to earn money for correct judgement) was consistent across the two tasks examined in Study 1. The majority of the participants judged their performance to be below the relevant group mean when no explicit reason for making the judgement was provided, and yet, when an explicit reason was provided, this self-effacing tendency was completely reversed, showing a clear self-enhancement no matter whether the performance was related to intelligence (EFT) or to social skills (trustworthiness judgement).

However, before making a firm conclusion that this reversal of self-enhancement/effacement effect is a consequence of the default use (or non-use) of the do-not-offend-others strategy, we need to first evaluate a couple of potentially confounding sources. The first one is the order effect. Manipulation of the experimental conditions was conducted as a within-participant factor, and the order of the control and bonus conditions was not counterbalanced. However, even if

![Figure 1](image-url)
the order had any effect at all, it is unlikely that the order
effect would produce the reversal of self-enhancement/
effacement itself. Measurement of the same variable in the
second control condition may move the measured value
toward the mean (regression effect) or in a more extreme
direction, but cannot change the direction of the difference.
Furthermore, the fact that Suzuki and Yamagishi (2004),
who used between-participant manipulation of the presence
and absence of bonus found the same effect, reduces the
likelihood that the reversal of self-enhancement/effacement
effect found in this study is an artifact of the presentation
order of the experimental conditions. The second potentially
confounding source is the decay of memory due to the lapse
of time between the two conditions. The control condition
took place either right after the participants performed a task
(right after they finished the trustworthiness judgement task)
or 11 months after they performed on EFT. The bonus con-
tition took place eight months after the control condition in
both tasks. It is possible that participants remembered their
actual performance level less in the bonus condition than in
the control condition. The decay in memory of their actual
performance level may have introduced larger errors in their
judgement in the bonus condition, but it is not likely that

such errors were biased toward self-enhancement. Although
it is desirable to replicate the study using the between-
participant manipulation of the presence and absence of
bonus (which had been done by Suzuki & Yamagishi, 2004),
the current study, using within-participant manipulation,
provides additional support for Suzuki and Yamagishi’s

Study 2

Having demonstrated the reversal of the self-enhancement/
effacement tendency as a function of providing participants
with a clear reason for making such a self-evaluation judge-
ment in Study 1, in Study 2 we tested the prediction that in
the bonus condition the often-observed cross-cultural differ-
ences in self-enhancement and self-effacement will be
eliminated. For this purpose, we replicated Suzuki andYam-
agishi’s (2004) study with 61 (33 male and 28 female)
American Stanford University students and compared the
results with those obtained by Suzuki and Yamagishi. Since
the enhancement/effacement reversal reported by Suzuki
and Yamagishi (2004) involved the default evaluation in their
first study and the bonus evaluation in their second study, we
adopted the same dataset used by Suzuki and Yamagishi with
162 (108 male and 54 female) Hokkaido University students
in the following analysis to compare with the US data.

Method

The procedure in our study was identical to that in Suzuki
and Yamagishi (2004). Participants were given an ID
number and were instructed that they would be identified
by this ID number throughout the experiment to protect
anonymity. Then they were escorted to a private cubicle
equipped with a PC to complete the ICA test. In the ICA test
(which had been translated into English by a team of Japa-
nese and American researchers including the first and the
third authors), participants were told that the goal of the
study was to help researchers develop a newly constructed
psychological test to measure the responder’s ‘integrated
cognitive ability’ by examining how quickly and accurately
he or she could use different types of cognitive and percept-
tual abilities. This scoring procedure made it difficult for
participants to guess their performance level, and in fact, no
feedback on their performance was provided. When the
test was over, they were asked to judge whether their per-
formance was above or below the average performance in
their own school. When they answered this question, no
feedback on their actual performance level was provided.
This was the control condition. In the bonus condition,
participants were told they would receive an extra dollar for
a correct judgement of their performance level in addition

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to the base pay of $15.00. In the control condition, no such information was provided.

**Results**

About two-thirds (66% or 21 out of 32) of the American participants in this bonus condition judged their performance as above the school average, and this figure was almost identical to the Japanese data (69%, or 36 out of 52). That is, both cultural groups showed the same self-enhancing tendency when they were given a reason for making the self-evaluation judgement. On the other hand, a clear cultural difference did emerge in the control condition where 52% (15 out of 29) of the American participants demonstrated a clear self-enhancement tendency, judging their performance to be above the school average, which was significantly higher than the proportion of the Japanese participants who made the same judgement (28%, or 31 out of 110). This difference in the control condition between the Japanese and Americans was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 5.74, p < 0.05$. These results support our prediction that a cultural difference in self-enhancement/effacement will emerge only in the control condition when no reason for making the self-assessment is provided, whereas such cultural effect will disappear in the bonus condition when participants are given an explicit reason for making the assessment.

Analysis of the combined Japanese and American data also found a gender difference (Fig. 3). A logistic regression analysis in which the above/below judgement was predicted from the presence/absence of bonus, participant’s nationality, participant’s gender and all interactions among them, found the main effect of the experimental condition to be highly significant, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 14.39, p < 0.0001$. The main effect of the participant’s gender was also highly significant, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 7.85, p < 0.01$. The main effect of the participant’s nationality was not statistically significant, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 2.61, p < 0.11$. The interaction between the participant’s nationality and the experimental condition was marginally significant, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 3.60, p < 0.06$. The participant’s gender did not interact with the participant’s nationality or the experimental condition. The pattern supporting our prediction was maintained for both male and female participants (see Fig. 3).

**General discussion**

Based on the argument that self-effacing tendency often observed among East Asians is a reflection of their default strategy to adapt to the collectivistic social relations they face in their everyday life, we predicted that such a tendency will disappear in a situation in which the use of the default, do-not-offend-others strategy is irrelevant. The predicted reversal of self-effacement/enhancement effect as a function of providing participants with a reason for making a self-evaluation judgement, an effect first demonstrated by Suzuki and Yamagishi (2004), was found not to be limited to the particular task they used or to the student sample. The results of Study 1 demonstrate the robustness of the default strategy account of self-effacement among East Asians in general, and Japanese in particular. In Study 2, the cultural differences in self-enhancement/effacement disappeared when a reason for making self-evaluation was provided. This offered further support for the default strategy argument concerning the predicted cultural differences.

The pattern shown in Figure 3 illustrates clearly the nature of the presence and absence of cultural differences in self-enhancement/effacement that have characterized the current debates between cultural psychologists and ‘universalists’. On the one hand, these results support the view that self-enhancement is pan-cultural. In the bonus condition in which participants were provided with a reason for making the judgement, the Japanese participants revealed an almost identical level of self-enhancement as their American counterparts. The same pattern was observed for both male and female participants. On the other hand, the cultural difference did emerge in the control condition. In that condition, Japanese participants exhibited a self-effacing tendency, whereas American participants exhibited a self-enhancing tendency. We conclude that the cultural mandate among the Japanese to not upset people around them induced them to present themselves, even in anonymous responses to a questionnaire, as modest persons. The Japanese participants...
respond to this cultural mandate, which requires them to be modest, by adopting a ‘do-not-offend-the-other’ strategy (Yamagishi et al., 2008) as a default response strategy. In a collectivist society in which exclusion from current relations is highly costly, avoiding the risk of offending others is a socially wise strategy or behavioural principle. It is natural that people living in such a society adopt this socially wise strategy even in the absence of clear cues indicating the usefulness of this strategy (i.e., in the control condition) as a default behavioural principle. However, in another situation where the use of the strategy is obviously not appropriate anymore (in the bonus condition), people stop using this default strategy. This interpretation of the finding in the current study is also consistent with findings in another line of research in which East Asians have been frequently found to engage in self-enhancement when implicit measures are used (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Kitayama & Uchida, 2003; Yamaguchi et al., 2007) or when self-enhancement is socially permissible (Cai et al., 2011; Kurman, 2001; Sedikides et al., 2005).

One issue that needs to be addressed in future research before drawing a firmer conclusion from the current study on the role do-not-offend-others strategy plays as a default behavioural principle concerns the possible role that promotion focus could have played in the studies presented in this paper. The promise of a bonus has been shown to induce promotion focus (Worthy, Maddox, & Markman, 2007), and promotion focus has been shown to cause positive self-evaluation (Leonardelli, Lakin, & Arkin, 2007). Thus, it is possible that the enhanced level of self-evaluation in the bonus condition is a reflection of promotion focus induced by the reference to bonus. While this possibility cannot be logically eliminated from the interpretation of the current findings, we can provide some evidence against this explanation. In fact, we also measured participants’ levels of promotion focus using the regulatory focus scale by Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002). While we could not measure the change in promotion focus as a result of the bonus manipulation, and so cannot demonstrate if the bonus manipulation changed the participant’s level of promotion focus or not, we nevertheless can at least examine if their default level of promotion focus was related to their default level of self-enhancement in the control condition. The point biserial correlation coefficient between self-enhancement and promotion focus score was $r_{pb} = 0.17$, ns., in the EFT study and $r_{pb} = 0.05$, ns., in the trustworthiness judgement task. Given the lack of correlation between promotion focus and self-enhancement of the current type, it is not likely that the potentially induced promotion focus mediated the effect of the bonus manipulation. Nevertheless, future research should examine if the same reversal of self-enhancement/effacement will occur when an explicit reason for making self-evaluation is provided in a way that does not involve promise of a bonus.

The ‘game player’ account of culture-specific behaviour such as self-effacement proposed by Yamagishi and his colleagues (Hashimoto et al., 2011; Suzuki & Yamagishi, 2004; Yamagishi, 2011; Yamagishi et al., 2008, Yamagishi, Hashimoto, Li, & Schug, in press) emphasizes the critical role of shared beliefs, that game theorists call ‘commonality of knowledge’, plays in generating culture-specific behaviour. The intersubjective approach to culture advanced by Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shieyman, and Wan (2010), Zou et al. (2009), and others also emphasizes the critical role of shared beliefs. Zou et al. (2009), for example, argue that the fact that people perceive that others share particular beliefs, values, and preferences enables ‘us to use them to comprehend others’ actions and expectations, to anticipate how they will evaluate and respond to our actions, and so on’ (p. 582). The fundamental understanding that humans adjust their behaviour to the anticipated actions of others, and that the anticipation of others’ actions comes from the knowledge that others are also acting on the same beliefs and the same expectations, is the unique aspect of both the game player approach taken by Yamagishi and his colleagues (Hashimoto et al., 2011; Yamagishi, 2011; Yamagishi et al., 2008) and the intersubjective approach taken by Chiu, Gelfand, Zou, and their colleagues (Chiu et al., 2010; Zou et al., 2009).

How cultural mandates affect the way people behave has received increasing attention in recent developments in cultural psychology (Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul, 2009; Na, Grossmann, Varum, Kitayama, Gonzalez, & Nisbett, 2010; Varum, Grossmann, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2010). The current study suggests an important pathway through which cultural mandates affect people’s behaviour. That is, cultural mandates take the form of beliefs about how others might respond to one’s behaviour, and thus, people adjust their behaviour to the anticipated responses of others, as many have discovered in previous research on the effects of expectations in other behavioural domains (e.g., Hashimoto et al., 2011; Yamagishi et al., 2008).

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End notes

1. Some researchers such as Tsukishima (1977, 1984) argue that the self-effacing tendency observed among East Asians is a reflection of self-presentation to preserve a norm abiding façade (tatemae in Japanese) and does not reflect their true
inner self-evaluation (honme). Kurman (2001) presents a similar view to explain the difference in modesty among four Israeli groups. However, this self-presentation account of self-effacement has been rejected by self-construalists since self-effacement was often observed among East Asians even in their responses to anonymously administered questionnaires. The concept of default strategy we adopted in this paper has been developed to explain the presence of self-effacement in anonymous situations.

2. We excluded two participants who did not understand the instructions well from the following analyses.

3. EFT was conducted in the second wave of the G&C Study.

4. The below/above judgement was asked in the fourth wave of the G&C Study. Ninety-nine participants were asked to make this judgement, but two of these participants did not remember the EFT task. Therefore, they were excluded from the following analysis.

5. This task was conducted in the fourth wave of the G&C Study.

6. When they answered this question, no feedback about their accuracy level was given to them. On average, participants’ judgement was better than random guessing, though the accuracy of their judgement as it was measured as the within-participant correlation between the targets’ actual choices and their judgements was not striking (the mean within-participant correlation of 0.06, p < 0.0001).

7. Eighty-six of the original 108 participants performed on EFT, made the default judgement, and also made the bonus judgement. Concerning the trustworthiness judgement, 84 participants performed the task, made the default judgement, and also made the bonus judgement. We used these 86 and 84 participants respectively for our analyses.

8. Suzuki and Yamagishi (2004) did not test the gender effect. We tested for the gender effect since the sex ratio varied between the Japanese and the American participants and found the main effect of gender.

9. Whether the tendency to self-enhance represents Americans’ default strategy of asserting themselves unless they are assured that they get what they want, or a is more fundamental human and universal trait is an important issue, but outside the scope of this study.

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