On Pancultural Self-Enhancement: Well-Adjusted Taiwanese Self-Enhance on Personally-Valued Traits

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Abstract

Taiwanese participants made better-than-average judgments on collectivistic and individualistic traits, evaluated the personal importance of those traits, and completed measures of psychological adjustment (depression, perceived stress, subjective well being, and satisfaction with life). Replicating findings from other East Asian samples, participants self-enhanced (i.e., regarded the self as superior to peers) more on collectivistic than individualistic attributes, and assigned higher personal importance to the former than the latter. Moreover, better adjusted participants manifested a stronger tendency to self-enhance on personally important attributes. These data are consistent with the view that self-enhancement is a universal human motive that is expressed tactically and at odds with the assertion that self-enhancement is a uniquely Western phenomenon.

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People strive for self-positivity. Stated somewhat differently, people are motivated to think well of themselves relative to others. Self-superiority beliefs come in abundance and are aptly demonstrated by the so-called better-than-average effect: People rate themselves as better-than-average on a variety of personality traits and abilities (Alicke & Govorun, 2005). The motive to increase self-positivity is known as self-enhancement. It is pervasive, and we consider it fundamental or universal (Sedikides, 1993; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003, in press).

The universality of the self-enhancement motive has been disputed by Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999), who argued that members of Eastern cultures (East Asians, in particular) do not have a self-positivity need. In their own words, "the empirical literature provides scant evidence for a need for positive self-regard among Japanese and indicates that a self-critical focus is more characteristic . . . the need for self-regard must be culturally variant" (Heine et al., 1999, p. 766). The crux of the argument is that self-enhancement (e.g., perceiving self as superior to other ingroup members) is a uniquely Western phenomenon.[1]

Universal Motive: The Evidence

Self-enhancement as a culturally constructed motive is a provocative argument. It is, nonetheless, an argument at odds with the extant data. Self-enhancement as a universal motive is buttressed theoretically by evolutionary accounts (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Gaertner, 2004), behavior genetic accounts (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002, 2006; Neiss et al., 2005), and existential or terror management accounts; notably, the last account has been empirically supported both in the West (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004) and the East (Heine, Harihara, & Niiya, 2002). In addition, the universality of self-regard is unequivocally backed by implicit measures, which side-step to a substantial degree self-presentational (Kudo & Numazaki, 2003) and modesty (Kurman, 2003; Muramoto, 2003) concerns. In particular, response latencies to pairings of self versus other with favorable versus unfavorable adjectives demonstrate that

Japanese and Chinese regard themselves more favorably than they regard a comparison other (Kobayashi & Greenwald, 2003) – even when a best friend or ingroup serves as the comparison other (Yamaguchi et al., 2007). Furthermore, name-letter preferences show self-enhancement in Japan (Murakami & Yamaguchi, 2000), Singapore (Pelham et al., 2005), and Thailand (Hoorens, Nuttin, Erdelyi-Herman, & Pavakanun, 1990). Likewise, birthday-number preferences (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997) and semantic priming (Hetts, Sakuma, & Pelham, 1999) reveal a favored self among Easterners.

More relevant to the objectives of this article are two other domains of evidence for the panculturality of self-enhancement. These are (a) tactical self-enhancement, and (b) relation between self-enhancement and psychological adjustment.

Tactical Self-Enhancement: Cultural Expressions of a Universal Motive

The Self-Enhancing Tactician Model (SCENT; Sedikides & Strube, 1997) guided our response to the cultural construction argument. SCENT postulates that the self-enhancement motive is fundamental, but its manifestations are tactical and sensitive to social-contextual or normative considerations. Rampant self-praise is frowned upon, invites scorn and ridicule, and is reputation-damaging. Tactical self-enhancement, however, is subtle and eludes direct disapproval by others. Arguably, the most common tactical self-enhancement strategy is to ennoble the self on personally important domains, but refrain from self-commendation (and even self-disparage) on personally unimportant domains (Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1998).

The personal importance of an evaluative domain is, to a degree, culturally-prescribed (Fischer, 2006). Cultures define what constitutes a “good person,” and cultural members strive to fulfill this role. Western cultures value the agency imperative (e.g., personal success, social dominance) or the individualistic dimension. Eastern cultures value the communion imperative (e.g., personal integration, social harmony) or the collectivistic dimension. Following from SCENT, therefore, both Westerners and Easterners should self-enhance, but they should do so on different dimensions. Westerners should self-enhance more fervently on the individualistic dimension, Easterners on the collectivistic dimension.

We obtained initial support for these propositions in two studies (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; see also Brown, 2003). We empirically validated attributes (i.e., traits and behaviors) that describe the individualistic and collectivistic dimensions, respectively. Next, participants completed a variant of the above-average paradigm in which they rated the extent to which the attributes describe the self relative to a typical ingroup member. In Study 1, we tested Japanese versus US students. In Study 2, we tested US students with interdependent versus independent self-construals (Singelis, 1994). US students and independents self-enhanced more strongly (i.e., rated attributes as more descriptive of self than other) on individualistic than collectivistic attributes. On the other hand, Japanese students and interdependents self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic attributes. Furthermore, there was evidence, in Study 2, that self-enhancement differences were mediated by attribute importance: both independents and interdependents self-enhanced on attribute dimensions that they deemed subjectively important.

We subsequently submitted the pancultural tactical-enhancement hypothesis to a meta-analytic test (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005). Our literature search revealed a potential methodological problem: Several studies claimed to assess self-enhancement on individualistic versus collectivistic attributes without validating the attributes. Given that non-validated attributes are potentially non-diagnostic, such studies might conceal the nuanced tactical expression of the enhancement motive. Symptomatic of the problem was inconsistent classification of attributes across studies. “Hardworking,” for example, was classified as collectivistic by some researchers (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002) and as individualistic by others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As expected, the meta-analysis identified attribute validation as a crucial moderator.

Studies that did not validate attributes produced inconclusive patterns. On the other hand, studies that validated attributes yielded consistent support for the universal nature of tactical self-enhancement (Sedikides et al., 2005, Investigation 1). *Within-culture analyses* indicated that Easterners self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic attributes, whereas

Westerners self-enhanced more strongly on individualistic than collectivistic attributes. *Between-culture analyses* indicated that Easterners self-enhanced *more strongly* than did Westerners on collectivistic attributes, whereas Westerners self-enhanced more strongly than did Easterners on individualistic attributes. Finally, some studies circumvented the validation issue by assessing tactical enhancement via the within-person correlation between self-enhancement and attribute importance (i.e., do persons self-enhance more strongly on personally important attributes?). Again, the data suggested a pancultural motive (Sedikides et al., Investigation 2). Easterners and Westerners evidenced an *equally strong* and *positive* within-person correlation such that self-enhancement systematically increased with the subjective importance of the attributes.

Relation between Self-enhancement and Psychological Adjustment

Markers of psychological adjustment (e.g., relatively low levels of depression, greater purpose in life) vary positively with self-enhancement in Western culture (e.g., Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, McDowell, 2003) and a growing body of evidence reveals a similar pattern in Eastern culture. Self-enhancing social comparisons, self-serving attributions, perceptions of self-efficacy, and optimism are negatively associated with depression and positively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction among Japanese (Kobayashi & Brown, 2003), Chinese (Anderson, 1999), Hong Kongese (Stewart et al., 2003), Koreans (Chang, Sanna, & Yang, 2003), Singaporeans (Kurman & Siram, 1997), and Singaporean Chinese (Kurman, 2003). Such a functional association between self-enhancement and adjustment in the West and East attests to the universality of the self-enhancement motive. Indeed, if self-enhancement was absent in the East, it would not vary systematically with psychological adjustment as it does in the West.

Universal Motive or Not? Two New Challenges

Favorable implicit self-regard, tactical self-enhancement, and a functional association with psychological adjustment certainly provide evidence for a universal self-enhancement motive. However, two recent meta-analyses and a critique of the better-than-average effect warn against a pancultural conclusion. We subsequently weigh the evidence of those challenges as well as the available counterevidence.

Two Alternative Meta-analyses

Two meta-analyses published subsequent to Sedikides et al. (2005) concluded that Easterners do not self-enhance. That conclusion, however, is compromised because neither meta-analysis provided a viable test of tactical self-enhancement.

Attribute validation. Heine, Kitayama, and Hamamura (2007) extended the Sedikides et al. (2005) meta-analysis with six additional studies. This extension, however, aggregated across studies that did versus did not validate attributes and, thereby, compromised the test of tactical self-enhancement. Reanalysis of the data with the moderating effect of validation revealed tactical enhancement: (1) Easterners self-enhanced more fervently on attributes validated as collectivistic than on attributes validated as individualistic, and (2) self-enhancement positively varied with the subjective importance of the attributes (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2007a, b).

Cultural relevancy of dimension. Heine and Hamamura (2007) meta-analyzed self-enhancement across multiple enhancement paradigms and concluded that, unlike Westerners, Easterners do not self-enhance. This meta-analysis, however, did not allow for tactical self-enhancement, because it did not distinguish between individualistic versus collectivistic dimensions. If studies primarily assessed self-enhancement on dimensions relevant to Western culture, both the SCENT model and the cultural perspective would predict self-enhancement among Westerners but not Easterners. Thus, the practice of aggregating across culturally-relevant dimension does not provide a suitable context for assessing the relative validity of these two rival theoretical views.

Non-motivational Account of the Better-than-Average-Effect

Evidence for explicit tactical self-enhancement in Eastern and Western culture has been demonstrated using variants of the better-than-average-effect in which participants provide a comparative rating of self versus a generalized other (e.g., the typical same age and sex peer). Heine and Hamamura (2007) suggested that Eastern self-enhancement in the latter paradigm reflects measurement artifact rather than motivation to maintain a positive self. They derived their argument from the work of Klar and colleagues who identified a non-motivational influence

on judgments of singular (e.g., self) versus generalized (e.g., the average peer) targets (Klar, 2002; Klar & Giladi, 1997; Giladi & Klar, 2002). Given that greater emphasis is placed on consideration of the singular target than the generalized comparative target, the singular target is perceived to be more extreme. Klar and colleagues, for example, demonstrated that any member of a liked group (e.g., a randomly selected student at one's university, police officer, soap fragrance) is rated more positively than the group average (e.g., average student at one's university, average police officer, average fragrance), and any member of a disliked group is evaluated more negatively than the group average.

However, extension of this cognitive process into a non-motivational artifact-argument regarding Eastern self-enhancement is compromised by two limitations. To begin with, the cognitive process is predicated on a positive evaluation of the singular target (in the case of self-enhancement). For example, the process anticipates a personal superiority bias when "the judge perceives the self (and the others in the concurrently judged group) as high on the judged trait" (Giladi & Klar, 2002, p. 550). Obviously, the necessary assumption of positive self-regard in an Eastern culture is inconsistent with the core assumption of the cultural construction argument.

In addition, the functioning of a cognitive process does not supplant the motivational basis for the better-than-average effect. Indeed, doing so would require that the cognitive process eliminates the effect, and it does not (Alike & Govorun, 2005). For example, the effect is diminished but *not eliminated* when the singular entity is the self (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg 1995). That is, compared to other singular entities, the self has a privileged position: The effect is greater when the self is the singular entity. Thus, the singular-versus-generalized target process cannot fully account for the effect, as it can not explain the augmented favorability accorded to the self.

Importantly, five sources of evidence support the motivational underpinnings of the better-than-average effect. We briefly review each in turn. First, the effect is a function of attributes that are strongly tethered to the self, such as positive or controllable traits. When comparing with the average college student, people consider positive traits to be more

descriptive of the self and negative traits to be more descriptive of others (Alicke, 1985). Similarly, they consider positive controllable traits to be most descriptive of self and negative controllable traits to be most descriptive of others (Alicke, 1985). Second, the effect emerges more strongly when there is interpretational latitude. The effect, for example, is stronger when people rate themselves on moral rather than intellectual behaviors, presumably because the former is more subjective (and thus less verifiable) than the latter (Allison, Mesick, & Goethals, 1989; Van Lange & Sedikides, 1998). Third, the effect remains under cognitive load (Alicke et al., 1995, Study 7). Such a load minimizes the impact of cognitive influences and the effect's continued presence supports the notion that it is an instance of automatic self-enhancement (Paulhus, 1993).

Fourth, the effect emerges selectively both in our primary research (Sedikides et al., 2003) and in the meta-analyses (Sedikides et al. 2005, 2007a). For Westerners, it emerges when they compare themselves with the average peer on individualistic attributes but not on collectivistic ones; for Easterners, it emerges when they compare themselves with the average peer on collectivistic attributes but not on individualistic ones. More generally, the effect emerges in both cultures to the extent to which comparison attributes are personally important. The singular-versus-generalized-target process, however, provides only a main-effect explanation (i.e., greater emphasis on singular than generalized target) that does not account for the interaction pattern in which self-other ratings fluctuate as a function of the cultural value and subjective importance of the comparison attributes. Indeed, the singular-versus-generalized-target process is hard-pressed to explain why the effect comes and goes as a function of the motivational significance of the judgment (i.e., stronger when social comparison involves valued or important attributes).

Finally, the functional association between self-enhancement and psychological adjustment has been documented with the better-than-average effect (e.g., Taylor et al. 2003; Kobayashi & Brown, 2003; Kurman, 2003) as well as with a multitude of enhancement measures that do not involve singular-versus-generalized target comparisons. For example, the functional

association has been evidenced with (a) self ratings of academic performance controlled against actual performance (Kurman, 2003; Kurman & Siram, 1997), (b) discrepancy between a participant's self-evaluation and a friend's evaluation of the participant (Taylor et al.), (d) optimism (Chang et al., 2003), (e) personal-desirability ratings (Taylor et al.), (f) self-deceptive enhancement (Taylor et al.), (g) self-efficacy (Stewart et al., 2003), and (h) self-serving attributions (Anderson, 1999). Such a shared pattern of association across methodologically diverse measures of enhancement provides convergent validity for the motivational underpinnings of the better-than-average effect.

Tactical Self-Enhancement in the East: A Focused and Novel Test

The current research provides a novel test of the notion that the self-enhancement motive is fundamental and relevant to human functioning in Eastern Culture. If self-enhancement is a relevant motive for Easterners, we should be able to bridge the literatures on psychological adjustment and tactical self-enhancement to yield a hypothesis regarding the typology of individuals who enhance more than others and the nature of the attributes on which they do so. Simply put, self-enhancement on personally-important attributes (i.e., tactical enhancement) should be evidenced more strongly by better adjusted persons.

In particular, self-enhancement, attribute importance, and adjustment should relate multiplicatively, such that self-enhancement varies as an interactive function of attribute importance and adjustment. Better adjusted members of Eastern culture should evidence a stronger tendency to self-enhance on subjectively important attributes (i.e., tactical self-enhancement) than do their less adjusted counterparts. Stated otherwise, the positive association between explicit self-enhancement and psychological adjustment should be stronger on attributes of greater than lesser subjective importance. However, if self-enhancement and its tactical expression are irrelevant to human functioning in Eastern culture, then systematic associations among self-enhancement, attribute importance, and psychological adjustment should be negligible. We conducted a study in Taiwan to distinguish these hypotheses.

Eastern countries, of course, are not homogenous and vary in cultural characteristics (e.g., Huo & Randall, 1991). Taiwan provides an apt test of the hypotheses in that it ranks among the more collectivistic countries in Hofstede's (1980) pivotal analysis – a ranking that has been replicated in subsequent multi-country samples (Merritt, 2000; Spector, Cooper, & Sparks, 2001). Indeed, this is the first study in an Eastern culture to assess the multiplicative association among self-enhancement, attribute importance, and psychological adjustment.

Method

Participants

Participants were 60 undergraduate students (35 females, 25 males) at one of three Taiwanese universities: National Dong Hwa University (n = 25), National Taipei University (n = 15), and Taiwan Tzu Chi University (n = 20). The distribution of female and male participants was approximately even across universities. Students received 250 New Taiwan Dollars (approximately $9 US) for their participation.

Procedure

Participants first completed a self-enhancement task in which they made better-than-average judgments on 14 traits (i.e., attributes), seven of which were collectivistic (respectful, compliant, tolerant, compromising, loyal, modest, self-sacrificing) and seven were individualistic (independent, separate, unconstrained, free, leader, unique, original). Sedikides et al. (2003, Pilot Study) initially validated the traits. Following extensive consultation with members of Taiwanese culture and in an effort to take into account culture-specific communication norms, we made minor alterations to the original set of traits. We replaced the collectivistic traits "agreeable," "patient," and "good listener" with "compliant," "tolerant" and "modest," while excluding the collectivistic trait "cooperative" and the individualistic trait "self-reliant."

Instructions to the self-enhancement task informed participants to "rate yourself in comparison to your peers." Thus, participants rated the extent to which each trait described themselves relative to the average Taiwanese university student of similar age and sex on a 6-point scale: 1 = *definitely less than the average university student of my age and gender*, 2 =

somewhat less than the average university student of my age and gender, 3 = *slightly less than the average university student of my age and gender*, 4 = *slightly more than the average university student of my age and gender*, 5 = *somewhat more than the average university student of my age and gender*, 6 = *definitely more than the average university student of my age and gender*. Subsequently, participants considered the same 14 traits and rated "the extent to which each trait is important to you, personally" on a 6-point scale: 1 = *very unimportant*, 2 = *moderately unimportant*, 3 = *slightly unimportant*, 4 = *slightly important*, 5 = *moderately important*, 6 = *very important*.

Participants completed the session with four validated psychological adjustment measures. The *Beck Depression Inventory* (BDI; Beck & Steer, 1987) is a 21-item item instrument on which higher scores indicate greater depression. The *Perceived Stress* scale (PS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) is a 10-item instrument on which higher scores indicate greater perceived stress. The *Subjective Well Being* scale (SWB; Sevastos, Smith, & Cordery, 1992) is a 12-item instrument on which higher scores indicate greater subjective well being. Finally, the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWL; Pavot & Diener, 1993) is a 5-item instrument on which higher scores indicate greater global satisfaction with life. These measures have been validated previously with Chinese participants (Che, Lu, Chen, Chan, & Lee, 2006; Chen, 2006; Lu & Argyle, 1994; Lu et al., 1997).

Translation

All instruments were presented in Traditional Chinese (Taiwanese version). We used available Chinese translations of the psychological adjustment measures. The self-enhancement and importance tasks were translated into Chinese by co-author and native Chinese speaker Kirk Chang. Back translations insured that the Chinese items matched the English version.

Results

The psychological adjustment measures evidenced internal consistency and moderate intercorrelations in directions as expected (Table 1). Although an argument could be made for collapsing the measures into a single index, we opted to analyze the measures separately. This

strategy allows examination of the hypothesized relations across each measure and enables detection of nuanced differences among measures. We initially included sex in the following analyses and subsequently removed it, because it exerted neither main nor interactive effects.

Self-Enhancement and Attribute Dimension: Replication of Sedikides et al. (2003)

Taiwanese participants self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic (M = 4.29, SD = 0.66) than individualistic (M = 3.99, SD = 0.60) attributes, $F(1, 59) = 9.33$, $p = .0034$, $d = 0.39$, and rated as more personally-important the collectivistic (M = 4.77, SD = 0.52) than individualistic (M = 4.48, SD = 0.59) attributes, $F(1, 59) = 9.64$, $p = .0029$, $d = 0.40$. These results replicate our past findings of tactical self-enhancement in Eastern cultures, and support the tenets of the SCENT model.[2]

Self-Enhancement, Subjective Importance, and Psychological Adjustment

To test our prediction that self-enhancement varies across attributes and persons as an interactive function of attribute importance and psychological adjustment, we conducted a multi-level modeling analysis (Raudenbush & Bryrk, 2002) for each adjustment measure. We regressed the self-enhancement ratings on the corresponding importance ratings, the participant's psychological adjustment score (for a given measure), and the Importance x Adjustment interaction. Also, we person-centered importance ratings, grand-mean centered adjustment ratings, allowed the intercept and importance slope to vary randomly, used Satterthwaite *df*, and included as a covariate the person-level mean importance rating to estimate accurately the within-person effect (Raudenbush & Bryrk, 2002, p. 183).

As Table 2 shows, each model evidenced a significant Importance x Adjustment interaction, indicating that tactical self-enhancement (i.e., positive within-person association between self-enhancement and attribute importance) was more pronounced among better adjusted persons (i.e., lower depression and stress, higher subjective well being and satisfaction with life). In particular, we decomposed the interactions by testing the simple slope of importance at low and high values of psychological adjustment (i.e., 1 *SD* below and above the adjustment measure mean; Curran, Bauer, & Willoughby, 2006). As the middle columns of

Table 2 display, the positive within-person association between self-enhancement and importance was stronger at *lower than higher* levels of depression and perceived stress, and at *higher than lower* levels of subjective well being and satisfaction with life. That is, the tendency to self-enhance on subjectively important attributes was stronger among more adjusted participants.

An alternative way to view the interaction is via the association between self-enhancement and adjustment at low and high values of attribute importance (i.e., 1 *SD* below and above the mean importance rating, with the *SD* derived from the within-person variance estimate of an unconditional multi-level model predicting importance; Nezlek & Plesko, 2003). As the right-most columns of Table 2 display, self-enhancement was unrelated to psychological adjustment at lower attribute importance. At higher attribute importance, however, self-enhancement was *negatively* related to depression and perceived stress, and was *positively* related to subjective well being and satisfaction with life. Stated otherwise, the tendency for self-enhancement to increase with better adjustment occurred on the attributes of higher but not lesser personal importance.

An additional question of the data regards the absolute magnitude of the self-other social comparison: do Taiwanese participants evidence significant self-enhancement? Do they rate self more favorably than other? We can address the question of absolute self-enhancement by testing responses against the scale midpoint of 3.5, which differentiates self-enhancing responses from self-critical responses (see *Procedure*). As displayed in Table 3, each predicted mean from the multi-level analyses at low and high values of importance and mental health reflect significant self-enhancement in that each is significantly greater than the scale midpoint of 3.5.

Finally, we added to the multi-level models the main and interactive effects of dimension (whether an attribute was individualistic or collectivistic) to test whether the previously described patterns varied across attribute dimensions. In no instance was there a significant Importance x Adjustment x Dimension effect. The tendency for better adjusted persons to self-

enhance increasingly with the subjective importance of an attribute was consistent across the individualistic and collectivistic attributes

Discussion

The universal nature of the self-enhancement motive was disputed by Heine and colleagues (Heine et al., 1999; Heine et al., 2007; Heine & Hamamura, 2007), who argued that a need for positive self-regard is a product of Western culture and absent in Eastern culture. Challenging that cultural construction perspective is the SCENT model, which, on the basis of evolutionary (Sedikides et al., 2000, 2004, 2006), behavior genetic (Neiss et al., 2002, 2005, 2006), and existential (Heine et al., 2002; Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2007) accounts of the fundamental nature of self-regard, postulates that *humans* are driven to maintain a positive sense of self. The model recognizes that detection of the motive can prove elusive, because it is expressed tactically. People rarely self-enhance rigidly and unwaveringly. Instead, they strategically navigate social contexts, customs, and norms. Cultural members elevate their self-regard by enhancing on dimensions their culture imbues with meaning – dimensions that members consider as subjectively important. As our research consistently indicates, Westerners self-enhance more fervently on attributes relevant to their cultural call for individualism, whereas Easterners self-enhance more fervently on attributes relevant to their cultural call for collectivism (Sedikides et al., 2003, 2005, 2007a, b). Underlying that cultural difference in expression is a common psychological mechanism: tactically self-enhancing on personally-important dimensions.

The current study extends existing research in two regards. First, the Taiwanese sample expands the Eastern locales in which we have tested the SCENT model. Replicating our findings from other Eastern samples, members of the current Taiwanese sample self-enhanced (i.e., regarded self as superior to peers) more strongly on (and assigned higher personal importance to) collectivistic than individualistic attributes. These data are consistent with the SCENT model and at odds with the argument that self-enhancement is a uniquely Western motive.

Second, the current study provides a novel test for the cultural relevance of the self-enhancement motive. Simply stated, if the enhancement motive is relevant to human functioning in Eastern culture, then its tactical expression should systematically vary with psychological adjustment. In particular, better adjusted persons should evidence a stronger tendency to self enhance on personally important attributes. On the other hand, if self-enhancement is a uniquely Western motive with no relevance to human functioning in Eastern culture, then self-enhancement and its tactical expression should remain independent of psychological adjustment in the Taiwanese sample. Indeed, this is the first study to measure concurrently in an Eastern culture the three theoretical constructs of interests: self-enhancement, attribute importance, and psychological adjustment. Consistent with a universal enhancement motive, the latter three constructs evidenced a multiplicative association: Taiwanese participants who reported less depression, less perceived stress, higher subjective well being, or higher satisfaction with life manifested a stronger tendency to self-enhance on personally important attributes. Not only do members of Eastern culture self-enhance tactically, but the tendency to do so is most pronounced among the more psychologically adjusted members. These data contribute novel and critical evidence that the self-enhancement motive is alive and well in Eastern culture.

A skeptic, however, might contend that the absence of a Western sample renders the current research mute as to whether the self-enhancement motive is universal. We remind the skeptic that the cultural construction perspective is an argument of absolutes: Westerners self-enhance and Easterners do not. Consequently, detection of non-zero tactical self-enhancement and a non-zero association between tactical self-enhancement and psychological adjustment in an Eastern sample directly falsifies the latter argument. Consider the following thought experiment. Imagine the current research included a Western sample and evidenced an interaction such that the results previously reported for the Eastern sample were stronger among the Western sample. Would such an interaction merit the conclusion that self-enhancement is a uniquely Western motive? No, that interaction would not refute a pancultural argument. The critical test is whether tactical self-enhancement and its association with psychological

adjustment are significant in the Eastern sample. Factors other than the presence or absence of the enhancement motive, such as self-presentation and modesty concerns (Kudo & Numazaki, 2003; Kurman, 2003; Muramoto, 2003), additionally influence the relative magnitude of cross-cultural comparisons. The critical pattern of non-zero tactical self-enhancement and its non-zero association with psychological adjustment in Eastern culture attests to the functional presence of self-enhancement in the East and does not require a Western sample.

In concluding, we contemplate two issues for future research. Although the current study revealed a systematic association between tactical-self enhancement and psychological adjustment, the cross-sectional methodology remains silent as to whether (1) tactical self-enhancement promotes adjustment, (2) better adjustment promotes tactical self-enhancement, or, as the case may be, (3) causal influence flows in both directions. A longitudinal investigation, with repeated measurements of self-enhancement, attribute importance, and psychological adjustment, would provide the necessary data to examine each possibility.

The second issue is the prospect of a finer-grained detection of tactical self-enhancement. Recognizing that unwavering self-enhancement is greeted by disdain and possibly exclusion from others (Sedikides, Gregg, & Hart, 2007), the SCENT model suggests that self-enhancement is achieved tactically, such as by enhancing primarily on culturally and personally valued dimensions. The existing and current results are certainly consistent with such a strategic ennobling of the self. However, culturally valued dimensions might not constitute the most efficient means of tactical self-enhancement. It is plausible that culturally valued dimensions are particularly salient to others, in which case efforts at strategic self-enhancement might also become salient. Such an argument raises the possibility that tactical self-enhancement is achieved most efficiently on dimensions for which personal value and cultural value diverge. Perhaps people self-enhance most emphatically on dimensions that they uniquely and idiosycratically value?

The current research, based on a Taiwanese sample, offers the novel finding that better adjusted persons evidence a stronger tendency to perceive the self as superior to others on

personally important attributes. This finding attests to the universal nature of the self-enhancement motive. Easterners, like Westerners, self-enhance.

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Footnotes

[1]We use the terms Eastern and Western for expedience but recognize the diversity within each category. Eastern studies cited in the current research sampled from East-Asian nations and Western studies sampled from the United States of America, Canada, and Western Europe.

[2]The same pattern of self-enhancement is yielded by the four collectivistic attributes retained from the pilot research of Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi (2003) and the three newly added attributes derived from interviews with members of Taiwanese culture (see *Method*). In particular, Taiwanese participants self-enhanced *less strongly* on the individualistic attributes (M = 3.99) than on either the 4-retained-collectivistic attributes (M = 4.33), $F(1, 59) = 11.60$, $p < .05$, or the 3-new-collectivistic attributes (M = 4.23), $F(1, 59) = 4.87$, $p < .05$, and self-enhancement did not differ between the new and retained collectivistic attributes, $F(1, 59) = 1.16$, $p = .29$.

Table 1

Correlations among Psychological Adjustment Measures (PAM).

PAM	BDI	PS	SWB	SWL
BDI	(.84)			
PS	.52***	(.82)		
SWB	-.65***	-.64***	(.80)	
SWL	-.30*	-.32*	.54***	(.73)

Note. Cronbach's alpha is on the diagonal.

BDI = Beck Depression Inventory; PS = Perceived Stress; SWB = Subjective Well Being; SWL = Satisfaction with Life;

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Self-enhancement as an interactive function of Attribute Importance and Psychological Adjustment Measures (PAM)).

			Importance Simple Slopes				*PAM Simple Slopes*			
	Importance x PAM		PAM Low		PAM High		Importance Low		Importance High	
PAM	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
BDI	-0.38**	0.12	0.52***	0.06	0.26***	0.06	0.15	0.19	-0.68***	0.19
PS	-0.20*	0.08	0.49***	0.06	0.28***	0.06	-0.13	0.12	-0.53***	0.12
SWB	0.24***	0.07	0.23***	0.06	0.54***	0.06	-0.06	0.10	0.45***	0.10
SWL	0.13*	0.06	0.29***	0.06	0.49***	0.06	0.02	0.08	0.28**	0.08

Note. BDI = Beck Depression Inventory; PS = Perceived Stress; SWB = Subjective Well Being; SWL = Satisfaction with Life; Simple slopes are estimated 1 SD below (i.e., low) and above (i.e., high) the mean of the corresponding variable (i.e., importance or PAM).

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3

Predicted Self-Enhancement Means as a Function of Attribute Importance and Psychological Adjustment Measures (PAM)).

	PAM Low		*PAM High*	
PAM	Importance Low	Importance High	Importance Low	Importance High
BDI	$3.68^{\dagger}$	4.79^{***}	3.78^{**}	4.33^{***}
PS	3.80^{**}	4.82^{***}	$3.67^{\dagger}$	4.28^{***}
SWB	3.78^{**}	4.27^{***}	3.69^{*}	4.83^{***}
SWL	3.72^{*}	4.34^{***}	3.75^{**}	4.77^{***}

Note. BDI = Beck Depression Inventory; PS = Perceived Stress; SWB = Subjective Well Being; SWL = Satisfaction with Life; Means are estimated 1 SD below (i.e., low) and above (i.e., high) the mean of Importance and PAM, respectively. Superscript refers to a test of the predicted mean against the scale midpoint of 3.5, with means greater than 3.5 reflecting a self-enhancing response.

$^{\dagger}p < .06$. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.