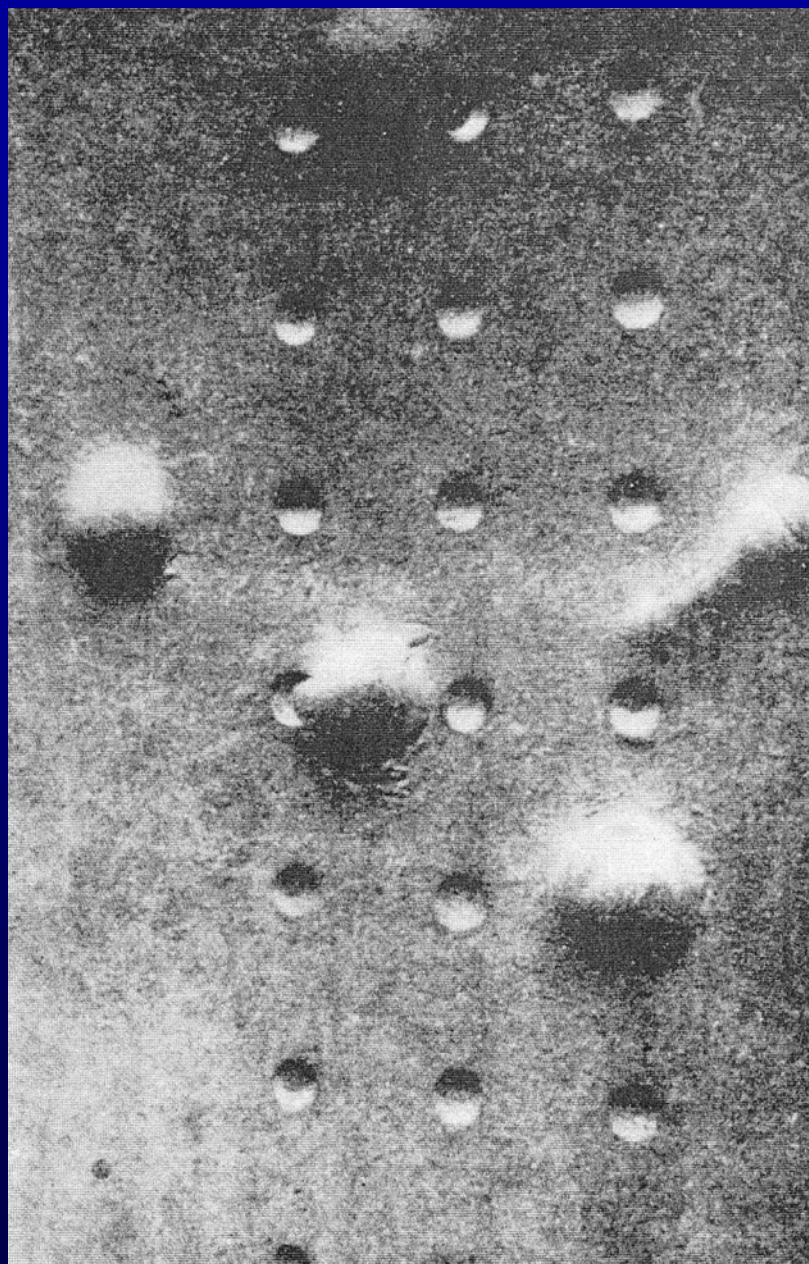


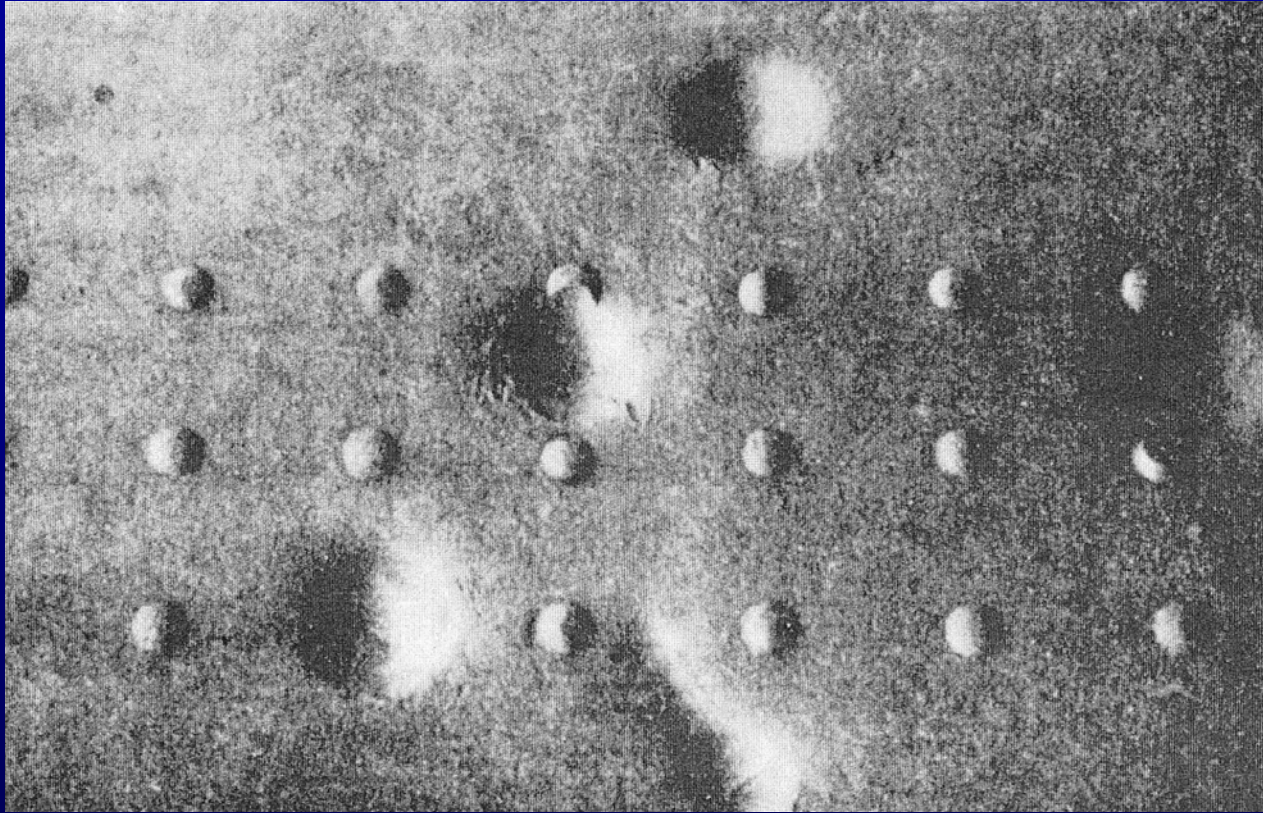
# Social Constructivist Approach to Cultural Influences

Ying-yi Hong

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Paper presented at Hokkaido University, Sapporo,  
Japan (January 2006).





# Four principles of Person X Situation interactionism:

1. Situation transforms people as they try to understand and create meanings in their lives: e.g., cognitive dissonance, self-perceptions.
2. Of course people also actively change their environment.
3. People construct situation: Often times it is not the reality that matters. It is how people understand and construct realities that matters.

(Part 1 of my talk: beliefs about race)

4. Human psychological system is flexible and can adapt to different environment. These adaptation will be internalized as background assumptions, knowledge and representations.

For example, the crater vs. hill illustration.

(Part 2: Culture matters -- beliefs about the social world)



## Part 1: Beliefs about Race

Although recent research on the human genome suggests that the variations within racial groups are larger than the differences between them, and that no real genetic differences are found across different human races, the belief that there are underlying realities—essences—among such socially constructed categories as race still exists.

**Essentialist/Entity theory:** A belief in race as reflecting deep biological essence, unchangeable, and indicative of abilities and traits.

How does holding the essentialist belief of race influence lay people's psychological functioning?

Study 1: Western expatriates in Beijing;

Study 2: Chinese Americans' switching between Chinese and American cultures;

Study 3: Chinese Americans' integration of bicultural experiences.

## Study 1: Zhang and Hong

A belief in entity race predicts less acculturation into Chinese culture for Western expatriates in Beijing.

**Below are questions concerning your activities during the past 6 months. Please fill in the blanks with percentages. (0 to 100)**

*Sample activities:*

During this past period, when I listened to music, \_\_\_\_\_% of the time I listened to Chinese music.

During this past period, when I was engaged in recreation, \_\_\_\_\_% of the time it was Chinese forms of recreation. (e.g. Chinese movies, Ma jiang, Chinese poker....)

Among the restaurants where I dined out during the past month, \_\_\_\_\_% were Chinese restaurants.

During this past period, the language I used at work was \_\_\_\_\_% Chinese.

During this past period, \_\_\_\_\_% of the films I watched was in Chinese.

Now \_\_\_\_\_% of my friends are Chinese.

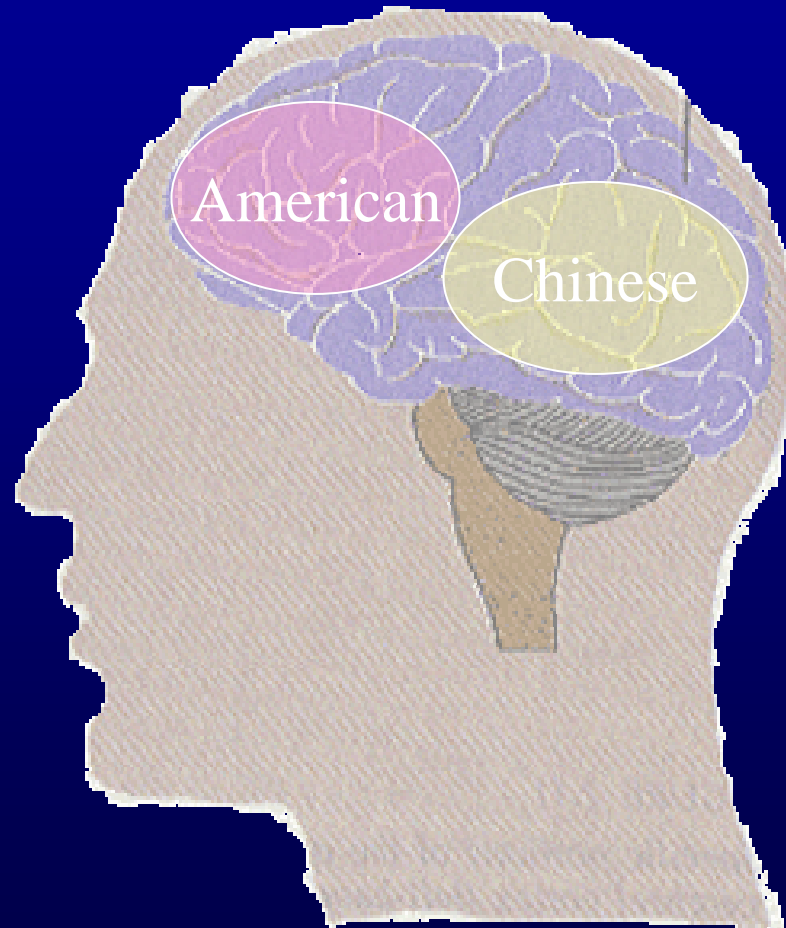
## Results (N=84)

gender composition:	71% males
mean age:	35 years-old
mean length of residence in China:	3.38 years
mean endorsement of race theory:	2.76 (out of a 6-point scale)
mean activity level:	21.36%

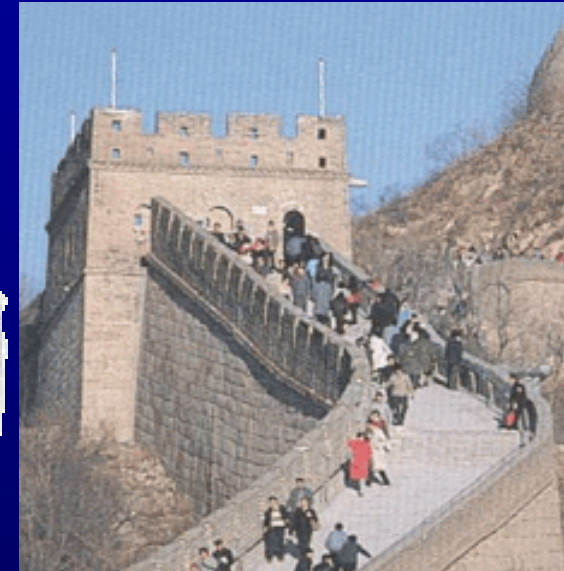
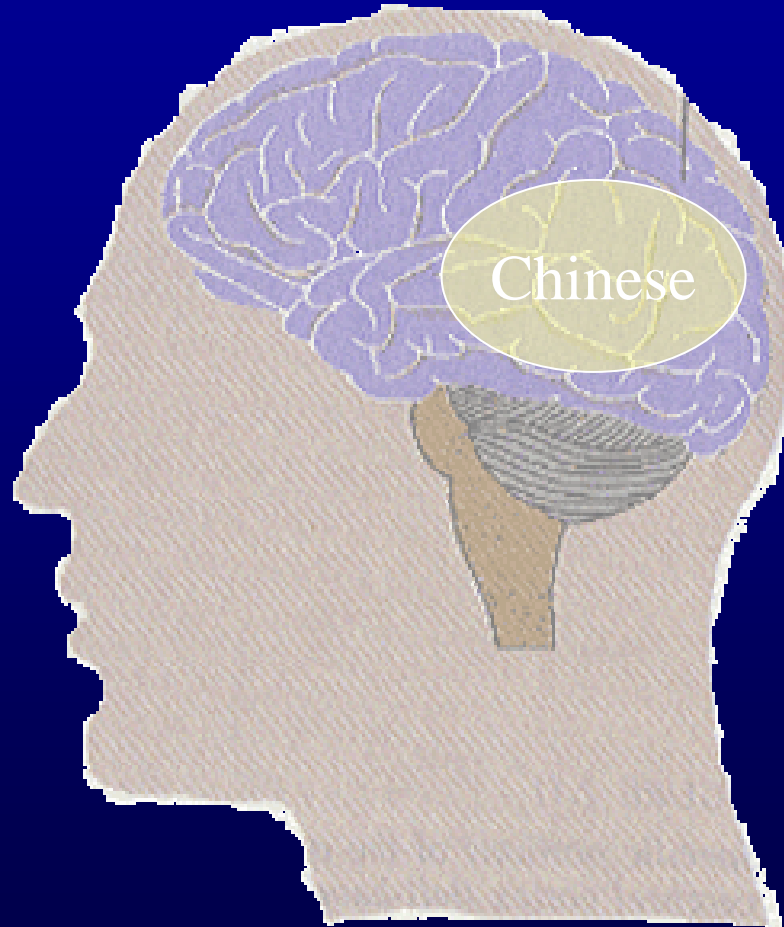
**correlation between beliefs of race and activity:  $-.43$**



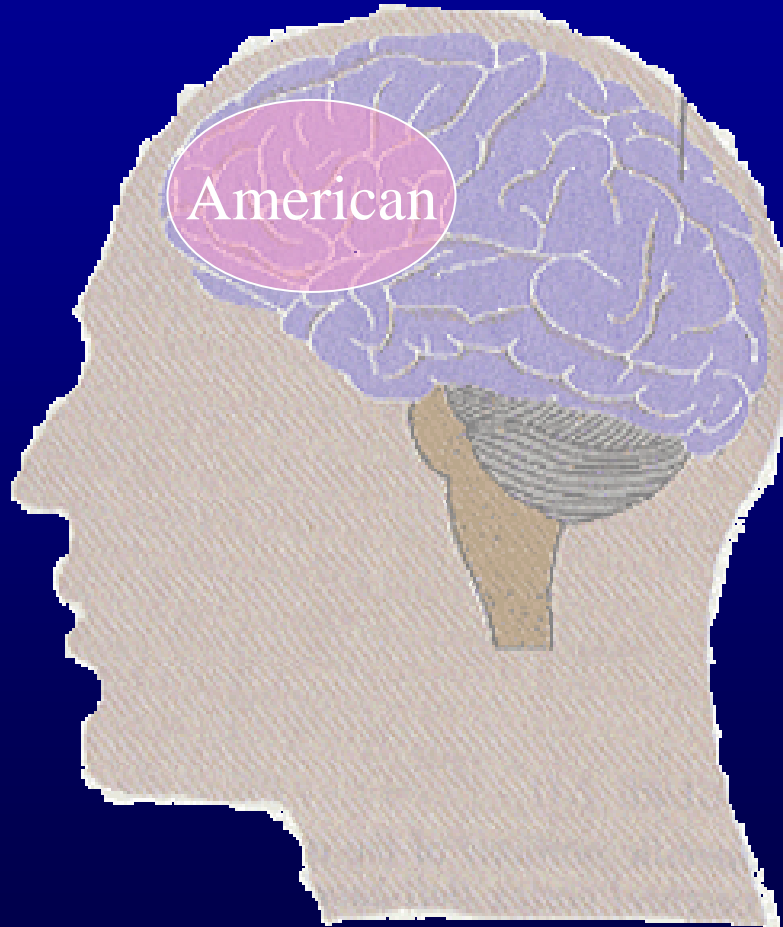
# Bicultural individuals



# Cultural priming



# Cultural priming



## Chinese Cultural Primes



## Neutral Primes



## American Cultural Primes

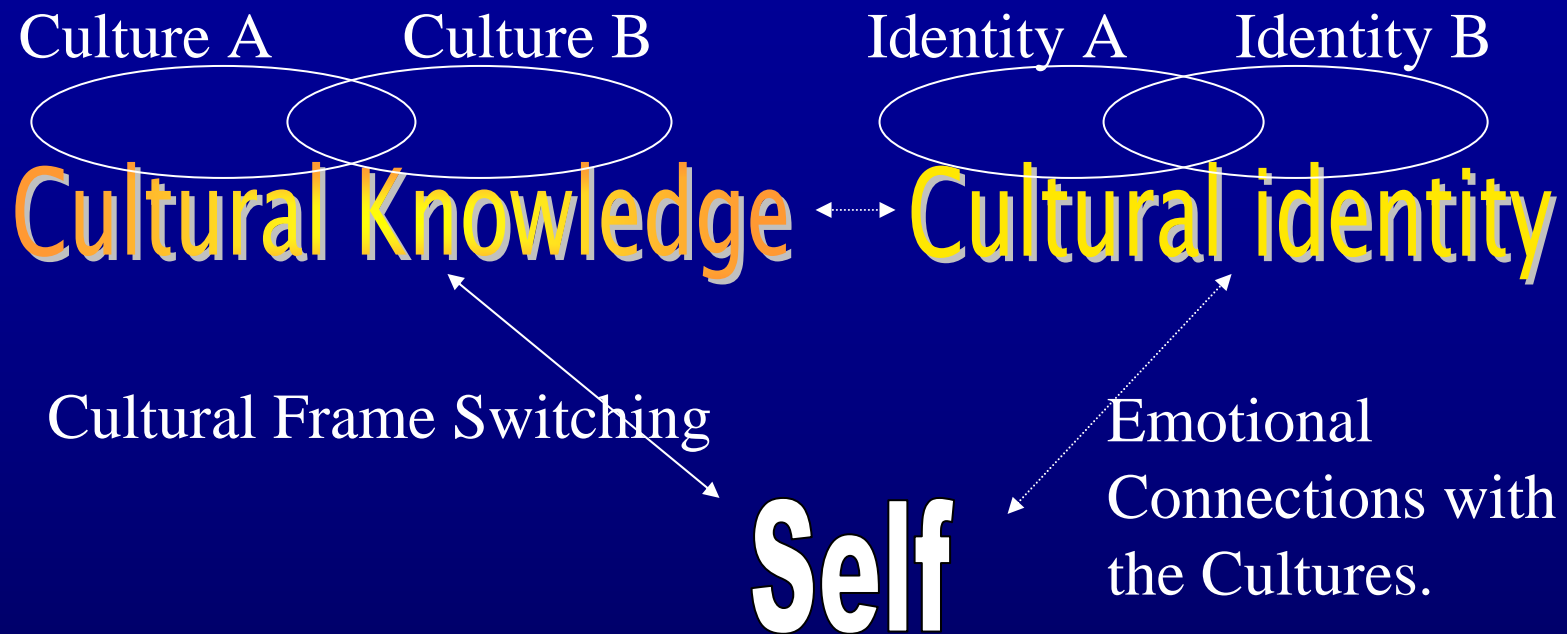


## *Result Summary*

The Chinese (American) cultural cues heightened the *accessibility* of the Chinese (American) cultural theory. Subsequently, these individuals will apply the more accessible cultural theory to the task at hand.

### Dependent measures:

1. Internal versus external attributions (Hong, Chiu, et al., 1997, Hong et al., 2000; Hong et al., 2003)
2. Cooperation versus competition in Prisoner's dilemma game (Wong & Hong, 2005)
3. Egocentric versus relational emotional projection (No & Hong, 2004)



Do bicultural individuals differ in the extent of frame switching? YES.



# Theory

Bicultural individuals can dynamically switch between cultural frames, and the individual differences in the extent of doing so are linked to the *lay theories of race*:

**Essentialist/Entity theory:** A belief in race as reflecting deep biological essence, unchangeable, and indicative of abilities and traits.

Endorsements of these theories are not related to years of residence in the United States nor general cognitive styles (e.g., need for cognitive closure).

## How do beliefs about race affect cultural frame switching?

Believing in race as essentialist would lead ethnic minority members to view the boundary between their own ethnic groups and the mainstream group as impermeable. As a result, an entity belief would create resistance toward cultural frame switching, such that the mainstream American icons would remind ethnic minority members of their fixed ethnicity (i.e., “I am a Chinese”), and thereby evoke reactivity in their cognitive and affective responses.

## Study 2: Chao and Hong

A belief in entity race predicts longer reaction time in switching between cultural frames.

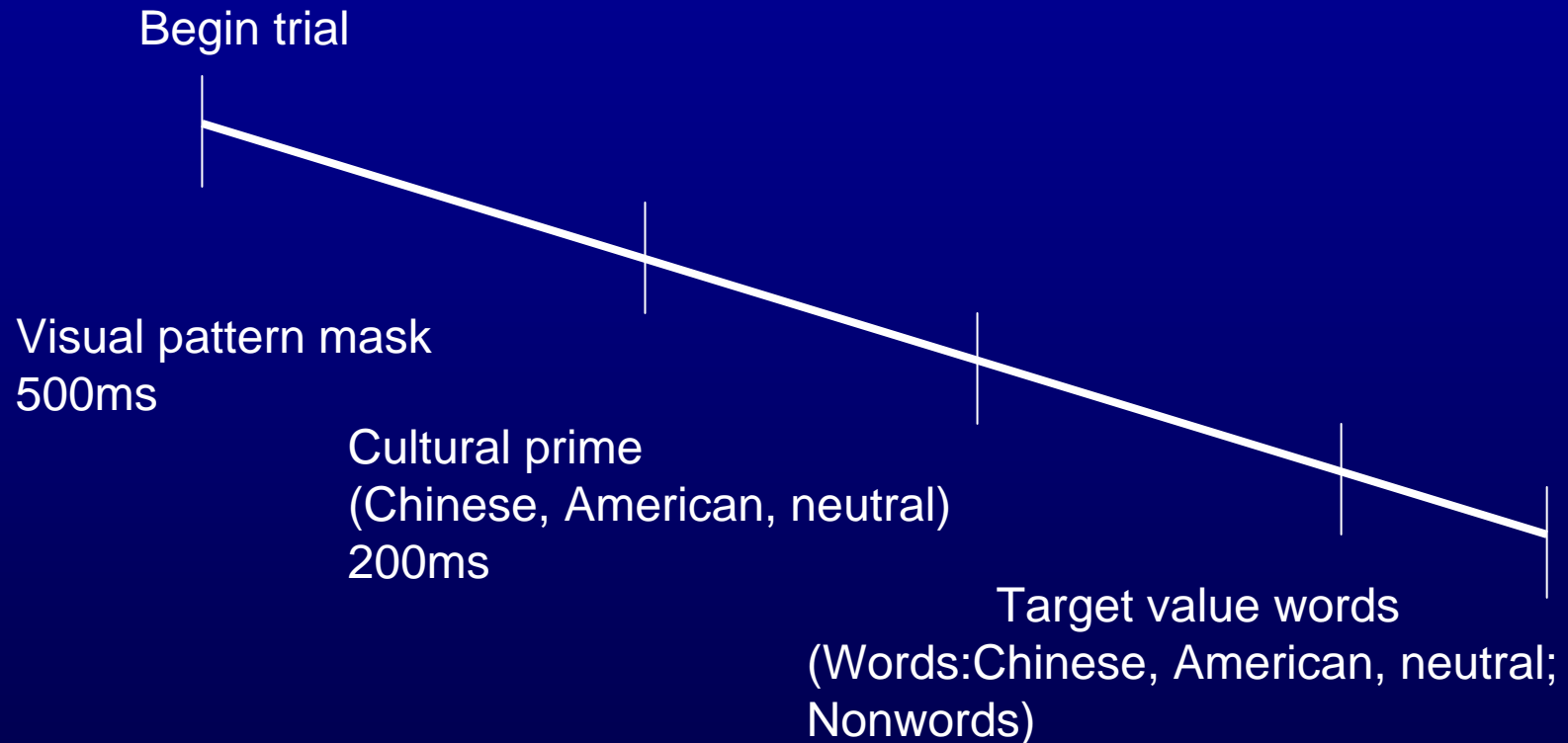
- Cultural prime
  - Increase accessibility of
    - Chinese cultural knowledge
    - American cultural knowledge
- Control prime



# Dependent measure: RT in Lexical decision task

- Target words
  - Chinese value:
    - obedient, modesty, collective, obligation, harmony
  - American value:
    - assertive, unique, individuality, autonomy, freedom
  - Neutral:
    - surprise, temporary, velocity, invisible, preparation
- Adjusted for baseline target word frequency differences
  - Neutral prime RT served as baseline

# Timeline of a trial



# Results

- Replicating the cultural frame switching effect: American primes facilitate subsequent identification of American value words, and Chinese primes facilitate subsequent identification of Chinese value words.

## Facilitation scores

American Prime		Chinese Prime	
American Value	Chinese value	American value	Chinese value
1.97	.79	-4.42	5.44



Correlations  
between facilitation score and entity theory of race

American Prime		Chinese Prime	
American Value	Chinese value	American value	Chinese value
-0.05	<b>-0.35*</b>	<b>-0.24</b>	-0.06

## Study 3: Chen, Roisman, & Hong

A belief in entity race predicts more sweating when describing their personal experience with Chinese and American cultures.

### Cultural Attachment Interview

- The interview protocols were adapted from Adult Attachment Interview (*Main, Kaplan, Cassidy, 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1998; Hesse, 1999*); 17 episodes with standardized interview questions (45~60 minutes);
- Participants' skin conductance and heart rate were measured second by second throughout the interview.

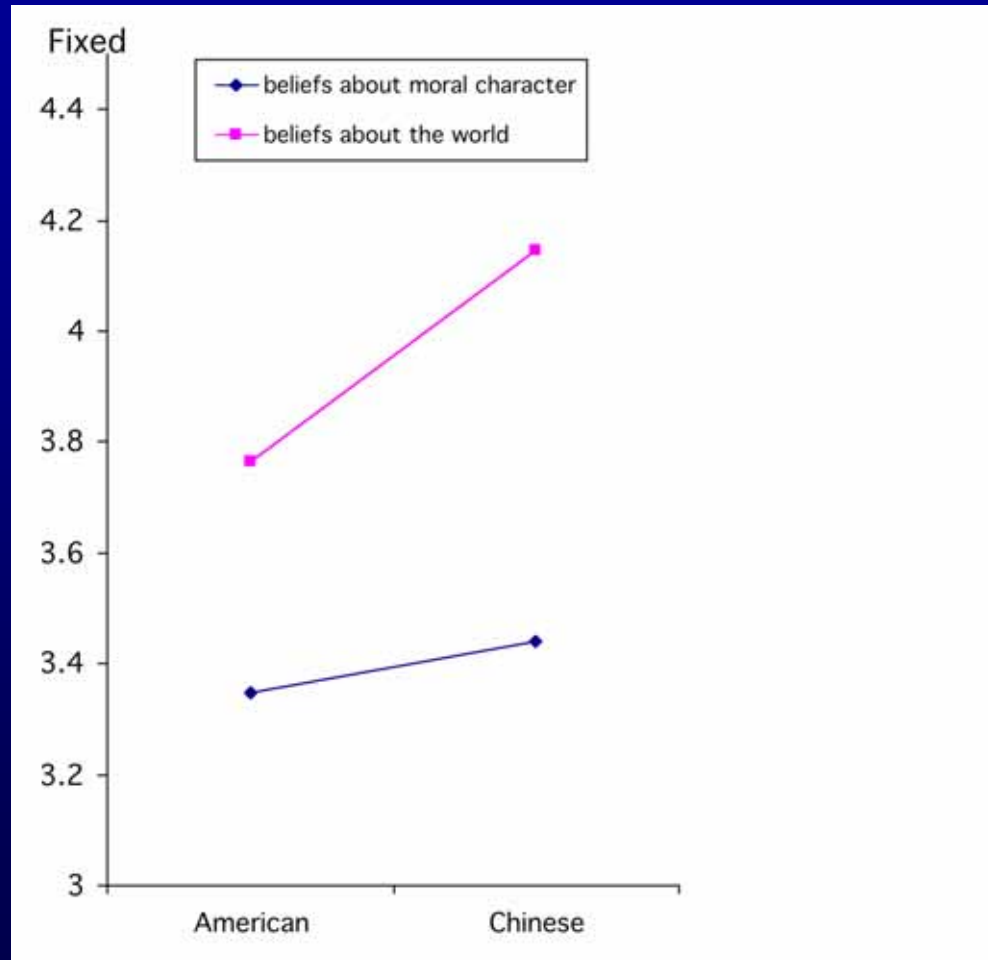
## Correlations between skin conductance and entity theory of race

Interview questions	r
1. Baseline (10 minutes rest)	.06
2. After baseline, before interview starts	.01
3. Warm up questions	.15
4. General feelings about Chinese culture	.21
5. Generate 5 words to characterize personal experience with Chinese culture	.34**
6. General feelings about American culture	.34**
7. Generate 5 words to characterize personal experience with American culture	.30**
8. Ever feel close to Chinese culture?	.29*
9. Ever being discriminated/rejected from Chinese culture?	.31*
10. Ever feel close to American culture?	.29*
11. Ever being discriminated/rejected from American culture?	.28*
12. If born again, choose to be Chinese or American?	.30*
13. Cultural influence on personality	.30*
14. Ever confused about your identity?	.32*
15. Anything else?	.34*
16. After interview, before final rest starts	.30*
17. Final rest (10 minutes rest)	.25

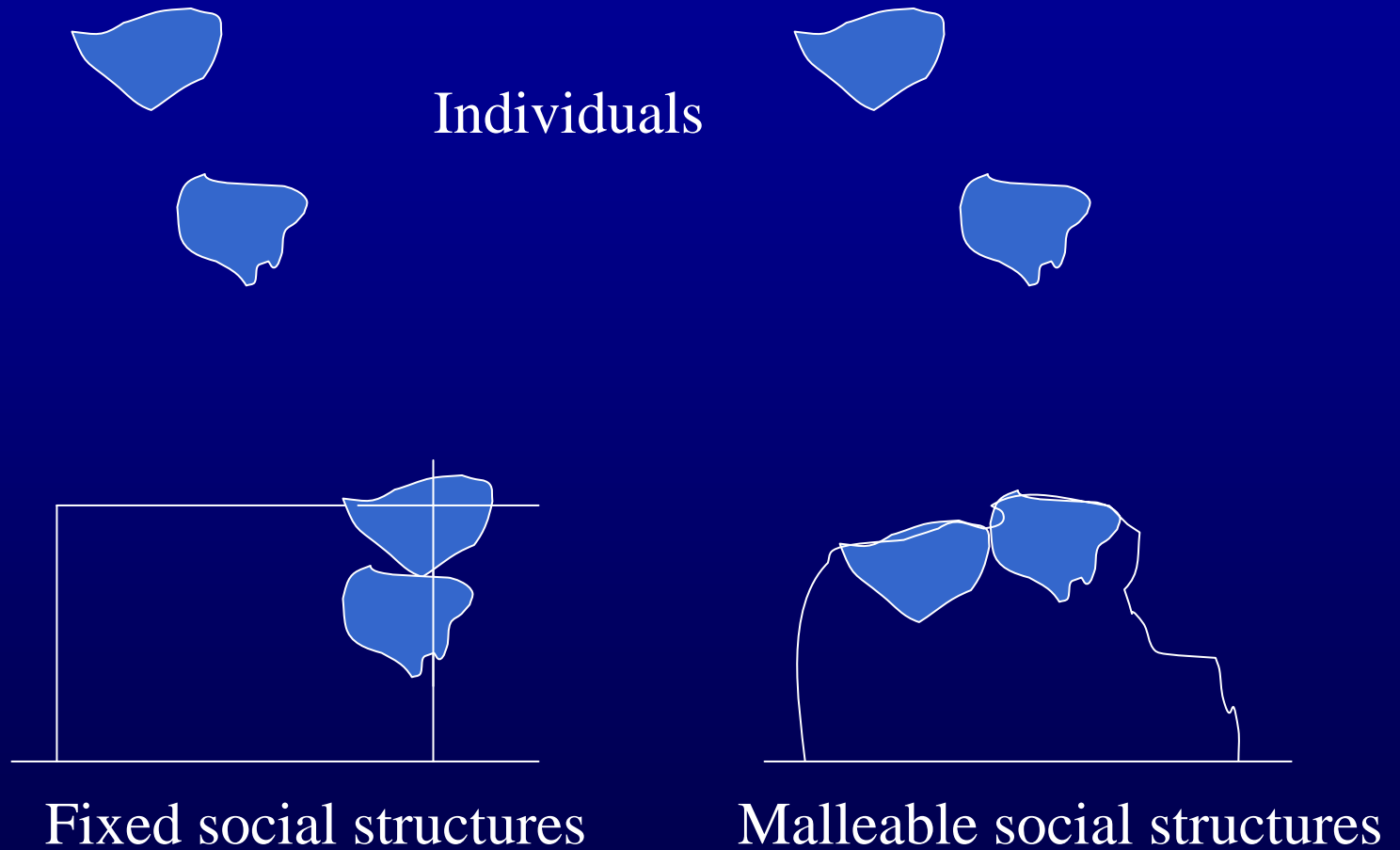
## Part 1 Summary

A belief in race as essentialist entity (an entity theory) seems to set up a framework within which racial minority group members (Asians in the US or Westerners in China) have difficulty in integrating their experience with the mainstream culture.

## Part 2: Culture matters – beliefs about the social world (Hong, Lee, & Zhang)



# Building a wall as a metaphor





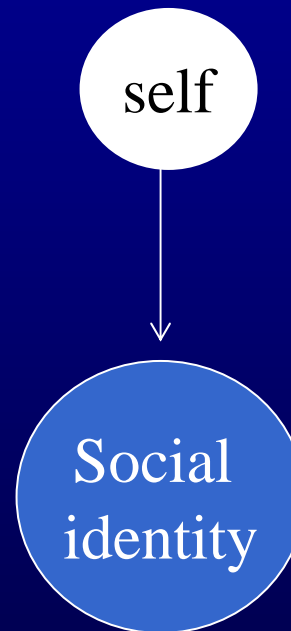
**Ways people relate to a social group**



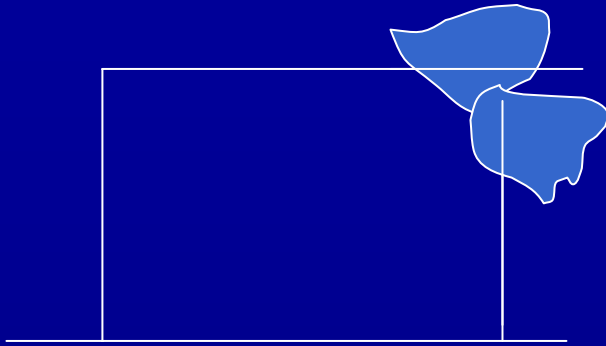
**Interpretation of the self in terms of the social group membership (social identity)**



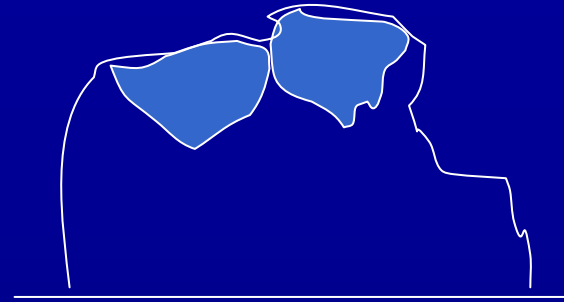
Social identity and the self are intertwined



Social identity is an extension of the self



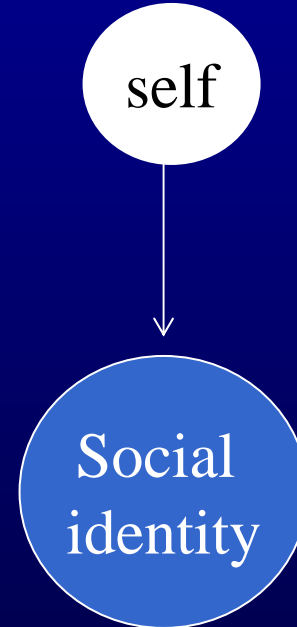
Fixed social structures



Malleable social structures



Social identity and the self are intertwined



Social identity is an extension of the self

# How does the collective self relate to the individual self?

	Fixed world	Malleable world
individual and collective self	The collective self is intertwined with the individual self.	A primacy in individual self
The role of the collective self	Collective self is an integral part of the self and cannot be discarded. The two depend on each other.	Collective self is at the service of the individual self and can be discarded.

## Study 1: Manipulations

### Individual Shame

Recall 2/5 incidents that made you feel ashamed of yourself.

### Collective Shame (Chinese sample)

Recall 2/5 incidents that made you feel ashamed of being a Chinese.

### Collective Shame (American sample)

Recall 2/5 incidents that made you feel ashamed of being an American.

### Control (no recall)

## Dependent measures

Individual self-esteem (Rosenberg): 4-point scale

“One the whole, I am satisfied with myself.”

Collective self-esteem: 7-point scale

- *Private esteem*

“I feel good being a Chinese”

- *Public esteem*

“Overall, Chinese are considered good by others”

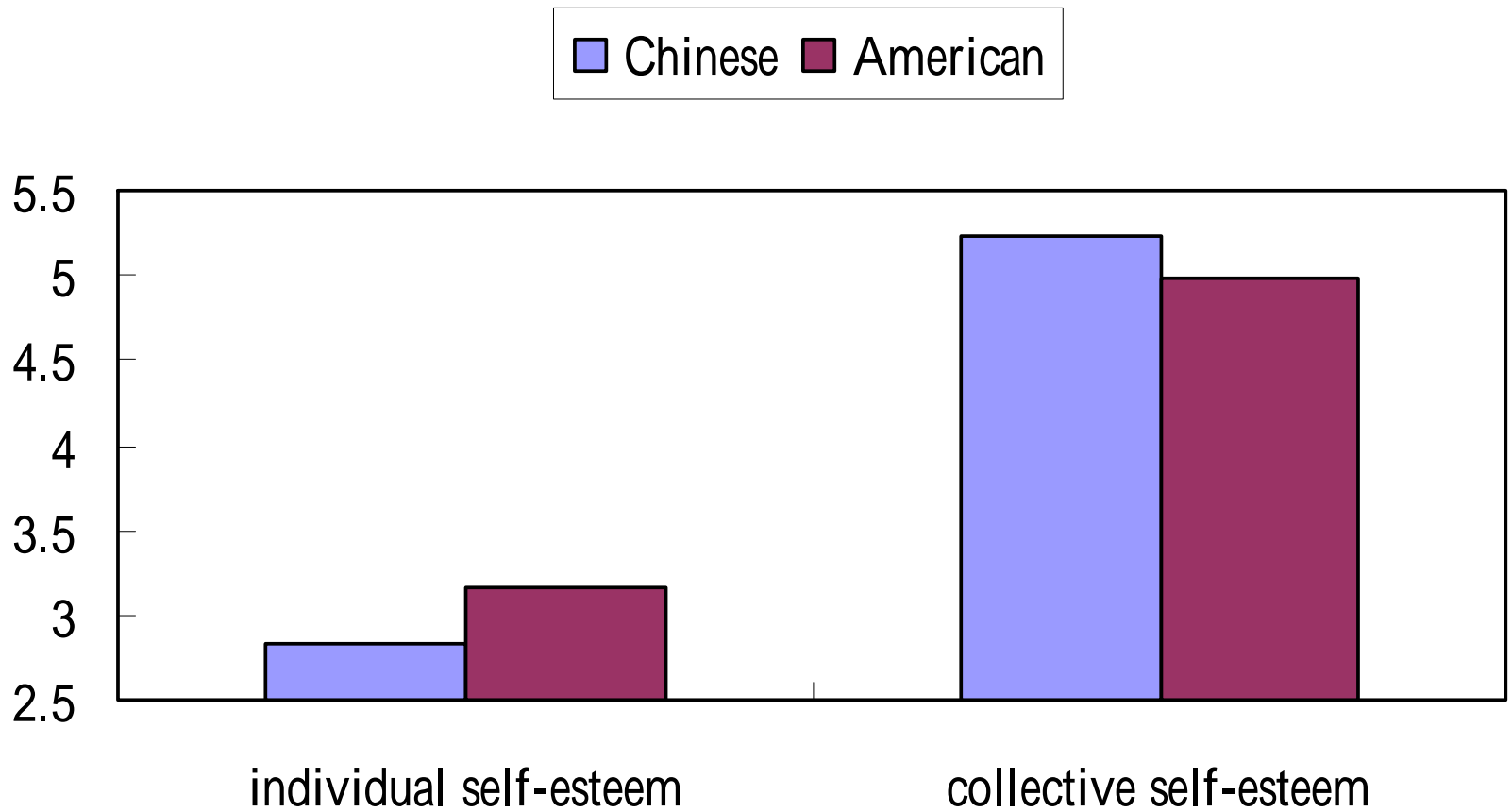
- *Self-definition*

“Being a Chinese is an important part of who I am.”

- *Contribution*

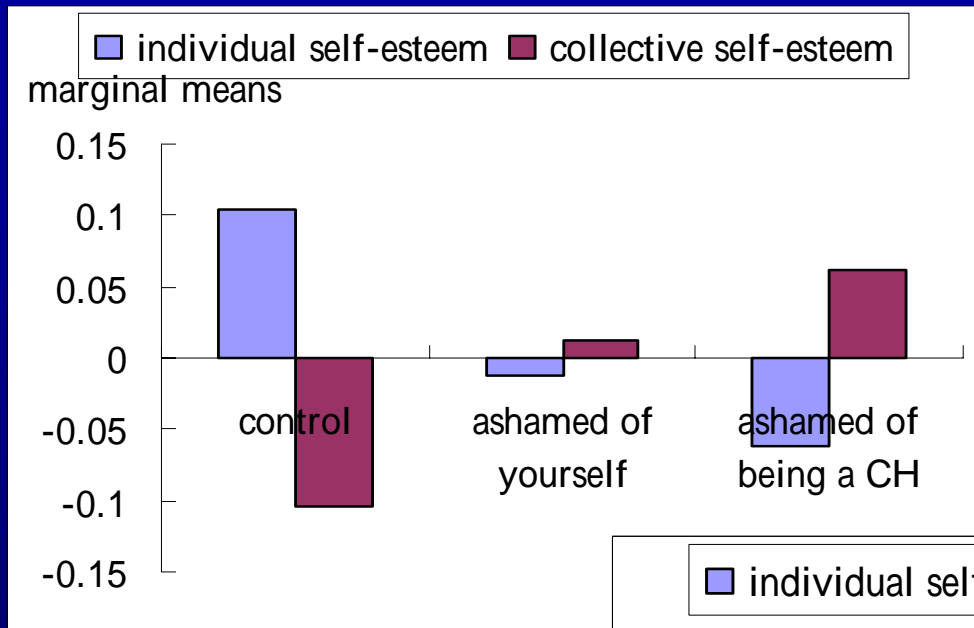
“I am a worthy member of my group (Chinese)”

# Results

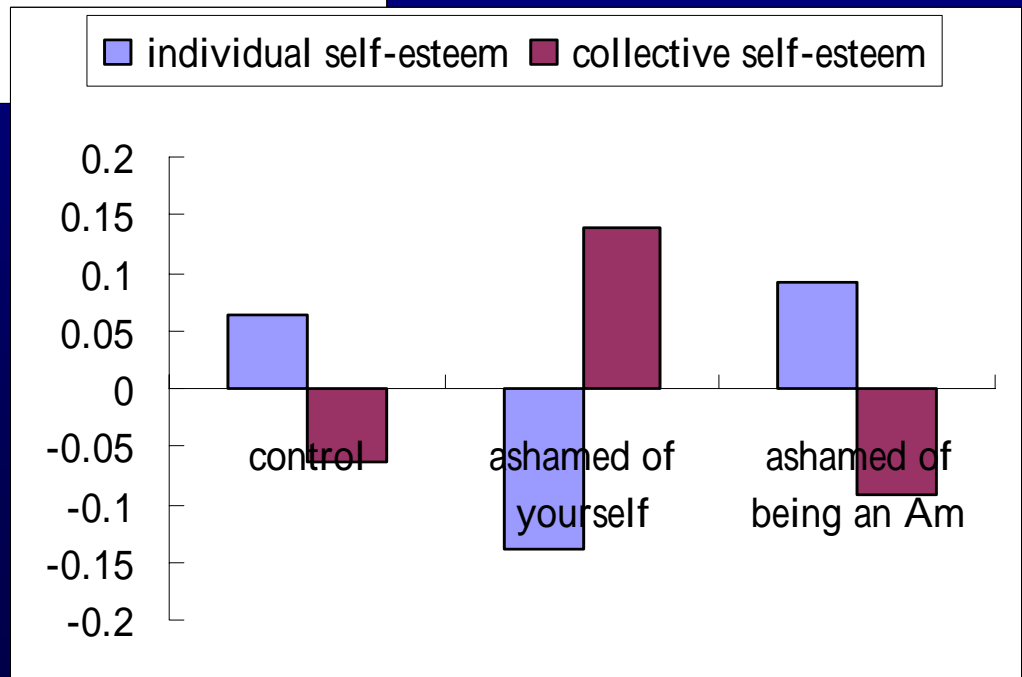


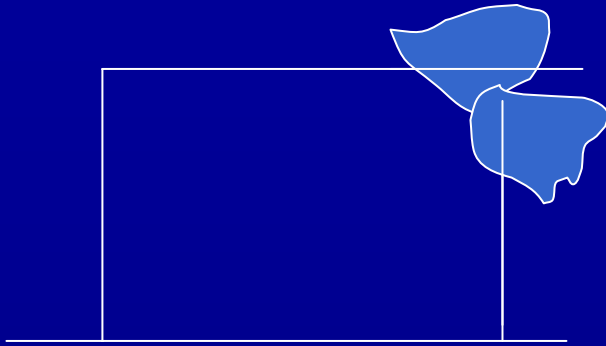


# Chinese sample

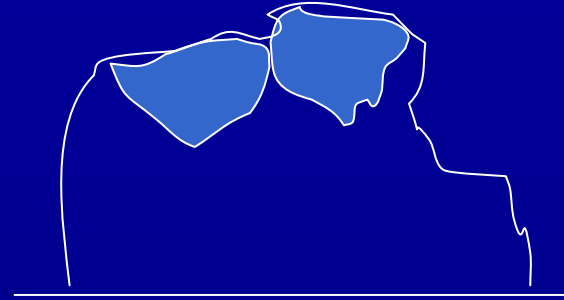


# American sample





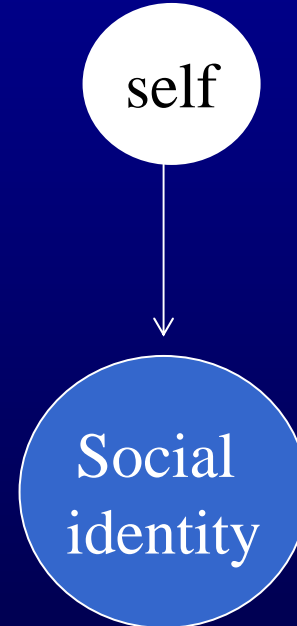
Fixed social structures



Malleable social structures



Social identity and the self are intertwined



Social identity is an extension of the self

## Ashamed of being myself (Chinese students)

和父亲争吵，被父亲骂自己没有出息，自己据理力争说自己在努力，父亲却说“努什么力啊，你连一个感谢都没有说过。”母亲说我这个孩子让她伤心。

小时候跟几个朋友到山边游泳（没穿衣服），被几个女生看到了。

五年级时问班长一个学习问题，她要求我磕三个响头再告诉我，然后趾高气扬地嘲笑我（我年龄比其他同学都小）。

考大学时，没有考到理想的学校，虽然也进入了名牌大学，每个人都羡慕不已，但自己心里始终觉得很丢人，没有达到原有目标。

## Ashamed of myself (American students)

When I yelled at a family member and made her cry. I really didn't have any regard for her well being because I did this when she was sick. I later called her back and apologized

I was playing with a basketball and holding metal keys in my mouth. At one time, I bounced the ball too hard and it hit my face. As a result, I lost a tooth.

I started asking out with a girl from my class at some party. The girl was the opposite of “pretty” in our class. I couldn't explain it to myself and to my friends who were laughing at me afterwards.

## Ashamed of being a Chinese

日本教科书事件之后，韩国人能抗议，但中国人却不能自发形成抗议。

中国人中某些人有随地吐痰的行为和在公共场所里使用不雅的语言和肢体语言。在外国人的眼里，觉得中国乃文明古国，此为其文明之举吗？这样让外国人会以一概全地认识中国人，令我感到难堪。而中国人的行为令我感到羞耻。

中国留学生大多出国而不返，可谓“壮士一去兮，不复返”，不及印度留学生回国率

2002年世界杯，男足失利。

赵薇身穿日本国旗装。

## Ashamed of being an American

I went to an Indian Reservation in South Dakota. I went to the site of Wounded Knee where Custer massacred Indians. I was ashamed for what was done to the Indians and for being an American.

When the Dixie Chicks showed a lack of support for the war in Iraq while in a different country. They also cursed the President. Regardless of what they believe, they shouldn't behave that way.

When the current war in Iraq began I felt ashamed. We as American decided to police the world. War violates the ideals by which this country was found.

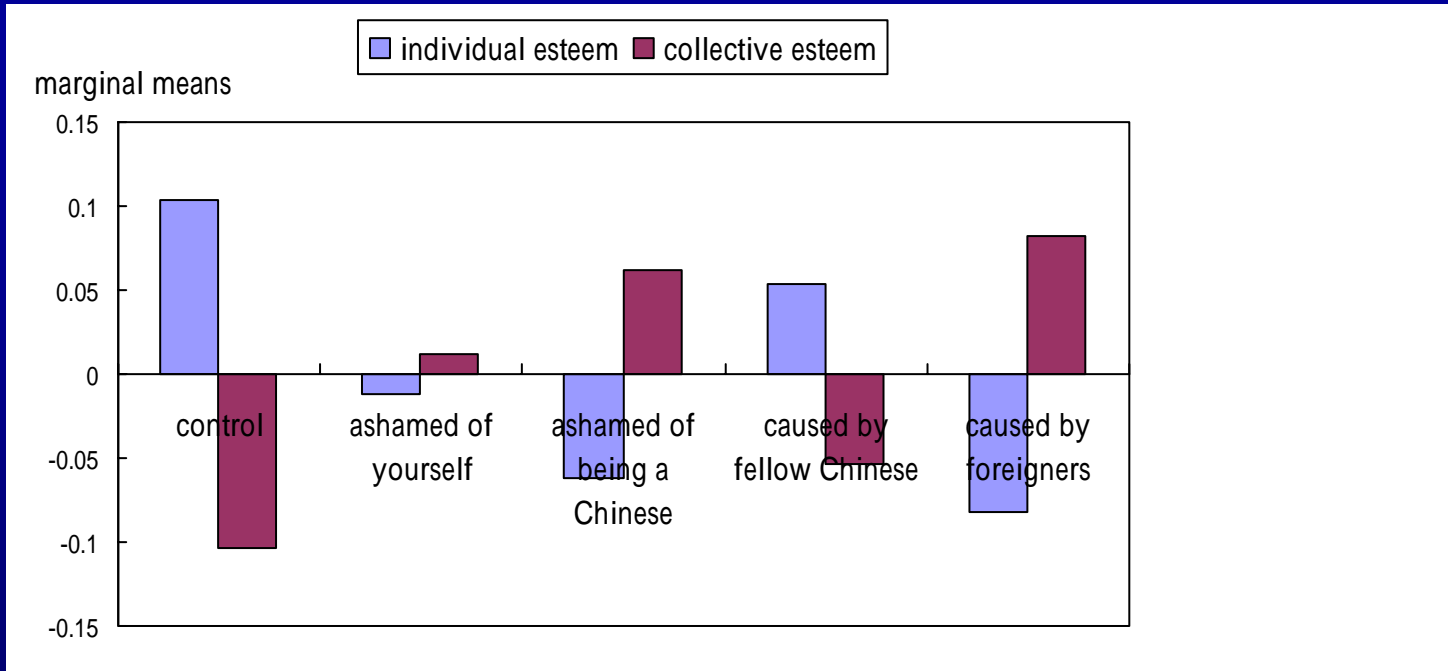
I was ashamed when America became obsessed with President Clinton's social life. I did not believe the story deserved to be the headline of the newspaper everyday. I was ashamed that people were more interested in reading about him than about real news.

## Study 2: Manipulations

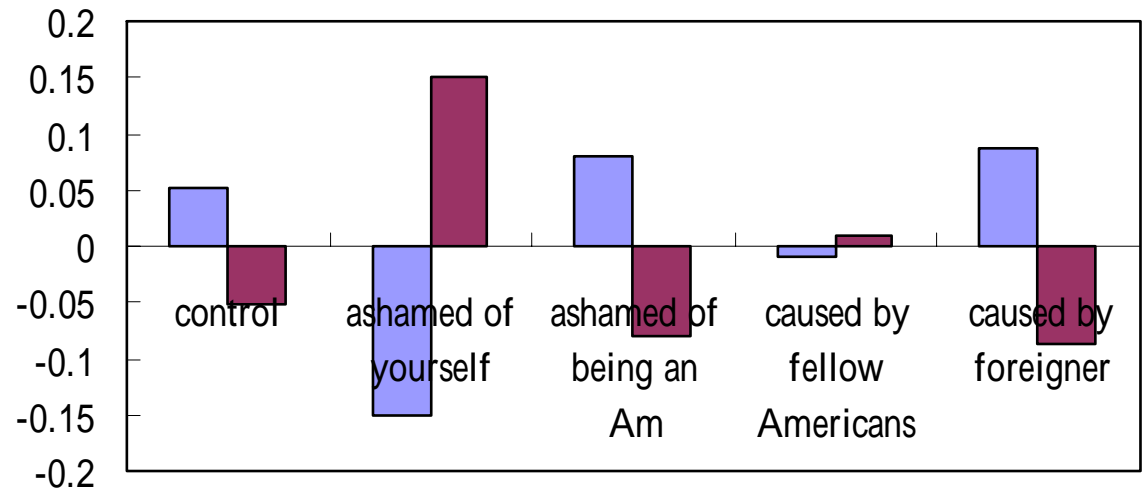
Recall 2 incidents that you felt ashamed of being a Chinese/an American because of something **done by China or Chinese/America or Americans.**

Recall 2 incidents that you felt ashamed of being a Chinese/an American because of something **done by other countries or people from these countries.**

# Chinese sample



# American sample





## Study 3: Manipulation the world beliefs (an on-going study)

### Individual Shame

Recall 2/5 incidents that made you feel  
ashamed of yourself.

### Collective Shame (Chinese)

Recall 2/5 incidents that made you feel  
ashamed of being a Chinese.

### Collective Shame (American)

Recall 2/5 incidents that made you feel  
ashamed of being an American.

## Scholars Stress the Fixed Nature of Social Structure in the United States

By James Adler  
Washington

Think about a clean straight and square wall. This wall can be seen as a metaphor for our society, with each individual a brick in the wall. Building a good wall requires the bricks to be reshaped (such as the corners have to be cut) in order to accommodate the other bricks and form a good wall.

Some scholars use this metaphoric wall to explain how Americans relate to the social organizations to which they belong (such as their schools, companies, and nation). The structures of social organizations are relatively fixed, and individual members would need to adapt themselves to fit into the fixed social structure. This metaphor seems rudimentary, yet, is receiving growing support from research evidence in recent years.

While today's America gives every impression of being a fluid and malleable society, this does not seem to be the case. Activist groups, such as consumer groups and environmental groups, have no doubt played a role in the public discourse on social policy. Nonetheless, scholars studying these groups have in general come to the conclusion that these groups have not brought about significant changes in any of the pertinent social policies. "The US government is doing business as usual," says David Levine, professor of law at George Town University. "Constitutional law has basically set the agenda of this country since the time of its founding fathers and little has changed since then. The social system is like engraved in stone, so to speak."

This is also represented in the philosophy of the US legal system – the common law system. The basis for the US legal system is tradition, past practices, and legal precedents set by the courts through interpretations of statutes, legal registration, and past rulings. This has indeed remained unchanged since before the American Revolution. Related to the recent Supreme Court judge nominations, the country's two leading newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, are winding up their own special reports on the subject. The main conclusion in both series is that the judicial system in this country has hardly changed. In the overwhelming majority of new cases before the court, the

matter is decided primarily by how similar cases were ruled on in the past.

Anthropologists studying the American ethos and culture find the American way of life likewise unchanged. At the Annual Conference of the American Anthropological Association in April 2006, experts on the subject spoke at a roundtable symposium. Alex Stern, a researcher from UCLA, reported findings from a longitudinal study of 165 baby-boomers from the 60s up until now. Although the living conditions of these individuals have improved, as it has for most other Americans over the years, they basically follow through the same life cycle of previous cohorts. That is, they went through the trajectory of usual life tasks, owning a home, raising a family, engaging in community activities, advancing in their career and retiring at around 64-years-old on average, which by the way is about 2.8 years later than the average of earlier cohorts. Yet, according to Dr. Stern, the community and region where the participants lived predicted significant differences in their life style. In other words, it seems like the social structure that the participants lived in guided and shaped their lives more so than they guided that structure.

How can the lack of changes in the culture and social system be explained? James Bryce, a renowned sociologist at Harvard University, explained that most Americans have adjusted their aspirations in order to accommodate the social system and institutions. One of the examples that Professor Bryce provided is education. Well-known success stories of college dropouts such as Bill Gates or Steve Jobs are becoming a "once-upon-a-time story." In reality, those cases are rarely encouraged. The gap in income between the college-educated and the non-college-educated rose from 31% in 1979 to 66% in 1997. These days the biggest determinant of how far someone goes in life is how far the person goes in education. That is, instead of challenging the social system and structure and making an individual's own way, American society rewards the people who are shaped into the existing structure.

Moreover, admissions to university have been and continue to be largely

determined by social class. The proportion of students from upper-income families at the country's elite colleges has been growing steadily since WW II. Only 3% of students in the most selective universities come from the bottom income quartile, and only 10% come from the bottom half of the income scale. Professor Bryce attributed this differential in education opportunities both to the fixed nature of the social structure that limits people's opportunities, and to people's tendency to acclimate into the social system and structure, which in turn reinforces the fixed structure.

Indeed, this is also revealed in many of the baby-boomers in Dr. Stern's longitudinal study. Specifically, the participants in Dr. Stern's study were interviewed every five years since the 60's. Although many of these folks grew up in a time of radical change, the interview data showed that most of them actively adapted and fit themselves into the social structure. Despite the wide variations in the educational and occupational background of these individuals, most of them engaged in various social organizations (parent-teacher associations, community groups, and political organizations), and acquired similar attitudes as the folks in their respective region. These individuals basically accommodate into the local communities and become part of it.

Other evidence of support comes from the studies of technology and culture. For instance, rapid advancements in technology notwithstanding, these changes are often times used to reinforce the existing systems. The military is a case in point. Many recent developments in telecommunication and global positioning technology are used to strengthen the already well-established military structure. Other technological advancements, which have more direct applications to civilians, have been integrated into the fabric of peoples' lives, again reinforcing the established culture and social system. In sum, Americans seem to be eager to acclimate into the social structure and organizations that are relatively fixed. ■

## Scholars Stress the Malleable Nature of Social Structure in the United States

By James Adler  
Washington

Think about a wall. This wall can be seen as a metaphor for our society, with each individual a brick in the wall. The resulting shape of the wall depends on the combination of its constituting bricks, which come in different shapes and sizes.

Some scholars use this metaphoric wall to explain how Americans relate to the social organizations to which they belong (such as their schools, companies, and nation). The structures of social organizations are relatively malleable as they accommodate the emerging needs and wishes of individual members. This metaphor seems rudimentary, yet, is receiving growing support from research evidence in recent years.

While today's America gives every impression of social stagnation, this does not seem to be the case. Activist groups, such as consumer groups and environmental groups, have no doubt played a role in the public discourse on social policy. Scholars studying these groups have in general come to the conclusion that these groups have brought about significant changes in many of the pertinent social policies in the past two decades. "The US government is pressured not to do business as usual," says David Levine, professor of law at George Town University. "Constitutional law allows persons to assert their rights and challenge the status quo and the social system. The social system is never engraved in stone, so to speak."

This is also represented in the philosophy of the US legal system – the common law system. Unlike code law system adopted by most other countries, the legal system is not primarily based on an all-inclusive system of written rules (codes) of law. Instead, common law is recognized as not being complete, and therefore, how the rule is *interpreted* at an individual's current situation is considered as basis for decision.

More important, the Declaration of Independence of the United States, 1776, states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men... That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of

the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government." As such, the Declaration of Independence clearly endorses the view that even long-established social and political institutions can and should be changed when these institutions violate people's rights.

Anthropologists studying the American ethos and culture find the American way of life likewise changed quite rapidly in the past two decades. At the Annual Conference of the American Anthropological Association in April 2006, experts on the subject spoke at a roundtable symposium. Alex Stern, a researcher from UCLA, reported findings from a longitudinal study of 165 baby-boomers from the 60s up until now. Besides the fact that the living conditions of these individuals have improved, as it has for most other Americans over the years, many of these individuals led a life quite different from previous cohorts. In fact, many of them did not go through the trajectory of "usual" life tasks, owning a home, raising a family, engaging in community activities, advancing in their career and retiring. For instance, many of these people choose to be single, "childless," to push off retiring, or to pursue new phase of life such as by starting a new career after retirement. According to Dr. Stern, the participants were often proactive in selecting and shaping their immediate social environment from early years of their lives, which in turn gave rise to cascading changes in the communities and organizations they belong.

Similarly, James Bryce, a renowned sociologist at Harvard University, explained that most Americans have actively shape and create their social systems in different ways. Some well-known examples include the country's favorite heroes -- Benjamin Franklin types who made something out of nothing (The 15<sup>th</sup> child of a candle-and-soap maker, Franklin retired a wealthy man at 42); college dropouts such as Bill Gates or Steve Jobs who turned their own dreams into an empire. These examples celebrate individual's agency in defying the fixed social structure. American society rewards the people who take action to shape the existing social system.

Indeed, this is also revealed in many of the baby-boomers in Dr. Stern's

longitudinal study. Specifically, the participants in Dr. Stern's study were interviewed every five years since the 60's. Many of these folks grew up in a time of radical change and the change has both inspired and given opportunities for these individuals to sculpt a new social order. Many of them were once young "hippies" who experimented on new ways of life, participated actively in the Civil Rights movement, and were in general skeptical of the status quo. Interestingly, most of them later on engaged in various "traditional" social organizations (parent-teacher associations, community groups, and political organizations). However, these individuals often brought about new changes to the social organizations they belong. They became the important reforming force rather than passively accommodated into the local communities.

Other evidence of support comes from the studies of technological and cultural change. For instance, rapid advancement in technology has allowed information to flow freely without boundary in an unprecedented speed. E-mails, global positioning, and satellite maps are put to daily uses in many households across the country. These technologies were once exclusively used by the military, but now no more. With more technology integrated into the fabric of peoples' lives, the general public is more equipped than before to get a hold of previously exclusive information and demand accountability of the status quo. Against this backdrop, Americans continue to shape and sculpt the social structure and organizations, which in turn change across time. ■

## Conclusion

Cultural influences on social identity processes are dynamic:

- (1) It can be understood through the distribution and prevalence of some basic beliefs in a domain among members of the cultural group,
- (2) the beliefs will have effects only when they are accessible in the context,
- (3) because new ideas and beliefs are constantly brought into a society and contested (especially for societies under rapid social change), the distribution and prevalence of some basic beliefs are by no means unalterable. The challenge is to identify and track the processes of change.

# Back to the principles:

1. Situation transforms people as they try to understand and create meanings in their lives: e.g., cognitive dissonance, self-perceptions.
2. Of course people also actively change their environment.
3. People construct situation: Often times it is not the reality that matters. It is how people understand and construct realities that matters.

(Part 1 of my talk: beliefs about race)

4. Human psychological system is flexible and can adapt to different environment. These adaptation will be internalized as background assumptions, knowledge and representations.

For example, the carter vs. hill illustration.

(Part 2: Culture matters -- beliefs about the social world)

Thank You!

Additional Slides

## Measure of entity theory of race

To a large extent, a person's race biologically determines his or her abilities and traits.

Although a person can adapt to different cultures, it is hard if not impossible to change the dispositions of a person's race.

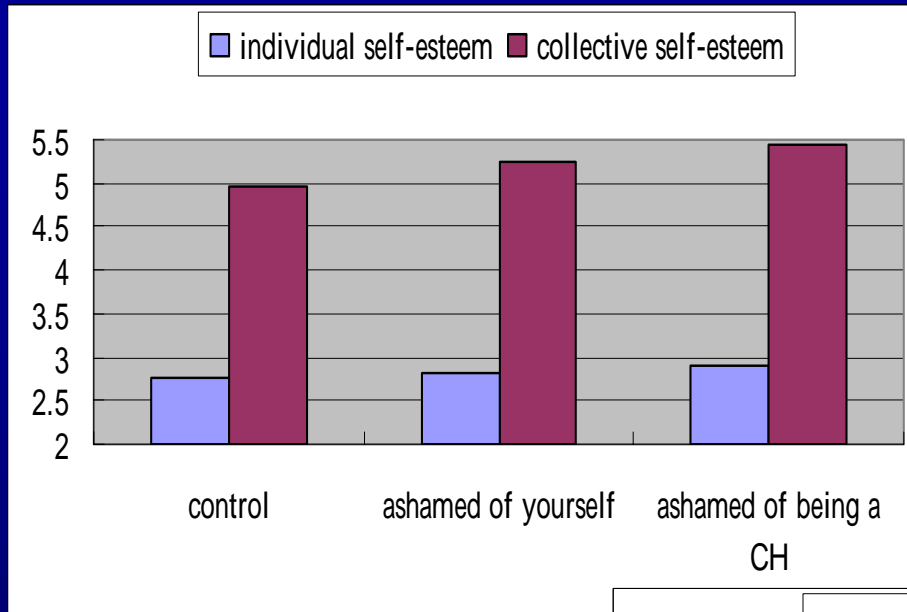
How a person is like (e.g., his or her abilities, traits) is deeply ingrained in his or her race. It cannot be changed much.

A person's race is something very basic about them and it can't be changed much.

*Ratings: from 1, strongly disagree, to 6, strongly agree.*



# Chinese sample



# American sample



<b>Static approach</b>	<b>Dynamic constructivist approach</b> (Hong et al., <i>American Psychologist</i> , 2000)
Focuses on stable, static aspects of cultures	Cultures are open systems subjected to changes
Comparing cultures along some universal dimensions	Cultural differences are mediated by some domain-specific theories
Makes inferences from the score distributions of cultural samples	Focuses on how cultural theories mediate cognition, affect, and behavior
Bicultural individuals are problematic and usually excluded from studies	Bicultural individuals are the targets of investigations

“Um... well since I live in both places [Taiwan & the US] and like every year I go back to Taiwan to visit I find myself changing within the two cultures. It's like I go back to Taiwan they sometimes get scared of me because I'm too open and stuff. So I try to be more and more like um like fit into their definition um but when I come back I sometimes feel myself a little bit overwhelmed like oh everybody's so open but then after like a month I get used to it. And then I go back to Taiwan again and then they're not used to me again so it's like a cycle kind of...”

(excerpt from an interview of a Chinese-American, from Chen, Roisman, & Hong)

## Implications

Research on cultural differences should not be restricted to studying how cultures differ in the relative prevalence of certain psychological phenomena. Other equally important issues include how cultures differ in the way the meaning of psychological construct is constructed, and how universal processes may take on different behavioral expressions and social psychological functions in different cultural contexts.