

Abstract

We hypothesized that weakness in social constraints characterizing metropolitan life in contrast to rural life frees people from pressure for suppressing their pursuit of their personal goals, and tested this hypothesis by comparing Japanese living in metropolitan areas with those living in non-metropolitan areas on their preference for conformity and uniqueness. We replicated Yamagishi et al.'s (2008) vignette study of pen choice with a web-based national survey of 821 Japanese respondents from all 47 prefectures. The results supported the “city air” hypothesis and rejected Kitayama et al.'s (2006) “frontier spirit” hypothesis. Choice of a unique color pen was the highest among respondents from metropolitan areas, closely followed by those from Hokkaido, and then by respondents from Kyoto and other, non-urban prefectures. These findings point to the impact of the immediate social ecology in shaping “culture-specific” cognition and behavior.

Key words: culture, social ecology, conformity, uniqueness, self-construal