

## “Express Yourself”: Culture and the Effect of Self-Expression on Choice

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Whereas self-expression is valued in the United States, it is not privileged with such a cultural emphasis in East Asia. Four studies demonstrate the psychological implications of this cultural difference. Studies 1 and 2 found that European Americans value self-expression more than East Asians/East Asian Americans. Studies 3 and 4 examined the roles of expression in preference judgments. In Study 3, the expression of choice led European Americans but not East Asian Americans to be more invested in what they chose. Study 4 examined the connection between the value of expression and the effect of choice expression and showed that European Americans place greater emphasis on self-expression than East Asian Americans, and this difference explained the cultural difference in Study 3. This research highlights the importance of the cultural meanings of self-expression and the moderating role of cultural beliefs on the psychological effect of self-expression.

*Keywords:* culture, expression, self, choice, attitudes

*Imago Animi Sermo Est* (Speech is the mirror of the mind)—Seneca

The superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions.  
—Confucius, *The Confucian Analects*

In the Western cultural tradition, expression of thoughts, preferences, and feelings is considered to be a way to express one’s selfhood, and thus, freedom of expression becomes a powerful sign of individual freedom. As the value of freedom and individuality are core ideals that define individualistic cultures, *self-expression*, defined as “assertion of one’s individual traits” (Merriam-Webster, 2006), is strongly valued in these cultures. Consequently, one important aspect of individualism is called “expressive individualism” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985), in which individuals express their inner thoughts and feelings in order to realize their individuality. Freedom of speech, which symbolizes an array of different self-expressive acts, such as written and spoken words, choices, actions, and

artistic endeavors, is one of the most fundamental rights in the United States, enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

Whereas expression is clearly prominent in the United States and in Western cultures, it is also a cultural particularity that cannot be understood unless it is examined in relation to aspects of the individualistic cultural context, such as the cultural definition of the self and the cultural model of relationships (D’Andrade, 1990, 1995; Quinn & Holland, 1987). The significance of self-expression depends on the concept of the self because the act of self-expression involves projecting one’s own thoughts and ideas into the world. In contrast, in another cultural context in which the model of relationships and the concept of the self are different, the meaning of self-expression could also be different. For instance, in a more collectivistic culture, the cultural privilege bestowed on expression may not be shared. For example, in the East Asian cultural context, expression of one’s thoughts may be neither particularly encouraged nor viewed positively.

In the present research, we explore cultural differences in how people from East Asian and European American cultural contexts are affected by expression of their internal attributes—in particular, focusing on their preferences. We examine, from a cultural perspective, the practice of expressing one’s choices, as opposed to privately thinking about them. How does the expression of preferences and choices affect the meaningfulness and commitment that people feel toward these preferences and ultimately how people feel about what they choose? And how does this vary for people who come from cultures that place either great or minimal emphasis on self-expression? Our aim is to examine the importance of culturally shared assumptions about the function and importance of self-expression in the shaping of psychological processes such as preference and choice.

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### Cultural Definitions of the Self

One of the most fundamental assumptions shared within a given culture is the definition of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Triandis, 1989). Different cultures often hold different assumptions about what are the core features of the self. The most prevalent view of the self in Western cultures, such as in the United States, is the independent self. This view holds that the individual is understood and practices as a separate or distinct entity whose behavior is determined by some amalgam of internal attributes. Central to our present analysis, a person is assumed to possess a set of internal attributes—thoughts, preferences, motives, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and abilities—that uniquely define the individual and enable, guide, and constrain behavior (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). One of the most obvious roots of this understanding is the Cartesian notion of the person that emphasizes thinking as the very core of human existence. As Descartes (1637/1993) put it, “I am a substance the whole nature or essence of which is to think” (p. 28).

There are, however, other views of the self. In many cultural contexts in East Asia, the person is understood not as an independent entity but primarily as a relational entity. In these cultures, relationships define the self, and the person is viewed as connected with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1989). These cultural views of the person stress social and relational concepts such as reciprocity, belongingness, kinship, hierarchy, loyalty, honor, respect, politeness, and social obligation to a greater extent than individualist cultural views. Typically in these contexts, an individual’s self is thought to be enabled, guided, and constrained by his or her social relationships, roles, and norms, rather than his or her own thoughts (Fiske et al., 1998).

These different cultural definitions of the self and models of relationships have implications for how individual participants of a culture act to socially define themselves. In particular, these definitions of the self influence cultural views on the importance of self-expression.

### Culture and Self-Expression

In cultural contexts in which internal attributes are considered to be the core of the self, such as in the United States, expression of thoughts and ideas is a common and habitual practice (Kim & Markus, 2002). For instance, people commonly express their political beliefs through bumper stickers and votes, signs of political affiliation in the front yard, and personal Weblogs. Through these actions and words, people reveal their internal attributes, such as preferences, beliefs, and values. Through these self-expressive acts, individuals make their private thoughts and feelings concrete, tangible, and socially recognizable, and having freedom to speak one’s mind symbolizes one’s ultimate freedom to be oneself. Some historians argue that America can be viewed predominantly as a culture of ideas and the expression of these ideas (Angell, 1999). Thus, self-expression occupies a special position in these cultural contexts because through self-expression people define who they are by making their thoughts tangible. Along with the right to vote and the freedom to choose one’s religion, the right to speak one’s mind—freedom of speech—protected in America as part of the Bill of Rights. Freedom to express is part and parcel of America’s democratic tradition.

Why does the practice of expression make thoughts and feelings concrete in the manner described above? Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) posits that a key way that people come to know their own internal states is through observing their actions and behaviors. The act of expression, then, may make what is expressed more real to individuals because it helps inform them, in a sense, of what they really feel and think. Consistent with this idea, research shows that verbal expression of attitudes makes people believe in those attitudes more (Higgins & Rholes, 1978). That is, individuals may feel more committed to their thoughts and bound by them when their thoughts are expressed through words and behaviors (Kiesler & Sakumura, 1966) because what is expressed—thoughts—implicates central aspects of who they are. This process takes on particular importance when a culture emphasizes internal attributes in defining the self.

In contrast, the interdependent view of the self that is prevalent in East Asian cultures leads to different cultural meanings and practices of self-expression. When meaningful aspects of the self are social and external, such as roles and relationships, rather than private and internal, such as beliefs and values, expressing internal attributes is less significant. Roles and relationships are readily recognizable by others without being expressed by an individual, and private and internal thoughts are relatively insignificant in defining the self. In this context, self-expression may not convey the core aspects of the self. In a culture in which what is conveyed through self-expression is not considered to be of particular importance, the act of expression may not have the same implications for the self as it has in the individualistic cultural context.

Culturally shared views often give rise to culturally distinctive patterns of social structures, interactions, and psychological functioning (Bruner, 1996; Fiske et al., 1998; Kim & Markus, 1999; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990). Given that cultures differ in their views on self-expression, individuals from different cultures may view and practice self-expression differently as well.

### Choice as Self-Expression

One way in which people express themselves is through their choices (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Kim & Drolet, 2003; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002). Through choice, people can make their preferences and values overt and observable. Because of this function of choice as self-expression, having the freedom to choose symbolizes the freedom of individuality, and the act of choosing becomes significant in individualist cultural contexts. For instance, American culture places strong emphasis on choice, and people value their freedom to choose and care about what they choose, and thus, having one’s choice usurped even by those who are close to oneself is demotivating for European Americans (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

Consequently, people from different cultural contexts differ in how the act of choosing implicates psychological processes. Studies using the free-choice dissonance research paradigm show the “spreading alternatives effect” among participants from the United States. When people choose between two objects, they tend to increase liking for the chosen object, and decrease liking for the rejected object, compared with their liking for the same objects prior to making the choice (Brehm, 1956; Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993).

Yet, cultural psychology research shows that choice making does not lead to the same psychological consequences among those from East Asian cultural contexts. Studies with the same free-choice dissonance paradigm show that choice making does not cause the experience of dissonance among East Asians, and consequently does not alter their subsequent liking for a chosen option (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004).

Moreover, even among European Americans, college-educated participants, who are generally more concerned about self-expression, show greater spreading of liking between alternatives, whereas choice does not affect preferences of less educated participants who are not as concerned about self-expression (Snibbe & Markus, 2005). That is, it appears that those from cultural contexts, whether national culture or social class, with greater emphasis on self-expression act as though they become more invested in their chosen object once they express their liking through choice, whereas those from cultural contexts with less emphasis on self-expression are not affected by the expression of their choice to the same extent. Taken together, these studies on cultural differences in practices and the effect of choice suggest that choice has a self-expressive function, and perhaps this is the reason for the importance of choice in the United States. The freedom of choice is essentially the freedom of self-expression.

### Overview of Studies

Given these overall differences in the meaning of expression among cultures, the present studies were conducted to examine cultural divergence in the way that expression of internal attributes implicates individuals' psychological processes. More specifically, in four studies, we examined cultural difference in the importance of self-expression and how actual expression affects psychological processes of people from cultures with differing views of self-expression.

Studies 1 and 2 are questionnaire studies designed to measure what individuals from East Asian and European American cultural contexts consider to be the primary function of speech and the extent to which they consider self-expression important. In Studies 3 and 4, we examined cultural differences in the impact of expressing choice on people's psychological processes. We did so by having people either express their thoughts in a written form or privately reflect their thoughts in silence (with no written or spoken expression) and comparing the relative effect of verbal expression or silent reflection. More specifically, in Study 3, we examined how people from different cultures are affected by the act of expressing preference for an object. In Study 4, we replicated Study 3 with a measure of individuals' value for expression to understand the mediational role of cultural values shared by people from different cultural contexts.

We hypothesized that people from East Asian cultural contexts would be less concerned about verbal expression of internal attributes than those from European American cultural contexts (see Study 1 and Study 2). Building on this cultural difference, we hypothesized in Study 3 that the expression of choice would make European Americans more invested in their choice, whereas the same act of expression would not make East Asian Americans more invested. In Study 4, we hypothesized that the cultural difference in the effect of expression on choice would be mediated

by the degree to which people from different cultures value self-expression.

### Study 1

Our review suggests that East Asians and European Americans should differ in their beliefs about the importance of self-expression. Yet, there exists little direct empirical evidence as to this point. The purpose of Study 1 was to demonstrate that there are indeed differences in how salient and important the notion of self-expression is for people from these two cultures. In particular, we examined how people view the purpose and function of "speaking," the most common and primary form of expressing thoughts in the United States (Kim & Markus, 2002). Although people in every culture speak, the most culturally salient function of the act might differ. Thus, in this study, we looked at how much emphasis people from different cultures place on the expressive function of speech as one way to measure the centrality and salience of self-expression.

In this study, we administered a survey to Koreans and European Americans. The survey included two open-ended questions that centered on why the ability to speak is important and what the purpose of language is. Using an open-ended measure for which people spontaneously generated responses allowed us to sample the most culturally salient functions of speech from different cultures without imposing demand characteristics. It also allowed us to reduce problems associated with the reference group effect (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002), a potential confound in cross-cultural comparisons that occurs as people from different cultures compare themselves with different standards in responding to Likert-type scales of their values.

We predicted that people from European American cultural contexts, in which internal attributes are viewed as the core of the self, would be more likely to think that the purpose of speech is self-expression, that is, the expression of one's internal traits. In contrast, we predicted that people from East Asian cultural contexts, in which social relations are viewed as the core of the self, would be more likely to indicate that the purpose of speech is relationship maintenance.

### Method

*Participants.* Forty-four Korean (27 women and 17 men) undergraduates at a large Korean university and 53 European American (30 women and 23 men) undergraduates at a large university in California participated in the study.<sup>1</sup> Both samples were recruited from a psychology class and participated in the study for course credit.

*Procedure.* This study was a survey study in which two open-ended questions were asked. The first question was "Why do you think the ability to speak is important/unimportant?" and the second question was "What do you think is (are) the purpose(s) of language?" The survey was handed out in class as part of a larger questionnaire packet. Participants took the questionnaires home, filled them out, and turned them in at the next class.

*Coding scheme.* We developed a coding scheme on the basis of the common responses in the questionnaire. Primarily, we focused on the frequency of responses that connect the importance and function of speech to either internal attributes (such as beliefs, thoughts, and feelings) or relationships with others. All coding was binary (yes or no), indicating whether each person's response mentioned certain functions. These spe-

<sup>1</sup> The two universities are academically comparable.

cific functions were then grouped into four main functions: expression of internal attributes (e.g., "Language serves to give us signifiers for our abstract ideas. It is a tool, and can be used by nearly anybody to express thoughts, ideas, and values," "Language is a medium of thought. It is a way to express ideas and feelings within the mind" and "We can express our inner most ideas and desires in a way that is unique to our species"), self-expression (e.g., "We can express who we are through language"), accommodation of relationship (e.g., "Talking can help us cooperate with each other"), and communication with others (e.g., "We can communicate with other people").

*Coding.* The responses generated by participants were coded according to a written coding scheme by multiple coders. Each response was coded twice, once by a native of the culture (either Korean or American, who was unaware of the cross-cultural aspect of the study), and once by a bilingual coder. Discrepancy in coding was settled by discussion among coders. The coding was reliable, with 93% agreement for American coding and 92% agreement for Korean coding.

## Results

The types of responses generated by the two questions on the importance of the ability to speak and the purpose of language were highly overlapping in terms of content, and so we combined responses in the analyses. If a participant mentioned one of the four main functions, then his or her response would be rated "yes."

We subjected the coded data to a series of chi-square analyses. As predicted, European American participants (80%) mentioned expression of internal attributes significantly more frequently than Korean participants (31%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 96) = 23.50, p < .001$ . As well, European American participants (25%) listed the self-expressive function of speech significantly more frequently than Korean participants did (9%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 96) = 4.14, p = .037$ .

In contrast, Korean participants generated responses that focused on the social functions of speech. A greater proportion of Korean participants (68%) mentioned communication with others as the primary function of speech than did European American participants (39%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 96) = 8.44, p < .01$ . Furthermore, a greater proportion of Korean participants (14%) mentioned the social accommodative function of speech than did European American participants (2%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 96) = 4.84, p = .03$ .

## Discussion

Using an open-ended format, these results provide empirical evidence to support the notion that cultures place different emphasis on self-expression and that people's own beliefs reflect the views of their culture. Participants from the United States viewed the purpose of speech to be self-expression and the expression of one's thoughts, whereas participants from Korea viewed the purpose of speech to be a means for the maintenance of relationships. Of course, we do not claim that these results show that talking and speech are unimportant for Koreans, as the function of social relationship maintenance is of great importance. Rather, these results demonstrate that people from the two cultures differ in their views on the function of talking and that the expression of individuals' internal attributes is more salient and important for those from the United States than for those from Korea.

## Study 2

Study 2 was designed to examine cultural differences in the view of the overall importance of self-expression. There are two

main differences between Study 1 and Study 2. First, unlike Study 1, which featured a comparison between Koreans and European Americans, in Study 2, we compare the beliefs of East Asian Americans and European Americans. As we compare the behaviors of East Asian Americans and European Americans in Studies 3 and 4, it is important to make sure that the difference found between Koreans and European Americans in Study 1 applies to the comparison between East Asian Americans and European Americans. Second, we measured cultural difference in how much people value expression by using a closed-ended questionnaire format. Using a scale format will not only provide convergent evidence along with the open-ended data of Study 1 but also provide a more convenient measure of beliefs that can be used as a predictor measure, which we shall do in Study 4.

The questionnaire was designed to measure how important people think the expression of their thoughts is. We hypothesized that European Americans would endorse the importance of expression of thoughts more than East Asian Americans.

## Method

*Participants.* Sixty-three East Asian American and 103 European American undergraduates from large California universities participated in the study (44 men and 122 women; mean age = 20.72,  $SD = 2.56$ ). Participants were recruited from psychology classes and participated in the study for course credit or money.

*Materials.* The Value of Expression Questionnaire (VEQ) is composed of 11 items. The items were created to measure both the extent to which participants value self-expression in their behaviors (e.g., "I express my feelings publicly, regardless of what others say" and "I do not like to talk about my thoughts to others" [reverse coded]) as well as the extent to which participants value self-expression in their beliefs (e.g., "Freedom of expression is one of the most important rights that people should have" and "People place too much value on the expression of ideas [reverse coded]"). Participants responded using an 8-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 8 (*strongly agree*). Although the goal of this study was not scale validation, we also included the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994), a 31-item measure of self-construal (on a 9-point scale) to examine the convergent validity of our questionnaire. Demographic information was also collected at the end of the questionnaire.

*Procedure.* Participants received the questionnaires as a part of a larger questionnaire packet that was distributed in psychology classes or in a paid participants pool. It took approximately 15 min to complete the questionnaires.

## Results

The two components (Behavior and Belief) of the VEQ had moderate reliabilities ( $\alpha$ s = .64 and .62, respectively). First, we compared the European Americans and the East Asian Americans as to how much they differed on each component of the questionnaire. As predicted, significant cultural differences emerged. European Americans scored higher on the Behavior component, indicating that they practiced self-expression in their own behaviors more ( $M = 5.54, SD = 0.97$ ) than East Asian Americans ( $M = 4.71, SD = .93$ ),  $t(164) = 5.42, p < .001$ . European Americans scored higher on the Belief component as well, indicating that they believed in the value of expression in principle more ( $M = 5.76, SD = 0.84$ ) than East Asian Americans ( $M = 5.36, SD = 0.82$ ),  $t(164) = 3.01, p = .003$ . In terms of responses to the Self-Construal Scale, the two groups did not differ on how much they

valued independence (European Americans  $M = 6.11$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ; East Asian Americans  $M = 6.06$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ),  $t(162) = 0.25$ , *ns*. However, the East Asian Americans indicated a greater value of interdependence ( $M = 6.20$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) than the European Americans ( $M = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ),  $t(159) = 4.06$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Next, we examined the correlations among the two components of the VEQ, independence and interdependence. As Table 1 indicates, the Behavior component of the VEQ was positively correlated with independence,  $r(164) = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ , and negatively correlated with interdependence,  $r(161) = -.16$ ,  $p = .04$ . The Belief component was positively correlated with independence,  $r(164) = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ , but uncorrelated with interdependence,  $r(161) = -.07$ ,  $p = .38$ . These results support the idea that the emphasis placed on self-expression is a feature of an individualist value system.

### Discussion

As predicted, European Americans indicated that they personally valued self-expression more than East Asian Americans, reflecting the mainstream cultural assumptions of each culture. Study 1 and Study 2 demonstrate that there are clearly differing views on the functions of expression of thoughts and how expression relates to the self and that these differences can be observed even at the individual level. On the basis of these observations, we conducted two experimental studies to examine how the effect of self-expression differs in its psychological implications for European Americans and East Asian Americans.

### Study 3

In Study 3, we examined the effect of expression on how much people are committed and invested in their choices as a function of cultural background. We compared conditions in which people either expressed their choice of an object or privately chose an object and examined how the effect of the manipulation differed for people from European American and East Asian American cultural contexts. In other words, participants in both conditions made a choice among objects, and the only difference between the two conditions was whether they expressed their choice or kept their choice private. To do this, we created a choice scenario (adapted from Snibbe & Markus, 2005) in which participants evaluated pens and were asked (or not asked) to express their favorite. We then usurped the choice of participants and forced them to evaluate an alternative, less desirable pen. We predicted that participants would denigrate this less desirable choice as a function of culture and whether they had previously expressed

their original preference. More specifically, we hypothesized that European Americans, who are from a culture that emphasizes expression of internal attributes, would derogate the less desirable choice more when they express their choice than when they do not. In contrast, we hypothesized that East Asian Americans, who are from a culture without such an emphasis, would not be affected by expression of their choice in terms of how much they derogate the less desirable choice.

### Method

**Participants.** Ninety undergraduates at a large California university participated in exchange for credit in their introductory psychology class. Of the participants, 55 were European American (21 men and 34 women), and 35 were East Asian American (10 men and 25 women).

**Procedure.** Participants were run individually in a study on "Research in Consumer Behavior" examining students' personal preferences for pens. Upon arrival at the lab, an experimenter presented four pens in a tray and handed the participant a sealed envelope with the choice instruction sheet (keeping the experimenter unaware of condition assignment), and left the participant. At this point, participants were randomly assigned either the writing condition or the no-writing condition. In both conditions, participants read the instructions:

We would like you to test the four pens in front of you. In the space below, try each pen individually. At the end of the study, you will get to keep the pen you liked the most. Of the four pens, decide which pen you like the most. In a moment, you will get to evaluate that pen more extensively.

The only difference between the two conditions was that in the writing condition, participants were instructed to write down what pen they chose in the underlined space provided on the sheet. In the no-writing condition, participants were instructed to make a choice and remember it. However, there was no space to write down their choice. To ensure that participants in the no-writing condition would not express their choice in any way, participants (in both conditions) were also told to return all the sample pens to the tray before summoning the experimenter.

When participants completed the choice task and summoned the experimenter, the experimenter returned to the room and told them "I am sorry, but we are really low in our inventory of pens, and the only pen we have is this one. So, could you evaluate this one, and you will get to keep this one" and handed them the target pen. The target pen was noticeably inferior to the other three pens, and we selected our materials in such a way to decrease the likelihood of participants choosing the target pen (i.e., to increase the likelihood of the target pen being an "un-chosen" one). In other words, all participants were asked to evaluate and keep an "undesirable" pen that they did not choose.<sup>2</sup> With the target pen, the experimenter handed out the pen evaluation questionnaire. At the end of the study, participants received a demographic questionnaire in which we included a question asking for their initial choice of a pen. In the end, we debriefed them and gave all participants the pen of their initial choice.

**Measures.** Participants evaluated the target pen on four items: "Overall, how much do you like the pen?" "How much do you like the design of the pen?" "How much do you like the pen's ink?" on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 8 (*very much*) and "How well does the pen write?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*very poorly*) to 8 (*very well*).

**Materials.** The four pens used in the study were Paper Mate, Uni-ball, Ultimate Gel, and Staedtler. To ensure that the target pen (Paper Mate) was

Table 1  
*Correlations Between Self-Expression, Independence, and Interdependence in Study 2*

Scale component	1	2	3	4
1. Behavior	—			
2. Belief	.39**	—		
3. Independence	.44**	.35**	—	
4. Interdependence	-.16*	-.07	.19*	—

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the final question asking to identify their initial choice, 5 participants chose the target pen as their favorite pen in their initial choice, so they were excluded from analyses. There was no systematic pattern in terms of culture or condition for this exclusion.

indeed rated as less desirable, we conducted a pilot test in which a separate group of participants ( $N = 26$ ) evaluated the four pens on the same four measures as above. We formed a composite measure by averaging the four measures ( $\alpha = .86$ ). A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that people differed in their evaluations for the four pens,  $F(3, 23) = 5.74, p = .004$ . The target pen was rated lowest ( $M = 5.15$ ) of the four pens. We conducted a series of paired  $t$  tests comparing the target pen with the other three pens. The target Paper Mate pen was evaluated as worse than the Uni-ball pen ( $M = 6.20$ ),  $t(25) = 3.49, p = .002$ ; the Ultimate Gel pen ( $M = 6.17$ ),  $t(25) = 3.60, p = .001$ ; and the Staedtler pen ( $M = 5.81$ ),  $t(25) = 2.06, p = .05$ . Thus, we successfully picked an undesirable pen to give to the participants.

## Results

The purpose of Study 3 was to provide an opportunity for participants to denigrate a pen that they did not desire after they had either expressed or silently determined an alternative preference. To examine how participants evaluated the “un-chosen” target pen as a function of culture and writing, we conducted a 2 (culture: European Americans vs. East Asian Americans)  $\times$  2 (writing vs. no writing) ANOVA. The four evaluation items had high reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and so were combined into a single measure of how favorably participants evaluated the target pen. There was no effect of gender, which is not mentioned further. There were no main effects of culture,  $F(1, 81) = 0.78, p = .38$ , or instruction,  $F(1, 81) = 1.40, p = .24$ . However, there was a significant interaction between culture and instruction,  $F(1, 81) = 4.05, p = .047$ . Planned comparisons indicate that the European Americans evaluated the pen less positively when they wrote down their preference ( $M = 3.80, SD = 1.35$ ) than when they did not write down their preference ( $M = 4.73, SD = 1.49$ ),  $t(48) = 2.31, p = .025$ . That is, once the European American participants expressed that they chose a different pen, they evaluated the target pen much more negatively than when they did not express what their favorite pen was. In contrast, East Asian American participants did not differ in their evaluation of the target pen regardless of whether they wrote down their choice ( $M = 4.07, SD = 1.48$ ) or did not write down their choice ( $M = 3.70, SD = 1.51$ ),  $t(33) = 0.72, p = .36$  (see Figure 1).

Did expression cause the European Americans and East Asian Americans to like the un-chosen pen *less*? Or, did the lack of expression cause them to like the un-chosen pen *more*? To examine this, we added the pilot test group as an additional condition

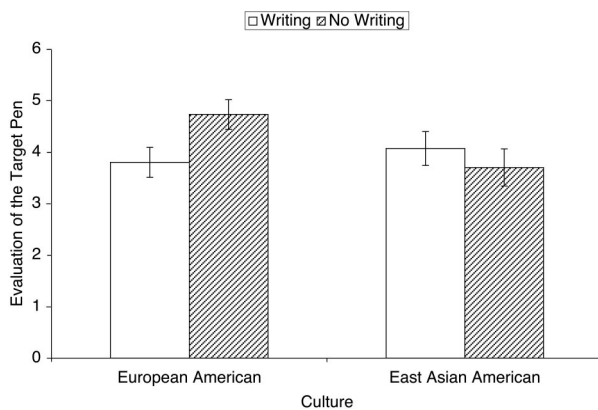


Figure 1. Mean (and standard error) evaluation of the target pen as a function of culture and instruction in Study 3.

and used their ratings of the target pen as a baseline to compare with the participants in the lab study. For European Americans, a one-way ANOVA revealed that the three conditions (i.e., writing, no writing, and pilot) differed,  $F(2, 75) = 5.84, p = .004$ . We tested the relevant contrasts using least significant difference multiple comparisons. The writing condition ( $M = 3.80$ ) differed from both the no-writing condition ( $M = 4.73, p = .026$ ) as well as from the pilot test rating ( $M = 5.15, p = .001$ ). The no-writing condition and the pretest rating did not differ ( $p = .30$ ). Thus, it appears that expressing one’s preference for an alternative pen caused European American participants to like the un-chosen pen less.

## Discussion

For European Americans, initially expressing their preference affected their subsequent evaluation of a pen they did not choose, as they evaluated the un-chosen pen more harshly than when they did not express their preference. In contrast, for East Asian Americans, initially expressing their preference did not affect their evaluation of the un-chosen pen. In other words, European Americans were more invested in their expressed choice and, hence, derogated the un-chosen item more, whereas East Asian Americans did not seem to differ in how invested they felt toward their choice whether a preference was expressed or not. It seems that the act of expression, however simple it may seem, made European Americans’ preference more “real” and their commitment to their choice more meaningful.

## Study 4

Our contention is that the different value of expression in East Asian and European American cultures leads to the different evaluations of items after expressing a choice and having that choice usurped. Yet, in Study 3, we did not directly examine how participants’ value of expression is related to the psychological phenomenon.

Thus, in Study 4, we tested whether individual differences in the extent to which people value expressing their thoughts would mediate the cultural findings of Study 3. To do this, we assessed participants’ values of expression using the VEQ used in Study 2. The results in Study 2 show that East Asian Americans and European Americans differed in their value of expression and that European Americans value expression more than East Asian Americans both in their behaviors and in their beliefs. Thus, using the same paradigm in Study 3, we tested whether cultural differences in the value of expression could explain the cultural differences in the effect of choice expression (or lack thereof) on participants’ liking for the un-chosen pen. In particular, researchers have theorized that cultural practices and behavior of people in different cultures are more important reinforcers of cultural values and ideals than are abstract beliefs (Bruner, 1996; Kim, 2002; Kitayama, 2002). Thus, we examined whether the Behavior component of the VEQ would be a significant mediator of cultural difference rather than the Belief component. That is, the value reflected in what people from different cultural contexts do (i.e., a proxy of their behavioral pattern), as opposed to the value reflected through a set of more abstract beliefs, was examined as a mediator of the cultural differences in behavior.

In short, we hypothesized that the extent to which participants value expression in their behaviors would moderate the effect of

expression (i.e., writing vs. not writing one's choice) on the subsequent evaluation of the un-chosen pen. Moreover, we predicted that the interaction between value of expression and instruction would mediate the interaction between culture and instruction on liking for the un-chosen pen, demonstrating mediated moderation (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005).

## Method

**Participants.** Ninety undergraduates at a large university in California participated in exchange for \$5. Participants were recruited from a large psychology class. Of the participants, 50 were European American (10 men and 40 women), and 40 were East Asian American (11 men and 29 women; mean age = 19.18,  $SD = 1.30$ ).

**Pretest.** Prior to coming to the laboratory, all participants completed the 11-item VEQ developed and used in Study 2.

**Procedure.** Aside from the pretesting questionnaire, the procedure of Study 4 was identical to Study 3. Participants were run individually in a study on "Research in Consumer Behavior" examining students' personal preferences for pens. The experimenter presented four pens (identical to those in Study 3) in a tray to a participant and handed them a sealed envelope with the choice instruction sheet, and left the participant. Participants were randomly assigned to either the writing condition or the no-writing condition and read the same instructions as in Study 3. Once again, the only difference between the two conditions was that in the writing condition, participants were instructed to write down what pen they chose in the underlined space provided on the sheet, whereas in the no-writing condition, participants were instructed to make a choice and remember it, with no space to write down their choice.

When participants completed the questionnaire, the experimenter returned, explained the low-inventory pen situation, and handed them the target pen to evaluate instead of their favorite pen. Again, the target pen was inferior to the other three pens, and all participants were asked to evaluate and keep an "undesirable" pen that they did not choose.<sup>3</sup> With the target pen, the experimenter handed out the pen evaluation questionnaire. At the end of the study, participants received a demographic questionnaire on which we included a question asking for their initial pen choice. The experimenter then debriefed participants and gave them a gift pen.

**Measures.** Participants evaluated the target pen on four items: "Overall, how much do you like the pen?" "How much do you like the design of the pen?" "How much do you like the pen's ink?" on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 8 (*very much*) and "How well does the pen write?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*very poorly*) to 8 (*very well*). Three items (overall liking, ink quality, writing quality) formed a reliable measure ( $\alpha = .83$ ) of liking for the target pen.<sup>4</sup>

## Results

**Cultural differences in value of expression.** The two components (Behavior and Belief) of the VEQ had adequate reliabilities ( $\alpha_s = .70$  and  $.80$ , respectively); the two components correlated,  $r(90) = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ . As in Study 2, a significant cultural difference emerged in response to the scale. European Americans indicated that they practice self-expression in their own behaviors more ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) than East Asian Americans ( $M = 4.69$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ),  $t(88) = 5.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . European Americans also indicated that they believe in the value of expression in principle more ( $M = 5.73$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) than East Asian Americans ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ),  $t(88) = 3.20$ ,  $p = .002$ .

**Culture moderates the effect of expression on liking.** As in Study 3, to examine how participants evaluated the "un-chosen" target pen as a function of culture and writing condition, we

conducted a 2 (culture: European Americans vs. East Asian Americans)  $\times$  2 (instruction: writing vs. no writing) ANOVA.<sup>5</sup> There was no main effect of instruction,  $F(1, 86) = 1.87$ ,  $p = .18$ . There was a main effect of culture,  $F(1, 86) = 6.27$ ,  $p = .014$ , as East Asian American participants ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) liked the pen more than European American participants ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ). However, this main effect was qualified by the predicted interaction between culture and instruction,  $F(1, 86) = 5.04$ ,  $p = .03$ . Planned comparisons indicate that the European Americans evaluated the pen less positively when they wrote down their preference ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) than when they did not write down their preference ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ),  $t(48) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .01$ . As in Study 3, once the European American participants expressed that they chose a different pen, they evaluated the target pen much more negatively than when they did not express what their favorite pen was. In contrast, East Asian American participants did not differ in their evaluation of the target pen regardless of whether they wrote down their choice ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) or did not write down their choice ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ),  $t(38) = -0.62$ ,  $p = .54$  (see Figure 2).

**Moderating role of value of expression.** We conducted an ordinary least squares regression analysis to test the hypothesis that individuals' value of expression in their behaviors would moderate the effect of writing on liking for the target object. We entered the contrast-coded-manipulated instruction variable ( $-1$  and  $+1$  for no writing and writing conditions, respectively) and the Behavior component of the value of expression (mean centered with  $M = 5.33$ ) as predictors, as well as the interaction term (the product of the manipulated variable and the mean-centered value of expression).

There was neither a main effect of instruction ( $\beta = -.15$ ),  $t(86) = -1.46$ ,  $p = .15$ , nor a main effect of the Behavior component of the value of expression ( $\beta = -.02$ ),  $t(86) = -0.22$ ,  $p = .83$ , in predicting liking for the pen. However, the interaction between instruction and the Behavior component of the value of expression was a significant predictor of liking for the target object ( $\beta = -.30$ ),  $t(86) = -2.94$ ,  $p = .004$ . We conducted simple slopes analyses (following Aiken & West, 1991) to examine how the value of expression moderated the effect of writing on liking for the target object. We plotted the relationship between value of expression (at one standard deviation above and below the mean) and liking for the object for participants in the writing condition and no-writing condition in Figure 3. As predicted, and consistent with the effects of culture in this study and in Study 3, for those who valued expression to a greater extent, the expression manipulation had a significant effect ( $\beta = -.46$ ),  $t(86) = -3.07$ ,  $p =$

<sup>3</sup> On the basis of the final question asking to identify their initial choice, 7 participants chose the target pen as their favorite pen in their initial choice, so they were excluded from analyses. There was no systematic pattern in terms of culture or condition for this exclusion.

<sup>4</sup> The design item did not correlate with the other three items and substantially reduced the reliability of the composite. Even if all four items are included, the Culture  $\times$  Expression condition remains significant,  $F(1, 86) = 4.37$ ,  $p = .04$ , replicating Study 3.

<sup>5</sup> There was a main effect of gender as overall, women ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) liked the pen more than men ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ),  $t(88) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .04$ . However, gender did not interact with culture, condition, or value of expression.

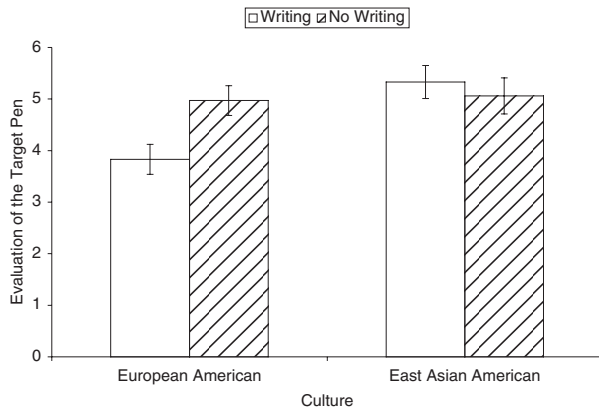


Figure 2. Mean (and standard error) evaluation of the target pen as a function of culture and instruction in Study 4.

.003. For those who valued expression to a lesser extent, the expression condition had an opposite, nonsignificant effect ( $\beta = .16$ ),  $t(86) = 1.11$ ,  $p = .27$ .

As can be seen in Figure 3, those who scored high on the Behavior component of the value of expression liked the target pen less when they wrote down their preference for another object (predicted  $M = 4.08$ ) than when they did not write down their preference (predicted  $M = 5.52$ ). In contrast, those who scored low on the Behavior component of the value of expression liked the target pen somewhat more when they wrote down their preference for another pen (predicted  $M = 5.11$ ) than when they did not write down their preference (predicted  $M = 4.62$ ).

**Mediating role of values of expression.** To examine the role of the Behavior component of the value of expression in mediating the interaction between culture and instruction, we conducted a mediated moderation analysis (following the procedure outlined in Muller et al., 2005). The results of the least squared regression analysis are presented in Table 2.

In the first regression equation, liking for the target pen was regressed on instruction, culture, and their interaction. This regression equation is equivalent to the ANOVA results reported above and depicted in Figure 2; there was a main effect of culture that was qualified by the significant Culture  $\times$  Instruction interaction on the liking for the target pen. In the second regression equation, the Behavior component of the VEQ was regressed on instruction, culture, and their interaction. There was only a main effect of culture ( $\beta = .51$ ),  $t(86) = 5.61$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that, as noted above, the European American participants endorsed the Behavior component of the VEQ to a greater extent than the East Asian American participants. Finally, in the third regression equation, liking for the target pen was regressed on instruction, culture, Instruction  $\times$  Culture, value of expression, and Instruction  $\times$  Value of Expression. The results indicate that the Instruction  $\times$  Value of Expression interaction was significant ( $\beta = -.25$ ),  $t(84) = -2.10$ ,  $p = .039$ , whereas the Instruction  $\times$  Culture interaction was not ( $\beta = -.11$ ),  $t(84) = -0.96$ ,  $p = .33$ . Thus, the interaction between the value of expression and instruction mediated the interaction between culture and instruction on liking for the target pen.

## Discussion

Study 4 replicated both Study 2 and Study 3. As in Study 2, cultural differences emerged in the value of expression, as European Americans indicated that in both behavior and belief, they valued expression to a greater extent than East Asian Americans. As in Study 3, there was a cultural difference in the effect of expression on liking for an un-chosen object. That is, European Americans evaluated the un-chosen pen more harshly when they expressed their pen choice than when they did not express their pen choice. In contrast, East Asian Americans were not affected by the expression of their pen choice.

In addition, the results in Study 4 show that cultural difference in how much people value the expression of thoughts explains the difference in how expression of choice affected people from East Asian American and European American cultural contexts. For European Americans who place greater value on expressing their thoughts and feelings, stating what pen they chose (as opposed to internally reflecting on their choice) made them like the un-chosen pen less, indicating that they became more attached to the pen they chose. In contrast, for East Asian Americans who do not place as much value on expressing their thoughts and feelings, stating their pen choice or not did not matter as much.

These findings from Study 4 directly support the idea that differences in the value people place on self-expression, and, in particular, how they express those values in their behaviors, lead to differences in how people feel about their preferences once they are expressed. Cultural systems and individuals' experiences in a cultural system are too complex and intricate to be reduced to what is measured in such questionnaires as the VEQ, and we do not suggest that differences found in individuals' beliefs fully capture differences in cultural experiences. What we suggest is that individuals' values are perhaps one means through which cultural ideals influence individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Such measured values are one of many possible proxies for cultural assumptions that can be used to understand the process of cultural influence.

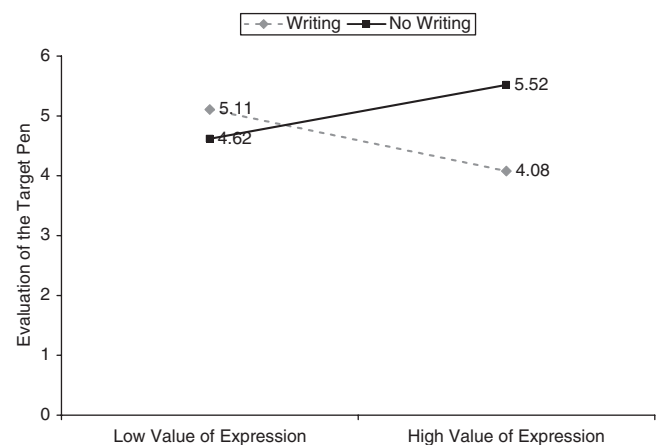


Figure 3. Liking for target pen as a function of value of expression and instruction (no writing vs. writing) in Study 4. Points are predicted values on the basis of values plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean on value of expression.



Table 2  
*Least Squares Regression Results for Mediated Moderation in Study 4*

Predictor	Regression 1 criterion: Evaluation of target pen		Regression 2 criterion: Value of expression (behavior)		Regression 3 criterion: Evaluation of target pen	
	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$
Instruction	-.14	-1.37	.15	1.66	-.17	-1.71
Culture	-.25	-2.50*	.51	5.61**	-.30	-2.58*
Instruction $\times$ Culture	-.23	-2.24*	.09	0.99	-.11	-0.96
Value of expression					.13	1.13
Instruction $\times$ Value of Expression					-.25	-2.10*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

## General Discussion

### Summary

Our studies demonstrate that East Asians/East Asian Americans and European Americans differ in the extent to which they value expression (see Studies 1 and 2). Furthermore, this difference in the value of expression leads to differences in how people from each culture are affected by the act of expression (see Studies 3 and 4).

We demonstrated in Study 1 that individuals indeed share the culturally represented meanings of speech and reflect the meanings through their own beliefs. We demonstrated that European Americans tend to view speech as an expression of internal attributes, and ultimately an expression of the self, to a greater extent than East Asians. Study 2 conceptually replicated the findings from Study 1 with the comparison of East Asian Americans and European Americans using a scale to measure value of expression. The study showed that the European Americans care about self-expression more than East Asian Americans and that how much people care about self-expression is related to the degree to which they endorse the independent self-construal. In Studies 3 and 4, we showed that the actual roles of expression in preference judgments are consistent with the cultural assumptions about the self-expression. More specifically, Study 3 showed that the expression of choice leads European Americans to be more invested and committed to their choice, whereas East Asian Americans were relatively unaffected by expression. Study 4 directly examined the connection between the value of expression and the actual effect of choice expression. The study demonstrated that European Americans place greater emphasis on self-expression than East Asian Americans, and this difference explained the cultural difference in how people from each culture were affected by the expression of choice. Taken together, all studies consistently demonstrated that self-expression—the expression of internal attributes—carries greater cultural significance among people from a European American cultural context as a means to commit, establish, and affirm who they are, whereas it plays a relatively insignificant role in the psychological processes of people from an East Asian cultural context.

### *Self-Expression and Psychological Processes*

In addition to demonstrating cultural differences, our findings provide another perspective on several social psychological theories. The present research underscores the psychological importance of expression and the importance of cultural context in shaping the effect of self-expression on psychological processes. The findings suggest that the act of self-expression makes European Americans become more committed to their choices and preferences because they participate in a culture in which their thoughts define themselves, and the expression of thoughts reveals (or exposes) who they are. This theorizing leads to questions about the influence of culturally shared beliefs and assumptions regarding expression on how people are affected by self-expression.

Many studies have shown the positive psychological effects of expressing one's internal states. For instance, studies in the United States that have specifically examined the effect of various types of verbal expression have found that verbal expression can be physically and psychologically beneficial (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988). Indeed, researchers have created interventions that have people express their emotions about issues such as how they are coping with breast cancer (Stanton et al., 2002). These emotional expression interventions have produced positive psychological and physical outcomes. What is beneficial about these interventions is not that people have thoughts or feelings about themselves but that they are given the opportunity to express them. Moreover, Gross and his colleagues have also shown the importance of expression by studying what happens when the normal expression of emotion is suppressed (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). When people are forced to suppress their emotional expression, it has negative effects on their cognitive functioning (Richards & Gross, 2000). These positive effects of expression (and negative effects of suppression) on psychological functioning may be at least in part the result of the assumptions about the value of expression shared in the cultural context in which these phenomena occur. In fact, research on culture and social support shows that European Americans more frequently use and benefit from talking about their thoughts and feelings with close others in seeking social support compared with Asian Americans (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, in press; Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004).

Previous research has also examined the effect of expression on attitudes in the U.S. cultural context. For instance, Kiesler and his colleagues (Kiesler, Roth, & Pallak, 1974; Kiesler & Sakumura, 1966) have shown that when people's attitudes are made public, they become more committed to their attitudes. Similarly, Higgins and Rholes (1978) found that verbal expression of attitudes makes people believe in those attitudes more, even when the expressed attitudes are not consistent with their own. The present analysis provides a sociocultural explanation for such phenomena. That is, it seems that what is expressed (i.e., various internal attributes) through these acts implicates the self for people from the European American cultural context because they live and participate in a cultural context in which internal attributes define who they are. Thus, once thoughts are expressed, people become more invested and committed to those thoughts probably as a way of defending themselves. These effects of expression are bounded by cultural meanings of expression and self, and in another culture in which these meanings differ, the effects would probably differ as well.

### *Communication and Expression of the Self*

All humans are social beings who probably share a universal need to be acknowledged by other social participants. In this article, we mainly focused on the cultural importance of expression of internal attributes in the United States. The question arises, however, as to how self-expression operates on psychological processes of those who are from cultures in which the self is defined in more social terms, such as people from East Asian cultural contexts (cf. Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

We speculate that this difference in self-definition has implications for both the content and mode of self-expression. First, it is plausible that because there is greater emphasis on social aspects of the self, such as social roles, status, and relationships in East Asian cultures, people from these cultures are more affected by the expression of these social attributes than by the expression of internal attributes. In other words, those from East Asian cultural contexts may feel more secure about the self when others (and themselves) can see their roles, social status, and relationships.

Second, much like cultural patterns of general communication styles, the form of self-communication itself may be more interdependent (e.g., Bond & Venus, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1994) and indirect (e.g., Hall, 1976; Holtgraves, 1997; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). That is, direct verbal expression may not be the most appropriate mode of communicating one's social roles, status, and relationships. These social attributes are perhaps best expressed through actions, such as fulfilling obligations that come with social roles, or maintaining important relationships. Thus, it may be the behavioral expression of their social selves, rather than the verbal expression, that is psychologically meaningful to people from East Asian cultural contexts. Moreover, among people from more interdependent cultural contexts, how people convey who they are may depend more on others' recognition of who they are through social networks (e.g., by reputation or through mutual acquaintance) than direct self-expression.

### *Conclusion*

Expression of thoughts, feelings, and intentions implicates many different aspects of human life and psychology. The present re-

search demonstrates the relevance of self-expression as an important social behavior that can influence and alter internal psychological processes. The research also shows the importance of culturally represented meanings of the act of expression and how these cultural meanings are reflected in the way people from different cultures are affected by expression. The act of self-expression holds great psychological significance only in a culture that grants it social significance. Taking a cultural perspective allows this alternative theoretical view that reveals the importance of expression in American psychology as well as its cultural nature. We believe this is one of many potential benefits of incorporating culture in the study of the human mind.

We began our article with quotes from two wise men—Seneca and Confucius. Whether speech, as a symbol of self-expression, is the reflection of the mind, as Seneca suggests, or, compared with action, it is merely a pale reflection of the self, as Confucius suggests, seems to depend on the cultural contexts in which speech is practiced. These men, after all, are both considered to be wise, and the world is probably large enough to have more than one set of wisdom.

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