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Leader Choices Reflect Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect More During Organizational Growth Than Decline

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Abstract

What emotions do people prefer in their leaders, and does this vary depending on how their organizations are performing? In three studies conducted between 2018-2023 with European American, East Asian American, and Hong Kong Chinese participants, we predicted that people would choose leaders whose emotional expressions match their culture's ideal affect (the affective states they value) more during *growth*, when conditions are favorable and people default to cultural ideals, than during *decline*, when conditions are unfavorable, and people are more open to other options. In Study 1 (N = 304), participants imagined that their own organizations were undergoing growth or decline and rated the emotions they would ideally like their leaders to have. In Studies 2 (N = 449) and 3 (N = 558), participants read hypothetical scenarios of student organizations undergoing growth and decline, and chose among excited, calm, and neutral leaders. Across the studies, during growth, European Americans and East Asian Americans chose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than did Hong Kong Chinese, consistent with cultural differences in the valuation of high arousal positive affect (ideal HAP). During decline, however, these cultural differences disappeared. In Study 3, participants' ideal HAP predicted their positive judgments of the excited candidate when conditions were favorable but not when they were unfavorable. Together, these studies suggest that people may prefer leaders who express culturally ideal emotions more during organizational growth than decline.

Keywords: Culture, Emotional Expression, Growth, Organizational Behavior, Ideal Affect

Leader Choices Reflect Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect More During Growth Than Decline

Social groups need effective leaders to survive and thrive, and therefore, choosing a leader can be one of the most consequential decisions that people make for their organizations. When choosing among different leadership candidates, people consider their personalities (Foti & Hauenstein, 2007), particularly their emotional qualities (e.g., extraversion; Ashkanasy, 2003; Gooty et al., 2010; Ensari et al., 2011). What factors influence the emotional qualities people look for in their leaders? Here we propose that the specific emotional qualities people look for in leaders depend on their cultural contexts and how well their organizations are performing. To test this hypothesis, we conducted three studies comparing the leader choices of European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese for organizations that were undergoing growth or decline. Prior to describing the studies, we review relevant research on emotion and leadership and present our theoretical framework, Affect Valuation Theory.

Previous Research on Emotion and Leadership

Previous research suggests that leaders who express more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions appear more effective to their constituents (Bono & Illies, 2006; Cherulnik et al., 2001; Elfenbein, 2007; Erez et al., 2008; Lewis, 2000), presumably because positive emotions inspire and motivate others as well as promote social bonds (Shiota et al., 2004). Relatedly, individuals who report experiencing more positive emotions and fewer negative ones are often rated as better leaders (Carleton et al., 2018; Sy et al., 2005; Wunderley et al., 1998). Certain positive emotions seem to matter more than others. For instance, leaders who express excitement and enthusiasm are viewed as more competent and increase their followers' confidence, optimism, and enjoyment (Cattell & Stice, 1954; George, 1996).

These findings, however, are largely based on U.S. and Western samples (Elfenbein, 2023). Cross-cultural research suggests that leadership styles and their associated emotions differ across cultures. In a meta-analysis of 18 nations, leaders in Western nations, such as the

U.S. and Canada, scored higher on “transformational” leadership styles, or those that are charismatic, inspirational, and stimulating, than leaders in East Asian nations, like China and South Korea (Leong & Fischer, 2011). Similarly, research conducted by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) team found that countries with less clearly defined norms (e.g., the U.S. and other Western countries) valued charismatic and visionary leaders who evoke positive emotions more than did countries with well-defined, formal norms (e.g., China and other East Asian countries; Aktas et al., 2016; Hanges et al., 2016; Stephan & Pathak, 2016; Den Hartog et al., 1999).

Why do cultural differences in leadership preferences exist, and are they reflected in whom people choose as leaders in everyday life? In this paper, we propose that such differences reflect in part the emotions people value and ideally want to feel.

Affect Valuation Theory

Affect Valuation Theory (AVT) states that how people ideally want to feel (their “ideal affect”) differs from how people actually feel (their “actual affect”), and that cultural factors shape ideal affect more than actual affect. In previous studies, European Americans ideally wanted to feel high arousal positive (HAP) states, like excitement and enthusiasm, more than Hong Kong Chinese and other East Asians (Tsai et al., 2006; Tsai et al., 2016). In contrast, Hong Kong Chinese ideally wanted to feel low arousal positive (LAP) states, like calm and peacefulness, more than their European American counterparts (Tsai, et al., 2006). However, a recent meta-analysis surveying nearly twenty years of ideal affect research reveals that these latter differences in ideal LAP have changed over time, driven by increasing LAP among European Americans. As a result, European Americans report valuing LAP states as much as or even more than East Asians (Tsai et al., accepted), although concomitant changes in behavior are less clear.

According to AVT, ideal affect influences how people behave and what decisions they make, including how they judge others (Tsai, 2007; Tsai, 2017; Tsai, 2024). For instance, European Americans rated open, toothy “excited” smiles as more affiliative (i.e., friendlier and more extraverted) than did Hong Kong Chinese, and this cultural difference was mediated by how much people valued HAP (Tsai et al., 2019). Importantly, these social judgments have behavioral consequences. Compared to Hong Kong Chinese and other East Asians, European Americans were more likely to share resources with excited (vs. calm) recipients (Cachia et al., 2024; Park et al., 2020; Park et al., 2017); to choose excited (vs. calm) physicians (Sims et al., 2014, 2017); and to hire excited (vs. calm) job applicants (Bencharit et al., 2019), in part because they perceived excited recipients, physicians, and job applicants to be more trustworthy and knowledgeable than did Hong Kong Chinese and other East Asians.

Based on AVT and previous research, we expected that cultural differences in ideal affect would influence the emotions that people look for when choosing leaders. Some evidence already supports this prediction: Top-ranking leaders in the U.S. were over six times more likely to show excited smiles in their official website photos than were leaders in China (Tsai et al., 2016, Study 1). Additionally, across 11 nations, the more nations valued HAP states, the more likely their legislators were to show excited smiles in their official website photos, whereas the more nations valued LAP states, the more likely their legislators were to show closed calm smiles (Tsai et al., 2016, Study 3). These findings suggest that leaders’ emotional expressions reflect their culture’s emotional ideals.

Leader Choice During Organizational Growth and Decline

What remains unclear, however, is whether people *choose* leaders whose emotional expressions reflect their culture’s affective ideals, and whether this varies depending on how well an organization is performing. Although choosing leaders is in some ways similar to choosing other authority figures like physicians, leaders hold significantly more power and status. Leaders are responsible for individuals beyond the person making the choice and are expected to respond to their organization’s immediate circumstances as well as to plan for its future success (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009; Zaccaro et al., 2018). Although nations vary in terms of whether constituents choose their top leaders like heads of state, people across nations often choose leaders for their local organizations, clubs, or social groups. Therefore, it is important to investigate the factors that shape people's judgments and choices of leaders to better understand how people make decisions in everyday life.

We predict that people will be more likely to choose leaders whose emotional expressions match their ideal affect when organizations are doing well or are in "growth." When organizations are doing well, people in those organizations may rely more on their default ways of thinking and feeling to judge and choose leaders (Kahneman, 2003; Loewenstein et al., 2015; Levine et al., 2018), which are in part shaped by their cultures (Markus et al., 2024). Consistent with this idea, under conditions of certainty, participants were more likely to support a "prototypical" leader (e.g., a "typical student" who "shares the same interests, values, and opinions") than a "non-prototypical" leader (e.g., an "atypical student" who does "not share the same interests, values, and opinions"; Rast III et al., 2012).

But what about when organizations are failing or in decline? Some evidence suggests that under these conditions, people take more risks and choose more non-traditional or unorthodox leaders (Barr, 1998). Indeed, student participants who felt less certain about themselves, their places in the world, and their futures showed reduced support for the prototypical leader (Rast III et al., 2012). This may be because when an organization is declining, its members feel anxiety, fear, and even anger, which may signal to them that they should "stop" and consider other alternatives (Huntsinger et al., 2010). For example, Huntsinger et al. (2010) instructed participants to view an ambiguous stimulus that could be processed in two ways. Participants who were induced to feel positive emotions stuck with their instructed way of processing the stimulus, whereas participants who were induced to feel negative emotions processed that stimulus in the alternate, uninstructed way (Huntsinger et al., 2010). Along these same lines, people may choose leaders who show emotional traits that do not match their cultural values during decline because their negative emotions lead them to look for different leaders than they would normally seek.

Alternatively, a different body of research suggests that people's intuitive, culturally shaped defaults may be even more important during periods of uncertainty (Bonn & Rundle-Thiele, 2007; Markus et al., 2024; Sayegh et al., 2004). As a result, people may choose leaders who express the emotions valued by their cultures as much or more during decline compared to growth perhaps because one function of culture is to provide a script for how to operate during uncertain, stressful, and even threatening times (Markus et al., 2024; Sullivan, 2016; Pyszczynski et al., 2015).

There is also evidence that leaders who match the cultural defaults and ideals may be more effective during periods of decline. In the United States, "charismatic" and "transformational" leaders produce more positive organizational outcomes under risky, stressful and rapidly changing circumstances (Cannella Jr. & Monroe, 1997; House et al., 1991; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Lowe et al., 1996; Waldman et al., 2001; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). Similarly, among top-ranking CEOs in the United States, charismatic leadership was associated with better organizational performance under uncertain conditions (Tosi et al., 2004).

In summary, while previous literature supports the prediction that cultural differences in ideal affect would be reflected in leader choice during growth, it remains unclear whether this would be the case during decline. Some research suggests that cultural ideals would matter less, whereas other research suggests that cultural ideals might matter more. Moreover, the *mechanism* through which people choose their leaders remains unclear. People's ideal affect influences their social judgments of others and ultimately their decisions to share resources with (Cachia et al., 2024; Park et al., 2020; Park et al., 2017) and hire them (Bencharit et al., 2019; Tsai et al., 2019), but it remains unknown whether a similar mechanism applies to leader choices under conditions of growth and decline.

The Present Research

To address these gaps in the literature, we conducted three studies on the links between ideal affect and leader choices under different performance scenarios among European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese. We focused on these cultural groups for two reasons. First, we wanted to build on previous work demonstrating differences in ideal affect between European Americans, East Asian Americans, and East Asians (e.g., Tsai et al., 2006). Second, some East Asian Americans describe hitting a "bamboo ceiling," making it very difficult for them to advance to top leadership positions because of cultural mismatches with mainstream U.S. values (Lu et al., 2020), and we wanted to have a better understanding of their leader choices. In previous work on hiring decisions, European Americans reported being more likely to hire the excited candidate than did Hong Kong Chinese (Bencharit et al., 2019, Study 4a). East Asian Americans, who were less oriented to American culture than their European American peers and similarly oriented to East Asian culture as their Hong Kong Chinese peers, reported being less likely than European Americans, but more likely to than Hong Kong Chinese to hire the excited candidate. In other words, East Asian Americans "fell" in between the other two cultural groups. However, when they had to choose one candidate to hire, East Asian Americans chose the excited candidate as much as European Americans and more than Hong Kong Chinese did. We predicted that East Asian American leadership ratings and choices would follow a similar pattern as in Bencharit et al. (2019).

In Study 1, participants imagined that their *own* organizations were undergoing growth or decline and rated what emotions and traits they wanted their ideal leader to show. In Study 2, participants read hypothetical scenarios about student organizations undergoing growth and decline, and then chose an excited, calm, or neutral leader for the student organization. In Study 3, participants read hypothetical scenarios about a student business undergoing growth and decline but also provided ratings of the scenario and the different candidates so that we could assess (a) the features of organizational growth that might lead people to use their ideals more and (b) whether these features actually moderate the links between people's ideal affect and their judgments and choices of the leader candidates. We focused on *student* organizations in Studies 2 and 3 because they were most relevant to our participants and were comparable in the United States and Hong Kong.

Transparency and Openness Statement

All procedures were approved by the Stanford University Institutional Review Board under the protocol, “Cultural variation in the expression and perception of affect” (IRB #15307). Study 1 was conducted in 2023; Study 2 was conducted in 2018; and Study 3 was conducted in 2020. Although Study 1 was conducted most recently, we report it first because it is related to participants’ own organizations and therefore, has less experimental control than Studies 2 and 3, which were more similar to each other. The methods, hypotheses, and data analysis plan for Studies 1 and 3 were pre-registered prior to data collection. Facial stimuli, anonymized data, analysis scripts, and pre-registrations are available on the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/bn65m/.

Data Analysis Approach

Data were analyzed in SPSS (version 31) and RStudio (version 4.2.3; RStudio Team, 2020). Across studies, we conducted a mixed-design analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and post-hoc pairwise comparisons in SPSS to probe for cultural differences in mean ratings of ideal affect, controlling for actual affect. For post-hoc pairwise comparisons, we report adjusted means, standard error estimates, and effect sizes. To test for cultural differences in ideal leader judgments, we conducted a mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc t-tests in RStudio using the “afex” (Singmann, Bolker, Westfall, Aust, & Ben-Shachar, 2024) and “emmeans” (Lenth, 2024) packages. We applied a Huynh-Feldt correction when assumptions of sphericity were violated (Blanca et al., 2023). To examine cultural differences in participants’ leader choices, we fit binomial logistic regression models using the “lme4” package (Bates et al., 2015). We conducted the tests of indirect effects (mediation, moderated mediation) for all studies using the PROCESS macro (version 3.5.3; Hayes, 2022) in SPSS (version 31).

Throughout the studies, we standardized ratings within participants to control for cultural differences in response style bias (Chen et al., 1995).

Study 1: Do Culture and Ideal Affect Predict Ideal Leader Ratings More During Growth Than Decline for People's Own Organizations?

Hypotheses

We predicted that: (1) European Americans would value HAP states more than Hong Kong Chinese (Tsai et al., accepted; Tsai et al., 2006), (2) when imagining an ideal leader for their organizations during growth, European Americans would rate their ideal leaders as more excited and less calm compared to Hong Kong Chinese, (3) East Asian Americans' ratings of their ideal leaders would fall between those of European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese in terms of excitement and calm, as in prior work (Bencharit et al., 2019), and (4) cultural differences in ideal excited leaders during growth would be mediated by cultural differences in ideal HAP. Additionally, we examined two competing possibilities for organizations during decline: (1) cultural differences in leader choice would be as or even more pronounced during decline compared to growth, or (2) there would be no cultural differences in leader choice during decline.

Method

Power Analysis

As described in our pre-registered a priori power analysis, we needed 279 participants to achieve 80% power ($f^2 = 0.05$), with main effects of cultural group, ideal leader judgment, performance scenario, and their interactions resulting in five tested and six total predictors, $F(5, 256) = 2.25$. We therefore aimed to recruit 100 participants from each cultural group to allow for missing data and attrition.

Participants

We recruited participants for a 30-minute online survey from email listservs for community members and university alumni in the United States and Hong Kong. European

Americans identified as White or European American; East Asian Americans identified as East Asian American (e.g., Chinese American, Japanese American, Korean American), and Hong Kong Chinese identified as East Asian or Chinese. Additionally, all participants were 18 years and older. One hundred twenty-nine European Americans, 45 East Asian Americans, and 166 Hong Kong Chinese completed the survey.

We excluded 36 participants: 16 had missing open-ended responses; 3 typed random, nonsense letters; 3 had participated more than once (based on their IP addresses and nearly identical open-ended responses); and 14 had ambiguous or mixed descriptions of their organizations' performances. Thus, we conducted our analyses on 304 participants: 124 European Americans (55.6% male, 41.9% female, 2.4% non-binary or agender), 44 East Asian Americans (38.6% male, 61.4% female), and 136 Hong Kong Chinese (72.1% male, 27.9% female). While we did not reach our targeted number of East Asian Americans in this study due to limited availability (we were more successful in Studies 2 and 3), we included them in our analyses to ensure we had sufficient power to test our main hypotheses.

To ensure that we sampled participants from the cultural groups of interest, participants completed one item from the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ; Tsai et al., 2000) as a measure of their overall cultural orientation (see *Materials and Measures*). European Americans reported greater orientation to American culture than East Asian Americans, $t(165) = 2.93$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.76], $d = 0.51$ (European American: $M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.91$; East Asian American: $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.78$). Hong Kong Chinese reported being moderately oriented to Chinese culture ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.83$). East Asian Americans who reported their orientation to Asian American or East Asian cultures (e.g., Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean) were similarly oriented to East Asian culture as Hong Kong Chinese (East Asian American: $M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.78$; $t(164) = 0.81$, $p = .421$, 95% CI [-0.19, 0.45], $d = 0.16$). For additional information about East Asian Americans, including their generational status for this and subsequent studies, please see Supplementary Materials, Section 1.

The three cultural groups differed in age, $F(2, 298) = 9.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$. European Americans were significantly younger than East Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese (European American: $M = 29.32$, $SE = 0.63$; East Asian American: $M = 32.50$, $SE = 1.06$; Hong Kong Chinese: $M = 33.00$, $SE = 0.61$; European American vs. East Asian American: $t(176) = -2.99$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-5.28, -1.08], $d = -0.53$; European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(255) = -4.19$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-5.42, -1.95], $d = -0.52$). There were no significant differences in age between East Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese, $p = .680$, $d = -0.07$. Additionally, the three groups differed in gender, with East Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese having a greater percentage of females compared to European Americans, $\chi^2(4, N = 304) = 26.81$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.21$. However, when we included age and gender in our analyses, the pattern of results remained the same. For parsimony, we omitted these covariates from our final analyses reported below (see Supplementary Materials, Section 6a for analyses and results with age and gender).

Leader Judgment Task

Participants thought of an organization that they belonged to and with which they strongly identified. Participants briefly described the organization, how long they had been a member of it, their specific role, and why they felt strongly connected to it. Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of two performance scenarios: growth or crisis/decline. Participants were given examples of “growth” (e.g., “your business has reported an increase in profits” or “your sports team has won multiple games”) or “crisis” (e.g., “your business has reported a decrease in profits” or “your sports team has lost multiple games”). To make the scenario more vivid and relevant, participants were asked to describe in a few sentences what growth (or crisis) looked like for their own organization. Participants were then asked to imagine they were selecting a leader for their organization during a time of growth (or crisis) and made judgments about their ideal leader under those conditions.

Materials and Measures

European American and East Asian American participants completed all the measures in English, and Hong Kong Chinese participants completed the measures in Chinese, except for the Affect Valuation Index (AVI), which was presented in both Chinese and English as in Tsai et al. (2006). All materials and measures were written in English, translated into Chinese by bilingual speakers, and back-translated into English by native Chinese speakers using back-translation approaches (Brislin, 1970). Any discrepancies between the original English version and the back-translated English version were reconciled by a group of bilingual research assistants from the U.S. and Hong Kong research teams.

Descriptions of Organizations. We developed a coding scheme to examine whether the types of organizations that participants described were similar across cultures as well as to ensure that participants clearly described conditions of growth or decline (see exclusions under *Participants*). Most participants (66.1%) described non-work-related organizations (i.e., related to recreation, service, or volunteer work) that they had been involved in for an average of six years (M = 6.10, SD = 5.95). There were no cultural differences in the types of organizations participants described or how long participants had been members of their organizations. For additional details on the coding scheme, descriptives within each cultural group, examples, and analyses, please see Supplementary Materials, Section 2.

Ideal Leader Judgments. Participants used a scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely* to rate how much they wanted their ideal leader to be: even-tempered, objective, dominant, friendly, passionate, assertive, nervous, competent, composed, calm, hard-working, enthusiastic, energetic, sluggish, excited, warm, sleepy, angry, relaxed, dull, rational, serene, emotionally stable, and extraverted under the imagined performance conditions (i.e., growth, crisis/decline). This list included affective and emotional states (e.g., enthusiastic, calm) as well as interpersonal traits (e.g., dominant, friendly, competent, emotionally stable; Tsai et al., 2019). We also included negative states (e.g., angry) to examine whether participants wanted their ideal leaders to express negative emotions during decline. Based on results from factor analyses (provided in Supplementary Materials, Section 3), we calculated four aggregates that showed consistency across cultures: (1) *excited* (extraverted, enthusiastic, energetic, passionate, excited), (2) *calm* (composed, calm, emotionally stable), (3) *non-emotional* (competent, rational, objective) and (4) *negative* (angry, nervous, dull, sleepy, sluggish). Internal consistency estimates were moderate to high across cultural groups ($\alpha_{excited}$: .62 - .81; α_{calm}: .61 - .72; $\alpha_{non\text{-}emotional}$: .51 - .75; $\alpha_{negative}$: .69 - .74).

To control for cultural differences in response style, as outlined in our *Data Analysis Approach*, we ipsatized ideal leader judgments within participants. For each judgment, we subtracted the participant's mean (across all 24 judgments) and divided by the participant's standard deviation (across all 24 judgments). We then calculated the mean of the ipsatized judgments for each of the four aggregates.

Ideal and Actual Affect. Participants completed the Affect Valuation Index (AVI; Tsai et al., 2006), which asks respondents to rate on a scale from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *All the time* how much they actually feel and how much they would ideally like to feel the following emotions over the course of a typical week: enthusiastic, dull, excited, sleepy, sluggish, idle, aroused, rested, astonished, quiet, surprised, still, passive, strong, inactive, fearful, calm, hostile, peaceful, nervous, relaxed, elated, lonely, content, sad, happy, unhappy, satisfied, serene, and euphoria.

We calculated actual and ideal high arousal positive (HAP) aggregates by averaging participants' ratings for actual and ideal excited, enthusiastic, elated, and euphoric, respectively, and actual and ideal low arousal positive (LAP) aggregates by averaging ratings for actual and ideal relaxed, calm, peaceful, and serene, respectively. Internal consistency estimates were moderate to high across cultural groups ($\alpha_{ideal\ HAP}$: .71 - .79; $\alpha_{actual\ HAP}$: .78 - .84; $\alpha_{ideal\ LAP}$: .70 - .82; $\alpha_{actual\ LAP}$: .74 - .85).

To control for cultural differences in response styles, we also created ipsatized actual and ideal HAP and LAP aggregates. For each actual affect item, we subtracted the participant's actual affect mean (across all actual affect items) and then divided by the participant's actual affect standard deviation (across all actual affect items). We followed the same procedure to ipsatize ideal affect items using each participant's ideal affect mean and standard deviation (across all ideal affect items). We then calculated the ipsatized HAP and LAP aggregates using the items described above. As mentioned above, in most cases, we report results from analyses of ipsatized values; for descriptives and analyses using raw ideal affect aggregates for this study as well as the subsequent studies, see Supplementary Materials, Section 4.

Cultural Orientation. Participants completed one item from the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ) in which they rated their orientation to different cultures on a scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely* (Tsai et al., 2000). Specifically, European Americans and East Asian Americans rated the extent to which they were oriented to mainstream American culture, and Hong Kong Chinese rated the extent to which they were oriented to Chinese culture. Additionally, all participants had the opportunity to report their orientation to another culture with which they identified (e.g., a specific East Asian or Western culture).

Demographics. Participants reported their age, education and work experience, language(s) spoken, birthplace, and their parents' ethnicities and birthplaces.

Procedure

Participants completed an online study on leader choices related to their own organizations. Participants first answered three pre-screening questions that asked for their self-identified racial/ethnic background, age, and gender. Eligible participants then completed the leader judgment task, AVI, GEQ, and demographics. Afterwards, participants were debriefed and compensated. Consistent with local norms, European Americans and East Asian Americans received a $10 Amazon gift card, and Hong Kong received $30HKD cash for their participation.

Data Analyses and Results

Are There Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect?

We conducted a 3 (Cultural Group [between-subjects: European Americans, East Asian Americans, Hong Kong Chinese]) X 2 (Ideal Affect [within-subjects: HAP, LAP]) ANCOVA, controlling for ipsatized actual HAP and actual LAP. There was a significant Cultural Group X Ideal Affect interaction, $F(2, 290) = 4.07$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$.

As predicted and consistent with prior work (Tsai et al., 2025), European Americans valued HAP states more than Hong Kong Chinese ($p = .005$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.26], $d = 0.41$; European American: $M = 0.53$, $SE = 0.04$; Hong Kong Chinese: $M = 0.37$, $SE = 0.04$). Like their European American counterparts, East Asian Americans also valued HAP states more than Hong Kong Chinese ($p = .046$, 95% CI [0.003, 0.28], $d = 0.38$; East Asian American: $M = 0.52$, $SE = 0.06$), but European Americans and East Asian Americans did not differ from each other in their ideal HAP ($p = .883$, $d = 0.03$). Consistent with recent findings (Tsai et al., accepted), there were no significant differences among the three cultural groups in their valuation of LAP (*ps* > .091; *ds* ranged from -0.32 to 0.13; European American: $M = 0.79$, $SE = 0.04$; East Asian American: $M = 0.91$, $SE = 0.06$; Hong Kong Chinese: $M = 0.86$, $SE = 0.04$). Within cultures, European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese valued LAP more than HAP (*p*s < .001; European American: 95% CI [0.15, 0.37], $d = 0.63$; East Asian American: 95% CI [0.21, 0.57], $d = 0.96$; Hong Kong Chinese: 95% CI [0.38, 0.59], $d = 1.20$).

Are There Cultural Differences in Ideal Leader Judgments for Organizations in Growth and Crisis/Decline?

Based our pre-registration, we conducted a 3 (Cultural Group [between-subjects: European American, East Asian American, Hong Kong Chinese]) X 2 (Performance Scenario [between-subjects: growth, crisis/decline]) X 3 (Ideal Leader Judgment [within-subjects: excited, calm, non-emotional]) mixed-design ANOVA. As predicted, there was a significant Culture X Performance Scenario X Ideal Leader Judgment interaction, $F(3.69, 543.85) = 3.14$, Huynh-Feldt corrected $p = .017$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Mean ideal leader judgments for each cultural group and performance scenario are presented in Table 1. While we focused on participants who clearly described organizations in either growth or decline (see *Participants*), the results remained the same when we also included participants who described organizations with ambiguous or mixed performance (see Supplementary Materials, Section 5 for findings).

Table 1

Ideal Leader Judgments by Cultural Group and Performance Scenario

	European Americans		East Asian Americans		Hong Kong Chinese	
Judgment	Growth	Decline	Growth	Decline	Growth	Decline
Excited	0.46 (0.31)	0.30 (0.37)	0.57 (0.32)	0.23 (0.25)	0.24 (0.38)	0.21 (0.34)
Calm	0.42 (0.31)	0.52 (0.32)	0.37 (0.39)	0.56 (0.34)	0.60 (0.42)	0.57 (0.37)
Non-Emotional	0.48 (0.33)	0.65 (0.28)	0.54 (0.35)	0.60 (0.27)	0.62 (0.37)	0.61 (0.42)
Negative	-1.37 (0.49)	-1.41 (0.37)	-1.51 (0.30)	-1.36 (0.42)	-1.29 (0.38)	-1.21 (0.53)

Note. Judgment ratings are ipsatized, and standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

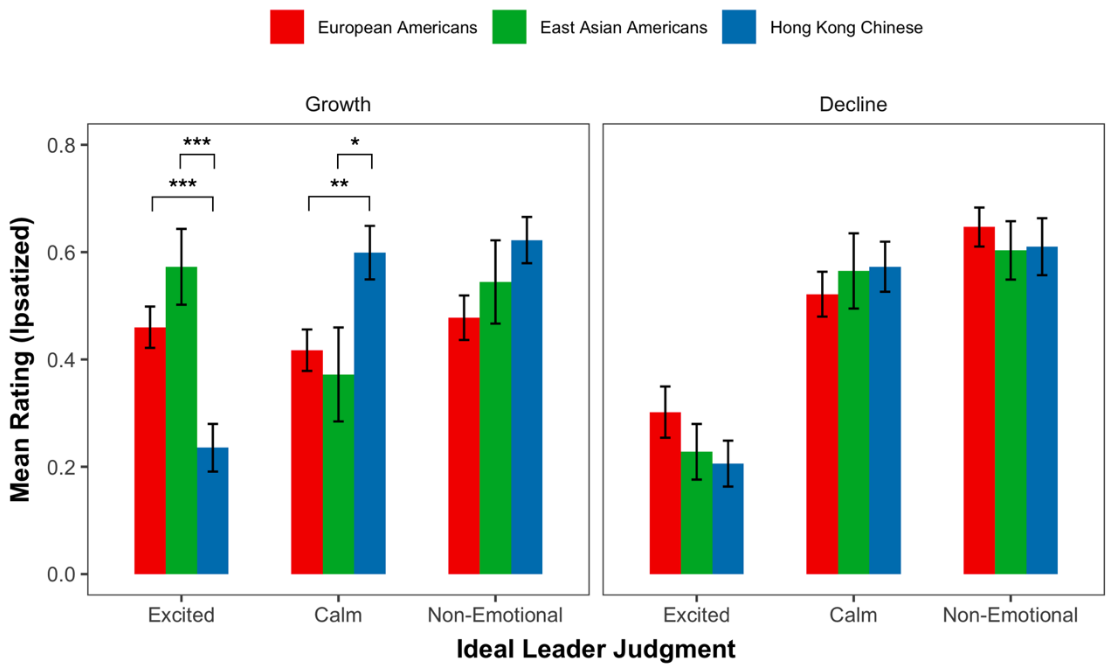
Between-Culture Comparisons. As predicted, when imagining their organizations in growth, European Americans rated their ideal leader as more excited than Hong Kong Chinese did (Figure 1; European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = 3.80$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.34], $d = 0.69$). Partly consistent with our prediction, East Asian Americans rated their ideal leader as more excited than did Hong Kong Chinese (East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = 3.90$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.51], $d = 1.04$), but contrary to our hypotheses, East Asian Americans and European Americans rated their ideal leader as similarly excited ($p = .201$; $d = -0.35$). Also as predicted, Hong Kong Chinese rated their ideal leader as calmer than did both European Americans and East Asian Americans (European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = -2.90$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [-0.31, -0.06]], $d = -0.56$; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = -2.47$, $p = .014$, 95% CI [-0.41, -0.05]], $d = -0.70$; European American vs. East Asian American: $p = .629$; $d = 0.14$). Although we did not predict differences in non-emotional ratings, for organizations in growth, Hong Kong Chinese rated their ideal leader as more non-emotional than European Americans did, with East Asian Americans' ratings falling in between the two cultural groups (European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = -2.40$, $p = .017$, 95% CI [-0.26, -0.03]], $d = -0.45$; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $p = .377$, $d = -0.24$; European American vs. East Asian American: $p = .458$, $d = -0.21$).

In contrast, when imaging their organizations in decline, there were no significant differences among European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese in their ratings of their ideal leader as excited, calm, or non-emotional (*p*s > .123; *d*s ranged from -0.16 to 0.30). These findings suggest that ideal affect matters <u>less</u> for leaders during decline compared to growth.

Within-Culture Comparisons. European Americans rated their ideal leader as more excited and less non-emotional when imagining their organizations in growth than in decline (excited: $t(295) = 2.55$, $p = .011$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.28]], $d = 0.41$; non-emotional: $t(295) = -2.67$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [-0.29, -0.04)]], $d = -0.44$). However, they rated their ideal leader as similarly calm during both growth and decline ($p = .114$; $d = -0.27$). Like their European American counterparts, East Asian Americans rated their ideal leader as more excited in organizational growth than decline ($t(295) = 3.33$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.55]], $d = 0.90$), but they also rated their ideal leader as similarly calm and non-emotional in both scenarios (*ps* > .081; *d*s ranged from -0.51 to -0.15). Hong Kong Chinese rated their ideal leader as similarly excited, calm, and non-emotional in growth and decline (*p*s > .617; *d*s ranged from 0.03 to 0.08).

Figure 1

Cultural Differences in Ideal Leader Judgments During Organizational Growth and Crisis/Decline



Note. Error bars represent ±1 standard error of the mean, and asterisks indicate significant pairwise differences between cultural groups within growth and decline.

***$p < .001$. **$p < .010$. *$p < .050$.

When Organizations Are in Crisis/Decline, Do People Want Their Leaders to Express Negative Emotions?

We also examined the possibility that participants would want their ideal leaders to express negative emotions when their organizations were in decline by conducting a 3 (Cultural Group [between-subjects: European American, East Asian American, Hong Kong Chinese]) X 2 (Performance Scenario [between-subjects: growth, crisis]) ANOVA on the negative aggregate. The main effect of Cultural Group was significant: $F(2, 295) = 4.66$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$.

Both European Americans and East Asian Americans rated their ideal leader as less negative than did Hong Kong Chinese (European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = -2.58$, $p = .010$, 95% CI [-0.25, -0.03], $d = -0.32$; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(295) = -2.42$, $p = .016$, 95% CI [-0.33, -0.03], $d = -0.42$; European American vs. East Asian American: $p = .574$, $d = 0.10$). However, the mean negative aggregate scores were below zero for all three cultural groups (Table 1), suggesting that negative emotional traits were <u>the least</u> desirable relative to the other traits. Additionally, there was no significant main effect of Performance Scenario or Cultural Group X Performance Scenario interaction (ps > .275), suggesting that these ratings did not vary as a function of organizational growth vs. decline. In other words, during times of crisis/decline, participants across groups wanted their leaders to be more excited, calm, and non-emotional than negative.

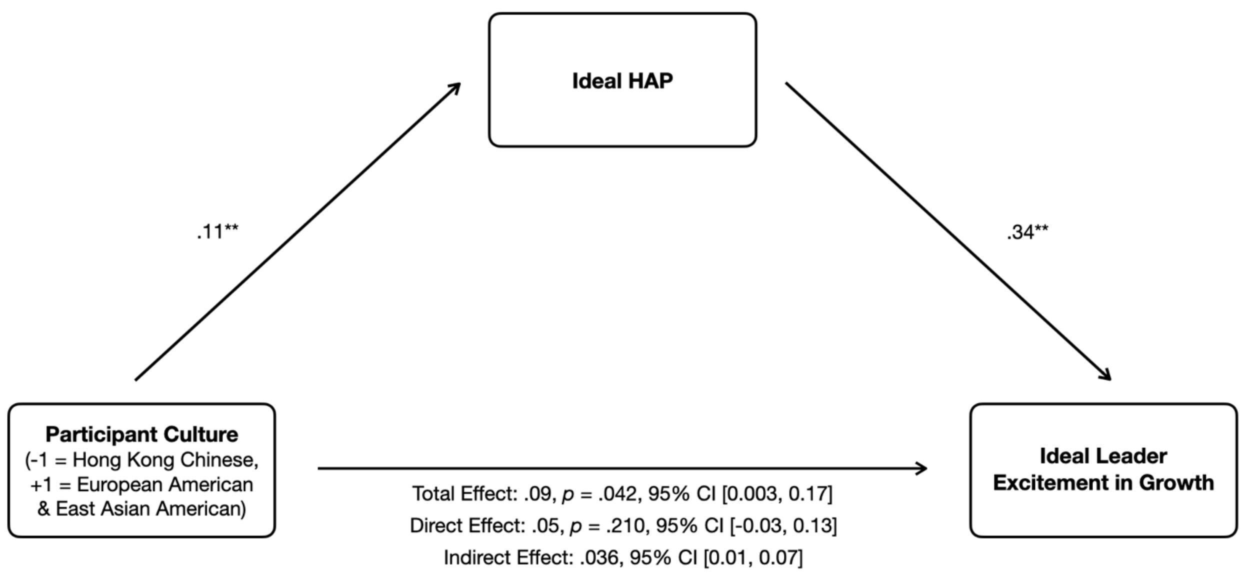
Do Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect Mediate Differences in Ideal Leader Judgments During Growth?

We tested whether ideal HAP (controlling for actual HAP) mediated cultural differences in ideal leader excitement ratings during growth, collapsing across European and East Asian Americans since they did not differ in ideal HAP or ideal leader ratings (see Supplementary Materials, Section 6b for results separating European and East Asian Americans). As described previously, cultural group predicted ideal HAP: European Americans and East Asian Americans valued HAP states more than did Hong Kong Chinese, $B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 2.46$, $p = .014$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.19]. Ideal HAP, in turn, predicted ideal leader excitement ratings, such that the more participants valued HAP states, the more they rated their ideal leader as excited, $B = 0.34$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 6.37$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.44]. After accounting for ideal HAP, the direct effect of cultural group on ideal leader excitement ratings was no longer significant. Furthermore, the indirect effect of ideal HAP was significant. These results suggest that although the indirect effect was small, as predicted, ideal HAP fully mediated cultural differences in ideal leader excitement ratings during growth (Figure 2).

Additionally, we examined whether ideal LAP (controlling for actual LAP) mediated cultural differences in ideal leader calm ratings during growth. As reported earlier, cultural group did not significantly predict ideal LAP (*p* = .753), and the indirect effect was not significant (indirect effect = 0.005, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.04]). However, ideal LAP (controlling for actual LAP) did significantly predict ideal leader calm ratings during growth, *B* = 0.39, *SE* = 0.05, *t* = 8.20, *p* < .001, 95% CI [0.30, 0.48]. Thus, while there were no cultural differences in ideal LAP, the more participants ideally wanted to feel LAP states, the more they judged their ideal leader as calm when imagining their own organizations in growth.

Figure 2

Cultural Differences in Ideal Leader Excitement are Mediated by Ideal HAP



Note. Mediation model is based on 5000 bootstrapped samples, and controls for actual HAP. HAP = high arousal positive.

***p < .001. **p < .010. *p < .050.

Study 1 Discussion

In Study 1, we found that culture and organizational performance influenced the emotions that people wanted in their ideal leaders. When imagining their own organizations in growth, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to envision an excited leader than were Hong Kong Chinese, whereas Hong Kong Chinese were more likely to envision a calm leader than were European Americans and East Asian Americans. When imagining their organizations during crisis/decline, however, there were no cultural differences in participants' ideal leader ratings, suggesting that cultural differences in ideal affect influenced judgments of their ideal leader more under conditions of growth than decline.

Although we had predicted that East Asian Americans' responses would fall in between those of European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese, as in Bencharit et al., (2019) when participants rated their likelihood of hiring excited, calm, and neutral candidates, we observed that East Asian Americans were more like their European American than their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts when rating their ideal leaders. In hindsight, this is perhaps not surprising since European Americans and East Asian Americans in the current study did not differ in their ideal HAP and because most of the East Asian Americans were born and raised in the US, and therefore primarily exposed to US leadership ideals.

Interestingly, European Americans and East Asian Americans seemed to change their view of an ideal leader more than Hong Kong Chinese as a function of organizational growth vs. decline. Hong Kong Chinese valued calm and non-emotional leaders more than excited ones across the two performance scenarios. Although it is possible that Hong Kong Chinese leader choices are less influenced by performance scenario, it is also possible that Hong Kong Chinese imagined situations that less strongly differentiated between growth and crisis/decline.

Study 2: Do Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect Predict Leader Choice for Organizations in Growth (vs. Decline) Under Controlled Conditions?

Study 1 showed that cultural differences in ideal affect are reflected in people's leader choices more during growth than crisis/decline for organizations that people belonged to and identified with. This was particularly true for European Americans and East Asian Americans. This study, however, had several limitations. First, while most participants described non-work organizations, there was variability across cultures in the specific kinds of organizations as well as the growth and decline scenarios participants described. Therefore, in Study 2, we presented European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese with the same hypothetical scenarios to ensure that people were responding to the same organizations and the same performance scenarios. Second, Study 1 primarily focused on non-work related organizations. In Study 2, we focused on work-related organizations in Study 2 that were relevant to university samples. We sampled three different sectors (i.e., business, research, and government; see Supplementary Materials, Section 7 for a preliminary study with the business sector only) because we wondered whether cultural differences in leader choices might be stronger during growth than decline for more client- and public-facing sectors like business and government organizations than less client- and public-facing sectors like research organizations.

Third, Study 1 focused on growth and crisis/decline. In Study 2, we also presented scenarios in which organizations were maintaining the status quo ("stability"), to examine whether people's ideal affect mattered under conditions that were less favorable than growth but more favorable than decline. Fourth, participants in Study 1 rated their ideal leaders across multiple traits, but in real life, people need to choose one leader. In Study 2, we presented participants with equally qualified excited, calm, and neutral candidates, and we asked them to choose the candidate they preferred most.

Hypotheses

We predicted that: (1) European Americans would choose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than Hong Kong Chinese would for organizations undergoing growth, (2) East Asian Americans' leader choices would most resemble those of European Americans, and (3) cultural differences in excited leader choices would be mediated by ideal HAP during growth. Consistent with the possibility that ideal affect matters less for leaders during decline, we did not predict cultural differences in participants' leader choices for organizations in decline. We also examined whether our findings held during stable conditions that were in between growth and decline, as well as across sectors that varied in how client- and public-facing they were.

Method

Power Analysis

In our original a priori power analysis, we estimated the sample size for a different task, which we do not report here (279 participants; 80% power; f^2 = .05; seven total predictors). For the analysis reported in this manuscript, we needed 105 participants across the three cultural groups to achieve 95% power (f = .18) for three groups and three measures; $F(4, 204) = 2.42$.

Participants

We recruited participants from universities in the United States and Hong Kong for a one-hour online study on leadership through university subject pools, email listservs, and lab web pages. Participants completed a prescreening questionnaire, on which they reported their ethnicity and cultural background. European Americans were required to identify as "White/European American," be born in the United States or Canada, and currently live in the United States. East Asian Americans were required to identify as "East Asian/East Asian American," be born in the United States or an East Asian country and currently live in the United States. Hong Kong Chinese were required to identify as "Chinese," be born in Hong Kong or China, and currently live in Hong Kong.

We invited 199 European Americans, 133 East Asian Americans, and 130 Hong Kong Chinese to participate. Following the same exclusion procedure as Study 1, we excluded participants who had missing data or typed random, nonsense letters for open-ended questions (7 participants) as well as participants who had previously participated in the study (6 participants). Our final sample consisted of 449 participants: 197 European Americans (71.1% female, 28.9% male), 129 East Asian Americans (72.9% female, 27.1% male), and 123 Hong Kong Chinese (72.4% female, 27.6% male).

As in Study 1, participants completed one item from the GEQ (Tsai et al., 2000) that assessed their cultural orientation (see *Materials and Measures*). The cultural groups differed in their orientation to American culture, $F(2, 446) = 112.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.34$. European Americans were significantly more oriented to American culture than East Asian Americans, who in turn, were more oriented to American culture than Hong Kong Chinese (European American: $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.01$; East Asian American: $M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.80$; Hong Kong Chinese: $M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.80$; European American vs. East Asian American: $t(324) = 4.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.65], $d = 0.47$; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(250) = 10.96$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.91, 1.30], $d = 1.38$; European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese: ($t(318) = 14.39$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.33, 1.75], $d = 1.65$). East Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese were similarly oriented to East Asian culture (East Asian American: $M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.70$; Hong Kong Chinese: $M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.77$; $t(217) = -0.86$, $p = .389$, 95% CI [-0.28, 0.11], $d = -0.12$). Within cultural groups, East Asian Americans were significantly more oriented to American than to East Asian culture, $t(95) = 4.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.28, 0.80], $d = 0.42$. In contrast, Hong Kong Chinese were more oriented to East Asian culture than to American culture, $t(122) = 4.16$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.59], $d = 0.38$.

While the three cultural groups did not differ in gender distribution ($p = .932$, Cramer's $V = 0.02$), they differed in age, $F(2, 443) = 8.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$. European Americans and East Asian Americans were younger than Hong Kong Chinese (European American: $M = 20.29$, $SE = 0.20$; East Asian American: $M = 19.67$, $SE = 0.25$; Hong Kong Chinese: $M = 21.12$, $SE = 0.25$; European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(317) = -2.33$, $p = .020$, 95% CI [-1.54, -

0.13], *d* = -0.27; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: $t(248) = -5.32$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.99, -0.92], *d* = -0.67; European American vs. East Asian American: $p = .053$, $d = 0.22$). When we controlled for these age differences, the results remained the same (see Supplementary Materials, Section 9b for results controlling for age).

Leader Choice Task

Participants were randomly assigned to one sector: business, government, or research. Participants read three scenarios, each describing an organization in that sector undergoing growth, decline, and stability. We focused on organizations that would be relevant to our university sample (student business, student government, research lab). For example, the "growth" scenario described a student business organization that was performing above average (e.g., increase in sales); the "decline" scenario described an organization that was performing below average (e.g., decline in sales); and the "stability" scenario described an organization that was performing at average levels (e.g., average sales). Examples of business scenarios are presented in Table 2 (see Supplementary Materials Table S8a for examples of student government and research scenarios).

After reading each scenario, participants viewed a set of three candidates who varied in emotional expression but matched participants' ethnicity and gender (e.g., East Asian American female participants saw three Asian female candidates) and were asked to choose one to lead the organization.[1] The presentation order of the three performance scenarios was counterbalanced across participants. The order of the three leadership candidates was also counterbalanced across performance scenarios, so that participants saw excited, calm, and

[1] While it is possible that having three candidates that matched the participant's self-identified race/ethnicity and gender may have caused suspicion in a corporate setting, participants were from university settings and were asked to make decisions about student organizations, which are more diverse in terms of ethnicity and gender. We did not systematically vary the ethnicity and gender of the leadership candidates because this was not the main focus of our study, and doing so would have added considerable length to the study.

neutral candidates in a different order for each scenario, and participants viewed a different set of candidate profiles for each scenario.

Table 2

Examples of Performance Scenarios in the Business Sector

Performance	Scenario
Growth	Student Business A reported a **substantial increase** in net profits, and the net profits have continued to **increase** over the course of the fiscal quarter. It has also **succeeded in securing additional investors** since the beginning of the fiscal quarter. Further, its product has become **more popular**, as indicated by **increasing brand awareness**. In summary, Student Business B has experienced considerable **growth** throughout the fiscal quarter.
Stability	Student Business B reported average sales, with no change in revenue over the course of the fiscal quarter. It also received **moderate** student reviews and news coverage, which **have not changed over the course of the quarter**. Further, the number of stores and clubs on campus carrying its product **remained the same**; therefore, the number of customers **has not changed**. In summary, Student Business C has remained **moderate and stable** throughout the fiscal quarter.
Decline	Student Business C experienced a **massive decline** in sales, and the rate has continued to **decrease** over the course of the fiscal quarter. It also has reported a **substantial drop** in the number of sponsorships, as indicated by **fewer companies advertising its product** compared to the beginning of the quarter. Further, it **failed to recover** its original development costs, and **has not made any profit**. In summary, Student Business A has experienced a **substantial downturn** throughout the fiscal quarter.

Note. Selected text is bolded to illustrate differences across the scenarios but was not bolded in the actual study.

Materials and Measures

As in Study 1, European American and East Asian American participants completed the measures in English, and Hong Kong Chinese participants completed the measures in Chinese, except for the AVI, which was presented in both Chinese and English.

Leader Candidate Profiles. We created leader candidate profiles that contained a photo, description of the candidate's education and internship experience, and adjectives that the candidate used to describe themselves. Candidates varied by race (White, Asian), gender (male, female), and emotional expression (excited, calm, neutral). Because there were no well-controlled facial stimuli that varied along these dimensions at the time we conducted the research, we had to generate candidate photos. We imported White and Asian targets with excited (i.e., bigger, open-mouth) smiles, calm (i.e., smaller, closed-mouth) smiles, and neutral expressions from the IAS Lab Face Set (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009) and the Taiwanese Facial Expression Database (Chen & Yen, 2007) into Facegen Modeller (http://facegen.com) to standardize the faces in terms of size and lighting. Although these facial stimuli were used in previous research (Park et al., 2017), we pre-tested them to ensure that they conveyed the intended emotions for each cultural group. The leader candidate profiles, including example photos, education, and internship experience, as well as the pre-test results are presented in Supplementary Materials, Sections 8b-c.

Ideal and Actual Affect. Participants completed the AVI (Tsai et al., 2006) as in Study 1. Internal consistency estimates were high across cultural groups ($\alpha_{\text{ideal HAP}}$: .77 - .80; $\alpha_{\text{actual HAP}}$: .80 - .82; $\alpha_{\text{ideal LAP}}$: .79 - .85; $\alpha_{\text{actual LAP}}$: .85 for all groups).

Cultural Orientation. Participants completed the same item from the GEQ (Tsai et al., 2000) as in Study 1. All three cultural groups rated the extent to which they were oriented to American culture. Additionally, East Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese rated the extent to which they were oriented to East Asian and Chinese culture, respectively.

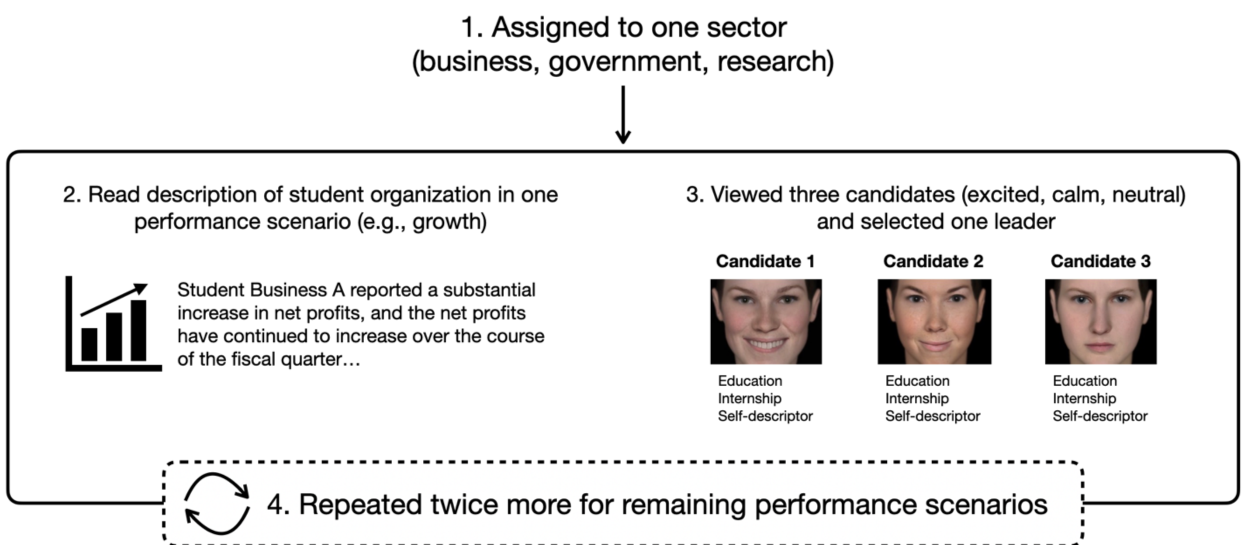
Demographics. Participants reported their ethnicity, gender, age, year in school, education and work experience, language(s) spoken, birth country, age living in the U.S. (if applicable), parents' birthplace, as well as parents' and grandparents' ethnicity.

Procedure

Participants first answered questions about their ethnicity and gender. Participants then completed the leader choice task for three performance scenarios (growth, stability, decline) within one sector (Figure 3). Afterwards, participants completed the AVI and the rest of the demographics. Finally, they were debriefed and compensated using comparable rates to those in Study 1.

Figure 3

Schematic of Leader Choice Task



Note. Leader candidates were matched to each participant's self-reported ethnicity and gender, and the order in which the three candidates were presented was counterbalanced across performance scenarios. The order in which the performance scenarios were presented was also counterbalanced. The faces were taken from the IAS Lab Face Set (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009) and the Taiwanese Facial Expression Database (Chen & Yen, 2007) and standardized with Facegen Modeller.

Data Analyses and Results

Are There Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect?

We examined whether cultural differences in ideal HAP and LAP emerged, controlling for actual HAP and LAP. While the Cultural Group X Ideal Affect interaction was not significant (p = .259, η_p^2 = 0.01; see Supplementary Materials, Section 4 for significant main effects), we conducted a planned comparison to test if European Americans valued HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese.

Consistent with Study 1, European Americans and East Asian Americans valued HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese, but did not differ from each other (European American: M = 0.57, SE = 0.03; East Asian American: M = 0.56, SE = 0.03; Hong Kong Chinese: M = 0.46, SE = 0.03; European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: p = .013, 95% CI [0.02, 0.19], d = 0.33; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: p = .026, 95% CI [0.01, 0.20], d = 0.33; European American vs. East Asian American: p = .946, d = 0.01). East Asian Americans also valued LAP more than European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese (e.g., Tsai et al., 2006; European American: M = 0.86, SE = 0.03; East Asian American: M = 0.96, SE = 0.03; Hong Kong Chinese: M = 0.83, SE = 0.03; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: p = .003, 95% CI [0.05, 0.22], d = 0.42; European American vs. East Asian American: p = .016, 95% CI [-0.18, -0.02], d = -0.31). However, European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese did not differ in ideal LAP, which again is consistent with recent trends (Tsai et al., accepted; p = .401, d = 0.11).

Comparing Models: Do Cultural Differences in Leader Choice Vary by Performance Scenario and Sector?

To test whether cultural differences in leader choices varied by performance scenario and sector, we fit four binary logistic regression models to predict choice of excited or calm leaders (0 = leader not chosen, 1 = leader chosen) and then compared model fit (see Supplementary Materials Section 9a for models predicting choice of neutral leaders).

In Model 1, we entered Cultural Group (European American, East Asian American, Hong Kong Chinese) as the fixed effect. In Model 2, we added Performance Scenario (growth, stability, decline) and the Cultural Group X Performance Scenario interaction. In Model 3, we entered Cultural Group, Sector (business, government, research) and the Cultural Group X Sector interaction. In Model 4, we included Cultural Group, Performance Scenario, Sector, all two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction. Categorical predictors were dummy coded with Hong Kong Chinese, decline, and research group serving as the reference categories for Cultural Group, Performance Scenario, and Sector, respectively. Although we initially entered participants as random intercepts in all four models, there was little variability among participants and therefore we omitted the random effects from the models described below.

We then used two methods to compare the models and to select the best fitting, most parsimonious one. For nested models (e.g., Model 1 vs. Model 2), we used the "anova" function to compare whether one model (e.g., Model 2) had significantly lower deviance than the other (e.g., Model 1). To compare non-nested models (e.g., Model 2 vs. Model 3) as well as models with more predictors (e.g., Model 3 vs. Model 4), we compared the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) to determine which model had the lower BIC and better fit (Charpentier et al., 2016; Dziak et al., 2012).

Model 2, which included Cultural Group, Performance Scenario, and their interaction, was the best fit to predict the choice of both excited and calm leaders (Table 3). This suggested that leader preferences depended on participant's culture as well as the organization's performance—whether it was in growth, stability, or decline—*but not on the sector of the organization,* such as a student business, government, or research group. Results of Model 2 are presented below. To parse significant Cultural Group X Performance Scenario interactions, we examined the simple effects using the "emmeans" package and calculated odds ratios on the response scale, adjusting *p*-values for multiple comparisons.

Table 3

Models to Predict Choice of Excited and Calm Leaders

Model Predictors	Comparison of Nested Models (AIC)	Comparison of Non-Nested Models (BIC)	AIC	BIC	log likelihood	deviance
Choice of Excited Leaders						
M1: Cultural Group			1794.1	1809.7	-894.0	1788.1
M2: Cultural Group X Performance Scenario	Outperforms M1: $\chi^2(6) = 37.43$, $p < .001$		1768.6	1815.5	-875.3	1750.6
M3: Cultural Group X Sector	Does not outperform M1: $\chi^2(6) = 2.85$, $p = .827$	Does not outperform M2	1803.2	1850.1	-892.6	1785.2
M4: Cultural Group X Sector X Performance Scenario		Does not outperform M1, M2, or M3	1766.7	1907.3	-856.4	1712.7
Choice of Calm Leaders						
M1: Cultural Group			1670.0	1685.6	-832.0	1664.0
M2: Cultural Group X Performance Scenario	Outperforms M1: $\chi^2(6) = 22.06$, $p = .001$		1659.9	1706.8	-821.0	1641.9
M3: Cultural Group X Sector	Does not outperform M1: $\chi^2(6) = 3.07$, $p = .800$	Does not outperform M2	1678.9	1725.7	-830.4	1660.9
M4: Cultural Group X Sector X Performance Scenario		Does not outperform M1, M2, or M3	1684.8	1825.4	-815.4	1630.8

Decomposing the Cultural Group X Performance Scenario Interaction in Model 2

Choice of Excited Leaders. There were significant Cultural Group X Performance Scenario interactions for growth and stability (vs. decline; Table 4), suggesting that the likelihood of choosing excited leaders for organizations in these scenarios differed across cultures.

Between-Culture Comparisons. When organizations were in growth, European Americans were 2.76 times more likely to choose excited leaders than Hong Kong Chinese as predicted (95% CI [1.56, 4.89], $p < .001$). East Asian Americans were also 3.79 times more likely to choose excited leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese (95% CI [2.03, 7.10], $p < .001$). European Americans and East Asian Americans did not differ from each other in their likelihood of choosing excited leaders when organizations were undergoing growth ($p = .355$).

When organizations were stable, both European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese, and again they did not differ from each other (European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: OR = 2.63, 95% CI [1.43, 4.82], $p = .001$; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: OR = 3.45, 95% CI [1.80, 6.61], $p < .001$; European American vs. East Asian American: $p = .458$). When organizations were in decline, however, there were no differences among the three cultural groups: European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese were similar in their likelihood of choosing excited leaders (*ps* > .650).

Within-Culture Comparisons. Within cultural groups, European Americans were 2.06 times more likely to choose excited leaders for organizations in growth compared to decline (95% CI [1.27, 3.34], $p = .001$). However, European Americans did not differ in their likelihood of choosing excited leaders between stability and decline or between stability and growth (*ps* > .087). East Asian Americans were 3.27 times more likely to choose excited leaders for organizations in growth than decline (95% CI [1.77, 6.01], $p < .001$). They were also 2.03 times more likely to choose excited leaders in stability compared to decline (95% CI [1.11, 3.71], *p* =

.016) but did not differ between stability and growth (*p* = .145). In contrast, Hong Kong Chinese were as likely to choose excited leaders across growth, stability, and decline (*ps* > .259).

Choice of Calm Leaders. There were significant Cultural Group X Performance Scenario interactions for growth and stability (vs. decline; Table 4), again suggesting that the likelihood of choosing calm leaders differed across these scenarios for the cultural groups.

Between-Culture Comparisons. As predicted, when organizations were in <u>growth</u>, European Americans and East Asian Americans were less likely to choose calm leaders than Hong Kong Chinese (*ps* < .001; European American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: OR = 0.36, 95% CI [0.21, 0.63]; East Asian American vs. Hong Kong Chinese: OR = 0.34, 95% CI [0.18, 0.63]). In fact, Hong Kong Chinese were 2.78 times more likely than European Americans and 2.95 times more likely than East Asian Americans to choose calm leaders when organizations were undergoing growth. European Americans and East Asian Americans did not differ from each other in their likelihood of choosing calm leaders during growth (*p* = .970).

When organizations were <u>stable</u>, East Asian Americans were less likely to choose calm leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese (OR = 0.37, 95% CI [0.19, 0.71], *p* = .001). Hong Kong Chinese were 2.73 times more likely to choose calm leaders than East Asian Americans. European Americans, however, did not differ from East Asian Americans or Hong Kong Chinese in their likelihood of choosing calm leaders during stability (*ps* > .109).

When organizations were in <u>decline</u>, there were no cultural differences in the likelihood of choosing calm leaders, with European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese showing comparable preferences (*ps* > .407).

Within-Culture Comparisons. Within cultures, European Americans and East Asian Americans were similarly likely to choose calm leaders during growth, stability, and decline (for European Americans: *ps* > .214; East Asian Americans: *ps* > .265). In contrast, Hong Kong Chinese were significantly <u>more</u> likely to choose calm leaders during growth than decline (OR = 2.86, 95% CI [1.53, 5.34, *p* < .001). Hong Kong Chinese, however, did not differ in their likelihood of choosing calm leaders between stability and decline or between stability and growth (*ps* > .104). Thus, unlike Study 1, in Study 2, Hong Kong Chinese did differ in their choice of calm leaders between growth and decline conditions.

Table 4

Models to Predict Choice of Excited and Calm Leaders

	Model Statistics			
	b	*SE*	*z*	*p*
Choice of Excited Leaders				
Cultural Group X Performance Scenario (growth vs. decline)				
European Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	.80	.34	2.33	.020
East Asian Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	1.26	.38	3.32	< .001
Cultural Group X Performance Scenario (stability vs. decline)				
European Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	.75	.36	2.11	.034
East Asian Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	1.16	.39	3.01	.003
Choice of Calm Leaders				
Cultural Group X Performance Scenario (growth vs. decline)				
European Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	-.70	.35	-1.99	.047
East Asian Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	-.86	.38	-2.23	.026
Cultural Group X Performance Scenario (stability vs. decline)				
European Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	-.15	.35	-.43	.670
East Asian Americans (vs. Hong Kong Chinese)	-.78	.40	-1.98	.048

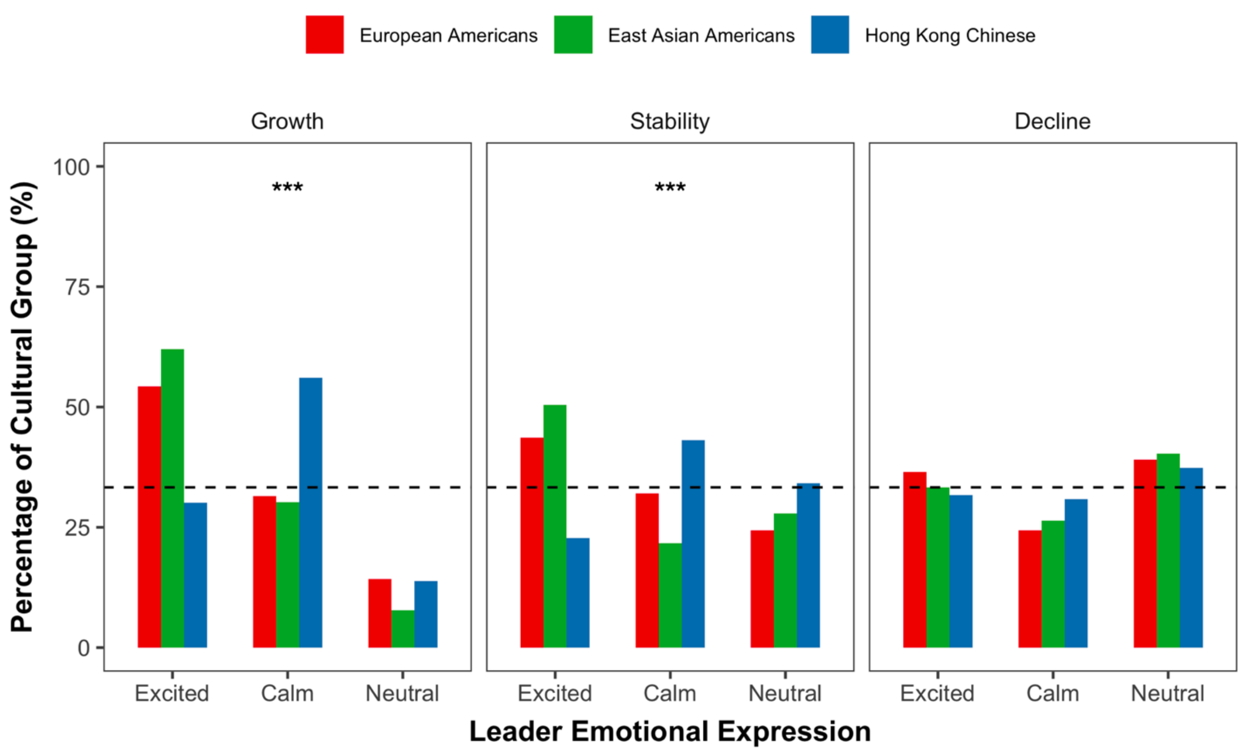
Note. Cultural Group and Performance Scenario were dummy coded, with Hong Kong Chinese and decline serving as the reference groups, respectively.

In summary, based on our model comparisons, cultural group and performance scenario—but not the sector of the organization—influenced participants' leader choices in response to hypothetical scenarios. When organizations were undergoing growth or stability, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders and less likely to choose calm leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese. When organizations were in decline, however, there were no cultural differences in the likelihood of choosing excited or calm leaders. Moreover, European Americans and East Asian Americans chose excited leaders more during growth than decline, and Hong Kong Chinese chose calm leaders more during growth than decline.

To help illustrate these findings, Figure 4 shows the percentage of participants from each cultural group that chose each candidate during growth, stability, and decline. As shown, there were no cultural differences in choice of neutral leaders across the performance scenarios. Moreover, during decline, there was no clear preference for one type of leader.

Figure 4

Leader Choice Across Sectors by Performance Scenario



Note. Dashed line indicates chance (33.3%). Asterisks denote significant cultural differences in the distribution of participants who chose excited, calm, and neutral leaders within the performance scenario based on Chi-squared analyses (See Supplementary Materials, Section 10).

***p < 0.001.

Do Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect Mediate Differences in Leader Choices During Growth?

Choice of excited leader. As in Study 1, we tested whether ideal HAP mediated cultural differences in choice of excited leaders during organizational growth. We again collapsed across European Americans and East Asian Americans because they did not differ in ideal HAP or their likelihood of choosing excited leaders during growth (see Supplementary Materials, Section 9c for the results using three cultural group categories). Contrary to hypotheses and Study 1, the indirect effect was not significant, and ideal HAP (controlling for actual HAP) did not predict choice after accounting for cultural group (indirect effect = 0.02, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.08]; cultural group: $B = 0.55$, $SE = 0.12$, $z = 4.76$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.78]; ideal HAP: $p = .554$). It is possible that ideal HAP did not account for additional variance above and beyond cultural group, which we have observed in prior work (e.g., Blevins et al., 2023). To test whether individual differences in ideal HAP alone was associated with choice of the excited leader, we conducted a regression. Supporting our predictions and previous work (Blevins et al., 2023), ideal HAP significantly predicted choice of the excited leader ($B = 0.29$, $SE = 0.12$, $z = 2.39$, $p = .016$).

Choice of calm leader. We then tested whether ideal LAP mediated cultural differences in choice of calm leaders during growth. The indirect effect was not significant, and ideal LAP (controlling for actual LAP) did not predict choice after accounting for cultural group (indirect effect = 0.02, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.08]; cultural group: $B = -0.53$, $SE = 0.11$, $z = -4.74$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.75, -0.31]; ideal LAP: $p = .453$). This was perhaps not surprising because as in Study 1, European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese did not differ in their ideal LAP. Unlike

Study 1, however, when we conducted a regression analysis across cultural groups to examine whether ideal LAP alone predicted choice of the calm leader, we found that it did not (p = .717).

Study 2 Discussion

Consistent with Study 1, when participants read hypothetical scenarios about work-related student organizations, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders and less likely to choose calm leaders than Hong Kong Chinese for organizations undergoing growth, but these cultural differences disappeared for organizations undergoing decline. As in Study 1, East Asian Americans resembled their European American counterparts in their choices of excited leaders. Moreover, all three cultural groups showed changes in their leader choices across performance scenarios: European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders during growth vs. decline, and Hong Kong Chinese were more likely to choose calm leaders during growth vs. decline. During decline, participants appeared to choose excited, calm, and neutral leaders to similar degrees, suggesting that they were open to all options. This is a different pattern from Study 1 (where there was a preference for the non-emotional/neutral option) and might reflect the fact that the organizations were work-related and/or hypothetical, making it less clear to participants which choice was best.

In Study 1, cultural differences in choice of the excited leader during growth were mediated by cultural differences in ideal HAP, but in Study 2, cultural differences in ideal HAP did <u>not</u> mediate cultural differences in choice of the excited leader during growth, although ideal HAP was significantly associated with choice of the excited leader during growth. This might have been because there was significant overlapping variance between cultural grouping and ideal HAP, which we have seen in prior work (Blevins et al., 2023). Also contrary to Study 1, ideal LAP was not associated with choice of the calm leader during growth, suggesting that this particular association may be less stable than the link between ideal HAP and choice of the excited leader.

Finally, some cultural differences in choice of excited and calm leaders emerged for organizations that were stable, although the magnitude of these differences was smaller than those for growth. These findings suggest that there may be more continuous features of growth and decline that are important in determining when ideal affect matters for leader choice. We explored this and other questions next.

Study 3: Two Potential Mechanisms

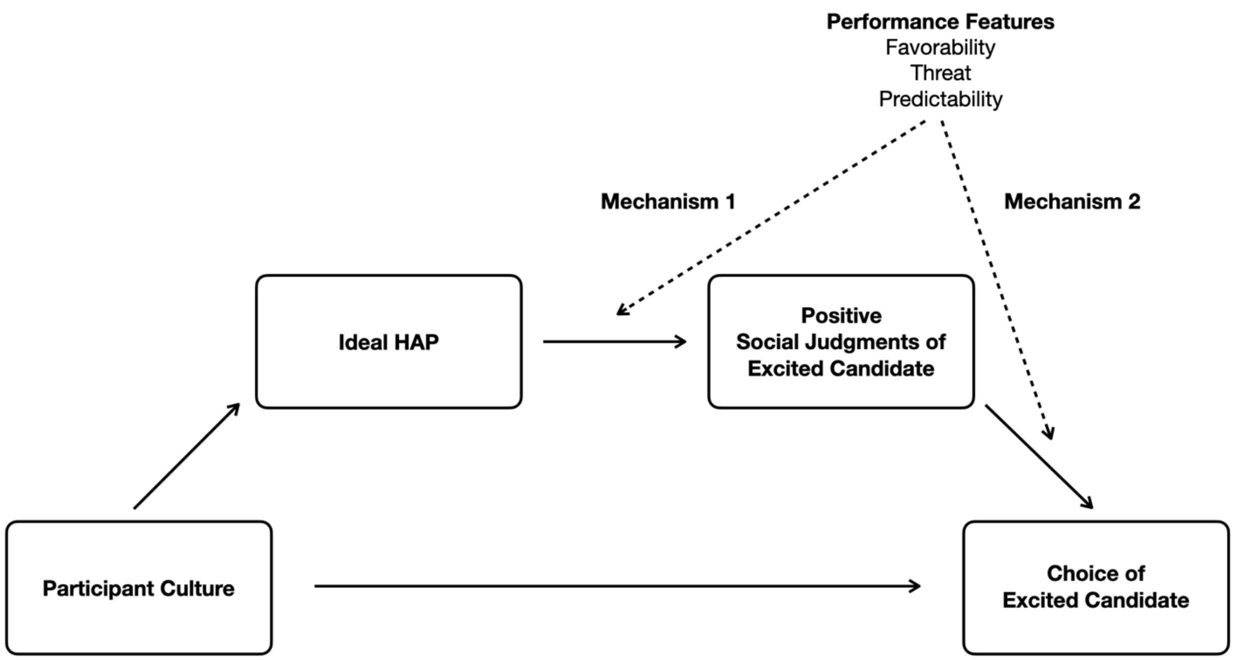
While Studies 1 and 2 show a clear association between ideal HAP and choice of the excited leader during growth, they do not speak to how this occurs. In previous work, we demonstrated that people evaluate others more positively when their emotional expressions match people's own ideal affect, which in turn, increases their willingness to share resources with or hire those individuals (Cachia et al., 2024; Park et al., 2020; Bencharit et al., 2019; Tsai et al., 2019). We examined whether a similar process occurred for leader choice and if so, how features of organizational performance might moderate this process.

Study 2 findings suggest that there may be more continuous features of growth and decline that are important in determining when ideal affect matters for leader choice. For instance, growth may be perceived as more favorable and beneficial, as well as less threatening or uncertain, than decline. Therefore, one possibility is that under more favorable, more predictable, and less threatening conditions, people's ideal affect may more strongly predict people's judgments of candidates, which influences their leader choices, than it does under less favorable, less predictable, and more threatening conditions. Another possibility is that people's ideal affect may influence their judgments of candidates regardless of organizational performance, but these judgments may have a stronger influence on leader choice when conditions are more favorable, more predictable, and less threatening than when conditions are less favorable, less predictable, and more threatening.

To test these two possible mechanisms (illustrated in Figure 5), in Study 3 we asked participants to rate how favorable, threatening, and predictable they perceived the organization's performance to be after reading the scenarios, and then to choose a leader. We focused on the relationship between ideal HAP and the choice of the excited leader because it was stronger than the link between ideal LAP and choice of the calm leader in Studies 1 and 2.

Figure 5

Two Potential Mechanisms for How Ideal Affect May Shape Leader Choice Under Different Performance Scenarios (Study 3)



Hypotheses

We tested two mechanisms (Figure 5), focusing on choice of excited leaders. For both mechanisms, we predicted that: (1) European Americans and East Asian Americans would choose excited leaders more than Hong Kong Chinese and that (2) European Americans and East Asian Americans would value HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese. Mechanism 1 predicted that: (3) ideal HAP would be associated with positive social judgments of the excited leader, especially when the organization's performance was more favorable, more predictable, and less threatening, and that (4) positive social judgments of the excited leader would predict choice of the excited leader. In contrast, Mechanism 2 predicted that: (3) ideal HAP would be associated with positive social judgments of the excited leader, and that (4) positive social judgments of the excited leader would predict choice of the excited leader, especially when the organization's performance was more favorable, more predictable, and less threatening. Thus, the two mechanisms differed in how features of the performance scenario moderated this process.

Method

Power Analysis

We conducted two pre-registered power analyses prior to data collection. To replicate the effects found in Study 2, we needed 279 participants to achieve 80% power (f^2 = .05; seven total predictors; $F(6, 271) = 2.13$). To estimate sample sizes for the predicted indirect effect of ideal HAP and positive social judgments on choice of the excited leader, we based our power analysis on a linear multiple regression deviation from zero. Based on the power analysis, we needed 100 participants for each condition (80% power; estimated f^2 = .10, $F(2, 97) = 3.09$). We multiplied this value by three since there were three scenarios, and therefore, we aimed to recruit at least 300 participants to test the predicted moderated mediation.

Participants

We invited 245 European American, 190 East Asian American, and 165 Hong Kong Chinese university students and community affiliates using the same eligibility criteria and recruitment methods as in Study 2. A total of 15 European Americans, 14 East Asian Americans, and 13 Hong Kong Chinese participants were excluded from data analysis because of data quality concerns (e.g., responding to open-ended questions with random letters or numbers) or because they had already participated in the current study or in a related one. Thus, our final sample consisted of 558 participants: 230 European Americans (27.0% male, 73.0% female), 176 East Asian Americans (25.6% male, 74.4% female), and 152 Hong Kong Chinese (33.6% male, 66.4% female).

As in Studies 1 and 2, European Americans identified more with American culture than East Asian Americans did (European American: M = 4.13, SD = 0.85; East Asian American: M = 3.62, SD = 0.86; $t(404) = 6.01$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.35, 0.68], d = 0.60). East Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese were similarly oriented to East Asian culture ($t(312) = -0.36$, $p = .721$, d = -0.04; East Asian American: M = 2.71, SD = 1.04; Hong Kong Chinese: M = 2.67, SD = 0.87). Within cultures, East Asian Americans were significantly more oriented to American than to East Asian culture, $t(162) = 7.71$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.67, 1.12], d = 0.61.

The three cultural groups did not differ in gender distribution ($p = .233$, Cramer's V = 0.07), but differed in age, $F(2, 554) = 94.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.26$. European Americans were older than East Asian Americans, who in turn, were older than Hong Kong Chinese (ps < .001; European American: M = 25.60, SE = 0.25; East Asian American: M = 23.84, SE = 0.28; Hong Kong Chinese: M = 20.21, SE = 0.31; European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese: d = 1.51, East Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese: d = 1.10, European American vs. East Asian Americans: d = 0.42). When we controlled for age, the results remained the same, so we excluded it from the analyses below (see Supplementary Materials, Section 13e for results with age as a covariate).

Leader Choice Task

Participants were randomly assigned to read one scenario about a student business that was undergoing either growth, stability, or decline and then rated the scenario along several features. Participants then viewed three candidates who varied in their emotional expression (excited, calm, and neutral) but matched participants' ethnicity and gender; made social judgments about each candidate (see below); and then selected one to be the leader. We used the business scenarios and candidate profiles from Study 2, and the order in which the candidates were presented was counterbalanced.

Materials and Measures

As in Studies 1-2, European American and East Asian American participants completed the study in English, and Hong Kong Chinese completed the study in Chinese.

Performance Scenario Features*.* Participants rated the degree to which they thought that the business scenario was predictable, inescapable, uncertain, possible to change, threatening to the future of the business, and beneficial for the future of the business on a scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely*. Based on a factor analysis (Supplementary Materials, Section 11a), we created three aggregates: *threatening* (threatening, uncertain), *favorable* (beneficial, possible to change), and *predictable* (predictable, inescapable). Because each aggregate only had two items, internal consistencies were essentially Pearson moment correlations and suggested moderate reliability ($\alpha_{threatening}$: .41 - .73; $\alpha_{favorable}$: .41 - .42; $\alpha_{predictable}$: .32 - .51).

We ipsatized performance scenario ratings to control for cultural differences in response style, following the procedures described earlier. To test whether participants rated favorability, threat, and predictability differently across the performance scenarios, we conducted a 3 (Cultural Group [between-subjects: European American, East Asian American, Hong Kong Chinese]) X 3 (Performance Scenario [between-subjects: growth, stability, decline]) mixed-design ANOVA (see Supplementary Materials, Section 11b for full description of main effects and interactions).

Across the three cultural groups, participants rated the growth scenario as more favorable than the decline scenario (growth: M = 0.70, SE = 0.04; stability: M = 0.11, SE = 0.04; decline: M = -0.33, SE = 0.04; growth vs. decline: p < .001, 95% CI [0.92, 1.15], d = 1.91). They also rated the growth scenario as less threatening than the decline scenario (growth: M = -0.50, SE = 0.04, stability: M = -0.52, SE = 0.04; decline: M = 0.52, SE = 0.04; decline vs. growth: p < .001, 95% CI [0.91, 1.12], d = 1.99). However, participants rated the growth and decline scenarios as similarly predictable (growth: M = -0.20, SE = 0.04; stability: M = 0.41, SE = 0.04; decline: M = -0.18, SE = 0.04; growth vs. decline: p = .697, d = 0.04).

Participants rated the stability scenario as less favorable than the growth scenario but more favorable than the decline scenario; as similarly threatening as the growth scenario but less threatening than the decline scenario; and more predictable than the growth and decline scenarios (for favorability: growth vs. stability: $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.48, 0.70], $d = 1.10$; stability vs. decline: $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.55], $d = 0.82$; threat: decline vs. stability: $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.93, 1.14], $d = 2.04$; stability vs. growth: $p = .698$, $d = 0.04$; predictability: stability vs. growth: $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.51, 0.72], $d = 1.20$; stability vs. decline: $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.49, 0.70], $d = 1.17$).

Because there were no differences in predictability between growth and decline scenarios, we dropped this variable from our analyses and focused on how favorable and how threatening the business was as features of growth and decline, respectively.

Social Judgments of Candidates. Participants made a series of social judgments about each candidate on a scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely*. Specifically, participants rated the candidates on the following characteristics: extraverted, transparent, team-oriented, flexible, friendly, self-directed, competent, experienced, assertive, articulate, future-oriented, and able to manage stress. We conducted a factor analysis on the social judgment ratings, which revealed two factors: (1) *competent* (articulate, competent, experienced, future-oriented, able to manage stress, self-directed, assertive), (2) *affiliative* (extraverted, flexible, friendly, team-oriented, transparent). Because the aggregates were correlated (Supplementary Materials, Table 13a), and the pattern of findings was similar for each aggregate, we aggregated all 12 judgments into an overall positive social judgments composite ($\alpha_{excited}$: .78 - .86; α_{calm}: .79 - .86; $\alpha_{neutral}$: .84 - .86). See Supplementary Materials for the results of the factor analyses (Section 12) and moderated mediation analyses treating competent and affiliative aggregates separately (Section 13e).

Ideal and Actual Affect. As in Studies 1-2, participants completed the AVI. Because data were collected in Fall of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we modified the instructions slightly to ask participants to report on their pre-pandemic ideal and actual affect. Internal consistency estimates were high across cultural groups ($\alpha_{\text{ideal HAP}}$: .76 - .84; $\alpha_{\text{actual HAP}}$: .81 - .87; $\alpha_{\text{ideal LAP}}$: .78 - .82; $\alpha_{\text{actual LAP}}$: .83 - .89).

Cultural Orientation. In Study 3, East Asian Americans were asked about their identification with American culture and with East Asian culture, as in Studies 1 and 2. Hong Kong Chinese were asked about their identification with Chinese culture, and European Americans were asked about their identification with American culture.

Demographics. We collected the same demographics as in Study 2.

Procedure

Participants completed the leader choice task, AVI, and demographic measures. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and compensated.

Data Analyses and Results

We first replicated cultural differences in choice of the excited and calm leaders during growth (see Supplementary Materials, Section 13a for descriptives, analyses, and results for excited, calm, and neutral leaders). We focused on ideal HAP and choice of excited leaders for the rest of our analyses because it was most consistent association in Studies 1 and 2.

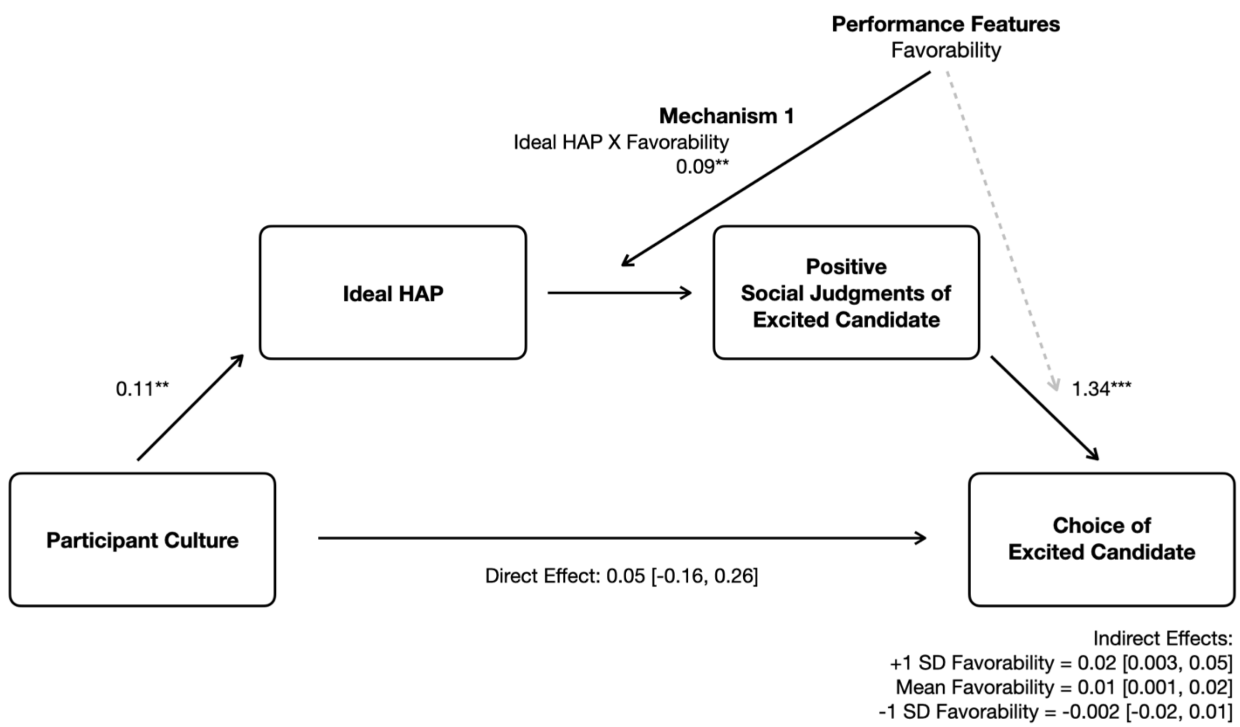
As we observed in Studies 1 and 2, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders during growth than Hong Kong Chinese, and there were no significant cultural differences in choice of excited leaders during decline. Within cultural groups, similar to Study 2 findings, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders in growth than decline, whereas Hong Kong Chinese were similarly likely to choose excited leaders across growth, stability, and decline scenarios.

Next, we used the “PROCESS” macro with 5000 bias-corrected boot-strapped resamples to simultaneously test which mechanism was responsible for these differences. We entered Cultural Group as the independent variable (+1 = European Americans and East Asian Americans, -1 = Hong Kong Chinese), collapsing across European Americans and East Asian Americans because they did not differ in their ideal HAP or preference for excited leaders in Studies 1-2 (see Supplementary Materials, Section 13f for the results using three cultural group categories). We entered ideal HAP as the first serial mediator (controlling for actual HAP), positive ratings of the excited leader as the second serial mediator, and choice of the excited leader as the dependent variable. We defined the moderator as mean-centered favorability (or threat) ratings across the three performance scenarios (growth, stability, and decline). The Pearson-moment correlations among the variables in these moderated mediation analyses are presented in Supplementary Materials, Section 13b. To test Mechanism 1, we examined whether favorability ratings moderated the link between ideal HAP and positive social judgments of the excited leader, and to test Mechanism 2, we examined whether favorability moderated the link between positive social judgments and choice.

As shown in Figure 6, European Americans and East Asian Americans valued HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese ($B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 3.29$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.17]). Ideal HAP, in turn, predicted positive social judgments of the excited candidate, although this relationship depended on favorability (ideal HAP: $B = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 2.25$, $p = .025$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.13]; ideal HAP X favorability: $B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 3.15$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.14]. Consistent with Mechanism 1, ideal HAP predicted positive judgments of the excited candidates when participants viewed the situation as highly (+1 SD from the mean) favorable or moderately (mean) favorable, but not when they viewed the situation as less (-1 SD from the mean) favorable (high favorability: indirect effect = .02, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.003, 0.05]; moderate favorability: indirect effect = 0.01, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.02]; low favorability: indirect effect = -0.002, $SE = .01$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.01]). Positive social judgments of the excited candidate then predicted participants' choice of that candidate as leader (*B* = 1.34, *SE* = 0.22, z = 6.11, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.91, 1.77]). This relationship was similar across all levels of favorability, providing no evidence for Mechanism 2 (positive social judgements X favorability: *B* = 0.009, *SE* = 0.21, *z* = 0.04, *p* = 0.965). We also found converging results when we used a Bayesian approach (see Supplementary Materials, Section 13d).

Figure 6

Support for Mechanism 1



Note. Favorability ratings of the scenario moderated the indirect effect of ideal HAP on positive ratings of the excited candidate.

We then tested the two mechanisms using threatening ratings of the performance scenarios as the moderator. There was no significant interaction between ideal HAP and threatening ratings ($p = .360$) and no significant interaction between positive social judgments and threatening ratings (*p* .108); see Supplementary Materials Section 13e for details). These results suggest that how threatening the conditions were did not moderate the relationship between cultural differences in ideal HAP, perceptions of the excited candidate, and choice of the excited candidate as leader.

In summary, we found evidence for Mechanism 1 but not Mechanism 2 (see Figure 6): the more favorable the conditions, the greater the relationship between participants' ideal HAP and their positive judgments of the excited candidate, which in turn, increased their likelihood of choosing the excited leader. These findings are consistent with the prediction that under less favorable conditions, people may base their judgments of leadership candidates on different factors than they do under more favorable conditions.

Study 3 Discussion

Study 3 tested two ways in which performance scenario might moderate the associations between people's ideal affect, their judgments of leader candidates, and their ultimate choice of a leader. Our findings suggest that when conditions are favorable for an organization, people's ideal affect is more likely to shape their judgments of leader candidates than when conditions are not favorable, which in turn impacts their subsequent leader choices. Contrary to our predictions, the link between ideal affect and social judgments of the candidates did not vary as a function of how threatening conditions were. Favorability ratings did <u>not</u> influence the link between social judgments and leader choice, suggesting that people's choice of leaders depends on how they judge the candidates, regardless of how that organization is doing.

General Discussion

In three studies conducted in the U.S. and Hong Kong, we examined the emotional qualities that people look for in their leaders when their organizations are undergoing growth or decline. Although previous studies have examined cultural differences in leader choices or have examined leader choices during various performance scenarios, few if any have looked at how leader choices during various performance scenarios might vary across cultures and the role that cultural differences in emotion might play in this process.

Cultural Differences in Leader Choice During Growth but Not Decline

As predicted, we observed consistent cultural differences in leader choices among European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese during growth, but not decline. Specifically, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited and less likely to choose calm candidates than Hong Kong Chinese during growth. We observed a similar pattern during stability in Study 2. However, during decline, there were no cultural differences in leader choice. Across cultures, in Study 1, participants were more likely to see ideal leaders for their own organizations as non-emotional/neutral during decline, but in Study 2, participants chose excited, calm, and neutral leaders to similar degrees.

Comparisons within cultural groups also suggested that overall, people were more likely to choose leaders who reflected their ideal affect during growth than decline, although this was particularly true for European Americans and East Asian Americans. Across all three studies, European Americans and East Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders during growth than decline. While Hong Kong Chinese were more likely to choose calm leaders during growth than decline in Study 2, they showed no significant differences in choices for excited, calm, or neutral leaders in Studies 1 and 3. One possible reason may be the greater dialecticism in Chinese than U.S. contexts characterized in previous research (e.g., Peng & Nisbett, 1999): even under conditions of growth and decline, Hong Kong Chinese may have believed that their circumstances would change, making them prefer calm and neutral leaders who could adjust to these changes (Tsai et al., 2007).

In Study 3, we examined *how* ideal affect might influence leader choices during growth. We observed that when circumstances were more favorable, participants who valued HAP more were more likely to judge the excited candidate positively, and as a result, were more likely to choose that candidate to lead. We did not find this pattern for how threatening circumstances were perceived, suggesting that favorability may be an important aspect of growth that determines whether people choose leaders whose emotional expressions match their cultural ideals. This is consistent with the notion that when people are feeling good, they use heuristics like ideals when making decisions (Kahneman, 2003; Rast III et al., 2012; Lowenstein et al., 2015). Study 3 also ruled out the possibility that performance features moderated the link between social judgments and leader choice, suggesting that under different conditions, how people judge candidates still has implications for their ultimate choice of a leader.

What Types of Leaders Do People Look for During Decline?

In Study 1, participants of all cultural groups seemed to prefer calm and non-emotional leaders during decline perhaps to offset the negative emotions, like anxiety and fear, that might accompany these conditions, as well as the instability that might ensue. In Studies 2 and 3, however, participants did not show a clear preference for one type of leader when forced to make a choice. This might also be due to the negative emotions that arise from organizational decline, which might serve as a "stop" signal for members, guiding them to think in different ways, and as a result, consider other leadership choices (Barr, 1998; Huntsinger et al., 2010). In general, people's leader choices were more varied during decline than growth, suggesting that participants were more open to options that did not necessarily reflect their ideal affect. Future studies are needed to identify what factors shape judgments of candidates under those conditions.

East Asian American Leader Choices

Consistent with prior research (Bencharit et al., 2019), our East Asian American samples identified with American *and* East Asian cultures. Even though they were less oriented to American culture than European Americans, they were similar to European Americans in their ideal HAP and their leader choices. This may not be entirely surprising since most East Asian Americans were second generation (see Supplementary Materials, Section 1) and therefore primarily raised with U.S. leadership ideals. Of course, it is also possible that these participants may have consciously or unconsciously experienced identity concerns around not being "American" enough and thus overcompensated in their ideal HAP and leader choices to fit American ideals (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). These findings suggest that while East Asian Americans may generally be perceived as not qualified to lead, many (i.e., second generation) may share the same leadership ideals as their European American peers. Future research is needed to explore this further as well as among first-generation East Asian Americans who had greater exposure to East Asian ideals prior to living in the United States.

Implications for Research on Emotion, Leadership, and Culture

The present work integrates and contributes to research on culture and emotion (Tsai & Clobert, 2019), emotion and organizations (Elfenbein, 2023), and emotion and leader choice (Gooty et al., 2010) in novel and important ways. First, while most studies of emotion and leadership have been conducted in the United States and other Western cultures, our studies examined emotion-based leader choices in the United States and Hong Kong. By including another culture that differs from the US in its valuation of high arousal positive states, we showed that although people prefer positive emotions (vs. neutral expressions) in their leaders, the specific types of positive emotions they value in their leaders differs by culture during times of organizational growth. Thus, the work is part of increasing efforts to broaden research in psychology beyond WEIRD contexts (Henrich, 2020).

Second, these studies examine the specific circumstances under which culture may shape emotion-based leader choices. While our results contradict previous research suggesting that cultural values may matter more during decline or crisis (Pyszczynski et al., 2015; Sayegh et al., 2004), they are consistent with other findings that people are more open to other and even unorthodox choices during decline (Rast III et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2016). Indeed, European Americans, East Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese did not differ in their preference for excited vs. calm leaders during decline. Similarly, this work contributes to our understanding of situational moderators of cultural influences on emotion (see Ma et al., 2018; Talhelm et al., 2019).

Finally, this work adds to growing research examining the circumstances under which norm (or ideal) violators attain power in different cultures (e.g., Kinias et al., 2014; Stamkou et al., 2019). Literature on the “glass cliff,” suggest that women and people of color are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions during times of crisis and decline, and more likely to accept leadership positions in un-ideal circumstances compared to majority group members (Ryan et al., 2016). Building on this work, our research suggests that during times of decline, people may be open to leaders with *emotional* traits that differ from the cultural ideal as well as non-emotional traits. That said, our results were not in complete alignment with the glass cliff literature because participants did not systematically choose candidates who showed the opposite expression of their ideals. For instance, Hong Kong Chinese did not choose excited leaders more during decline than growth. Moreover, in the real world, there may be other motivations on the part of companies when appointing more diverse leaders (e.g., wanting a scapegoat). Future research is needed to examine these dynamics in the real world.

Implications for Affect Valuation Theory

The present research also supports and extends previous research and theory on ideal affect. First, we replicated previous findings that European Americans valued HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese, and that European Americans judge excited (vs. calm) targets more positively than Hong Kong Chinese because of cultural differences in ideal HAP. In our previous work, however, ideal affect predicted affiliative judgments but not competence judgments. In the current work, we show for the first time that ideal HAP also predicted competence ratings, likely because competence is more relevant in the context of leadership. Second, previous studies have shown that ideal affect shapes what people do for exercise, what consumer products they purchase, what doctors they prefer, and even with whom they are more willing to share resources (Tsai, 2017; 2021). The current research shows that ideal affect also shapes whom people choose to lead during growth. Third, this work shows the moderators of Affect Valuation Theory. Cultural differences in leader choice only occurred under more favorable circumstances (i.e., growth). These findings are part of a series of studies in which we are examining the conditions under which ideal affect match matters for resource sharing (e.g., Cachia et al., 2024; Blevins & Tsai, in press; Lua et al., in preparation).

This work also raises important questions about ideal LAP. Despite cultural differences in choice of the calm leader, we found no cultural differences in ideal LAP, and therefore, ideal LAP did not mediate cultural differences in choice of the calm leader. In Tsai et al. (accepted), we find that European Americans report higher ideal LAP in current compared to previous studies, resulting in a lack of cultural difference in ideal LAP between European Americans and many East Asian groups in recent studies. Interestingly, this increase in ideal LAP has not translated into greater preferences for calm (vs. excited) options among European Americans, and the results presented here provide another illustration of this. It is of course also possible that the link between ideal LAP and judgment of calm candidates is weaker than that for ideal HAP and judgment of excited candidates. Indeed, whereas in some studies, ideal LAP is associated with more positive ratings of calm options (e.g., Sims et al., 2014), in other studies, there is no such association (Tsai et al., 2019). These findings suggest that ideal LAP may work differently than ideal HAP in the context of social judgment and choice, but more research is clearly needed to understand how.

Practical Implications

Our findings have several practical implications. First, they can be used to increase people's awareness of why they may be drawn to certain candidates over others even when their qualifications are similar. Second, the findings suggest that one reason people might vary in their leadership preferences may have to do with whether they view their organization as undergoing growth or decline. Third, when being considered for leadership roles, candidates might align their emotions with cultural values more during times of growth than decline. Finally, one implication of our findings is the intriguing possibility that cultural barriers to leadership related to emotion that disadvantage certain groups may be easier to overcome during declining conditions.

Limitations and Future Directions

While these studies are the first to demonstrate that culture, ideal affect, and organizational performance influence leader choices, they of course have several limitations. First, we matched participants' and candidates' ethnicities and gender, which may have aroused suspicions among the participants. Although ideal affect match matters more than ethnic and gender matches in the context of resource sharing (Park et al., 2017), this has not yet been demonstrated in the context of leader choice. Second, we used computer-generated stimuli in Studies 2 and 3, which allowed us greater experimental control but may have led to a less realistic experience. While Study 1 addresses some of these limitations by asking about participants' ideal leaders, more studies are needed to examine whether cultural differences in leader choice exist when participants are viewing real faces of leaders who vary in gender, race, and other demographic characteristics.

Third, while some have argued that during decline, leaders' negative expressions may matter even more than their positive and neutral expressions (see Gooty et al., 2010), we found little evidence for this prediction when participants rated their ideal leaders' qualities in Study 1. That said, in future studies, it would be interesting to include candidates who showed negative emotional expressions like anger and sadness to examine the specific situational and cultural factors that determine when people prefer leaders who show negative emotion (Madera & Smith, 2009; Tiedens, 2001).

Constraints on Generality

Last but not least, it would be important to examine whether these processes hold in the real world for various types of organizations, for circumstances that are more threatening and uncertain, and for other cultural contexts. While our results suggest that cultural differences in ideal affect matter less when organizations are undergoing decline, our decline scenarios did not differ from the growth scenarios in terms of perceived predictability (i.e., certainty). It is possible that our results would be different for larger organizations at the national level and during intense crises where the situation is more threatening and the future is unknown (e.g., economic depression, pandemic). Indeed, in Markus et al. (2024), we observed that during the pandemic, nations and their leaders responded in ways that were *consistent* with their cultural defaults—ways of thinking, feeling, and acting—which might suggest that people would be more likely to choose leaders that matched the culture's ideal affect for more intensely threatening and uncertain situations, along the lines of Terror Management Theory or Threat Rigidity Theory. Both of these theoretical frameworks suggest that when faced with threatening events, individuals, groups, and organizations revert to familiar responses and resist innovation (Mazzei, DeBode, Gangloff, & Song, 2024). Consequently, it would be important to examine these processes in other cultural contexts.

Despite these limitations, we demonstrate in three studies that cultural and organizational performance factors interact to shape emotion-based leader choices. When organizations are doing favorably, people are more likely to choose leaders whose emotional expressions match their cultural ideals, resulting in cultural differences in leader choice that are consistent with cultural differences in ideal affect. When organizations are doing poorly, however, these cultural differences in leader choice disappear, suggesting that people consider other factors when choosing a leader during times of decline.

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