*Human Performance*, 21:277–290, 2008

ISSN: 0895-9285 print/1532-7043 online
DOI: 10.1080/08959280802137754

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

# Asian Variability in Performance Rating Modesty and Leniency Bias

Laura G. Barron and Paul R. Sackett
*University of Minnesota*

Western managers typically rate their performance higher than their bosses, peers, or subordinates do; research on Asian managers, however, has been both sparse and conflicting. In examining data from six Asian countries, Japanese managers were found to rate themselves lower than others in their organization do. This "modesty bias," however, varies considerably among Asian countries; in other countries, including India and China, self-inflation was more comparable to typical Western findings. Findings lend initial support to the ability of national collectivism to explain differences in modesty and leniency bias when institutional collectivism is distinguished from in-group collectivism using data from the GLOBE Project (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Theoretical basis for modesty bias, and implications for Asian and American expatriates are discussed.

Western research consistently finds job performance self-ratings inflated relative to supervisor and peer ratings (a "leniency bias"). Harris and Schaubroeck's (1988) comprehensive meta-analysis found average self-ratings .70 standard deviations higher than supervisor ratings and .28 standard deviations higher than peer ratings (corrected). Thornton's (1980) qualitative review found a similar trend of leniency bias when self-ratings were compared to subordinate ratings.

However, in 1991, Farh, Dobbins, and Cheng published findings of the reverse tendency (a "modesty bias"; self-boss: $d = -.22$) within a Taiwanese sample. No evidence that Taiwanese supervisors evaluated more leniently than their U.S. counterparts was found, suggesting a fundamental difference in employees' self-perception. In explanation, the authors broadly discussed contrasting Asian and American cultural values of individualism–collectivism, noting that leniency bias, as motivated by a need to view oneself as positively as possible, may be incongruent in "a collectivistic culture [where] individual achievement is often

We gratefully acknowledge Personnel Decisions International for granting access to this data.
Correspondence should be sent to Laura G. Barron, Psychology Department – MS 25, Rice University, P.O. Box 1892, Houston, TX 77251–1892. E-mail: lgb1@rice.edu

deemphasized and sometimes even suppressed in the interest of interpersonal harmony and group cohesion" (p. 131).

If Farh et al.'s (1991) Asian findings were to prove replicable and consistent, the implications would loom large, on both the microlevel, for expatriates, and at the macrolevel, for companies competing for business internationally. In the managerial context, failure to communicate one's own abilities and strengths may disadvantage Asians working in the United States during the selection, promotion, or salary negotiation process. American expatriates in Asia may face interpersonal challenges, perhaps alienating the people they work with through perceived cockiness, creating a work environment where cooperation, teamwork, and ultimately advancement are less likely.

Further, American employees' relative inability or unwillingness to acknowledge faults and weaknesses may limit self-improvement. In contrast, although an Asian tendency to concentrate on self-weaknesses may have short-term economic benefits, they may be more likely to experience stress and burnout and over time, as positive self-regard is considered by many to be essential for maintaining mental health (e.g., Baumeister, 1993; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

However, subsequent research has suggested that Farh et al.'s (1991) Taiwanese findings of modesty bias may not generalize to the rest of Asia, or even the rest of East Asia. Within 2 years of publication, Yu and Murphy (1993) reported a leniency bias in self-ratings among Mainland Chinese ($d = .38$), as is typically found in Western research, noting that the culture of Taiwan may be relatively unique among Asian nations in its conduciveness to modesty bias. Although the authors alluded to Asian cultural variability, exactly how Mainland China's and Taiwan's cultures differ was never discussed, leaving readers with little basis on which to interpret the failure to replicate Farh et al.'s findings. Additional research on Asian modesty bias has since then been sparse and has not found Asian modesty bias. A later study focused on work absences among the Mainland Chinese found similar leniency bias (Johns & Xie, 1998), as did a study comparing self-ratings to subordinate-ratings among Hong Kong managers (Furnham & Stringfield, 1994).

Notably, in explaining these conflicting findings, intra-Asian differences on individualism/collectivism, the dimension explicitly identified by Farh et al. (1991) as a possible rationale for the difference between Taiwanese and Western self-rating tendencies, have not been explored. The article presented here is intended to fill this gap and offer further exploration of both (a) the prevalence of modesty bias versus leniency bias in Asian nations and (b) the ability of national level individualism/ collectivism to explain international differences in prevalence.

First, to further address the prevalence of modesty bias across Asia, the discrepancies between self- and other-ratings of job performance in Mainland China, India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand were compared. Although Taiwanese performance ratings were not available, enough Asian nations were

included to address the consistency of Asian modesty bias. Second, to explain potential variability in modesty bias, national standing on the most often cited estimates of collectivism were considered: Hofstede's (1980, 2001) unidimensional individualism/collectivism index; Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier's (2002) meta-analytic estimates of collectivism; and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta's (2004) GLOBE indices that differentiate in-group and institutional collectivism.

The three most widely cited studies of national level collectivism lead to vastly competing conclusions regarding both the degree and variability of collectivism among the Asian nations included in our study. For ease of comparison, we standardized national scores based on the 34 nations for which individualism and/or collectivism scores are available across all three sets of studies; relative scores are presented in Table 1. Based on Hofstede (1980, 2001), China, Singapore, and South Korea are about 3 standard deviations more collectivistic, and India and Japan are about 2 standard deviations more collectivistic than the United States. Based on Oyserman et al. (2002), China and India are about 1 standard deviations more collectivistic than the United States, whereas Singapore, Japan, and Korea are roughly on par with the United States. On House et al.'s (2004) in-group collectivism practices, China, India, Singapore, and Korea are about 2 standard deviations more collectivistic than the United States, whereas Japan is .5 standard deviations more collectivistic than the United States. On House et al.'s institutional collectivism practices, in contrast, Japan and South Korea are over 2 standard deviations more collectivistic, China and Singapore are about 1 standard deviations more collectivistic, and India is roughly on par with the United States.

In summary, because Asian performance modesty bias research has been so limited, this present research was exploratory. Because Farh et al. (1991) suggested the potential ability of individualism and collectivism to explain international differences on modesty versus leniency bias, we did make it an a priori ob-

TABLE 1
Standardized Relative World Standing ($n$ = 34) of Included Nations on Collectivism

| *Index* | *Japan* | *Korea* | *Singapore* | *China* | *India* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hofstede (rev.) | –.019 | 1.099 | 1.020 | 1.020 | –.099 |
| Oyserman et al. | –.684 | –.425 | –.748 | .866 | .651 |
| GLOBE | | | | | |
| In–group | –.573 | .950 | .873 | 1.181 | 1.104 |
| Institutional | 2.237 | 2.169 | 1.194 | .967 | .015 |

*Note.* z scores are relative to the 34 nations common to Hofstede (1980, 2001), Oyserman et al. (2002), and House et al. (2004). Standing on Hofstede's Individualism-Collectivism dimension has been reversed to indicate collectivism. GLOBE collectivism scores are for Practices. Collectivism scores are not available for Thailand across the four indices.

jective to explain any Asian variability on modesty bias that we found based on national individualism and collectivism. However, because the most influential existing indices of individualism and collectivism would make drastically different predictions, no specific hypotheses were made regarding the pattern of Asian modesty bias.

## METHOD

### Participants and Design

This study analyzed all multirater feedback data from clients of the Asian branches of an international consulting firm conducted over a period of 11 years (1994–2004; 66.4% from 2002–2004). Specifically, the PROFILOR®, a feedback instrument designed for developmental purposes (see Hezlett, Ronnkvist, Holt & Hazucha, 1997), was used to obtain self-, boss, peer, and subordinate ratings of 1,388 managers working within 92 organizations across Japan, China, Singapore, India, South Korea, and Thailand. Ratees were instructed to choose at least three peers and three subordinates (direct reports) to protect anonymity and were usually assessed by one boss, four or five peers, and four or five subordinates. Ratings by multiple raters per perspective were averaged.

The instruments include 135 items, with 75 items common across the different versions used in different countries. Although exploratory factor analysis revealed a single dimension, we view content sampling as also important. Thus, because the common items are not evenly distributed across the content domain, we chose to limit the present analyses to the 5-item overall performance composite measuring the extent to which the manager is seen as productive and effective.[1] Items were assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very great extent*). Interitem alpha for the 5-item performance composite was .829 ($n$ = 908) for self-ratings, .883 ($n$ = 919) for boss ratings, .917 ($n$ = 862) for peer ratings, and .989 ($n$ = 946) for direct subordinate ratings.

Of the 1,388 target managers who were rated, most were first-line (48.9%) and middle management (38.4%). Eighty percent were male, with a mean age of 39.9 ($SD$ = 7.2). Because the ethnic background questionnaire item had been intended for U.S. residents only, 70.1% of the managers left the item blank, with most of the rest indicating "Asian or Pacific American" ethnicity (17.5%) or "other" (9.1%). Only 3.3% indicated that they were White, Black, Hispanic, or Native American. As the actual names of 68.2% of ratees were available, to produce a surrogate measure of ethnicity, ratees were coded for Asian or non-Asian origin based on sur-

[1]We note that the decision is largely moot because of the extremely high correlations between the 5-item and 75-item composite, ranging from .85 for self-ratings to .99 for direct report ratings.

name. Of the sample for whom name data were available, managers of Asian origin made up 89.6% across countries, ranging from 84.8% of managers employed in Thailand to 94.6% of managers employed in South Korea. We note that the use of last names may result in the classification of Asian Americans as Asians, and indeed Asian Americans are often recruited to Asian branches of multinational organizations for their language skills. However, the Asian scholars we spoke to indicated that in their experience, these individuals (particularly nisei) tend to act more like prototypical Americans than like Asians in their country of family heritage. Thus, if anything, findings of modesty bias reported here may be conservative.

Although there were not significant differences on non-Asian origin, there were significantly more men in the Korean, Japanese, and Indian samples (88.4%–94.6%), older Japanese and Korean samples ($M$ = 42.3 and 42.8), a more educated Indian sample (64.3% with bachelor's degree or higher), and more first-line management in the Japanese sample (54.7%).

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

Because the samples from the six countries differed significantly on other demographics, analyses were run to determine if these factors affected self- and other-ratings of performance. Self-ratings were significantly higher with increasing age, educational attainment, and managerial level. Boss ratings were higher with increasing managerial level, and subordinate ratings were higher with increasing managerial level and for women. Because the differences found among our samples on these demographics may or may not reflect true differences among the management populations of these countries, analyses were subsequently run to control for these effects (see Country Effects section).

### Absolute Modesty Bias

Data were split by country, and one-sample $t$ tests were performed with the midpoint of the scale (3) as the test value. All six countries had self-ratings significantly higher than 3. Thus any modesty bias found in this study is only due to self-ratings lower than other ratings, not self-ratings that are low in an absolute sense.

### Modesty and Leniency Bias Compared to Other-Ratings

Self-ratings of performance for each country were then compared to ratings of performance from each of the three other perspectives using paired-sample $t$ tests. In

TABLE 2
Effect Sizes of Self–Other Differences, and Results of ANOVA Post Hoc Tests

| | | *China* | *India* | *Japan* | *Korea* | *Singapore* | *Thailand* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boss–self | *d* | –.002 | –.247m | .367* | .184 | .131 | –.050 |
| | ANOVA | B | A | ABcd | — | c | d |
| Peer–self | *d* | –.159* | –.614* | .265* | .206 | –.150 | .012 |
| | ANOVA | B | AD | ABC | D | C | — |
| DR–self | *d* | .120 | –.254m | .302* | .165 | .087 | .246 |
| | ANOVA | B | A | ABC | — | C | — |

*Note.* Means in the same row that share common uppercase letters differ significantly from one another at $p < .05$ in the Games–Howell comparison; those with common lowercase letters differ significantly from one another at $p < .10$ level. ANOVA = analysis of variance.

*Self–other difference significant at $p < .05$; m self–other difference significant at $p < .10$.

Japan, evidence of a modesty bias was found. Boss, peer, and subordinate ratings were .37, .27, and .30 standard deviations higher than self-ratings, $t(529) = 6.618$, $p < .001$; $t(519) = 4.919$, $p < .001$; and $t(442) = 5.389$, $p < .001$, respectively. In none of the five other included Asian countries was significant modesty bias found. Evidence of leniency bias was found in China, where self-ratings were .16 standard deviations higher than peer ratings, $t(445) = –2.611$, $p = .009$; and India, where self ratings were .61 standard deviations higher than peer ratings, $t(81) = –4.155$, $p < .001$; and .25 standard deviations higher than boss and subordinate ratings, $t(87) = –1.777$, $p = .079$ and $t(72) = –1.827$, $p = .072$ (see Table 2).

## Country Differences on Modesty and Leniency Bias

Boss–self, peer–self, and subordinate–self difference scores were computed, and analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were run on each, with country as the factor. In ANOVAs (i.e., using the whole data set), boss–self differences, peer–self differences, and subordinate–self differences all varied significantly by country. When compared to all three other perspectives, Japanese managers showed greater modesty bias than managers in India, China, and Singapore. Table 2 indicates the results of Games–Howell post hoc tests.

To control for demographic differences that may or may not reflect the true national populations of managers, ANCOVAs were run. Controlling for age and managerial level, the two demographic variables on which the Japanese sample differed, did not alter findings. Because age was positively related to self-ratings, but not other-ratings, and Japanese and Korean managers were older than those in the other countries, if anything this may have artificially depressed the modesty bias found in Japan and Korea, not inflated it. Overall findings were not altered ex-

TABLE 3
Sample Size per Perspective for ANOVAs and ANCOVAs using Three and Five Covariates

| | *China* | *India* | *Japan* | *Korea* | *Singapore* | *Thailand* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ANOVA | 369–483 | 73–88 | 443–530 | 44–56 | 139–185 | 37–46 |
| ANCOVA (3) | 228–302 | 59–71 | 338–407 | 34–45 | 95–124 | 19–24 |
| ANCOVA (5) | 227–301 | 57–69 | 13–19 | 34–45 | 94–123 | 19–24 |

*Note.* ANCOVA (3) refers to analysis with covariates of gender, age, and managerial level. ANCOVA (5) also includes covariates of Asian descent and educational attainment. ANOVA = analysis of variance; ANCOVA = analysis of covariance.

cept for subordinate–self differences when controlling for the full set of demographic covariates, because of a dramatically reduced sample size (see Table 3).

## Country Effects on Self- and Other-Ratings

Relative differences in modesty or leniency bias could be because of variation between nations in either self- or other-ratings. To clarify the nature of variation in self–other differences, ANOVAs were run on both self and boss, peer, and subordinate ratings, with country as the factor. Performance ratings in Japan were significantly lower for both self and peer and subordinate ratings compared to all five other countries; boss ratings were significantly lower than those from all other countries except Thailand. This is to say, even though bosses, peers, and subordinates all rate Japanese managers lower than managers from the other included countries, Japanese rate themselves lower still. Peer ratings in Korea were significantly higher than those in all other countries. See Table 4 for results of all Games–Howell post hoc tests.

## Individualism and Collectivism

Findings indicate that when compared to all three other perspectives, Japanese managers showed significantly greater modesty bias than managers in India, China, and Singapore. This is in contrast to predictions based on Hofstede's (1980, 2001) or Oyserman et al.'s (2002) estimates of national-level individualism and collectivism and House et al.'s (2004) in-group collectivism estimate. An explanation for the pattern of modesty bias found does however seem tenable based on House et al.'s national estimate of institutional collectivism.

To more formally test the ability of collectivism to explain Asian variability in modesty bias, we took two approaches. In the first approach, we regressed mean national self-rating on national standing on each collectivism index, controlling for mean national average other-rating. Using this method, Hofstede, Oyserman et al.,

TABLE 4
Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings by Perspective With Results of ANOVA Post Hoc Tests

| | | *China* | *India* | *Japan* | *Korea* | *Singapore* | *Thailand* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self | M | 3.842 | 4.041 | 3.435 | 3.956 | 3.837 | 3.770 |
| | SD | .547 | .439 | .638 | .521 | .524 | .558 |
| | ANOVA | C | A | ABCDE | B | D | E |
| Boss | M | 3.841 | 3.910 | 3.673 | 4.059 | 3.908 | 3.741 |
| | SD | .584 | .608 | .660 | .595 | .559 | .612 |
| | ANOVA | D | B | ABCD | A | C | — |
| Peer | M | 3.764 | 3.770 | 3.595 | 4.053 | 3.766 | 3.776 |
| | SD | .418 | .444 | .567 | .416 | .413 | .387 |
| | ANOVA | CE | DG | ABCD | AEFGH | BF | H |
| Direct report | M | 3.905 | 3.921 | 3.627 | 4.042 | 3.882 | 3.890 |
| | SD | .496 | .511 | .631 | .524 | .514 | .385 |
| | ANOVA | E | B | ABCDE | A | D | C |

*Note.* Means in the same row that share common uppercase letters differ significantly from one another at $p < .05$ in the Games–Howell comparison. ANOVA = analysis of variance.

and House et al.'s in-group collectivism estimates fail to significantly explain mean self-ratings, controlling for other-ratings. In contrast, House et al.'s (2004) institutional collectivism significantly explains mean self-ratings, controlling for ratings by others, such that individuals in more institutionally collectivistic cultures show greater modesty bias (–.557, $p = .004$). An alternate approach to the analysis, in which self- and other-ratings are preserved as individual-level variables, and national mean level collectivism estimates are imputed to the individual (i.e., intranational variability on collectivism is ignored) results in the same conclusion. Using this latter method produced similar findings: Only institutional collectivism leads to the conclusion that individuals from more collectivistic cultures give lower self-ratings, controlling for other-ratings (–.298, $p < .001$). The caveat to these analyses is that because we standardized relative global standing on the 34 nations common across the three sets of studies, Thailand was omitted from these analyses. The level of modesty bias found in the Thai sample does not neatly lend itself to an explanation based on any of these indices, although this is by far the smallest sample of the included countries, and analyses do not indicate level of modesty bias to significantly differ from that found in the other nations.

In sum, the GLOBE Project (House et al., 2004) distinction between in-group and institutional collectivism appears to be crucial, such that the expected pattern of modesty bias would be fully altered depending on which facet of collectivism is used. Although in-group collectivism practices measure pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness, institutional collectivism practices measure the extent to which organizational and societal practices are perceived to encourage and reward collective dis-

tribution of resources and collective action. On this latter dimension, Japan is more than 2 standard deviations higher than India, and more than 1 standard deviation higher than China and Singapore. Thus based on institutional collectivism, Japan would be expected to show more modesty bias than China and Singapore, and especially more modesty bias than India. This is the pattern of significant differences in modesty bias that is indeed found.

## DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate extensive variability in the prevalence of Asian modesty bias in the job performance domain. Although absolute modesty bias (i.e., self-ratings below the midpoint of the scale) was not found to exist in any of the included countries, modesty bias in self-ratings appears to be prevalent in Japan, whether self-ratings were compared to boss, peer, or subordinate ratings. Comparing self- to boss ratings, Japanese managers evidenced significantly more modesty bias than did managers in India, China, and Singapore. Comparing self- to direct report ratings, Japan evidenced significantly more modesty bias than India, China, and Singapore. Comparing self- to peer ratings, Japanese managers evidenced significantly more modesty bias than managers in India, China, and Singapore.

Not only does this study establish the existence of Japanese modesty bias, but it also provides evidence that Japanese modesty bias is due to self-effacement rather than other-praise, just as was Taiwanese modesty bias (Farh et al., 1991). Japanese self-ratings are significantly lower than Japanese ratings provided by all other perspectives (boss, peer, or subordinate), and this occurs despite findings that Japanese boss, peer, and subordinate ratings are significantly lower than those found in all other included countries.

Because the Japanese sample was far larger than the other samples, it is important to review the magnitude of effects rather than just the significance of the findings. The magnitudes of modesty biases in Japan, however, were the highest of any of the included nations: Self-ratings were .37 standard deviations lower than boss ratings, .27 standard deviations lower than peer ratings, and .30 standard deviations lower than subordinate ratings (uncorrected). Because of the much smaller sample size, the findings of modesty bias in Korea are not significant. Nevertheless, in Korea self-ratings were .21 standard deviations lower than peer ratings, .18 lower than boss ratings, and .17 lower than subordinate ratings. Even if modesty bias does exist in Korea, evidence that such bias reflects self-effacement rather than other-praise is weaker than for Japan, given significantly higher peer-ratings relative to the other countries included.

Compared to peer ratings, a leniency bias in self-ratings was found in China and India, and compared to subordinate and boss ratings, a marginally significant leniency bias was found in India. In contrast to Yu and Murphy's (1993) findings,

boss and self-ratings in China did not differ. Yu and Murphy's blue-collar sample may largely account for this difference, perhaps suggesting that motivations for modesty and leniency exist concurrently, and that the clearly defined nature of blue-collar jobs may hinder modesty bias more than it hinders leniency bias.

### Basic Psychological Literature

The finding of strong modesty bias in Japan has not been previously documented in the work performance domain and led to a search of the broader social psychological literature on modesty bias. This literature has focused largely on Japan and consistently found Japanese self-effacement (see Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999, for a review). When research into modesty bias in other Asian nations has been conducted, findings are more mixed. Although self-serving attributions are not normative in Taiwan and Mainland China (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992), and the false uniqueness bias has been corroborated in Korea and Thailand (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), many direct signals of modesty bias are absent. For example, Mainland Chinese schoolchildren self-enhance on the trait of competence (Falbo, Poston, Triscari, & Zhang, 1997), and Hong Kong Chinese college students perceive a self-enhancing confederate to be more competent than a self-effacing one (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982).

Notions of Chinese modesty may have some basis in cultural reality, but such modesty may operate at only a more surface level. For example, upon receiving a compliment Americans typically respond, "Thank you"; in contrast, Chinese typically respond with the set phrase "nali, nali" (literally "where? where?" as in where is that compliment coming from?) and proceed to deny the compliment. It seems however that when assessment is of one's abilities and performance, and is on paper and to be added to one's file, Chinese modesty may be more absent.

### Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism as broad cultural dimensions do not appear sufficient to explain cultural differences in modesty bias. Despite being the only Asian nation in this present study in which modesty bias in performance ratings is consistently found, Japan ranks as far less collectivistic than most other Asian nations, including China, based on Hofstede's (1980, 2001) study and Oyserman et al's (2002) meta-analysis. In contrast, when collectivism is separated into the facets of in-group and institutional collectivism using GLOBE Project (House et al., 2004) data, the pattern of modesty bias found can be explained. Whereas in-group collectivism focuses on perceptions of intangibles such as pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness, institutional collectivism is focused more on tangibles. It is these perceptions of tangibles that appear to explain modesty bias. Specifically, institutional collectivism refers to the extent to which organizational and societal practices encourage

and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action. This suggests modesty bias in performance appraisal can be best explained as motivated by quid pro quo resource allocation practices rather than by more affectively-motivated group cohesion.

## When Self-Effacement Is Self-Profitable

Despite the Japanese explicit modesty bias found both in performance appraisal and less applied research, the literature supports the notion that the Japanese implicitly see themselves positively. For example, Japanese have been shown to evaluate the alphabetical letters in their own names more favorably than other letters (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997), make judgments more quickly when indicating "good" (vs. "bad") words with the same hand with which they indicated their own handwriting (vs. that of a friend; Kitayama & Uchida, 2003), and exhibit self-regard using a semantic priming task (Hetts, Sakuma, & Pelham, 1999).

This pattern of implicit self-regard despite explicit self-effacement could be explained in light of either a desire to conceal positive self-views to maintain harmonious relationships or a desire for self-benefit in terms of advancement if self-effacement is seen as societally or organizationally desirable. That in-group collectivism fails to explain variability on modesty bias, but institutional collectivism appears to do so, offers support for the latter. Previous research outside of the applied domain further supports this contention. In public Japanese describe themselves as lower in "self-profitable" traits than in private (Harihara, Yamaguchi, & Niiya, 2000) and vary the extent of self-effacement depending on the type of audience, self-effacing the most in the presence of high-status others, in the case of college students, professors at their university (no variation in self-enhancement based on condition was found among Americans; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001). Thus the extant research seems to suggest that self-effacement helps one to get ahead in Japan.

That Japanese implicitly self-enhance should come as good news to Japanese working abroad. Having been, in essence, trained to self-efface living domestically through reward (attachment to their in-groups) and punishment (fear of rejection; Yamaguchi, 1994), they have overcome their natural tendency—evident explicitly as children (Yoshida, Kojo, & Kaku, 1982)—to self-enhance. Training later in life to self-enhance, or at least not self-efface, in order to work abroad would seem an easier feat, as Japanese managers should be able to adapt to an environment in which their natural tendency is rewarded. Even a short expatriate training program may be able to incorporate an acknowledgment that this restriction has been lifted to great success.

In contrast, the fact that Americans self-enhance both implicitly and explicitly (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000; Johnson, 1986) does not bode well for Americans preparing for overseas assignment or for American organizations that would like to

see their employees more fully recognize their weaknesses so as to more readily embrace self-development. American employees will face an uphill battle as restriction on their natural tendency awaits.

Expectations about the efficacy of such training are somewhat premature however. We suggested that certain groups of Asians working in the United States who fail to adopt more self-enhancing tendencies may "sell themselves short" during selection or promotion consideration, or in attempts to create new business, perhaps putting them at a disadvantage relative to their native-born U.S. counterparts. Further research should empirically confirm whether individuals recently arrived from Japan and perhaps Korea do in fact downplay their accomplishments to their detriment in job interviews or when seeking to gain new clients. The notion that in those countries in which modesty bias is pervasive (i.e., Japan, possibly Korea), expatriates who fail to adopt self-effacing tendencies alienate people they work with through perceived cockiness, creating a work environment where cooperation and teamwork, are less likely also awaits empirical testing.

## CONCLUSION

This study cannot attest to the prevalence of modesty bias in all Asian countries, having included samples from only six countries, three of which (Thailand, Korea, and India) contained ratings for less than 100 employees. As Taiwan was not included, this study cannot directly replicate Farh et al.'s (1991) findings. Because the contexts of the developmental feedback may have varied somewhat from organization to organization (and thus country to country), this research does not allow the standardization in instructions to participants afforded when ratings are for research purposes only.

When we asked Asian scholars from the countries included in this analysis to comment on our findings, they further emphasized the importance of context—organizational, regional, and temporal. First, they noted that the organizations in China that have the chance to receive 360-degree feedback interventions are typically multinational companies and that the overall organizational culture (i.e., not just the local branch culture) may play a role in influencing employees' responses. Second, they noted the regional differences within countries, particularly China. They noted that the greater Shanghai area, where the consulting firm's Chinese office is located, is much more Westernized than other areas of China. As such, Japanese managers may not show higher modesty bias than Chinese from other regions where, scholars suggested, people tend to behave according to more traditional Chinese culture. Finally, one scholar noted the importance of considering the effects of governmental policy changes over time, noting Chinese reform in the 1990s designed to change the emphasis from equality to equity in the treatment of

employees in Chinese companies. We hope that these contextual issues may be further investigated in the future.

Despite these limitations, Farh et al.'s (1991) finding that leniency bias in performance ratings is not the norm in all countries is confirmed; so too is Yu and Murphy's (1993) finding that modesty bias is not the norm in all Asian countries. By extending the scope of Asian countries investigated, a fuller picture of Asian variability in performance rating modesty bias was obtained. Having found the most consistent and largest modesty bias in Japan, the least collectivistic of the included nations based on Hofstede (1980, 2001) and Oyserman et al. (2002), it is clear that explanations based on the broad dimension of collectivism are not sufficient to explain this phenomenon. However, when two facets of collectivism are distinguished using GLOBE data (House et al., 2004), findings indicate initial support of a potentially generalizable cultural explanation, based more on resource allocation practices than group affect.

## REFERENCES


Baumeister, R. F. (1993). Understanding the inner nature of low self-esteem: Uncertain, fragile, protective, and conflicted. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *Self-esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard* (pp. 201–218). New York: Plenum.

Bond, M. H., Leung, K., & Wan, K. (1982). The social impact of self-effacing attributions: The Chinese case. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 118,* 157–166.

Falbo, T., Poston, D. L., Jr., Triscari, R. S., & Zhang, X. (1997). Self-enhancing illusions among Chinese schoolchildren. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 28,* 172–191.

Farh, J., Dobbins, G. H., & Cheng, B. (1991). Cultural relativity in action: A comparison of self-ratings made by Chinese and U.S. workers. *Personnel Psychology, 44,* 129–147.

Furnham, A., & Stringfield, P. (1994). Congruence of self and subordinate ratings of managerial practices as a correlate of supervisor evaluation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 67,* 57–67.

Greenwald, A. G., & Farnham, S. D. (2000). Using the Implicit Association Test to measure self-esteem and self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79,* 1022–1038.

Harihara, M., Yamaguchi, S., & Niiya, Y. (2000, July). *Japanese self-effacement: Low self-regard or self-presentation?* A poster presented at the 15th international congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, Pultusk, Poland.

Harris, M. M., & Schaubroeck, J. (1988). A meta-analysis of self-supervisor, self-peer, and peer-supervisor ratings. *Personnel Psychology, 41,* 43–62.

Heine, S. J., Lehman, D. R., Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1999). Is there a universal need for positive self-regard? *Psychological Review, 106,* 766–794.

Heine, S. J., Takata, T., & Lehman, D. R. (2000). Beyond self-presentation: Evidence for self-criticism among Japanese. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26,* 71–78.

Hetts, J. J., Sakuma, M., & Pelham, B. W. (1999). Two roads to positive regard: Implicit and explicit self-evaluation and culture. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35,* 512–559.

Hezlett, S. A., Ronnkvist, A. M., Holt, K. E., & Hazucha, J. F. (1997). *The PROFILOR $^{R}$ Technical Summary.* Minneapolis, MN: Personnel Decisions International.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Johns, G., & Xie, J. L. (1998). Perceptions of absence from work: People's Republic of China versus Canada. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 83,* 515–530.

Johnson, M. M. S. (1986). *The initial letter effect: Ego-attachment or mere exposure?* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University.

Kanagawa, C., Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. R. (2001). "Who am I?" The cultural psychology of the conceptual self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27,* 90–103.

Kitayama, S., & Karasawa, M. (1997). Implicit self-esteem in Japan: Name letters and birthday numbers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23,* 736–742.

Kitayama, S., & Uchida, Y. (2003). Explicit self-criticism and implicit self-regard: Evaluating self and friend in two cultures. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 39,* 476–482.

Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypotheis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 6,* 518–530.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Cultural variation in self-concept. In G. R. Goethals & J. Strauss (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on the self* (pp. 18-48). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin, 128,* 3–72.

Stevenson, H., & Stigler, J. (1992). *The learning gap: Why our schools are failing and what we can learn from Japanese and Chinese education.* New York: Summit Books.

Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin, 103,* 193–210.

Thornton, G. C. (1980). Psychometric properties of self-appraisals of job performance. *Personnel Psychology, 33,* 263–271.

Yamaguchi, S. (1994). Collectivism among the Japanese, a perspective from the self. In U. Kim, H. Triandis, C. Kagitcibasi, S. Choi, & G. Yoon (Eds.), *Individualism and collectivism* (pp. 175–188). London: Sage.

Yoshida, T., Kojo, K., & Kaku, H. (1982). A study on the development of self presentation in children. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology, 30,* 30–37.

Yu, J., & Murphy, K. R. (1993). Modesty bias in self-ratings of performance: A test of the cultural relativity hypothesis. *Personnel Psychology, 46,* 357–363.