Running Head: WHEN IDEAL AFFECT INFLUENCES LEADERSHIP CHOICE

People Choose Leaders Who Match Their Affective Ideals

During Growth More Than Crisis Across Cultures

*Keywords*: Culture, Emotional Expression, Growth, Organizational Behavior

**Abstract**

What emotions do people prefer in their leaders, and under what circumstances? We predicted that people would be more likely to choose leaders whose emotional expressions matched their culture’s ideal affect (the affective states they value) during times of *growth*, when individuals are more likely to rely on heuristics, than during times of *crisis*, when people may be more open to unorthodox leadership alternatives. We found support for this prediction in three studies.  In Studies 1 (N = 323) and 2 (N= 449), European Americans, Asian American, and Hong Kong Chinese participants read hypothetical scenarios of businesses, governments, and research labs undergoing growth and crisis. Consistent with cultural differences in ideal affect, European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited (vs. calm) leaders more than did Hong Kong Chinese across all sectors during growth, but not crisis. In Study 3 (N = 558), participants rated how affiliative and competent candidates were and how favorable each scenario was prior to making their choices.  As predicted, the more favorable the circumstances, the more positively participants judged the candidate whose emotional expressions matched their ideal affect, and the more likely they were to choose them to lead. Together, these studies demonstrate that across cultures, people prefer leaders whose expressions match their ideals during growth but not crisis.

**People Choose Leaders Who Match Their Affective Ideals**

**During Growth More Than Crisis Across Cultures**

Most social groups need good leaders to survive and thrive, and therefore, choosing a leader can be one of the most consequential decisions that people make. But how do people choose among different leadership candidates, especially when the candidates have comparable qualifications and levels of experience?

While leadership might take many different forms (e.g., president versus CEO), research suggests that our leadership choices and perceptions are very much shaped by our emotions. For example, people select leaders in part based on candidates’ personalities, especially their emotional qualities (e.g., extraversion and authoritarianism, see Ashkanasy, 2003; Ensari, Riggio, Christian, & Carslaw, 2011; Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010 for a review). For example, in a classic study, Zullow & Seligman (1990) found that US presidential candidates who expressed more pessimistic rumination (i.e., a focus on negative events and emotions) during their nomination acceptance speeches were ultimately less likely to be elected. Indeed, individuals who report experiencing fewer negative emotions and more positive emotions are often rated as better leaders (Carleton, Barling, & Trivisonno, 2018; Sy, Côtė, & Saavedra, 2005; Wunderley, Reddy, & Dember, 1998). Similarly, the less leaders express negative emotions, and the more leaders express positive emotions, the more effective they are, as rated by their constituents (Bono & Illies, 2006; Cherulnik, Donley, Wiewel, & Miller, 2001; Elfenbein, 2007; Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008; Lewis, 2000), presumably because positive emotions (e.g., happy, cheerful) inspire and motivate others (Bass, 1990) as well as promote social bonds (Shiota, Campos, Keltner, & Hertenstien, 2004).

Moreover, certain specific positive emotions seem to matter more than others. Individuals who express more intense positive emotion are generally rated as warmer, more likeable, more trustworthy, and as better leaders (Rule & Ambady, 2008). Expressions of excitement and enthusiasm appear to reflect perceptions of leaders’ competence, and to increase followers’ confidence, optimism, and trust in their leaders (Cattell & Stice, 1954; George, 1996). Similarly, physical expressions of pride and dominance such as disinhibited laughter signal high status (Oveis, Spectre, Smith, Liu & Keltner, 2016; Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000).

These findings, however, are largely based on US and Western samples, raising the question of whether the preference for high intensity positive emotion in leaders is universal, or reflects the US emphasis on high arousal positive states. Do people from cultures that value high arousal positive states less also prefer leaders who express intense positive emotion? To answer this question, we conducted three studies to examine how European American, Asian American, and Hong Kong Chinese samples choose leaders. Prior to describing these studies, we review relevant research, including our theoretical framework, Affect Valuation Theory.

**Leadership Choice Across Cultures:** **Affect Valuation Theory**

Affect Valuation Theory (AVT) states that how people ideally want to feel (“ideal affect”) differs from how people actually feel (“actual affect”), that cultural factors shape ideal affect more than actual affect, and that ideal affect predicts what people do, what decisions they make, and how they perceive and treat others. As a result, cultural differences in ideal affect generate cultural differences in mood-producing behaviors, decisions, and responses to others. Based on AVT, we predict that cultural differences in ideal affect may also result in cultural differences in the types of emotions that people look for when choosing leaders.

Previous research supports this view. For instance, US leaders were over 6 times more likely to show open, toothy smiles that signal high-intensity positive emotions than were Chinese leaders in their official website photos (Tsai et al., 2016). These differences are consistent with previously observed cultural differences in the valuation of excitement, enthusiasm, and other high arousal positive states (HAP), with European Americans valuing HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese because they want to influence others more (e.g., change others’ ideas and behaviors to be consistent with their own) (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006; Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung & Yeung, 2007). Indeed, the more nations valued and ideally wanted to feel HAP states (“ideal HAP”), the more likely their legislators were to show open, toothy “excited” smiles in their official website photos across eleven different nations, controlling for other national indicators such as GDP per capita and democratization (Tsai et al., 2016). Moreover, the more nations valued and ideally wanted to feel LAP states (“ideal LAP”), the more likely their legislators were to show closed calm smiles in their official website photos (Tsai et al., 2016). These findings suggest that cultural differences in ideal affect are reflected in the expressions actual leaders show in their official web photos. Relatedly, a meta-analysis of leadership styles found that leaders in Western cultures (e.g., the US and Canada) scored higher on transformational leadership (i.e., leadership that was inspirational, charismatic, stimulating, and individualized) than did leaders in East Asian cultures (e.g., China and Taiwan; Leong & Fischer, 2011).

However, what remains unknown is whether people choose future leaders whose expressions reflect their culture’s affective ideals. Consistent with this idea, the Global Leadership & Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project team found that countries with less clearly defined and more informal norms (e.g., the US and other Western countries) valued and endorsed charismatic (e.g., visionary, evokes positive emotions, generates respect and admiration) leadership more than did countries with more clearly defined and formal norms (e.g., China and many other East Asian countries; Aktas, Gelfand, & Hanges, 2016; Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999; Hanges, Aiken, Park & Su, 2016; Stephan & Pathak, 2016). In these contexts, being supportive, fair/just, and responsible were more important (e.g., South Korea; Chai, Jeong, Kim, Kim, & Hamlin, 2016).

None of these studies, however, have directly examined whether there are cultural differences in the types of positive emotional expressions that people value in their leaders.

Although previous work has shown that European Americans are more likely to choose excited (vs. calm) physicians (Sims et al., 2017), to share resources with excited (vs. calm) recipients (Park, Blevins, Knutson, & Tsai, 2017), and most relevant to the present work, to hire excited (vs. calm) job applicants for an internship position (Bencharit et al., 2018) compared with Hong Kong Chinese and other East Asians, it is still unknown whether people choose leaders based on whether their emotional expressions match their ideal affect. While choosing leaders is in some ways similar to choosing other authority figures like physicians, leaders hold significantly more power and status than ordinary employees or citizens; leaders are responsible for a larger group of individuals beyond the person making the choice; leaders can influence the dynamics its followers and the larger organization (e.g., Lian, Huai, Farh, Huang, Lee, & Chao, 2022; Lu, Li, Leung, Savani, & Morris, 2018; Zhu, He, Treviño, Chao, & Wang, 2015), and perhaps even most importantly, leaders are expected to be responsive to their organizations’ immediate circumstances (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Across industries (e.g., politics versus business), there are indeed a number of important factors that distinguish the duties of an organization’s leader. However, the common features of leadership remains the same: leaders exert influence on a group (Kalish & Luria, 2021). Thus, unlike choosing physicians or employees, we may base leadership choices on other factors in addition to our ideal affect.

For example, research supports the idea that what matters for becoming the leader of an organization—particularly in times of crisis—might be having a prototypical social identity in regards to race and gender. Specifically, work on the glass cliff suggests that women and people of color are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions in times of crisis despite being a non-prototypical choice (Ryan et al., 2016). Researchers highlight that these effects are likely attributed to 1) organizations scrutinizing and punishing non-traditional leaders more than prototypical leaders in times of crisis (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010), and 2) underrepresented individuals being more willing to take these risky positions to which they do not have access under conditions of growth (Boin & Hart, 2003). Extending this work, it is possible that leaders who exhibit non-traditional *emotional* traits and characteristics are preferred in times of crisis because organizations are looking for both a changemaker and a scapegoat.

**Do Cultural Ideals Matter More During Growth vs. Crisis?**

We predict that people’s leadership choices depend on how well an organization is performing. While some work suggests that organizations’ performance have minimal impact on constituents’ views of positive leaders (Gaddis, Connelly, & Mumford, 2004), other work suggests that constituents take situational factors into consideration when judging leaders: e.g., members viewed leaders’ positive expressions as more effective when leaders were providing positive feedback than when they were providing negative feedback (Newcombe & Ashkanasy, 2002). Few studies, however, have directly examined how organizational performance might alter the emotions that people look for when they are choosing leaders. Indeed, such differences in organization performance may explain cases where people did not prefer candidates who showed high arousal positive states over calm or neutral candidates (Olivola & Todorov, 2010; Rule et al., 2010).

Here we predict that people might be more likely to choose leaders whose emotional expressions matched their culture’s ideal affect when organizations are undergoing growth vs. crisis. When people feel good, they rely more on their intuitions and heuristics to make decisions (Kahneman, 2003; Loewenstein, O’Donoghue, & Bhatia, 2015; Levine, Barasch, Rand, Berman, & Small, 2018). In contrast, when people feel bad, they may be less risk-averse and more open to unorthodox alternatives (Ryan et al., 2016). As a result, cultural ideals may have a greater influence on leadership choices during growth, when people are typically feeling good because things are going well, than during crisis, when things are going poorly, and people want change.

Consistent with this idea, research suggests that people are less open to unorthodox alternatives during growth than during crisis (Barr, 1998). For instance, participants who were more certain about themselves, their place in the world, and their future were more likely to support a “prototypical” leader (i.e., a “typical student” who “shares the same interests, values, and opinions”) versus a “non-prototypical” leader (e.g., “atypical student” who does “not share the same interests, values, and opinions”). In contrast, participants who were less certain showed reduced or no differences in support for the prototypical and non-prototypical leaders (Rast III, Gaffney, Hogg, & Crisp, 2012). Thus, under crisis conditions, the degree to which candidates’ emotional expressions match their cultural ideals may matter less when people are choosing leaders.

On the other hand, another body of literature suggests that one’s values, intuitions, and emotions may be even more impactful for decision-making during crisis (Sayegh, Anothony, & Perrewé, 2004). For example, an ethnographic study found that the decisions made by airline managers and executives during crisis (e.g., following September 11th, 2001) involved more intuitive and less analytic processes compared to those made during stability (Bonn & Rundle-Thiele, 2007). Moreover, research finds that charismatic and transformational leaders produce more positive organizational outcomes (Bass, 1990; Cannella & Monroe, 1997; House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999) under risky, stressful and rapidly changing circumstances (Waldman, Ramírez, House, & Puranam, 2001). Among CEOs from the top 59 largest Fortune 500 firms in the US, the more charismatic the CEO, the greater the company performance under conditions of perceived uncertainty (i.e., political and market uncertainty; Tosi, Misangyi, Fanelli, Waldman, & Yammarino, 2004). One limitation of these correlational findings is of course that the reverse could be true such that companies undergoing uncertainty hire charismatic leaders more. Despite this limitation, it is feasible that people may want leaders to express the affective states that their culture values----as a way of being encouraging, comforting, and optimistic during uncertain and troubled times (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2015).

**The Present Research**

To test these different hypotheses regarding the role of culture, ideal affect, and organizational performance on leadership choice, we conducted three carefully-controlled studies. In Studies 1-2, we tested the prediction that European Americans and Asian Americans would prefer excited (vs. calm) leaders more than Hong Kong Chinese during growth than crisis. In Study 3, we examined the specific mechanisms for why this may be the case. While we predicted that cultural differences in ideal affect would be reflected in leadership choice during growth, we were agnostic about whether this would be the case during crisis given the different theories in the literature described above. This work is the first to examine how situational factors like organizational performance might moderate the effects of cultural differences in ideal affect on people’s decisions.

## Study 1: Do Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect Predict Leadership Choice for

## Businesses Undergoing Growth vs. Crisis?

**Hypotheses**

We predicted that during growth, European Americans would choose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than Hong Kong Chinese would, with Asian Americans’ choices falling in between those of the two other cultural groups because they are often influenced by both American and Asian cultural values (Choi et al., 2018). We also tested the two competing hypotheses about leadership choices during crisis, one suggesting that cultural differences in leadership choice based on ideal affect may be less pronounced under crisis because people may be less influenced by heuristics and more open to other options, and another suggesting that cultural differences in leadership choice based on ideal affect might be more pronounced during crisis because cultural values may be particularly important during times of uncertainly and threat.

**Method**

***Power analyses***

Based on previous research that found medium effect sizes in cultural differences on choice of job applicants (*w* = .28 to .30; Bencharit et al., 2018; Tsai et al., 2018), we conducted a power analysis using the program G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). We modeled the effect of performance scenario (growth, stability, crisis) above and beyond cultural group, to account and control for the predicted cultural difference in leadership choice (*f*2 = .05; multiple regression analysis with 2 tested and 3 total predictors). These analyses revealed that 312 subjects would be sufficient to achieve 95% power to test whether ideal HAP (or ideal LAP) and performance scenario shape choice of the excited (calm) leader above and beyond cultural group, *F* (2, 192) = 3.03. This sample size also allowed us to test the main effect of cultural group on leadership choice. Therefore, we used a total of 312 subjects across cultural groups as a minimum target sample size, but aimed to recruit more subjects in anticipation of participant attrition or a smaller than predicted effect size.

***Participants***

Participants were recruited from universities in the US and Hong Kong for a one-hour online study through university social media, subject pool listservs, and email listservs. Participants completed a prescreening questionnaire assessing ethnic self-identification, cultural background, and participation history. Based on their responses, participants were invited if they met several criteria. For “European Americans,” participants were required to identify as “White/European American,” be born in the US or Canada, and currently live in the US. For “Asian Americans,” participants were required to identify as “East Asian/East Asian American,” be born in the US or an East Asian country, and currently live in the US; and for “Hong Kong Chinese,” participants were required to identify as “Chinese,” be born in Hong Kong or China, and currently live in Hong Kong.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Our final sample consisted of 323 participants: 121 European Americans, 96 Asian Americans, and 106 Hong Kong Chinese. While 157 European Americans, 116 Asian Americans, and 138 Hong Kong Chinese completed the study, 34 participants (4 European Americans, 3 Asian American, 27 Hong Kong Chinese) were excluded from data analysis due to missing or incomplete data; 10 participants (3 European Americans, 4 Asian American, 3 Hong Kong Chinese) were excluded because they failed the attention check, and 14 participants (4 European Americans, 8 Asian American, 2 Hong Kong Chinese) were excluded because they had already participated in this study or a similar study. Based on the power analyses described above, our sample size of 323 participants had more than sufficient power to test all of our hypotheses. Consistent with local norms, European American and Asian American participants received an $8 Amazon gift card, and Hong Kong participants received a $50HKD ($6.40USD) in cash or a Starbucks gift card for their participation.

To ensure that we sampled participants that represented the cultural groups of interest, participants completed a cultural orientation measure (see *Measures* below). The cultural groups differed in their orientation to Western/American cultures, *F* (2, 319) = 94.54, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .37, with European Americans (*M* = 4.33, *SE =* .07) being more oriented to US American culture than Asian Americans (*M* = 3.64, *SE =* .08), who were more oriented to US American culture than Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 2.84, *SE =* .08), *p*s < .001. Interestingly, Asian Americans (*M* = 3.11, *SE =* .08) did not differ from Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 3.00, *SE =* .08) in their orientation to East Asian/Chinese culture, *t* (178) = 0.95, *p* = .35, 95% CI = [-.12, .33], but they did report greater orientation to American culture than to East Asian culture, *t* (74) = 5.17, *p* < .001, *d* = 0.96. Thus, based on participants’ self-reported cultural orientation, we successfully recruited the cultural groups of interest.

There were no significant cultural group differences in gender distribution, 69.0% female, χ2 (2, *N* = 323) = 1.55, *p* = .46. However, there were significant cultural group differences in age, *F* (2, 319) = 13.56, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .08, with Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 21.30, *SD* = 2.84) being older than European Americans (*M* = 20.20, *SD* = 2.09) and Asian Americans (*M* = 19.64, *SD* = 1.93), *p*s < .001, who did not significantly differ from each other, *p* = .08.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***Leadership choice task***

Participants were presented with three scenarios. In each scenario, participants read about a student business (we focused on a student business to make it relevant to student participants) that was undergoing either growth, crisis, or stability. All scenarios were similar in length (77 to 81 words). The “growth” scenario described a business that was performing at above average levels (e.g., massive increase in sales); the “crisis” scenario described an organization that was performing at below average levels (e.g., massive decline in sales), and the “stability” scenario described a business that was performing at average levels (e.g., average sales), see **Table 1**.

**Table 1**

*Business Performance Scenarios (Study 1)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Business  Performance | Scenario |
| Growth | Student Business B 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 C 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. |
| Crisis | Student Business A 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.* Participants read descriptions of the three businesses above and chose a leader for each business. Text is bolded for illustrative purposes only.

After reading each scenario, participants were asked to choose a leader for the business, among three candidates. Participants were presented with a photo of each candidate and a brief summary of each candidate’s education and internship experience as well as a self-description (self-descriptions matched candidates’ emotional facial expression). Candidates differed in emotional facial expression (excited, calm, neutral, as in Park, et al., 2017; Tsai et al., 2018) but matched participants’ race and gender (e.g., Asian American female participants saw three Asian female candidates).[[3]](#footnote-3) Candidate photos were generated from the IAS Lab Face Set (European American targets; Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009) and the Taiwanese Facial Expression Database (Asian targets; Chen & Yen, 2007), and were standardized using the Facegen Modeller program (http://facegen.com). Neutral (i.e., no smile), calm (i.e., smaller, closed-mouth smile), and excited (i.e., wider, open-mouth smile) images were the same as those used in previous research (Park et al., 2017). Targets were pretested in prior research to ensure that the facial images elicited the intended excited, calm, and neutral expressions (Park et al., 2017).

See **Figure 1** for sample candidates presented to Asian American female participants; other faces are provided in Supplementary Materials, Section 1a. Targets’ emotional expressions were pre-tested to ensure that they conveyed the intended emotions for each cultural group, which they did. For instance, results of the stimuli pre-test with a separate group of European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese showed that both groups rated the excited candidate as more excited than the calm and neutral candidate, and rated the calm candidate as more calm than the excited and neutral candidates (See Supplementary Materials, Section 1c for additional details). Excited, calm, and neutral candidates differed for each scenario, and therefore, participants made three independent leadership choices in total.

**Figure 1**

*Website

Description automatically generatedSample Leadership Choice Task*

*Note.* After reading the scenario, participants viewed three leadership candidates (neutral, calm, excited), and chose one candidate to lead the organization. Leadership candidates were matched to each participant’s self-reported race and gender.

***Measures***

Consistent with prior research, European American and Asian American participants completed all of the measures in English, and Hong Kong Chinese participants completed all of the measures in Chinese, with the exception of the Affect Valuation Index [AVI], which was presented in two languages, Chinese and English, to Hong Kong Chinese.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Leadership choice.** For each performance scenario, participants were instructed to choose one of three candidates to lead the organization. For the analyses reported below, we coded each choice using three binary variables: choice of the excited candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), choice of the calm candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), and choice of the neutral candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected).

**Ideal and actual affect.**Participants completed a shortened 10-item version of the Affect Valuation Index (AVI; Tsai et al., 2006). Participants rated how much they actually feel and how much they would ideally like to feel 10 emotions “at this moment” on a scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Extremely*. Items included: enthusiastic, happy, calm, inactive, bored, sad, anxious, aroused, excited, and relaxed. We aggregated HAP items (i.e., excited, enthusiastic) and LAP items (i.e., relaxed, calm). Internal consistency estimates were moderate to high across cultural groups (α for ideal HAP: European American = .79, Asian American = .85, Hong Kong Chinese = .75; α for ideal LAP: European American = .80, Asian American = .78, Hong Kong Chinese = .67; α for actual HAP: European American = .73, Asian American = .75, Hong Kong Chinese = .67; α for actual LAP: European American = .85, Asian American = .80, Hong Kong Chinese = .59).

To control for cultural differences in response style (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995; Fischer, 2004), we ipsatized each ideal affect item at the individual level by subtracting each item from the participant’s ideal affect mean (across the 10 items) and dividing by the participant’s ideal affect standard deviation (also across the 10 items). We then aggregated these ipsatized ideal affect items to create composite scores of ideal HAP and ideal LAP. We did the same for actual affect. We report the ipsatized means and standard errors in this manuscript; however, the results were similar when we used raw ideal and actual affect composites (see Supplementary Materials, Section 1a).

**Demographics.** At the beginning of the study, participants reported their race/ethnicity and gender identification. At the end of the study, participants reported their age, year in school, education and work experience, language(s) spoken, nationality, and parents’ and grandparents’ race/ethnicity, and cultural orientation. Using one item from the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ-A; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000), we assessed all participants’ overall orientation to American culture (“Overall, I am \_\_\_ oriented to American culture”). Hong Kong Chinese completed an additional question to assess their overall orientation to Chinese culture (“Overall, I am \_\_\_ oriented to Chinese culture”). All participants were also asked whether they identified with another culture, what that culture was, and the degree to which they identified with it (“How much are you oriented to the culture listed above?”). Here, Asian Americans typically indicated their identification to their specific East Asian culture. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=*Not at all* to 5=*Extremely*.

***Procedure***

Participants were recruited for a one-hour online study entitled “How do we choose leaders?” Interested participants were directed to a 2-minute online prescreening questionnaire that asked for their race/ethnicity, gender, student status, and email address. Eligible participants were emailed the link to the study within one week of completing the prescreening questionnaire. Participants completed a measure of gender and race/ethnicity at the beginning of the study so that they would see candidates that matched their gender and racial/ethnic identification. They then completed the leadership choice task for businesses in three different performance scenarios (growth, stability, crisis). The presentation order of the three scenarios was counterbalanced to control for order effects. The order of the leadership candidates was also counterbalanced, so that participants saw the excited, calm, and neutral candidates in a different order for each scenario.[[5]](#footnote-5) Participants then completed the AVI and demographic questions. Finally, participants were debriefed and compensated for their participation.

**Data Analyses and Results**

***Do cultural differences in ideal affect predict leadership choice for businesses undergoing growth and crisis?***

To answer this question, we conducted two types of analyses. First, to achieve an overall sense of whether performance scenario altered leadership choice across cultures, we conducted a chi-squared test of independence to examine leadership choice by cultural group for each performance scenario. Then, to break down the specific simple effects of each cultural group and each performance scenario, we conducted a set of nested mixed-effects logistic regression models.

**Distribution of leadership choice by cultural group for each performance scenario.**Analyses revealed significant cultural differences in choice of the excited leader when businesses were in growth, χ2 (4, *N* = 323) = 15.59, *p* = .004. As shown in **Figure 2**, consistent with cultural differences in ideal affect and as we predicted, when organizations were in growth, the majority of European Americans (55.4%) and Asian Americans (57.3%) chose an excited leader, whereas only a minority of Hong Kong Chinese (34.0%) did. Conversely, the majority of Hong Kong Chinese (58.5%) chose a calm leader compared to the minority of European Americans (38.0%) and Asian Americans (34.4%). As predicted, these values differed from chance for all groups (European Americans, χ2 (2) = 44.35, *p* < .001, Asian Americans, χ2 (2) = 34.56, *p* < .001, and Hong Kong Chinese, χ2 (2) = 41.28, *p* < .001).

During crisis, however, there were no significant cultural differences in leadership choice, χ2 (4, *N* = 323) = 1.01, *p* = .91. Again, European Americans (25.6% excited leader, 21.5% calm leader, 52.9% neutral leader), Asian Americans (30.2% excited leader, 19.8% calm leader, 50.0% neutral leader), and Hong Kong Chinese (28.3% excited leader, 23.6% calm leader, 48.1% neutral leader) chose the excited and calm leaders at similar rates when businesses were undergoing crisis. However, European Americans, χ2 (2) = 21.14, *p* < .001, Asian Americans, χ2 (2) = 13.56, *p* = .001, and Hong Kong Chinese, χ2 (2) = 10.77, *p* = .01, all chose neutral leaders at levels above chance (33.3%). These findings do not support the hypothesis that during crisis, people would choose leaders who matched participants’ ideal affect, and instead, support the hypothesis that during crisis, people are more open to unorthodox alternatives.

Interestingly, there were no significant cultural differences in leadership choice when businesses were stable, χ2 (4, *N* = 323) = 5.14, *p* = .27. During stability, European Americans (33.9% excited leader, 28.1% calm leader, 38.0% neutral leader), Asian Americans (43.8% excited leader, 27.1% calm leader, 29.2% neutral leader), and Hong Kong Chinese (35.8% excited leader, 35.8% calm leader, 28.3% neutral leader) chose the excited and calm leaders at similar rates, and these choices did not significantly differ from chance (European Americans, χ2 (2) = 1.80, *p* = .41, Asian Americans, χ2 (2) = 4.75, *p* = .09, Hong Kong Chinese, χ2 (2) = 1.21, *p* = .55), suggesting that during stability, participants were also open to alternatives. This might be because businesses aspire for growth, so that stable conditions may be viewed as more similar to crisis than growth conditions.

**Figure 2**

*Leadership Choice for Businesses by Performance Scenario (Study 1)*

*Chart, bar chart

Description automatically generated*

*Note.* European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than did Hong Kong Chinese when businesses were in growth but not during stability or crisis.Dashed line indicates chance (33.3%).

In sum, findings supported our prediction that people would be more likely to choose candidates who matched their ideal affect during growth than crisis. Interestingly, findings also suggest that during crisis, people are more likely to choose non-emotional or neutral leaders.

**Logistic regression models*.*** Next, we parsed apart the effects of cultural group, performance scenario, and their interaction on leadership choice of the excited and calm candidates. Specifically, we fit two nested mixed-effects logistic regression models based on maximum likelihood (glmerMod package in the R computing environment, version 4.1.2) and then compared their fit indices to select the best fitting and most parsimonious model. We used logistic regression models (e.g., choice of excited candidate = 1 or 0) because candidate choice was a binary classification and not an independent occurrence.

Model 1 examined the fixed effect of cultural group (European Americans [0, 0], Asian Americans [1, 0], Hong Kong Chinese [0, 1]) on choice of excited (or calm) leaders (0 = not selected, 1 = selected). Model 2 added performance scenario (growth [0, 0], stability [1, 0], crisis [0, 1]) and the cultural group by performance scenario interaction as fixed effects to Model 1. Across models, we first defined European American as the reference group for cultural group, and crisis as the reference group for performance scenario. To report the simple effects between cultural groups and performance scenarios, we changed the reference group as needed; the findings and indices of model fit remained the same. Participants were entered as random intercepts in each of the models.

We then compared Model 1 and Model 2 using a test of model fit based on the Chi-squared distribution (anova function in the CAR package of the R computing environment) to determine whether one model significantly reduced the residual sum of squares compared to the other model. This test is based on Akaike’s Information Criterion (AIC), and should only be used to compare nested models. For example, a significant result indicates that Model 2 is a significantly better fit to the data than Model 1.

**Choice of excited leaders.**

*Cultural group.* Model 1 (AIC = 1287.9, BIC = 1307.4, log likelihood = -639.9, deviance = 1279.9) results indicate significant cultural group differences in choice of excited leaders, with Asian Americans, *b* = .47, *SE* = .17, *z* = 2.79, *p* = .005, being more likely to choose excited leaders than Hong Kong Chinese. Surprisingly, European Americans were not more likely to choose excited leaders than Asian Americans, *p* = .16, or Hong Kong Chinese, *p* = .13.

*Performance scenario*. Results of the test of model fit revealed that Model 2 (AIC = 1259.7, BIC = 1308.5, log likelihood = -619.9, deviance = 1239.7) was a significantly better fit to the data than Model 1, χ2 (6) = 40.15, *p* < .001. As shown in **Table 2**, when organizations were undergoing growth, European Americans, *b* = .88, *SE* = .27, *z* = 3.21, *p* = .001, and Asian Americans, *b* = .96, *SE* = .29, *z* = 3.30, *p* < .001, were more likely to choose excited leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese. European Americans were 2.41 times more likely to choose excited leaders during growth than were Hong Kong Chinese; Asian Americans were 2.61 times more likely. When organizations were in crisis, European Americans, *b* = -.14, *SE* = .30, *z* = -.46, *p* = .65, and Asian Americans, *b* = .09, *SE* = .31, *z* = .30, *p* = .77 were just as likely as Hong Kong Chinese to choose excited leaders. When organizations were stable, European Americans, *b* = -.09, *SE* = .28, *z* = -.31, *p* = .76, and Asian Americans, *b* = .33, *SE* = .29, *z* = 1.15, *p* = .25, were also just as likely as Hong Kong Chinese to choose excited leaders. European Americans and Asian Americans did not differ from each other in their likelihood of choosing excited leaders during growth, *p* = .78, stability, *p* = .14, or crisis, *p* = .45.

Within groups, European Americans were 3.60 times more likely to choose excited leaders when organizations were in growth, *b* = 1.28, *SE* = .28, *z* = 4.62, *p* < .001, than when they were in crisis. There was no difference in choice of excited leaders between stability, *b* = .40, *SE* = .28, *z* = 1.40, *p* = .16, and crisis. Similarly, Asian Americans were 3.10 times more likely to choose excited leaders when organizations were in growth vs crisis, *b* = 1.13, *SE* = .30, *z* = 3.73, *p* < .001, and 1.80 times more likely when organizations were in stability vs crisis, *b* = .59, *SE* = .30, *z* = 1.94, *p* = .05. For Hong Kong Chinese, there was no difference in their likelihood of choosing excited leaders when organizations were undergoing growth, *b* = .26, *SE* = .30, *z* = .89, *p* = .37, or were stable, *b* = .35, *SE* = .30, *z* = 1.18, *p* = .24, compared with when they were in crisis.

**Table 2**

*Choice of Excited Leaders in Study 1*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *b* | *SE* | *z* | *p* |
| Cultural Group (European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) | 0.88 | 0.27 | 3.21 | 0.001\*\* |
| Cultural Group (Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) | 0.96 | 0.29 | 3.30 | < 0.001\*\*\* |
| Performance Scenario (Stability vs. Growth) | 0.08 | 0.29 | 0.29 | 0.77 |
| Performance Scenario (Crisis vs. Growth) | -0.26 | 0.30 | -0.89 | 0.37 |
| Cultural Group (European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Stability vs. Growth) | -0.97 | 0.39 | -2.47 | 0.01\* |
| Cultural Group (Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Stability vs. Growth) | -0.63 | 0.41 | -1.53 | 0.13 |
| Cultural Group (European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Crisis vs. Growth) | -1.02 | 0.41 | -2.50 | 0.01\* |
| Cultural Group (Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Crisis vs. Growth) | -0.87 | 0.42 | -2.04 | 0.04\* |

*Note.* Cultural group and performance scenario predict choice of excited leaders in Model 2.The reference level for cultural group is Hong Kong Chinese and for performance scenario is growth. \* *p* < .05**;** \*\* *p* < .01**;** \*\*\* *p* < .001.

In summary, based on a test of model fit (anova function in the R computing environment), Model 2 was the best fitting model to predict choice of excited leaders. When organizations were undergoing growth, European Americans and Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese. However, during crisis, there were no cultural group differences in choice of the excited leaders, supporting the hypothesis that cultural differences in leadership choice would be less pronounced during crisis.

We were surprised that the stable condition, which was included to serve as a control, elicited different leadership choices for different cultural groups. While European Americans behaved similarly in stability as they did in crisis (with no preference for the excited candidate), Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese responded similarly in stability as they did in growth, with Asian Americans preferring the excited candidate and Hong Kong Chinese having no preference for the excited candidate. One possibility is that stability was interpreted as more threatening by some cultural groups and more favorable by other cultural groups. We address this possibility in Study 2.

**Choice of calm leaders.**

*Cultural group.* Model 1 (AIC = 1209.1, BIC = 1228.6, log likelihood = -600.5, deviance = 1201.1) results reveal significant cultural group differences in choice of calm leaders, with Hong Kong Chinese being more likely to choose calm leaders than European Americans, *b* = .45, *SE* = .16, *z* = 2.77, *p* = .006, and Asian Americans, *b* = .56, *SE* = .18, *z* = 3.17, *p* = .002, who did not differ from each other, *p* = .55.

*Performance scenario*. Results of a test of model fit indicated that Model 2 (AIC = 1179.6, BIC = 1228.4, log likelihood = -579.8, deviance = 1159.6) was a significantly better fit to the data than Model 1, χ2 (6) = 41.48, *p* < .001. When organizations were in growth, European Americans, *b* = -.83, *SE* = .27, *z* = -3.06, *p* = .002, and Asian Americans, *b* = -.99, *SE* = .29, *z* = -3.39, *p* < .001, were less likely to choose calm leaders than Hong Kong Chinese. Hong Kong Chinese were 2.29 times more likely to choose the calm leader during growth than were European Americans, and 2.69 times more likely than were Asian Americans. However, when organizations were in crisis, European Americans, *b* = -.12, *SE* = .32, *z* = -.38, *p* = .71, and Asian Americans, *b* = -.22, *SE* = .34, *z* = -.65, *p* = .51, did not differ from Hong Kong Chinese in their choice of calm leaders. Similarly, when organizations were stable, European Americans, *b* = -.36, *SE* = .29, *z* = -1.25, *p* = .21, and Asian Americans, *b* = -.41, *SE* = .31, *z* = -1.33, *p* = .18, did not differ from Hong Kong Chinese in their likelihood to choose calm leaders. Again, European Americans and Asian Americans did not differ from each other in their likelihood to choose calm leaders during growth, *p* = .58, stability, *p* = .87, or crisis, *p* = .76.

Within groups, Hong Kong Chinese were 4.57 times more likely to choose calm leaders when organizations were in growth (vs. crisis), *b* = 1.52, *SE* = .30, *z* = 5.03, *p* < .001, and more likely to choose calm leaders when organizations were in stability (vs. crisis), *b* = .59, *SE* = .31, *z* = 1.94, *p* = .05, Odds Ratio = 1.80. Asian Americans were 2.12 times more likely to choose calm leaders when organizations were in growth (vs. crisis), *b* = .75, *SE* = .33, *z* = 2.25, *p* = .02, but did not differ in their likelihood of choosing the calm leader during stability (vs. crisis), *b* = .41, *SE* = .34, *z* = 1.19, *p* = .23. European Americans were 2.25 times more likely to choose calm leaders when organizations were in growth (vs. crisis), *b* = .81, *SE* = .29, *z* = 2.78, *p* = .01, but European Americans were as likely to choose calm leaders during stability as they were in crisis, *b* = .36, *SE* = .30, *z* = 1.19, *p* = .23, see **Table 3**.

**Table 3**

*Choice of Calm Leaders in Study 1*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *b* | *SE* | *z* | *p* |
| Cultural Group (European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) | -0.83 | 0.27 | -3.06 | 0.002\*\* |
| Cultural Group (Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) | -0.99 | 0.29 | -3.39 | < 0.001\*\*\* |
| Performance Scenario (Stability vs. Growth) | -0.92 | 0.28 | -3.27 | < 0.001\*\*\* |
| Performance Scenario (Crisis vs. Growth) | -1.52 | 0.30 | -5.03 | < 0.001\*\*\* |
| Cultural Group (European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Stability vs. Growth) | 0.47 | 0.39 | 1.20 | 0.23 |
| Cultural Group (Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Stability vs. Growth) | 0.58 | 0.42 | 1.37 | 0.17 |
| Cultural Group (European Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Crisis vs. Growth) | 0.71 | 0.42 | 1.70 | 0.09 |
| Cultural Group (Asian Americans vs. Hong Kong Chinese) X Performance Scenario (Crisis vs. Growth) | 0.77 | 0.45 | 1.70 | 0.09 |

*Note.* Cultural group and performance scenario predict choice of calm leaders in Model 2.The reference level for cultural group is Hong Kong Chinese and for performance scenario is growth. *p* < .10; \*\* *p* < .01; \*\*\* *p* < .001.

In summary, as predicted, Hong Kong Chinese chose calm leaders more than European Americans and Asian Americans did when organizations were in growth. However, there were no cultural differences in choice of the calm leader when organizations were in crisis, supporting the hypothesis that cultural differences in leadership choice are less rather than more pronounced during crisis.

**Choice of neutral leaders.**

*Cultural group.* Model 1 (AIC = 1190.6, BIC = 1210.1, log likelihood = -591.3, deviance = 1182.6) results reveal no significant cultural group differences in choice of neutral leaders, *p*s > .20.

*Performance scenario*. Model 2 (AIC = 1040.8, BIC = 1089.6, log likelihood = -510.4, deviance = 1020.8) was a significantly better fit to the data than Model 1, χ2 (6) = 161.77, *p* < .001. However, there was no cultural group by performance scenario interaction, *p*s > .52. Across cultural groups, participants were more likely to choose neutral leaders during crisis compared to stability, *b* = -.86, *SE* = .29, *z* = -2.94, *p* = .003, and growth, *b* = -2.45, *SE* = .42, *z* = -5.80, *p* < .001. Model 2 details can be found in the Supplementary Materials, Section 3a.

In summary, across cultures, participants chose neutral leaders more during crisis than during growth or stability.

***Does ideal affect mediate cultural differences in leadership choice?***

**Cultural differences in ideal and actual affect*.*** First, we examined whether there were cultural differences in ideal affect (controlling for actual affect) and actual affect (controlling for ideal affect). As predicted, European Americans (*M* = .66, *SE* = .04), *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.11, .32], and Asian Americans (*M* = .57, *SE* = .04), *p* = .03, 95% CI = [.01, .23], valued HAP more than did Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = .45, *SE* = .04). Contrary to our prediction, but similar to recent results (Bencharit et al., 2018; Tsai et al., 2018), European Americans (*M* = .81, *SE* = .03), Asian Americans (*M* = .89, *SE* = .04), and Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = .80, *SE* = .04) did not differ in the ideal LAP similarly, *p*s = .11 to .81. These effects were similar using raw scores (see Supplementary Materials, Section 2a).

There were no cultural group differences in actual HAP (European Americans: *M* = -.20, *SE* = .06; Asian Americans: *M* = -.07, *SE* = .06; Hong Kong Chinese: *M* = -.08, *SE* = .06). However, European Americans (*M* = .62, *SE* = .05) and Asian Americans (*M* = .63, *SE* = .06) actually experienced more LAP than did Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = .39, *SE* = .06) (see Supplementary Materials, Section 2a for details). Consequently, we controlled for actual HAP and LAP in the following mediation analyses.

**Choice of excited leaders*.*** To test our hypothesis, we conducted a test of mediation (using the PROCESS macro in SPSS, version 2.16.1; Hayes, 2012) to examine whether ideal HAP mediates cultural differences in choice of excited leaders. Because we did not find cultural group differences in leadership choice in the stability or crisis scenarios, we examined this hypothesis for choice of the excited leader in the growth scenario only (0 = excited leader not chosen to 1 = excited leader chosen).Cultural group was defined as the independent variable (Hong Kong Chinese = -1, Asian Americans = 0, and European American = 1), ideal HAP (raw) was defined as the mediator, and excited leadership choice (0 = excited leader not chosen during growth, 1 = excited leader chosen during growth) was defined as the dependent variable, controlling for actual HAP and LAP (raw). The following results are based on 5000 bias-corrected bootstrapped resamples.

Consistent with the above analyses, cultural group predicted ideal HAP (Model Fit: *F* (3, 319) = 19.65, *p* < .001, *R*2 = .16), *b* = .18, *SE* = .07, *t* = 2.58, *p* = .01, 95% CI = [.04, .32], such that European Americans and Asian Americans valued HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese. Consistent with our hypothesis, ideal HAP marginally predicted choice of excited leaders during growth (Model Fit: -2 log likelihood = 433.01, log likelihood = 14.61, McFadden’s Pseudo *R*2 = .03, *p* < .01), *b* = .21, *SE* = .11, *z* = 1.91, *p* = .06, 95% CI = [-.01, .42], such that the more participants valued HAP, the more likely they were to choose the excited leader during growth. The significant total effect of cultural group on choice of the excited leader during growth, *b* = .42, *SE* = .14, Wald = 9.12, *p* = .003, 95% CI = [.003, 1.52], was reduced but still significant after entering ideal HAP into the model, *b* = .38, *SE* = .14, *z* = 2.74, *p* = .01, 95% CI = [.11, .66], and the indirect effect of ideal HAP was significant, Effect = .04, Boot *SE* = .02, 95% CI = [.003, .10] (see **Figure 3**).

**Figure 3**

*Mediation Model for Study 1*

Diagram

Description automatically generated

*Note.* Ideal HAP mediates cultural differences in choice of excited leaders when businesses are in growth, controlling for actual HAP and LAP.HAP = high arousal positive; LAP = low arousal positive.Beta values are reported in the figure. *p* < .10; \* *p* < .05.; \*\* *p* < .01.; \*\*\* *p* < .001.

**Choice of calm leaders*.*** Next, we tested whether ideal LAP predicts choice of the calm leader. Because we did not find the predicted cultural differences in ideal LAP, we used a stepwise logistic regression model to identify whether ideal LAP (added in Model 2) predicted choice of the calm leader during growth over and above culture group (added in Model 1). Model 1, χ2 (1) = 9.19, *p* = .002, fit the data adequately. However, contrary to our prediction, adding ideal LAP in Model 2 did not improve the model fit, χ2 (1) = .59, *p* = .44, and ideal LAP did not predict calm leadership choice in Model 2, *p* = .44. In other words, European Americans and Asian Americans were less likely to choose calm leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese before adding ideal LAP to the model, *b* = -.41, *SE* =.14, Wald= 9.00, df = 1, *p* = .003, Log Odds = .66, and after controlling for ideal LAP, *b* = -.42, *SE* = .14, Wald= 9.21, df = 1, *p* = .002, Log Odds = .66. We did not conduct the predicted mediation model with ideal LAP because there were no cultural differences in ideal LAP; however, because we did find the predicted cultural differences in ideal HAP, we examined whether ideal HAP mediated cultural differences in choice of calm leaders in growth, but it did not, Indirect Effect = -.01, Boot *SE* = .01, 95% CI = [-.03, .002].

Thus, as predicted, European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited leaders more than Hong Kong Chinese when businesses were in growth in part because European Americans and Asian Americans valued HAP more than did Hong Kong Chinese. However, perhaps because we did not find the predicted cultural group differences in ideal LAP, ideal LAP did not predict choice of the calm leader above and beyond cultural group. One possible explanation is that Hong Kong Chinese are selecting calm leaders more during growth rather than crisis because they are choosing the candidate that matches the situation rather than basing their choice on their *individual* values and preferences.

**Choice of neutral leaders*.*** Next, we used a stepwise logistic regression model to identify whether cultural group, *p* = .80, and ideal LAP, *p* = .46, predicted choice of neutral leaders in growth, but they did not. Using a similar model, we tested whether cultural group and ideal HAP, *p* = .38, predicted choice of the neutral leader, but they did not.

Because choice of the neutral leader was significantly more prevalent in crisis, we tested whether cultural group, *p* = .48, and ideal LAP, *p* = .65, predicted choice of neutral leaders in crisis, but they did not. Similarly, ideal HAP *p* = .91 did not predict choice of neutral leaders in crisis.

In sum, as predicted, choice of the excited leader during growth was related to ideal HAP; however, contrary to predictions, choice of the calm and neutral leaders was not related to ideal LAP.

**Study 1 Discussion**

As predicted, we observed that under carefully controlled conditions, candidates’ emotional expressions influence their likelihood of being chosen to lead. Specifically, Study 1 revealed that people chose leaders whose emotional expressions matched their ideal affect for businesses undergoing growth. This was true for both European Americans, Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese. However, this was not true when businesses were undergoing crisis. These findings contradict previous results suggesting that people particularly prefer leaders who embody their cultural values during crisis and instead suggest that during crisis, people may be open to different alternatives. Specifically, when businesses were in crisis, all three cultural groups in this study preferred the neutral leader more.

One limitation of this study, however, is that we did not find the predicted cultural differences in ideal LAP or the predicted relationship between ideal LAP and choice of the calm candidate. One possibility is that Hong Kong Chinese prefer calm candidates based not on their personal or immediate emotional values, which we assessed in this study, but the general emotional values around them or the social norms and customs of the nation. In the next study, we test whether we might find this may be the case by examining participants’ ideal affect in general.

Another limitation of this study is that we only examined leadership choices in business organizations. One possibility is that businesses may be more client-facing, and thus require interpersonal skills more than other industries. Thus, it is possible that leaders’ emotional expressions may matter more in business than in other occupational sectors. In the next study, we examined whether we would see a similar pattern of results when we broadened leadership choices to government and research sectors.

**Study 2: Generalizability to Government and Research Sectors**

**Hypotheses**

We predicted that we would replicate the findings from Study 1 such that European Americans would choose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than Hong Kong Chinese during growth but not crisis, and that these cultural differences would be mediated by ideal HAP. Because the sample of Asian Americans in Study 1 resembled European Americans more than Hong Kong Chinese in their ideal affect and leadership choices, we predicted that they too would elect excited leaders more in growth (vs. crisis) similar to their European American counterparts. In previous research (Tsai et al., 2016), European American leaders were more likely to show excited smiles than Chinese leaders regardless of occupational sector (business, government, academia); however, because the effects of performance scenario (growth vs. crisis) were not examined in that study, we were agnostic about whether the effect of performance scenario on leadership choice would vary across occupational sectors.

**Method**

***Power analyses***

As in Study 1, we conducted power analyses using the program G\*Power (Faul, et al., 2007). We identified the sample size that corresponds to an 80% chance of detecting whether ideal affect, performance scenario, and occupational sector predict leadership choice above and beyond cultural group. Consistent with prior research, we used a small effect size estimate (*f*2 = .05; Tsai et al., 2018). Power analyses revealed that we would need a total to 279 subjects across cultural groups to test the predicted main effects (cultural group, ideal affect, occupational sector, performance scenario) and interactions (cultural group by ideal affect, cultural group by occupational sector, cultural group by performance scenario), 6 tested and 7 total predictors, *F* (6, 271) = 2.13. Therefore, we aimed to recruit at least 279 subjects across cultural groups; we did not limit participation for any cultural groups during data collection unless there were data integrity concerns in order to account for potential exclusions during analysis or smaller than predicted effect sizes.

***Participants***

As in Study 1, participants were recruited from local universities in the US and Hong Kong through social media, university subject pool listservs, and email listservs for a one-hour online study. Participants first completed a pre-screening survey. We used the same eligibility criteria as in Study 1. 199 European Americans, 132 Asian Americans, and 130 Hong Kong Chinese were invited to participate in the study. Two European Americans, 3 Asian Americans, and 7 Hong Kong Chinese participants were excluded from participating if they had already participated, or if they had missing or suspicious data (e.g., responding to open-ended questions with random letters or numbers). Based on these criteria, our final sample consisted of 449 participants: 197 European American (71.1% female), 129 Asian American (72.9% female), and 123 Hong Kong Chinese (72.4% female). Based on the power analyses described above, our sample size of 449 participants had more than sufficient power to test all of our hypotheses.

Consistent with local norms, European American and Asian American participants received a $6-$8 Amazon gift card, and Hong Kong participants received a $50HKD ($6.40USD) in cash or a Starbucks gift card for their participation.

As expected, the cultural groups differed in their orientation to Western/American cultures, *F*(2, 446) = 112.61, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .34, with European Americans (*M* = 4.15, *SE =* .06), being more oriented to American culture than Asian Americans (*M* = 3.71, *SE =* .08), who were more oriented to American culture than Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 2.61, *SE =* .08), *p*s < .001. Asian Americans (*M* = 3.09, *SE =* .08) and Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 3.01, *SE =* .06) did not differ in their orientation to East Asian/Chinese culture, *t* (217) = -.86, *p* = .39, 95% CI = [-.28, .11]. Asian Americans were more oriented to American than East Asian culture, *t* (95) = 4.09, *p* < .001, *d* = .42. While the groups did not differ in gender composition, χ2 (2, *N* = 449) = .14, *p* = .93, they differed in age, as in Study 2, *F*(2, 443) = 8.57, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .04.[[6]](#footnote-6)

***Leadership choice task***

Before the task began, each participant was randomly assigned to one of three occupational sectors (business, government, or research). Participants were then presented with a description of an organization from that occupational sector that had one of three different performance scenarios (growth, stability, and crisis), and were asked to make a leadership choice. After their choice, participants read two more descriptions of two other organizations from the same occupational sector with the two remaining performance scenarios. As in Study 1, all descriptions were similar in length (77 to 81 words). We used the same business scenarios as in Study 1, and developed additional government and research scenarios (Supplementary Materials, Section 4). We also used the same leadership candidates as Study 1 for organizations in the business sector but developed additional candidates for government and research organizations, with relevant qualifications and internship experience (see Supplementary Materials, Section 1b). As in Study 1, participants viewed candidates who were matched in terms of their self-reported racial/ethnic identity and gender.

***Measures***

European American and Asian American participants completed the study in English, and Hong Kong Chinese completed the study in Chinese.

**Leadership choice.** As in Study 1, for each scenario, participants were instructed to choose one of three candidates (excited, calm, neutral) to lead the organization. The three candidates differed for each scenario. We coded each choice using three binary variables: choice of the excited (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), choice of the calm candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), and choice of the neutral candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected).

**Ideal and actual affect*.***Participants completed the Affect Valuation Index (AVI; Tsai et al., 2006), and rated how much they actually feel and how much they would ideally like to feel a list of 30 emotions over the course of a typical week on a scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time*. Items included: 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 euphoric. We aggregated HAP items (excited, enthusiastic, elated, euphoric) and LAP items (relaxed, calm, peaceful, serene). Internal consistency estimates were high across cultural groups (α for ideal HAP: .77 - .80; α for ideal LAP: .79 - .85; α for actual HAP: .80 - .82; α for actual LAP: .85 for all groups).

As in Study 1, we ipsatized each ideal affect item at the individual level to control for cultural differences in response style (Chen et al., 1995). The results were similar using raw ideal and actual affect composites (see Supplementary Materials, Section 2b).

**Demographics*.*** We collected the same demographic information as in Study 1.

***Procedure***

Similar to Study 1, participants were recruited for a one-hour online study entitled “How do we choose leaders?” After a 2-minute online prescreening questionnaire that assessed participants’ race/ethnicity, gender, student status, and email address, eligible participants were emailed a link to the study. During the study, participants were randomly assigned to one of three occupational sectors: business, government, or research. Participants then completed the leadership choice task for three different performance scenarios (growth, stability, crisis) within that occupational sector. Participants completed the AVI, cultural orientation items, and additional demographic questions. Finally, participants were debriefed and compensated for their participation.

**Data Analyses and Results**

***Do previous findings replicate across occupational sectors?***

To examine whether the effects of performance scenario on leadership choice varied by occupational sector (business, government, research), we fit four mixed-effects logistic regression models based on maximum likelihood (glmerMod package in the R computing environment) to predict binary choice of excited (calm) leaders.

**Logistic regression models*.*** As in Study 1, Model 1 examined the fixed effect of cultural group (European Americans [0, 0], Asian Americans [1, 0], Hong Kong Chinese [0, 1]) on choice of excited (calm) leaders (0 = not selected, 1 = selected). Also similar to Study 1, Model 2 added performance scenario (growth [0, 0], stability [1, 0], crisis [0, 1]) and the cultural group by performance scenario interaction as fixed effects to Model 1.

Model 3 added occupational sector (business [0, 0], government [1, 0], research [0, 1]) and the cultural group by occupational sector interaction as fixed effects to Model 1. Finally, Model 4 included cultural group (from Model 1), performance scenario (from Model 2), occupational sector (from Model 3), the 2 two-way interactions (cultural group by occupational sector, cultural group by performance scenario), and the three-way interaction of cultural group by performance scenario by occupational sector. For each of the models, we first defined European Americans as the reference group for cultural group, business as the reference group for occupational sector, and crisis as the reference group for performance scenario. See **Table 4** for model summaries and fit indices.[[7]](#footnote-7)

We then used two methods to compare the models and select the best fitting and most parsimonious model: (1) For nested models, we performed a test of model fit (the anova function in the CAR package of the R computing environment) to test whether one model significantly reduces the residual sum of squares compared to another model, as in Study 1. Because this test is based on Akaike’s Information Criterion (AIC) and may be inflated for complex models, we also (2) directly compared values of the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), which is a penalized-likelihood information criteria that is more appropriate for comparing complex or non-nested models. Lower values of BIC indicate a preferred model fit (Dziak, Coffman, Lanza, & Li, 2012).

We ran each of the models using dummy coding for each level of cultural group, occupational sector, and performance scenario; participants were entered as random intercepts in each of the models. Because Study 2 findings for Models 1 & 2 were very similar to Study 1 findings (for details see Supplementary Materials, Section 5), we focus on Models 3 & 4 below.

***Choice of excited leaders.*** To test the hypothesis that cultural differences in choice of the excited leader varied as a function of occupational sector, we compared Model 3 (AIC = 1805.2, BIC = 1857.3, log likelihood = -892.6, deviance = 1785.2) to Model 1. Analyses revealed that Model 3 was not a significantly better fit to the data based on a test of model fit, χ2 (6) = 2.85, *p* = .83. In addition, the results of Model 3 suggest that there was no significant cultural group by occupational sector interaction, *p*s = .44 to .95, and no simple effect of occupational sector for European Americans, *p*s = .67 to .84, Asian Americans, *p* = .18 to .27, or Hong Kong Chinese, *p*s = .44 to .82. Thus, occupational sector did not have an effect on the likelihood of choosing excited leaders and did not moderate the effect of cultural group on choice of excited leaders. We then compared Model 4 to Models 1 & 2. Again, Model 4 (BIC = 1914.5) did not perform better than Model 1 (BIC = 1816.9) or Model 2 (BIC = 1822.7) based on BIC criteria (which is a more conservative test of complex models; Charpentier, De Neve, Li, Roiser, & Sharot, 2016). Thus, we conclude that occupational sector did not interact with performance scenario to influence choice of the excited leader.

In summary, we replicate the findings of Study 1 in which Model 2 provided the best fit, suggesting that cultural group and performance scenario interact to predict choice of the excited leader. As in **Figure 4**, European Americans and Asian Americans were more likely to choose excited leaders than Hong Kong Chinese when organizations were in growth. When organizations were in crisis, there are no cultural group differences in likelihood of choosing excited leaders. During stability, European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese were not more likely to choose excited leaders while Asian Americans were. Importantly, occupational sector did not alter these effects: cultural differences in choice of excited leaders during growth held regardless of whether people are choosing leaders for business, government, or research organizations.

**Table 4**

*Models to Predict Choice of Excited Leaders in Study 2*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model: Predictors | Model Comparison of Nested Models (anova function, based on AIC) | Model Comparison of Non-nested Models (BIC criteria) | AIC | BIC | log likelihood | deviance |
| 1: Cultural Group |  |  | 1796.1 | 1816.9 | -894.0 | 1788.1 |
| 2: Cultural Group, Performance Scenario, Cultural Group X Performance Scenario | Outperforms M1: χ2 (6) = 37.43, *p* < .001 |  | 1770.6 | 1822.7 | -875.3 | 1750.6 |
| 3: Cultural Group, Occupational Sector, Cultural Group X Occupational Sector | Does not outperform M1: χ2 (6) = 2.85, p = .83 | Does not outperform M2 | 1805.2 | 1857.3 | -892.6 | 1785.2 |
| 4: Cultural Group, Occupational Sector, Performance Scenario, Cultural Group X Performance Scenario, Cultural Group X Occupational Sector, Cultural Group X Performance Scenario X Occupational Sector |  | Does not outperform M1, M2, M3 | 1768.7 | 1914.5 | -856.4 | 1712.7 |

*Note.* Model 2 outperforms Model 1, 3, and 4 in predicting choice of the excited leader.

***Choice of calm leaders.*** Like choice of excited leaders, Model 3 (AIC = 1680.9, BIC = 1732.9, log likelihood = -830.4, deviance = 1660.9), which included occupational sector and the cultural group by occupational sector interaction, was not a better fit to the data compared to Model 1 based on a test of model fit, χ2 (6) = 3.07, *p* = .80. Furthermore, the results of Model 3 showed no simple effect of occupational sector (government, research, business) for European Americans, *p*s = .77 to .91, Asian Americans, *p*s = .49 to .82, or Hong Kong Chinese, *p*s = .13 to .68, and no interactions between occupational sector and cultural group, *p*s = .27 to .99. In addition, the cultural group differences remained, such that European Americans, *b* = -.64, *SE* = .24, *z* = -2.70, *p* < .01, and Asian Americans, *b* = -.85, *SE* = .28, *z* = -3.06, *p* < .01, were less likely to choose calm leaders than were Hong Kong Chinese. Thus, we concluded that occupational sector did not predict choice of the calm leader, and that occupational sector did not moderate cultural differences in choice of the calm leader. Similarly, we found that Model 4 (BIC = 1832.6) did not outperform Model 1 (BIC = 1692.8) or Model 2 (BIC = 1714.0). See **Table 5** for model summaries and fit indices.

In sum, Model 2 was also the best fitting and most parsimonious model for predicting choice of the calm leader. Hong Kong Chinese were more likely to choose calm leaders than were European Americans and Asian Americans for organizations that were undergoing growth or that were stable, and these cultural differences in choice of the calm leader held across business, government, and research.

**Table 5**

*Models to Predict Choice of Calm Leaders in Study 2*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model: Predictors | Model Comparison of Nested Models (anova function, based on AIC) | Model Comparison of Non-nested Models (BIC criteria) | AIC | BIC | log likelihood | deviance |
| 1: Cultural Group |  |  | 1672.0 | 1692.8 | -832.0 | 1664.0 |
| 2: Cultural Group, Performance Scenario, Cultural Group X Performance Scenario | Outperforms M1: χ2 (6) = 22.06, *p* = .001 |  | 1661.9 | 1714.0 | -821.0 | 1641.9 |
| 3: Cultural Group, Occupational Sector, Cultural Group X Occupational Sector | Does not outperform M1: χ2 (6) = 3.07, p = .80 | Does not outperform M2 | 1680.9 | 1732.9 | -830.4 | 1660.9 |
| 4: Cultural Group, Occupational Sector, Performance Scenario, Cultural Group X Performance Scenario, Cultural Group X Occupational Sector, Cultural Group X Performance Scenario X Occupational Sector |  | Does not outperform M1, M2, M3 | 1686.8 | 1832.6 | -815.4 | 1630.8 |

*Note.* Model 2 outperforms Models 1, 3, and 4 in predicting choice of the calm leader.

***Choice of neutral leaders.*** Similar to the analyses for excited and calm candidate choice, Model 2 (AIC = 1479.0, BIC = 1531.0) outperformed Model 4 (AIC = 1481.6, BIC = 1627.4) and Model 3 (AIC = 1572.1, BIC = 1624.2) based on BIC criteria, and outperformed Model 1 (AIC = 1562.7, BIC = 1583.5) based on AIC and BIC criteria as well as a test of model fit, χ2 = (6) = 95.72, *p* < .001. The results of Model 2 demonstrate a main effect of performance scenario: participants across cultures are more likely to choose the neutral candidate in stability (vs. growth), *b* = 1.19, *SE* = .33, *z* = 3.66, *p* < .001, and in crisis (vs. growth), *b* = 1.34, *SE* = .33, *z* = 4.12, *p* < .001, across all occupational sectors. The main effect of cultural group and the cultural group by performance condition interaction were not significant, *p*s > .11. See Supplementary Materials, Section 5c for details of Models 1-4.

***Leadership choice distribution.*** The above results reveal that the effect of performance scenario on leadership choice was similar across occupational sectors. To examine the percentage of participants who chose excited and calm leaders by cultural group and performance scenario, we conducted a Chi-squared test of independence between cultural group and choice of the excited leader for each scenario (growth, stability, crisis) separately. As in Study 1, we found significant cultural differences in choice of the excited leader when organizations were in growth, χ2 (4, *N* = 449) = 32.16, *p* < .001, but not when organizations were in crisis, χ2 (4, *N* = 449) = 1.92, *p* = .75. As shown in **Figure 4**, when organizations were in growth, the majority of European Americans (54.3%) and Asian Americans (62.0%) chose the excited leader whereas a minority of Hong Kong Chinese (30.1%) did. Unlike Study 1, however, we also found significant cultural differences in choice of the excited leader during stability, χ2 (4, *N* = 449) = 24.88, *p* < .001: 43.7% of European Americans and 50.4% of Asian Americans chose the excited leader compared to 22.8% of Hong Kong Chinese. In contrast, when organizations were in crisis, European Americans (36.5%), Asian Americans (33.3%), and Hong Kong Chinese (31.7%) chose the excited leader at similar rates.

Similarly, when organizations were in growth, the majority of Hong Kong Chinese (56.1%) chose the calm leader, whereas a minority of European Americans (31.5%) and Asian Americans (30.2%) did. This pattern also held when organizations were stable: 43.1% of Hong Kong Chinese chose the calm leader compared to 32.0% of European Americans and 21.7% of Asian Americans. However, in crisis, Hong Kong Chinese (30.9%), European Americans (24.4%), and Asian Americans (26.4%) chose the calm leader at similar rates (Figure 6).

When organizations were in growth, Hong Kong Chinese (13.8%), European Americans (14.2%), and Asian Americans (7.8%) chose the neutral leader at similarly low rates. In stability, Hong Kong Chinese (34.1%), European Americans (24.4%), and Asian Americans (27.9%) all increased in their choice of the neutral leader. In crisis, Hong Kong Chinese (37.4%), European Americans (39.1%), and Asian Americans (40.3%) were more likely to choose the neutral leader compared to stability and growth conditions.

**Figure 4**

*Leadership Choice Across Occupational Sectors by Performance Scenario (Study 2)*

*Chart, bar chart

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*Note.* European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than did Hong Chinese when organizations were in growth and stability, but not when organizations were in crisis. Dashed line indicates chance (33.3%).

In summary, as predicted and consistent with Study 1 findings, European Americans chose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than did Hong Kong Chinese during growth but not crisis. Asian Americans resembled European Americans more in leadership choice, rather than falling in between the two groups, suggesting that they are influenced by US American more than East Asian cultural ideals regarding leadership. This may also be because they assumed that they were choosing a leader for a mainstream US American organization. Importantly, cultural differences in leadership choice were not moderated by occupational sector (i.e.*,* business, government, and research), and occupational sector did not have a direct effect on leadership choice. Instead, cultural differences in leadership choice were significantly influenced by the organization’s performance scenario, and this held across business, government, and research. Organizations undergoing growth showed the most pronounced cultural differences in leadership choice, followed by organizations in stability. Although across cultural groups, participants were more likely to choose the neutral leader during crisis than growth or stability, this preference was less pronounced than in Study 1.

***Does ideal affect mediate cultural differences in leadership choice?*** We tested the predicted mediation model and replicated the effects reported in Study 1. Specifically, the cultural differences in the preference for the excited leader across performance scenarios were mediated by cultural differences in ideal HAP (Indirect effect of ideal HAP: Effect = .02, *SE* = .01, *p* = .05, 95% CI = [.001, .05]). Interestingly, unlike Study 1, this effect was not significant in growth alone, Indirect Effect = .04, *SE* = .03, 95% CI = [-.01, .10], perhaps because of increased variance. Like Study 1, there were no cultural differences in ideal LAP, and ideal LAP was not related to choice of the calm or neutral leader (See Supplementary Materials, Section 6 for details).

## Study 2 Discussion

In Study 2, we observed that across business, government, and research sectors, European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited leaders more and calm leaders less than did Hong Kong Chinese during growth but not crisis. In other words, we replicated and extended Study 1 findings to different occupational sectors.

Participants’ specific choices during crisis, however, were slightly different from Study 1. In this study, during crisis, European Americans, Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese chose excited, calm, and neutral leaders to similar degrees, suggesting that they were open to different alternatives. This was different from Study 1, in which people clearly preferred neutral over excited and calm leaders during crisis. Furthermore, in this study, during stability, European Americans, Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese chose the leader that expressed the emotions they and their cultures valued, although to a lesser degree than they did during growth. This again was different from Study 1, where Europeans Americans did not show a preference for excited, calm, or neutral leaders during stability.

Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that people choose leaders whose expressions reflect their cultural ideals during growth more than crisis across various occupational sectors. These studies, however, had two limitations. First, they did not examine *why* participants made different leadership choices during growth vs. crisis. In previous work, people in the US and Hong Kong judged internship candidates more positively when candidates showed the emotional expressions that matched how people ideally wanted to feel, and this led to their hire (Tsai et al., 2018). These studies, however, did not examine whether this process varied as a function of whether the organization was undergoing growth vs. crisis. Therefore, in Study 3, we examined whether a similar process occurred for leadership choice, particularly during growth. Second, in Studies 1 and 2, it is unclear what specific characteristics of growth vs. crisis make ideal affect more relevant to leadership choice, or whether the cultural groups perceived the scenarios similarly. Therefore, in Study 3, we assessed how favorable, threatening, and predictable participants perceived the growth, stability, and crisis scenarios to be, and examined whether these ratings moderated the link between ideal affect, social judgment, and leadership choice.

**Study 3: Why Do People Choose Leaders Whose Expressions**

**Match Affective Ideals During Growth**?

**Hypotheses**

We predicted that the more favorable, the less threatening, and the more predictable the situation, the more positively participants would judge candidates who matched their ideal affect, and the more likely they would be to choose them as their leader. We focused on choice of the excited leader because we only observed cultural differences in ideal HAP in Studies 1 and 2. Thus, we predicted that under more favorable, less threatening, and more predictable conditions, European Americans would be more likely to choose excited candidates as leaders because they valued HAP more, which would lead them to judge excited candidates more positively compared to Hong Kong Chinese. These hypotheses are represented in **Figure 5**.

**Figure 5**

*Pre-registered hypotheses for moderated mediation (Study 3).*

**Diagram

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**Method**

***Preregistration***

The methods, analyses, and hypotheses reported here were pre-registered in August 2020, before data collection began. The preregistration document is available through OSF: https://osf.io/k96xm. ­­

***Power analyses***

Pre-registered power analyses indicated that we would need 279 subjects to achieve 80% power to test the predicted main effects (cultural group, ideal affect, social judgments, scenario ratings) and interactions (cultural group by ideal affect, cultural group by social judgments, cultural group by scenario ratings), 6 tested and 7 total predictors, *F* (6, 271) = 2.13 (G\*Power; Faul, et al., 2007). To account for attrition and missing data, we aimed to recruit at least 300 subjects across cultural groups. We did not establish a maximum limit for how many subjects were allowed to participate during the data collection period in case the effect size was smaller than predicted.

***Participants***

As in Studies 1 and 2, participants were recruited from local universities in the US and Hong Kong through university subject pool listservs, and email listservs for a one-hour online study. Participants first completed a pre-screening survey. We used the same eligibility criteria as in the previous studies. 245 European Americans, 190 Asian Americans, and 165 Hong Kong Chinese were invited to participate in the study. 15 European Americans, 14 Asian Americans, and 13 Hong Kong Chinese participants were excluded from data analysis because they had already participated in the present study or in a related study, or because of data integrity (e.g., responding to open-ended questions with random letters or numbers). Thus, our final sample consisted of 558 participants: 230 European American (73.0% female), 176 Asian American (74.4% female), and 152 Hong Kong Chinese (66.4% female).[[8]](#footnote-8) Consistent with local norms, European American and Asian American participants received a $12 Amazon gift card, and Hong Kong participants received a $50HKD ($6.40USD) Hung Fook Tong gift card for their participation. Based on the power analyses described above, our sample size of 558 participants had more than sufficient power to test our hypotheses.

As predicted, the cultural groups differed in their cultural orientation such that European Americans (*M* = 4.13, *SE =* .06) were more oriented to Western/American culture than were Asian Americans (*M* = 3.62, *SE =* .07), *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.35, .68], and Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 2.67, SE = .07), *p* < .001, 95% CI = [1.29, 1.64]. As in Studies 2 & 3, Asian Americans were more oriented to American culture than were Hong Kong Chinese, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.76, 1.14]; Asian Americans (*M* = 2.71, *SE =* .08) did not differ from Hong Kong Chinese (*M* = 2.67, *SE =* .07) in their orientation to East Asian culture, *t* (312) = -.36, *p* = .72, 95% CI = [-.25, .17], and Asian Americans identified more with American culture than with East Asian culture, *t* (161) = 7.71, *p* <.001, *d* = .61.

The cultural groups did not differ in gender composition, χ2 (2, *N* = 558) = 2.92, *p* = .23. As in previous studies, there were significant differences across groups in age, *F* (2, 554) = 94.90, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .26, which did not change our results when they were included in the model.

***Measures***

European American and Asian American participants completed the study in English, and Hong Kong Chinese completed the study in Chinese.

**Performance scenario ratings*.*** After reading the business scenario, participants used a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely* to rate the degree to which they thought that the scenario was predictable, inescapable, uncertain, possible to change, threatening to the future of the business, and beneficial for the future of the business. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation revealed three factors that accounted for 77.75% of the variance: “threatening” (threatening = .86, uncertain = .81, Cronbach’s alphas = .41-.74); “favorable” (possible to change = .81; beneficial = .75; Cronbach’s alphas = .41-.42); and “predictable” (predictable = .88; inescapable = .67; Cronbach’s alphas = .32-.51).[[9]](#footnote-9)7 We generated mean scores for each factor by averaging the two items for each factor.

**Social judgments**. Participants made judgments about how extraverted, transparent, team-oriented, flexible, friendly, self-directed, competent, experienced, assertive, articulate, future-oriented, and able to manage stress each candidate is on a scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely*. We aggregated these 12 items into a composite of positive social judgments for the excited (α = .84), calm (α = .84), and neutral (α = .85) leadership candidates. See Supplementary Materials, Section 7 for factor analysis results.[[10]](#footnote-10)8

**Leadership choice.** Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, participants chose one of three candidates (excited, calm, neutral) to lead the student business. We coded each choice using three binary variables: choice of the excited (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), choice of the calm candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), and choice of the neutral candidate (0 = not selected, 1 = selected). Unlike Studies 2 and 3, this study used a between-subjects design in which each participant only made one leadership choice for a business in growth, stability, or crisis.

**Ideal and actual affect*.***As in Studies 1 and 2, participants completed the AVI. Because data was collected in Fall of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we modified the instructions slightly and asked participants to report on their pre-pandemic ideal and actual affect to be consistent with Studies 1 and 2. These data were comparable to other ideal affect data collected before the pandemic, and most like the ideal affect data collected in Studies 1 and 2. Internal consistency estimates were high across cultures (αideal HAP: .76 to .84; αideal LAP: .78 to .82; αactual HAP: .81 to .87; αactual LAP: .83 to .89). Unlike Studies 1 and 2, we used raw ideal and actual affect composites in Study 3 because the ipsatized values did not show predicted differences in ideal HAP, while the raw values did (see Supplementary Materials, Section 2c for descriptive statistics).

**Demographics*.*** The same demographic information was collected as in Studies 1 & 2.

***Procedure***

As in the previous studies, participants completed an online study entitled “How do we choose leaders?” Participants first answered two pre-screening questions that asked for their self-identified gender and ethnicity. They were then randomly assigned to read one performance scenario (growth, stability, or crisis) description about a student business. Next, participants completed the performance scenario ratings described above. Participants then viewed three leadership candidates, completed the social judgment ratings for each of the three candidates, and then chose one of the candidates to lead the business. Finally, participants completed the AVI, cultural orientation items, and demographic measures. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and compensated.

**Data Analyses and Results**

***Replication of Studies 1 and 2***

As shown in **Figure 6**, we replicated the predicted (and preregistered) cultural differences in leadership choice during growth from Studies 1 and 2. Additionally, we replicated the mediation model in Study 1, such that ideal HAP mediated cultural differences in leadership choice of the excited candidate when businesses were in growth, *b* = .14, *SE* = .07, *t* = 2.12, *p* = .04, 95% CI = [.01, .27], Indirect Effect = .07, Boot *SE* = .05, Boot 95% CI = [.003, .19], but not when businesses were in stability or crisis. Full details of these analyses can be found in the Supplementary Materials, Section 8.

**Figure 6**

*Cultural Differences in Leadership Choice by Performance Scenario (Study 3)*

***Chart

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*Note.* European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited leaders more than did Hong Chinese when organizations were in growth, but not when organizations were in crisis. Dashed line indicates chance (33.3%).

While we did replicate the findings from Studies 1 and 2 with regard to choice of the excited candidate, like Studies 1 and 2, we did not find a link between ideal LAP and choice of the calm candidate during growth, *p* = .68, and there was no significant indirect effect of ideal LAP that accounted for cultural group differences in choice of the calm candidate during growth, Indirect effect = .03, Boot *SE* = .05, Boot 95% CI = [-.03, .15]. Therefore, in the subsequent analyses, we focused on cultural differences in the choice of the excited candidates. Specifically, we tested the main hypotheses for this study by first examining whether cultural differences in ideal affect impact leadership choice through positive social judgments (i.e., competence, dominance, and affiliation). Then, we examined whether participants’ scenario ratings (i.e., favorable, threatening, predictable) moderated this effect; that is, whether the influence of ideal affect on positive social judgments was greater during more favorable, less threatening, and more predictable conditions.

***Performance scenario ratings moderate cultural differences in leadership choice***

To test the predicted moderated mediation model, we used Model 91 of the “PROCESS” (Version 4.0; Hayes, 2022) with 5000 bias-corrected boot-strapped resamples. We defined cultural group (European American and Asian American = 1, Hong Kong Chinese = -1) as the independent variable, ideal HAP as the first serial mediator, positive ratings of the excited candidate as the second serial mediator, and choice of the excited candidate as the dependent variable. We defined the moderator as mean-centered favorability ratings of the situations (growth, stability, and crisis) in the model, which rendered a significant index of moderated mediation: Index = .02, Boot *SE* = .01, 95% CI = [.004, .03].

As in the previous analyses, we found cultural differences in ideal HAP, *b* = .14, *SE* = .04, *t* = 3.79, *p* = .002, 95% CI = [.07, .21], such that European Americans and Asian Americans valued HAP more than Hong Kong Chinese. Ideal HAP predicted positive judgments of the excited candidate, *b* = .15, *SE* = .03, *t* = 5.68, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.10, .21], but favorability ratings did not, *b* = .02, *SE* = .02, *t* = .84, *p* = .40, 95% CI = [-.03, .07]. However, as predicted, the interaction of ideal HAP and favorability ratings significantly predicted positive judgments of the excited candidate, *b* = .10, *SE* = .03, *t* = 3.42, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.04, .15]. Specifically, ideal HAP predicted positive judgments of the excited candidate when they viewed the situation as moderately favorable (mean value), Effect = .15, *SE* = .03, *t* = 5.68, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.10, .21], or highly favorable (+1 SD from the mean), Effect = .24, *SE* = .04, *t* = 6.50, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.17, .32], but not when the situation was less favorable (-1 SD from the mean), Effect = .07, *SE* = .04, *t* = 1.77, *p* = .08, 95% CI = [-.01, .14]. Finally, as in the previous analyses, positive judgments of the excited candidate predicted participants’ choice of the excited candidate as the leader, *b* = 1.17, *SE* = .20, *z* = 5.82, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [.78, 1.57].

As further evidence for the significant moderated mediation, there was a significant indirect serial mediation effect when the scenario was rated as moderately favorable, Effect = .03, Boot *SE* = .01, Boot 95% CI = [.01, .05], and highly favorable, Effect = .04, Boot *SE* = .01, Boot 95% CI = [.02, .07], such that cultural differences in ideal HAP and judgments of the excited candidate mediated cultural differences in choice of the excited candidate. However, when participants rated the scenario as being less favorable, cultural differences in ideal HAP and judgments of the excited candidate did not mediate cultural differences in choice of the excited candidate, Effect = .01, Boot *SE* = .01, Boot 95% CI = [-.001, .03].

In summary, the more favorable the situation was, the more individuals’ ideal HAP predicted their judgments and choice of the excited candidate (see **Figure 7***);* as a result, cultural differences in ideal HAP led to more positive judgments of the excited candidate, and ultimately, cultural differences in the choice of the excited candidate.

**Figure 7**

*Moderated Mediation Model (Study 3).*

*Diagram

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*Note.* Favorability ratings of the scenario moderate the indirect effect of ideal HAP on positive ratings of the excited candidate. \*\*\* *p* < .001.

We also tested this moderated mediation model with ratings of the scenarios as “predictable” and “threatening,” but neither model was significant (predictable: Index of moderated mediation = .01, Boot SE = .01, 95% Boot CI = [-.002, .02]; threatening: Index of moderated mediation = .01, Boot SE = .01, 95% Boot CI = [-.003, .02]). Thus, our findings suggest that the degree to which individuals based their leadership choice on ideal affect depended specifically on how *favorable* they perceived the business’ conditions.

**Study 3 Discussion**

Study 3 findings suggest that people’s ideal affect is more likely to shape their judgments of leadership candidates the more favorable organizational conditions are, and that the judgments predict leadership choice. Interestingly, and contrary to our predictions, the link between ideal affect and social judgments of the candidates did not vary as a function of how threatening or predictable the situation was. It is possible that particularly in business, threat and uncertainty may be constantly present and therefore may not determine the degree to which leadership choices are based on ideal affect. Therefore, future studies that include other occupational sectors will determine whether this is the case.

**General Discussion**

In three studies that span two cultural contexts, we observed that the degree to which people choose leaders based on their emotional expressions depends on whether the organization was undergoing growth or crisis. During growth, when conditions are favorable for the organization, people are more likely to choose candidates who express the emotions that they value or ideally want to feel than they are during crisis.

In Studies 1-3, we tested our hypotheses under controlled conditions and in two different cultures. As predicted, and consistent with cultural differences in ideal affect, European Americans and Asian Americans chose excited (vs. calm) leaders more than Hong Kong Chinese during growth. Moreover, these cultural differences in leadership choice were mediated by cultural differences in the valuation of high arousal positive states. In contrast, during crisis, participants in the US and Hong Kong chose the excited and calm candidates to similar degrees in all three studies. In addition, in Study 1, participants showed a preference for neutral leaders, but this preference disappeared in Studies 2-3. Together, these findings suggest that during crisis, people are more open to alternative and even unorthodox options (Barr, 1998; Rast III, Gaffney, Hogg, & Crisp, 2012). This is consistent with the literature on the “glass ceiling” which finds that women and people of color are more likely to be offered leadership opportunities when organizations are in crisis (Ryan et al., 2016). Building off of this work, our research suggests that in addition to being more open to non-prototypical leaders based on their social identities, we may also see that different kinds of emotional expressions can lead to non-prototypical leaders in times of crisis.

Finally, Study 3 began to delve into how ideal affect might influence leadership 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 or predictable circumstances were, suggesting that favorability may be the main 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.

**Implications for Research on Emotion, Leadership, and Culture**

Our findings contribute to the existing literature on emotion, leadership, and culture in several ways. First and foremost, while most studies of emotion and leadership have been conducted in the US and other Western cultures, our studies examined emotion-based leadership 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.

In addition, our studies add to the existing literature by examining the specific circumstances under which culture may shape emotion-based leadership choices. Across three studies, we consistently found that cultural values related to emotion were more likely to shape leadership choice during growth than crisis. While these results contradict previous research suggesting that values may matter more during crisis (Pyszczynski et al., 2015; Sayegh et al., 2004), they are consistent with other findings that people are more open to unorthodox choices during crisis (Rast et al., 2012). Indeed, European Americans, Asian Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese did not differ in their preference for excited vs. calm leaders during crisis, and in some cases, they preferred neutral candidates. In other words, cultural differences in leadership preferences disappeared during crisis.

These findings raise more general questions about how situational factors moderate cultural influences on emotional behavior, and how this might vary depending on the situational factor. For instance, in Study 3, we found that the favorability of the situation influenced the link between people’s ideal affect and their judgments of the different candidates, whereas how threatening or predictable the situation was did not. While significant research has examined the situational moderators of cultural influences on cognition (Miyamoto, 2013), only a few researchers have examined the situational moderators of cultural influences on emotion (see Ma, Tamir, & Miyamoto, 2018).

**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 their differences in ideal HAP. 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 extends this work to show that ideal affect also shapes whom people choose to lead.

At the same time, the study shows the limits of Affect Valuation Theory. Cultural differences in leadership choice only occurred under more favorable circumstances (i.e., growth). These findings suggest that ideal affect may exert greater influence when people are feeling good and a lesser influence when people are feeling bad, or have other reasons to deliberate about their decisions.

Despite cultural differences in choice of the calm leader, we found no cultural differences in ideal LAP in Studies 1-3, and therefore, ideal LAP did not mediate cultural differences in choice of the calm leader. The lack of cultural difference in ideal LAP may be largely due to the European Americans reporting valuing LAP more in these studies than in previous studies. We are currently examining the socioeconomic and political factors that may explain this increase, and whether it translates into deeper social preferences and behavior. It is possible that although European Americans value LAP as much as Hong Kong Chinese, this valuation may not translate to leadership preferences in the same way as it does for Hong Kong Chinese. Indeed, in Study 3, although not significant, ideal LAP was positively correlated with choice of the calm candidate for Hong Kong Chinese, but negatively correlated with choice of the calm candidate for European Americans.

It is also possible that the link between ideal LAP and judging calm candidates is less strong than for ideal HAP. Indeed, previous studies reveal mixed results. Whereas in some studies, ideal LAP is associated with greater trustworthiness ratings of the calm physicians (Sims et al., 2014), in other studies, there is no association between ideal LAP and affiliation ratings of calm or neutral targets (Tsai et al., 2019). These findings suggest that ideal LAP is multiply determined, but more research is needed to explore how.

**Practical Implications**

Our findings have practical implications as well. First, the findings can be used to make people more aware of why they may be drawn to certain candidates over others so that they can make the best decisions for their organizations. Second, the findings suggest that one reason people might vary in their leadership preferences within the same organization may have to do with whether they view their organization is undergoing growth or crisis. Third, the findings suggest that when being considered for leadership roles, candidates might focus on how they align with cultural values during times of growth, but on how they depart from cultural values during times of crisis. Finally, our findings raise the intriguing possibility that cultural barriers to leadership that disadvantage certain groups (like the Bamboo ceiling for Asian Americans) may be easier to overcome during crisis when people are more open to less traditional and more unorthodox options.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

While these studies are the first to demonstrate that culture, ideal affect, and performance (e.g., growth, stability, crisis) influence leadership choices, they have several limitations. First, in our experimental studies, we matched participants’ and candidates’ ethnicities and gender. 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 leadership choice. In future studies it would be important to vary these and other characteristics of candidates (e.g., levels of experience) to examine the effects of ideal affect match over and above these characteristics.

Second, we focused on neutral, excited, and calm expressions in these studies. However, 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 to show negative states (Tiedens, 2001).

Third, more work needs to be done to understand the mechanisms by which ideal affect influences leadership choices during growth. We hypothesized that when conditions are favorable, people feel good and therefore make quick and intuitive decisions based on cultural values, whereas during crisis, participants may be more open to alternatives, which make them more critical of more traditional and prototypical candidates. While our data are in line with these hypotheses, additional work is needed to test them even more directly.

Finally, Studies 1-3 were based on participants’ responses to hypothetical scenarios. Although this allowed us to exert greater experimental control, it would be important to see what happens in the real world at existing organizations.

Despite these limitations, across three studies, we demonstrate that situational and cultural factors interact to shape emotion-based leadership preferences. Across cultures, when their organizations are doing well, people are more likely to choose leaders whose emotional expressions match their cultural ideals, but when their organizations are doing poorly, people are more open to other emotional and non-emotional leadership options.

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1. Because we did not include South Asian groups in these analyses it would be more accurate to describe this group as East Asian American. However, we will refer to this group as Asian American in the rest of the manuscript for brevity. The majority of Asian Americans were born in the U.S., with only 21 participants who were born in East Asian countries. Thus, we collapsed these groups for parsimony. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In Studies 1-3, there are cultural group differences in age. However, because across studies, the pattern of results remained the same when age was and when it was not included as a covariate in the analyses, for parsimony, we report results when age was not included in the analyses. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. While it is possible that having 3 candidates that matched the participant’s self-identified race/ethnicity and gender may have caused suspicion, this was the only design in which we could reduce potential racial and gender bias in leadership candidate selection, which have been found in the leadership emergence literature (Ryan et al., 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The AVI was administered to HKC in both English and Chinese to be consistent with prior research (Tsai et al., 2006) and to ensure that the bicultural Hong Kong Chinese sample understood the nuanced emotional terms contained in the scale. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Originally, we also aimed to examine whether manipulating ideal affect (HAP, LAP) at the beginning of the study would alter leadership choice, but because our manipulation was unsuccessful based on self-reported ideal affect results, we collapsed across manipulation conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As in Study 1, European Americans and Asian Americans were older than Hong Kong Chinese, but when we controlled for age, the results did not change. Therefore, we excluded age from our final models for parsimony. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As in Study 2, we changed the reference group to report the simple effects between cultural groups, occupational sectors, and performance scenarios when needed; the findings and indices of model fit remained the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Unlike Studies 1 and 2, there were substantially more European Americans who signed up for this study compared to Hong Kong Chinese and Asian Americans. We did not restrict participation during the data collection time period. When we select a random subset of European American participants in this dataset (in order to test our hypotheses with equal sample sizes among cultural groups), the results are consistent with those reported in the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 7 Because these alphas are based on two items, they are essentially Pearson correlation coefficients. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 8 We conducted the analyses reported in Study 3 for each of the three factors (competence, affiliation, dominance) that emerged from the factor analysis; competence and affiliation aggregates showed the same pattern of results as reported in the manuscript for the overall aggregate (See Supplemental Materials Section 9). While the single dominance factor (“assertiveness”) did not show the same pattern, we decided to include all 12 items together for completion because the results did not change when we excluded the single item “assertiveness” from the overall aggregate. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)