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## Understanding the Authentic Self Through Intuitive and Deliberative Modes of Choice: An Eastern Cultural Perspective

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### Abstract

Three experiments investigated how individuals in Eastern cultural contexts come to know their authentic selves through intuitive versus deliberative choice modes. Experiment 1 replicated the study by Maglio and Reich (2019), employing a product choice task with instructional prompts to prime choice mode; Experiments 2 and 3 extended to domains including mate selection and tourist destination choice, utilizing time pressure to manipulate choice mode. Results demonstrated that, contrary to existing Western findings, individuals in Eastern cultural contexts believed that deliberative choices better reflected their authentic selves; choice confidence served a mediating role. These findings preliminarily reveal cultural differences in how people come to know their authentic selves through choice modes.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

#### Understanding the True Self through Intuitive or Deliberate Choices: An Eastern Cultural Perspective

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### Abstract

This paper presents three experiments investigating how individuals from Eastern cultural backgrounds perceive their true selves through intuitive versus deliberate choices. Experiment 1 replicated Maglio and Reich (2019), employing a

product selection task with instructional prompts to initiate different decision-making modes. Experiments 2 and 3 extended these findings to domains including mate selection and travel destination choice, manipulating decision-making processes through time pressure. Contrary to established Western findings, results indicate that individuals from Eastern cultural contexts believe choices made through deliberation more accurately reflect their true selves, with choice confidence serving as a mediator. These findings illuminate cultural variations in how the true self is understood through intuition and deliberation.

**Keywords:** intuition, deliberation, true self, choice confidence

## Introduction

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Headmaster Dumbledore offers the memorable insight, “It is not our abilities that show what we truly are, it is our choices.” As this line suggests, choice represents a crucial context for revealing and experiencing the true self. Social psychological theory similarly posits that choices reflect individuals’ values and preferences, serving as an important window through which people come to know their authentic selves (Bem, 1972; Bettman et al., 1998).

According to dual-process models, individuals engage in two distinct modes when making choices: the intuitive heuristic system and the deliberate analytic system (hereafter referred to as intuition and deliberation) (Sun et al., 2007). Intuition operates more quickly, automatically, and demands fewer cognitive resources, whereas deliberation proceeds more slowly, is controlled, and requires greater cognitive investment (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Which of these modes—intuitive or deliberate—better reflects one’s true self?

Recent research has examined this question from a lay epistemological perspective. For instance, people believe that more spontaneous thoughts better reflect their deeper selves (Morewedge et al., 2014), and that easier choices more accurately represent their true selves (Steffel & Williams, 2021). More directly, Maglio and Reich (2019) had participants make choices either intuitively or deliberately, then assessed the extent to which these choices reflected their true selves. Their findings revealed that individuals perceived intuitive choices as more authentic.

However, these studies were conducted exclusively in Western cultural contexts. Would these conclusions hold in Eastern cultural settings? Researchers generally characterize Western culture as individualistic, where people maintain independent self-concepts and value personal autonomy. In contrast, Eastern culture is considered collectivistic, where individuals typically hold interdependent self-concepts and focus on relational attributes such as social roles and status (Kitayama & Uskul, 2011).

Correspondingly, conceptions of the true self differ systematically between cultures. Westerners view the true self as an expression of personal values, at-

titudes, or preferences, arising primarily from autonomous motivation and exhibiting cross-situational stability or consistency (Chen, 2019; Ryan & Ryan, 2019). Easterners, however, conceptualize the true self as incorporating relationship maintenance, emerging more from relational motivation and varying according to context or relationship (Liang & Xie, 2021; Meng & Peng, 2021).

These divergent cultural understandings of the true self may produce systematic cultural differences in how people recognize their authentic selves through choice modes. Intuitive choices tend to be relatively fixed, leading to stable, consistent selections across situations (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). This aligns with Western cultural definitions of the true self, leading Westerners to view intuitive choices as more authentic. However, the Eastern conception of the true self is more complex, considering relational motivation and varying with context (Yang, 2015). Deliberation better equips individuals to navigate this complexity, leading Easterners to perceive deliberate choices as more reflective of their true selves. Accordingly, we propose **Hypothesis 1**: In Eastern cultural contexts, people believe that deliberate choices better reflect their true selves.

Furthermore, why might Easterners view deliberate choices as more authentic? Recent research indicates that perceptions of the true self are not objective but exhibit a positive bias—what is good is perceived as real (Bailey & Iyengar, 2023; Guenther et al., 2023). Extending this logic, choice confidence may serve as an important subjective cue: options associated with higher confidence are deemed more authentic. Deliberative choice processes typically accumulate more evidence for one's selection, thereby enhancing choice confidence (Scherer et al., 2015). Thus, we propose **Hypothesis 2**: Choice confidence mediates the relationship between choice mode and perceived authenticity. Specifically, people have greater confidence in deliberate choices, which in turn leads them to view these choices as more reflective of their true selves.

To test these hypotheses, we conducted three experiments in an Eastern cultural context. Experiment 1 replicated Maglio and Reich (2019) using a product selection task with instructional prompts to prime different choice modes, providing an initial exploration of how choice mode influences perceived authenticity. Experiments 2 and 3 manipulated choice mode by imposing time constraints (Gao et al., 2020) and extended the investigation to domains including mate selection and travel destination choice to enhance ecological validity. Additionally, Experiments 2 and 3 examined the mediating role of choice confidence. This study was approved by the xxxx University Biomedical Ethics Committee (2023-031).

## Experiment 1: Product Selection Task

### Participants and Design

We recruited 151 participants (120 female, mean age = 19.95 years, SD = 1.79). The study employed a single-factor between-subjects design with choice mode (intuition, deliberation, or control) as the independent variable. The dependent

variable was the extent to which participants believed their choice reflected their true self. Participants received ¥5 compensation upon completion.

## Procedure

The procedure closely followed Maglio and Reich (2019, Study 1). Participants were randomly assigned to intuition, deliberation, or control conditions and completed demographic questions. They were instructed to imagine purchasing a product and having narrowed their options to two items. We presented two candidate products with four features each—two identical and two differing features. Participants selected their preferred item using either an intuitive, deliberate, or unrestricted approach. The task comprised four trials involving phones, hamburgers, movies, and clothing, presented in random order.

After making their selections, participants rated the extent to which their choice reflected their true self on a 1-7 scale, with the true self defined as “one’s innermost, genuine thoughts.” They then completed two manipulation check items, rating on 1-7 scales the extent to which their decision was made intuitively versus deliberately (Scherer et al., 2015). Finally, they rated how much they liked the product as a covariate.

## Results

Manipulation checks revealed significant differences across groups on both items,  $F(2, 148) = 3.52, 6.53, p = 0.04, 0.002, \eta^2 = 0.09, 0.15$ . Post-hoc tests showed that the intuition group ( $M = 4.93, SD = 0.91$ ) reported using intuition more than both the deliberation group ( $M = 4.04, SD = 1.49, p = 0.02, 95\% CI = [0.17, 1.6]$ ) and control group ( $M = 4.19, SD = 1.28, p = 0.04, 95\% CI = [0.04, 1.44]$ ), with no difference between deliberation and control groups ( $p = 0.67$ ). Conversely, the intuition group ( $M = 2.8, SD = 1.28$ ) reported using deliberation less than both the deliberation group ( $M = 3.57, SD = 1, p = 0.01, 95\% CI = [0.16, 1.38]$ ) and control group ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.09, p = 0.001, 95\% CI = [0.46, 1.64]$ ), with no difference between deliberation and control groups ( $p = 0.35$ ).

[Figure 1: see original paper]

Ratings of true self-reflection across the four trials showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) and were averaged for analysis. Results revealed significant differences across groups,  $F(2, 148) = 4.17, p = 0.02, \eta^2 = 0.05$  (Figure 1). Post-hoc tests indicated that the deliberation group ( $M = 6.16, SD = 0.68$ ) believed their choices reflected their true selves more than both the intuition group ( $M = 5.8, SD = 0.94, p = 0.046, 95\% CI = [-0.71, -0.01]$ ) and control group ( $M = 5.67, SD = 0.94, p = 0.01, 95\% CI = [0.14, 0.84]$ ), with no difference between intuition and control groups ( $p = 0.8$ ). Controlling for product liking did not change the main effect of choice mode,  $F(2, 148) = 33.56, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.41$ . Chi-square tests revealed no significant differences in actual choices across the three groups ( $ps > 0.22$ ).

## Experiment 2: Mate Selection Task

Individuals tend to make mate selection decisions intuitively (Pachur & Spaar, 2015) and value authenticity in this domain (Oktar & Lombrozo, 2022). If participants still perceive deliberate choices as more authentic in this context, it would demonstrate the robustness of this effect in Eastern cultures. Experiment 2 extended the investigation to mate selection, manipulated choice mode through response time constraints, and measured choice confidence to examine its mediating role.

### Participants and Design

We recruited 256 participants (229 female, mean age = 20.16 years, SD = 1.61). The study used a single-factor between-subjects design with choice mode (intuition vs. deliberation) as the independent variable. The dependent variable remained the same as in Experiment 1.

### Procedure

A pretest determined the time constraints for manipulating choice mode. Twenty-eight participants completed the mate selection task while their response times were recorded. We used the mean response time  $\pm$  1 SD as the time limits for the main experiment (Gao et al., 2020). Participants in the intuition condition had 10 seconds to respond, while those in the deliberation condition had to wait 34 seconds before responding.

Participants were randomly assigned to conditions and completed demographic questions. They read: “Imagine you want to start a new romantic relationship. A dating app presents you with four candidates. Please select based on their characteristics.” The scenario, adapted from Oktar and Lombrozo (2022), comprised five trials (one practice trial) presented in random order.

After making their selection, participants rated their choice confidence on 1-7 scales using two items: “I believe my choice just now was correct” and “I am certain my choice is very close to the right answer” (Gino et al., 2012). They then rated the extent to which their choice reflected their true self, with two additional items beyond those used in Experiment 1: “In making this type of decision, I followed my heart” and “This decision reflects my true preferences” (Wood et al., 2008). Finally, they completed a manipulation check item: “When making the decision just now, I felt time pressure” (Gao et al., 2020), also on a 7-point scale.

### Results

An independent samples t-test confirmed the manipulation’s effectiveness: the intuition group felt significantly more time pressure,  $t(235.5) = 14.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.87$ . Both choice confidence and true self-reflection measures showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ;  $0.76$ ) and were averaged for analysis.

Results showed that the deliberation group ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) believed their choices reflected their true selves more than the intuition group ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ),  $t(254) = 3.28$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.41$  (Figure 1). Additionally, the deliberation group ( $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) reported higher choice confidence than the intuition group ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ),  $t(229.74) = 4.84$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.6$ . Bootstrap mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes & Preacher, 2013) with 5,000 resamples revealed a significant indirect effect of choice confidence, 95% CI = [0.15, 0.41].

[Figure 2: see original paper]

### Experiment 3: Extended Contexts

Experiment 3 further extended the contexts to enhance ecological validity and test the stability of the choice confidence mediation effect.

#### Method

We recruited 124 participants (110 female, mean age = 20.24 years,  $SD = 1.58$ ). The scenarios, adapted from Oktar and Lombrozo (2022), involved selecting: a travel destination, a movie to watch, songs for a party, and a kitten to adopt. The experimental design and procedure mirrored Experiment 2.

#### Results

The intuition group ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) felt significantly more time pressure than the deliberation group ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ),  $t(123) = 9.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.66$ . Both choice confidence and true self-reflection measures showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ; 0.72) and were averaged for analysis.

Independent samples t-tests revealed that the deliberation group ( $M = 6.30$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) believed their choices reflected their true selves more than the intuition group ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ),  $t(123) = 4.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.76$ . The deliberation group ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) also reported higher choice confidence than the intuition group ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(121.88) = 3.76$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.67$ . The mediating effect of choice confidence was significant, 95% CI = [0.12, 0.59] (Figure 2).

### General Discussion

Across three experiments, we investigated how individuals from Eastern cultural backgrounds understand their true selves through choice modes. Our findings reveal that, contrary to Western research, Easterners believe deliberate choices more accurately reflect their true selves. Choice confidence mediated this effect: people had greater confidence in deliberate choices, which led them to perceive these choices as more authentic.

These cultural differences likely stem from divergent conceptions of the true self. Consistent with Western individualism and independent self-concepts, Westerners view the true self as an expression of personal values and preferences, emphasizing autonomous motivation and cross-situational consistency (Chen, 2019; Ryan & Ryan, 2019). Conforming to external expectations reduces felt authenticity (Wood et al., 2008; Lutz et al., 2023). Intuition is perceived as spontaneous and thus a key manifestation of autonomy (Morewedge et al., 2014), leading Westerners to view intuitive choices as more authentic.

In contrast, consistent with Eastern collectivism and interdependent self-concepts (Kitayama & Salvador, 2024), Easterners' true selves are more closely tied to situational and interpersonal contexts (Liang & Xie, 2021; Meng & Peng, 2021). Behavioral changes made for close others are seen as expressions of the true self (Sun & Chen, 2018). Consequently, the Eastern true self is more complex than its Western counterpart (Yang, 2015). Deliberation better equips individuals to navigate this complexity, leading Easterners to perceive deliberate choices as more authentic.

In Eastern cultural contexts, higher confidence in deliberate choices leads people to view these choices as more authentic. This confidence boost represents a positive feeling, and positive feelings tend to increase subjective authenticity (Bailey & Iyengar, 2023; Guenther et al., 2023). For Easterners, choice confidence may serve as confirmation that deliberation has adequately addressed the current situation, thereby signaling authenticity. For Westerners, however, deliberation may signify constraint by external factors, deviating from initial preferences and undermining autonomous motivation. Thus, although deliberation increases their choice confidence (Scherer et al., 2015), they do not perceive deliberate choices as authentic. This pattern suggests that whereas Westerners experience a “mismatch” —feeling more confident when deliberate but more authentic when intuitive—Easterners experience alignment, feeling both more confident and more authentic when deliberate. This may indicate that the Chinese psyche is more stable and coherent.

Several limitations warrant mention. First, we did not conduct direct cross-cultural comparisons; future research should provide more direct evidence for cultural differences. Second, we attribute these differences primarily to variations in self-concept, yet independent and interdependent self-concepts also vary within cultures (Talhelm et al., 2014) and can be primed (Fu et al., 2007). Future studies should measure or manipulate self-concept to examine its moderating role and reveal the psychological origins of these cultural differences.

In conclusion, individuals from Eastern cultural contexts perceive deliberate choices as more reflective of their true selves, with choice confidence serving as a key mediator. These findings illuminate fundamental cultural differences in how people come to know their authentic selves through the choices they make.

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**Author Contributions:**

Hu Xiaohan and Wang Xiuxin: Conceptualized the research and designed the study;

Sun Fengyang and Wang Xiuxin: Developed theoretical framework and interpretation;

Liu Jie and Hu Xiaohan: Conducted the experiments;

Hu Xiaohan and Liu Jie: Performed data analysis;

Hu Xiaohan and Wang Xiuxin: Drafted the manuscript;

Wang Xiuxin and Li Zhaoxu: Revised the final manuscript.

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