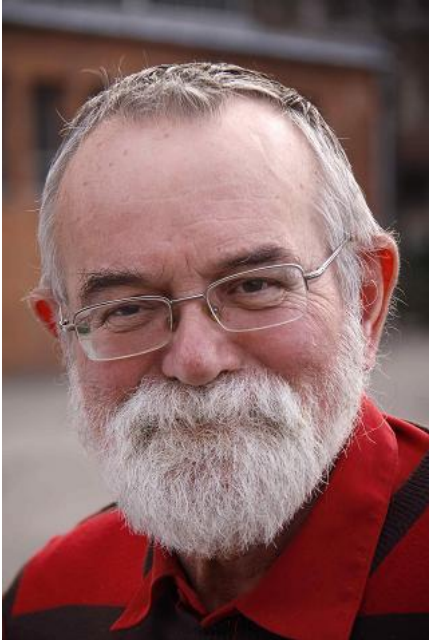# Positive Psychology Traditions and the Concept of Good Life

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East-West Connections: Cultural, Cognitive, Social Patterns and Good Life

*Workshop at Nanyang Technological University Singapore, September 16-17th, 2015*

Outline

- Three approaches the thought/culture relation
- Culture, perception, and contextual holism in East/West comparisons
- Some lessons from linguistic relativity
- Constrained relativity
- Cultural influences on well-being
- An analogue to ‚androgyny': ‚Orientoocidentalism'

Two radical visions

- Life and thought is entirely universal
- Our mind and brain are forming universal representations of the world
- We are rational. Thought and representation are value and context free
- Social world and culture are merely coloring our mind, not shaping it

- The human mind is entirely flexible
- The mind and brain are forming entirely culture dependent frames of the world
- We are emotional as well. Thinking is permeated with emotions and values
- Practices in the social world and culture do shape the mind

# Three visions of the modifiability of architectures (Michael Cole)
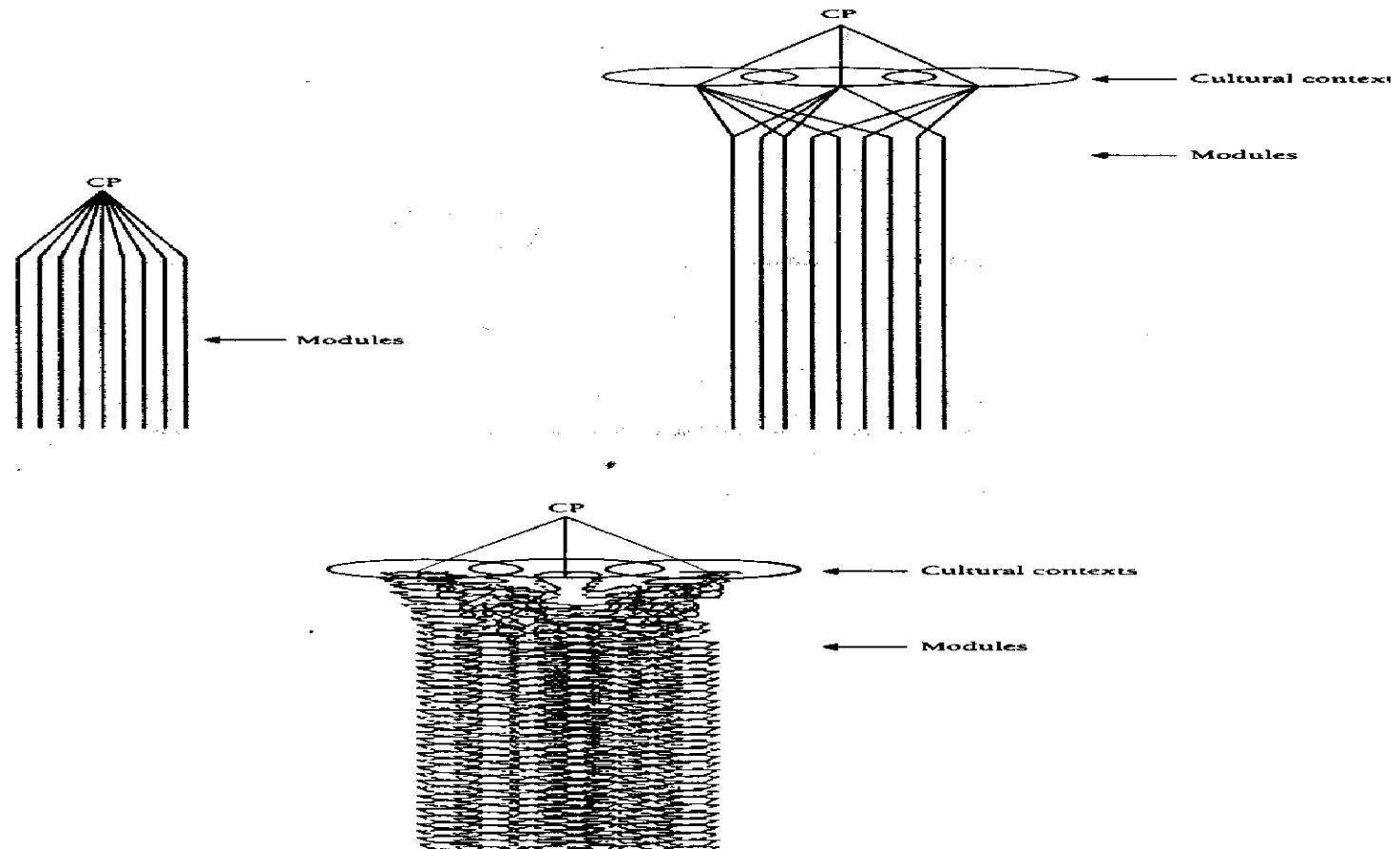
East/West, an example for cultural influence
Context and Detail Richard E. Nisbett

- **Eastern mind**
- Relation oriented
- More prototype oriented
- Attention to whole
- Social life less individual

- Western mind
- Item oriented
- More feature oriented
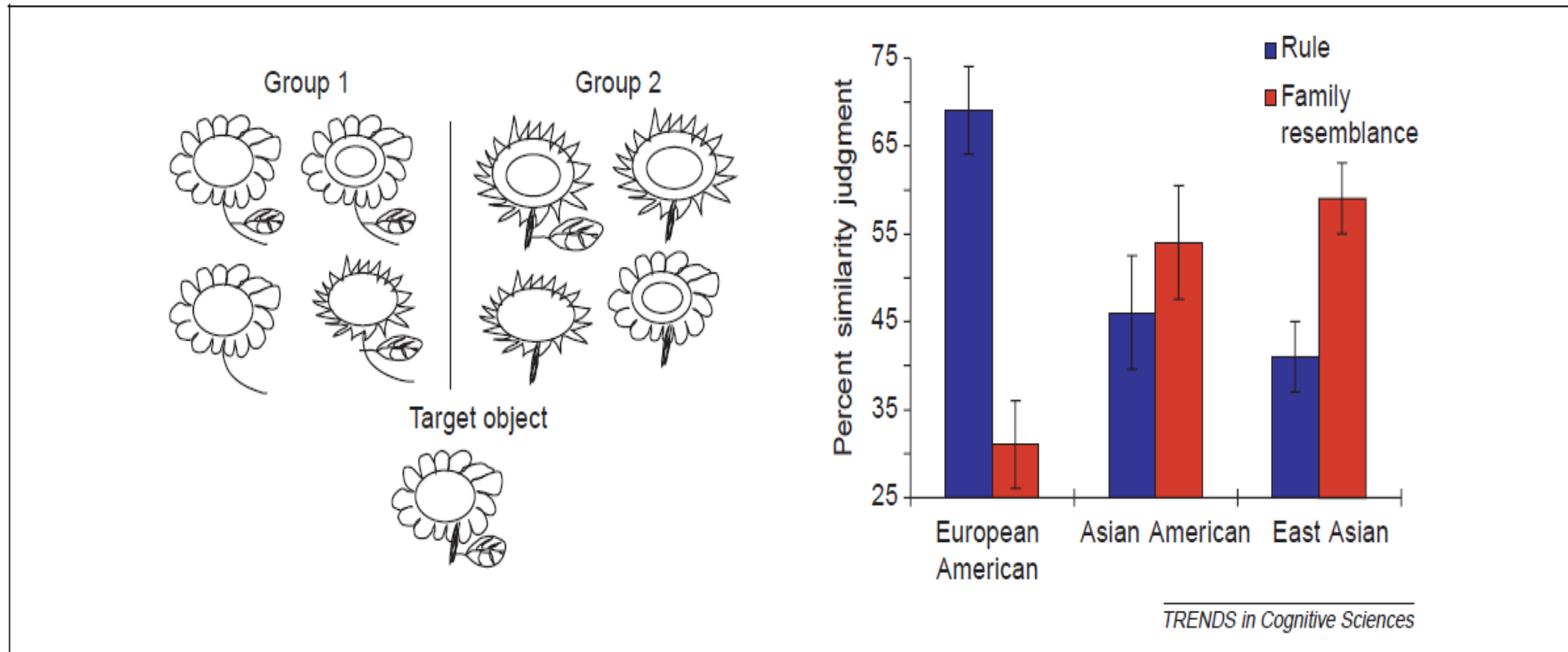- Attention to elements
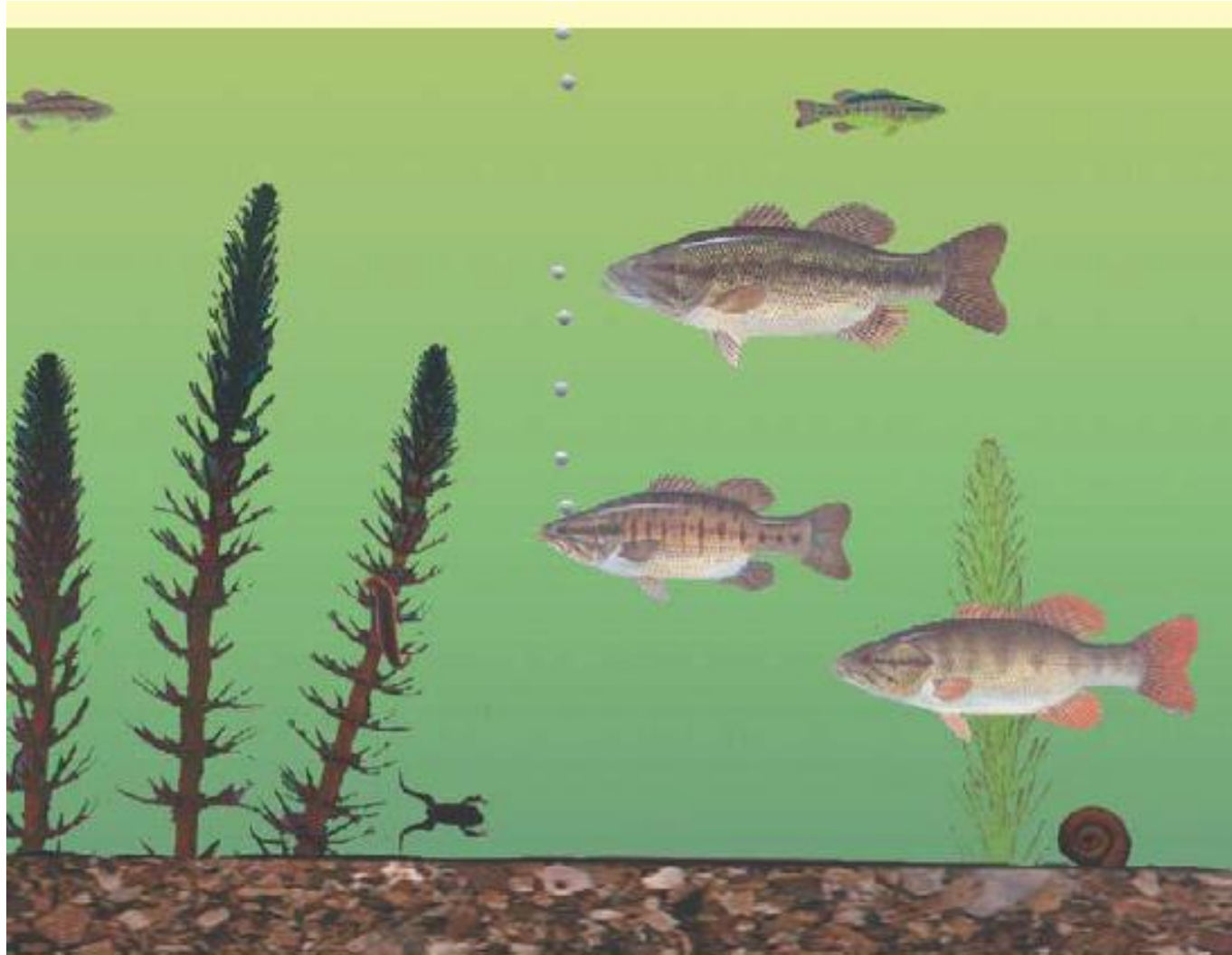- Exteremely individualized

Where does the target belong?

Group 1

Group 2

Target object
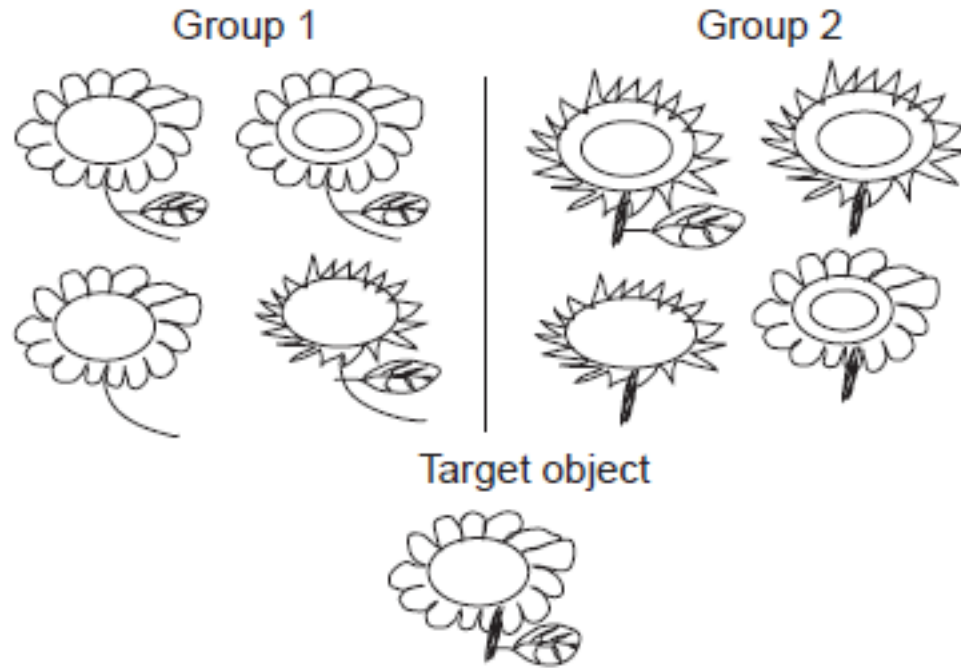
Norenzayan et al 2002

Left has a common feature,
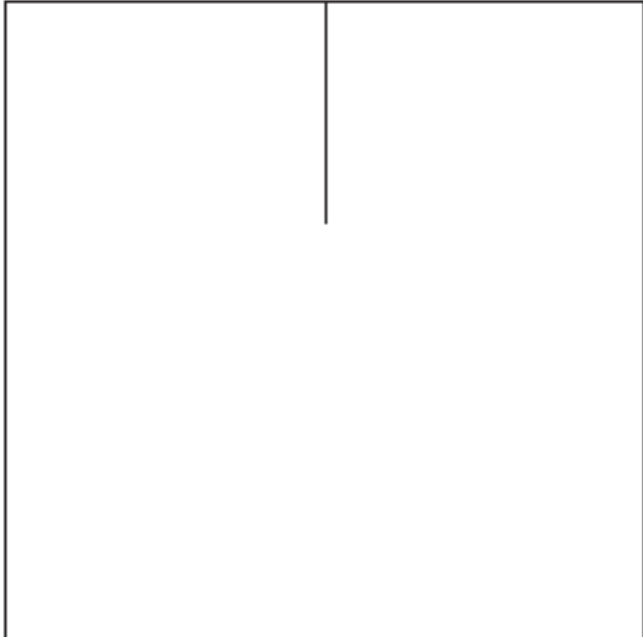right a general similarity

Typical scene in target and detail study

Masuda and Nisbett 2002

- Americans start with the big stimuli
- Japanese 60 % more details
- Recognition: in Japanese context dependent
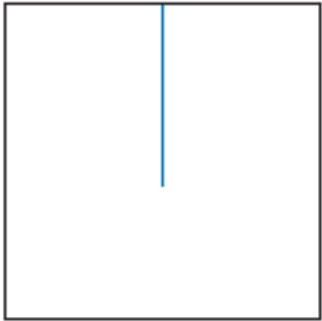- In Americans, context independent

Frame and line
Draw the same !

Errors
Japanse more correct in context, Americans with no context

The correct answer for the absolute task

The correct answer for the relative task
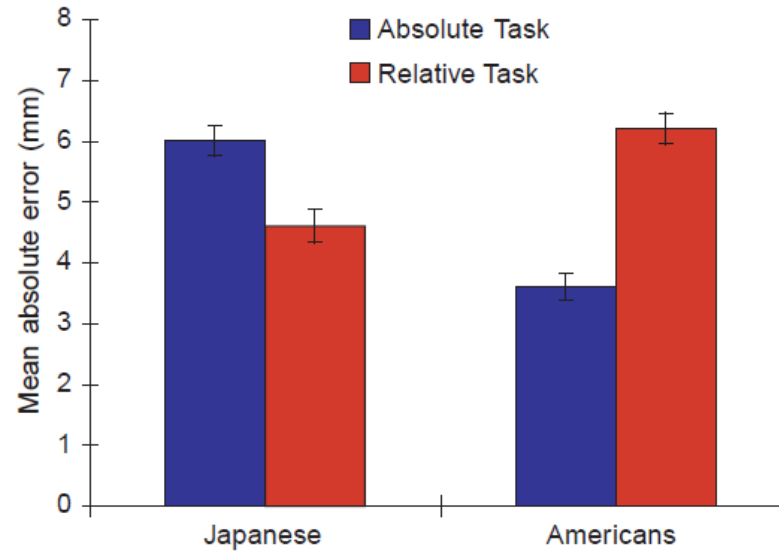
Some suggestions of Nisbett

- `Eastern` More context oriented

- Less individualistic

- Social consideration directs attention to relations

Is this valid for language as well ?

- `Western` more item oriented

- More individualistic

- Social emphasis on stressing points of views and divergencies

Language and the Whorfian circles

- Language determines thought
- This is seen in differences of expressions in different languages
- Lexical and grammatical relativity
- Trivially circular: need for behavioral measures
- Language, thought, and determines issues

Research fashions over half century

- '50s: large differences, overall relativity
- Chomskyan revolution: universalism and modularity, no determination
- '80s: typological differences, parameters, processing types
- Recently: constrained relativity and contextualized universality

Processing relativity

- Languages differ in the way they approach the linguistic task of understanding
- Language-to-language relativity
- Languages also differ in their use of universal resources
- Debates on when and how this is fixed

An example: Interpretation of simple transitive sentences, Bates – MacWhinney, 1989, 'competition'

Analytic,
Non configurational

Language	Children	Adults
Turkish	Case > Order	Case > Anim > Order
Hungarian	Anim > Case> Order	Case > Order
Warlpiri	Anim > Case> Order	Case > Anim > Order
Serbian	Anim > Case> Order	Case> Agr > Anim > Order
Dutch	Order > Case > Anim	Case > Order > Anim
French	Order > Anim	Agr > Anim > Order
English	Order > Anim > Agr	Order > Anim > Agr

Holistic
Configurational

Explanatory power of factors in Hungarian Unlearning animacy
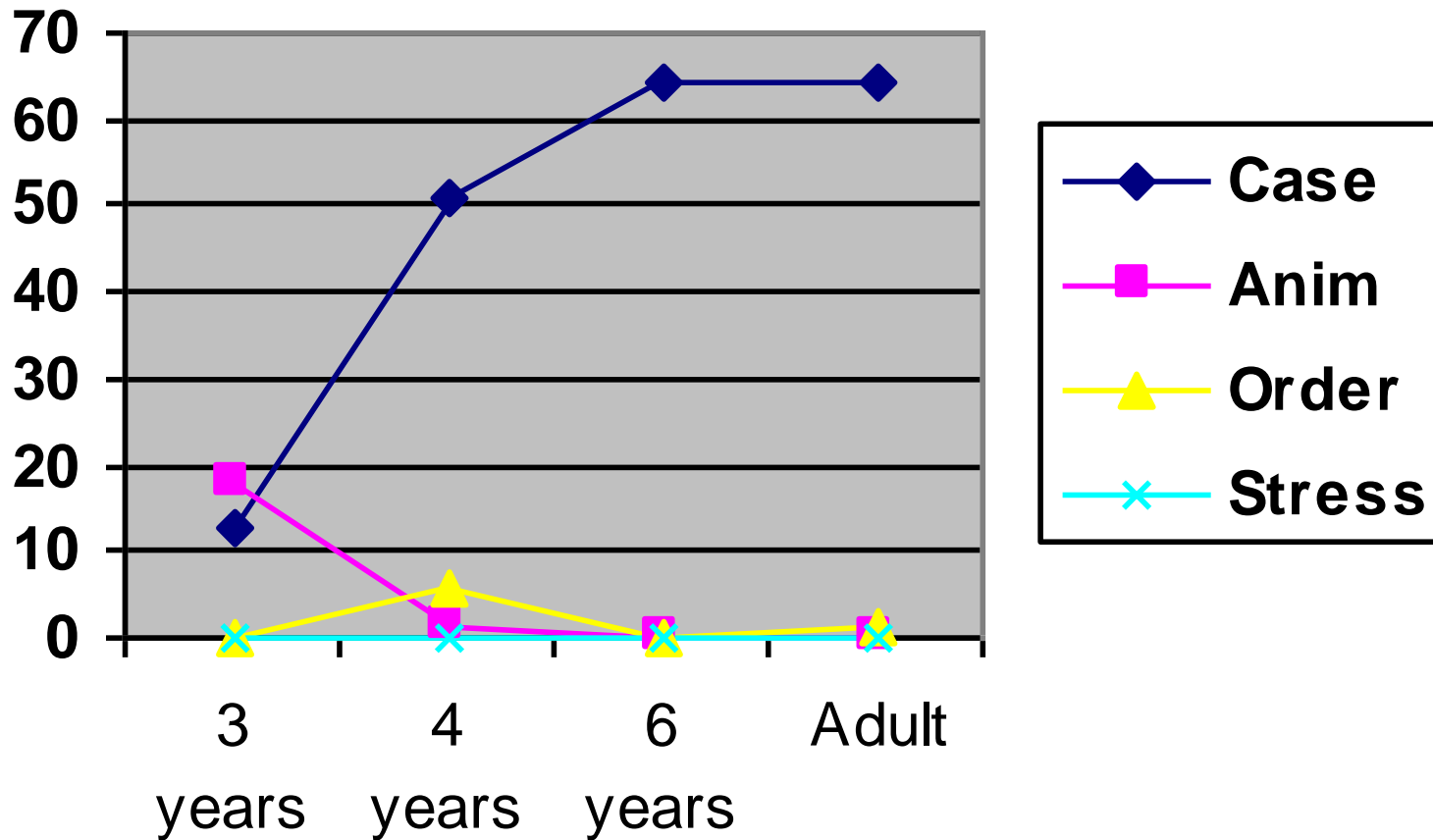
Learning the saliency of case and unlearning animacy in Hungarian
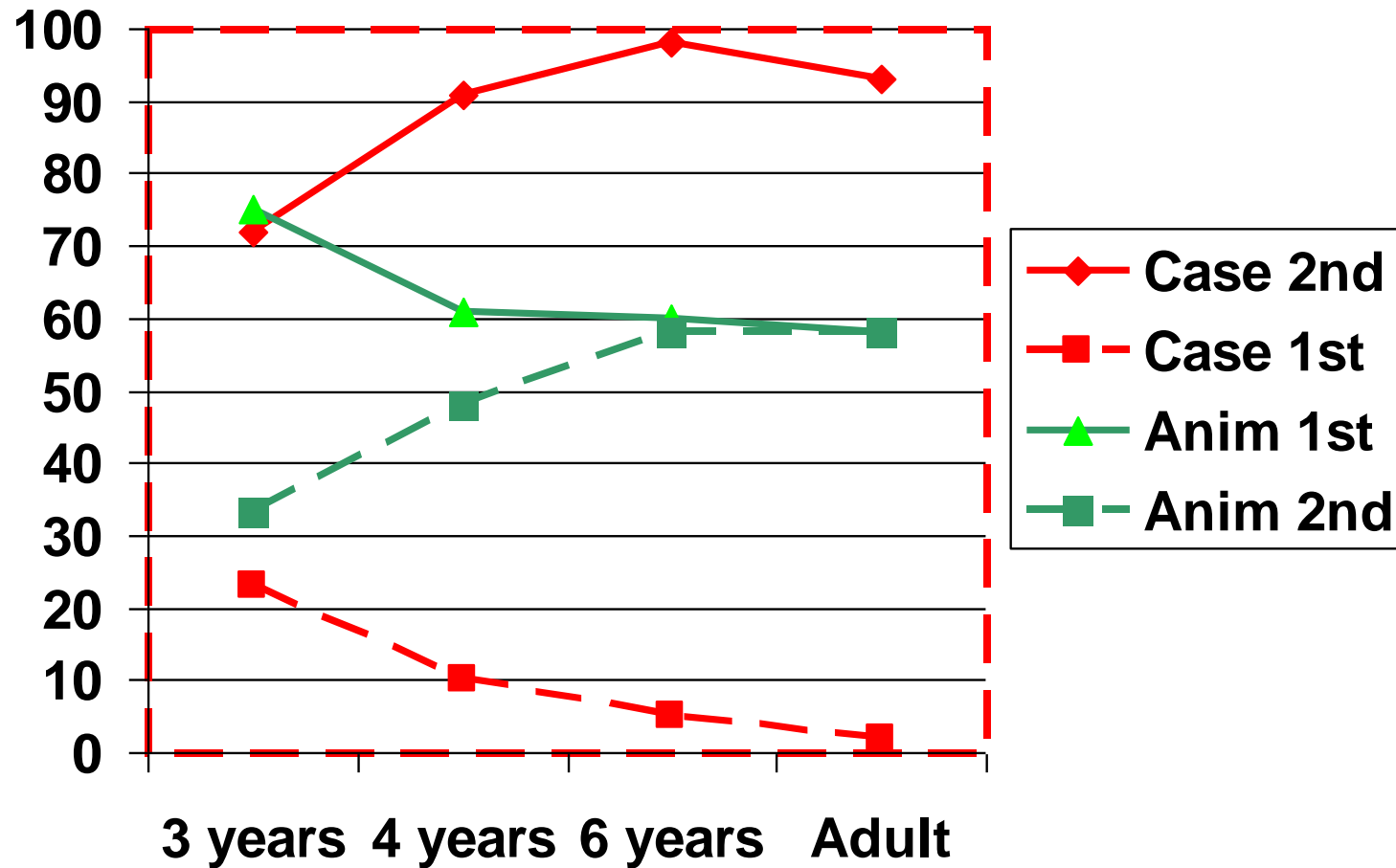
Consequences of an increased role of morphology in non-configurational languages
(Gergely and Pléh)

Rich morphology	Poor morphology
Fast decisions	Slow decisons
Non-configurational	Configurational
Localistic model	Holistic model
Memory over words	Memory over phrases

Some consequences

Németh et al. 2012: working memory constraints over words in Hungarian
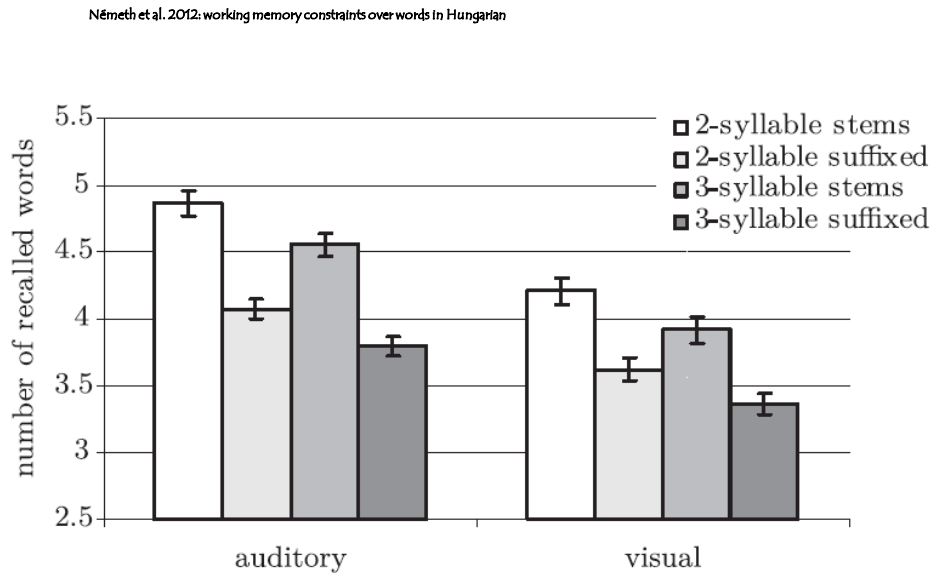
Brain is tuned to language

- English: increase in left hemisphere use is related to SVO
- Hungarian: related to more analytic strategies (Pléh, 2000)
- Intonation: English RH (Meyer, 2002)
- Tonal languageas: Left Hemisphere (Gondiour, 2002)

Back to holistic and item based

1. It is culture independent in language
2. It is not related to East and West
3. Does it entail a value?

The challenge of positive psychology
Not past, but future oriented

- The equilibrium of experience Csikszentmihályi. Flow.

Emphasis on strengths and virtues Seligman

Challenge

Flow Channel

Anxiety

Boredom

Skill
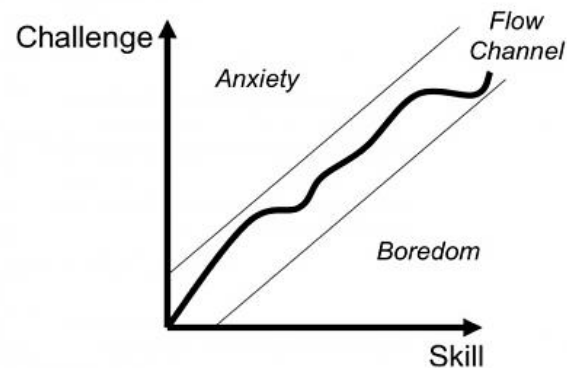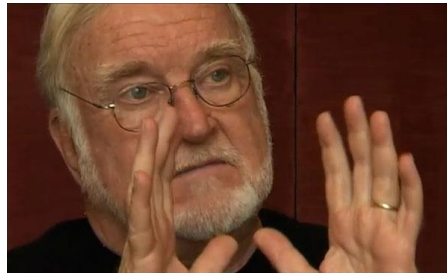
"Flow" concept by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.   Drawn by Senia Maymin.

HAPPINESS FRAMEWORK 3
3 TYPES OF HAPPINESS

HAPPINESS

Higher Purpose Meaning
Being part of something bigger than yourself

The better approach

Passion
FLOW and ENGAGEMENT
Time flies

Pleasure
ROCK STAR
Chasing the next high

Most people's approach

TIME
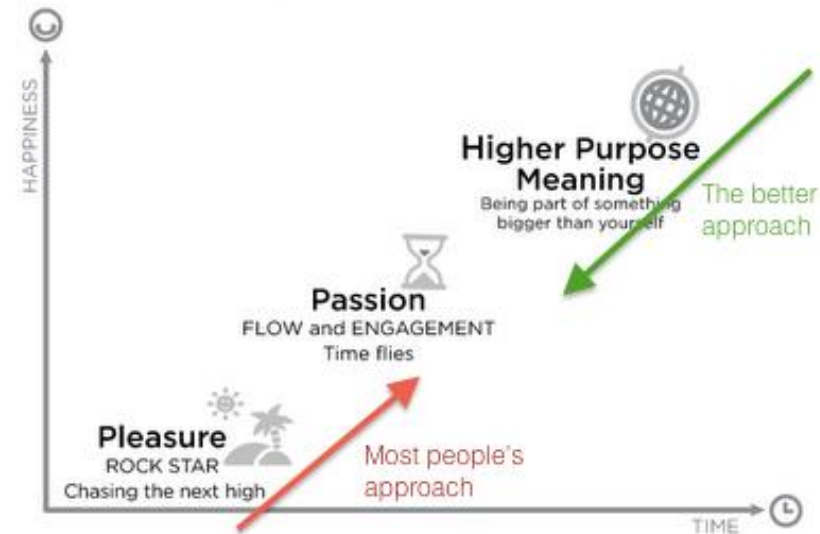
We are not happier
Oisi et al, 2015 American novels

Veenhoven 2012

Global assessment: **Overall Happiness**
(Satisfaction with one's life-as-whole)

↑

Sub-assessment: **Hedonic level of affect**
(Balance of pleasant and unpleasant affect)

↑

Information basis: **Affective experience**

↑

Underlying process: **Need gratification**

↑

Substrate: **Human nature**
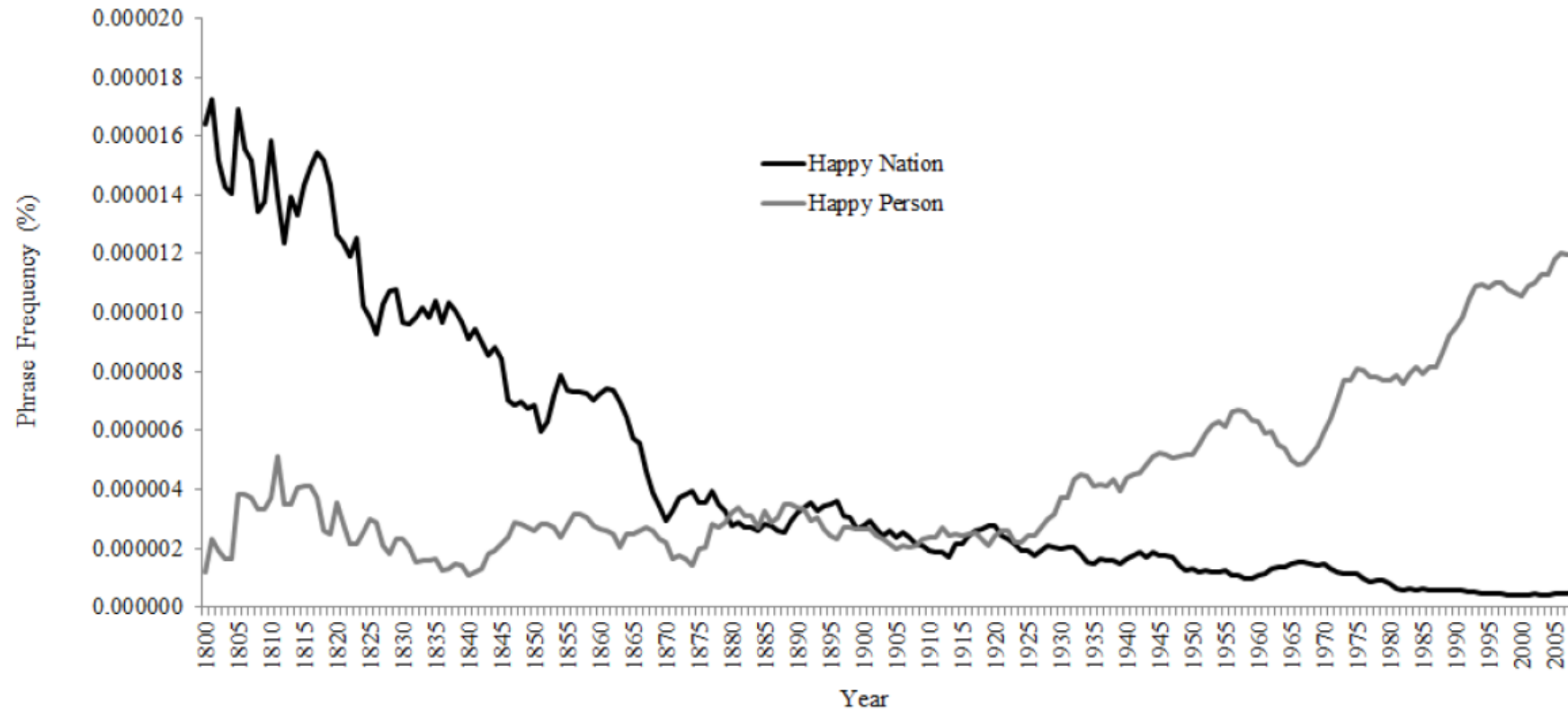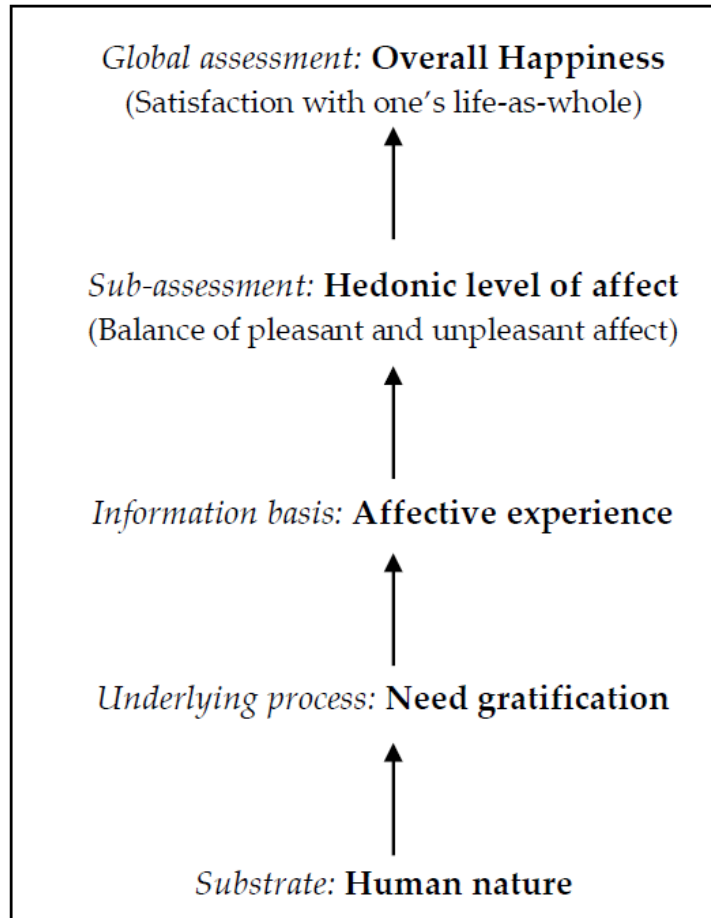
Table 3. Happiness and society in 146 Nations around 2006

Characteristics of society	Correlation with happiness	N
Affluence	+.69	136
Rule of law		
Civil rights	+.50	131
Corruption	-.69	137
Freedom		
Economic	+.63	135
Political	+.53	131
Personal	+.41	83
Equality		
Income inequality	-.08	119
Gender inequality	-.21	110
Pluriformity		
% Migrants	+.29	126
Tolerance of minorities	+.49	77
Modernity		
Schooling	+.56	138
Urbanization	+.58	137
Explained variance (Adjusted R^2)	75%	

Cultural aspects of a good life
Dualities in positive psychology

- **Universal values**

- Driving towards similar ideas of good life

- Everyone aims for the same life

- **Rival values**

- Individualism vs. collectivism

- Reconciliation issues towards the future

A duality within positive psychology Bacon (2005) creativity versus wisdom

Contrasting the Balance and Focus Strengths

	Type of strength	
Feature	Balance	Focus
Associated strengths	Wisdom, fairness, citizenship, gratitude, prudence, humility, kindness	Creativity, leadership, analytical intelligence, perseverance, curiosity, social intelligence
Intrapersonal goal	Harmonize personal strengths and weaknesses; harmonize internal tensions	Increase personal competence
Intrapersonal outcome	Integration	Achievement
Interpersonal goal	Harmonize self-interest and others' interests	May choose to apply personal strengths to social ends
Interpersonal outcome	Good relationships	Variable relationships
Career track	Slower	Faster
Occupational achievement	Variable	Higher
Famous exemplars	Fewer	More
Ultimate goal	Satisfying, meaningful life	Satisfying, meaningful life

Joshanloo (2004) basic divergencies

- **Eastern**
- Self disappears
- Group minded
- Virtues
- Harmony, group
- Contentment, loyalty
- Suffering
- Cooperative
- Spirituality

- Western
- Self actualization
- Individual minded
- Hedonism
- Mastery, Ego
- Satisfaction
- Joy
- Competitive
- Immanence

Proposed universal virtues
Seligman

courage,
 justice
  humanity
   temperance
    wisdom
transcendence

Forgiveness

Core virtues

Virtue	Description
Courage	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal; examples include bravery, perseverance, and authenticity (honesty)
Justice	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life; examples include fairness, leadership, and citizenship or teamwork
Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that involve "tending and befriending" others (Taylor et al., 2000); examples include love and kindness
Temperance	Strengths that protect against excess; examples include forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-control
Wisdom	Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge; examples include creativity, curiosity, judgment, and perspective (providing counsel to others)
Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning; examples include gratitude, hope, and spirituality

Their presence in different cultures

Tradition	Courage	Justice	Humanity	Temperance	Wisdom	Transcendence
Confucianism		E	E	T	E	T
Taoism		E	E	E	E	T
Buddhism		E	E	E	T	E
Hinduism	E	E	E	E	E	E
Athenian philosophy	E	E	E	E	E	T
Christianity	E	E	E	E	E	E
Judaism	E	E	E	E	E	E
Islam	E	E	E	E	E	E

Note. E = explicitly named; T = thematically implied.

Critic of the universal values by Christopher and Higginbottom (2008)

- criticize the hidden individualistic assumptions

- overcome false dichotomies

- interpret cultural meanings with an open mind

Forgiveness and empirical study
Stephanie Lichtenfeld, Vanessa L. Buechner , Markus A. Maier, Maria Fernández-Capo (2015)
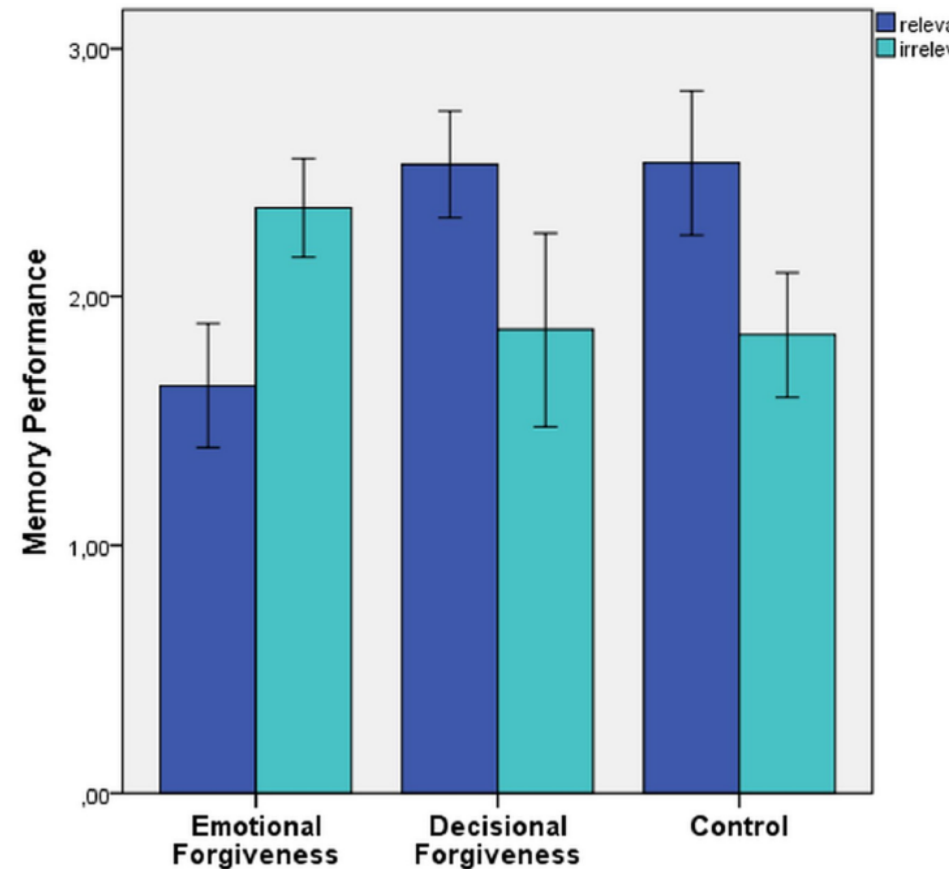

Fig 1. Memory performance as a function of forgiveness manipulation and relevance.

Conflict and well-being

conflict = pain in the neck?
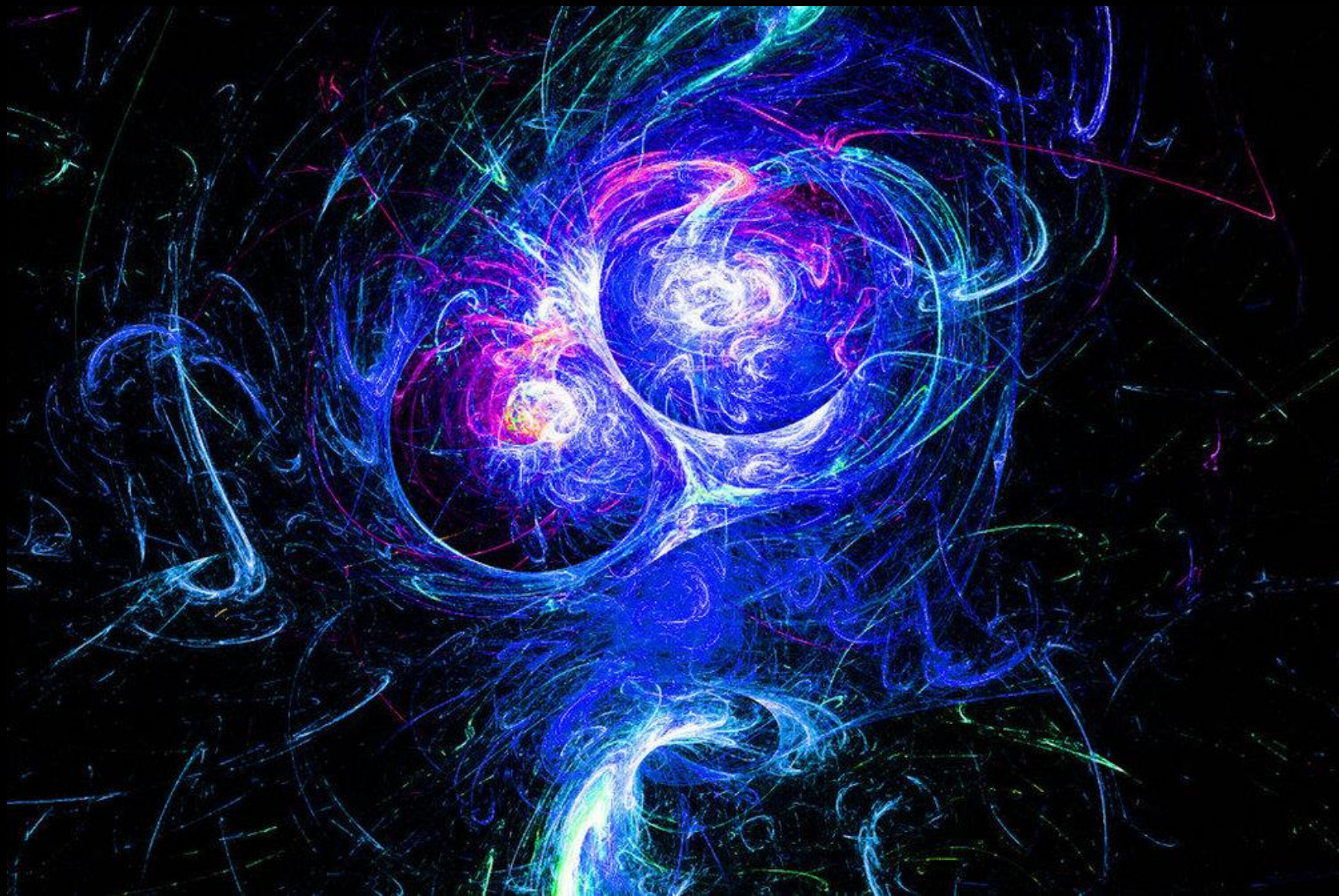
Conflict
conflictus (latin) – clash, collision

no life (world) without motion

cannot be fully controlled or directed

no life (world) without conflicts

planets collide

…. and so do humans sometimes …

Intrapersonal – incompatible needs, desires within an individual, hard decisions

Extrapersonal – incompatible interests between an individual and his/her environment

Interpersonal – incompatible needs, desires, goals between two or more individuals, or groups

conflicts in the „animal" world

satisfying basic needs   – survival of the individual
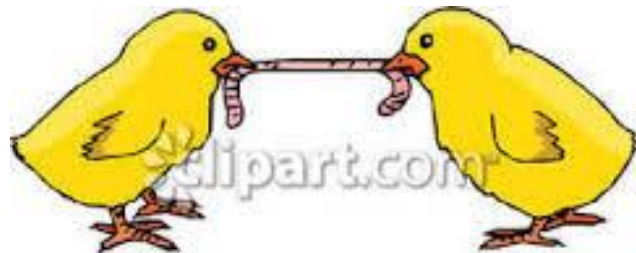
– survival of the species

higher human needs   – autonomy
– competence
– relatedness
– spirituality
– freedom, etc.

Expression of conflicts

Behavioral
manifest
latent

Verbal
direct (row)
indirect (gossip, ruining reputation)

Mental
suppressed/repressed
expressed

Ultimate goal of conflicts:

Implicit, instinctive goals:
    to win, to humiliate/destroy the other

Cultural, spiritual, social goals:
    to adapt to the new situation/demands/
    to preserve/improve relationship

functional/constructive
        removes obstacles
        clarifies interests
        reduces tensions
        preserves relationship
        cooperative (innovations, new ideas)
High chance of win-win outcome

dysfunctional/destructive
        aggravates disagreement
        makes hostility explicit
        enhances competition
        wants to defeat the other
        dtóetrimental to relationships
High chance of win-lose ir lose-lose outcome

Conflicts on prehuman level

Inevitable – survival of the fittest!

Aggression
    inborn
    long evolutionary history
    must have powerful inborn coping

chimpanzees reconcile
after fights
– kiss and embrace

- restore social relationships disturbed by aggression, and any animal that depends on cooperation needs such mechanisms of social repair

- reconciliation pays off
  - the winner gets what he wants (no reason to be angry)
  - both might need the relationship later
  - reduces tension (even for winners)
  - collecting enemies is dangerous
  - though: no sign of forgiveness; purely strategic

restore social
relationships
disturbed by aggression,

cooperation needs
social repair

Peaceful attitude can be learned; stumptail monkeys vs. Rhesus monkeys

Comparing primate and human peacemaking

Relationship is important

Tension reduction is good

No need for enemies

Win-lose model preferred

Reconciliation behavioral (no forgiveness)

No need for understanding reasons behind conflict

No need for change

Relationship is important

Tension reduction is good

No need for enemies

Invents win-win model

Reconciliation interiorized (forgiveness is a virtue)

Might want to understand reasons behind conflict

Might try changing the environment

Simple negotiation skills
    inborn – primary biological skill
    present in all cultures

Sophisticated negotiation skills
    learned – secondary biological skill
    might be missing from some cultures
    cultures might use different strategies
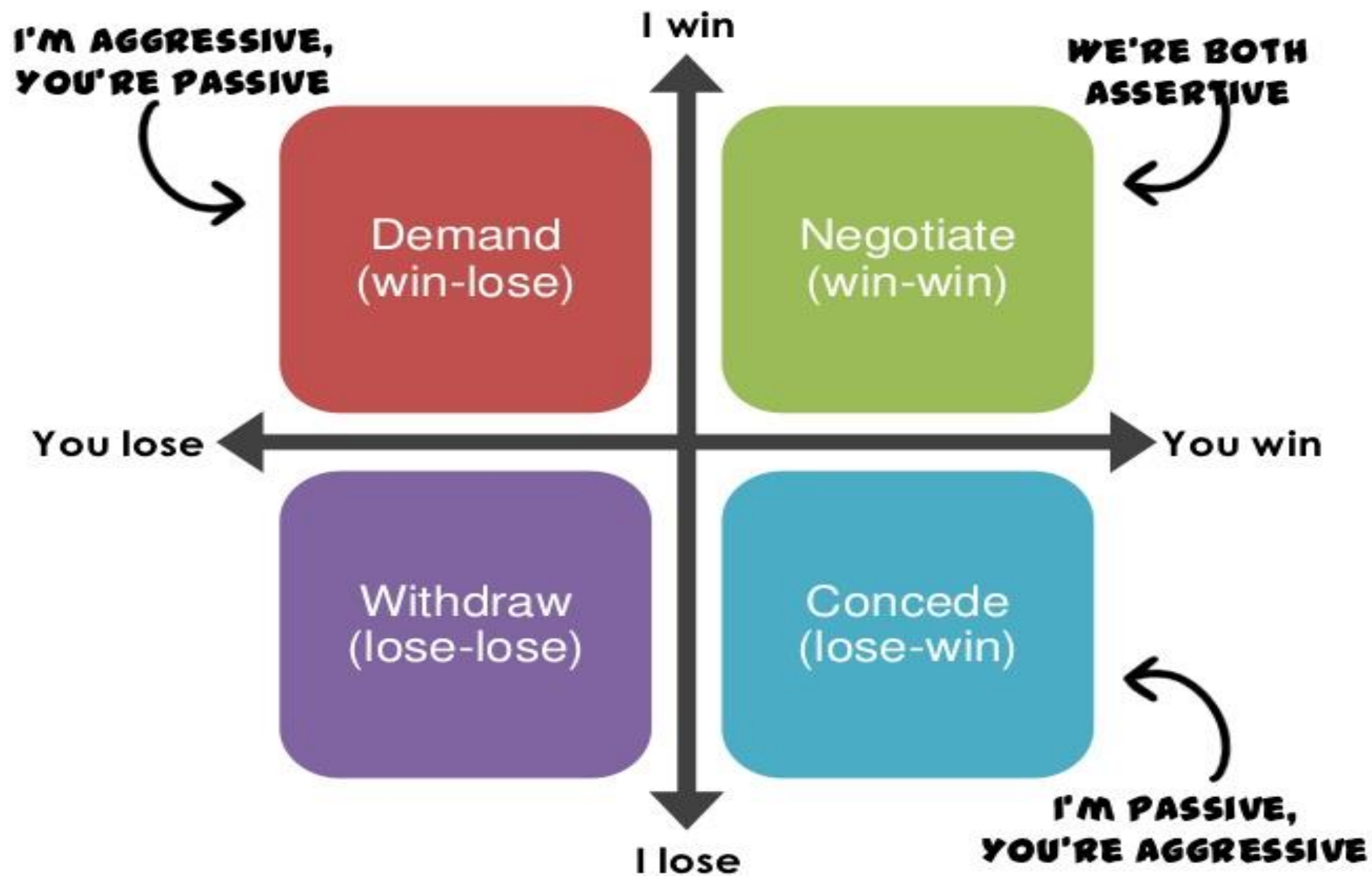
- People in conflict perceive a threat (to our well-being)

- Perceived threat is influenced by our evaluation

- Conflicts continue to churn, even if repressed or ignored

- Conflicts offer opportunity for change, improvement, or growth.

What are the good negotiation strategies
reducing tension
building cooperation
bringing mutual satisfaction?

Are there cultural differences in using different tactics?
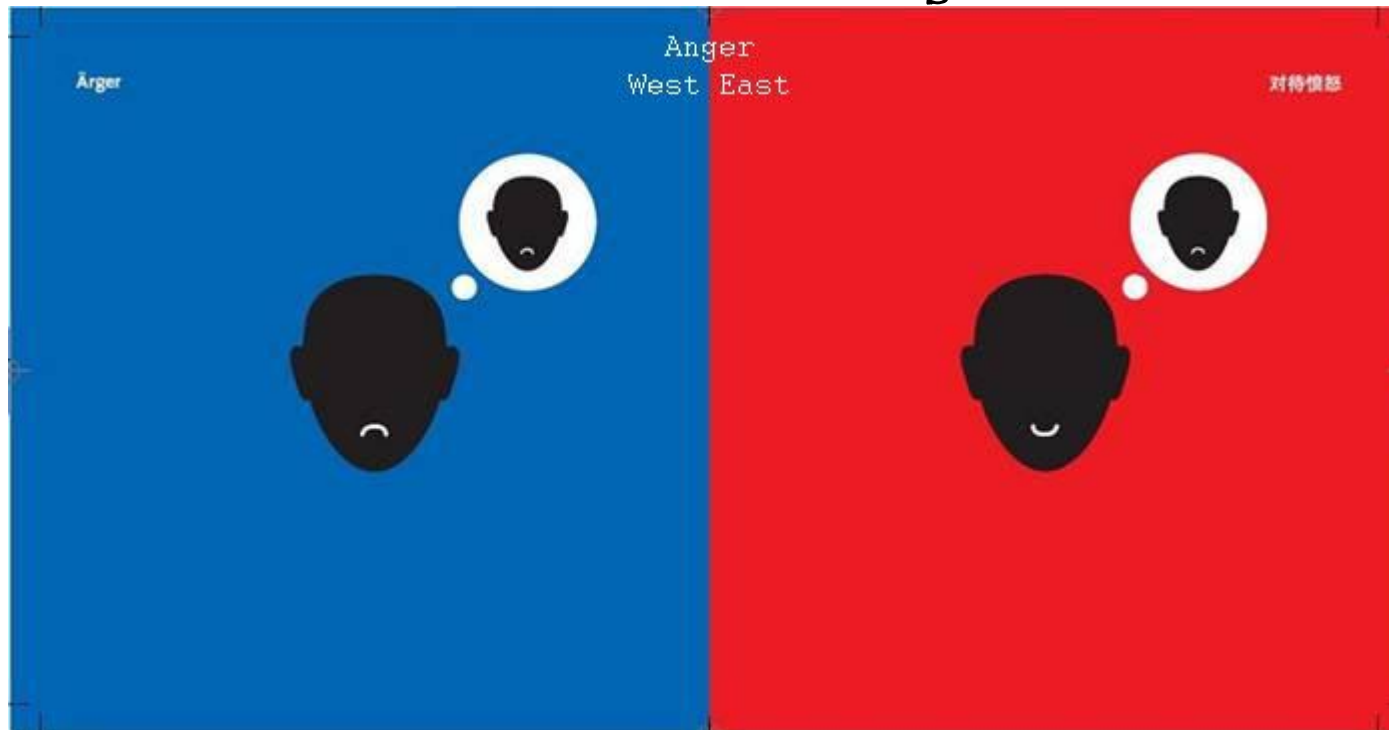
attributes influencing conflict management

Western

individualism

less holistic

less integrative and oblique

more direct and confrontational

judge by separate attributes

words taken literally

immediate considerations

Eastern

collectivism

more holistic

more integrative and oblique

more indirect and agreement-centered

judge by overall impression

words taken in context

long-term considerations

Conflict management style

Western	Eastern
more confrontational	less confrontational
more assertive	less assertive
competing	accomodating
collaborating	collaborating
compromising	compromising
avoiding	avoiding

Is it as simple as this?

Western

Collaborating:	win-win
Competing:	win-lose
Avoiding:	lose-lose
Compromising:	win.lose-win.lose

Eastern

Collaborating:	win-win
Accomodating:	lose-win
Avoiding:	lose-lose
Compromising:	win.lose-win.lose

In multicultural environment: eastern and western strategies are adjusted to one another

Multicultural environment

Conflict Management Styles	S. Korean		U.S.		Univariate F
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Compromising	7.81	1.91	7.08	2.15	6.13*
Collaborating	6.48	1.94	5.27	2.16	16.81**
Accommodating	6.39	2.34	5.47	2.31	7.51**
Competing	4.03	3.16	4.64	3.20	1.76
Avoiding	5.22	1.77	7.31	2.28	50.30**

the two kinds of strategies mutually influence one another:

"…conflict management styles of Chinese managers or executives have switched from the adoption of the 'compromising' or 'withdrawal' approach to the 'confrontation' approach…effective in handling conflict, especially the intergroup conflict and the outcome is usually constructive to an organisation" Cheung and Chuah (1999)

Some tentative conclusions

- local and holistic cognitive approaches are intertwined

- language is not East-West related

- good life and conflict management styles are coming closer to one another

- dichotomies must be overcome