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Do more, say less: Saying "I love you" in Chinese and American cultures

Abstract: Reticence to express emotions verbally has long been observed in Chinese culture, but quantitative comparisons with Western cultures are few. Explanations for emotional reticence have typically focused on the need in collectivist culture to promote group harmony, but this explanation is most applicable to negative emotions such as anger, not positive expressions such as *Wo ai ni* [*I love you*]. A survey on verbal usage of *Wo ai ni* was administered to university students in Beijing and Shanghai, and compared to uses of *I love you* by American students in the United States. Chinese respondents were not only overall more reticent than Americans in their love expressions, but differed from Americans in avoiding *I love you* expressions with family (especially parents). Interviews revealed that Chinese and American students, the two groups endorsed different reasons for saying *Wo ai ni*/*I love you*. The reasons Americans provided most often related to the inherent importance of saying *I love you*, while this was the least frequently mentioned reason by Chinese. Bicultural Chinese interviewees observed that one could perform nonverbal actions or even say English *I love you* as substitutions for saying *Wo ai ni*. Chinese survey respondents did not endorse these options, and instead consistently minimized both verbal and nonverbal love expressions. The pattern of responses is consistent with theoretical proposals about high vs. low context cultures, especially with regards to the usefulness of saying *I love you* for relationship management purposes, and for asserting (or avoiding) statements of one's individual autonomy.

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1 Introduction

In a study on emotional expressiveness in second-language acquisition, international students from China answered questions about their current use of English and Mandarin, as part of a language history interview (Caldwell-Harris, Tong, Lung, and Poo 2011: 331):

> *Interviewer:* "How much Mandarin do you speak currently?"
> *Student:* "About an hour a day, on the phone to my mother."
> *Interviewer:* "And the whole hour is in Mandarin?"
> *Student:* "Yes, except at the end, we say *love ya*."

This anecdote illustrates the phenomenon of avoiding verbal love declarations among persons of Chinese cultural heritage. It indicates how bicultural individuals may use English *I love you* as part of grafting an American goodbye routine onto a Mandarin conversation. The larger issues exemplified are why and how much cultures differ in their verbal expressiveness of love, and whether this is changing due to recent globalization.

Verbal declarations of love are frequent in Western cultures, especially North America (Wilkins and Gareis 2006: 52). Western media depict family members showering each other with hugs and *I love you* expressions. Clinical psychologists advocate open expression of emotion as a route to healthy social relations and improved well-being (e.g., Floyd, Hess, Miczo et al. 2005: 299). East Asian cultures pose a contrast to American expressivity. These cultures are widely regarded as reticent in both verbal and nonverbal emotional displays (Bond 1993: 1755; Hsu 1981: 12; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988; Kleinman 1980: 136; Matsumoto 1991: 230; Wilkins and Gareis 2006: 52). The principle of being indirect appears to govern much of everyday interaction in Chinese culture (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 230). Hsu (1981: 12) noted, "Chinese underplay all matters of the heart" in contrast to American high emotionality.

A common explanation of East Asian emotional reticence is the Confucian value of preserving group harmony. For example, Matsumoto et al. (2008: 927) suggested that, because collectivist cultures prioritize the needs of the group, negative emotions in particular need to be controlled. Bond (1993: 245) wrote that in Chinese culture, "expression of emotion is carefully regulated out of concern for its capacity to disrupt group harmony and status hierarchies." Displays of anger, criticism, and other negative emotions emphasize individual needs and reactions, and if allowed to be freely expressed would disrupt smooth group functioning (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 223).

Concern for group harmony appears insufficient to explain reticence to express positive emotions, such as love. In principle, expression of love and other warm feelings could facilitate relational closeness and interdependence, which are valued in collectivist cultures. But it has been frequently observed that persons in China avoid expressing love feelings. Based on his therapeutic work with urban Taiwanese, Kleinmen (1980) observed that, "talking about deeply felt emotions is revealing only under some circumstances and is generally seen as embarrassing or shameful" (1980: 136). In summarizing their observations from fieldwork in rural China, Potter and Potter (1990: 192) noted that expressions of love are "dangerous and remain infinitely private."

The current paper investigates how and why verbalization of love varies between the United States and China. Our starting point is accounts of cultural differences in emotional expressiveness from the fields of anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, and intercultural communication. Taken together, these explanations paint a detailed but complex picture of why cultures may differ in the frequency and comfortableness of verbal expressions of love. Synthesizing this diverse literature, we formulate four broad reasons why expression of affection and specifically usage of *I love you/Wo ai ni*[1] may differ between North America and China. These are then tested in a survey administered in China and the United States.

It is worth noting that *Wo ai ni* is an expression that does not have a long history in Chinese language (see also Potter 1988: 200). The reason is that Wo and ni, meaning *I* and *you*, were not commonly used until the New Culture Movement in the early 20th century. The form *Wo ai ni* probably originated as a translation of European forms as part of a larger pattern of foreign borrowings at this time.

2 Theoretical characterizations about expressing positive emotions in Chinese culture

2.1 Low-context cultures require greater verbalization of feelings

Greater use of *I love you* in individualistic vs. collectivist cultures has been discussed by those in the field of intercultural communication (e.g., Gudykunst et al. 1996: 511). These usage patterns are consistent with Edward Hall's (1976: 98) distinction between "low context" vs. "high context" cultures, which is itself a generalization of Bernstein's (1971) distinction between elaborated and restricted codes. In a low-context culture, language needs to be elaborated in order to be transparent because of the lack of shared contexts. In a high-context culture, communication takes place against the backdrop of a great deal of shared contextual information. This means that verbal discussion can be restricted to convey just the new information. Alternatively, talk can be purposely opaque to provide privacy (Lindholm 1988: 232).

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[1] To refer to *I love you* in any language we will use the phrase "*I love you* expressions." We will also use the phrases *Chinese I love you* and *English I love you* to refer to the specific phrases *Wo ai ni* and *I love you*.

Related ideas in the behavioral sciences are high residential mobility and high relationship mobility. Individualistic attitudes are generally enhanced for persons with high residential mobility (Oishi 2010). Persons with higher relationship mobility need to quickly share personal details (Schug, Yuki, and Maddux 2010). Greater turnover in friendships requires starting new friendships easily. Sharing of intimate details is a sign that a close friendship is desired. Intimate disclosures such as love declarations are less risky with high relationship mobility because if undesired events follow, other groups can be found for affiliation (see Schug et al. 2010 for more details). From this perspective, low-context and high relationship mobility promote open emotional expression, including expressions like *I love you*. In contrast, high-context cultures are traditional societies in which the majority of interactions are with family members and long-time associates. These individuals are likely to have low residential and relationship mobility. Many interactions are routine and thus conversation can proceed with both participants assuming rich contextual background, such as knowledge of prior interactions. A great deal of information can sometimes be conveyed with few words. A result is that intensely personal and intimate declarations such as *I love you* can seem out of place and overly forceful; this then inhibits their use further.

This approach has a great deal of face validity, given the decades of work connecting collectivism, low context cultures, and verbal reticence (e.g., Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988; although see Bond 2002: 76 for reasons to be cautious about generalizing group tendencies to individuals). But the high-context/low context construct is not likely to be the single cause of emotional expressiveness vs. reticence. For example, Germans are more reticent about *I love you* locutions, but Germany is considered more low-context than the United States (Gereis and Wilkins 2011: 317).

2.2 Emotional expression is not used for relationship management in Chinese culture

We draw on the perspective of Potter (1988: 190), whose insightful paper challenged the generally accepted view that emotional expression is minimized among Chinese. From her fieldwork in rural villages, Potter recounted many instances of powerful emotional displays, such as the open expression of anger at government officials, or weeping when recounting the death of a child. She argues that emotional expressions are not considered relevant to the outcome of an interpersonal interactions. Anger or happiness may be displayed if they are felt, but are not displayed for the purpose of influencing another's opinions or behaviors.

Potter counter-posed her many observations of emotional displays in a fieldwork setting to Kleinman's (1988: 141) observation of emotional reticence in his clinical interviews with Chinese patients. Potter (1988: 188) commented:

> Active willingness to pay attention to emotional response, like active attempts to elicit it, are attitudes that strike Chinese informants as peculiar. Polite informants do not focus on what is, to them, the bizarre quality of the question but continue the conversation by providing additional information about what is being discussed. This kind of cross-cultural misunderstanding is probably an underlying factor in Kleinman's comment, "I have often felt exasperated and quite helpless trying to get Chinese patients to talk about a specific dysphoric affect." (Kleinman 1980: 141, cited in Potter 1988: 141)

Potter argues that Chinese do not recruit emotions as a tool to manage relationships because in China, relationships are structural: part of the static, unchanging backdrop of one's social world. "Because the Chinese assume the existence of a continuous social order that requires no affirmation in inner emotional response, but only in behavior, there is no need for them to treat emotions as inherently important" (Potter 1988: 185).

This contrasts with the volitional status of relationships in Western culture. In the West, if a relationship isn't conferring benefits, it can be terminated. But ease of termination places a burden on individualists: One must repeatedly signal the ongoing importance of any given relationship.

2.3 Confucian saying, "Do more, say less"

The Confucian admonition of "do more and say less" reflects the attitude that words have low cost and cannot be trusted. Consider the remarks of Veronica Zhengdao Ye (2004: 140), a Chinese scholar who emigrated to Australia in the 1990s. Ye wrote, "We do not place so much emphasis on verbal expression of love and affection, because they can evaporate quickly. For a Chinese, love and affection are embodied in care and concern, in doing what we believe are good things for the other party" (Ye 2004: 140). Potter (1988: 203) discussed how villagers valued actions as demonstrations of love and commitment. In interviews about relationships which were apparently close and loving, villagers emphasized doing chores as a sign of care and commitment (Potter 1988: 203).

2.4 Saying "I love you" implies differentiation and autonomy

People choose emotional expressions to be consistent with their explicit and implicit motives (Woike 2008: 107). Perceiving oneself as differentiated from others allows agentic people to satisfy their needs to be autonomous, competitive, and dominating in the social world. Mesquita (2001: 68) reasoned along similar lines, but from a cross-cultural perspective, observing that emotions in collectivist cultures embody the connectedness between individuals and their social environment, while emotions in individualist cultures underline the disparity of self and others. The expression of affection, and especially *I love you*, and the choice to voice it in a particular situation, are often unilateral decisions that imply autonomy.

Narrowing our scope to the Chinese context, Confucian teachings require treating social authorities with respect and deference. This may play into habits of low verbal assertion, as described by Fukuyama and Greenfield (1983: 429). Consistent with this, Potter proposed, "As an experienced emotion, love has the intrinsic capacity to lend importance to relationships, whether they have structural significance or not. Since the patterns of preexistent structure have primary importance in Chinese social relations, love is the rival and the potential enemy of structure. Rather than affirming structure, love is understood to endanger it (Potter 1988: 199).

Sun (2008: 173) commented, "Love in a Chinese relationship is the extraneous variable, the element most threatening to the social order. An open expression of love shortens the power distance between parties concerned, making the appropriate maintenance of the relationship difficult" (Sun 2008: 173).

Power distance cannot be the only explanation for frequency and comfort in saying *I love you*. The United States is regarded as having higher power distance than Germany. This implies that Americans would express love verbally less often than Germans, when the reverse has been documented (Geris and Wilkins 2011: 317).

2.5 Summary and predictions

The different explanations reviewed above are mostly complimentary and together paint a compelling portrait of why Chinese are reticent about love expressions compared to Americans. These explanations are the backdrop for the following predictions:

(1) Theoretical views about high- and low-context culture make the prediction of general verbal reticence for expressing *Wo ai ni* among Chinese, in all rela-

tionship roles, relative to Americans. An additional question is whether reticence about expressing *Wo ai ni* extends to similar phrases in another language such as English. Namely, can English *I love you* fill this lexical gap?

(2) When members of a culture need to manage relationships because they are less predefined by social structure, *I love you* locutions will be frequent. This predicts greater overall use of *I love you* by Americans than by Chinese. For Chinese, love expressions will be less frequent in relationships that are less voluntary and governed by specific socially instituted expectations, such as the child-parent relationships, and to a lesser extent, sibling relationships.

(3) A prediction following from the Confucian principle "do more, say less" is that Chinese will prefer to demonstrate love by performing actions rather than verbal expression. The American emphasis on open verbal expression (as in explanation (1) above) predicts that Americans will prefer verbal expression rather than actions.

(4) The need to maintain hierarchy and avoid unilateral individuation in collectivist cultures leads to the prediction that Chinese will use *I love you* locutions less frequently to parents than will Americans. Within the Chinese respondents, it is predicted that love expressions will be particularly avoided with the older generations (parents and grandparents) because of their position as authorities.

In the next section, we review recent empirical work to identify what evidence already exists about these predictions.

3 Prior cross-cultural results from surveys and interviews on expressing love

Cross-cultural differences in usage of verbal expressions of love and affection have been documented but are not well understood. We review five important studies that are similar to ours in their use of surveys/interviews and their focus on (or inclusion of) *I love you* locutions.

Wilkins and Gareis (2006: 61) interviewed American and international students on U.S. campuses regarding why and when they expressed love in English or in their own language. They noted that *I love you* use was restricted to romantic declarations in some cultures, but wide usage was common within the United States. International students often preferred to use a foreign language (mainly English) for love expressions, whereas Americans rarely preferred to use a non-English substitute (Wilkins and Gareis 2006: 56). Those from collectivist cultures gave varied reasons for restrictions on verbalizing love (see examples, Wilkins and Geris 2006: 63). Some noted that *I love you* in their culture was reserved for serious, committed relationships. Another explanation was that family members understood that love was mutual, making a verbal declaration unnecessary. Respondents also mentioned nonverbal expressions are more meaningful indication of feelings. Some respondents only said that verbalizing love would violate cultural norms. This paper is noteworthy for being the first to focus on *I love you* across respondents from varied cultural backgrounds.

Kline, Horton, and Zhang (2008: 210) investigated how American and East Asian international students (attending college in the United States) understood communicating love between spouses and same-sex friends. Americans (50%) were more likely than East Asians (29%) to use oral or written direct expressions such as "You're ___," and "I love/like/miss you." Americans also used more direct expressions with friends (45%) than did East Asians (37.3%). Americans also used more physical contact to communicate love compared to the East Asians. These usage frequencies are suggestive of greater verbal and nonverbal expression of love feelings by Americans than by East Asians, although the differences were not significant in a chi-square analysis (Kline et al. 2008: 2010). Indeed, the authors note that substantial similarities were found in communicating love across respondents from different cultures (Kline et al. 2008: 212). It is worth keeping in mind that the East Asian respondents were bicultural, given their residence in the United States at the time of testing.

Seki, Matsumoto, and Imahori (2002) investigated how American and Japanese students expressed intimacy in different relationships. Surprisingly, "directly verbalizing how you feel about each other" was more valued by the Japanese than by the Americans toward mother, father, and same-sex best friend (Seki et al. 2002: 317). Seki et al. suggested that this "may be related to the changing characteristics of the Japanese youth culture, who in many ways do not conform to previous stereotypes of classical Japanese culture (e.g., see Matsumoto, Kudoh, and Takeuchi 1996)" (Seki et al. 2002: 317). This is a reminder of prior studies (e.g., Oyserman et al 2002: 41; Tokana and Osaka 1999: 311) in which Japanese individuals have been found to be more idiocentric than has been assumed based on collectivist attributes of Japanese culture (see Bond 2002: 74 for discussion of how Japan has been mislabeled as a collectivist society).

Gudykunst et al. (1996: 511) noted that theorists who discuss individualism-collectivism acknowledge that both value systems exist in all cultures. Within any given culture, individuals vary widely in their person-level degree of allocentrism or idiocentrism. These authors asked how person-level characteristics mediate the influence of cultural individualism-collectivism on communicative expression, drawing on ideas about low-context and high-context cultures. These authors found only weak cross-cultural differences. In contrast, individualism-collectivism had a strong impact on communication style (510).

Gareis and Wilkins (2011) pursued the question of cross-cultural differences in saying *I love you* by focusing on the U.S.-German comparison. This is an enlightening study because Germany, like the United States, is an individualist culture, and is considered to be even more "low context" that the United States. Thus, Germany should resemble the United States or make more use of direct love expressions. Instead, Germans favor restrained use of *Ich liebe dich* 'I love you.' The authors review Germans' distaste for the superficial use of English *I love you* in advertising campaigns, noting that German journalists argued that "love is an emotion too deep and transcending to be evoked for mundane objects or businesses, like McDonald's" (Gareis and Wilkins 2011: 308). In a cross-national comparison of American and German students (surveyed in their home country), the authors asked respondents to rate the frequency of using the *I love you* locution with people varying in relationship role. For each relationship, Germans gave frequencies that were one step lower than those endorsed by Americans (e.g., Americans on average reported that *I love you* would be said frequently to spouses; Germans endorsed "occasionally").

While the German *Ich liebe dich* is recognized as the translation of English *I love you*, Gareis and Wilkins (2011: 316) note that the meanings are not equivalent, as shown by their survey data. Compared to *Ich liebe dich*, *I love you* has a broader category width, since American respondents were willing to use *I love you* more frequently and in more diverse situations than Germans.

Is the American relatively frequent use of English *I love you* and the Chinese avoidance of *Wo ai ni* a simple outcome of these phrases having different meanings? In one sense, yes. But what needs to be explained is why one culture has an expression with a broad meaning and another with a narrow, more restricted meaning. An additional question is whether Chinese speakers who have acquired some Western values will find that they need a phrase that does the relationship-management work of English *I love you*. Will *Wo ai ni* be recruited for this, or will such bicultural individuals borrow English phrases? Evidence for the latter is the insertion of "love ya" into the end of a phone conversation by the mother and daughter we quoted in the opening to this paper.

3.1 Summary and preview

Our review of the literature on *I love you* locutions indicates that the predictions generated in the prior section either have not yet been empirically tested or have received equivocal support. The prediction of greater emotional reticence among Chinese (or East Asians) received either no support or equivocal support in the Gudykunst et al. (1996) and Seki et al. (2009) studies. The Wilkins and Geris

(2006) and Kline et al (2009) studies were consistent with this prediction, although no actual binational comparison between China and America has yet been conducted.

Given these gaps in the research literature, we planned a survey to test the predictions described above. Preparatory to designing the survey, we conducted interviews to identify any additional topics to include in the survey, including reasons Chinese persons give for avoiding *Wo ai ni*.

3.1.1 Interviews regarding the reasons for reticence about saying *Wo ai ni*

Informal interviews were conducted by the first author in English in Beijing and Taipei (five interviewees) and with international students or scholars from a Chinese-speaking country who were interviewed at Boston University (10 interviewees). Interviewees learned of the project via their psychology class, from working as a research assistant, and via Internet postings. U.S. interviewees were fluent in both English and Mandarin and identified as bicultural, judging themselves to be familiar with both American and Chinese cultures. Beijing students had not traveled outside of China, and said their familiarity with American culture was obtained via books, Internet, and movies/TV.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, with the respondents explaining their experience and provided examples. Interviews opened with a general statement such as, "I'm interested in understanding cross-cultural differences in expressing feelings with language. Do you have any thoughts on saying the Mandarin phrase *Wo ai ni* compared to the English phrase *I love you*?" To avoid being intrusive, the interviewer did not ask specific questions about usage, such as usage with different addresses, as the main goal was to identify what topics would be spontaneously addressed.

3.2 Reluctance to say *Wo ai ni* by Chinese respondents

Several interviewees (3/15 or 20%) confessed they had never told anyone *Wo ai ni*. Another common statement was that they had never heard their parents say the phrase (4/15 or 26%). A 25 year-old graduate management student from Taiwan, interviewed in Boston, reported, "My parents told me I would say *I love you* to only one person in my life."

Another common response (6/15 or 40%) was that in Chinese culture, one doesn't need to say *Wo ai ni* because close family members will already know what one feels. This explanation supports our analysis based on Hall's (1976: 99) idea that in high-context cultures people have a great deal of knowledge about other's daily activities, feelings and attitudes. However, this was not mentioned by everyone, and those who brought it up also provided other reasons for reluctance to use this phrase. In particular, it was explained that *Wo ai ni* is too strong. Approximately half of the interviewees (8/15 or 53%) proposed that infrequent use is the reason why *Wo ai ni* has great emotional force, and suggested that frequent use of *I love you* in English and other languages has reduced the emotional impact of these phrases.

Some interviewees (3/15 or 20%) made reference to widespread cultural emphasis on minimizing unnecessary verbal expression. One respondent mentioned the Confucian admonition, "Do more, say less," and another cited the ancient proverb, "If your products are good you don't need to advertise." One interviewee, DW, said that, "It is wrong to intrude your emotions on people who are not close," and "English is an open culture, easy to express one's feelings."

HL, 38-year-old male visiting scholar from China, who was teaching Chinese literature in Boston, explained that, "Less is more. If you add in extra words, it's a sign of emotional distance. Saying 'my good friend' actually means 'a casual friend' or someone who is not so close, while just saying 'my friend' implies a closer friend."

HL went on to explain that in the Nineteenth Century, a genre of folk tales was popular, warning young girls of flirtatious men, cads who lacked noble intentions, but who offered seductive verbal declarations of their love. The moral intent of the folktales was to warn readers that these men were not to be trusted, and that the good Chinese girl should be wary of facile and free emotional expression.

3.3 Nonverbal substitutions

As noted above, interviewees (6/16 or 40%) said that verbal expression isn't necessary because people who know each other well can infer each other's feelings based on long mutual knowledge and immediate shared experience. Several respondents (7/15 or 46%) said affection could be demonstrated by behaving particularly nicely, or planning an activity that is valued by the other person (such as cooking a meal, doing a favor or errand).

All of the interviewees in China and Taiwan (5/5) mentioned that giving a gift can be a substitute for saying *Wo ai ni*. For example, DW commented, "Sending gifts is a major way of expressing feelings." Fewer of the Chinese interviewed in the United States mentioned this point (3/10 or 30%).

3.4 Inserting English *I love you* into Mandarin conversation

All interviewees expressed familiarity with the practice of using English *I love you* as a substitute for *Wo ai ni* because the latter was "too strong."

XZ reported the habit of saying *love ya* at the end of conversations with parents. She reported over-hearing an example in a cafe in which a lengthy phone call conducted in an unknown Chinese dialect ended with caller saying *Baba, miss you, love you*. Baba is the word for "father" in several Chinese languages.

3.5 Reasons for using *I love you* as a substitute for *Wo ai ni* while speaking Chinese

All interviewees gave a variant on the following ideas: Using English *I love you* would allow the speaker to avoid the too-strong *Wo ai ni*. Using a foreign language would help create emotional distance between the speaker and the meaning of the phrase.

SM, a 24-year-old Chinese female masters' student in sociology interviewed in Beijing, said the main reason was "shyness. English *love ya* is affectionate, the Chinese phrase is too strong."

Another Chinese female graduate student interviewed in Beijing, DH, age 26, claimed that saying *I love you* in English isn't just inserting the translation equivalent for *Wo ai ni*, but is making reference to Western-style romance. She said, "Saying *Wo ai ni* is the marker of seriousness."

DH later explained, "But there has been generational change. Young people will say *Wo ai ni* to their romantic partners, but the older generation will not."

Several interviewees in China noted that Chinese pop singers who are "American-born Chinese" may use English phrases like *I love you* in Chinese-language songs because these phrases are well-known, and their use identifies the singers as knowledgeable about the West.

3.6 Discussion of interviews

Chinese speakers interviewed in Boston and Beijing reported reticence in using *Wo ai ni*, especially to parents and siblings. Interviewees said one could perform a nonverbal activity (buy a gift or plan a favored activity) as a substitute for saying *Wo ai ni*. These are consistent with predictions in (1)–(4) listed above. Interviewees readily voiced their understanding that frequent or easy love verbalization is inconsistent with cultural norms, sometimes citing the Confucian aphorism "Do more, say less." Some interviewees claimed they avoid *Wo ai ni* because it is "too strong," similar to a comment reported by Wilkins and Geris (2006: 63). However, the "too strong" claim is a restatement of the view that unencumbered expression of *Wo ai ni* violates Chinese cultural values, not an explanation for verbal reticence.

Interviewees also said one doesn't need to use *Wo ai ni* with family members because they already know one's feelings. This is consistent with our prior discussion of verbal reticence in high-context cultures. If one sees the same family members every day for decades, a direct display of emotions might discredit the existing history of intimacy. Put differently, if you need to verbalize emotions such as love, then you probably aren't a family member or close friend. However, anthropologists consider it an over-simplification to infer that those living in close quarters invariably know each other's emotional state (Potter 1988: 210). Restricting emotional expression may serve the purpose of allowing people their psychological privacy; it provides a protective ambiguity (Lindholm 1988: 232).

We conducted the interviews as an initial exploration of the widespread view, common in both everyday conversation and in scholarly writings, that cultural display rules differ for *Wo ai ni* and *I love you*. This was confirmed. We also sought ideas for questions for the survey. Interviewees said that instead of saying *Wo ai ni* an action could be done. We thus included in the survey questions about whether the respondent would do an action instead of saying *Wo ai ni*. Affection could be demonstrated by behaving particularly nicely, or planning an activity that is valued by the other person (such as cooking a meal, doing a favor or errand). We also conducted the interviews to gain ideas about what reasons Chinese give for being reticent about saying *Wo ai ni*. These were used as the basis for questions about reasons for reticence, described below.

The number of interviewees may be too small for their comments to stand as evidence about cultural practices. Nevertheless, the interviews have face validity given their similarity to other interviews and autobiographical reports (e.g., Caldwell-Harris et al. 2009; Dewaele 2009; Wilkins and Gareis 2006; Ye 2004: 140). However, the interviewees had fair to excellent English and those in the United States identified as bicultural. In addition, respondents were susceptible to the demand characteristics of our questions, since we explicitly asked them to compare how it feels to say *I love you* vs. *Wo ai ni*. We then conducted a structured survey among Chinese and American students, trusting the survey may remedy these problems.

4 Survey method

4.1 Participants and procedure

137 participants completed the questionnaire. Chinese respondents were 36 students from Beijing Normal University (mean age 23, range 18–34, 68% female), and 30 students from several different colleges in Shanghai (mean age 27, range 20–41, 53% female). American participants were 71 students from a Northeastern University in the United States (mean age 19.5, range 18–24, 73% female). The Americans were mostly monolingual English speakers and thus represented a more culturally homogenous group than would have been obtained by including immigrants and heritage language learners. Participants were recruited via a message board and participated for either cash payment or course credit.

4.2 Survey

The questionnaire was written in Mandarin in consultation with native Mandarin speakers, Han Yanli and Dai Yujing, English majors at Beijing Normal University, who also translated the Mandarin questionnaire into English. Author J.Y., a graduate student and fluent in both Mandarin and English, reviewed both versions for accuracy of translation.

In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they said *Wo ai ni* or *I love you* to people in seven relationship roles, listed in order of closeness of relation. These were family members (parents, grandparents, siblings) followed by friends (romantic partners and close friends, casual friends); with strangers listed as the last relationship role. The six-point scale was: 0 = never; 1 = a couple times; 2 = several times; 3 = quite a few times; 4 = often; 5 = frequently.

In the second part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they felt comfortable saying *Wo ai ni* or *I love you* to people in the different relationship roles on a 5-point scale (1 indicates very uncomfortable, 5 indicates very comfortable).

Participants were then asked whether they substituted *Wo ai ni* or *I love you* with a phrase in a different language or a different phrase in their language, addressing the seven different addressees. For all types of substitutions participants were able to check zero, one, or more relationship roles. This section generated seven responses of 0 (did not) or 1 (did) per participant for each of the two questions. From this we calculated the sum of all uses of verbal substitutes with family (parents, grandparents, and siblings) or with romantic partners and friends, resulting in two scores for each participant.

The interviews included respondents providing explanations for why *Wo ai ni* was avoided, including comments that *Wo ai ni* is too intense or too formal, that they don't feel comfortable saying it, or that they prefer to express their feelings by an activity. We drew on these responses to create a series of questions for the survey about why expressions of love may be avoided. We also included questions about why one may choose to use an *I love you* expression. These were constructed based on our own knowledge of American cultural norms, combined with suggestions provided during discussion with American and international students in a cross-cultural psychology class. An example is that in American culture, Americans are encouraged to express love feelings even if they know that their loved one already understands their feelings. This differs from the response given in the interviews, that saying *Wo ai ni* isn't necessary because family members already know that they are loved.

One drawback of asking people to evaluate reasons for saying *I love you* is that reasons that resonate in one culture may seem foreign or inexplicable to another culture. We wanted to give respondents from both America and China the same questions, without asking anyone to respond to nonsensical questions. Our method was to provide a list of reasons, followed by checkboxes for relationship roles, and to tell respondents to check all that apply. Our method appeared to be successful since respondents typically only checked some of the boxes. Exact phrasings of questions appear in Tables 1 and 2.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they substituted the verbal *Wo ai ni* or *I love you* with any of the following eight non-verbal substitutions: hug, spend time, talk, be extra nice, give a gift, do a chore, prepare favorite food, and invite for a favorite activity. These options were those mentioned by our interviewees or were used by Kline et al. (2008: 208–210). We calculated the sum of non-verbal substitutions with family (grandparents, parents, or siblings) or nonfamily (romantic partners, close friends, and casual friends) for each substitution type. Number of substitutions could then vary from 0 to 24 (three relationship roles x eight activities), although the highest number from anyone respondent was 13.

Table 1: Percentage of endorsement of reasons for saying *I love you*/*Wo ai ni*

In the cases when you told X "*I love you*" in the appropriate situation, what was your reason? (If you have never used the phrase "*I love you*" for a particular person, just leave that column blank.) Check all that apply.		**Percentage of respondents**		**Statistical comparison between groups**		
		Chinese	**American**	**Chi-square**	**p value**	
X probably didn't know how I felt and I wanted to convey it.	Parents	12.1	29.7	5.42	0.02	*
	Grandparents	12.1	20.3	1.15		
	Sibling	6.1	27.0	9.37	0.001	***
	Romantic	13.6	33.8	6.64	0.01	**
	Close friend	15.2	35.1	6.28	0.01	**
	Friend	12.1	32.4	7.05	0.01	**
X may have known have I felt, but I wanted to make sure.	Parents	16.7	51.4	16.95	0.001	***
	Grandparents	12.1	37.8	10.77	0.001	***
	Sibling	12.1	39.2	11.79	0.001	***
	Romantic	16.7	47.3	13.48	0.001	***
	Close friend	18.2	62.2	26.03	0.001	***
	Friend	7.6	36.5	14.94	0.001	***
X probably already knew how I felt, but it is still important to say "*I love you.*"	Parents	27.3	79.7	36.7	0.001	***
	Grandparents	13.6	52.7	21.93	0.001	***
	Sibling	19.7	56.8	18.56	0.001	***
	Romantic	24.2	51.4	9.71	0.001	***
	Close friend	16.7	63.5	29.65	0.001	***
	Friend	6.1	24.3	7.46	0.01	**
Even though X knew how I felt, I knew that saying "*I love you*" would make him/her feel good.	Parents	25.8	66.2	21.32	0.001	***
	Grandparents	15.2	39.2	8.87	0.001	***
	Sibling	15.2	47.3	15.09	0.001	***
	Romantic	36.4	51.4	2.6		
	Close friend	24.2	60.8	17.52	0.001	***
	Friend	12.1	25.7	3.29		
Even though X knew how I felt, saying it shows X I care about his/her/their feelings.	Parents	39.4	64.9	8.09	0.001	***
	Grandparents	25.8	41.9	3.35		
	Sibling	24.2	41.9	4.11		
	Romantic	59.1	55.4	0.07		
	Close friend	30.3	60.8	11.86	0.001	***
	Friend	10.6	28.4	5.82	0.02	*

Note: We set $p < 0.02$ as the criterion for statistical significance given that multiple statistical comparisons were conducted; this represents a compromise between minimizing type I and type II statistical errors. * $p < 0.02$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: Percentage of endorsement of reasons for not saying *I love you*/*Wo ai ni*

In some cases, you don't say "*I love you*," why not? Check all that apply.		**Percentage of respondents**		**Statistical comparison between groups**		
		Chinese	**American**	**Chi-square**	**p value**	
Not necessary because X will probably already understand that I love them.	Parents	51.5	58.1	0.38		
	Grandparents	28.8	25.7	0.05		
	Sibling	28.8	48.6	4.97		
	Romantic	33.3	24.3	0.98		
	Close friend	21.2	41.9	5.92	0.01	*
	Friend	6.1	18.9	4.06		
Don't feel comfortable saying "*I love you*" verbally.	Parents	48.5	20.3	11.22	0.001	***
	Grandparents	37.9	20.3	4.47		
	Sibling	28.8	31.1	0.01		
	Romantic	4.5	5.4	0		
	Close friend	22.7	24.3	0		
	Friend	25.8	28.4	0.02		
Meaning of "*I love you*" is to too intense to use comfortably with X.	Parents	16.7	5.4	3.52		
	Grandparents	13.6	9.5	0.26		
	Sibling	18.2	13.5	0.28		
	Romantic	4.5	9.5	0.64		
	Close friend	13.6	24.3	1.92		
	Friend	19.7	33.8	2.82		
Meaning of "*I love you*" is too formal to use comfortably with X	Parents	40.9	6.8	21.18	0.001	***
	Grandparents	34.8	4.1	19.89	0.001	***
	Sibling	36.4	14.9	7.49	0.01	**
	Romantic	6.1	4.1	0.02		
	Close friend	21.2	18.9	0.02		
	Friend	21.2	18.9	0.02		
I feel more comfortable expressing my feelings about love nonverbally.	Parents	27.3	25.7	0		
	Grandparents	22.7	20.3	0.02		
	Sibling	27.3	39.2	1.72		
	Romantic	42.4	14.9	11.85	0.001	***
	Close friend	28.8	31.1	0.01		
	Friend	7.6	13.5	0.74		
Not necessary because I don't frequently feel I need to say this to X.	Parents	16.7	20.3	0.11		
	Grandparents	13.6	21.6	1.02		
	Sibling	16.7	21.6	0.28		
	Romantic	9.1	4.1	0.75		
	Close friend	18.2	20.3	0.01		
	Friend	21.2	41.9	5.92	0.01	**

5 Results

The results are ordered as follows:

- Chinese and Americans' usage and comfortableness of saying *Wo ai ni/I love you* to different addressees in their native language
- Chinese and Americans' verbal and non-verbal substitutes to saying *Wo ai ni/I love you*
- Chinese and Americans' reasons for using *Wo ai ni/I love you* in an appropriate situation, or not using this phrase
- Within the Chinese sample, respondents' usage of English *I love you*, and the effect of English language experience on this behavior

5.1 Frequency and comfortableness of *I love you* expressions to different addressees

5.1.1 Frequency of saying *I love you* to different addressees

Repeated measures analysis was conducted to explore the effect of culture (Chinese vs. American, between subjects) on the frequency of saying *I love you* in the respondent's native language to the seven addressees. A significant interaction between cultural group and addressee was found, $F(6,516) = 11.4$, $p < .001$, indicating that Chinese and American respondents used *Wo ai ni* and *I love you* differently with different addressees. Since our main focus is on the comparison between family members and other relationships, we collapsed the responses for parents, grandparents and siblings into one variable named "family" and the re-

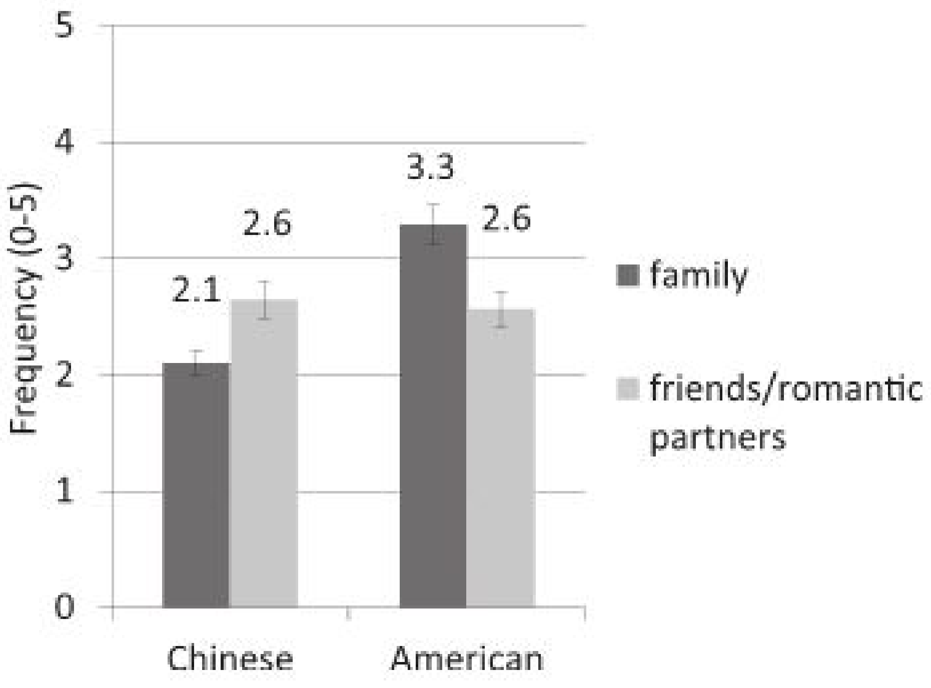

Fig. 1: Frequency of saying *I love you* in native language to friends/romantic partners and to family in American and Chinese cultures (scale 0–5)

sponses for romantic partners, close friends and casual friends into another variable named "friends." This created a 2 (culture: American vs. Chinese, between subjects) by 2 (addressee: family vs. friends, within subject) design. Figure 1 presents a comparison between American and Chinese culture members in their usage of *I love you* in native language with family members vs. romantic partner/friends. A significant interaction of culture and addressee, F(1,130) = 29.5, $p < .001$, was found. Planned contrasts revealed that while American respondents said *I love you* to family members more frequently (M = 3.3) than to friends (M = 2.6; F(1,68) = 13.9, $p < .001$), Chinese respondents showed an inverse tendency, saying *Wo ai ni* to family members less frequently (M = 2.1) than to romantic partners/friends (M = 2.6, F(1,62) = 20.0, $p < .001$).

5.1.2 Comfortableness of saying *I love you* to different addressees

Repeated measures analysis was conducted with the between-subject factor of culture (American vs. Chinese) within-subject factor of addressee (family vs. friends), and dependent variable comfortableness of saying *I love you* in one's native language. An interaction of those factors was obtained, F(1,118) = 7.5, $p < .007$) and is depicted in Figure 2. American respondents were more comfortable saying *I love you* to family members (M = 3.4) than to romantic partners/friends (2.9; F(1,60) = 5.1, $p < .028$), while Chinese respondents showed no significant difference in comfortableness saying *Wo ai ni* to family members (M = 2.3) and to romantic partners/friends (M = 2.6; F(1,58) = 2.5, n.s.). Further, we found a main effect for culture, indicating that the American sample felt generally more comfortable saying *I love you* (M = 3.14) than did the Chinese saying *Wo ai ni* (M = 2.45) (F(1,118) = 17.6, $p < .001$).

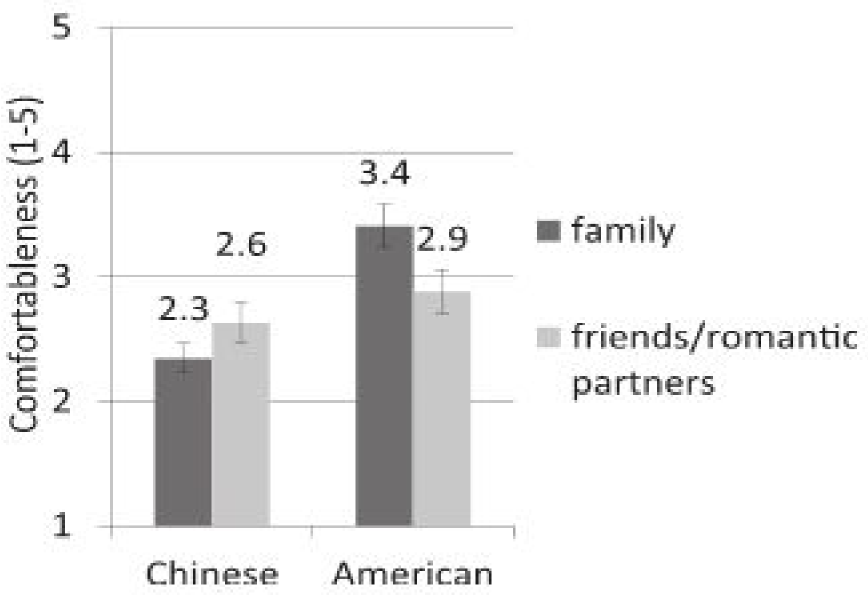

Fig. 2: Comfort of saying *I love you* in native language to friends/romantic partners and to family in American and Chinese cultures (scale 1–5)

5.2 Verbal and non-verbal substitutions

Our questionnaire inquired about 3 verbal ways of substituting *"I love you."* One of these applies only to Chinese speakers:

- Chinese speakers could indicate that they substitute with English *I love you*, consistent with anecdotal reports that this is an option available for many urban, educated Chinese speakers

Respondents in both the Chinese and American sample were asked if they

- Used an expression in a different language from English or Mandarin
- Made a substitution in their native language (Mandarin or English), using other phrases.

The questionnaire items pertaining to usage of verbal substitutions for *Wo ai ni* or *I love you* required respondents to mark the addressees with whom they would make this substitution. We tallied up the number of addressees each participant mentioned as substituting *Wo ai ni* or *I love you* with any of the three above mentioned verbal substitutions. All averages were less than 1 and did not vary between cultural groups. Note that if a respondent checked off parents, romantic partners, and siblings as recipient for using other phrases, then their score would be a 3. For the Chinese sample, the average value on this question was 0.2, meaning less than 20% of respondents checked off even 1 of the relationship roles for this question. The analogous value for Americans was 0.4. For the question of using a love expression in a different language, averages for the Chinese sample were 0.6 (SD 1.3), and for the Americans 0.2 (SD 0.7). The average value for Chinese respondents on using English I love you instead of *Wo ai ni* was 0.9 (SD 1.1). We conclude that both American and Chinese participants do not frequently substitute a phrase in a different language for their native language *I love you*, nor do they frequently substitute a phrase in their native language.

Given the low preference for verbal substitutions, it is plausible that people prefer non-verbal methods of conveying love feelings. The questionnaire asked participants to check off which nonverbal activities they would use with different addressees instead of saying *I love you*. Those included hugging, spending time together, talking, being extra nice, giving gifts, doing chores, preparing food, and sharing an activity. For each of these, participants checked off the response option corresponding to each addressee with whom they would substitute *I love you* with this activity.

The total checks for each activity were tallied for family members (parents, grandparents, and siblings) and for romantic partners/friends (close, casual, and romantic). The eight activities loaded on a single factor, suggesting a single con-

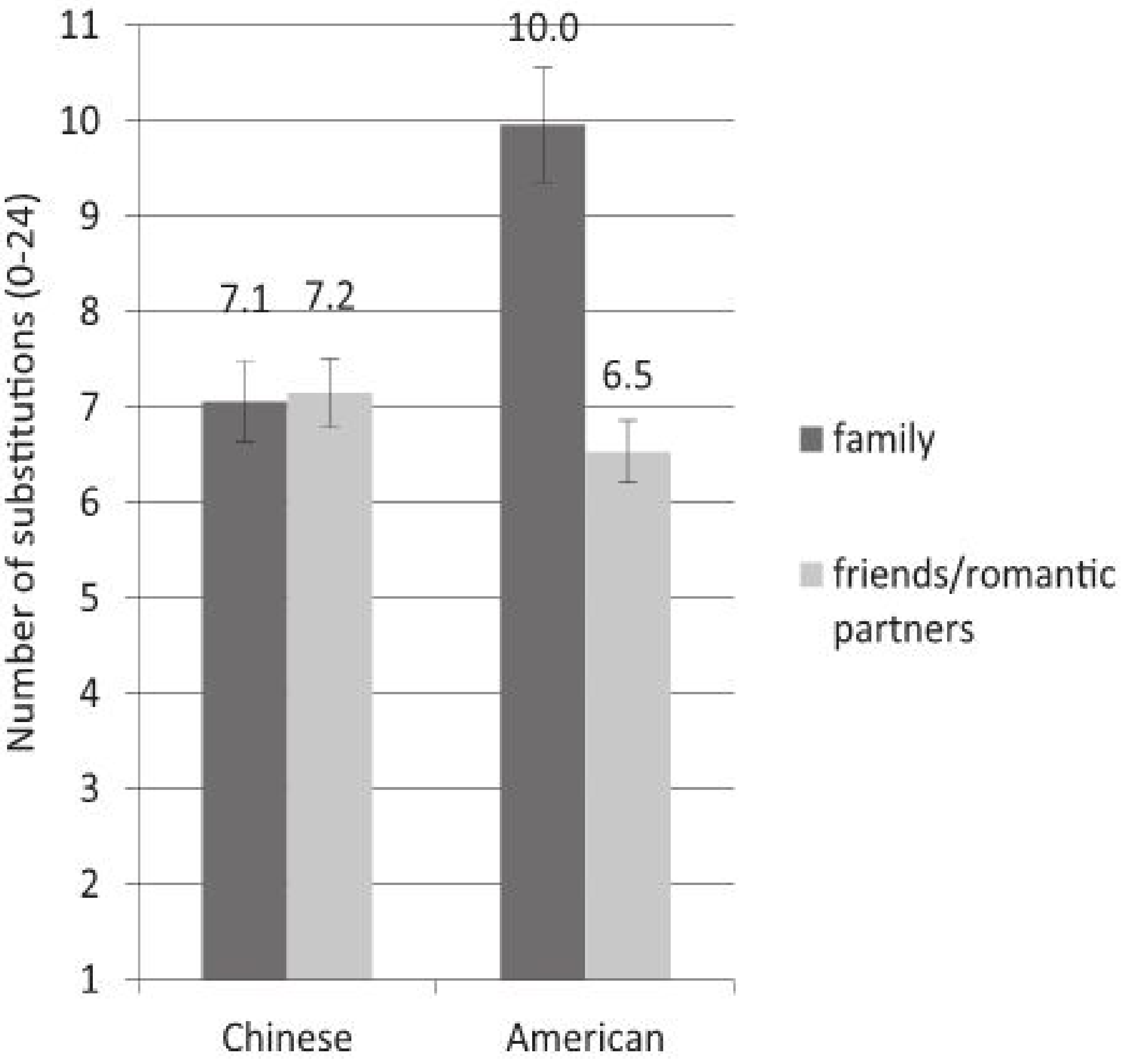

Fig. 3: Frequency of non-verbal substitutions to saying *I love you* in native language to friends/romantic partners and to family in American and Chinese cultures (scale 1–24)

struct representing nonverbal behavior. Reliability of the items was α = 0.83. Based on this analysis we tallied up the activities into one index of nonverbal substitution, resulting in a value that could range from 0 (no nonverbal activities checked) to 24 (or 8 × 3, for all activities checked for the three categories of relationship partners). Thus, for each participant two scores were obtained, representing the participant's frequency of using a nonverbal substitution for *Wo ai ni/I love you* with family or with romantic partners/friends.

Repeated measures with addressee (family vs. friends) as the within subject factor and culture (American or Chinese) as the between subject factor revealed a significant interaction, F(1,135) = 22.3, $p < 0.001$. This suggests a different pattern of nonverbal substitution for the two cultures, as shown in Figure 3. Chinese participants employed nonverbal substitutions for *I love you* rarely with either romantic partners/friends or family members. American participants used nonverbal substitutions more frequently with family than with friends, M = 10, 6.5, F(1,70) = 32.2, $p < 0.001$.

Repeated measures analysis comparing verbal and non-verbal expression of love by Chinese and American participants (averaging over addressees) revealed a main effect (F(1,132) = 6.8, $p < 0.01$), indicating that American participants used both verbal and nonverbal expressions of love significantly more frequently than Chinese participants. There was no significant difference in extent of usage of verbal vs. nonverbal communication for American participants. In contrast, Chinese participants used more non-verbal communication ($M = 15$) than verbal communication, $M = 4$, $F(1,132) = 5.1$, $p < 0.02$.

For each question (listed on rows in Tables 1 and 2), the chi-square statistic was calculated for the proportion of Americans vs. Chinese who checked a box (i.e., a relationship role). The table lists the chi-square value for the between-culture comparison of proportions for each question (see Kline et al. 2008, who presented a similar method of comparing group differences).

5.3 Reasons for saying *I love you* in an appropriate situation

Americans endorsed all five reasons at higher rates than Chinese (on average, 56% of Americans checked boxes in this section compared to 20% of Chinese). Americans had particularly high rates of endorsement of the explanation that referenced the cultural norm that what is important for Americans in verbal displays of emotion. This is the option "X probably already knew how I felt, but it is still important to say '*I love you.*'" Indeed, high rates were given for all explanations except the first. The first explanation is the simple communicative reason that "X probably didn't know how I felt, and I wanted to convey it."

Compared to Americans, Chinese had especially low rates for the two questions that involved explanations based on desire to communicate one's feelings (see questions 1 and 2, "I wanted to convey it" and "I wanted to make sure X knew it"). The explanation that Chinese endorsed most often was, "Even though X knew how I felt, saying it shows X I care about his/her/their feelings." Of the five reasons for saying *Wo ai ni/I love you*, this reason was the most concerned with the other person, and the least about self-expression. Our literature review suggested that expression of *Wo ai ni* violates display rules, and thus its expression could make people uncomfortable. Consistent with this, Chinese respondents did not frequently endorse the reason "make him/her feel good."

Group differences were strongest (as measured by magnitude of chi-square) for the reason that strongly referenced cultural norms (question 3). Americans agreed that saying *I love you* is important, while Chinese rarely endorsed this explanation.

Group differences for relationship roles were strongest for reasons for saying *I love you* to family members, and weakest for romantic partners and friends. Indeed, the explanation that saying *I love you* would make a relationship partner feel good was endorsed similarly by Americans and Chinese. For the explanation "shows that I care about his/her/their feelings," there were no group difference in endorsement rate for grandparents, siblings, and romantic partners.

5.4 Reasons for avoiding *Wo ai ni/I love you*

Among Chinese, reasons for avoiding *Wo ai ni* were endorsed at higher rates than were the reason for saying *Wo ai ni*. This is consistent with the idea that Chinese avoid *Wo ai ni*.

Americans endorsed fewer explanations for this set of questions compared to reasons for saying *I love you*, but they still endorsed a good amount. Americans' propensity to check off many boxes means that they often endorsed these reasons at a similar rate to Chinese. When group differences were present, they are telling and affirm points that have been discussed repeatedly in this paper: Young adults of Chinese cultural heritage are not comfortable using *Wo ai ni* with parents, find *Wo ai ni* too formal, and when they do want to express their love feelings with a romantic partner, prefer to do so nonverbally.

5.5 Additional analyses within the Chinese respondents

5.5.1 Parents vs. children

A strong correlation was obtained between the frequency of saying *Wo ai ni* by Chinese respondents and the frequency with which they reported their parents employed the phrase $r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$. Ratings of comfortableness of saying *Wo ai ni* with frequency of hearing these phrases from parents were also correlated, $r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$. These results are consistent with the view that parental modeling of emotional expression usage influences children's usage and comfort.

5.5.2 English experience and frequency of using English *I love you*

Although English *I love you* was not widely used by our respondents, slightly more than half of our sample said that they had used English *I love you* at least once. Multiple regression using the various measures of English cultural and language exposure revealed that the only variables to predict English *I love you* usage were years of English study, as measured by the years of study before and during university enrollment, $R^2 = 0.53$, $p < 0.017$ for the regression with these two variables.

6 Discussion

The overall cultural differences in frequency and comfortableness of *I love you* expressions, and reasons endorsed for saying or avoiding these expressions, were fully consistent with predictions 1 and 2 and partially consistent with predictions 3 and 4. We address the four predictions in turn.

6.1 Chinese more reticent than Americans

The Chinese respondents reported using *Wo ai ni* less often and with less comfort than Americans. This is consistent with Chinese as a high-context culture and the United States as a low-context culture (Gudykunst et al. 1996: 511; Hall 1976: 98).

One of our exploratory questions was whether the survey would validate interviewees' comments that English *I love you* was sometimes used as a substitute for *Wo ai ni*. One aspect of globalization is that the American style of emotional expressiveness is incorporated into other cultures, often via media and advertising campaigns (see Gareis and Wilkins 2011 for a description of contemporary Germany). An example in Chinese popular culture is the 2002 film titled *I love you*, directed by Zhang Yuan.

Only a third of respondents reported using English *I love you* even one time in their lives. Those respondents with the highest English usage and proficiency were the most likely to report using English *I love you* as a substitute for *Wo ai ni*. Watching of English-language media did not correlate with English *I love you* usage.

We conclude that using English *I love you* in Mandarin conversations is restricted to proficient bilingual speakers who are also likely to be bicultural and/or Westernized. There is thus no general phenomena of widespread use of English *I love you* by educated Chinese young adults in Beijing and Shanghai. Chinese culture continues to value emotional reticence for any type of love expression.

6.2 Love expressions are useful for relationship management

American respondents used *Wo ai ni* more comfortably and frequently with family members than with romantic partners and friends. The opposite was found for Chinese. This striking reversal of preferences has not been previously reported in the literature. The Chinese pattern is consistent with prediction 2 (based on Potter 1988: 190). The structural, socially dictated nature of family relationships means that these non-volitional relationships do not need to be managed with *I love you* reminders. But romantic relationships are voluntary; direct expressions of love thus have a role.

One open question is whether Americans are using *I love you* as part of relationship management for family members as well as for friends/romantic partners. Analysis of the reasons section of our survey supported this. Americans endorsed at high rates "it is still important to say *I love you*" and "makes him/her feel good." Low rates for these reasons were given by Chinese respondents, with the exception of romantic partners (see Table 1). We infer that that Americans use *I love you* to manage all relationships (family and nonfamily), while Chinese primarily use *Wo ai ni* for managing romantic partners, which are intensely important and voluntary relationships (romantic partners).

6.3 Chinese prefer nonverbal expressions of love and Americans prefer direct verbal expressions

It is well known that gift-giving is an important part of Chinese culture (Yang 1994). The interviewees reported that to communicate love or affectionate feelings, one would buy a gift, do chores or errands, or engage in mutual activities of talking and sharing. As noted, this is consistent with the Confucian admonition of "Say less, do more." It was thus at least superficially plausible that our Chinese respondents would report more nonverbal substitutes for saying *I love you* than Americans. However, this did not occur in the current data set.

While the pattern of responses strongly supports "say less," it appears that "do more" is also avoided if the action is too direct. An example is the Chinese avoidance of showing affection with hugs. While Americans favored showing physical affection, this was the least preferred option for Chinese. Note, however, that the wording of our question was doing an action as a substitute for a verbal expression of love. Chinese cultural norms appear to dictate restraint for direct expression, even if it is an action. The American response pattern suggests that American cultural norms encourage emotional expressiveness in both verbal and non-verbal ways. Indeed, the Americans actually reported higher frequencies of using nonverbal substitutions for saying *I love you* (see Figure 3).

Consistent with "Do more, say less," almost half of Chinese respondents (42.4%) endorsed the explanation that *Wo ai ni* was avoided with romantic partners because "I feel more comfortable expressing my feelings about love nonverbally." However, for the other relationship roles, on average only a quarter (27%) of respondents endorsed this explanation.

6.4 Chinese respondents will avoid love expressions with the older generation

Among Chinese respondents, *Wo ai ni* was avoided with both the older generation and with siblings. This does not support prediction 4, which included the idea that love expressions are avoided because they situate interlocutors as equals. However, respondents' endorsement of reasons for not saying *Wo ai ni* was consistent with prediction 4. The explanations of "not comfortable" was given by 48% of Chinese respondents for avoiding saying *Wo ai ni* to parents, while only 28.8% said they did not feel comfortable saying this to siblings. The percentages were reversed for Americans, with 31% indicating they felt too uncomfortable to use *I love you* with siblings, compared to only 20.3% endorsing this explanation for *I love you* with parents. The reversal of preferences suggests that different goals and processes are involved in expressing love for Chinese and Americans. If love expressions are indeed individuating, then their frequent use in American culture is consistent with the American cultural mandate to assert one's autonomy.

For our data on reasons for saying *Wo ai ni/I love you*, Chinese respondents had low rates, and Americans had high rates, for the two questions that involved explanations based on desire to communicate one's feelings (see questions 1 and 2, "I wanted to convey it" and "I wanted to make sure" X knew it). This fits with Americans seeing *I love you* as part of self-expression, consistent with autonomy and differentiation, and Chinese as refraining from expressions of autonomy.

A final surprising point was that Chinese and Americans had similar frequency of expressing *Wo ai ni/I love you* to nonfamily members. Why weren't Chinese more reticent than Americans regarding expression of love to nonfamily? Chinese had numerically higher usage of *Wo ai ni* with romantic partners than with friends, while Americans had the reverse (although differences were not statistically significant). American college students were reticent to say *I love you* to romantic partners, compared to their ease at expressing love to family members, while the reverse held for Chinese respondents. We suspect that American young adults may have relatively uncommitted dating relationships and thus *I love you* is used sparingly in order to avoid signaling that marriage or a long-term commitment is intended. The dating arena may be the one area where Americans are cautious about saying *I love you*.

7 Conclusions

According to their self-report, the Chinese college students in our sample, compared to American college students, were reticent about expressing love verbally using *Wo ai ni*. While expected, this difference has not been previously established in a cross-national study. The Chinese were more reluctant to verbally express love feelings than Americans for all categories of addressees. Emotional reticence in expressing love was found even for performing actions and for using foreign languages. Chinese respondents preferred to use indirect non-verbal communication, such as doing mutual activities or giving gifts to convey their feelings, rather than direct physical affection, or direct verbal expression; indirection in communication is favored by Chinese respondents.

There were several cases in which Chinese and American respondents showed opposite patterns with respect to expressing love in different relationship roles. Americans were more comfortable in expressing love to family than to non-family, and did so more frequently, while Chinese were more comfortable saying *Wo ai ni* to non-family than to family, and did so more frequently. Regarding reasons for refraining from expressing love, Americans reported more discomfort with siblings than with parents, while Chinese reported more discomfort with parents than with siblings. A third case of a reversal between the cultural groups concerned reasons for saying *I love you*/*Wo ai ni*. The most frequently cited reasons for Americans were the least frequently cited reasons for Chinese. These were the reasons that cited open, direct expression as important for its own sake (e.g., "I wanted to make sure that X knew my feelings," and "it is still important to say '*I love you*'"). This confirms that different cultural norms underlie differences in emotional expression.

Our cross-cultural findings can serve as a foundation for further research on emotional restraint in diverse communicative settings, such as managerial, marketing, advertising, and business communication. The patterns of responses described here suggest that globalization will influence changes in communicative style in media and commerce before it makes inroads into realms of family and personal relationships.

We hope our data will prompt theorists to explain cultural display rules by drawing on ideas about high and low context (Hall 1976) and proposals that cultures differ in whether relationships are foundational or whether they are provisional and legitimated by emotional experiences (Potter 1988).

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