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Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 42(0)

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Publication Date

2020

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Peer reviewed

A Cross-Cultural Principle Of Temporal Spatialization

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Abstract

The Temporal Focus Hypothesis proposes that a person's tendency to conceptualize either the past or the future as being located in front of them depends on their temporal focus: the balance of attention paid to the past (tradition) and the future (progress). How general is the TFH and to what extent can cultures and subcultures be placed on a single line relating time spatialization and temporal focus in spite of stark differences in language, religion, history, and economic development? Data from 10 Western and Middle Eastern (sub)cultural groups (N=1198) were used to derive a linear model relating aggregated temporal focus and proportion of future-in-front responses. This model then successfully fitted nine independently collected (sub)cultural groups in China and Vietnam (N=841). A logistic mixed model computed over the whole dataset (N=2039) showed that the group-level relation arose at the individual level and allowed precise quantification of its influence. Temporal focus shapes how people around the world think of time in spatial terms.