

You Are What You Eat

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The Economist:

Many psychological studies conducted over the past two decades suggest Westerners have a more individualistic, analytic and abstract mental life than do East Asians. Several hypotheses have been put forward to explain this.

One, that modernisation promotes individualism, falls at the first hurdle: Japan, an ultra-modern country whose people have retained a collective outlook. A second, that a higher prevalence of infectious disease in a place makes contact with strangers more dangerous, and causes groups to turn inward, is hardly better. Europe has had its share of plagues; probably more than either Japan or Korea. And though southern China is notoriously a source of infection (influenza pandemics often start there), this is not true of other parts of that enormous country.

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