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A CLASSIFICATION OF CHINESE CULTURE

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a classification of Chinese Cultural Values (CCVs). Although there exist great differences between the Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is still possible to identify certain core cultural values that are shared by the Chinese people no matter where they live. Based on the original list by the Chinese Cultural Connection (1987), the paper creates a new list that contains 71 core values against 40 in the old. The implications and limitations of the classification are also discussed.

KEY WORDS: cultural values, Chinese culture, classification.

INTRODUCTION

Culture and management is an interesting but difficult field for study. It is more interesting and difficult to study Chinese culture and management. This is because both subjects are complex and multidimensional and little is known about the relationship between these two subjects. The fundamental problem in this area is the lack of any agreement on what Chinese culture is and the difficulty in operationalising the cultural variables in the study.

In order to carry out cultural study, it is important to have a framework from which to work. This paper presents a classification of Chinese culture, in which 71 core cultural values that are generally accepted by the Chinese people are identified and grouped into eight categories. The paper begins by a brief review of the culture concept. After introduction of the Confucianism, it focuses on the core Chinese values and their classification. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of the classification and directions for future research.

THE CULTURE CONCEPT

Culture is complex and multidimensional. It is in fact too complex to define in simple terms. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified over 160 different definitions of culture. One of the earliest widely cited definitions by Tylor (1887) defines culture as “*that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.*” In this century, culture has been defined by different authors as follows:

- *all the historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and nonrational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of men* (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945);
- *the man made part of the environment* (Herskovits, 1955);
- *the integrated sum total of learned behavioural traits that are shared by members of a society* (Hoebel, 1960);
- *a mental map which guides us in our relations to our surroundings and to other people* (Downs, 1971).

More recently, Hofstede (1980) defines culture as “... *the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a group’s response to its environment*”. He (1984) redefines culture as *the collective programming of the mind which distinguish one group of people from another*. The word *culture* apparently originates with the Latin *cultura*, which is related to *cultus*, which can be translated as “cult” or “worship”. This meaning is helpful in understanding the use of the term. Members of a cult believe in specific ways of doing things, and thus develop a culture that enshrines those beliefs. A definition by Terpstra and David (1985) serves to delineate what is meant by culture in this context:

Culture is learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meaning provides a set of orientations for members of a society. These orientations, taken together, provide solutions to problems that all societies must solve if they are to remain viable.

To sum up the above definitions, culture can be described as the collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, customs, and attitudes that distinguish a society. A society's culture provides its members with solutions to problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Culture can be studied at different levels:

- International (e.g. East v West)
- National culture (e. g. Chinese culture)
- Regional culture, subculture
- Business culture (industry or professional culture)
- Organisational (corporate) culture

CULTURAL VALUES

A national culture is best embodied in the values its people hold. Cultural values shape people's beliefs and attitudes and guide their behaviour. Values have been described as enduring beliefs that specific modes of conduct or states of existence are socially preferable to their opposites (Rokeach,1973) A value system is seen as a relatively permanent perceptual framework that influences an individual's behaviour (England, 1978). Cultural values establish the norms or standards by which everything in a society is judged. Not all members of a cultural group will hold exactly the same values (Hofstede, 1984). A value system represents what is expected or hoped in a society, not necessarily what actually occurs. In the past 20 years, researchers have attempted to develop a composite picture of culture by studying the differences among cultural values. This has been done in two ways. Some studies have looked at the cultural dimensions that reflect similarities and differences among cultures (for example, Hofstede, 1980). Others have used these findings to group countries into

clusters of nations with similar cultures (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). The purpose of this paper is not to review these studies, but to look at an alternative way to classify cultural values.

CHINESE CULTURE

While there exist great differences in terms of political, social and economic dimensions between the mainland China and other places where Chinese culture dominates, it is still possible to identify certain core cultural values that are held in common by the Chinese people, no matter where they live: mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan or by the overseas Chinese. Chinese culture gives the Chinese people their basic identity. These core values are unique and consistent, shaped by a tradition of four thousand years of history and maintained by the same language. There is only one set of core values in the Chinese national culture, despite all the differences among these people and their societies. This cultural value system is uniquely Chinese that distinguish itself not only from Western cultures, but also from other Eastern cultures (for example, Japanese culture).

Chinese culture is seen in this paper as a set of core values that underlies social interaction among the ordinary Chinese people and remains relatively stable over a long period of time. The focus in this paper is on national culture, in particular, those elements that can be seen both in the PRC and among Chinese elsewhere. The contemporary Chinese culture in the PRC consists of three major elements: traditional culture, communist ideology and, more recently, western values. The traditional Chinese culture encompasses diverse and sometimes competing schools of thought, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, etc., and a host of regional cultures.

Nevertheless, Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential thought, which forms the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis for the norms of Chinese interpersonal behaviour (Pye,1972). Confucianism is basically the behavioural or moral doctrine that are based on the teaching of Confucius regarding human relationships, social structures, virtuous behaviour and work ethics. In Confucianism, rules are spelled out for the social behaviour of every individual, governing the entire range of human interactions in society. The basic teaching of Confucius is distilled in the Five Constant Virtues: humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness (Ch'en, 1986). Confucius further defined five basic human relations and principles for each relation, called *Wu Lun*:

<i>Basic Human Relations</i>	<i>Principles</i>
Sovereign and subject (or master and follower)	Loyalty and duty
Father and son	Love and obedience
Husband and wife	Obligation and submission
Elder and younger brothers	Seniority and modelling subject
Friend and friend	Trust

Thus, relationships are structured to deliver optimum benefits for both parties. For each relation, certain behaviour principles must be followed to ensure a harmonious society. Among these five basic human relations, a) three are family relations. which clearly show the importance of family in Chinese society and account for its paternalism; b) the first two relations, filial piety and loyalty, are generally deemed the most important; c) when they are applied to management, the first and last relations stand out, leading to the birth of a paternalistic management style in both China and Japan (Hsiao, et al, 1990); d) Confucius always used only the male versions of language to define family relations. This paternal character is clearly expressed in the Chinese system of property inheritance.

A CLASSIFICATION OF CHINESE CULTURE

Because there are hundreds of definitions of culture, it is important to use an appropriate definition of the concept and to develop a framework from which to work. A variety of proposed models are helpful in analysing cultural values. They examine dimensions of cultural values and compare various national cultures on the dimensions. These models are not mutually exclusive nor are they all-in-compassing, rather they provide a variety of ways of examining cultural similarities and differences. Two most widely used models are Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) five dimensions and Hofstede's (1984) Value Survey Model (VSM). However, the problem with these models is that the scope is too narrow or simplistic with only four or five variables. Both models could not be used as a true representation of the complexity of a national culture, particularly in the case of Hofstede's VSM that is mainly concerned with business culture rather than national culture.

An alternative method is the one used in an earlier study by the Chinese Culture Collection (1987). After consulting a number of Chinese social scientists, the survey developed a list of 40 key values. For the purpose of this paper, these 40 cultural values have been re-examined and fully amended to produce a new list of Chinese Culture Values (CCVs) shown in Table 1a (in English) and 1b (in Chinese). There are substantial revisions in the new list: 31 values are added. After an extensive review of literature on Chinese culture and management, the authors believe that these following values are equally important but missing from the original list. They are:

- bearing hardship
- governing by leaders instead of by law

- equality /egalitarianism
- *li* / propriety
- people being primarily good
- kinship
- veneration for the old
- deference to authority
- conformity / group orientation
- a sense of belonging
- reaching consensus or compromise
- avoiding confrontation
- collectivism
- not guided by profit
- guanxi (personal connection or networking)
- attaching importance to long-lasting relationship not gains
- morality
- Te (virtue, moral standard)
- wisdom / resourcefulness
- being gentleman anytime
- obligation for one's family, and nation
- pragmatic / to suit a situation
- contented with one's position in life
- orientation to the past
- continuity / being part of the history
- taking a long range view
- the way (Tao)
- fatalism / Karma (believing in one's own fate)
- Yuarn
- harmony between man and nature
- unity of Yin and Yang

This results in total of 71 values in the new list. These core values are then grouped under eight categories: national traits, interpersonal relations, family (social) orientation, work attitude, business philosophy, personal traits, time orientation and relationship with nature. Such a classification is fairly arbitrary as the same value could be assigned to a different group or to more than one group. For example, *trustworthiness* is in the group of interpersonal relations but can also be placed into business philosophy or personal traits.

The revision is significant as the total number of values is increased 78 percent from 40 to 71, with 31 values newly added (44 %). It should be noted in the new list, firstly,

the majority of the values listed are traditional, only a small number can be viewed as contemporary, for example, *guanxi*. Secondly, some once prevailing values promoted by the communist party are not listed, as they are in direct conflict with the traditional ones and are no longer in fashion, such as *conquering and remaking nature*. Thirdly, a large number of values (27 or 38 %) relate to interpersonal relations and social orientation, which can be seen clearly rooted in the Confucian doctrines. Fourthly, some values may be in contradiction with others, for example, 37 and 45 (adaptability and being conservative). This is not surprising as any culture itself is bound to have contradictions and paradoxes. Fifthly, this list, like the original one, does not consider the differences in values between different regions (e.g., South versus North) and social classes. But these variations should not be overlooked in any cultural analysis since cultural values held by a peasant differ greatly from those of an intellectual. Sixthly, culture is not static but dynamic. Cultural values are changing all the time, and they go hand in hand with economic and social changes. The core values listed are, however, more or less stable and have persisted over time. This list does not contain those which are regarded as fad. Finally, this list is not exhausted and some values are not included. For example, *Wuwei*, or do nothing - letting things take their own course, is an important concept of Taoism. It is not included in the list as it is believed to be held only by a small group of people, namely, intellectuals and mandarins.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is tempting to draw some comparison between the classification of CCVs and other models of cultural values. However, such comparison may prove to be extremely difficult. The following table shows a tentative comparison with Hofstede's VSM. It

may seem to be clear that the matching values from CCVs indicate that Chinese culture is more collective rather than individualistic, with high uncertainty avoidance and large power distance. However, Chinese culture can be said as neither masculine nor feminine but emphasises the unity of both.

Individualism	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance	Masculinity
29 Conformity	41 Prudence	28 Hierarchy	71 Unity of Yin and Yang
35 Collectivism	49 Conservative	27 Deference to authority	8 Moderation

The comparison with Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's dimensions is even more problematic and inconclusive. No values can be found from the list to match the activity orientation while in the dimension of human relationship, there are 27 values. This has led to a fundamental question: is this comparison meaningful? If yes, how should it be done?

Relationship to Nature	Time Orientation	Basic Human Nature	Activity Orientation	Human Relationship
67 Tao	64 Past orientation	12 Being primarily good	?	(total 27 values).
68 Fatalism	65 Continuity			
70 Harmony	66 Long term			

An important area for future research of CCVs is to explore the linkage between cultural values in the list as cultural values are closely interrelated as pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. For example, a collective orientation also implies a tendency to submit to one's individual fate -fatalism, (Chan, 1967), whereas the individualistic orientation, in the quest for freedom, implies a desire to seek control over one's fate. It will be useful to further classify these values into primary and secondary values. A primary value is the key principle or standard from which secondary values can be derived. Take Te or virtue as an example of principal value, probably the most

important value in the personal traits. It is also helpful if all these values can be prioritised or ranked according to the importance attached to them by people from different social or regional background or by different generations. On the other hand, there may be other ways to classify CCVs, particularly at regional or business culture level. Redding and Hsiao (1990) suggests that Chinese business culture can be classified along three dimensions: paternalism, personalism and insecurity.

While it is assumed at the beginning of the paper that CCVs are believed to be accepted by the Chinese people no matter where they live, it is important to recognise that cultural differences do exist between the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese. They may identify themselves with the same values, but differ significantly in the way they interpret and apply them. Reasons for these differences can be traced in the political and economic systems and historically, they are further compound by the western influences which vary greatly in each region. This may be another interesting area to explore.

China has changed over the past 20 years and is still changing. So are the nation's cultural values. Economic reforms and opening doors to the west have not only changed the social landscape, but also reshaped the value system. Future research needs to study the evolution of culture, and in particular, the interaction of the three elements of contemporary Chinese culture, as well as each individual value within the system. Culture is important and attractive to explain the differences in management behaviour or organisation system, but culture is only one factor. Other factors such as political and economic structure, are equally important. They affect a nation's culture at different levels and are affected by the culture. The purpose of this paper is to

present a classification of Chinese cultural values, a small step in the perpetual journey of understanding of our own culture.

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Table 1a: Chinese Culture Values

National Traits	38 Thrift (saving)
1 Patriotism	39 Persistence (perseverance)
2 A sense of cultural superiority	40 Patience
3 Respect for tradition	41 Prudence (carefulness)
4* Bearing hardships	42 Adaptability
5 Knowledge (education)	
6* Governing by leaders instead of by law	Business Philosophy
7* Equality /egalitarianism	43 Non-competition
8 Moderation, following the middle way	44*Not guided by profit
	45*Guanxi (personal connection or networking)
Interpersonal Relations	46*Attaching importance to long-lasting relationship not gains
9 Trustworthiness	47 Wealth
10 Jen-ai / Kindness (forgiveness, compassion)	48 Resistance to corruption
11*Li / Propriety	49 Being conservative
12*People being primarily good	50*Morality
13 Tolerance of others	
14 Harmony with others	Personal Traits
15 Courtesy	51*Te (virtue, moral standard)
16 Abasement / Humbleness	52 Sense of righteousness / Integrity
17 A close, intimate friend	53 Sincerity
18 Observation of rites and social rituals	54 Having a sense of shame
19 Reciprocation of greetings, favours and gifts	55*Wisdom / Resourcefulness
20 Repayment of both the good or the evil that another person has caused you	56 Self-cultivation
21 Face (protecting, giving, gaining and losing)	57 Personal steadiness and stability
	58 Keeping oneself disinterested and pure
Family /Social Orientation	59 Having few desires
22 Filial piety	60*Being gentleman anytime
23 Chastity in women	61*Obiligation for one's family and nation
24*Kinship	62*Pragmatic / to suit a situation
25*Vebneration for the old	63*Contentedness with one's position in life
26 Loyalty to superiors	
27*Deference to authority	Time Orientation
28 Hierarchical relationships by status and observing this order	64*Past-time oriented
29*Conformity / group orientation	65*Continuity / time viewed as circular rather than linear
30*A sense of belonging	66*Taking a long rang view
31*Reaching consensus or compromise	
32*Avoiding confrontation	Relationship with Nature
33 Benevolent autocrat / Paternalistic	67*The way (Tao)
34 Solidarity	68*Fatalism / Karma (believing in one's own fate)
35*Collectivism	69*Yuarn
	70*Harmony between man and nature
Work Attitude	71*Unity of Yin and Yang
36 Industry (working hard)	
37 Commitment	

Source: Those with asterisk are added by the author. Amended and revised from the Chinese Value Survey by the Chinese Culture Connection.

Table 1b: Chinese Culture Values (in Chinese)

<u>國民特征</u>	39	耐力 (毅力)
1 愛國	40	耐心
2 文化優越感	41	謹慎
3 尊重傳統	42	適應環境
4* 吃苦		
5 知識 (教育)		<u>商業信條</u>
6* 人治而非法治	43	不重競爭
7* 平等/平均主義	44*	不以謀利為目的
8 中庸之道	45*	關係
	46*	重義輕利
<u>人際關係</u>	47	財富
9 信用	48	廉潔
10 仁愛 (恕, 人情)	49	保守
11* 禮	50*	不取不義之財
12* 性本善		
13 忍讓		<u>個人品質</u>
14 和睦	51*	德
15 有禮貌	52	正直
16 謙虛	53	真誠
17 知己之交	54	知耻
18 遵循禮教	55*	才智
19 禮尚往來	56	修養
20 報德報冤	57	穩重
21 臉面	58	清高
	59	寡欲
<u>家庭 (社會) 準則</u>	60*	慎獨
22 孝道	61*	對家庭 (國家) 的責任感
23 貞操	62*	務實
24* 親情關係	63*	安分知足
25* 尊老		
26 效忠上司		<u>對時間的看法</u>
27* 服從官方	64*	着眼過去
28 尊卑有序	65*	承前啓后
29* 從衆	66*	從長計議
30* 歸屬感		
31* 達成一致/妥協		<u>對自然的態度</u>
32* 避免沖突	67*	道
33 仁政 (父母官)	68*	聽天由命
34 團結	69*	緣
35* 集體主義	70*	天人合一
	71*	陰陽和諧
<u>工作態度</u>		
36 勤奮		
37 敬業		
38 節儉		

(有 * 者為作者新加的)