# Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology

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# How Distinctive Are Indigenous Ways of Achieving Influence? A Comparative Study of *Guanxi, Wasta, Jeitinho,* and "Pulling Strings"

Peter B. Smith[1], Hai Juan Huang[1],
Charles Harb[2], and Claudio Torres[3]

## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the cultural specificity of *guanxi*, *wasta*, and *jeitinho*, each of which has been identified as an indigenous process of informal influence. Students in Brazil, China, Lebanon, and the United Kingdom were presented with three scenarios derived from each of the nations sampled. They rated the extent to which each scenario was representative of the locally indigenous process, the typicality for their culture of the events portrayed in the scenarios, and the extent to which these interpersonal exchanges were perceived positively. While each type of scenario was perceived as representative and typical in its culture of origin, each was also perceived as somewhat typical by respondents in additional locations. Informal influence processes may vary between cultures more in frequency than in quality. Rated scenario positivity was significantly predicted by respondents' values. The United Kingdom–based process of "pulling strings" was rated as typical in all locations and was more positively evaluated than the other influence processes by all respondents. It is concluded that in addition to the pragmatic value of these concepts locally, their comparative testing can contribute to the development of culture-general models of social influence processes.

## Keywords

informal influence, cross-cultural, indigenous, guanxi, wasta

Cross-cultural studies of social influence have included attention to both formal and informal processes. The most fundamental choice has been whether to formulate one's hypotheses on the basis of conceptualizations drawn from mainstream North American psychology or to construct indigenous, locally derived models. The predominant focus has been on the influence exercised by formally appointed leaders. For instance, leadership effectiveness has been studied both by

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researchers who claim universal effects (Bass, 1997) and by those who find interactions between preferred leader styles and national culture (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta, & GLOBE Associates, 2004). Cultural differences have also been identified in influence processes occurring within small groups. Conformity and social loafing have both been shown to vary in magnitude in relation to prevailing values (R. Bond & Smith, 1996; Earley, 1989, 1993).

In contrast, some researchers have preferred to formulate locally relevant models of paternalistic leadership and of distinctive modes of interpersonal influence (e.g., Amado & Vinagre Brasil, 1991; Aycan, 2008; Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993; Xin & Pearce, 1996). Perhaps because the models favored by mainstream researchers have mostly originated within North America, models of indigenous influences have mostly been proposed by researchers located elsewhere.

This study is intended to explore the middle ground between these two divergent perspectives and approaches to researching the phenomenon. The growing literature on indigenous approaches to influence does not yet include any comparative tests of whether processes said to be indigenous to a particular cultural context are in fact also to be found in other cultural contexts. It may be, for instance, that a process that has been described as indigenous to one nation is also present in other culturally similar national cultures. In the clinical field, syndromes initially described as culture-bound are now found to be present in a range of similar cultures (Tseng, 2006) and are better described as culture-related rather than culture-bound. The same may be true for influence processes. Alternatively, processes considered as indigenous in one context may be particularly salient in that context but be present in more a muted form in other contexts, including those in which mainstream models of influence have originated. If this is found to be the case, models of influence initially identified as indigenous could contribute toward a broader understanding of influence processes than has been provided by mainstream models of leadership, conformity, and so forth.

There is continuing uncertainty as to how best to define a psychological concept as indigenous. Sinha (1997) noted that proponents of indigenous psychology describe it as not externally imposed, not experimentally contrived, not interpreted in terms of imported concepts, locally relevant, and appropriate to its context. These attributes do summarize the priorities of those who have been most active in developing indigenous psychologies. However, they do not address the question of cultural uniqueness.

Over the past two decades, indigenous researchers have identified a variety of psychological concepts that are considered by them to be culturally distinctive. Must a concept be culturally distinctive before it can be considered as indigenous? As Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006) have observed, the merit of indigenous concepts can only be determined if they are investigated empirically and if their distinctiveness is evaluated comparatively. The present study provides some initial data relevant to these priorities.

## Informal Influence Processes

In contrast to studies of formal leadership, the focus of the present investigation is on informal modes of influence. Informal influence processes can occur both within organizations and in everyday life. Most previous relevant studies have focused on influence within business organizations. The present study samples students, since there is no reason to expect that indigenous processes will be any less frequent in academic organizations than in business organizations. Three modes of influence have been proposed as important but culturally distinctive.

*Guanxi* ("connections") is said to be an important aspect of many kinds of interpersonal relationships in Chinese cultures. X. P. Chen and Chen (2004) describe it as "an indigenous Chinese construct . . . defined as an informal particularistic personal connection between two individuals who are bounded by an implicit psychological contract to follow the norm of *guanxi*, such as

maintaining a long-term relationship, mutual commitment, loyalty and obligation" (p. 306). Chen and Chen identify three stages in the creation of *guanxi* relationships, the third of which is their pragmatic use to solve problems, following the principle of long-term equity. Recent studies have begun to test empirically the bases on which *guanxi* rests and the circumstances that enhance or hinder its effects (C. C. Chen, Chen, & Xin, 2004). However, researchers differ as to whether it is best operationalized in terms of specific particularistic ties (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998), presence of perceived *guanxi* (Farh et al., 1998), or presence of specified behavioral consequences (Law, Wong, Wang, & Wang, 2000). Law et al. (2000) found that behaviors associated with presence of *guanxi* in Chinese superior-subordinate relationships predicted consequences related to career progress that differed from those predicted by measures derived from U.S. leadership theories. *Guanxi* relationships are often described as making a positive contribution to Chinese societies (Xin & Pearce, 1996), but some authors see their potential for nepotism and corruption (Dunfee & Warren, 2001).

*Wasta* ("Going in between") is a salient practice in many Arab nations. It refers to the process whereby one can achieve goals through links with key persons in positions of high status. These links are personalistic and most often derive from family relationships or close friendships (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). Few empirical studies of *wasta* have been undertaken, but descriptive accounts emphasize its ubiquity. "[E]verything, no matter how simple it is, requires a *wasta* in Jordan" (El-Said & McDonald, 2001, p. 77). In Kuwait, the need to rely on *wasta* is said to be pervasive (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2006). In the Arab nations of North Africa that were formerly French colonies (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco), *wasta* is referred to as *ma'arifa* ("who you know") or *piston* ("pulling strings") (Yahiaoui & Zoubir, 2006). The second of these terms is taken from the French language. Mellahi and Wood (2003) found that jobs in Algeria were increasingly obtained through links with acquaintances or friends rather than through family links. Thus, the types of relationship on which *wasta* rests may be changing, just as C. C. Chen et al. (2004) have found for *guanxi*. *Wasta* is often portrayed as corrupt, but some authors argue for its social value in giving "individuals a sense of belonging to a social entity that provides unconditional acceptance, and assistance to the novice in solving problems that are commonplace to someone more experienced. These functions are positive for the individual and for society" (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993, p. 191).

*Jeitinho* ("little way out" or "adroitness") is reported to be a strong characteristic of behavior in many segments of society in Brazil (Neves Barbosa, 1995; Duarte, 2006). The concept refers to creative ingenuity in rapidly achieving short-term solutions to problems. This may include ways of circumventing bureaucratic rules or ways of handling potential difficulties with superiors in a strongly hierarchical context. It will often involve working through others on an egalitarian basis, with persons who may or may not be previously acquainted. As social hierarchy is well accepted in the Brazilian culture (Torres & Dessen, 2006), the use of *jeitinho* across social classes is more a matter of magnitude than of incidence. In terms of evaluation, Neves Barbosa positions *jeitinho* in between favors (which are seen as positive and are given to people with whom one has close relationships) and corruption (which is always seen as negative).

In this way, *jeitinho* can be viewed as either positive or negative. Barbosa (2006) distinguishes between *dar um jeitinho* (to have a way out) and *jeitinho Brasileiro* (Brazilian way out). The former expression has the meaning of solving a problem no matter what, even when it appears that it cannot be solved by legal or official ways. In this sense, *dar um jeitinho* is quite close to the notion of corruption. The second expression refers to the usage of creativity and pragmatism in dealing with everyday events and is understood as part of the Brazilian identity as a nation. Thus, *jeitinho brasileiro* is seen a strategy used by all Brazilians. It essentially involves ways of achieving one's goals that are quick and indirect but do not threaten the preservation of harmony

(Amado & Vinagre Brasil, 1991; Torres & Dessen, 2008). The term was first popularized in the context of admiration for the dexterity of certain football players.

The three influence processes described above have each been identified within a non-Western cultural context. In order to test their distinctiveness, it is desirable to contrast them with influence processes found within an example of the cultures within which most of the conceptions of influence processes favored by mainstream researchers have originated. The British culture of the United Kingdom is employed for this purpose. "Pulling strings" is an idiomatic phrase in use in the United Kingdom. It refers to obtaining favors particularly through links with influential persons. These links may be longstanding ones, deriving from family connections or shared schooling, but they may also derive from shorter term chance contacts. The phenomenon has not been the subject of academic study, and there have been no published suggestions that the phrase refers to a process that is indigenous to the United Kingdom. In relation to the obtaining of employment, it is widely disapproved, with formal procedures being perceived as more equitable. In her anthropological analysis of British culture, Fox (2004) does not refer to pulling strings explicitly but notes a ubiquitous emphasis on the concept of "fair play."

## Comparison of Influence Processes

Each of these influence processes has in common its reliance on linkages that have no formal status. However, they differ in their relative emphasis on the intensity, duration, and hierarchical nature of the relationship between the parties. Influence associated with *guanxi* and *wasta* occurs in contexts that are typically hierarchical and involve long-term emotional commitment. Behaviors used by Law et al. (2000) to define *guanxi* included giving one's supervisor birthday gifts, visiting or calling him during holidays, and always taking his side. Failure to maintain a *guanxi* relationship will involve a mutual loss of face. Receipt of favors through *wasta* involves a continuing obligation to uphold the honor of one's benefactor. *Jeitinho* and pulling strings may also derive from longer term relationships and may involve hierarchical relations, but they do not necessarily do so. They can occur between peers and may not entail strong continuing obligations to the same extent.

In developing the present study, it was considered initially that perceptions of influence processes might differ, dependent on whether respondents were asked to imagine themselves as the actor in a series of scenarios or as a bystander observing each event. As will be reported in the results section, there were minimal differences in the responses provided by actors and bystanders, and the hypotheses and subsequent data analyses therefore refer to the sample as a whole.

## Hypotheses

Since the first purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which indigenous influence processes are distinctive, the hypotheses are stated in a form that favors distinctiveness. The first hypothesis provides what is essentially a manipulation check as to whether respondents perceive that the scenarios used in the present study do validly represent the concepts that are being sampled:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Respondents from each nation will perceive scenarios derived from their nation as more representative of the specified local concept than will respondents from other nations.

If it is established that each concept is validly represented, then it becomes possible to test whether they are distinctively typical of the processes that occur normally at a given site. Typicality

can be evaluated in two ways. First, we need to know whether a process rated as typical at one location is also rated as typical elsewhere. This requires a between-nations analysis. Second, we need to know whether a process rated as typical at one location is seen as more or as less typical than other processes at the same location. This requires a within-subject analysis.

> *Hypothesis 2a*: Respondents from each nation will perceive scenarios derived from their nation as more typical of the influence processes that occur in their locality than will respondents from other nations.
> *Hypothesis 2b*: Respondents from each nation will perceive scenarios derived from their nation as more typical than scenarios derived from other nations.

It has been noted above that none of the four influence processes under study is viewed as uniformly positive by local commentators. There is therefore no basis for predicting that typicality will predict positive endorsement. One possibility is that the various types of influence differ in their intrinsic attractiveness and would be evaluated similarly by respondents at all locations. An alternative is that a given context provides distinctive opportunities to achieve influence, either because of the values that are widely endorsed in that context or because of the compatibility of particular individuals' values with a given influence process.

Measures of values have been used frequently to characterize national cultures and to predict the actions of individuals in differing cultural contexts (Schwartz, 2004; Smith & Schwartz, 1997). Schwartz's research has indicated that individuals' values may be summarized in terms of major contrasts between self-enhancement and self-transcendence and between openness to change and conservation. These contrasts provide a basis for considering where informal influences would occur more frequently. Informal influence is more likely in social systems that are fixed and traditional and in which individuals are seeking some type of individual or collective advantage. Schwartz's conservation value type involves endorsement of conformity, tradition, and security. His self-enhancement value type involves endorsement of power and achievement. Informal influence is more likely in cultural contexts where these values are widely endorsed than in contexts where Schwartz's other two value types are more strongly endorsed. These are openness to change (hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction values) and self-transcendence (benevolence and universalism values). Value domains as broad as these do not provide a basis for predicting which specific forms of informal influence would be most typical in a given culture. There is also no basis for predicting nation-level differences in approval of informal social influence. Within a given nation, frequent use of these types of influence is likely to benefit some parties and handicap others:

> *Hypothesis 3*: Influence scenarios will be rated as most typical in nations where conservation and self-enhancement values are most strongly endorsed.

Given that the nation-level context where informal influences are expected to be more widespread has been specified, some individuals in all cultural groups are more likely to engage in informal influence than others. These individuals will not necessarily differ from other respondents in rating informal influence as typical since this involves a generalization about the behavior of others, but they are likely to perceive it more positively. This provides the basis for an individual-level hypothesis. Approval of influence attempts is more likely among persons who endorse self-enhancement than those who endorse self-transcendence. Self-enhancement involves the exercise of forms of power and influence, whether for the benefit of oneself or others. Approval of influence attempts could also be more likely among persons who endorse openness to change rather than conservation values, since openness to change values includes endorsement of self-direction.

Self-direction values could be a motivator for influence attempts in contexts where individuals are seeking freedom, for instance, from bureaucratic constraints. These predictions can be tested both in terms of approval of all types of informal social influence and in terms of locally favored types of influence.

> *Hypothesis 4*: Influence scenarios will be rated positively by those who endorse self-enhancement more than self-transcendence and openness to change more than conservation.

## Method

### Pilot Study

A range of pilot scenarios was elicited from local students in the language used on each of the university campuses that were sampled (Portuguese, Chinese, and English). Each scenario described in two to five sentences an influence event involving a student that is said to have occurred in a context familiar to students. Pilot test respondents were students in the same four universities where the main study was conducted. They were asked to rate on 10-point scales the extent to which each of the pilot scenarios was representative of the local influence process. The three scenarios rated as most representative in each location were then selected for use in the main, cross-cultural study. Mean representativeness of the selected scenarios was 7.25 (Brighton, United Kingdom), 8.08 (Shanghai, China), 7.88 (Beirut, Lebanon), and 7.53 (Brasilia, Brazil).

### Participants

One hundred and forty-seven British university students, 220 Chinese university students, 290 Lebanese university students, and 266 Brazilian university students participated in the main study. Demographic details of the samples are provided in Table 1.

### Measures

There were equal numbers of male and female actors in the scenarios. After pilot testing was complete, minor modifications were made to ensure that the scenarios accorded with circumstances prevailing in all of the university contexts being sampled. The selected Chinese and Brazilian scenarios were then translated into English, and all 12 scenarios were subsequently translated into the local language used at each of the other sites. English is the language of instruction at the American University of Beirut. The scenarios were also modified to disguise their place of origin, by replacing the names of actors in the scenarios by widely used local names of the same gender. Appendix 1 shows the English language versions of the scenario from each nation that was judged to be most representative of the relevant local concept. It can be seen that these scenarios do contain elements consistent with the ways that these influence processes are characterized in the literature. For instance, the Brazilian scenario involves ingenuity, and the Chinese and Lebanese scenarios involve existing long-term relationships, while the U.K. scenario lacks these elements.

The scenarios were placed in the survey in randomized sequence. In the actor version of the survey, respondents were asked to imagine that they themselves were the person who sought to achieve influence in the scenarios. In the bystander version, respondents were asked to imagine that the person seeking to achieve influence was someone they know.

The extent to which each scenario was perceived as representative of the relevant locally named influence process was rated on a single 3-point scale ($3 = yes$, $2 = not\ sure$, $1 = no$). Thus,

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics

|  | United Kingdom | China | Lebanon | Brazil |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| n | 147 | 220 | 290 | 266 |
| % Female | 61.9 | 88.0 | 50.6 | 53.0 |
| Age (*SD*) | 21.7 (3.3) | 21.6 (2.5) | 20.1 (3.5) | 21.9 (4.8) |
| Acquiescence | 4.19 (0.50) | 4.19 (0.49) | 4.46 (0.52) | 4.35 (0.51) |
| Openness to change: Mean (*SD*) | 4.64[b] (0.79) | 4.33[c] (0.80) | 4.56[b] (0.69) | 4.83[a] (0.63) |
| α | .78 | .74 | .62 | .66 |
| Conservation: Mean (*SD*) | 3.46[d] (0.81) | 4.11[a] (0.74) | 3.76[b] (0.86) | 3.97[c] (0.74) |
| α | .66 | .65 | .62 | .72 |
| Self-enhancement: Mean (*SD*) | 4.01[b] (0.93) | 3.85[c] (0.84) | 4.27[a] (0.88) | 4.05[b] (0.96) |
| α | .70 | .68 | .61 | .76 |
| Self-transcendence: Mean (*SD*) | 5.00[a] (0.65) | 4.68[b] (0.65) | 4.59[c] (0.82) | 4.93[a] (0.68) |
| α | .69 | .57 | .65 | .68 |

PVQ means are adjusted for gender and acquiescence covariates.
a, b, c, d. Means in the same row with the same superscript do not differ from one another at $p < .05$.

all scenarios were rated in China as instances of *guanxi*, in Lebanon as instances of *wasta*, and so forth. The extent to which each scenario was perceived as "typical of events like this around here" was rated on a single 5-point scale (5 = *very typical*, 1 = *not at all typical*).

Scenario positivity was measured by four 5-point, semantic differential ratings relating to each of the scenarios. For respondents rating as actors, the scales were happy–unhappy (1 = *happy*; 5 = *unhappy*, subsequently reversed to give high scores for positive evaluations), unjustified–justified, embarrassed–unembarrassed, and proud–ashamed (reversed). When respondents rated as bystanders, the scales were happy–unhappy (reversed), indifferent–concerned (reversed), approving–disapproving (reversed), and annoyed–not annoyed. These scales were designed in English and then back-translated into local languages where necessary.

In order to determine whether positivity was construed in similar ways within each sample, principal component analyses were conducted for ratings relating to each scenario in turn, separating also the ratings from actors and bystanders. Single-factor solutions were indicated in all cases. Variance accounted for by single-factor solutions averaged 57% for actor ratings and 66% for bystander ratings, with no percentage lower than 54. Internal consistency estimates were also computed for actor and bystander ratings of each scenario separately. Mean alpha was at 0.73 or higher for each nationality, for both actors and bystanders. Ninety percent of values of alpha exceeded .70. Mean positivity scores were subsequently calculated to form a single positivity rating for each scenario.

Respondents also provided demographic details and completed a 21-item version of Schwartz's Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz et al., 2001). The mean level of endorsement of all 21 items was computed to provide a control for respondent acquiescence, since it is known that acquiescent responding varies between nations (Smith, 2004). Within the present samples, Lebanese respondents showed substantially higher acquiescence, as shown in Table 1, indicating the need to control this variable in making comparisons between nations.

## Results

Responses to the PVQ were averaged to yield scores on the four major domains of values identified by Schwartz et al. (2001). Means and reliability estimates for these measures are provided in Table 1. The scores for each nation were compared by univariate analysis of covariance, with gender and acquiescence (as measured by the PVQ mean) as covariates. As indicated in Table 1,

**Table 2.** Mean Representativeness of Scenarios

| Scenarios | British Respondents | Chinese Respondents | Lebanese Respondents | Brazilian Respondents | F | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pulling strings | 2.56 | 2.53 | 2.37 | 2.44 | 4.97** | .016 |
| Guanxi | 2.59 | 2.76 | 2.52 | 2.41 | 22.85*** | .070 |
| Wasta | 2.74 | 2.67 | 2.76 | 2.40 | 28.15*** | .085 |
| Jeitinho | 2.07 | 1.75 | 2.02 | 2.50 | 60.42*** | .167 |

Representativeness was measured on a 3-point scale.
*Note*: ***: $p < .001$

the Chinese sample scored significantly higher on conservation values than all other samples. The Lebanese sample scored significantly higher on self-enhancement than all other samples. The Brazilian sample scored significantly higher on openness to change than all other samples. The U.K. sample scored higher on self-transcendence than the samples from China and Lebanon but did not differ from the Brazilian sample. Thus, the samples do differ in ways that permit the testing of hypotheses concerning cultural difference.

Preliminary analyses also indicated no significant effects for age, and this variable was therefore not included in the analysis. Data analysis was conducted through multivariate analysis of covariance with nationality as the main independent variable; representativeness, typicality, and positivity as dependent measures; and gender, perspective, and acquiescence as covariates. Significant effects were obtained for nationality with Pillai's Trace, $F(36, 2,685) = 29.04$; $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .28$, perspective, $F(12, 893) = 3.11$; $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .04$, gender, $F(12, 893) = 3.36$; $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .04$, and acquiescence, $F(12, 893) = 3.14$; $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .04$. The significant effects for perspective and gender are attributable to the fact that actors and men rated all scenarios more positively than did bystanders and women. Acquiescence is a significant predictor of representativeness and of typicality but not of positivity, because the positivity index includes reversed items, whereas representativeness and typicality do not.

It was first necessary to establish the extent to which the selected scenarios are seen as representing the relevant influence processes. As shown in Table 2, significant univariate effects of nationality on the representativeness of each type of scenario were obtained. Table 2 also shows that the adjusted mean representativeness of all own-nation scenarios was rated at or above 2.50 on the 3-point rating scale. However, representativeness of other-nation scenarios was also rated high in some instances. Post hoc comparisons of between-subject means with Bonferroni correction were made. The local representativeness of the *pulling strings* scenarios was rated highest by British respondents, significantly more so than by Lebanese respondents ($p < .05$). Chinese respondents rated the *guanxi* scenarios as more locally representative than did British respondents ($p < .01$) and Lebanese and Brazilian respondents (both $p < .001$). Lebanese respondents rated the *wasta* scenarios as more locally representative than did Brazilians ($p < .001$). Brazilians rated the *jeitinho* scenarios as more locally representative of *jeitinho* than did any of the other respondents (all $p < .001$). Thus, the scenarios from each nation were seen as locally representative of the relevant indigenous process, which is consistent with Hypothesis 1 and permits the testing of the subsequent hypotheses. However, in several instances the scenarios were also seen as locally representative in some other locations.

Hypothesis 2a tests the extent to which each indigenous process is seen by local respondents as more typical of events in their culture than it is by other respondents. It is possible that differences in the degree to which respondents perceived their scenarios as representative could affect their ratings of typicality. However, preliminary analyses showed no significant correlations

**Table 3.** Mean Typicality of Scenarios

| Scenarios | British Respondents | Chinese Respondents | Lebanese Respondents | Brazilian Respondents | F | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pulling strings | 3.49 | 3.75 | 4.16 | 3.86 | 26.85*** | .082 |
| Guanxi | 3.10 | 3.78 | 4.14 | 3.53 | 71.77*** | .192 |
| Wasta | 2.83 | 3.55 | 4.06 | 3.35 | 80.70*** | .211 |
| Jeitinho | 2.83 | 3.24 | 4.20 | 3.36 | 122.73*** | .289 |

Typicality was measured on 5-point scales.
*Note:* **: $p < .01$; ***: $p < .001$

between ratings of representativeness and typicality within each nation's data. Table 3 shows significant univariate effects of nationality on the typicality of each type of scenario as well as estimated marginal means for typicality. *Pulling strings* was seen as significantly less typical of what happens in their country by U.K. respondents than by each of the other nations' respondents (each $p < .001$). *Guanxi* was seen as less typical by respondents in U.K. ($p < .001$) and in Brazil ($p < .01$) than by Chinese respondents but as more typical by Lebanese respondents than Chinese ($p < .001$). *Wasta* was seen as more typical by Lebanese respondents than by all other respondents ($p < .001$). *Jeitinho* was seen as less typical by U.K. respondents than by Brazilians ($p < .001$) but as more typical by Lebanese than by Brazilians. Thus, there was a consistent ordering of nations with all social influence processes perceived as less typical by U.K. respondents and all processes regardless of their origin perceived as more typical by Lebanese respondents. Hypothesis 2a is not supported.[1]

Hypothesis 2b was tested through paired sample *t* tests comparing the rated typicality of the local scenarios against all other scenarios. British respondents rated *pulling strings* scenarios as more typical than all other scenarios, $t(146) = 11.20$; $p < .0001$. Chinese respondents rated *guanxi* scenarios as more typical than all other scenarios, $t(219) = 6.64$; $p < .0001$. Lebanese respondents rated *wasta* as less typical than all other scenarios, $t(289) = 3.58$; $p < .0001$. Brazilian respondents rated *jeitinho* as less typical than all other scenarios, $t(263) = 5.43$; $p < .0001$. Hypothesis 2b is supported for the United Kingdom and China but rejected for Lebanon or Brazil.

Positive evaluations of each type of scenario were next examined. No prediction was made as to whether local scenarios would be evaluated more positively. Table 4 shows that the *pulling strings* scenarios were most favorably evaluated by all samples. The table also shows significant univariate effects of nationality on positivity as well as their estimated marginal means. British respondents perceived *pulling strings* more positively than did Chinese and Brazilians (both $p < .01$). *Guanxi* was rated more positively by Chinese than by Brazilians ($p < .001$). *Wasta* was rated more positively by Lebanese than by Brazilians ($p < .001$). *Jeitinho* was rated more positively by Lebanese than by Brazilians ($p < .001$).

Thus, the local scenarios were evaluated more positively in three of the four nations sampled. However, Brazilians were least positive about all the forms of social influence, whereas Lebanese were relatively more positive about most of them.

Hypothesis 3 concerns links between values and the rated typicality of scenarios. Since data are available from only four nations, systematic tests of the hypothesis are not possible. Across all types of scenario, typicality is highest in Lebanon, which scored highest on self-enhancement values. Across all but the *jeitinho* scenarios, the Chinese respondents scored second highest on typicality. The Chinese scored highest on conservation values. Thus, there is some support for the hypothesis, but a broader range of sampled nations would be required for a valid test of this nation-level hypothesis. The overall pattern of typicality ratings gives no support to the local distinctiveness of specific influence types.

**Table 4.** Mean Positivity of Scenarios

| Scenarios | British Respondents | Chinese Respondents | Lebanese Respondents | Brazilian Respondents | $F$ | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pulling strings | 3.52 | 3.29 | 3.36 | 3.27 | 5.02** | .016 |
| Guanxi | 2.97 | 2.96 | 2.98 | 2.65 | 13.51*** | .043 |
| Wasta | 2.39 | 2.58 | 2.56 | 2.19 | 18.07*** | .057 |
| Jeitinho | 2.71 | 2.66 | 2.78 | 2.55 | 6.44*** | .021 |

Positivity was measured on 5-point scales.
*Note:* **: $p < .01$; ***: $p < .001$

**Table 5.** Regression of Schwartz Values on Scenario Positivity

| | Pulling strings | Guanxi | Wasta | Jeitinho |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step1: Controls $R^2$ | .027*** | .058*** | .068*** | .043*** |
| Step 2: Values $R^2$ change | .036*** | .017*** | .020*** | .026*** |
| | Step 2 β | Step 2 β | Step2 β | Step 2 β |
| Openness to change / conservation | .16*** | .06 | .03 | .08* |
| Self-enhancement / self-transcendence | .10** | .11** | .14*** | .14*** |

Finally, Hypothesis 4 concerns the relation between respondents' values and how positively they evaluated the scenarios. Since the hypothesis is phrased in terms of the prevalence of two of Schwartz's value types over two opposing value types, dimension scores were computed reflecting each contrast. Self-transcendence values were subtracted from self-enhancement values and conservation values were subtracted from openness to change values. Table 5 shows the results of stepwise regressions on positivity ratings of these two value dimensions for the data set as a whole. At the first step in each regression, gender and dummy variables for three of the four nations were entered. At the second step, the values indicators were entered. In all cases, significant additional variance was explained at Step 2. The strength of effects varies depending on scenario type, but there is a consistently positive evaluation of the scenarios by those who score high on self-enhancement versus transcendence. The effect for openness to change versus conservation is found for *pulling strings* scenarios and for *jeitinho* scenarios but not for *wasta* or *guanxi* scenarios. This provides substantial support for Hypothesis 4. Interaction terms between local nation and centered values measures entered at Step 3 (not shown) explained no additional variance, which shows that there is no strengthening of these effects in relation to local scenarios. Thus, positivity is not linked to a specific type of scenario. Indeed, all correlations between the positivity ratings for the four types of scenario were substantial, ranging from .35 between ratings of *pulling strings* and *wasta* scenarios to .61 between ratings of *guanxi* and *wasta* scenarios.

## Discussion

The present results indicate that all four informal influence styles were rated as both representative of their locally indigenous designation and typical of what occurs within their local cultural contexts. Thus, each is able to satisfy Sinha's criteria for inclusion within an indigenous psychology

developed in its culture of origin. However, the between-nations analysis shows that none of the four influence styles can wholly satisfy the criterion of uniqueness. Relative to the baseline provided by the typicality of the local influence style, *pulling strings* was considered more typical in nations other than the United Kingdom, *guanxi* was considered to be more typical in Lebanon than China and *jeitinho* was considered to be more typical in Lebanon than in Brazil. At least across the four nations sampled, it appears that pulling strings is the least distinctive, while *wasta* is shown as rather more distinctive than *guanxi* and *jeitinho*. In the terms advocated by Tseng (2006), these influence processes are culture-related rather than culture-bound. The rated predominance of all four types of scenario in Lebanon and their apparent scarcity in the United Kingdom might be thought of as due to differences in acquiescent response style. This cannot be the case because the reported means have been controlled for acquiescence.

The argument for distinctiveness receives rather more support from the within-nation analysis. British respondents saw *pulling strings* as distinctively typical and Chinese respondents saw *guanxi* as distinctively typical. Putting the tests of Hypotheses 2a and 2b together, we can see that in the United Kingdom *pulling strings* is typical but infrequent. *Guanxi* in China is seen as typical and moderately frequent. Conversely, in Lebanon *wasta* is seen as frequent but no more typical than other types of influence. Finally, in Brazil, *jeitinho* is seen as moderately typical but less frequent than some other types of influence.

The cultural distinctiveness of these four influence styles is mirrored inversely by their relative popularity. The *pulling strings* scenarios were rated as most typical and were also most positively evaluated. The *wasta* scenarios were rated least typical and were least positively evaluated, even by the Lebanese. In no sample was any of the influence processes rated at much above the midpoint on the positivity scale. Bearing in mind that the respondents were students, their lack of enthusiasm for these influence processes may reflect their estimation of the degree to which their own career prospects might be impeded by them. The data do not provide any basis for explaining why the Brazilians were less positive about all the types of influence.

Respondents' values were found to differ between the four samples. The nation-level mean differences provided modest support for the view that prevailing values can provide a guide as to whether these types of influence processes would be frequent and evidence for their distinctiveness. Individual values did predict the positivity of scenario ratings. This predictability indicates a weak but culture-general basis for understanding informal influence processes. It is possible that more specifically focused value measures could account for greater amounts of variance. At least among the generic value indices employed here, no evidence was found that any of the influence processes was associated with endorsement of a locally distinctive value profile. Across the sample as a whole, endorsement of pulling strings was most strongly associated with openness to change as opposed to conservation. Since pulling strings was perceived as typical in all samples, it is possible that the association with openness to change reflects a broadly shared aspect of student cultural norms. In relation to all of the types of influence scenario, it is notable that self-enhancement values were a stronger predictor of positivity than the values that are often thought of as more characteristic of collectivist cultures, namely conservatism and self-transcendence. This suggests that it was the relatively assertive and ambitious students among the samples who favored the types of influence that have been the focus of this study.

This study has provided initial evidence that influence processes characterized as indigenous to local cultures are perceived as typical in a broader range of locations. There is evidently an element in common between informal modes of influence in widely varying cultural contexts. Informal influence processes may vary between cultures in frequency more than in quality. It is important to consider how these findings might contribute to a more universally valid model of social influence. *Guanxi* and *wasta* rest particularly on a strong degree of relatedness between the parties involved. In contrast, mainstream models of influence have focused more on the legitimacy

of an appointed individual's influence (in studies of leadership and obedience) and on the penalties for norm violation (in the case of conformity). Influence based on relatedness entails the need to maintain and sustain the relationships that are involved. It is evident that in those locations where indigenous social influence processes have been identified, indigenous ways of maintaining in-group relationships have also been proposed. Within the nations currently sampled, we find models of face (Hwang & Han, 2010), of honor (Gregg, 2005), and of processes similar to Hispanic *simpatía* (Triandis, Lisansky, Marin, & Betancourt, 1984). In contrast, research within individualistic cultures into informal influence has so far focused mostly on achievement of short-term effects. For instance, studies of impression management have emphasized only the effectiveness of a range of tactics such as ingratiation that individuals might employ to achieve their ends (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008).

In accommodating the more contextual aspects of influence processes, we may require a "relationshipology" rather than a psychology of indigenous influence (Smith & Bond, 2003). In other words, the types of influence identified as most typical in a given culture may be constrained by the types of relationships that are prevalent. In some cultures, influence may occur primarily in the context of hierarchy and of long-term relatedness. In other cultures, there may be more peer influence and more influence between strangers. The scenarios selected on the basis of pilot study for inclusion in the present study may reflect this variation in frequency of situations. Two of the three U.K. scenarios featured peer influence, whereas all of the Chinese and Lebanese scenarios featured influence through authority. This may account for the greater approval given to the U.K. scenarios.

### Limitations

The validity of the present results rests on the adequacy with which the scenarios that were employed represented each of the influence processes. While the validation checks that were employed do provide substantive evidence for representativeness, it is possible that the brevity of the scenarios did not fully capture the richness of the processes involved. Sampling a wider range of more fully described scenarios is desirable. A second issue concerns the use of student respondents as cultural respondents. University students are known to be less traditional in their values than the general population (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). They also comprise a much smaller percentage of the population in some nations than in others (e.g., about 3% in Brazil, more than 40% in the United Kingdom). The cities in which the data were collected are also relatively cosmopolitan. Nonetheless, the data collected from the present samples do provide evidence that the values that they endorsed differ substantially between samples. Perhaps other more traditional cultural groups would provide stronger evidence of cultural distinctiveness.

The choice of the four nations to be sampled was required primarily by the content of the existing literature concerning informal sources of influence. However, these nations may not be those in which the most culturally distinctive forms of influence prevail. For instance, some theorists have identified *amae* as a particularly distinctive form of influence within Japanese culture (Doi, 1973). In this case too, preliminary comparative studies have suggested that effects attributable to *amae* may also occur in Taiwan and the United Sates (Yamaguchi & Ariizumi, 2006). Much broader sampling of influence forms is desirable before the uniqueness or generality of any forms of social influence could be established.

## Conclusion

It appears that the types of informal social influence that have been studied are less unique to specific cultural contexts than is implied by the ways in which these concepts have most frequently been discussed in the literature. They are recognizable elsewhere. This finding does not in any

way undermine the utility of these concepts in analyzing social processes within their cultures of origin. On the contrary, if the findings prove replicable, they open up some additional opportunities for bridge-building between the perspectives of cross-cultural psychology and cultural psychology. One of the most strongly significant effects in the data was that while respondents from the non-Western nations saw pulling strings as also typical of processes within their contexts, U.K. respondents saw the other influence processes as much less typical of what happens in the United Kingdom. Thus, an impetus is provided toward the fuller exploration of forms of social influence that are distinctively non-Western.

To be worthy of further study, a social process does not need to be distinctive to a single national culture or to a cluster of culturally allied national cultures. The present study has shown that individual-level measures of values can account for only a small amount of variance in the effects obtained. At the nation level, the dimensions of cultural variation in values and beliefs that have been identified by cross-cultural psychologists (M. H. Bond & Leung, 2004; Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 2004) could be used as a basis for prediction as to the contexts in which particular forms of influence process become distinctively salient. How, for instance, would a cultural group's positioning on dimensions such as collectivism, power distance, fate control, or reward for application affect the prevalence and popularity of the influence styles examined in the present study, as well as others such as *amae*, ingratiation, and paternalism? Conversely, what is it about pulling strings that renders it more prevalent and relatively acceptable across a broad range of cultural profiles? To answer such questions, studies will be required that sample a range of maximally differing national cultures, not just the few that have so often been examined in the cross-cultural literature on social processes.

# Appendix

## *Examples of Scenarios Used*

1 (Brazil). It is closing time in the branch of the bank located on campus when a person walks in, clearly in a hurry. Judging by his clothes, a well-cut suit and a white shirt, it is likely that he is a senior professor in the university. He goes immediately to a cashier point which is closing. The professor seems to know the cashier and asks her to pay in some cash, so that he does not have to join the queue for a cashier who has not yet closed.

2 (China). Ting took the university entry exam this year. As her exam result was not good enough, she was not accepted for her preferred course. Her father and Dr. Zhang, who works in that university, were schoolmates many years ago. Her father asks Dr. Zhang to convince the head of the department to transfer his daughter to the desired course.

3 (Lebanon). Nadine is a student with a poor performance record. She has repeatedly failed courses and she is likely soon to be expelled from university. Her parents, who hold prestigious positions, call the administration to defer the decision to expel her for one more semester.

4 (United Kingdom). John is a student who has a job in a restaurant four evenings a week. His friend David is short of money and needs a job too. He has not worked in a restaurant before. Even though there are other candidates with more experience, David asks John to convince the owner of the restaurant that it would be best if he would to take on his friend as extra cover for the times when the restaurant is very busy on the weekend.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

## Note

1. The means for perceived representativeness were somewhat lower for U.K. and Brazilian respondents. Sixty-five percent of Brazilian respondents were sure that the local scenarios represented *jeitinho* and 71% of U.K. respondents were sure that the local scenarios represented *pulling strings*. Means for typicality were recomputed using only the two most representative scenarios for each of these nations. This raised the percentage of "sure" Brazilian and British respondents to 69% and 80%, respectively. A univariate analysis with typicality as the dependent measure using these means yielded the same significant effects as those reported above.

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