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The Lasting Impact of Subsistence Style on Moral Norms and Attitudes: How the Way We Used to Eat Shapes Our Morality Today

Abstract

In the last few decades, the field of cultural psychology has received increasing attention due to the recognition that individual actions and thoughts are guided by more than one's biology. Layering in the cultural context in which people exist has enriched our understanding of the human psyche but has also raised questions about the origins of cultural differences. This thesis explores one possible explanation, namely the historical subsistence style of a region. In the most basic sense, subsistence style refers to the way we used to eat, whether it be farming, herding, or hunting, and some cultural psychologists have found evidence suggesting that subsistence styles – even if they are no longer practiced – continue to shape contemporary cultures and their conceptions of morality. This thesis evaluates the theoretical underpinnings of Subsistence Style Theory and extrapolates its implications to moral attitudes and norms, including human rights, upheld by various cultures.

Keywords

cultural psychology, morality, norms, attitudes, subsistence style, human rights, individualism, collectivism

Disciplines

Multicultural Psychology | Place and Environment | Regional Sociology | Social Psychology | Sociology of Culture

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The Lasting Impact of Subsistence Style on Moral Norms and Attitudes: How the Way We Used to Eat Shapes Our Morality Today

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Submitted to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program at the University of Pennsylvania in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors

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ABSTRACT

In the last few decades, the field of cultural psychology has received increasing attention due to the recognition that individual actions and thoughts are guided by more than one's biology. Layering in the cultural context in which people exist has enriched our understanding of the human psyche but has also raised questions about the origins of cultural differences. This thesis explores one possible explanation, namely the historical subsistence style of a region. In the most basic sense, subsistence style refers to the way we used to eat, whether it be farming, herding, or hunting, and some cultural psychologists have found evidence suggesting that subsistence styles – even if they are no longer practiced – continue to shape contemporary cultures and their conceptions of morality. This thesis evaluates the theoretical underpinnings of Subsistence Style Theory and extrapolates its implications to moral attitudes and norms, including human rights, upheld by various cultures.

INTRODUCTION

For my senior honors thesis, I wanted to connect the academic interests that have shaped my time at Penn, ranging from moral psychology to global human rights, and explore their intersection vis-à-vis culture. In particular, I was driven by the question, "Why do moral norms and attitudes vary by culture?" In the Obedience capstone taught by Professor Royzman, we debated whether or not Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking Nazi SS officer, was wickedly evil in nature or simply complying with the norms of his environment. Philosopher Hannah Arendt has famously argued for the latter perspective using the term "banality of evil," which describes the capacity for destructive obedience that exists in all of us and can materialize under specific circumstances.[1] According to Arendt's theory, Eichmann's actions were culturally influenced – in the culture fostered by the Nazi regime, ordinary people without sadistic or anti-Semitic tendencies were able to commit extraordinary crimes against humanity.

The debate between nature and nurture emerged in my human rights courses as well. Are human rights universal or culturally-determined? The history and practice of human rights suggest the latter, or at least that if there are universally-recognized rights, cultures support and enforce them differently. The most notable distinction is between Western and Eastern countries and their preferential support for political and civil rights and economic, social, and cultural rights, respectively. In the "West," referring to developed, wealthy, and individualistic countries, political and civil rights such as the right to a fair trial and to free speech are considered more important than economic, social, cultural rights such as the right to healthcare and to adequate housing. The trend is flipped for Eastern countries who are typically developing, collectivistic, or both.

[1] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (München: Piper, 1964).

With the understanding that human rights are moral claims that aim to set the minimum standard of decent and dignified life, human rights are necessarily a category of moral norms. Thus, if conceptions of morality differ across cultures then it follows that those of human rights are also culturally-determined. Essentially, this speculation is reflective of the moral universalism vs. relativism debate which is ongoing and contentious. This thesis presumes that morality, at least in some part, is shaped by culture and examines this complex part of human psychology through a cultural lens in order to assess a possible explanation for the cultural differences in morality and by extension human rights.

The objective of this thesis is not to add new knowledge to the relevant disciplines; rather, it is to connect the insights from existing literature and research on cultural orientations, subsistence style theories, and notions of morality. By doing so, I hope to shed light on an interesting, albeit obscure, perspective on the causal mechanisms behind contemporary cultures and their manifestations in moral attitudes and behaviors. I do not make grandiose claims or predictions about cultures around the world, how they will change in the future, and what that implies for the conception of morality. Instead, I offer criticisms and alternative explanations for every theory I discuss, caveats to the disciplines and premises that guide this thesis, and a philosophical discussion at the end to invoke thoughtful and inquisitive reflection on the part of the reader.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for the thesis, providing an overview of the role of culture in shaping individual and collective psychology. Chapter 2 discusses two theories that support Subsistence Style Theory, which offers a possible and/or partial explanation for cultural differences. Finally, Chapter 3 attempts to answer the question “so what?” by exploring the

human rights implications of cultural orientations that have evolved from historical subsistence styles.

CHAPTER 1: THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SHAPING PSYCHOLOGY

Culture is critical to virtually every aspect of society, shaping institutions, ideas, and behaviors of humankind. Social theorists and anthropologists understand culture as a dynamic force that is not only an inner state (feelings and experience) but also a vehicle for commitments, utterances, and actions – a view known as the "subjective-behavioral approach."[2] According to cultural sociologist Ann Swidler, culture shapes behavior by providing a repertoire of habits, styles, and skills upon which people rely to operate, and it also consists of meaningful constructs such as beliefs, rituals, art forms, language, and stories.[3] Richard Shweder, a cultural anthropologist, highlights that culture is constructed and inherited by members of a community, the boundaries of which need not be national or ethnic.[4] A differentiated and legitimate culture can exist for any community whose members share key beliefs and behaviors. Despite their core similarity, however, various subgroups and individuals within a culture can still vary in meaningful and large ways.[5]

This thesis embraces the above understanding of culture and is primarily concerned with the dimension of culture that includes norms and rules that regulate and promote certain human activities and thoughts. To better understand the ways in which culture (external influence) can shape psychology (internal influence), including morality, a closer look at cultural psychology and moral psychology is warranted.

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[2] Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis,* (1987).
[3] Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review,* vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 273, (1986).
[4] Schweder et al., "The Cultural Psychology of Development: One Mind, Many Mentalities." *Handbook off Child Psychology: Theoretical Models Of Human Development,* (2006).
[5] Jensen, "Different worldviews, different morals: America's culture war divide." *Human Development,* vol. 40, pp. 325-344, (1997); Turiel, *The culture of morality,* (2002).

1.1 Cultural Psychology

Cultural psychology is the study of how cultures reflect and shape the psychological processes of their members – it contextualizes individual psychology through the lens of social practices and ideas. While some cultural psychologists, such as cross-cultural psychologists, search for psychological processes that are universal, others compare differences in thought patterns and behaviors within and across cultures. The field emerged in response to Western psychologists' failure to replicate laboratory findings in non-Western settings, a phenomenon that supported Shweder's theory that the psyche and culture are mutually constructed and inseparable.[6] Therefore, Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (W.E.I.R.D.) populations, who were overrepresented in psychological research, could no longer be considered the universal standard for human behaviors and thoughts.[7] Indeed, psychologists are increasingly discovering that core values and cognitive processes can vary greatly across cultures and that these more-informed findings can better explain and predict people's behaviors and thoughts.

The following theories and research in this thesis assume that cultures are inherited from past generations yet dynamic, continually adapting to potential changes in the demographic, ecology, and economy of regions.

1.2 Sociocultural Ecologies: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

In 1887, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies proposed the theoretical constructs of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, meaning "community" and "society," respectively. *Gemeinschaft* environments are rural, small-scale, low-tech, homogenous, and relatively self-contained communities, whereas *Gesellschaft* environments are urban, large-scale, high-tech,

[6] Shweder, *Thinking Through Cultures*, (1991).
[7] Henrich et al., "The Weirdest People in the World?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 33, no. 2-3, pp.61-83, (2010).

heterogeneous, and permeable societies.[8] These concepts have been studied and further elaborated upon by scholars and researchers, including anthropologist Robert Redfield whose 1941 research compared folk society (*Gemeinschaft*) with urban society (*Gesellschaft*). The two prototypes have emerged as important starting points for psychologist Patricia Greenfield's theory of social change, which explains and predicts how culture transforms as social, ecological, and demographic conditions change.[9] This thesis focuses on one of these conditions – subsistence style – and explores its impact on culture in Chapter 2.

According to Greenfield's theory, there is a causal relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and cultural values, and so *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* necessarily have different developmental pathways, as shown in the figure below.[10] Though *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* seemingly represent a sociological and ecological dichotomy, many environments, at various points in their development, fall somewhere in between. Thus, the contrasting prototypes serve as only the "outer limits" of a continuum of environments along which various regions can be placed. They provide a loose framework for understanding and predicting a region's process of change or current phase in its developmental pathway based on its degree of similarity to either prototype.[11] For example, a Mexican town Redfield observed for his research exhibited a few but key *Gemeinschaft* characteristics, so he predicted it follow a *Gemeinschaft* pathway but only generally.

[8] Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, (1887).
[9] Greenfield, "Linking Social Change and Developmental Change." *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 401-418, (2009).
[10] Abels et al., "Early socialization contexts and social experiences of infants in rural and urban Gujarat, India." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 36, no. 6, pp. 717-739, (2005).; Keller, *Cultures of infancy*, (2007).
[11] Loomis et al., "The application of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as related to other typologies." *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 12-29, (1957.)

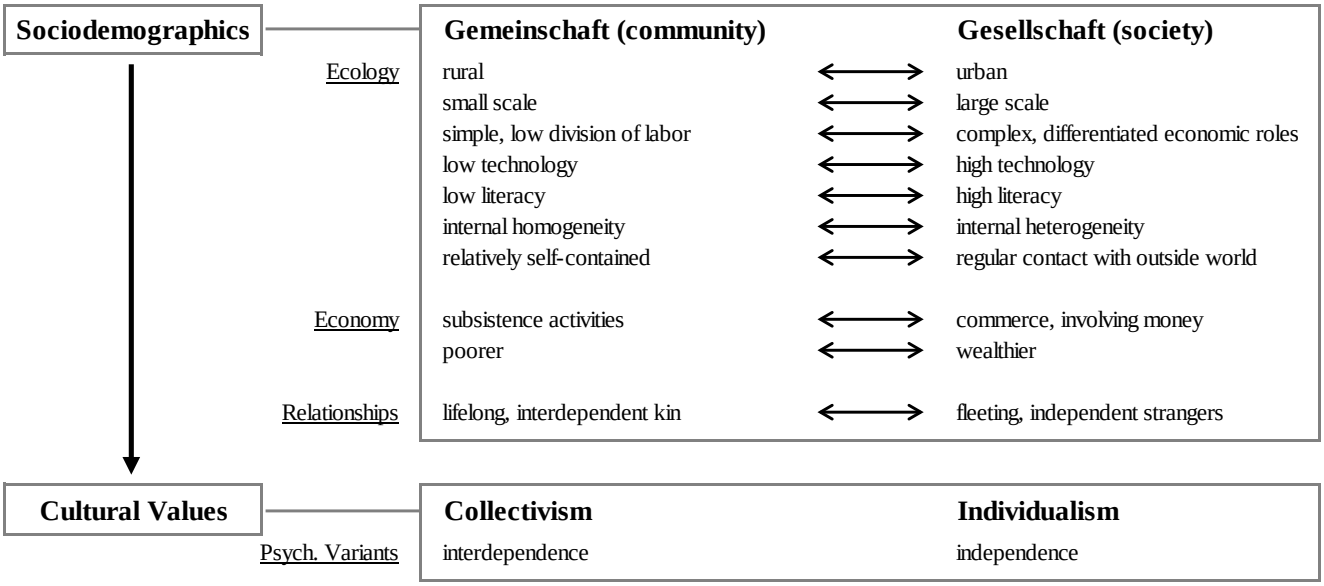

Figure 1. The double-sided horizontal arrows indicate that the variables are multivalued dimensions rather than binary concepts. The vertical arrows indicate dominant causal relations. Adapted from Patricia Greenfield's model of social and developmental change (2009).

Redfield's research findings corroborate the theory of social change in which sociodemographic variables influence cultural values. In the indigenous village of Tusik, which largely mirrored the *Gemeinschaft* prototype, social relations were lifelong and highly interdependent – the institution of divorce did not exist and married couples were permanently connected to their spouse's kin.[12] Virtually everyone in Tusik relied on subsistence agriculture based on growing corn. On the other hand, in the city of Mérida, which was closer to *Gesellschaft* in terms of social complexity, kin relations were less enduring than those in Tusik as divorces and marital desertion were relatively common.[13] Instead of a subsistence economy, the people of Mérida lived by commercial activity, including trading commodities, manufacturing goods, or providing services. Given these differences, Tusik and Mérida were

[12] Redfield, *The folk culture of Yucatán,* (1941).
[13] Ibid.

predicted to follow different pathways and thus develop different cultural values, characteristic of collectivism and individualism, respectively.

1.3 Cultural Orientations: Collectivism and Individualism

Cross-cultural psychologist Harry Triandis explains that collectivism and individualism describe the theme around which cultures, including shared norms, cognitive styles, and practices, are organized.[14] Specifically, the theme for collectivism is connection and for individualism is autonomy. Interdependence and independence represent psychological variants of collectivism and individualism, respectively. They are based on contrasting construals of the self and of others – in collectivistic cultures, the emphasis is on attending to others, fitting in, and maintaining harmonious interdependence within the community; in individualistic cultures, people seek to maintain their independence by attending to the self and expressing unique inner attributes.[15] Triandis points out that, similar to *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, collectivism and individualism serve as useful theoretical constructs that can link and explain a variety of different behaviors around the world. For this reason, they form the basis of many studies and debates in disciplines such as philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

In terms of how these two orientations manifest, a 2011 study showed that in people in individualistic cultures such as the U.S. think of themselves as "independent," "equal," and consistent across time and situations, whereas those in collectivistic cultures such as Japan think of themselves in relation to their communities and situations, using descriptors like "considerate," "father," and "daughter."[16] However, the cultures of the U.S. and Japan are

[14] Triandis, *Individualism and Collectivism*, (1995).
[15] Markus et al., "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation." *Psychological Review*, vol. 98, no. 2, pp. 224-253, (1991).
[16] Heine, *Cultural Psychology*, (2011).

dynamic and vary within each country. For example, over time Japan has become more individualistic, adapting to changes in sociodemographic variables such as its economy.[17]

Collectivism and individualism can also describe the social adaptations to *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* environments.[18] Collectivistic qualities, such as enduring relationships with extended relatives, are supported by the practices and norms of *Gemeinschaft* environments. Individualistic values, such as the importance of privacy, are correlated with *Gesellschaft* environments. Greenfield's review of empirical research revealed that, through adaptive processes, movement of any ecological variable in a *Gesellschaft* direction shifts cultural values in an individualistic direction, encouraging more independent social behavior and more abstract cognition. In contrast, ecological changes toward a *Gemeinschaft* direction are likely to move cultural values and the developmental pathway toward collectivism.[19] Thus, much like the spectrum anchored by *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, individualism and collectivism also serve as endpoints of a continuum rather than as dichotomous labels. Even mostly individualistic cultures will have some collectivistic traits, and vice-versa.

1.4 Criticisms and Vulnerabilities

As with every field of psychology, cultural psychology is not without its pitfalls. Psychologist Per Gjerde stated that the field "generalizes human development across nations and continents" and promotes a disregard for the heterogeneity of individuals within a culture as well as for the nuances across similar ones.[20]

[17] Miyanaga, *The creative edge: Emerging individualism in Japan*, (1991).
[18] Markus et al., "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation."
[19] Greenfield, "Linking Social Change and Developmental Change."
[20] McNulty, "Emphasis on 'culture' in psychology fuels stereotypes, scholar says." *AScribe*, (2004).

Cultural Universalism. In the 1960s, psychological and cultural universalism was the popular view, regarding human groups as fundamentally similar in both psychology and culture. While there are apparent, undeniable differences across cultures, such as race and language, universalists believe that there are some values, behaviors, thoughts, and rights that exist in every human culture. Opposite to this view is cultural relativism, which argues that everything is culturally constructed and thus varies across different cultures. Relativists believe that values, including moral principles and norms, are culturally dependent and that there are no fundamental truths. This debate has been particularly salient in human rights discourse, given it aims to define and enforce rights and norms that should be afforded to every human. Where the fault lines of cultures are and what constitutes as universal are still debated upon, and this thesis does not endorse one view absolutely or wholly, even though subsequent discussions necessarily accept some degree of relativism as the premise.

Dichotomizing Cultures and Individuals. Dichotomizing cultures minimizes important within-group variability and within-person complexity.[21] Reliance on concepts such as *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft,* collectivism-individualism, and interdependence-independence – even with the cautionary note that they exist on a spectrum – can promote faulty labeling of cultures as strictly one or the other. This variability and complexity are crucial to acknowledge, especially when the geographical unit of analysis in cultural research is continents or larger; for example, a theory discussed in Chapter 2 contrasts a Chinese province that is surprisingly individualistic with a neighboring one that is more predictably collectivistic.[22] At the same time, these theoretical anchor points are useful to generally situate various cultures and their

[21] Rogoff, *The cultural nature of human development,* (2003); Smetana, "On heterogeneity, coexistence, and development within cultures: Commentary on Catherine Raeff's "Multiple and inseparable: Conceptualizing the development of independence and interdependence." *Human Development,* vol. 49, no. 2, pp, 129-134, (2006).
[22] Talhelm et al., "Large-Scale Psychological Differences Within China Explained by Rice Versus Wheat Agriculture." *Science,* (2014).

arrangement at a specific moment in time, allowing researchers to better describe and predict tendencies and values of individuals as well as of whole communities.

Stereotyping. Stereotypes arise from the blanket generalizations that dichotomies promote. Researchers most commonly juxtapose the East with the West, a dichotomy that can serve as a baseline heuristic but also confer a sense of inferiority or negative biases on others along sociographic lines such as race. Ironically, while stereotypes acknowledge individuals in relation to their environments, they can undermine the entire purpose of cultural psychology by seeing people as homogenous products of culture.

Methodology. The methodology of many cultural studies has also been scrutinized for its reliance on self-reported data. Though self-reporting data is one of the most accessible and practical methods of mass data collection, particularly in cultural studies, it is vulnerable to errors and biases that bring the validity and reliability of subsequent analyses into question. Attitudes do not always correspond to behavior, and even when they do, participants may not be adequately self-aware or choose to lie, especially on sensitive topics such as torture. Participants can also interpret questions and answer choices differently; for example, a trait like “tolerance” is vaguely and variously defined and a self-reported “6” on a scale of 7 can mean another person’s “4.” These criticisms and dangers of cultural psychology are important to keep in mind for theories and frameworks discussed in subsequent chapters and form the basis of evaluations and critiques that follow.

CHAPTER 2: SUBSISTENCE STYLE THEORY

Subsistence style is both an economic and social system, characterized by the circulation of goods, services, and other processes that support and maintain a community.[23] This system, sometimes referred to as "seasonal, integrated economy," follows the seasonal cycle of available resources and includes activities such as hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping, which in turn provide subsistence goods such as food, heat, clothing, shelter that are necessary for the continued survival of the community.[24] The Inuit Circumpolar Conference, a multinational NGO representing indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic regions (Inuits), defines subsistence as "a highly complex notion that includes vital economic, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions," meaning "much more than mere survival or minimum living standards."[25]

Sometimes, the term "subsistence" is used to negatively imply primitive ways of life in rural or older communities in the developing world. Some scholars have also drawn a sharp distinction between subsistence economy and market economy, considering the former to be an inferior, outdated mode of economic organization that should be replaced by the latter, a more complex and global capitalist system. In this thesis, however, "subsistence styles" exclusively refer to the various food production systems that communities relied on for sustenance, such as farming and herding.

Subsistence Style Theory argues that some forms of subsistence require and cultivate more functional interdependence than other forms. The most common comparison in subsistence style research has been between herding and farming, which vary significantly in

[23] Kuokkanen, "Indigenous Economies, Theories of Subsistence, and Women." *American Indian Quarterly,* vol. 35, no. 2, (2011).
[24] Elias, *Northern Aboriginal Communities: Economies and Development,* (1995).
[25] Various, *Principles and Elements for a Comprehensive Arctic Policy* (1992).

levels of mobility, labor, and self-sufficiency. Herders can move more freely and independently given their form of subsistence is animals and they are also usually only responsible for their own herds. In contrast, farmers are more anchored to their work, given that crops are rooted to the land, and their work is typically more laborious. Subsistence Style Theory contends that, because of these differences, herding cultures are more individualistic and farming cultures are more collectivistic.

The two theories discussed in this chapter – Rice Theory of Culture and Culture of Honor Theory – explore the impact of subsistence style vis-à-vis type of farming (rice or wheat) and herding, respectively.

2.1 Rice Theory of Culture: Diverging Legacies of Rice and Wheat

A 2014 cross-cultural study of Chinese provinces revealed that historical agricultural practices impact the cultural orientations we see today, even long after those subsistence styles have disappeared. Psychologists Talhelm, Zhang, Oishi, Shimin, Duan, Lan, Kitayama (Talhelm et al.) discovered that a history of farming rice cultivates more interdependent cultures whereas a history of farming wheat produces more independent cultures. This theory, termed the Rice Theory of Culture, is an extension of Subsistence Style Theory in that it explores beyond the mainstream herding-farming research and delves further into specific types of farming, namely of rice and wheat.

The researchers chose to compare the effects of farming rice and wheat because they are two of the most common subsistence crops yet differ greatly in how they are grown. Specifically, the different levels of irrigation and labor required for farming rice vs. farming wheat have been

suggested as possible explanations for the cultural differences between the rice regions and wheat regions.

Rice. Farming rice requires a high level of irrigation because rice paddies need standing water. To facilitate adequate irrigation, rice farmers need to build and rely on elaborate irrigation systems that stretch over multiple farms. These irrigation networks are intensely laborious to build, dredge, and drain, so entire communities, rather than individual farmers, are typically expected to contribute and collaborate. The need for collaboration continues even after the irrigation networks are set up – one farmer's water use can affect his or her neighbors' ability to irrigate their farms, so rice farmers have to continually coordinate their water usage.

The relative labor intensiveness of growing paddy rice ("rough rice") has also been well documented. Agricultural anthropologists visiting pre-modern China have estimated that farming paddy rice requires at least twice the number of hours as it takes to grow wheat. A Chinese farming guide in the 1600s recommended that people grow wheat instead of rice if there is limited availability of labor.[26] Therefore, to supply the requisite amount of labor for paddy rice, farmers form cooperative labor exchanges, which entail staggering the families' planting dates and thus the harvesting periods such that families can help with each other's fields.[27] Expectedly, farmers rely most heavily on these labor exchanges during transplanting and harvesting, processes that are particularly labor intensive.

Thus, the logic of cooperation underpinning the Rice Theory of Culture is based on economics and reason, not on the outstanding moral goodness of rice farmers. Cooperative behavior is economically beneficial and necessary even for the farmers and so they are

[26] Elvin, *The Chinese Agricultural Economy,* (1982).
[27] Bray, *The Rice Economies: Technology and Development in Asian Societies* (1986).

conditioned to form relationships of trust and reciprocity with each other and to avoid behaviors that may threaten these connections.

Wheat. Compared to farming rice, wheat is much easier to grow. Farming wheat does not require irrigation beyond natural rainfall, and as mentioned, needs only half of the manpower required for paddy rice farming, even during transplanting and harvesting periods. The relative ease in growing wheat allows farmers to work on and worry about their own plots and not have to systematically exchange help with others.

The Study. The study tested 1162 Han Chinese students from six regions: Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Liaoning. The Yangtze River, which runs horizontally through mainland China, splits the wheat-growing north from the rice-growing south. The regional difference in the type of farming stems in part from the differing ecological conditions created by the river whose basin is home to nearly one-third of the country's population, and as such, played a crucial role in shaping the country's agricultural history.[28] Per the hypothesis behind the Rice Theory of Culture, researchers predicted the southern and eastern regions to be most interdependent due to their flat floodplains which are ideal for growing rice.

The prevalence of rice farming in each region was measured using statistical yearbook data on the percentage of cultivated land in each province devoted to rice paddies. Provinces with more than 50% of farmland devoted to rice paddies were categorized as "rice provinces" in this study; those with less than 50% of land devoted rice paddies were considered "wheat provinces." To control for recent technological innovations in farming, the researchers analyzed rice farming data from the past, starting in 1996 which is the oldest data provided by the Bureau of Statistics.

[28] World Wild Life, "Yangtze." Web.

Degrees of individualism and collectivism in these cultures were determined through measuring cultural thought, implicit individualism, and loyalty/nepotism. These measures were designed and chosen specifically to avoid the bias that typically results from self-report scales.

Cultural Thought Style. Cultural thought was the main dependent variable of the study and measured through the triad task. The triad task entails asking participants to pair two out of three related objects, such as train, bus, and tracks. Two items belong to the same abstract category (train and bus belong to the category "tracks"), and two share a functional relationship (train runs on tracks). The idea behind this task is that individuals from individualistic cultures are more likely to choose abstract pairings, which implies analytic thinking style, whereas people from collectivistic cultures are more likely to choose relationship pairings, which connotes holistic thinking style.[29] Researchers found that people from provinces with a higher percentage of farmland devoted to rice paddies indeed think more holistically, even when neighboring counties were compared to control for other geographic confounds.

Implicit Individualism. Implicit individualism was measured through the sociogram task, which involves asking participants to draw a diagram of their social network using circles to represent themselves and their friends.[30] A bigger drawing of oneself relative to representations of others indicates self-inflation, which suggests a higher sense of individualism. A prior study found that Americans tend to self-inflate, meaning draw themselves bigger, by about 6 millimeters, and Europeans by 3.5 millimeters. In contrast, Japanese participants tend to slightly self-deflate, meaning draw themselves smaller than how they would draw their friends. According to the Rice Theory, people from rice provinces should be more likely to self-deflate,

[29] Ji et al., "Is it culture of is it language? Examination of language effects in cross-cultural research on categorization." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 87, no. 1, pp. 57-65, (2004).
[30] Kitayama et al., "A Cultural Task Analysis of Implicit Independence: comparing North America, Western Europe, and East Asia." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 97, no. 2, pp. 236-255 (2009).

and people from wheat provinces should self-inflate more. Talhelm et al. conducted the sociogram task and confirmed this prediction – people from rice provinces are more likely to draw themselves smaller than they drew their friends, and people from wheat provinces tend to self-inflate by about 1.5 millimeters.

Loyalty/Nepotism. Loyalty/nepotism was measured based on how differently people treat their friends versus strangers. People in collectivistic cultures are thought to draw a sharp distinction between friends and strangers.[31] This potential difference in treatment was tested in a prior study by having participants envision entering a business deal with an honest friend, a dishonest friend, an honest stranger, and a dishonest stranger.[32] All the scenarios are set up such that dishonesty of either friend or stranger causes the participant to lose money in the deal and that honesty of the business partner allows the participant to earn money. In each case, participants have a chance to use their own money to reward or punish their partner for their honesty or lack thereof. Preference towards rewarding rather than punishing friends can be construed positively as loyalty or negatively as nepotism, depending on one's perspective.

The same study found that Singaporean participants reward their friends much more than they punish them, whereas American participants are more likely to punish their friends for dishonest behavior. The findings of this study confirm the hypothesis that collectivistic cultures tend to punish friends less than individualistic cultures. Talhelm et al. sought to test if this applied to rice and wheat provinces as well, and found that people from rice provinces are indeed more likely than those from wheat provinces to show loyalty or nepotism towards their friends. People from rice and wheat provinces did not differ on how they treated business partners who were strangers, strengthening the validity of the results.

[31] Triandis, *Individualism and Collectivism,* (1995).
[32] Wang et al., "The effects of culture and friendship on rewarding honesty and punishing deception." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* vol. 47, no. 6, pp. 1295-1299 (2011).

These three measures – cultural thought style, implicit individualism, and loyalty/nepotism – support the claim that rice provinces are more holistic thinking, interdependent, and loyal/nepotistic than wheat provinces. However, given that all the participants were college students, Talhelm et al. additionally tested for divorce rates and patents for inventions – variables linked to higher individualism – to determine whether the cultural differences of rice and wheat regions extended beyond young adults.

Divorce Rates. A prior study showed that individualistic countries have higher divorce rates than collectivistic countries after controlling for GDP per capita.[33] The logic is that since collectivistic cultures encourage avoiding conflict and preserving relationships, people are less likely to get divorced. Examining data on farming and marital status in China from 1996 to 2010, Talhelm et al. found that rice provinces have in fact lower divorce rates than wheat provinces. In 1996, the divorce rate of wheat provinces was 50% higher than that of rice provinces, and despite the country-wide doubling of divorce rates over the past 15 years, the raw gap between the rates of rice and wheat regions remained mostly constant.

Patents. The number of successfully filed patents for inventions is another measure of analytic thinking, a trait associated with individualism. Research has shown that analytic thinkers are more creative and thus better at coming up with novel uses for ordinary objects.[34] A prior study conducted in the United States found that immigrants from individualistic cultures hold more patents for inventions than those from collectivistic cultures. After controlling for GDP per capita, Talhelm et al. found that up until 2010, wheat provinces generated about 30% more patents for inventions than rice provinces, corroborating the prior study's findings.

[33] Lester, "Individualism and Divorce." *Psychological Reports,* vol. 76, no. 1, pp. 258 (1995).
[34] Witkin et al., "Field-Dependent and Field-Independent Cognitive Styles and Their Educational Implications." *Review of Educational Research,* vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 1-64, (1977).

Additional analyses of divorce rates and patents for inventions show that rice provinces exhibit more markers of "East Asian" culture, specifically holistic thought, interdependent self-construal, loyalty/nepotism, and lower rates of divorces and patents. On the other hand, wheat provinces seem to possess more features of traditional, "Western" culture, such as analytic thought, individualism, higher divorce rates, and innovation.

Modern Day Effects. An interesting observation is that Rice Theory of Culture, which is rooted in the agricultural practices of the past, impacts individuals and communities who no longer rely on those subsistence styles. With technological innovations in global food production and delivery, the six regions represented in the study are not the same farming villages, if they farm at all, as those mentioned in the farming guides in pre-modern China. Especially considering that the participants who confirmed differences in rice and wheat provinces were mainly students in their early 20s, a question emerges: How is the cultural orientation of individualism or collectivism in a region preserved and perpetuated even after the supposed reason for the distinction – namely the regional subsistence style – disappears? It appears that certain aspects of cultures get passed down from generation to generation, but what are the mechanisms by which this happens? This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

2.2 Evaluation of Rice Theory and Alternative Theories

Strengths of Rice Theory. Talhelm et al.'s research addresses a common criticism of many cross-cultural studies that treat farming and herding as exhaustive and exclusive styles of subsistence that can be simply attributed to the East and the West, respectively. Though herding was certainly common in Western regions such as parts of Scotland and Switzerland, there also farming communities in the West. Similarly, herding existed in Eastern cultures as well. This

gave the scientific community reason to reexamine the traditional categorizations of herding and farming and differentiate types in both. Upon discovering that farming regions in the West mainly grew wheat and other similarly labor intensive crops such as barley whereas farms in the East tended to grow rice, Talhelm et al. sought to reframe the source of the East-West cultural dichotomy from farming-herding to rice-wheat.

An additional strength of the Rice Theory is the study's methodology. It limited the number of confounding variables such as religion, government, and language that are typically inescapable in cross-cultural studies that span continents. Specifically, the study included six sites within mainland China and all participants were of Han descent. As briefly mentioned, it also tested neighboring regions along the rice-wheat border to control for confounds like climate. China was a preferable sample to Europe or Sub-Saharan Africa for testing the Rice Theory of Culture because the Han Chinese are more ethnically and politically unified and have a long, documented history of growing both rice and wheat. To that end, Han participants from Tibet, inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang were excluded because they are historically herding cultures with different languages and customs.

Critiques and Limitations. As acknowledged by the researchers themselves, the Rice Theory has much potential for further development or discrediting. It remains unclear whether reliance on an irrigation network is essential to cultivating a collectivistic culture, specifically if cultures that farm rice on drylands without the need for irrigation will exhibit similar markers of collectivism. It is also possible to question the appropriateness of the triad task, sociogram task, and business deal task as reliable measures of cultural thought style, implicit individualism, and loyalty/nepotism. Many researchers can and have operationalized these traits differently, beyond the three tasks described in this thesis. Another potential criticism is whether the above traits are

true and accurate markers of individualism and collectivism; for example, loyalty/nepotism may not be a manifestation of collectivism but rather an indicator of corrupt and less developed societies. Given the multilayered, dynamic, and largely unobservable nature of culture, it is difficult to definitively and comprehensively analyze cultural orientations.

Modernization Hypothesis. Modernization Hypothesis argues that as societies become wealthier, more educated, and capitalist, they become more individualistic and analytical. Modernization is defined as the movement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* because *Gemeinschaft* communities predated *Gesellschaft* societies historically. Many researchers have articulated specific psychological and societal mechanisms through which regional affluence, defined as GDP per capita, might lead to higher individualism.[35] If higher rates of divorce and patents are indicative of individualistic cultures, then according to Modernization Theory, wealthier regions should have more divorces and patents. This prediction was supported by the data collected on the rice and wheat provinces in China.[36]

However, the theory cannot explain the persistently collectivistic cultures of Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and some provinces in China despite their immense growth in GDP per capita in recent history. The GDP of Guangdong is 3.5 times that of Guizhou, yet people in Guangdong actually thought more holistically, did not self-inflate in the sociogram task, and were not more likely to show loyalty/nepotism in the business deal task.[37]

Pathogen Prevalence Theory. Pathogen Prevalence Theory argues that regions that have historically had high prevalence of communicable diseases in the local ecology are more collectivistic, promoting behavioral manifestations of collectivism such as ethnocentrism and

[35] Triandis, *Individualism and Collectivism*, (1995); Hofstede, *Culture's consequences. Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*, (2001).
[36] Lester, "Individualism and Divorce."
[37] Talhelm et al., "Large-Scale Psychological Differences Within China Explained by Rice Versus Wheat Agriculture."

conformity which help lower the risk of pathogen transmission.[38] The logical basis of this theory is that pathogenic diseases impose selection pressures on the social behavior of host populations and interacting with strangers increases the risk of exposure to novel pathogens. Thus, high pathogen prevalence in a region encourages its members to draw a sharp distinction between coalitional in-groups and out-groups, a defining feature of collectivism, as part of anti-pathogen defense.[39] In these regions, it is more dangerous to have higher tolerance for deviation from the status quo and to hold a weaker in-group/out-group distinction, traits that characterize individualistic societies.[40]

From analyzing epidemiological data and worldwide cross-national surveys of individualism and collectivism, researchers found that regional prevalence of pathogens strongly positively correlates with cultural indicators of collectivism and negatively correlates with those of individualism. The findings suggest that pathogen prevalence may also predict additional cross-cultural differences such as preference for political conservatism, extended nepotism, and in-group care more generally, but rigorous empirical tests for these variables have yet to be conducted.[41]

Pathogen Prevalence Theory predicts southwestern China to be the most collectivistic given it has historically had the highest mortality rate from infectious diseases.[42] Talhelm et al. conducted the triad task and found that provinces with higher disease rates actually think less

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[38] Fincher et al., "Pathogen prevalence predicts human cross-cultural variability in individualism/collectivism." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences,* (2008)
[39] Gelfand et al, "Individualism and Collectivism." *Culture, leadership, and organizations: the GLOBE study of 62 societies,* (2004); Sagiv et al., "Value Priorities and Readiness for Out-Group Social Contact." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* (1995).
[40] Oishi et al., "The Measurement of Values and Individualism-Collectivism" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* vol. 24, no. 11, pp. 1177-1189, (1998).
[41] Thornhill et al., "What is the role of life history and attachment for political values?" *Evolution and Human Behavior,* vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 215-222, (2007); Bond et al., "Culture and conformity: a meta-analysis of studies using Asch's line judgment task." *Psychological Bulletin,* vol. 199, no. 1, pp. 111-137, (1996).
[42] Junshi et al., *Diet, Life-Style, and Mortality in China: A Study of the Characteristics of 65 Chinese Counties,* (1990).

holistically, and this negative correlation held even when researchers tested the Pathogen Theory more precisely by comparing province-specific data on disease prevalence over time, starting in 1976. The theory also failed to predict the results of the sociogram task, used to measure implicit individualism, as well as the findings from the business deal task, used to measure loyalty/nepotism. Additionally, regions with higher pathogen prevalence did not have lower rates of divorce or patents. Therefore, at least for the markers of collectivism and individualism tested in the Rice Theory, Pathogen Prevalence Theory did not fit the data.

Social Orientation Hypothesis. Social Orientation Hypothesis argues that differences such as genetics and linguistic origins cannot be ruled out as potential explanations for the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.[43] For example, Western languages are almost all Indo-European in origin and differ in many systematic ways from the major languages of East Asia. There are also clear and large differences in genetic makeup of the two regions, though of course that is true within each region as well. Generally speaking, religious roots in East Asia can be traced to Confucian values and ways of thought, whereas those in Europe are based on ancient Greek, notably Aristotelian, teachings.[44] To be clear, this hypothesis does not refute the causal potential of subsistence styles but rather suggests that a multitude of other factors may contribute to cultural differences. In fact, this hypothesis cautions against drawing strong causal conclusions about any one factor – subsistence style or not - given that there remains a lot of speculation regarding the construction and transformation of culture.

[43] Varnum et al., "The Origin of Cultural Differences in Cognition: Evidence for the Social Orientation Hypothesis." *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 9-13, (2010).
[44] Lloyd, "Science in antiquity: The Greek and Chinese cases and their relevance to the problems of culture and cognition." *Modes of thought: Explorations in culture and cognition,* (1996).

2.3 Culture of Honor Theory: Legacy of Violence Rooted in Pastoralism

Psychologists Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen examined the relationship between the past herding practice of the American South and higher levels of violence found in the region.[45] Pastoralism refers to the subsistence style of herding, which has been primarily contrasted with the agricultural style of farming in much of past cross-cultural research. Nisbett and Cohen relied on a variety of measurements and resources, including field observation, laboratory experiment, and analysis of historical data, to determine the existence of and possible reasons for this Southern phenomenon, termed the "Culture of Honor."[46]

The theory of Southern Culture of Honor posits that aggression is a defense mechanism that developed from the historical subsistence style of herding in the American South. The logical basis is that when resources are limited and subject to theft, such as animals in a herd, there is greater need for protection, which can take the form of a herder's reputation for toughness. Thus, herdsmen tended to be more aggressive and violent due to their vulnerability of losing their primary resources, and they comprised of the majority of the settlers in the South who immigrated from the fringes of Britain. "Honor" in the context of this theory does not refer to probity of character but rather to status and power – credible power of deterrence, achieved by projecting a stance of willingness to commit mayhem, even at the risk of harming oneself.[47] People in this culture cannot allow or forgive transgressions such as insults because that would give off the impression that they lack the strength to protect their property, people, and honor.

Analysis of correspondences, autobiographies, and newspapers in the South from the 18th century onwards reveals that duels, feuds, lynchings, and bushwhackings among other

[45] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* (1996).
[46] Ibid., pp. siv.
[47] Ibid., pp. 4.

violent incidents occurred more frequently in the South than in the North.[48] One account of the homicide rate in the plateau region of the Cumberland Mountains between 1865 and 1915 reports 130 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, 26 times the 2013 U.S. national average of five murders per 100,000 inhabitants.[49] To this today, the South maintains a version of its Culture of Honor despite the decline of herding since the 19th century when the cotton gin emerged as a viable alternative. Nisbett and Cohen propose several hypotheses to explain the relationship between herding and violence.

Vulnerability to Loss. Honor-based cultures develop in response to economic precariousness and minimal state protection against theft of property, conferring economic value upon aggression and readiness to act violently.[50] Both elements were present in the American South: for its herdsmen population, losing their herd equated to losing their entire wealth and livelihood, and the state held little power to enforce laws and protect them in this initially low-population frontier region. This gave Southerners more leeway as well as the need to create their own system of order, leading to the more aggressive methods of deterrence and punishment in the South. On the other hand, they hypothesize that a similar Culture of Honor did not develop in the North because it was settled by European farmers whose primary resources – crops of land – were physically more secure and depended on cooperation for labor intensive processes.

To be clear, Nisbett and Cohen do not believe that the absence of strong state presence was the main driver of aggression in cultures of honor; rather, it helped to preserve them by enabling people to commit violence with impunity. There are hunting-gathering cultures and farming cultures in areas with weak state presence that have low levels of violence, simply

[48] Gastil, "Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence." *American Sociological Review,* vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 416-427, (1971).
[49] Caudill, *Night comes to the Cumberlands,* (1962); UNODC, "Global Study on Homicide," (2013).
[50] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* pp. 4.

because there is not as great a need for a reputation of physical strength.[51] Instead, they claim aggression is a direct response to the vulnerable nature of herding, a claim that has been supported by anthropologists' findings that herding cultures outside of the American South, such as faraway ones in the Middle East and Africa, exhibit similar concerns about honor and readiness to show strength.[52]

Sensitivity to Insults. Herders vigilantly guard their reputation of strength by retaliating against any hint of an insult which might suggest that they are incapable of defending their property. An ethnographic study found that early in his career, a herder may deliberately pick fights in public to project an image of courage and strength.[53] Personal insults such as a wife's infidelity or verbal ridicule constitute violations of honor and warrant violence. Until the mid-1970s, Texas law held that if a man caught his wife and her lover in a "compromising position" and killed them, no crime had been committed. When a man from Louisiana was on trial in 1930 for shooting three men at a gas station for teasing him, all but one juror claimed that the man was innocent: "He ain't guilty. He wouldn't of been much of a man if he hadn't shot them fellows."[54]

Uses of Warfare. Herding is common in ecologies such as mountains, semi-deserts, and steppes where crop farming is unlikely to yield enough food for survival. Limited to this subsistence style, herders have little surplus of food which not only increases the economic precariousness described above but also makes stealing others' herds more tempting. Consequently, theft and raiding are endemic in pastoral populations, wherein skill at warfare

[51] Ibid.
[52] Galaty et al., *Herders, warriors, and traders: Pastoralism in Africa*, (1991).
[53] Campbell, "Honor and the devil." *Honor and shame: the values of Mediterranean society*, (1965).
[54] Carter, *Southern Legacy*, (1950), pp. 50; emphasis removed.

often determined herders' chances of survival and success.[55] This may explain why herding populations of Europe are reputed to have been the best soldiers over the centuries.

To test the above hypotheses, Nisbett and Cohen looked at contemporary regional differences in homicide rates, attitudes towards violence, and reactions to insults.

Homicide Rates. After isolating the U.S. Department of Justice data on homicide to look at Southern, white, non-Hispanic, male offenders, the researchers' analysis supported the Southern Culture of Honor Theory. Non-Caucasians were factored out due to their later arrival and inferior status in the South's early history which exempt them from the effects of the historical herding culture. Women were factored out because the D.O.J. only reported data on male offenders from 1976-1983. With the exception of the largest cities (over 200,000 in population), the South has the highest homicide rate out of all regions in the U.S.[56]

To link homicide rates more directly to herding-based Culture of Honor Theory, psychologist Andrew Reaves examined contemporary homicide rates of various regions within the South.[57] Moist plains allow for farming and cash crops while dry plains are more suitable for herding. He found that homicide rates in dry plains are indeed substantially higher than in farming regions. Furthermore, from analyzing 1987 data on the types of homicides, Nisbett and Cohen found that argument-related murders – brawls, lovers' triangles, or verbal spats – occurred much more frequently than felony-related murders – robbery or burglary.[58] For felony-related murders, the South's homicide rate was similar to that of non-Southern regions, further supporting the claim that the South is particularly approving of violent responses to insults.

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[55] O'Kelley et al., *Women and men in society*, (1986), pp. 65.
[56] Fox et al., "Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data [United States]: Supplementary Homicide Reports, 1976-1983." (1987).
[57] Reaves, "The cultural ecology of rural white homicide in the southern United States." (1993).
[58] [58] Fox et al., "Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data [United States]: Supplementary Homicide Reports, 1976-1983."

Attitudes toward Violence. When surveyed on general violence and specific violence unrelated to honor or self-protection, Southerners did not differ significantly from non-Southerners in their responses. If anything, Southerners were more opposed to above types of violence than non-Southerners – between hurting people or damaging property, Southerners were more likely than non-Southerners to say hurting people was worse.[59] However, the responses changed completely when asked about using lethal violence for self-protection, namely for protecting oneself, one's family, and one's home. Southerners were significantly more likely to agree that killing the perpetrator in the above circumstances is justified, and in the case of killing someone to defend one's home, the percentage of Southerners who agreed was roughly double that of non-Southerners.[60] This result is interesting given that in the abstract, Southerners believed that harming people was worse than damaging another's property. Therefore, while Southerners may not endorse general or even specific but abstract violence particularly more than non-Southerners, they were much more likely to endorse lethal violence in specific, personal, honor-related circumstances.

In a survey of rural countries in the South and the Midwest, which is most similar to the South in terms of ecology and economy, respondents were given a series of scenarios involving personal affronts a hypothetical character named Fred. In three of them, the question asked how justified it would be for Fred to fight an acquaintance who had affronted him – either by looking at and talking suggestively to his girlfriend, insulting his wife by implying she had loose morals, or telling others that he is a liar and a cheat. Two scenarios included more serious affronts – sexually assaulting his teenage daughter and stealing his wife – and the researchers asked how

[59] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor*.
[60] Cohen et al., "Self-Protection and the Culture of Honor: Explaining Southern Violence." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 5, pp. 551-567, (1994).

justified Fred would be in shooting the perpetrator.[61] On average, Southerners were more likely than Midwesterners to see strong justification for Fred taking violent action in response to these affronts. The difference in responses was a particularly dramatic on the sexual assault of the daughter question, with almost half of Southerners responding that the shooting would be "extremely justified" compared to only a quarter of Midwesterners. These findings affirm the existence of a Culture of Honor in the South, wherein violence is considered an acceptable tool for dealing with honor-related matters.

Reactions to Insults. Social psychologists have shown that there can be large gaps between expressed attitudes and actual behavior; thus, further research is warranted to determine whether or not Southern ideology of violence actually translates to behavior. Nisbett and Cohen conducted experiments in which Southerners and Northerners were rudely insulted and compared based on their reactions. They observed the participants' emotional reactions, physiological responses, and actions in response to the insults and found that Southern participants responded differently than Northern participants.

Emotionally, compared to Northerners, Southerners were more likely to be angry and less amused by an insult because they see insult as cause for anger. Physiologically, insulted Southerners exhibited large increases in cortisol levels – a hormone associated with stress, anxiety, and arousal – whereas Southerners and Northerners in control groups did not. Behaviorally, compared to control groups and insulted Northerners, insulted Southerners went much further in the "chicken game" wherein participants had to decide when to "chicken out" and give way to the confederate walking determinedly down a narrow hall where only one person could pass without the other swerving.

[61] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor*.

Findings from the research of Nisbett and Cohen support the Culture of Honor Theory in the South as well as in other traditional, herding-based cultures around the world. Similar to how Talhelm et al. compared neighboring Chinese provinces to control for confounding variables, Nisbett and Cohen also examined prior studies on neighboring communities with similar ecologies who differ only in subsistence style. Anthropologist Robert Edgerton found that two neighboring tribes in East Africa, one of herders and the other of farmers, have opposite attitudes towards toughness, violence, and warfare. The herding tribe values expressions of machismo, whereas the farming tribe displays an insistent desire to get along with each other.[62]

2.4 Evaluation of Culture of Honor Theory and Alternative Theories

Strength of Culture of Honor Theory. Nisbett and Cohen combine research techniques from various disciplines – history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and ethnology – in an attempt to address concerns over methodologies commonly used in cultural psychology and to gather more reliable data. To analyze the existence, extent, and cause of the Southern Culture of Honor, they look at prior research of ethnographers, psychometricians, cliometricians (involving quantitative and archival studies of history and social institutions), survey sociologists, and experimental social psychologist.[63] This panoply of methods strengthens their case for the Culture of Honor and its origin in the traditional, herding subsistence style.

Nisbett and Cohen also pay special attention to potential confounds and control for regional differences in age, education, race, and income when studying the Southern ideology of selective, honor-based violence. Since regional disparity in homicide rates, attitudes towards

[62] Edgerton, *The individual in cultural adaptation,* (1971).
[63] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* xvii.

violence, and reactions to insults remained statistically significant over time, the aggression cannot be simply attributed to structural or demographic changes in one community or region.

The bulk of the data – archival, survey, experimental, and field – overwhelmingly support the finding that insults are taken much more seriously by Southerners because personal affronts are perceived as threats to their honor. If left unpunished, insults can damage reputations and imply weakness, so affronted Southerners must respond with aggression to reestablish their reputation. The Culture of Honor is reflected in not only the individual behavior of Southerners, but also in the contemporary public policies and social institutions of the South, further affirming the pervasiveness and persistence of the honor-based culture.

Critiques and Limitations. Despite the multitude of research techniques used, some scholars might find the Nisbett and Cohen's reliance on social science experiments and findings unconvincing. Surveys and field experiments, no matter how carefully controlled, do not always yield the most accurate or representative results. A similar issue exists even in a laboratory setting, as researchers often struggle to find truly representative, untainted samples. For example, in an experiment intended to compare Southerners and Northerners based on their reactions to insults, the sample was not representative of the two regions broadly, let alone of even the white, non-Hispanic, non-Jewish, and male demographic the researchers intended to study. They were all students at the University of Michigan who were classified as "Southerner" or "Northerner" based only on their self-identified hometowns, leading them to vary on multiple dimensions that could have compromised the validity of the findings.[64]

This methodological limitation is in large part due to the nature of cultural psychology, in which phenomena are difficult to definitively and comprehensively explain. Even the best-considered assertions of researchers can be challenged as mistaken subjective interpretations

[64] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* 42.

with scientific evidence to back up the rejection. Quantitative social scientists also face this problem since many have found conflicting evidence for the existence of the Southern Culture of Honor. Some believe, from their research, that the South does not use or condone violence particularly more than other regions in the U.S. Admittedly, none of the lab experiments discussed actually produced violent behavior; therefore, it is indeed an extrapolation to claim that Southerners are violent when their honor is insulted, even if the regional penchant for aggression has been proven.

Higher Temperature. Some scholars have suggested that higher temperatures may be the cause of greater violence in the South. The underlying logic is that higher temperature causes tempers to flare, which subsequently leads to more aggressive behavior.[65] There is supporting evidence to this hypothesis – some research show that both lethal and nonlethal violent crimes are more likely to occur on hot days.[66] However, this alternative theory does not hold up when crime data is disaggregated by region and city size. Though villages in Georgia indeed have higher homicide rates than those in Massachusetts, there is little difference between the major cities in both states despite the significant temperature difference.[67] Additionally, Nisbett and Reaves' analysis of homicide rates per July temperature showed that dry plains, where homicide rates are highest, are actually cooler than moist plains. In other words, the pattern of homicide rates observed in the South contradicts the temperature hypothesis.

Tradition of Slavery. For a long time, slavery has been considered the primary cause of greater violence in the South.[68] It has been argued that whites used corporal punishment to control their slaves and that this violent behavior spread among whites in the environment.

[65] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* 83.
[66] Anderson, "Temperature and Aggression: effects on quarterly, yearly, and city rates of violence and nonviolent crime." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 6, pp. 1161-1173, (1987).
[67] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* 84.
[68] Gastil, "Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence."

Revolutionary John Dickinson concurred, stating that the institution of slavery led to Southern "pride, selfishness, peevishness, violence," Abigail Adams believed that whites inflicted on themselves on the same kind of violence that they accorded their slaves, an opinion shared by Thomas Jefferson.[69] Nisbett and Cohen's findings support the conjecture that Southerners use violence as a means of achieving social control, whether it be disciplining slaves, spanking children, or executing criminals.[70] Thus, the violent legacy of slavery remains a plausible part of the explanation for Southern attitudes and behaviors relating to violence. However, it alone cannot entirely explain greater violence in the South. Nisbett and Reaves' analysis of homicide rate per percent of population enslaved in 1860 showed that most plains regions where slavery was common have the lowest homicide rates, compared to the violent dry plains where slavery was less common. The hypothesis also fails to explain why the Midwest, which has no history of slavery, has a similarly high homicide rate.

Greater Poverty. As a whole, the South is historically poorer than any other region of the U.S., and data on every region and population unit in the U.S. corroborate the positive correlation between poverty and homicide rates.[71] Nisbett and Reaves' analysis of homicide rate per capita income showed that poverty is a conceivable explanation of higher homicide rate, though regional differences between dry plains and moist plains are small. However, upon further examination, it cannot adequately explain the Culture of Honor. Equally poor Northern and Southern villages displayed significant disparity in homicide rates and the disparity in homicide rates between major Northern and Southern cities actually increased after poverty was controlled for in the analyses.[72]

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[69] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and behavior in the Old South*, (1982), pp. 153.
[70] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* 8.
[71] Siegel, *Criminology,* (1989).
[72] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* 84.

CHAPTER 3: THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SHAPING MORALITY

The continued and selective perpetuation of regional collectivism and individualism in the absence of its presumed source – the subsistence style – suggests an interesting link between historical practices and contemporary cultures. In the case of the Chinese provinces, neighboring towns that differed primarily in their subsistence style decades and centuries ago still exhibit contrasting characteristics of collectivism and individualism. Though the lawless frontier and herding economy no longer characterize the American South, the honor-based attitude and use of violence forged during the seventeenth century have persevered, largely due to the South's harsh socialization process.

The goal of this chapter is twofold – first, to explore a few mechanisms by which these cultural orientations and norms persist; second, to discuss their implications on regional moral norms and attitudes, specifically in the realm of human rights.

3.1 Mechanisms of Norm Persistence

Socialization. Greenfield's theory of social change, detailed in Chapter 1, views sociodemographic changes as the primary driver of cultural change. Over time, the environment of a region transforms, generally towards *Gesellschaft.*[73] Qualities, skills, and social relations adapt to environmental changes, and children receive socialization messages from their parents and various stimuli in their environment. For example, a 2005 study found that American mothers generally perceived their children's self-esteem to be much more important than did

[73] Lerner, *The passing of traditional society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1958).

grandmothers, a change which coincided with U.S. becoming more *Gesellschaft* over the past few decades.[74]

Despite the dynamic nature of culture, some values are resistant to change even when the sociodemographics evolve and newer generations experience a different environment than that of their parents. A 2000 study found that U.S.-born Mexican teenagers from immigrant families endorsed family obligation values just as strongly as Mexican adolescents born in Mexico, despite the more *Gesellschaft* environment of the U.S.[75]

Similarly, socialization plays a major role in the generational perpetuation of the Southern Culture of Honor. Nisbett and Cohen found that Southern women and men hold similar attitudes towards violence, and women actively participate in teaching ideas of honor to their sons and enforcing the notions upon their husbands. As mothers and wives, Southern women perpetuate a culture in which boys are groomed for violence through a harsh socialization process designed to make them physically courageous and ferocious in defense of their reputations. Even very young children are encouraged to be aggressive and abide by the code of honor – for example, a boy who would dodge a stone rather than allow himself to be hit and then respond in kind would be ostracized by his fellows.[76]

In the collectivistic rice villages discussed in Chapter 2, children are socialized to engage in cooperative behavior given its essentiality to the labor-intensive subsistence style of rice farming. In these communities, cooperative behavior had practical benefits, and individuals who

[74] Cho et al., "What do grandmothers think about self-esteem? American and Taiwanese folk theories revisited." *Social Development*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 701-721, (2005).
[75] Phinney et al., "Cultural values and intergenerational value discrepancies in immigrant and non-immigrant families." *Child Development*, vol. 71, no. 2, pp. 528-531, (2000).
[76] MacWhiney, *Cracker culture: Celtic ways in the old South*, (1988), pp. 203.

successfully passed on such social qualities to the next generation improved the survival chances of their offspring.[77]

Collective Expressions. Collective expressions of culture, such as social policies and laws, can determine whether or not cultural values are manifested in aggregate, institutional-level processes. If values of honor and aggression are indeed encoded in the laws, policies, media representations, and institutional behavior of the South then it is possible to claim that Southern culture as a whole is more violent than Northern culture in honor-related circumstances. The following implication is that aggressive attitudes and behaviors transcend individuals in the South and exist as part of a larger phenomenon that persists across generations.

Law and social policy shape the behavior of citizens by defining what is acceptable, appropriate, worthy of reward, and worthy of punishment. Consequently, they affect individual behavior and attitudes, in both visible and invisible ways. For example, loose gun control laws reinforce as well as reflect the lawless frontier mentality, capital punishment laws and customs legitimize retributive feelings, corporal punishment laws convey ideas about appropriate methods for socializing children and dealing with disorder, and media portrayals of violence as a justified tool promote its usage.[78] Death penalty exists in many states, both Northern and Southern, but mainly those in the South have the means and desire to actually execute prisoners on death row – between 1977 to 1991, 140 out of 157 executions occurred in the South, affirming its elevated tolerance of violent attitudes and behaviors.[79] This feedback loop between individual- and collective-level behaviors perpetuate the norms around violence and honor in the South. In this model, individual behavior and private representations, occurring in an

[77] Moghaddam, "Toward a Cultural Theory of Human Rights." *Theory & Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 291-312, (2000).
[78] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor*, 57.
[79] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor*, 71.

institutional context, reinforce public representations of what is right, good, and appropriate, which future generations will uphold.[80]

3.2 Culture to Morality

More than a century ago, sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that moral choices, small and big, are influenced by the culture of the decision-maker:

> [E]ven the moralist who believes he is able, by the power of thought, to withdraw himself from the influences of surrounding ideas, cannot succeed in doing so. For he is entirely permeated by them, and, whatever he does, it is they that he discovers once more at the conclusion of his deductions.[81]

Therefore, morality forms in the context of social interactions which are largely shaped by culture. In 1990, cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder proposed a model of understanding the interaction between culture and morality – a tripartite distinction between Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity which takes into account the highly diverse moral nuances and considerations of cultures around the world.[82] Research shows the presence of all three ethics in diverse cultures, meaning that cultures are usually rarely only autonomy-, community-, or divinity-oriented. Recognizing this, Shweder assessed participants based on the degree to which they exhibited markers of the three Ethics, rather than classifying people as purely one type. This echoes the aforementioned claim that no culture is purely individualistic or collectivistic, and as such, individuals' moral attitudes and behaviors must also be theorized more holistically. Shweder's Ethic of Autonomy and the Ethic of Community are relevant to this

[80] Nisbett et al., *Culture of Honor,* 58.
[81] Durkheim, *The division of labor in society,* (1984).
[82] Shweder et al., "Culture and moral development." *Cultural psychology,* pp. 130-203, (1990).

thesis because they correspond to cultural orientations of individualism and collectivism, respectively, thereby linking cultural orientations and conceptions of morality.

Ethic of Autonomy. The Ethic of Autonomy involves a focus on people as individuals who have needs, desires, and preferences. The moral goal supported by this Ethic is to recognize the right to the fulfilment of these needs and desires and to strive to provide the means to satisfy them.[83] While the rights, interests, and well-being of the individual are emphasized, this Ethic also highlights the need to act with consideration of the needs and rights of others and to take responsibility for oneself. Naturally, this Ethic inspires autonomy-oriented virtues such as self-esteem, self-expression, and independence.

Ethic of Community. Shweder's Ethic of Community shifts the focus from the individual to the community, such as family, school, and nation. Individuals exist and function in this social context and in relation to others. From this perspective, a person's moral goal is to fulfill role-based duties to others and to contribute to the protection and positive functioning of one's social group. Consequently, this Ethic is concerned with the customs, interests, and welfare – the culture – of groups and values community-oriented virtues such as self-moderation, loyalty, and collaboration.

Therefore, people living in individualistic societies adopt the moral discourse of autonomy in that what is considered right or wrong depends on whether it affects one's rights or not. In contrast, collectivistic societies endorse a moral discourse of community, wherein people perceive themselves as interconnected with their social group and judge right and wrong on the

[83] Jensen, "Through two lenses: A cultural-developmental approach to moral psychology." *Developmental Review* vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 289-315, (2008).

basis of interpersonal duties, social roles, and obligations.[84] Even so, it remains unclear how autonomy-oriented and community-oriented virtues actually materialize as specific moral norms. In response, this thesis will examine how the two culture-based Ethics unfold with regards to human rights, a particular category of moral norms.

3.3 Culturally-Divided Rights: Economic, Social, Cultural vs. Civil and Political

After the Second World War, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which consists of 30 articles affirming the rights of individuals. Though UDHR has been considered a modern standard of international human rights for about seventy years, the document was non-binding and aspirational. When the international community convened to transform human rights principles into legally binding obligations, the ideological division between the East and West surfaced. The two Blocs insisted on rights focusing on different sets of issues, and tensions deepened against the backdrop of the Cold War.[85]

The failure to transform the UDHR into a single binding instrument led the UN bodies to facilitate the negotiation and adoption of two separate Covenants in 1966 – the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Distinguishing between economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) and civil and political rights (CPR) reified the existence of separate, distinct categories of human rights. In doing so, ESCR and CPR were pitted against each other in terms of relative legitimacy, universality, and prioritization of enforcement. Though the 1993 Vienna Declaration

[84] Vauclair, "Do cultural values predict individuals' moral attitudes? A cross-cultural multilevel approach." *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 41, no. 5, no. 645-657, (2011).
[85] UNHR Office of the High Commissioner, "Key concepts on ESCRs - Are economic, social and cultural rights fundamentally different from civil and political rights?" Web.

sought to undo the separation of rights and restore the UDHR's stance of undistinguished and therefore equally important rights, the political, conceptual, and institutional divide between ESCR and CPR persists.

Much like during the time of their adoption, Eastern, developing, and/or collectivistic countries prioritize ESCR while Western, developed, and/or individualistic countries continue to put greater emphasis on CPR. Differential support for types of rights appears to rise from variations in cultural values.[86] According to the Council on Foreign Relations, which published in 2011 *Public Opinion on Global Issues*, a comprehensive summary of polling data on global public attitudes on many major issues, U.S. respondents supported the right to express any opinion far more than the international average (76% vs. 66% said the right is "very important").[87] These results are in keeping with the traditional U.S. emphasis on political freedoms and individualism. On the other hand, only 34% of respondents from Russia believed it was "very important," which is unsurprising given Russia is often associated with collectivism and has been historically considered an anchor point in the individualism-collectivism spectrum, opposite the U.S.

Expectedly, these differences in support between U.S. and Russian citizens follow a similar trend for other issues of CPR – on the freedom of the press from government interference, 75% of Americans agreed as opposed to 45% of Russians; on the right to demonstrate peacefully, 94% of Americans vs. 76% Russians; on the freedom of religion, 77% of Americans vs. 34% of Russians.[88] For issues regarding ESCR, the trend is flipped – respondents from individualistic countries like the U.S. show far less support for these types of

[86] McFarland, "Culture, individual differences, and support for human rights: A general review." *Journal of Peace Psychology,* vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 10-27, (2015).
[87] Council on Foreign Relations, "2011 Public Opinion on Global Issues." Web.
[88] McFarland, "Culture, individual differences, and support for human rights: A general review."

rights, including rights to social welfare, food supply programs, healthcare, and employment, whereas those from collectivistic countries like Russia show far more support than the international average.

As per the discussion on norm persistence, these regional differences in support for certain types of rights are not a new phenomenon. In a 1998 study, European university students were asked to rate the importance of certain human rights. 99% of students in Yugoslavia, then a socialist country, rated the right of protection from unemployment "very important" compared to just 22% of their Western counterparts, namely students from Germany, Finland, and Norway.[89] When asked about the right to seek asylum, a political issue, the results flipped, with 37% of Yugoslavian students considering it to be "very important" vs. 73% of Western students.

As previously mentioned, attitude – especially when self-reported – does not necessarily translate to behavior. Self-rated agreement with human rights statements such as "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion" may reflect only a superficial endorsement of a moral value rather than a true commitment. A 1971 study on tolerance for dissent conducted by psychologists Gail Zellman and David Sears found that 60% of the sample of American youth claimed "I believe in free speech for all no matter what their views might be," but when asked later if a Communist should be allowed to speak in their city, only 21% agreed.[90] Therefore, while self-rated data reveal strong adherence to cultural norms – certainly important evidence of culture's influence on morality – it may not be as meaningful or reliable as one would expect.

[89] Sommer et al., *Menschenrechte und Menschenrechtsbildung,* (2009).
[90] Zellman et al., "Childhood origins of tolerance for dissent." *Journal of Social Issues,* vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 109-136, (1971).

3.4 A Potential Explanation: Individual vs. individual

Western modernity regards the "Individual" as the bedrock social actor from which all other higher-order units are constituted through associational activity.[91] Given that the language of human rights emerged from Western liberal tradition, it is not surprising then that 85% of all rights provisions enumerated in international human rights instruments pertain to individuated entities as opposed to groups.[92] In fact, some scholars have argued that human rights are inherently individualistic because they refer to rights held by individuals in relation to and sometimes even against the state and society.[93] However, what it means to be an individual varies across cultures and over time. In some cultures, individuals are understood as brute, social facts, akin to discrete members of the human species.[94] In others, they are considered autonomous and empowered social agents.

The conception of the Individual – with a capital "I" – is the product of long-term cultural construction and evolution in the West.[95] The Individual is a self-determining actor with intrinsic rights. From this perspective, the Individual is an ontological and cosmological artifact rather than a mere biological entity.[96] Though much of human rights literature has adopted this view of the Individual, interpretation and practice of human rights vary greatly across cultures. Non-Western societies lack the deep tradition of autonomous individualism that characterizes much of the West – in some societies, the conception of an abstract individual who exists and has value

[91] Cole, "Human Rights and the Individual: Cross-Cultural Variation in Human Rights Scores, 1980 to 2010." *Social Forces*, vol. 95, no. 2, pp. 721-752, (2016).
[92] Elliott, "Human Rights and the Triumph of the Individual in World Culture." *Cultural Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 343-363, (2007).
[93] Donnelly, "Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights." *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 400-419, (1984).
[94] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, (1995).
[95] Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and Its Implications*, (1986).
[96] Cole, "Human Rights and the Individual: Cross-Cultural Variation in Human Rights Scores, 1980 to 2010."

independent of particular social contexts is nonexistent.[97] In such cultures, individuals – with a lower-case "i" – have status and standing only by virtue of their membership in various groups.

The culturally-variant notions of the Individual and the individual correspond to those of individualism and collectivism, respectively. This association is further supported by social psychologist Geert Hofstede who found that the Individualist ideology was indeed strongest in Western Protestant countries and weakest in Animist and Confucian countries in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.[98] In African philosophy, French philosopher René Descartes' famous dictum "I think, therefore I am" is translated to "I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am."[99]

The empirical implication of the distinction between the ontological Individual and the biological individual is that rights which empower the Individual are more respected and supported in Western cultures and less so in Eastern and Sub-Saharan African cultures. These rights, considered to have been derived from Western values of liberty and equality, are best embodied in CPR. Thus, CPR issues continue to be at the forefront of many Western states' efforts to advance human rights. For example, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International – two of the biggest and most prominent human rights organizations globally – were founded in the West and remain largely Western in ideology and staff demographics. Perhaps as a consequence, both of their initial mandates focused on advancing CPR, and while they have since expanded their mandate in scope and reach, CPR issues arguably still take priority over ESCR in terms of funding, programming, and raising awareness.[100]

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[97] Boyle, *Female Genital Cutting: Cultural Conflict in the Global Community*, (2002).
[98] Hofstede, "The Cultural relativeity of organization practices and theories." *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 75-89, (1983).
[99] Mutua, *Human rights: a political and cultural critique*, (2002).
[100] Shetty, "Governments can no longer shirk responsibility to protect all human rights." Web.

On the other hand, non-Western cultures are generally more concerned than Western cultures about threats to their biological well-being such as practices of torture and poverty.[101] At the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, many Asian and African governments sought to redefine human rights away from CPR.[102] Some even claimed that protecting CPR was detrimental to achieving peace, order, and development of countries, for individualism fosters disorder and chaos whereas collectivism fosters harmony and progress. Therefore, without bridging the cultural construals of the Individual and the individual, support and respect for specific human rights will likely remain deeply divided based on cultural orientations.

[101] Cole, "Human Rights and the Individual: Cross-Cultural Variation in Human Rights Scores, 1980 to 2010."
[102] Riding, "A bleak assessment as rights meeting nears." *New York Times*, 1993.

CONCLUSION

This thesis connects theories and concepts from cultural psychology and moral psychology to propose an interesting perspective on the roots of cultural variation in moral attitudes and norms, including those of human rights. The first chapter gave an overview of cultural psychology and set the stage for subsequent discussions on how and why cultures vary. Specifically, they were categorized by orientation, as primarily collectivistic or individualistic. For the remainder of the thesis, different origins and spin-offs of the two were discussed – *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft,* interdependence-independence, farming-herding, rice-wheat, Ethic of Community-Ethic of Autonomy, and ICESCR-ICCPR.

Chapter 2 explored Subsistence Style Theory, a possible explanation for the persistence of cultural orientations, which argues that the particular social and economic systems created by a subsistence style can impact the culture at large and for generations. Two case studies – the Chinese provinces with agricultural legacies of rice and wheat and the American South with historical reliance on pastoralism – were elaborated upon to showcase the merits and weaknesses of Subsistence Style Theory.

The insights and theories discussed in the first two chapters, albeit interesting, may leave the reader thinking: "so what?" Even if Subsistence Style Theory is widely accepted and we are indeed a product of our ancestors' method of subsistence, how does that matter in the present day? The third and final chapter attempted to answer this question by exploring political, philosophical, and cultural ways in which these orientations, established historically and maintained generationally, impact today's moral ideas and behaviors. In an effort to assess the

validity of a causal link between culture and morality, the chapter opened with a discussion on potential mechanisms of norm persistence.

In particular, I focused on human rights as a key category of moral norms. The struggle to advance human rights requires the committed support of the world's citizens and governments, so it follows that understanding why cultures vary in their respect and support for certain types of human rights is crucial to effectively advocate for these rights on a global scale. The fact that cultural orientations can explain at least partly the West's prioritization of civil and political rights and the East's of economic, social, and cultural rights can inform the strategies of advocates in their efforts to increase support for all rights for everyone.

In keeping with the pattern of critically evaluating the theories put forth in the three chapters, I think it is only appropriate to end this thesis with questions and alternative considerations. First, it is worth considering if and how long the impact of historical subsistence style will last. To my knowledge, no study has explored this question in depth. At what point, under what catalyst, will a culture change so much that it no longer corresponds to the orientation promoted by its past subsistence style? Perhaps it is just a matter of time – given that cultures are constantly evolving, it may be the case that a culture's orientation and defining characteristics will change simply after some number of years. Alternatively, they may last permanently, maintained by strong mechanisms such as child socialization and social policies. The bottom line is that no one knows, and it will be interesting to follow communities like the Chinese provinces and Southern towns discussed above to see if and how they change over time.

Areas of further study include extensions of Subsistence Style Theory, much like the Rice Theory, as well as research outside of subsistence style, perhaps on alternative explanations for the persistence of cultural orientations. These studies could strengthen or weaken Subsistence

Style Theory and its implications for contemporary cultures. Separately, scholars could research methods to induce greater support for human rights that are less respected in a particular culture – for example, how to foster supportive attitudes and behaviors towards economic rights in the U.S. While policy can certainly be an important piece of change, I am interested in exploring the possibility of a broader cultural shift that makes Americans more approving of economic rights. Perhaps the key is to figure out ways to make American culture more collectivistic, as studies have shown that collectivistic cultures place greater value on economic, social, and cultural rights than do individualistic cultures like the U.S.

By nature, the disciplines and topics discussed in this thesis are hard to definitively prove and claim. It is entirely possible that after reading this thesis, the reader will have questions beyond those I attempted to address in the evaluation sections. The reader may even completely disagree with some of the premises – for example, if he or she believes in cultural universalism – and challenge the entire logic of connecting cultural orientations, subsistence style, and morality. Consequently, as I mentioned in the Introduction, my goal is not to convince the reader that the theories and findings discussed in this thesis are absolutely true or form the only explanation for the phenomena described. Rather, I hope to introduce the reader to lesser-known theories of cultural change and provide a theoretical starting point for a broader, more complex discussion on what makes us who we are today.

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