Independence and Obedience: An Analysis of Childrearing Values in the United States and China

Hong Xiao, Nanyang Technological University
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Independence and Obedience: An Analysis of Child Socialization Values in the United States and China*

HONG XIAO**

Child socialization values, the values that parents hold high in teaching children, occupy a central place in the studies of the family and social stratification. Socialization values not only condition parental behavior in childrearing practices, they also help shape children's value systems and behavior, which affect their life chances and pathways to success. Thus, an examination of the patterns of socialization values enhances our understanding of the process of status reproduction and social mobility. In the abundant research that has been undertaken primarily in the United States, there is a consensus that parents differ on a common set of values they desire in children. This set of values are independence and obedience. Among the ecological factors that influence parental valuation of independence and obedience, the role of social class is particularly significant and consistent. Studies over the past several decades have found that, while middle class parents place greater emphasis on their children's independence, working class parents are more concerned with their children's obedience (Alwin, 1988; Gecas, 1979; Grimm-Thomas and Perry-Jenkins, 1994; Kohn, 1977; Spade, 1991). It is argued that while parents' valuation of independence facilitates children's upward mobility, parents' emphasis on obedience prohibits it (Kohn, 1977).

Child socialization values may vary across societies as well as across individuals. Socialization, the process by which children are educated with the attitudes, values, and behaviors of a society, exists in every culture of the world. Because the general social structure is influenced by culture, the content of socialization is also based on the salient cultural values of the society. Due to the influence of cultural history and social systems, characteristics valued in children in one society may not be valued in another. In addition, ecological factors that are closely linked to a particular child socialization value in one culture may not be associated to that value in another. This research investigates national differences in child socialization values in the United States and China. While a few previous studies have examined child socialization values and their predictors from a comparative point, the focus has often been on the relationships between social systems and child socialization values within different societies (Barry et al., 1976; Ellis and Petersen, 1992; Kohn et al., 1990; Pearlin and Kohn, 1966). In this research, I give a straightforward

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** Department of Sociology, Monmouth College, Monmouth, Illinois 61462, USA Email: hong@monm.edu
U.S. — China comparison and test hypotheses suggested in literature pertaining to child socialization values in these two countries. Specifically, I explore two topics. First, I seek to demonstrate where and how Americans and Chinese differ in their orientations toward children. Second, I seek to explain the national differences by probing into the sources of value variations in the two countries.

Why should we compare child socialization values in the United States and China? The two countries represent two distinct social systems and cultures. The United States, the world's largest economy, is an advanced capitalist society and is for many the prototype of "the West." China, with the world's largest population, is an industrializing socialist society and has traditionally represented "the East." Comparisons of the two countries enhance our knowledge about where the two cultures and social systems converge and diverge. As our world becomes more global and increasingly interdependent, knowledge and understanding of other cultures become more vital to success in both competition and cooperation. This study seeks such knowledge and understanding.

NATIONAL CULTURE OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

The United States and China are two societies with distinctive cultures. While American culture is centered in the values derived from Judeo-Christian roots, Chinese culture is built upon a value system crystallized mainly in Confucianism. As such, the dominant American cultural themes of relevance stress individual independence and achievement. In contrast, Chinese culture values group cohesiveness and social deference. Common to many of the discussions of distinctive American values is the perception that Americans value self-governance and individual autonomy, are ambivalent towards authority, and admire those who achieve by their own efforts (Fiegleman, 1993; Hofstede, 1980; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Triandis, 1995). American economic and political systems promote individual rewards for individual effort. Additionally, influenced by Greek and Judeo-Christian thought, religion has always played an essential role in the lives of Americans. In the United States, the vast majority of those responding to public polls believe in God and they regard belief in God as essential to being a good American (Sasaki and Suzuki, 1987; Warner, 1993). Indeed, according to a Gallup poll, if a person has no religious beliefs, he or she will be subject to a negative image (Gallup, 1990).

Traditional Chinese culture, as researchers have argued, values group cohesiveness and social order (Bond, 1991; Hsu, 1981). Influenced by Confucianism, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes that man exists in relationships to others. People are born into a family or a group and can not prosper alone; the success of an individual depends on the harmony and strength of the group. With regard to socialization values, researchers seem to agree that, traditionally, Chinese parents have been more concerned with children's submissiveness and obedience to parents than their Western counterparts, but more tolerance of children's independence has been observed in young and better educated parents (Bond, 1991; Ho, 1989; Ho and Kang, 1984). Moreover, hardworking and thrifty were much emphasized because Chinese believe that these virtues bring prosperity and glory to the family name (Ho, 1994).

Thus, the discussions of the traditional American values and Chinese values depict the two countries as having very different cultural traditions. The theory of individualism and
collectivism also generates complementary expectations. In cross-cultural studies, American
culture is often considered an individualistic culture, in contrast to Chinese culture which
emphasizes collectivism. Several scholars have elaborated the contrasting characteristics
of individualism and collectivism. According to Hofstede (1980), individualism is a
preference for a loosely knit social framework in which individuals are supposed to take
care of themselves and their immediate families only. Collectivism is a preference for a
nearly knit social framework in which individuals can expect their relatives, clan, or other
in-group members to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. From a
psychological perspective, Triandis (1995) suggested a similar distinction between
collectivism and individualism. In collective cultures, individuals are willing to subordinate
their personal goals to the goals of various in-groups, such as the family, the tribe, or the
work group. By contrast, in individualistic cultures, it is considered acceptable for
individuals to place personal goals ahead of the group’s goals.

If the content of socialization is based on the salient cultural values of the society, the
above discussions then suggest the following expectations. Due to the influence of national
cultures, Americans and Chinese emphasize different values in children. In particular,
Americans are more likely than Chinese to desire values reflecting Judeo-Christian tradition
and individualism such as independence, determination, and religious faith. Chinese, on
the other hand, are expected to endorse more than Americans values emphasized in
Confucian teachings and collectivism. These values are obedience, hard work, thrift/
savings, unselfishness, and responsibility. I also hypothesize that child socialization values
have different roots in the United States and China.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data for the study come from the World Values Survey (hereafter WVS). Explicitly
designed to enable cross-national comparison of values and norms in a wide range of
areas, the WVS was conducted in 43 countries during the years of 1990 to 1993. The
principal investigator was the World Values Study Group (1994), with fieldwork supported
by sources within the participating country in most cases. The data are based on face-to-
face interviews, with samples consisting of all adults, ages 18 and older. For my purposes,
the survey contains information on the kinds of characteristics that adults desire in children
— child socialization values. Two samples in WVS 1990-1993, one from the United
States and one from China, are used in this study. The United State’s sample is a national
representative sample with interviews conducted by the Gallup Organization in 1990. The
Chinese data come from a representative sample of the urban population. China Statistical
Information Center collected data in July - December of 1990 (Inglehart, 1994). There is
clearly a difference in the sampling frame of the two samples. Although the Chinese
urban population is, in a sense, analogous to the U.S. civic population, one must remain
aware of this difference throughout the study. Due to the fact that the Chinese sample was
drawn from urban population, I do not assume that the Chinese respondents in the sample
are representative of the entire Chinese population. I do believe, however, that my findings
can be useful as indicators of the childrearing expectations of Chinese urban residents.

In the WVS, interviewees were instructed to choose up to five items from a list of
eleven items as the most important characteristics that a child should have. The samples
in this study consist of the American and Chinese respondents who gave valid answers to
the value question in the interview; that is, only those who selected 1 to 5 items were included in the analysis. I consider the responses of 6 items or more invalid because they are not consistent with the interview instructions. Furthermore, when more than five items are selected, the prioritization of certain values over others is lost. As a result of the restriction and excluding cases with missing values, there are 1575 Americans and 992 Chinese in the analysis samples out of 1839 Americans and 1000 Chinese in the total samples.

**Child Socialization Values**

Eleven items representing child socialization values are analyzed in the present research. These items are "good manners," "independence," "hard work," "feeling of responsibility," "imagination," "tolerance/respect for other people," "thrift/saving money and things," "determination/perseverance," "religious faith," "unselfishness," and "obedience." In my analysis, each of the value items is coded as 1 = selected and 0 = not selected.

**Predictor Variables**

Variables measuring the socio-demographic characteristics, family structural conditions, and belief systems make up the predictor variables. The socio-demographic variables are *age* (in years and in age group), *gender* (1 = female and 0 = male), *education* (less than high school, high school, and more than high school), *race* (African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and whites), and *social class*. Due to differences in social, economic, and political structures in the two nations, two measures of class locations are constructed. For the U.S. data, the five class locations are: owner/manager, professional, foreman/foreman/foreman, non-manual worker, and manual worker. For the China data, the five class locations are cadre/manager, professional, foreman/foreman/foreman, and manual worker.

Family structural variables include the number of children ever had and parental status. The latter is measured by three dummy variables — non-parent, current parent (living with children), and past parent (living without children). Belief system variables are *conventionality* (1 = yes and 0 = no) and *religiosity*. Conventional individuals are those who value filial piety — identified by an affirmative response to the question of "regardless of what the qualities and faults of one's parents are, one must always love and respect them." Religiosity is measured by two indicators included in all interviews: importance of God and religious attendance. Importance of God is measured by the question: "How important is God in your life?" The responses range from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very important). Religious attendance is measured by the question: "Apart from weddings, funerals, and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" The responses are 1 = never, 2 = less often, 3 = once a year, 4 = other specific holidays, 5 = Christmas, Easter Day, 6 = once a month, 7 = once a week, and 8 = more than once a week.\(^1\) The

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\(^1\) The answers to the question were originally coded as 1 = More than once a week, 2 = Once a week, 3 = Once a month, 4 = Christmas/Easter day, 5 = Other specific holidays, 6 = Once a year, 7 = Less often, and 8 = Never, practically never. For the purpose of constructing a religiosity scale, I reversed the original codings.
responses for these two questions were added to form a single measure of religiosity (coefficient alpha equals .86).

Although Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are often considered three major religions in China, they are not formal religions in Western terms; none of the three belief systems involve church service or attendance, and none of them has a place for God. Thus, the measure of religiosity I described above is only used in the analysis of the U.S. sample. There are certainly alternative methods to measure "religiosity" in China. Unfortunately, the WVS does not contain the relevant information for me to do so.

I also include a measure of urbanity for U.S.-China comparisons. This variable differentiates between urban and rural respondents in the U.S. sample. Percentage distributions of major socio-demographic characteristics for the two samples are presented in Appendix.

RESULTS

To test my hypotheses, I first examined the differences in percentages of people in each sample endorsing each of the value items. Table 1 presents the proportion of American and Chinese respondents selecting each of the value items. Percentage difference tests for two independent samples were conducted for each comparison. The results show mixed support for the hypotheses. I discuss the general value selection patterns first.

In keeping with my expectations, significant differences in percentage distribution between the two samples are found for nine out of the eleven value items. The selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Items</th>
<th>U.S. a %</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>(rank)</th>
<th>China b %</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>(rank)</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Manners</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>1162(1)</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>118.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>757  (5)</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>334.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Work</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>689  (6)</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>107.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>1082 (3)</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>327  (11)</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance/Respect</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>1090 (2)</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrift/Saving</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>336  (10)</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>315.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>453  (9)</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>68.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Faith</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>804  (4)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>697.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unselfishness</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>464  (8)</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>496  (7)</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>182.65***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Number of respondents = 1575.
b. Number of respondents = 992.
*** p < .001.
differences of these nine items between the two countries vary from as little as 6 percentage points ("imagination" — 20.8% for Americans versus 26.6% for Chinese) to as much as 50 percentage points ("religious faith" — 51.0% for Americans versus 1.2% for Chinese). However, Americans and Chinese also show great similarities in the kinds of qualities they desire most in children. One such similarity is manifested in the top six value items selected by the survey respondents. Despite of the percentage differences between the individual items, American and Chinese adults share five out of six value items selected most frequently within each country. For Americans, the top six value items in order of preference are “good manners,” “tolerance/respect,” “responsibility,” “religious faith,” “independence,” and “hard work.” For Chinese, the six most valued qualities are “independence,” “responsibility,” “hard work,” “tolerance/respect,” “thrift/saving,” and “good manners.”

Looking at individual value items, the between-country differences are both interesting and complex. Compared to Chinese, Americans are more likely to select “obedience” (31.5% vs. 8.0%), “good manners” (73.8% vs. 52.8%), “tolerance/respect” (69.2% vs. 61.7%), and “religious faith” (5.0% vs. 1.2%). Conversely, Chinese are more likely than Americans to choose “independence” (84.7% vs. 48.1%), “determination” (44.8% vs. 28.8%), and “imagination” (26.6% vs. 20.8%). Two items indicative of Confucian values, “hard work” and “thrift/saving,” are also endorsed more by Chinese than Americans (64.7% vs. 43.7% and 55.5% vs. 21.3%, respectively). However, Americans and Chinese are very similar in the endorsement of “unsocialness” and “responsibility.” Not only is the ranking of each item roughly the same within each country, the proportion of respondents valuing each item is also similar in U.S. and China.

While the greater valuation of “religious faith” by Americans and the stronger emphasis on “hard work” and “thrift/saving” by Chinese are expected, the greater selection of “obedience” by Americans than Chinese and the greater selection of “independence” by Chinese than Americans are in contrast to the common assumptions. All empirical research on values shows substantial between-country differences. Even countries that are similar in social and political systems, economic development, and cultural/religious traditions display major national differences in human values (Ester et al., 1993; Gundelach, 1994; Inglehart, 1990). But what is most striking in the U.S.-China comparison is that the country disparities in the valuation of “independence” and “obedience” are exactly opposite to what the traditional literature has suggested. What accounts for the observed differences?

Could the differences in the value selections be attributed to some background characteristics of American and Chinese respondents? After all, the Chinese sample was drawn from the urban population. Significant urban-rural differences exist in family structure, family size, class structure, and educational attainment in mainland China (Davis and Harrell, 1993). In general, rural residents are more likely than urban residents to live in extended families, have more children, be employed in manual work, and have a low level of education. Rural residents are also more traditional in their value orientations. This is the case in both U.S. and China (Pan et al., 1994). Given that the U.S. sample contains both urban and rural residents and the China sample has only urban residents, it is possible that the U.S.-China differences in the values are mainly due to the urbaniy of the Chinese sample. A comparison of the U.S. and China samples also shows that Chinese
respondents tend to be younger than Americans. Since age has been noted as an important factor in previous research, it is possible that the younger age of the Chinese respondents are mainly responsible for the value differences between the two countries.

Table 2 presents percentage distributions of the selection of “independence” and “obedience” by age for the whole Chinese sample and the urban respondents in the U.S. sample. The differences in value selection patterns are sustained, however. Although urban Americans of every single age group prefer children’s independence (46.8%) to children’s obedience (31.5%), Chinese adults of all ages value the former (84.1%) much more than the latter (8.6%). The results, then, clearly suggest that the differences in sampling frame and age structure are not the source of value variations between the American and Chinese respondents.

To further probe the source of the cross-national differences in the valuation of independence and obedience, I then estimated, using logistic regression, the effects of sociodemographic variables, family structural variables, and attitudinal variables on the probability of selecting independence and obedience. Analyses were run separately for

Table 2:

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SELECTION OF INDEPENDENCE AND OBEEDIENCE BY AGE GROUP FOR U.S. URBAN RESPONDENTS\textsuperscript{a} AND THE CHINESE RESPONDENTS\textsuperscript{b}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Independence</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Obedience</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Urban</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>U.S. Urban</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 24</td>
<td>49.3 (67)</td>
<td>88.2 (142)</td>
<td>53.60***</td>
<td>30.9 (42)</td>
<td>5.0 (8)</td>
<td>35.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 44</td>
<td>50.6 (275)</td>
<td>87.1 (383)</td>
<td>146.23***</td>
<td>29.8 (162)</td>
<td>5.7 (25)</td>
<td>91.77***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 64</td>
<td>46.4 (174)</td>
<td>78.7 (280)</td>
<td>80.72***</td>
<td>33.1 (124)</td>
<td>13.2 (47)</td>
<td>40.21 * *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>38.9 (107)</td>
<td>82.9 (29)</td>
<td>24.35***</td>
<td>33.1 (91)</td>
<td>14.3 (5)</td>
<td>5.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>46.8 (623)</td>
<td>84.1 (834)</td>
<td>336.94***</td>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>31.5 (419)</td>
<td>8.6 (85)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Number of respondents = 1330.
\textsuperscript{b} Number of respondents = 592.
\textsuperscript{* p < .05; *** p < .001.}
American and Chinese respondents. The results are summarized in Table 3.

My findings in Table 3 show clear and consistent evidence that preference for children's independence and obedience have very different roots in U.S. and China. For example, socio-demographic characteristics and belief system variables play a greater role in the valuation of independence in the American sample than in the Chinese sample. While Americans' preference of independence in children are strongly affected by their education, age, gender, racial/ethnic identity, parental status, as well as their belief orientation, the

TABLE 3:
STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS OF LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS OF INDEPENDENCE AND OBEDIENCE ON SELECTED INDEPENDENT VARIABLES FOR THE U.S. AND CHINA SAMPLES\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independence</th>
<th>Obedience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-demographic Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.159***</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td>-.011**</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1=female, 0=male)</td>
<td>.153***</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager or Cadre</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmanual</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race(^c)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structural Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>-.216**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Status(^d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Parent</td>
<td>.110*</td>
<td>-.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Parent</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>-.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudinal Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>-.170***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventionality</td>
<td>-.105**</td>
<td>-.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Chi-Square</td>
<td>127.271***</td>
<td>75.456***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each of the two value items is coded as 1 = selected and 0 = not selected.

\(^a\) N = 1359 for U.S.; N = 887 for China.

\(^b\) Manual worker is the reference category in all models.

\(^c\) White is the reference category in the U.S. models.

\(^d\) Non-parent is the reference category in all models.

\(^*\) p < .05; \(^**\) p < .01; \(^***\) p < .001.
Chinese valuation of independence is related directly only to the number of children one has ever had when other variables are controlled. For Chinese respondents, the more children one has ever had, the less likely one values independence.

In the case of obedience valuation, conventionality is a predictor for both Americans and Chinese. In both the U.S. and China models, the endorsement of obedience is positively affected by conventionality. In other words, the more one adheres to filial piety, the more one desires children's obedience. This finding indicates that whether in Western capitalist United States or in Eastern socialist China, obedience is a more conventional value, emphasizing authoritarian parenting style. Thus, it is preferred more by conventional individuals.

However, there are also significant cross-national differences in the sources of obedience valuation. In particular, while class and age are important predictors in the Chinese sample, they bear no direct impact in the U.S. sample when other variables are held constant. Instead, race is the only demographic variable that strongly influences Americans' desire for children's obedience. African Americans and Hispanic Americans are more likely than whites to desire children's obedience. This result is consistent with the findings of earlier research, and most likely reflects the social experiences of non-whites in the United States.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

As in many cross-national studies on values, my U.S. - China comparison has found both similarities and differences between the two countries in child socialization orientations. In terms of similarities, one of the striking features is that Americans and Chinese are fairly similar in the kinds of qualities they think important to teach children at home. Among the top six qualities that are emphasized in each country, five are identical. These five qualities are "independence," "hard work," "responsibility," "tolerance/respect," and "good manners." The emphasis of these values by the respondents suggests that certain child socialization goals do not have cultural boundaries.

Another noteworthy value selection pattern is the relative support given to the value of independence versus the value of obedience by American and Chinese respondents. Although the between-country differences are large, within each country, independence is valued more than obedience. This indicates that, for both American and Chinese respondents, children's ability to be independent is more desirable than their ability to be obedient. Earlier studies have reported that, over the past several decades in the United States, there is a consistent increase in the valuation of children's independence and a decrease in the valuation of children's obedience (Alwin, 1988, 1989; Wright and Wright, 1976). My findings provide additional evidence to support this claim.

At the same time, significant differences are found between Americans and Chinese in their valuation of obedience and independence in children. Americans, on average, are more likely than Chinese to think that it is important for children to be obedient. Chinese, on the other hand, are more likely than Americans to believe that it is important for children to be independent. This pattern of value selection does not support the common assumptions and past observations. After all, American culture is known for its emphasis on
individualism. Individual autonomy is one of the most treasured characteristics of the American value system. Due to the influence of Confucian teachings on social order and harmony, traditional Chinese culture values obedience and conformity. In the Chinese family, parents have been traditionally concerned that their children's behavior be culturally appropriate and socially desirable. As a result, Chinese children are taught to listen to parents and elders and to follow their guidelines without any objection.

Why are my findings opposite to the expectations? One possible explanation is the differing social environment in U.S. and China. U.S. is a country made of immigrants. As a society, it is characterized by cultural diversity and heterogeneity of norms and values. The greater heterogeneity (in cultural diversity, in values and norms, in behavioral models offered to children, etc.) of the society may undermine the family's ability to circumscribe children's behavior and make parental control over children more difficult to achieve. As parental control becomes more problematic and child obedience becomes more difficult to achieve, conformity in children may become more valued.

In addition, U.S. society is plagued by a series of social problems such as crime, drugs, violence, and gangs. In such a social environment, adults may place a greater value on children's obedience to parental/external authority because they perceive their environment as a more dangerous place for their children. Indeed, fear is pervasive in American society. Many Americans perceive themselves and their families at great risk of safety. Numerous public opinion polls show that Americans believe that they live in a very dangerous society and they are frightened about it (Altheide, 1997; Covington and Taylor, 1991). With this mentality, American parents may become particularly concerned with protecting their children and keeping them safe from potentially harmful environment and influences. A greater value for children's obedience may reflect a greater concern for insulating children from what parents perceive as undesirable or dangerous outside influences.

China has typically been characterized as more homogeneous in terms of cultural traditions and value systems. The influence of Confucianism emphasizing order and conformity to authority often makes us expect that Chinese adults place a high value on children's conformity. While some evidence suggests that Chinese people may be characterized by a more general authoritarian orientation, in the particular area of child socialization values, Chinese respondents appear to be less concerned with children's conformity to authority. I think this may be because in China, parental control and child conformity are less problematic and hence less important to parents and adults. Also, traditional Chinese culture values self-sufficiency within the family. The greater importance attached to the value of independence by Chinese respondents may represent that legacy.

Kohn (1977) made the point that adults may, to some extent, endorse values in terms of how difficult is their realization. Adults may value in children traits they feel are important, and at the same time are difficult to achieve in children. Since the parental values examined here reflect general attitudes rather than the standards for behavior adopted by a respondent in childrearing activities, it is possible that the respondents pick as values for children the things that are more contested or missing rather than self-evident in their own culture.
Another way to look at the U.S.-China difference is to reconsider the nature of the American value system, a system that may be more "traditional" in character than comparative observers have realized. That is, the relative higher level of endorsing "obedience" in children by the American respondents suggests that traditional American culture may be no less authoritarian in terms of parent-child relationships than was traditional Chinese culture. One premise of fundamentalist Judeo-Christian teaching is that the man is head of the household and has the authority over his children. Up until the latter half of the nineteenth century, most aspects of family law in the United States reinforced the coercive pronatalism characteristic of paternal patriarchy (Folbre, 1987). Parents, especially male parents, had strong authority and power over children, including children's labor. Furthermore, historical studies of societies show that parents had strong legal rights vis-a-vis their children in the early stage of capitalism (Handel, 1982). It was only after the passage of child labor laws and public education requirements in this century that we saw a sharp weakening of parental authority over children in American families. So it is quite possible that in the traditional value system, the idea of children obeying parents is no less important in American culture than in Chinese culture.

On the other hand, if we assume authoritarian values were dominant in both traditional American and Chinese cultures, and if we accept the validity of the measure employed here, the low levels of endorsement of child obedience represent a remarkable change. Even in the United States where the influence of Judeo-Christian beliefs is still very strong compared to other industrialized nations, less than one-third of the respondents seem to value children's obedience. Hence, this may be a traditional value that is on its way out in both China and the United States.

With respect to the high level of endorsement of children's independence by Chinese respondents, one may assume that Chinese are becoming more Westernized in childrearing expectations. A comparison of parental responsibilities for children between U.S. and China may provide a different explanation. In the United States, children are parents' responsibility until age 18 or when children complete their formal education. After that, parents are no longer obliged to financially support children. Children usually live out of the parents' house, supporting themselves. In urban China, at least until late 1980s, the traditional belief in extended family, the extremely low starting wages of young workers, and especially the lack of housing made it difficult for many adult children to live away from their parents' house. Although adult children (whether married or not) share with parents food provisions and other expenses as well as some household work, in many cases, parents feel obliged to do more than their share in all aspects. Feeding, providing for, and taking care of a large extended family is very demanding economically and physically. In addition, Chinese parents are responsible for furnishing their children's house and providing household goods upon children's marriage. These expenses usually amount to, if not exceed, parents' annual salary.

Moreover, in Chinese, "independence" is not the opposite of "obedience." It means self-sufficient or self-reliant. To desire children to be independent is to desire them to support for themselves. In urban China there is a common perception that children are spoiled nowadays. This is specially so with the only child. The only child is over-protected and overcared for. At the same time, parents are afraid that their children will not be
competitive and successful (Nan, 1998- Xie and Hultgren, 1994). In this sense, Chinese
respondents' overwhelming preference of independence may very well reflect contemporary
Chinese concern about children's ability to be self-reliant.

Using available information, I explored the factors predicting the endorsement of
independence and obedience within U.S. and China. The results of the logistic regression
analyses show that the effects of the predictor variables on the childrearing goals reveal
important differences in the sources of these values for the two societies. The strong
positive relationship between education and independence in the U.S. data is consistent
with the findings of others (Alwin, 1989, 1991; Kohn, 1977; Spade, 1991; Wright and
Wright, 1976). It most likely reflects the importance of schooling for the formation of
values. It is commonly observed that one of the functions of schooling is to teach people
to think for themselves. More years of schooling increase one's ability to do independent
thinking and make one value more independent thinking. Thus, educated individuals,
having been taught to think for themselves, desire children also to behave according to
internal standards instead of externally imposed rules.

American women's greater emphasis on independence is likely a result of their life
experiences. Despite enormous increase of women's participation in labor force in the
past several decades, American working women tend to be in occupations marked by sex-
segregation, lower pay, and lower prestige. They also receive lower pay even within a
prestigious occupational category. In addition, even when women work in the same
occupation as men do, they face discrimination in employment and advancement. Hence,
women's experiences may incline them to believe that it takes more efforts for them to get
ahead. This belief, in turn, makes them value more independence.

For Chinese respondents, their valuation of independence is negatively affected by
the number of children ever had, suggesting that the more children one has ever had, the
less likely one values independence. This result is consistent with theory that suggests
that family size can be a structural factor that conditions parent-child relationship. In
larger families, maintaining order is more difficult, and parents tend to rely on strong
parental control in rearing their children. While I expected that the number of children has
a negative impact on independence valuation, I did not expect that, in the Chinese sample,
it is the only variable that depresses the valuation of independence in children. I suspect
this reflects the collinear relationship between this variable and several other variables
such as age and conventionality in the Chinese data. My tabulations of the zero-order
correlations indeed show that age and number of children ever had are closely correlated,
r = .78.

Gender and education appear to have no direct influence on childrearing values in
China. Given the influence of Confucianism in Chinese society, one cannot help asking
why gender shows no effects. I think this may reflect the changes of women's roles in
China. Since 1949, women's liberation has been one of the major themes in campaigns
against old traditions. Government mandates equal opportunity and pay equity for women
and men. Liberal maternity leave policies also encourage a more equal balance between
work and family. As a result, today not only is China one of the leading societies in
female labor force participation, but the earning differential between male and female
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workers is one of the smallest (Bonney et al., 1992; Hsieh and Burgess, 1994). Hence, my findings suggest that policies that promote women's independence, such as those adopted in China, are very important in reducing gender inequality, which in turn helps foster similar socialization values among women and men.

An explanation of the muted effect of education can be found in the roles of formal education in China. Unlike in the West, where the teaching of knowledge is the primary goal of education, in China, moral development is the focus of formal education. Confucian education, which has dominated the Chinese curriculum for more than two thousand years, considers the cultivation of the person (xiao shen) as the top priority in education. A well-known Confucian's saying is "From the emperor to ordinary people, the cultivation of the person is the root" (Confucius, 1985: 1). The cultivation of the person is understood as forming an individual's moral character. In Confucian ethics, loyalty (zhong) occupies a central place. Historically, loyalty was loyalty to one's parents (filial piety) and to the state (the emperor). Within this tradition, the main goal of education was to produce obedient sons and daughters at home and loyal supporters of the state. People who failed to possess loyalty were characterized as "lacking education (shuo jiao)."

Although Confucianism was no longer a dominant ideology in the mainland after 1949, the Chinese Communist Party continued placing moral education at the center of education. The official slogan of education has been characterized in the order of "moral education, intellectual education, and physical education (de yu, zhi yu, ti yu). "The function of "moral education" is to foster students' moral character, which has been measured by their loyalty to the CCP. "Intellectual education" refers to the teaching of knowledge. It has been seen by the CCP as potentially dangerous because it may encourage independent thinking. Therefore, political campaigns were launched from time to time in order to make sure that students' loyalty to the state was solidly formed and reinforced under the name of "moral education." Those who failed to be molded by "moral education" have been either purged (e.g., the "anti-rightist movement" in 1957) or kept away from taking important positions. Within this system, each level of leadership is presumably representing the state, and loyalty to the state usually translates into obedience to authorities at all levels (Blum, 1994; Davis, 1992; Walden, 1995; Zhou et al., 1996). Thus, in China, historically and today, education has always had a political dimension. It has served as a means for maintaining social order by producing loyal and obedient citizens under the name of "moral education." Although the Chinese educational system has not always been successful in achieving its goals, the importance placed on "moral education" has prohibited certain degree independent thinking. If this is the case, it is quite possible that in China years of schooling is not closely related to independent thinking.

In summary, my analyses show important U.S.-China differences in the valuation of children's independence and obedience. However, the cross-national differences are opposite to conventional stereotypes. Furthermore, my analyses reveal significant differences in sources of value variations in the two countries. These findings support the view that child socialization values, like other orientation ideals, have a highly complex construction and are shaped with rich and sometimes subtle cultural deposits.
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Inglehart, Ronald.

Inglehart, Ronald.

Kohn, Melvin L.


**APPENDIX**

**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE U.S. AND CHINA ANALYSIS SAMPLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>(772)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>(771)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>(1250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>(166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>(88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>(32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (in group)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>(154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>(631)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>(455)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 or Older</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>(316)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean (in years)</strong></td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Than H.S.</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>(344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S.</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>(452)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than H.S.</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>(617)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Parents</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>(371)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Parent</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>(705)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Parent</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>(499)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Class</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner/Manager</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>(172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>(334)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman/Supervisor</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>(58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-manual</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>(287)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>(514)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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a. Total sample size is 1575 for U.S. and 992 for China.
b. About 98 percent of Chinese respondents identified themselves as Han people or as ethnic Chinese first and then an ethnic minority member.
c. Asians and others.