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The Transitional Value System Across Chinese Culture: A Review of The Literature
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Introduction

In the long history of Chinese culture, the changing value system is a significative but complicated field for deliberation. This is explained by the fact that Chinese culture is not static but multidimensional. Values are changing all the while, and they are linked to economic and social transformation. The primary problem in this scope is the diminutive of the consistent definition of Chinese culture and how to figure out the culture variables in the study (Ying Fan 2000).

In order to comprehend the transition of value system, it is important to have a brief review of Chinese cultural context. After the introduction of cultural background, it focuses on the changing Chinese value system from the ancient to the present time. It concludes with the relationship between Chinese culture and value system.

The Concept of Culture and Value

First of all, Ying Fan (2000) summed up other scholars definitions and described culture as the collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, customs, and attitudes that distinguish a society. A society’s culture provides its members solutions to problems of outward accommodation and domestic combination.

Then Ying Fan claimed that values are always embodied in the national culture. And the cultural value can not only shape people’s faith but also influence people’s behaviors. Indeed, a value system is a set of consistent values and measures; moreover, it is the representation of what people expected in the society. However, it is not indispensable to happen authentically.
Chinese Cultural Context

Through four thousand years of histories, Chinese culture is consistent and maintained by the same language (Chinese). To a certain extent, the feature of Chinese culture is conservative and unique. While Ying Fan (2000) claimed that the traditional Chinese culture consists of diverse thoughts, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, etc. There is no doubt that Confucianism is the most influential thought, which forms the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the essential for the standards of Chinese interpersonal behavior (Pye 1972).

Avner Greif and Guido Tabellini (2010) also analyzed that the Han dynasty came to power while advocating Confucianism as an alternative to the Legalism of the previous Qin dynasty. Confucianism considers moral obligations among kin as the basis for social order, while Legalism emphasizes legal responsibilities. Summarizing, in China, large kinship organizations prevailed and obligations to kin were stressed.

However, Hong Xiao (2005) concluded that during the past 100 years, the cultural context in China has changed significantly particularly in urban areas. As a result of China’s social and economic transformation, the impact of Confucianism and traditional culture in urban China has been degressive. Since 1949 the Chinese Communist Party (thereafter CCP) has become the only party in power, the country has been ruled by Chinese communist/socialist ideology. Then Ying Fan (2000) contended that since economic reforms and opening doors policy China has changed a lot and is always changing. Therefore, the consisting of three main elements of the contemporary China are traditional culture, communist ideology and western values.

The Transitional Chinese value system

Since Ying Fan (2000) indicated that Chinese culture is more collective rather than individualistic. However, Chinese culture can be asserted as the unity of masculine and feminineness. When it turns to the Chinese value system, Hsu (1972) abstracted two basic contrasts between the American and Chinese ways of life that Chinese are related to the collectivism. Though being situation-centered goes beyond in-group unity to encompass a
wider extent of values involved with role structures and traditional aspects of Chinese society. Hsu (1972) analyzed traditional Chinese values predate both the attractive social and political changes that occurred in China during the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao Tse-tung and the new emphasis on modernization and economic development promoted by China’s current political leaders. However, N.T.FEATHER (1986) found that traditional values are not readily or quickly transformed and that the two themes described by Hsu (1972) continue to be essential aspects of Chinese culture.

When it turns to Confucianism, CHEUNG, H.M, CHAN, K.M.CHAN, KING, CHIU, YANG (2006) said that, as a state-sponsored ideology was the overriding source of values for the Chinese people for more than two millennia. But under the persistent impact of the forces of modernization, its previously revered status as the hegemonic source of Chinese cultural values has taken issue with tides of liberalism and socialism in successive order. In contemporary Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China and Singapore, Confucianism hardly appears in official state ideology in any form. We would argue, however, that normative and behavioral orientations derived from Confucianism may still guide Chinese behaviour as a consequence of processes of social reproduction across generations. Besides, Xing Lu (1998) proposed two traditional Chinese value systems: the Confucian value of Yi and the value of Li by Mozi and Han Feizi. Clearly, Confucian concept of yi defined Chinese collectivism not only as a cultural trait but also as a moral attribute. Acting in the interests of family, group, and society is a sign of moral-ethical behavior. Rhetorically, the value of yi believes that human nature can be rectified by moral examples and by having less or no desires for pleasure and material gain; the value of li, on the contrary, holds that human behaviors can be regulated by mutual benefits and utilitarian appeals. According to Xing Lu’s (1998) survey results, certain value dimensions of yi, such as taking care of one’s parents and helping others, who are in need, are still practiced. However, they have been losing their appeals and are severely challenged. It seems obvious that the value of yi intermingled with the value of li in contemporary Chinese society and the choice over collectivistic or individualistic orientation is linked with age, regions, and in/out group differences.
However, Leigh Jenco (2013) claimed these Chinese values have little in common with the more fundamental tendencies of passivity, spirituality, and community that were celebrated by some scholars as “Eastern.” Eastern values generate a markedly circulating concept of “Asian” civilization, founded on the assumed common characters between Chinese, Japanese, and Indian forms of life, jointed essentially by European Orientalists.

The Relationship between Chinese Culture and Value System

In terms of the relationship between Chinese culture and value system, Xing Lu (1998) promoted that value systems are evident and have influenced Chinese cultural orientations and communication behaviors from the ancient to the present time. Take Confucianism as an example, Lin Hang (2011) said that The modern era of Confucianism began with its response to the challenges of Western powers and was labelled as the origin of the blame for intellectual, political and social failures of East Asia in modern times.

Chenyang Li (1997) mentioned that in China, the law states that parents have a legal obligation to rear their young, and when children grow up they have the responsibilities to provide for their aged parents. This phenomenon reflects that Chinese social value is deeply embedded in Confucian culture majority. Then David D. Huang (1996) found that in Massey’s (1979) “value programming” model, described the acquisition and duty of values by pointing out that although characters have a distinct personal history, a host of are exposed to, and are influenced by the same societal events at a critical period during which values are being formed, creating a generality among them. The responsibility of values in the formation of one's worldviews cannot be overstated absolutely.

In brief, Values relate to the norms of a culture, but they are more international and ideational than norms. Norms provide rules for individual’s behavior in more specific situations, while values are responsible for judge what is the good or evil. As a consequence, norms can be seen as the set of standards, patterns, rules and guidance of prospective behavior. On the contrary, values are nonobjective concepts of what is the significant and worthwhile.
Conclusion

To sum up the above viewpoints, Chinese culture can be seen as a gather of core values that underlie social interaction among the ordinary Chinese people and remain relatively stable over a long period time. Through all these literatures, a value system represents what is expected or hoped in a society, not necessarily what actually occurs. In the past 20 years, specialists have been trying to figure out the relationship between the Chinese culture and value system.

Those findings are meaningful to direct my future research. However, future research needs to concentrate on more details and understanding our own culture thoroughly. The most important area of this study is that search for the more relationships between Chinese culture and values system.
References


