

On Hofstede's Treatment of Chinese and Japanese Values

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Hofstede has identified four important work-related values, but he imposes his "mental programming" on the interpretation of other cultures, which are qualitatively different from those on which he relies to develop his constructs. This criticism is evidenced by Hofstede's treatment of Chinese and Japanese values. This paper discusses the treatment along the four value dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity, and their integration. The paper concludes that Hofstede's analysis of Chinese and Japanese values is inadequate because Japanese and Chinese (including people in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) may either have different interpretations of the same value scale, or have other value dimensions not tapped by Hofstede's value framework.

INTRODUCTION

Values are important variables in understanding the behavioural differences in different nations or cultures. Hofstede (1980a) empirically developed the following four value dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. His work has been praised as the most significant, elaborate and extensive cross-cultural study of work-related values (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982; Triandis, 1982; Robinson, 1983), but the reviewers have also criticised his work. The criticisms can be classified into three categories: (1) problems of conceptualisation of the four value dimensions; (2) inadequacy of Hofstede's research design and the measurements of the four values; and (3) problems of the explanations of the survey results. However, most of these criticisms are very general and do not focus on any particular cultural values. This paper belongs to the third category discussing specifically how Hofstede explains Chinese and Japanese values.

One concern about Hofstede's work is that it may be culture-bound (Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984; TCCC, 1987), especially when he discusses the origins and consequences of values. Many conceptual and methodological problems occur in his explanations (Robinson, 1983). Hofstede (1980a) himself recognises the cultural limitations in his research and asks others with different mental programmes to provide more insight and evidence to support and modify his value framework (p.374). The purpose of this paper is to comment on his treatment of Chinese and

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Japanese values. It provides better understanding of these values and points out some potential conceptual and methodological problems in Hofstede's framework. First, general criticisms of the framework are summarised.

GENERAL CRITICISMS OF HOFSTEDE'S FRAMEWORK

Hofstede (1980a) defines a value as "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others," and calls values the "mental programming" which exists before behaviour (p. 19). Hofstede collected data with questionnaires from IBM employees in forty countries during two different time periods, 1967-1979 and 1971-1973. Based on the data, Hofstede (1980a) developed four value dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. According to Hofstede (1980b), *Power distance* is described as the extent to which the unequal power distribution in organisations is accepted in a society. *Uncertainty avoidance* is the degree of tolerance for uncertainty or the extent of feeling secure with uncertainty. *Individualism/collectivism* is the extent to which people consider the collective equally or more important than the individual. *Masculinity* is the orientation of assertiveness and the caring for others.

Three problem areas of Hofstede's value framework have been recognised by the critics and are discussed below:

Some problems exist in Hofstede's conceptualisation of the four dimensions. They are criticised as too narrow in accounting for the way cultures differ. For example, the power distance is a poor measure because it is only one of many dimensions of inequality, and the values of the least powerful are not included. (Robinson, 1983). There are also many other important value dimensions not included. Triandis (1982) recommends about twenty value dimensions and Hunt (1981) adds a "shame and guilt" dimension. There is a strong possibility that respondents attribute different meanings to the same question (Hunt, 1981; Sorge, 1983), and some culture specific factors are not included (Triandis, 1982). Furthermore, the work-related values are not necessarily similar to national values, which are more complex and larger in content (Sorge, 1982).

Hunt (1981), Goodstein (1981) and Robinson (1983) question the generalisation of results based on a forty-country sample drawn from IBM, a large U.S.-based multinational corporation. As Robinson points out, two major biases exist in the sample design. First, the IBM employees' values are not typical of the values of all the members of the societies in the forty countries. Second, Hofstede's data are drawn only from the marketing and service branches of IBM and excludes working class people almost entirely. There is no evidence to support the contention that middle class people are the dominant class in all forty countries.

There are six measurement problems. First, many meanings of measurement may be distorted because back translation is not seriously and systematically

pursued, and English Language questionnaires are used in some non-English speaking countries such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. Second, Hofstede's methodology presents problems of replicability (Dorfman and Howell, 1988). The four value dimensions were obtained by a factor analysis of 32 questionnaire items with only 40 subjects of data points. Such an analysis can be statistically flawed. Third, the different formatted items in power distance and uncertainty avoidance scales do not tell what the items really measure (Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984; Robinson, 1983). Their meanings are thus entangled. Fourth, the individualism scale contains few items directly related to individualism or collectivism (Robinson, 1983). The items for the masculinity scale appear to measure an achievement/nurture or competitive/cooperative dimension, but it is incorrect to label them masculine or feminine (Robinson, 1983). Yeh (1988) indicates that these two dimensions may reflect "physical" and "social" needs or "hygiene" and "satisfier" factors. Fifth, if Hofstede's factor results are further examined, three problems emerge: (1) different countries may have different interpretations of work goals; (2) the same item is used on both the individualism and masculinity scales and Hofstede ignores several factors with significant cross loadings on both factors; and (3) the selection of measure is somewhat arbitrary, especially in his recommended measures (Hofstede, 1982; Yeh, 1988). Finally, the two statistical operations, extrapolating the missing data, and the combination of the data collected at two time periods, make interpretation difficult (Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984).

In summary, most of these problems result from the fact that Hofstede's research was not designed to explore the difference in values of the forty countries, but was a by-product of IBM's internal survey. As Hofstede (1980a) himself indicates his surveys "were not meant to be scientific instruments but practical management tools" (p. 63).

HOFSTEDE'S TREATMENT OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE VALUES

The Japanese and Chinese values found by Hofstede are represented in Table 1. The value scores for the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany and India are also presented for reference. It is an issue whether Hofstede can refer to people in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and China as "Chinese." This paper will not discuss this issue but only focuses on Hofstede's treatment of Chinese and in Taiwanese values which are organised along his four value dimensions and their integration.

Power Distance

As indicated in Table 1, the power distance values of the Japanese are lower than those of the Chinese (Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore). This might not be the case. In his explanation of the historical factors of power

TABLE 1
Value Scales for Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and
Selected Countries in Hofstede's Results

Country	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism	Masculinity
Japan	54	92	46	95
Taiwan	58 (76*)	69	17	45
Hong Kong	68	29	25	57
Singapore	74	8	20	48
U.S.A.	40	46 (61*)	91	62
Great Britain	35	35	89	66
France	68	86	71	43
Germany (F.R.)	35	65	67	66
India	77	40	48	56
Average (40 countries)	52	64	50	50

Source: Hofstede (1980a), p. 315.

* : The index is based on the data provided in the Appendix 2 in *Culture's Consequences* (Hofstede, 1980a). Hofstede's score on uncertainty avoidance for the U.S. is based only on two items (p. 190).

(1980a) that the inheritance law is one of the factors that differentiate Latin Europe, with high power distance values, and Germanic Europe, with low power distance values (p. 128). In Latin Europe, the practice of dividing inheritance equally among all heirs resulted in ever smaller farms and small family sizes. The smaller family size meant that parental authority weighed heavier on children, which resulted in high power distance values for the whole country. Hofstede further states that "the difference in inheritance law between Germanic and Latin Europe also exists between Japan and China" (p. 128). Hofstede argues that Japan's one son inheritance tradition should show lower power distance values than in China, which had an inheritance practice similar to that of Latin Europe.

Hofstede further states that: "in the Chinese tradition, the people had the right to judge the rules; in the Japanese tradition, the emperor was unimpeachable." From this perspective, "Japan is more like the Latin; China, like the Germanic countries, indicating high power distance values for Japan and low power distance values for China" (p. 128). Balancing these two historical factors, Hofstede concludes that the power distance scores for Japan and a part of China (Taiwan), are about the same. In fact, Taiwan shows much higher power distance values in Hofstede's own data. Hofstede makes a mistake in calculation of the power distance score for Taiwan, which should be 76, instead of 58. The score is higher than the score of 54 for Japan.

People in Hong Kong, and the majority of people in Singapore are also Chinese, but Hofstede uses different explanations for their power distance values. The higher power distance values for Hong Kong and Singapore are the result of their colonial experience. The British did not practise equality values between themselves and the colonised population. However, Taiwan was also a colony of Japan from 1894 to 1945 and the Japanese were then much more authoritarian than the British. This may add further stress on inequality of the power distance values of Taiwan. In addition, as indicated by Hsu (1983), "the Japanese have never been truly universalistic in their thinking" (p. 380). Not only do they not accept non-Japanese in Japan, but in their world scheme, the Japanese seek a world of hegemony in which they are placed in superior positions and other races and peoples in inferior positions.

If all these historical factors are considered, I strongly suspect that the power distance values for Japan might be lower than those for China, especially those in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. The only possible explanation is that the higher national wealth of Japan, as compared to those of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, reduced Japan's power distance values. According to Hofstede (1980a), the correlation between the wealth of a nation and the power distance is relatively high, with a correlation score of 0.65.

Uncertainty Avoidance

No reasons are given to explain why the uncertainty avoidance of Hong Kong and Singapore are so low when compared with those of Taiwan, even though they are all categorised as "Chinese." The only reason given by Hofstede (1980a) is his citation of Inkeles and Levinson's study, that "the Chinese have been described as showing an 'exceedingly relativistic sense of morality'" (p. 181). The reason for high uncertainty avoidance for Japan is that "ancestor worship in Japan can be seen as a form of religious coping with uncertainty" (p. 181). As indicated by Hsu (1971) and cited by Hofstede (p. 181), the Chinese people's tradition of ancestor worship is almost as strong as that of the Japanese. Why does Japan have the fourth highest uncertainty avoidance values (index = 92), while Singapore has the lowest (index = 8) among the 40 countries (Hofstede, 1980a; p. 315)?

If we use prediction as an important test of a theory, such a high uncertainty avoidance score for Japan does not make sense when the organisational characteristics of Japanese firms are examined. Hofstede (1980a, p. 187) predicts that there will be consequences for organisations in high uncertainty avoidance countries. These include more structuring of activities, more written rules, a larger number of specialists, more uniformity and standardisation, less individual and risk-taking managerial style and that is more task-oriented, lower labour turnover, less ambitious employees, higher satisfaction scores, more power through control of uncertainty and more ritual behaviour. However, except for lesser tendency to make individual decisions, many studies have found that Japanese organisations are characterised by less formalised rules and procedures, less standardisation, more people-oriented managers, lower satisfaction scores, and more informal control (Yoshino, 1968; Lincoln, et al, 1978, 1981; Yeh and Sagafi-nejad, 1987).

Individualism

The Chinese may be more individualistic than the Japanese. With respect to individualism, Hofstede states that the Chinese “*jen*” (*jn* in Japanese) philosophy of man is the formation of low individualism (p. 236). The Chinese and Japanese do not have the Western Concept of “personality” which is considered as “a separate entity distinct from society.” Instead, the Chinese and Japanese use the word *jen* to describe a “human constant” which includes the person and his surrounding environment (p. 215). This is one of the reasons, according to Hofstede, that Japan and the Chinese majority countries like Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore score very low on individualism. Hofstede further states that in countries with low individualism scores such as Japan, “members will transfer part of their extended family or clan allegiances to the organisation they belong to” (p. 236).

This observation is true in Japan, but not in Chinese societies. Hsu (1983) has indicated that, although there is no fundamental difference in the Chinese and Japanese kinship system, one difference is that “the Chinese kinship system provided for no more extension than the clan (the size of which is always limited because it is founded firmly on the principles of birth and marriage)”. In Japan the existence of *iemoto*, “the Japanese kinship system provided for affiliation of men into much larger groupings across kinship lines, each founded primarily on the kin-tract principle” and “the kin-tract principle provides for voluntary entry into any grouping” (p. 373). This kin-tract principle provides two distinct advantages for a Japanese company to recruit unrelated individuals and establish a modern corporation. These differences were responsible for the Japanese modernisation and industrialisation and the Chinese stagnation after contact with the West.

Chen and Chieu (1984) further indicate that even the meanings of “household” (*jia* in Chinese and *ie* in Japanese) are different in Japan and China. There is always a conflict between “loyalty” and “filial piety” for the Chinese; people cannot

be loyal to the society or country and the family at the same time. This conflict does not exist in Japan. The Chinese show loyalty only to their families, while the Japanese will show loyalty to their organisations.

Two implications flow from the above observation. First, the Chinese kinship system, according to Hsu (1983), inhibits Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore from achieving rapid economic growth. The fast economic progress evidenced in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore supports Hsu's observation. On the contrary, "the very dominant cultural characteristics of individualism and family" (Kelley, Whatley and Worthley, 1987; p.22) are the important factors that contribute to economic prosperity, mainly propelled by small and medium size companies in which the family has key control.

Second, it is related to Hofstede's measurement of individualism. As Robinson (1983) points out, the items that measure individualism are a "hodgepodge" of items having nothing to do with whether the collective or the individual is more important. For example, one item of the measurement is "the extent to which your job leaves you sufficient time for your personal or family life" (Hofstede, 1980a; p. 220). The greater the importance to the respondent, the higher he scores on the individualism values. However, this item presents different meanings to the Japanese and Chinese. The Japanese are loyal to their organisations, and the Chinese are loyal to their families. As Kelley, et al. (1987) says, comparing the Chinese and Japanese, "it is basically the trait of individualism that makes those two cultures different" (p. 33). The experience of Japanese firms in Taiwan confirms this observation in that the top management of Japanese firms very often complain that their Taiwanese employees show lack of loyalty to the organisations and cannot be trusted (Negandhi, 1973; Yeh, 1986).

Hofstede argues that Mao Zedong's anti-individualistic or pro-collectivistic ethos is evidence of the deeply rooted Chinese tradition. This is not true. On the contrary, one of the reasons that Mao's cultural revolution failed was the strong Chinese family orientation. Mao strongly condemned the selfish behaviour that places self-interest above that of the group and the excessive devotion to one's own family. This tradition of the family coming first and other groups second is strongly rooted in Chinese society.

Masculinity

The Chinese should show a higher masculinity score than the Americans. In Table 1, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore show lower masculinity values than the United States. However, the lower status of women in the work-place and women's lower work participation (an indicator used by Hofstede) in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore should indicate that masculinity values for the Chinese are higher than the Americans.

Hofstede observes that the high masculinity countries endorse the item, "decisions made by individuals are usually of higher quality than decisions made by group" (p. 281) more frequently. Japan is the country that has the highest masculinity values, but Japan does not endorse that concept. Instead, Japanese firms more often use the so-called "*ringi*" system, or consensus, bottom-up, or consultative decision-making process (Yoshino, 1968; Hatvany and Pucik, 1981).

The growth versus environment controversy has nothing to do with masculinity values, although Hofstede asserts that this factor accounts for the difference in masculinity. A country with "a more feminine value position will put higher priority on environmental conservation and a more masculine one on economic growth" (p. 297). Japan does not have the worst environment in the world nor are the US environmental problems worse than those in Taiwan. Hofstede (1980a) goes on to cite Tsurumi's study that "in Asia, Japan has huge pollution problems with which it seems to be unable to cope, while China attaches a greater priority to pollution control." "The masculinity scores of Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan make it likely that the Chinese value system is considerably less masculine than the Japanese" (p. 298). People who have lived in Japan and Taiwan will acknowledge that the pollution in Taiwan is much more serious than in Japan. A country in its early stage of economic development will emphasise economic growth and disregard environmental problems. However, once the country becomes wealthier, it will allocate more resources to remedy or prevent the environmental consequences of economic progress.

Integration Of Value Dimensions

Japan and Taiwan do not have the same organisational structure. By using Hugh's four types of organisations, Hofstede clusters both Japan and Taiwan in a large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance group. This group is characterised as a "full bureaucracy" in which "the relationship both among people and between people and the work processes are rigidly described either in formal rules and law or in tradition" (p. 319). The implicit model of organisation is a pyramid. Nevertheless, Hofstede puts Hong Kong and Singapore in a large power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance group whose organisation is characterised as a "personal bureaucracy" in which the concept of "Government of Man", not "Government of Law," is applied. In other words, "relationships among people are strictly determined by the hierarchy framework," (p. 320) and the workflow is not codified. The implicit model of organisation is family.

The above analysis requires two comments. First, studies have shown that the Japanese organisation is characterised by less formalised rules and procedures and by socially induced values (Yoshino, 1968; Lincoln, et al, 1978; Yeh and Sagafinejad, 1987). The Japanese organisation is that of a family rather than a "full bureaucracy." Second, Hsu (1971) indicates that Chinese society is characterised as

a family-clan system, while Japanese society is a clan-tract system. The people in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have been interchangeably characterised by Hofstede as Chinese. How can Taiwan be clustered with Japan, while Hong Kong and Singapore are clustered as another group?

The Japanese and Chinese may have a different incentive system. Using American motivation theory, Hofstede takes uncertainty avoidance and masculinity to explain that people in the United States, Britain and their colonies are more motivated by personal, individual success in the form of wealth, recognition and self-actualisation; people in Japan and the German-speaking countries are more motivated by personal and individual security; and people in Asian countries as being motivated by security and belonging, with individual wealth being less important than group solidarity (Hofstede, 1980a; p. 376). Our image of the Japanese is different from Hofstede's description. The Japanese are motivated by security and group solidarity. In contrast to the Chinese, be they in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore, are likely to place individual or family wealth above organisational solidarity.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The above treatment of Chinese and Japanese values by Hofstede has demonstrated that he imposes his "mental programming" on the interpretation of other cultures. These are qualitatively different from those he relies on to develop his constructs. This study argues that the Japanese might have higher power distance values than the Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. The reason that Hofstede reaches opposite results may be attributed to higher national wealth for Japan. The reason for the high uncertainty avoidance values for China and Japan is not convincing, and the huge difference in uncertainty avoidance among Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore was left unexamined.

The difference in concept of family between the Japanese and Chinese and the Chinese kin-clan and the Japanese kin-tract principles derive different loyalties; the Chinese will show loyalty to their families but not to non-family organisations. On the contrary, the Japanese do not have difficulty in shifting their loyalties from family to their working institutions. Even though the Chinese and Japanese have low individualism values, their incentive systems are very different. From a societal or a firm's perspective, the Chinese are very individualistic, in contrast to Hofstede's findings for Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The higher masculinity values for the Chinese when compared to those of the Americans do not reflect the status of women and their work participation in their respective countries. Furthermore, the masculinity values are not related to Japanese decision-making style and also have nothing to do with the controversy between economic growth and environmental protection. The actual organisational charac-

teristics of Japanese organisations contradict Hofstede's prediction of Japan's very high uncertainty avoidance and power distance values.

In conclusion, Hofstede's treatment of the Japanese and Japanese values is inadequate and seriously flawed. The Japanese and Chinese (people in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) may either have different interpretations of the same value scale, or have other value dimensions not tapped by Hofstede's value framework. It is necessary to modify this value framework to include other value dimensions. Recently, Hofstede and Bond (1988) have added Confucian dynamism to explain the rapid economic growth in South and Southeast Asia. The addition is a worthy approach, but a causality problem exists in the analysis. On the one, national wealth determines the individualistic values, while on the other hand, Confucian dynamism causes the change of national wealth. How do researchers reconcile the values in question (which are supposed to be constant), with changing economic, social and organisational conditions?

Where do cross-cultural researchers go from here? Although Hofstede has done a superb job in identifying four important work-related values, the problems discussed in this paper may apply to other cultural values. So far research is not enough to prove Hofstede's framework as conclusive. More replications of the framework in one or two countries should be pursued. It is, however, impossible to replicate this research in forty countries, but replication in one or two countries will be illuminating. It will not only provide more evidence to confirm or repudiate Hofstede's work, but also provide more cultural uniqueness of those cultures.

Furthermore, environmental factors such as political, legal, economic systems and religion have to be considered when values are compared. These environmental factors affect the value systems of a major group of a population (Hofstede, 1980a; p. 27). Japan is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and has experienced very rapid economic development in the past twenty years as have Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. After a long period of struggle with its adjustment to the Soviet's political and economic system, China is undertaking a new direction which will definitely change some factors. Thus, research questions should not only address what Japanese and Chinese values are, but also focus on how and what will change under different environmental conditions. The issue of whether people in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore are different in their values can then be resolved.

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