

JADE WILL NEVER BECOME A WORK OF ART WITHOUT BEING CARVED: WESTERN VERSUS CHINESE ATTITUDES TOWARD DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

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Abstract:

Educational institutions are increasingly catering to culturally diverse populations of students. The different attitudes and values that these students, and their families, bring with them pose a challenge to the ability of educators to meet the expectations of stakeholders. Amy Chua's bestselling book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mom* (2011) generated a lively debate on the merits and pitfalls associated with the strict disciplinarian approach of East Asian parents vis-à-vis the less authoritarian practices favored in the West. This three-country study examines the attitude toward obedience, school discipline and law enforcement among overseas Chinese in Australia and Canada, Chinese in China and Caucasians in Australia and Canada. 755 responses were obtained from people in these three countries. The findings reveal that, in general, overseas Chinese espouse their own unique attitudes on discipline in society and thus have "cross-verged" with their Caucasian counterparts, to some extent. Overseas Chinese favor stricter schools than the Chinese in China, while the latter support obedience to one's superiors. First-generation immigrants emulate the majority culture in their adopted country of residency, whereas the second-generation Chinese stress returning to their cultural roots. The implications of these findings for theory and practice are then discussed.

Keywords: Discipline, Obedience, China, Overseas Chinese, Immigrants, Tiger Mom

Introduction

Amy Chua's bestselling non-fiction, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), has spotlighted the differences between Chinese (or East Asian) child-rearing practices vis-à-vis those in the West and generated a heated debate among those who favored or opposed the use of strict discipline at home and at school. At the risk of over-simplification, in general, the West has favored a more participatory, child-centric and indulgent approach to education in comparison to the doctrinarian

approach with its emphasis on strict discipline common in China and other East Asian societies. Arguably, the learning environment, whether more or less disciplined, has an impact on student learning. Holtbrügge and Mohr (2010) have shown that learning preferences are related to cultural values, and a recent study has empirically linked culture to competitiveness, economic performance and academic performance (Baumann and Hamin, 2011). As such, the ideal teaching approach may depend on the students cultural background and values.

In light of the interest generated by the publication of Chua's book on the merits and pitfalls of the East Asian approach, this study seeks to examine the attitudes of Caucasians in Australia and Canada, overseas Chinese in Australia and Canada, and Chinese in China toward obedience, law enforcement and discipline in education and society. Overseas Chinese include first- and second-generation Chinese in both of these countries. Many first-generation immigrants have experienced both education systems: the stricter Chinese approach to education as well as the more indulgent approach favored in Western school systems. Second-generation Chinese, on the other hand, typically have been exposed to the Western educational system only; yet because of their upbringing, they may also be influenced by their parents' traditional family values. For example, even though Amy Chua herself is second-generation Chinese, her parents – ethnic Chinese from the Philippines – must undoubtedly have succeeded in imbuing the Confucian principles of scholarship and hard work on her, as reflected in her own approach to child rearing.

The objective of this research is to explore the extent to which views on discipline of first- and second-generation overseas Chinese are the same as those of their counterparts in Mainland China¹, and thus either converge, diverge or cross-verge with the typical Western view (Ralston et al., 1997; Ralston et al., 2006; Ralston, 2008). In terms of this study the Western view has been captured by survey respondents in Canada and Australia who have self-identified as "Caucasian." This study also sheds light on how Caucasians in both Australia and Canada view discipline issues, and thereby establishes whether Caucasians indeed prefer a more indulgent approach as is commonly assumed. At the same time, both Australia and Canada have become favorite destination countries of immigration for many from Asia, particularly Hong Kong and China. For example, according to the 2001 Canadian census, Chinese are the second largest visible minority group in that country, after South Asians. In Australia, the Chinese are the third largest group of overseas-born residents after those from the United Kingdom and New Zealand (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2009). In fact, the number of Chinese-born Australians increased nearly six-fold in two decades to over 310,000 (in 2008) to become the sixth largest ethnic group, while those from India increased four-fold to approximately 240,000.

The study of how discipline is viewed culturally has relevance to managers, politicians and educators from around the world. The association between education and performance has been well documented in a global context in relation to corporate communication (Goodmann and Hirsch, 2010). Communication skills learned in schools and at home play an integral part in linking a solid educational background to future economic successes, and this is especially true in a global environment with increasing cross-cultural communication. Understanding how people in different cultures view obedience and how they are disciplined in their respective

academic institutions has tremendous implications for how people are managed in organizations and how they react to authority/discipline in the workplace and in society at large.

Literature review

The influx of Asian immigrants into Western countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, has brought about changes to the education systems in the host societies in at least two important ways: students with Asian backgrounds and teachers with Asian values have become an integral part of the classroom at schools and universities. Chinese visa students (excluding ethnic Chinese who are either citizens or permanent residents in the country) now account for 18.5 percent of the total student body in U.S. colleges and universities (Studying the superpower, 2011). In 2006 East Asian students accounted for a quarter of all international tertiary students in Canada, and more than half of those studying in Australia. (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2006) Ethnic Chinese also represent a growing number of faculty members in science and business administration at U.S. colleges and universities. In short, a culturally diverse environment in education has become common-place in academia. This subject has been broached in the academic literature in various ways, and this section provides a bird's eye view of these research streams.

Early work on the impact of a growing Asian student population in North America has examined educational achievements across racial and ethnic groups and found a significant "achievement gap," where Asian and Caucasian students typically outperformed African American, Latino, and Native American students (Gregory and Mosely, 2004)². In terms of discipline, however, African American students in comparison to their Caucasian and Asian counterparts, are overrepresented among those that have been "disciplined". This has contributed, in part at least, to the characterization of Asians in the U.S. as the "model minority" (Li and Wang, 2008).

Discipline and Confucian Dynamism

Discipline issues have been investigated in isolation from ethnic/racial issues in the United States, where relatively lax school regulations might have contributed, in part, to security issues in schools and colleges (Brown and Beckett, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Kupchik and Ellis, 2008). Educational institutes in the United States also have a strong administrative focus on legal issues since teachers are concerned that students who have been disciplined may take legal action against them (Blois, 2005; Hyman et al., 1979; Schorr, 1959). In line with other student protection issues, fairness aspects dominate the Western pedagogic literature, for example where "zero tolerance" policies are viewed as "draconian" (Dupper, 2010, p. 68) based on concerns that they may contribute to students dropping out of school. In the United Kingdom, in order to comply with policy, "lessons are taught to a rigidly prescribed routine, school documentation and policies closely mirror the accepted discourses of school effectiveness and the whole school effort is directed away from education and towards passing inspection" (Perryman, 2006, p. 148). In other words, discipline is targeted at the school and the teaching staff, but not at the students. Despite these tendencies in Western education, in one way or another, educators have acknowledged that discipline issues in Western schools are a major concern, along with literacy

and numeracy (Fields, 2000), and it has been argued that “discipline in schools is inseparable from teaching” (Wagner, 1983).

In Asia, in contrast, rising economies such as China, Korea, and Singapore run their school systems on the principle of “guidance and discipline” (Hue, 2007; Kwon, 2004) with a strong emphasis on academic performance. In the case of Singapore, for example, within the course of one generation, it has surpassed its former colonial master, Great Britain. According to World Bank data, since 1989 Singapore’s Gross National Income (GNI) per capita based on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis has exceeded that of the United Kingdom’s, and Singapore has also surpassed the UK on international competitiveness as gauged in the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Competitiveness Index, where Singapore ranks in the top three in comparison to 12th for the UK (2010/11 ranking). In Great Britain the school system has become less strict in comparison to the regimented Singaporean approach (Zakaria, 1994). In the early 1950s, Singapore was ranked, economically, alongside Chile, Argentina, and Mexico, which have more relaxed education systems, but since then Singapore’s GNP per capita has increased almost 500% compared to Chile, Argentina, and Mexico (Zakaria, 1994, p. 109). Singapore has “order in society” which means it “educate[s] rigorously and train[s] a whole generation of skilled, intelligent, knowledgeable people who can be productive” (Zakaria, 1994, p. 114). Singapore achieves economic growth, and nurtures ambition in its education system, whereas the American system, like the British favors a more laissez-faire approach. East Asian nations share a teaching philosophy of “strict discipline, respect for the teacher, no talking back to the teacher and rote learning” (Zakaria, 1994, p. 116). These attributes have contributed, to a large extent, to the strong work ethic that is requisite to rapid economic growth. The literature on pedagogic and education policy issues has established, at least in principal, an association between education and economic development (e.g. Brown and Lauder, 1996; Olssena and Petersb, 2005; Psacharopoulos and Anthony, 2004; Psacharopoulos, 1994). Hofstede’s seminal work on Confucian Dynamism (subsequently relabeled as “long-term orientation”) has shown that economic growth is most highly correlated with Confucian Dynamism, which has characteristics including hard work, persistence, and thrift/saving (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Yeh and Lawrence, 1995).

Investment and Achievement

Besides Singapore, another country that showcases the relationship between Confucian Dynamism and economic growth is South Korea. This war-torn country with a per capita income of \$87 at the end of the Korean War (1950-1953) now ranks as the 15th largest economy in the world (2009, World Bank data). With a population of only 48 million, this dynamic country has risen to its current status as a leading provider of steel, ships, cell phones, electronics, and cars (Ihlwan and Woyke, 2007). Baumann, Hammin and Tung (2011) have argued that “one of the key factors leading to Korea’s rise from a developing country to an emerging market and eventually OECD member has been its performance-oriented education system”, a system that is characterized by a strong focus on academic achievement, discipline and also respect for teachers and education *per se*. According to Ihlwan and others (2007, p. 1), “Rote learning and cramming ... are credited with transforming a poor, mostly agrarian nation into a manufacturing powerhouse in the space of just three decades”. Today, Korea continues to invest

7.5% of its economic output in its people's education. Excluding the \$38 billion that Korean parents spend annually on after-school tuition for their children, the 7.5% expenditure is already higher than that of any other industrialized country.

The importance of education in Asia is also reflected in China's spending on education. Families in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou often spend a third of their total income on their children's education. For example, a family with one or more children at school or kindergarten on average spend 3,522 Yuan (about US\$544) on their education in one year alone (Xinhua, 2006). According to the 2009 Program for International Assessment (PISA) of 15 year-old students in 65 countries, these efforts have borne fruit. Students from Shanghai, China, received the top scores in mathematics, science and reading; those from Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan consistently ranked among the top 8 in all the three categories. The western societies that also scored high on these three categories are Finland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In terms of reading, U.S. students ranked in the middle, among the bottom one-third in science, and second to last in mathematics (Dillon, 2010b).

Despite the impressive rankings of Asian countries in the most recent PISA assessment, many parents in these countries continue to send their children to countries such as U.S., Canada and Australia for post-secondary education. In fact, with growing affluence in many Asian countries, there is a growing tendency for parents to send their children to study secondary school abroad for a variety of reasons. Firstly, study overseas provides the opportunity for students to improve their English-language skills, which is important as English is the *lingua franca* of international business. Secondly the perception that their children will acquire a more rounded education where academic performance is only one component, and finally, that they will have the opportunity to gain knowledge of other countries/cultures to better prepare them to be global citizens. In fact, critics of the PISA rankings have asserted that the performance-oriented education in Asia perpetuates the tendency to rely on rote learning, and that students trained under this system lack independent thinking (Biggs, 1996; Zerhouni, 2008). However high performance in mathematics and science cannot be accomplished in the absence of strong analytical skills, thus negating to some extent the criticisms voiced against pedagogical methods common in Asia.

Education in East Asia

To shed more light on the Asian education system, two streams of research are reviewed here. The first stream consists of studies that examine teaching and discipline issues in China and Hong Kong (Holtbrügge and Mohr, 2010; Hue, 2007; Meixia et al., 2008; Ming-Tak, 2007; Shek, 2006; Tam Shui Kee Tony, 2003), including the "misconceptions that Westerners may have about Chinese learning styles" (Chan, 1999, p. 294). The second stream compares different approaches to teaching and discipline between East and West (Hui, 2005; Lai, Zhang, and Wang, 2000; Lewis et al., 2005; Lin and Fu, 1990; Rosenthal, 2010). In general, the Western teaching style, in this study with a special focus on Australia and Canada (the two places under investigation) and the U.S. is less authoritarian, resulting in "teachers los[ing] about one half of their teaching time because of students' problem behavior" (Jones, 2000, as quoted in Meixia et al., 2008, p. 306). In other words, due to the lack of a disciplined school environment, dealing

with unruly students takes away time from students' actual learning. In contrast, in China, students appear to display greater self control, thus allowing for a larger class size (necessitated by China's sheer population size and budgetary constraints) with more time devoted to actual learning.

Confucian principles that emphasize deference to those in authority and the elderly (Chan, 1999) are taught both at home and at school, resulting in a higher level of respect for teachers. As such, problems of discipline are less common in the traditional Chinese classroom since students do not typically question the teacher's authority nor challenge his/her judgment. In addition, teachers in China rely on parents to imbue their children with self-discipline (Lewis et al., 2005). The Confucian virtue of the "golden mean" exhorts modesty and Chinese children are educated to maintain face and avoid shame, and misconduct and poor performance can bring shame to their family (Chan, 1999). This attitude differs to the "trophy syndrome" prevalent in the West where guilt rather than shame constrain bad behavior. The principle of "guilt" is grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition and as Western societies have become more secular, the role of "guilt" in inhibiting people to misbehave may have waned. At the same time, the Chinese emphasis on exams and excelling in them (Hui, 2005) stand in stark contrast to the practice at Western schools where discipline and testing are viewed as "anxiety provoking" (Rosenthal, 2010, p. 1).

Changes in education in the U.S and East Asia

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students in Asia view discipline and testing as a normal part of their educational system, and some have expressed that when they later went to school in the U.S., they actually missed these elements because they have come to view these as critical feedback tools. East Asian children appeared to favor these tests because they view them as an opportunity to excel over their peer group (Rosenthal, 2010), whereas, in general, the Western education system is concerned that testing young children may harm their self-esteem and hence negatively affect their creativity. Indeed, "Tiger Mom" Amy Chua said that she pushed her daughters to excel academically by never accepting a grade that is lower than an "A." She recounts her own upbringing by her first-generation Chinese parents as such: "I once won a second prize in a history concert. My parents came to the ceremony. ... Afterwards my father said to me, 'Never disgrace me like that again' " (Luscombe, 2011).

A recent change in the educational policy of America shows a governmental recognition of the importance of education. "Fifty years later, our generation's Sputnik moment is back," said President Obama in his second State of the Union Address. "With billions of people in India and China 'suddenly plugged into the world economy,' he said, nations with the most educated workers will prevail. 'As it stands right now,' he said, 'America is in danger of falling behind' " (Dillon, 2010b). The Bush administration's "No child left behind" program has been replaced by the Obama administration's "Race to the top" slogan. This change is a result of the increased awareness in the U.S. that a permissive and indulgent educational environment and practices may not be conducive to peak performance in a global context where some East Asian nations have implemented successful performance-oriented education programs. President Obama said, "In South Korea, teachers are known as 'nation builders.' Here in America, it's time we treated the people who educate our children with the same level of respect" (White House, 2011). He

has suggested a new national target for the U.S. — that all students should graduate from high school and be prepared for college and/or a career (Dillon, 2010). This change has been well-received by the U.S. business community as “[a] really positive step forward” (Dillon, 2010).

In sum and at the risk of oversimplification, East Asian schools are more discipline and performance-oriented, while schools in the West tend to be more focused on the students’ emotional wellbeing. However, there appears to be a growing movement to reverse these trends with some East Asian societies appearing to be softening their approach to education whereas some Western countries have come to realize that in order to regain competitiveness, their schools need to become more performance oriented (Fields, 2000; Wagner, 1983). In Korea there are now alternative schools that move away from the traditional discipline and performance-driven school system so that students can be “happy because [they] do what [they] want to do” (Ihlwan and Woyke, 2007). In three of sixteen school districts in Korea, all forms of corporal punishment have been abolished in 2011 (Ha-Wo, 2011).

China’s middle-class parents’ attitude towards education and child upbringing has also been changing with China’s increasing wealth. A book on the topic, *A Good Mom Is Better than a Good Teacher* (2010), “advocates listening to kids and developing their potential without forcing them to obey authority” (Ruan, 2011) and represents a departure from the traditional Chinese ‘overprotection’ by parents. The book is written by a former public school teacher in Beijing, Yin Jianli, and has become a bestseller in China.

Because many first-generation Asian immigrants have been exposed to both the East Asian and Western school systems, they are in a better position to compare the merits and limitations associated with either approach. Surprisingly, however, very little research has been done in this regard. Lin and Fu (1990) looked at the differences in child-rearing practices among Chinese immigrants, Chinese in Mainland China and Caucasians in the U.S. and Kaufman (2004) investigated perceptions towards schools of Chinese immigrants and second-generation Chinese students. The present study seeks to overcome this gap in the literature by exploring the differences in attitudes toward discipline, obedience and law enforcement among a sample of overseas Chinese, Chinese in China and Caucasians in two Western countries.

Methodology

An online survey was used to sample respondents’ attitude toward obedience, school discipline, and law enforcement. Respondents were recruited by a professional survey organization in Australia, Canada, and China. After pre-testing, the questionnaire was translated into simplified Chinese for sampling in China, whereas the original English version was used in Australia and Canada. The survey instrument also collected demographic data such as the respondent’s gender, age and income; self declared ethnicity and religious background.

While the sample size for this particular analysis was 755, it is not possible to estimate the response rate because the study was administered online utilizing a panel provided by the professional data collection company. The sample was evenly split between male and female respondents, as well as in terms of age and income. Respondents who reported their annual income as \$17,000 or less were classified as “low-income earners”. Those earning between

\$17,000 and \$80,000 were classified as “mid-income earners”; respondents who earned more were classified as “high-income earners”. Differences between ethnic groups in the sample were tested using MANOVA.

Findings

Since the purpose of this study was to examine Chinese and Caucasian views on how society should operate in terms of education and power relationships, the analysis focused on three areas: discipline in schools, the superior-subordinate relationship, and law enforcement. These dimensions were chosen based on the premise that all these dynamics are present in virtually all societies and are exhibited in the workplace and at home or school. In order to allow for differences based on other demographic variables besides ethnicity, the analysis included interaction terms with gender, income level, religious tradition and education level. Demographic factors of this nature have been demonstrated to be powerful moderators, in conjunction with ethnicity, in other important areas of life such as attitude towards money, materialism, and savings behavior (Tung and Baumann, 2009). Discipline in schools was measured in terms of whether respondents felt that schools in the country of their residence should enforce stricter discipline on its students (Table 1).

Table 1. Schools in This Country Should Enforce Stricter Discipline on its Students

Ethnicity	Gender			Income Level			
	Female	Male	p-value	Low income	Middle income	High income	p-value
Chinese	4.613	4.270	0.000	4.131	4.661	5.419	.062
First-generation	4.697	5.067		4.704	4.708	5.583	
Second-generation	4.737	5.074		4.760	4.929	5.571	
Caucasian	5.147	5.099		5.386	5.068	4.883	
	.628		0.222	.025			.000

Ethnicity	Education					Religion				
	Secondary or less	Diploma (College)	Under graduate	Post-graduate	p-value	Buddhist	Christian	Other	Atheist	p-value
Chinese	4.750	4.444	4.390	4.531	0.043	4.710	4.860	4.142	3.857	.089
First generation	4.900	4.500	5.000	4.750		4.700	4.789	4.970	5.000	
Second-generation	4.429	5.143	5.143	5.250		3.600	5.200	4.950	6.000	
Caucasian	5.331	5.092	4.986	4.500		5.333	5.380	4.578	4.720	
	0.966				.571	.148				.194

Discipline in Schools

The multivariate analysis revealed significant differences within ethnic groups. No significant difference was found on the basis of gender ($p = 0.628$), religious tradition ($p = 0.148$), or

education level ($p = 0.966$). There were, however, significant differences within income levels ($p = 0.025$) and also in the interaction of ethnicity and income (ethnicity * income; $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that a society’s view on school discipline between the two ethnic groups in question (Caucasians and Chinese) depends on their respective income level. Specifically, high-income-earning ethnic Chinese prefer stricter discipline at school, regardless of whether they reside in China, or are first- or second-generation immigrants. At the same time, Chinese in the mid- and low-incomes’ categories are in favor of more moderate discipline, again regardless of whether they live in China or overseas. Overall, Caucasians prefer stricter discipline in schools, although high-income-earning Caucasians are less in favor of stricter schools than those with low- and mid-incomes. This finding differs significantly from the pattern of the Chinese where the high-income earners want stricter schools more than their low- and mid-income counterparts.

Table 2. People Are Expected to Obey Their Leaders without Question (e.g. at School or at Work)

Ethnicity	Gender			Income Level			
	Female	Male	p-value	Low income	Middle income	High income	p-value
Chinese	4.840	4.447	0.000	4.358	4.878	5.419	0.000
First-generation	3.000	4.467		3.815	3.125	4.583	
Second-generation	4.105	4.000		4.000	4.357	3.571	
Caucasian	3.859	3.540		4.139	3.514	3.481	
	0.347		0.001	0.516			0.000

Ethnicity	Education					Religion				
	Secondary or less	Diploma (College)	Under graduate	Post-graduate	p-value	Buddhist	Christian	Other	Atheist	p-value
Chinese	4.625	4.944	4.549	4.857	0.000	4.976	4.930	4.376	3.571	0.094
First-generation	3.100	4.625	3.545	4.000		4.100	3.211	3.909	2.000	
Second-generation	4.214	4.571	3.619	4.750		4.400	4.200	3.750	5.000	
Caucasian	3.831	3.927	3.113	3.750		5.667	3.718	3.458	4.120	
	0.007				0.647	0.071				0.058

The superior/subordinate relationship

An analysis of respondents’ view on whether authority (i.e., leaders) should be obeyed without question (e.g. at school or work) showed that ethnicity is significant for all variables, and it was therefore used as a “base variable” to test for interactions with other demographic factors such as gender, income, and religion as in the previous set of analysis. This finding of willingness to obey superiors/leaders without question is not surprising in light of the higher power distance in China and many East Asian societies in general. Whereas the analysis of attitudes toward school discipline found that only the interaction between ethnicity and income was significant (Table 1),

in the case of obedience, the interaction terms between ethnicity and gender, income levels and religion were all significant (Table 2). In other words, while the view on school discipline tends to be homogenous across demographic groups, the views diverge on the issue of obedience. The demographic factors of gender, income level, and religion are not significant on a “stand alone” basis, but the respective interaction terms are significant, suggesting that ethnicity plays a key role.

In general, Chinese and Caucasian females place more emphasis on obedience than males although first-generation male immigrants have a higher mean than their female counterparts. This overall finding suggests that overseas Chinese tend to possess a unique set of value patterns. Chinese high-income earners and first-generation high-income earners prefer obedience more so than their low- and mid-income counterparts, but somewhat surprisingly, the second-generation overseas Chinese who are mid-income earners have the strongest preference for obedience. This finding is in distinct contrast to that for Caucasians where the low-income earners have the strongest preference for obedience. In other words, there appears to be convergence for high-income earners, i.e. the Chinese in China are in favor of greater respect for authority. Roughly a quarter of the Chinese in China sampled in this study hold managerial positions, suggesting that they actually represent authority themselves and therefore their view on this issue applies to both their subordinates and superiors (i.e. they favor respect ‘downwards’ and ‘upwards’). However, the mean value on this dimension for the first-generation immigrants drops to a mid-point between those of the Chinese in China and those of the Caucasians while the values for the second-generation overseas Chinese are in line with those of the Caucasians.

The significant interaction effect between ethnicity and religion suggests that for Buddhists and Christians, obedience is typically more important than for atheists and followers of other religions or ideologies. There is a sense of obedience to a higher force in the mindset of both Buddhists and Christians. This attitude is also reflected in their preferences for societal order. For atheists who do not believe in a higher force, the finding is less clear since the second-generation overseas Chinese have the highest score on the importance of obedience among all religious groups, and for Caucasians, the score for atheists is higher than that for Christians. This finding may stem from the fact that the former group has been imbued with the virtues of obedience by their parents, whereas possible reasons for the latter finding (i.e., atheist Caucasians possessing a higher score than for Christians) are less obvious.

Table 3. Strict Law Enforcement Is Beneficial for This Country

Ethnicity	Gender			Income Level			
	Female	Male	p-value	Low income	Middle income	High income	p-value
Chinese	5.920	6.220	0.000	6.102	5.965	6.258	.000
First-generation	5.152	5.333		5.222	5.167	5.417	
Second-generation	5.263	5.148		5.120	5.214	5.429	
Caucasian	5.552	5.466		5.604	5.582	5.247	
	0.580		0.203	0.857			0.395

Ethnicity	Education				p-value
	Secondary or less	Diploma (College)	Undergraduate	Post-graduate	
Chinese	5.875	5.944	6.056	6.306	0.000
First-generation	5.500	4.750	5.394	4.917	
Second-generation	5.071	5.286	5.190	5.500	
Caucasian	5.742	5.578	5.254	4.600	
	0.786				0.009

Ethnicity	Religion				p-value
	Buddhist	Christian	Other	Atheist	
Chinese	6.145	6.163	6.057	5.214	.013
First-generation	5.100	5.000	5.364	7.000	
Second-generation	4.200	5.350	5.250	6.000	
Caucasian	5.000	5.671	5.157	5.360	
	0.291				0.024

Learning Environment

The analysis of respondents’ views on law enforcement revealed that there was no interaction effect between ethnicity and gender and ethnicity and income levels. However, there is strong evidence to show that religion plays a major role since both the interaction terms between ethnicity and religious tradition and also the actual interaction with the religious categories were significant. For the religious group, the Chinese in China and the Caucasians place higher emphasis on law enforcement; for the overseas Chinese (both first- and second-generation), the values are higher for the non-religious group. The Chinese in China are in favor of strong law

enforcement, regardless of whether they are religious or not, but for the Caucasians, law enforcement is more important to the religious than to the non-religious group.

Views on law enforcement also depend on an interaction term between ethnicity and education level. The Chinese, regardless of education, favor stricter law enforcement, whereas for the Caucasians, there is wider variation among the different education level categories. For example, Caucasians with a post-graduate degree tend to put the least emphasis on law enforcement, whereas Caucasians with lower education attainment prefer stricter law enforcement.

Conclusions and discussion

This study has broken new grounds by examining whether first- and second-generation overseas Chinese have values similar to that of their counterparts in their home country, or have in fact adjusted to views more commonly held by people in their current country of residence. The study investigated three related views on society: school discipline, obedience, and law enforcement.

The school system in China is grounded on Confucian principles and therefore schools enforce discipline and respect for the teacher. This explains why the Chinese in China believe that there is no urgent need for stricter schools. On the other hand, first- and second-generation overseas Chinese favor stricter schools in comparison to their counterparts in China. In other words, it appears that overseas Chinese, regardless of whether they have experienced stricter schools themselves (first-generation) or rely on “hear-say” (second-generation), find Western schools too soft on discipline.

Despite the pedagogic literature in the West that generally favor a less authoritarian approach, Caucasians, perhaps surprisingly, are generally in favor of stricter schools regardless of other demographic factors. Caucasians in Australia and Canada seem to perceive their schools as having become too soft, and their views are thus in line with how overseas Chinese perceive Western schools. A recent study in Europe has come to a similar conclusion on Western schools, in this case the Netherlands: “Only with a combination of more discipline and a more individual approach could undisciplined or unmotivated children be brought back on the right track, achieve in an expected way, and finally pass their examinations” (Regt and Weenink, 2005 p. 75). In that study, parents demanded that schools should be more strict.

A more in-depth analysis in our study revealed a further significant interaction between ethnicity and income ($p < 0.001$; from Table 1), suggesting that views on school discipline depend on a combination of one’s income and ethnic background. High-income Chinese prefer stricter schools, possibly because they perceive that their children have become spoiled relative to their experiences in childhood. This latter situation may be attributed to China’s “One Child” policy where that *one* child is treated like the little prince or princess of the family. The Chinese often work hard for upward social mobility and thus view strict education and performance-orientation as the basis for their success. In Hong Kong, for example, the best schools are typically Catholic schools run by the religious where discipline is notoriously strict but in turn produce student with high academic scores, and high incomes after graduation.

As for the Caucasians, perhaps high-income earners are more relaxed and do not perceive the world to be as competitive as is the case in China. It is common for high-income-earning Caucasians in Anglo-Saxon countries to enroll their offsprings in stricter (and often religious) private schools, and therefore this segment may not perceive the need for (public) schools to be stricter.

The analysis of the second dependent variable of this study, obedience, revealed consistent results for the Chinese in China, regardless of other demographic factors. They all agree that one should obey authority (i.e., leaders) at school and at work. However, the first-generation immigrants, regardless of other demographic factors, tend to focus much less on obedience than their counterparts in China, whereas the second-generation holds views closer to those of the Caucasians, i.e., there is not a strong focus on obedience.

In Chinese culture, women are socialized to be obedient and “submissive”—traditionally, in China, women are taught the three rules of obedience: obedience to the father when young, to the husband when married, and to the eldest son when she is widowed. These values are reflected in this study’s finding since there was a significant interaction term between ethnicity and gender (ethnicity * gender, Table 2), thus suggesting that the views on this issue differ based on ethnic background and gender. In China, women believe more strongly in obedience than males, but this reverses for first-generation overseas Chinese where women expressed a significantly lower tendency for obedience (in fact the lowest of all respondent groups). Yet, for the second-generation overseas Chinese, the values are very similar for both women and men and fall somewhere between the Chinese in China and the Caucasians. Obedience is least important for Caucasians albeit it is slightly more important for Caucasian women than for men.

The study’s third dimension was respondents’ views on law and order in society, or more precisely, “law enforcement,” and this dimension was found to be significantly correlated with their attitude toward school discipline (Pearson Correlation 0.344, $p < 0.001$) and obedience (Pearson Correlation 0.225, $p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate how the respondents’ values on the way that school and society should function at large in relation to law enforcement correspond with their values on obedience and discipline. In East Asia, one’s attitude and behavior in society and in school is associated with consequences such as “reward and punishment,” thus individuals are ultimately held responsible for their own behavior. In contrast, in the West, poor performance or misbehavior does not usually trigger direct negative consequences as students are free to express any point of view regardless of its merit. While this reflects the more participative approach of Western society, this indulgent atmosphere may nurture a weaker performance orientation than under the East Asian system. In Australia, for example, the lack of discipline results in “least discussion and recognition and most punishment” (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 729), thus suggesting a number of possible causes: one, the students are not disciplined; two, they constantly misbehave; and, three, although punishment is frequently used, it is ineffective. In comparison, the same study (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 729) found that in China “teachers appear less punitive and aggressive”. The literature also found that “the majority of Chinese teachers (65.6%) do not think that classroom management is a great concern” (Meixia

et al., 2008, p. 305) since their students are respectful and disciplined, thus allowing the teachers to focus on actual teaching.

The findings of this study support prior studies in Western settings where “‘talking out of turn’ has been reported as the biggest concern” (Meixia et al., 2008, p. 305), thus suggesting that misbehavior in Western classrooms is indeed a problem. Respondents that felt schools should be stricter also wanted obedience and expressed a desire for tougher law enforcement. For the Chinese in China, such views may be attributed to one or both of the following reasons: (a) Confucianism that prescribes codes of conduct and behavior; and (b) communism that demands compliance with certain rules and regulations.

The overall findings of this study point to the divergence of views of overseas Chinese in relation to their counterparts in China. In general, overseas Chinese have developed their own unique attitudes in relation to discipline in society and have thus “cross-verged” with the Caucasians in their current country of residency. First- and second-generation overseas Chinese are a distinct segment that favors stricter schools than their counterparts in China, and while the Chinese in China are in favor of obedience to superiors, overseas Chinese have adapted to Western standards and focus much less on obedience.

Notes

¹ A counter-argument could be made that with the one-child policy, children in China have become very spoiled. As such, they may not be as well-disciplined as in the traditional sense. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this study.

² The achievement gap could be explained by numerous factors other than attitude toward discipline alone. For example, an argument can be made that because a larger percentage of African Americans and Native Americans come from broken homes and live below or close to the poverty line, they are not socialized to value academic achievements in the same way. However, these issues are beyond the scope of this current study.

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