

# **Rule of Morality vs. Rule of Law?**

## **An Exploratory Study of Civil Servant Values in China and the Netherlands**

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to assess whether civil servant values in China and The Netherlands reflect their different administrative traditions (“rule of morality” vs. “rule of law”). This question is highly relevant for two reasons: both countries have undergone recent reforms and modernizations and mutual dealings and interactions have increased and gained importance in recent years. A pilot survey and a content analysis of codes of conduct are employed to establish a value tested in an exploratory survey among Chinese (n=68) and Dutch (n=45) civil servants. The results reveal that value preferences reflect administrative traditions less clearly than expected. Moreover, some values associated with the “rule of law” tradition are more important for Chinese than for Dutch respondents. Theoretical and practical implications of our findings are offered.

**Key words:** public values, administrative culture, China, The Netherlands

### **Introduction**

Many researchers have studied public values, often with the aim to establish how they influence civil servants’ conduct. Although there is no agreed definition of ‘values,’ most definitions suggest that values can be ranked because they imply preferences or desires. Each value is of different importance to a person, and the same value is of

differing importance for different persons, meaning that values can be “ordered by relative importance” (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987, 551).

Moreover, value preferences “reflect cultural (and individual) ideals that motivate behavior” (Schwartz et al. 1990, 186). Van Wart also argues that values are “the cultural glue of civilizations and the organizations within them, and the fundamental building blocks of culture” (1998, 163). As a result, the value hierarchy of a group reveals “the fundamental nature of the members of that group” (Schwartz et al. 1990, 186). Schwartz (1999) has identified seven value types and cultural regions: Far East countries emphasize “Hierarchy”, “Intellectual Autonomy” is quite important in Western Europe; America belongs to the cultural region characterized by “Mastery: A cultural emphasis on getting ahead through active self-assertion” (1999, 28). Respondents from the same cultural region tend to share the proximate types of values. In this sense, administrative culture is partly reflected by the values of civil servants. In this paper, “values” refer both to “qualities that contribute to what is conceived as good, as well as to general standards of conduct, which, although broader and less direct than norms, act as guides in choices that have to be made” (Van der Wal 2011, 646).<sup>1</sup>

This paper studies the administrative cultures of China and the Netherlands, which are traditionally referred to as “rule of morality” and the “rule of law” (e.g., Scalia 1989; Fallon 1997). With the traditional administrative system of “Confucian scholar-officialdom” (Cheung 2010, 38), Chinese traditional<sup>2</sup> culture is ethics-centered and based on Confucian morality (Lu 2009), whereas a law-adherent culture prevails in Western Europe (Van der Meer 2011). Both traditions prescribe different values as most important for civil servants. Moral-based values that belong to the Confucian rule of morality tradition emphasize personal morals and qualities reached

by self-cultivation, such as righteousness, honesty, diligence, impartiality; since the officials in imperial courts and governments were monopolized by “the Confucian intelligentsia” and the idea of “...only one ruler under heaven...” (Cheung 2010, 39), the values related to personal attachment are also in the Confucian ‘morality based value group’, such as obedience and loyalty. Law-based values are those that prevail in a rule of law context which emphasizes professionalism, including values such as expertise, efficiency, transparency, lawfulness, and accountability (De Graaf & Van der Wal 2010).

However, it is unclear to what extent these traditional cultural differences still characterize the civil service ethos in both countries. Studying this is relevant for at least three reasons. First, even though there are a few empirical studies indicating that values differ between Confucian and other cultural contexts (e.g., Whitcomb et al. 1998; Zhang et al. 2005; Ralston et al. 2008), recent empirical studies into Chinese civil servants’ values or morals are non-existent, let alone those compare values preferences between the “East” and the “West.” Given China’s rapidly increasing influence on the global political stage, and the increase in public and private sector cooperation and interaction between China and the Netherlands, both communities would benefit from insights into what drives civil servants on both sides of the table. Thus, this comparison not only adds to our academic knowledge but also serves practical purposes.

Second, Communist China claimed that “China’s communitarian traditions are based on Confucianism” (De Bary 1998, 8), but the Confucian morals were declared to be reinforced and in fact replaced back and forth during Chinese political development. The “anti-Confucianism Campaign” launched during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s “attacked every aspect of Confucius’s

thought” (Zhang & Schwartz 1997, 200), but after the revolution, the “critical inherence” of Confucius was revamped to help the Communist regime to seek “a place in the modern world” (1997, 203). The current situation might therefore best be characterized by “value vagueness”: we do not know whether Confucian values have been well preserved or have faded in the governance of the Communist Party.

Moreover, a remarkable public administration reform “has spread round the world” (Kettl 2005, 1) since the 1980s, often referred to as new public management (Hood 1991), and this trend has not excluded China (see e.g., Xue & Zhong 2012). Nowadays, China promotes balancing the rule of morality with the rule of law as a “bird’s two wings” (Zheng 2009, 185). The rule of law is claimed to be equally important to the rule of morality, and some even argue that this approach is preferable if one wants to achieve better governance (e.g., Zheng 2009; Guo 2008; Wei 2010). But we do not know the extent to which value preferences have converged due to China’s increased global economic and political interaction initiated by its open door policy and the “global public management revolution” (Kettl 2005). Recent evidence suggests that administrative reforms in China since the 1980s have been inspired, to say the least, by similar reforms in the West (Christensen et al. 2012). In this paper, we wonder whether this process of learning from the Western rule of law approach has had any real effects on value preferences of civil servants in China. Do they tend to align with Western ideas on what it means to be a good civil servant? Are value preferences converging, or do ‘universal’ values exist that are shared by civil servants from both traditions? Do Dutch civil servants also look beyond their traditions and are they adopting ‘new’ civil service values as well?

We want to explore these issues by seeking an answer to the following central research question:

Do value preferences differ between Chinese and Dutch civil servants,  
and to what extent do they reflect the administrative cultures of the  
respective countries (rule of morality vs. rule of law)?

First, the results of a literature review are presented on Confucian and Western administrative values, focusing exclusively on civil servants. Then the paper reports on a pilot survey and an analysis of codes of conduct that resulted in a final value set in the main survey. The remainder of the paper reports on the results of this main survey, including value rankings, open questions on how and why values differ between both regions, and statements and dilemmas regarding the appropriate civil service ethos. The paper concludes with implications for future research. The paper thus aims to make methodological as well as empirical contributions.

### **Crucial values in Eastern and Western contexts**

Values related to Confucian morality and governance are found predominantly in classic Confucian works (e.g., *The Analects*) and a limited body of academic literature. But Confucian morals are mostly studied conceptually and historically, with scholars trying to show ‘philosophic understanding’ of the ‘classical Chinese mind’ in a Western linguistic way (Hall and Ames 1987). Unlike the absence of empirical data in Chinese literature on Confucian values, a considerable body of literature exists on the core values for civil servants in a European context (e.g., Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007; Rutgers 2008; Van der Wal 2008; Van der Wal, Vrangbaek and Pevkur 2008).

*Values in Confucian and other classical texts*

“Morality” in Confucian thought contains rich meanings as it refers to personal morals, rules to coordinate interpersonal relationships, and ways in which to run a country. Confucianism considers personal moral cultivation as the first step to “becoming a human being.” As Finer (1997, 443) states, “China was regarded as Kuo-chia, a ‘family state’...; ideally it was ruled by a service aristocracy of literary talent.” Confucius connects personal morals with the methods of state management, which are two aspects of the main body of Confucian political ideas.

According to the Confucian idea of ‘Internal Sage and External King,’ internal moral cultivation ‘like a sage’ is the foundation of governance. This combination of moral norms and expressions contained in Confucian works are well known by Chinese people. For instance, Guanzhong (725-645 B.C.) argued that the state would collapse without Confucius’ ‘Four Principles’ (Si-wei)<sup>3</sup>. Dong Zhongshu (179-104 B.C., West-Han dynasty, famous philosopher) promoted Confucianism as the dominant position in the country. He combined the power of king, the power of father, and the power of husband together to build the theory of the ‘three cardinal guides’ (San-gang) and ‘five constant virtues’ (Wu-chang).<sup>4</sup> Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925)<sup>5</sup> insisted that traditional morals should not be totally discarded, and that some positive values<sup>6</sup> should be preserved (Sun Yat-sen 1985, 37). Although some more contemporary researchers have tried to summarize Confucian or Chinese characteristics<sup>7</sup>, so far there is no research which has elicited a definitive list of Confucian values.

By analyzing the contents of Confucian works, traditional moral norms, and a limited number of contemporary studies, we have elicited eleven prominent values relevant in the Confucian context:

- Ren (humaneness<sup>8</sup>)
- Li (propriety)
- Yi (righteousness)
- Zhong (loyalty)
- Xiao (filial piety)
- Cheng-xin (integrity)
- Qian-rang (humility)
- Shu (tolerance)
- Qin-jian (diligence and thrift)
- Zhi (wisdom)
- Yong (courage)

Moreover, the literature also explains the broader content of each Confucian concept, which indicates the related values.<sup>9</sup> These values help us to establish a value list used in the pilot survey in order to ask civil servants to select and rank the most important values in a Confucian context.

#### *Values mentioned in European public administration research*

In a Western context, public values have been studied extensively in recent years, conceptually as well as empirically. Well known is Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman's (2007) "public values universe." Based on which aspects of public administration or public organization the value affects, they classify seventy-two values associated with seven constellations (359). The public values universe offers a structure with which to conduct an empirical study of values in an administrative context, and emphasizes values such as responsiveness, robustness, transparency, effectiveness, and the rule of law.

Rutgers (2008, 94-95) mentions no less than 63 values that are important for the civil service. Finding the most important values relates to how values are ordered. Rutgers puts forward a simple approach to creating order, which is “by focusing on core values in terms of the most frequently referred to values” (2008, 97). An empirical study offers a way to test a value hierarchy in a specific context. Different examples can be distinguished in the literature, such as the investigation of codes of good governance for different countries and public organizations (Beck Jørgensen and Sørensen, 2013), and related to the Dutch context, value rankings by public and private sector managers (Maesschalck et al. 2008; Van der Wal 2008), a comparison of the most important values for Dutch politicians and civil servants (Van den Heuvel et al. 2002), and the proportion of codes of conduct that mention certain values in Dutch government organizations (Ethicon 2003).

The most useful example of this approach comes from Van der Wal (2008). His overview of seven relevant books on administrative ethics and values, nine government documents and codes, and 46 issues of *Public Administration Review* and *Public Integrity*, involving a content analysis and empirical clustering of over 500 values mentioned in the literature, resulted in a list of 30 values most prominent in relation to public administration (2008, 55).

## **Methodology**

### *Value sets used in pilot study*

To begin with, it is necessary to explain why we needed a pilot survey. There are so many values both in Chinese and Dutch administrative contexts that we could never empirically test all. A value set includes crucial values embodying both traditions is

needed in our survey. So which values are crucial? Conclusive empirical evidence does not exist, particularly within the Chinese administrative context. Therefore, the best way is to let civil servants in each context decide which values are prominent for them. In the pilot survey, two different value sets were employed, based on Confucian literature and existing empirical research results. Based on the pilot survey results and the content analysis of codes of conduct, the final value set for the main survey was constructed.

The pilot survey was conducted in Shanghai (China) and Amsterdam (the Netherlands). The value set for the Shanghai pilot survey was based on the 11 Confucian values listed above and the related values. The value set for the pilot survey in Amsterdam consists of the 30 most frequently mentioned values as presented in Van der Wal's research.<sup>10</sup> All values were presented with clear definitions,<sup>11</sup> thus avoiding the possibility of respondents understanding the values too broadly.

#### *Pilot survey and analysis of codes*

We conducted the pilot survey among fifteen civil servants of the municipality of Shanghai and among eight civil servants of the municipality of Amsterdam. The respondents work at bureaus that are specifically involved in professional ethics issues, and therefore very suitable for our pilot study. We administered the pilot survey questionnaires by mail, and they were completed between February 28 and March 16, 2011. The questionnaire for respondents in Shanghai was in Chinese and English, while the questionnaire for Amsterdam respondents was only in English. The response rate of the questionnaire in Shanghai was 100 percent and 80 percent in Amsterdam.

In addition, a content analysis of various codes of conduct in the two countries was conducted to see which values were mentioned most frequently. As Rutgers (2008, 97) mentions, by determining “the most frequently referred to values” one can create an order of values. Codes of conduct usually offer criteria outlining what government employees should and should not do, so the codes of conduct for civil service employees will reveal what an ‘ideal’ civil servant should be like. The relative frequencies of the codes mentioning certain values will indicate the importance of each value for a good civil servant.

The most frequently mentioned values in the Chinese codes of conduct<sup>12</sup> were obtained by reviewing two state codes, 10 provincial codes, and 14 municipal codes in Chinese governments.<sup>13</sup> It is necessary to mention that the conduct of Chinese civil servants was, before the implementation of the ‘State Civil Service Code of Conduct’ in 2002, principally regulated by Communist Party doctrines and disciplines (Zhang 2004). Some values related to the Communist Party, such as ‘political loyalty,’ are still in the code of conduct. However, two distinct ethics entities exist in China nowadays: “the party’s discipline inspection commissions oversee party (cadre) officials, and the Ministry of Supervision is responsible for the conduct of government officials” (Smith 2004, 311). Their norms and codes are promulgated at multiple levels of Chinese government. Since we particularly focus on civil servants, we were able to exclude Party doctrines from our investigation by investigating formal civil service regulations. For the Netherlands, we used a survey by Ethicon (2003)<sup>14</sup> and data published by OECD in 2000,<sup>15</sup> which offer results of frequencies of values mentioned in codes of conduct in the Netherlands and several European countries.

The respondents in the pilot survey were first asked to give a score for each value presented, to show its importance (10 = very important; 1 = not important at all),

resulting in a mean (M) score for each value. Then the respondents were asked to rank the five most important values out of the list of 30, and order them from one (most important value) to five (fifth most important value). The sum of squares ( $\Sigma$ ) for each value makes up the final hierarchy.

According to the results of value *ratings* for civil servants in Shanghai, ‘incorruptibility,’ ‘lawfulness,’ ‘righteousness,’ ‘justice,’ and ‘responsibility’ are of particular high importance. Besides ‘incorruptibility’ and ‘lawfulness’ were also *ranked* in the first and second position, ‘loyalty,’ ‘people-oriented,’ ‘obedience,’ and ‘diligence’ also ranked as top ten important values. The respondents in Amsterdam *rated* ‘incorruptibility,’ ‘transparency,’ ‘honesty,’ ‘impartiality,’ and ‘reliability’ as the most important values. ‘Transparency,’ ‘reliability,’ ‘incorruptibility,’ ‘impartiality,’ and ‘accountability’ were *ranked* in top positions.

#### *The final value set for the main survey*

The final value set was constructed based on the pilot survey results and investigation of the codes of conduct. Once again, however, it was impossible to list all of the values in the final value set. Only those values that were in high positions in pilot survey and codes of conduct were selected, excluding values ordered below the tenth rank. The most important values in the Chinese and Dutch contexts were both based on three lists: the ten most important values by rating, by ranking, and by the codes of conduct<sup>16</sup>. The most important values in the Chinese and Dutch civil service contexts are shown in Table 1, as well as the final value set.

-----Insert Table 1 about here-----

*Selection of respondents and survey distribution*

We collected the data by distributing hardcopy questionnaires to a convenience sample of participants in two university MPA programs<sup>17</sup> in Shanghai and Chengdu (China) and the VU University Amsterdam (the Netherlands). In China, the response rate was 100 percent and 53 out of the 67 (79.1 percent) questionnaires were valid. In the Netherlands, questionnaires were distributed in hardcopy, via e-mail, and through an online survey. There are 37 valid questionnaires were obtained from a total of 54 (68.5 percent) administered. The respondents are comparable in many ways as they are in majority relatively junior, work at the local level<sup>18</sup>. However, due to time constraints and limited access, this study is exploratory in nature and that draws on a convenient sample.

The respondents were asked to select and rank five values that they ideally consider most important for being a good civil servant, the three values that they ideally consider least important, as well as the five values they consider to be actually most important in their daily work (cf. Van der Wal 2008). We formulated two propositions to assist us in answering our central research question:

P<sub>1</sub> Value preferences of civil servants in China and the Netherlands are more different than alike; administrative traditions still very much influence such preferences in both countries.

P<sub>2</sub> Value preferences of civil servants in China and the Netherlands show more similarities than differences; administrative traditions are becoming less influential on value preferences in both countries nowadays.

## **Main survey: Results**

This section presents the results of the three value ranking exercises: which values are ‘ideally’ most and least important for being a good civil servant, and which values are ‘actually’ most important in the daily life of a civil servant. Table 2 shows the ideal type and actual values according to civil servants in China and the Netherlands. Just as in the pilot survey, the orders were obtained by calculating the sum of squares  $\sum (N \times M)$  for each value. The values ranked in the top ten are in bold and the five values in the lowest positions are in italics.

When we look at the value preferences in both countries, we see considerable contrasts between the ideal type and actual rankings, and a number of unexpected differences and similarities.

### *Ideal type value preferences in China and the Netherlands*

Six out of the top ten values for both groups are shared: lawfulness, expertise, people-oriented, impartiality, incorruptibility, and responsibility. Moreover, Chinese respondents ranked lawfulness, being the most literal exponent of the ‘rule of law’ tradition, number one, whereas more Confucian values such as honesty and righteousness were valued more highly as ideal type values by Dutch respondents than by Chinese respondents. Somewhat more expected are some of the larger differences: transparency was ranked first by Dutch respondents and fifteenth by Chinese respondents, and reliability was ranked third in the Netherlands and twenty-second in China. Efficiency and equality are considered quite important by Chinese civil servants, but ranked relatively low (22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>) by their Dutch counterparts.

From the results, we clearly see that Chinese respondents consider some legalistic values to be very important for an ideal civil servant. Comparatively, some

moral-based values enjoy higher priority among Dutch respondents. On the one hand, Confucian values such as righteousness, incorruptibility, and honesty appear in the top ten ideal type values for the Netherlands but not in the top ten for China. On the other hand, Chinese civil servants prioritized professional and law-based values such as efficiency, effectiveness, equality, and accountability, whereas some of these are (relatively) less important in the Netherlands. This means that the previously mentioned notion of value change is largely supported here: Confucian values characterize the ideal civil service ethos in China as much as ‘rule of law values’ and respondents from both countries show more shared values in their respective top ten hierarchies than differences.

#### *Actual value preferences in China and the Netherlands*

The values considered actually important in the daily life of a civil servant show more differences between the two countries than the ideal type values. In the respective top ten hierarchies, only four values are shared: lawfulness, efficiency, effectiveness, and expertise. The most important value in each country was obedience in China and effectiveness in the Netherlands, while righteousness was hardly ranked in either.

The actual important values for Chinese civil servants are quite Confucian (at least, much more traditional than the ideal type values), while the actual picture in the Netherlands is also more Western. Obedience, loyalty, and diligence are in the Chinese actual top ten, but are absent in the ideal top ten hierarchy.

-----Insert Table 2 about here-----

*Least important values for being a good civil servant*

The following five values are most frequently considered to be least important by Chinese civil servants: courage (35%), propriety (28%), efficiency (24%), transparency (22%), and innovativeness (20%). The five least important values most frequently selected by Dutch respondents are: courage (53%), obedience (50%), innovativeness (36%), responsiveness (31%), and social justice (22%).

It is notable that none of the Chinese respondents ranked impartiality among the least important values, while none of the Dutch respondents considered effectiveness, expertise, honesty, lawfulness, or reliability as one of least important values.

*Civil servants speaking out*

After the respondents ranked the values, they were asked an open-ended question “Do you think being a ‘good’ civil servant in Western and Eastern administrative cultures requires different values?” It should be noted many respondents have no personal experience with the administrative culture guiding their counterparts on the other side of the globe. However, these mutual perceptions – or sometimes perhaps, guesses – may give readers a some insight into whether actual values differences are smaller than perceived differences in values, or the other way around (cf. Van der Wal et al. 2012).

We classified the answers of forty Chinese respondents and thirty Dutch respondents into the categories shown in Table 3. A small minority of respondents stated that they expect no differences, saying: “The difference is cosmetic. Obedience and submissiveness are important values inherent to a bureaucratic organization,” and “The fundamental [value] in both culture[s] is obeying [the] superior or ruler’s interest,” or that there should be no differences, saying: “The meaning of the civil

service in the eastern and in the west is different, but the premise in both cases should be to make no mistakes, as well we [have] other basic requirements like impartiality, incorruptibility, people-oriented as so on,” or simply “The value requirements are universal.”

Almost all respondents, however, assume that considerable, sometimes even fundamental differences exist between both administrative cultures’ values. Whereas some argue that Eastern bureaucrats might be more ethical, most respondents (from both sides of the aisle) think that Chinese civil servants are more loyal and obedient, but also more prone to serve their ‘own group,’ whereas Dutch civil servants are said to have more (or according to some, too much) autonomy, and pay more attention to efficiency and effectiveness. For instance, to quote a civil servant from the Netherlands: “In the east, civil servants are required to absolutely obey the superior.” Or, in the words of a policy employee from the Netherlands provincial government: “In the east: Being a good civil servant requires that one executes or carries out the superior’s intention; In the West: Being a good civil servant requires that one acts in accordance with procedures and regulations.” Another Dutch civil servant put it even more directly: “The biggest difference is the attitude towards ‘law.’”

Dutch respondents also consider Western civil servants to act more individualistically and Chinese civil servants to act more holistically (we did not find such opinions among Chinese respondents). Furthermore, unsurprisingly the Dutch respondents often portrayed their own ethos as being superior: “The conservative eastern culture determines [that] civil servants cannot act in the most efficient or direct way.” By contrast, a small group of Dutch respondents referred to a convergence of values, by stating such things as: “I personally consider western civil

service emphasizes more on servicing [the] public, in the east more on loyalty and being loyal to the party. But some changes are happening.”

These qualitative statements lend more support to the existence of ‘traditional’ views – that the values of Chinese civil servants are moral-based and the values of Dutch civil servants are law-based – than the quantitative results.

-----Insert Table 3 about here-----

#### *How respondents in both countries view their profession*

The survey confronted the respondents with twelve propositions about professional morals, often involving choices or (moral) dilemmas (see Table 4). Respondents had to choose whether or not they agreed with the proposition, ranging from one to five (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The mean score (M) for each proposition is shown in Table 4 below. We also did an independent-samples T test to show which differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Propositions six, eight, and ten show significantly different results. Chinese civil servants show more loyalty towards their superiors than Dutch respondents. They also consider personal relationships to be more crucial for their career development than their Western counterparts. So far, both results support traditional differences. Intriguingly, however, and contrary to the ideal type value hierarchies, Dutch respondents (2.87) consider it less necessary than Chinese respondents (3.28) to make all administrative decisions and actions visible to the public. Furthermore, and somewhat surprisingly, respondents in both countries equally value personal morals to be more important than rules or regulations (proposition 2).

-----Insert Table 4 about here-----

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The main survey presented unexpected and sometimes even contradictory results.

What do they mean in relation to the research propositions presented before? To start with, the ideal type value preferences certainly lend support to our second proposition that presupposes similarities rather than differences: six out of nine values ranked most important by our respondents are similar across both countries. Moreover, the Chinese ideal type administrative values are certainly not completely in accordance with traditional Chinese merit-based morality (Aufrecht and Li 1995, 181), supported by the “rule of virtue according to Confucian teaching” (Cheung 2010, 38). The Chinese respondents even rank “Western” values such as lawfulness, impartiality, expertise, and accountability among the most important.

The ‘actual’ work values, however, resemble much more traditional Eastern and Western flavors, and lend support to our first proposition, in particular when we take into account how respondents reacted towards the statements on proper civil servant conduct. As we mentioned before, the notion of “only one ruler under heaven” and the long history of “the Confucian intelligentsia” monopolizing imperial courts and governments (Cheung 2010, 39) might have influenced over time the degree of personal attachment of Chinese civil service; “Confucian values of filial loyalty, reinforced by the tradition of *guanxi* (personal relationship)” (Aufrecht and Li 1995, 181). The relationship with superiors (obedience, diligence), colleagues (cooperativeness), and political officials (obedience, loyalty) are considered more crucial for a civil servants’ career in China than in the Netherlands. Chinese civil servants evidently still hold these traditional values in high regard, even though the “Chinese government has studied and incorporated many Western ideas as a consequence of civil service reform in recent years” (ibid, 175).

Arguably, with respect to the ideal or should be situation, Chinese respondents increasingly appreciate a Western professional civil service ethos, while actual value preferences show more traditional, differences. Conversely, a considerable number of Confucian values are highly ranked by Dutch respondents, and they also value highly personal cultivation and personal morals for their professional ethos. One may wonder what this contrast between actual and ideal implies for the future development of civil servants' values in both countries.

In addition, it is clear that we can distinguish some "common core values" (cf. Van der Wal 2008) for respondents in both countries, such as lawfulness, expertise, and being people-oriented (ideal values), and lawfulness, efficiency, and effectiveness (actual values). Lawfulness and expertise are among the most important both in China and the Netherlands. Other studies have also demonstrated that these values simply belong to the bureaucratic ethos, regardless of context (Van Thiel and Van der Wal 2010). The commonalities between both groups are also depicted particularly strongly by the ideal values considered least important. Courage and innovativeness are not important for civil servants in either country. Civil servants usually work with high "job security" and "less volatile wage compensation" when compared to the private sector (Buurman et al. 2009, 1), and it is often argued that they are "more risk averse" (2009, 12). The survey results corroborate this rather classical (extrinsically motivated) imagery of the civil servant.

To conclude, the results show that the respondents' value preferences in both countries are not simply Chinese/Confucian vis-a-vis Western, especially when ideal type values are considered. The important values do still embody the characteristics of the respective administrative cultures, but value preferences undeniably converge across the two hemispheres, at least in terms of how civil servants would like to

characterize their professional ethos. An intriguing question is whether administrative value preferences ever were as black and white as we originally assumed, but a lack of comparative empirical research, especially from more than a decade ago, prevents us from adequately answering this question. In addition, some values such as loyalty are very prominent for both groups, but the question is to what extent such values have different meanings in the respective cultural contexts? Do respondents, for instance, refer to loyalty to the political party or to the country, to the general public or to the state? A qualitative follow-up study should answer such questions, complemented with survey data from a wider variety of civil servants at different levels of government. Such studies will also help to answer the question of the extent to which both countries' public sectors are likely to converge and why, and identify those dimensions in which traditions will remain and the dimensions in which traditions will be replaced by new ideas on how to be a "good civil servant." Gaining more insight in these issues knowledge will improve dealings between Western and Eastern countries and will assist public managers, politicians, and diplomats in decreasing mutual prejudice, building stronger relationships, and engaging in more effective communication.

On a final note, this exploratory and our sample size is way too small to generalize to the immense civil service populations of the Netherlands (over 300,000) and China (about 7,000,000) in whatever way. The value of our study lies primarily in the completion of a well-developed research instrument to test comparatively value preferences between Western and Asian countries, and between different countries and regions in general.

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**Table 1 Final value set as a survey research instrument**

Most important values in Chinese civil service	Most important values in Dutch civil service	Final value set
1. Cooperativeness	1. Accountability	1. Accountability
2. Diligence	2. Courage	2. Cooperativeness
3. Efficiency	3. Effectiveness	3. Courage
4. Equality	4. Efficiency	4. Diligence
5. Expertise	5. Equality	5. Effectiveness
6. Honesty	6. Expertise	6. Efficiency
7. Incorruptibility	7. Honesty	7. Equality
8. Innovativeness	8. Impartiality	8. Expertise
9. Justice	9. Incorruptibility	9. Honesty
10. Lawfulness	10. Justice	10. Impartiality
11. Loyalty	11. Lawfulness	11. Incorruptibility
12. People-oriented	12. Prudence	12. Innovativeness
13. Obedience	13. Reliability	13. (Social) Justice
14. Propriety	14. Responsibility	14. Lawfulness
15. Reliability	15. Responsiveness	15. Loyalty
16. Responsibility	16. Transparency	16. Obedience
17. Righteousness		17. People-oriented
18. Serviceability		18. Propriety
		19. Prudence
		20. Reliability
		21. Responsibility
		22. Responsiveness
		23. Righteousness
		24. Serviceability
		25. Transparency

**Table 2 Value rankings for civil servants in China and the Netherlands (n=80)**

Ideal value rankings				Actual value rankings			
China (n=53)		The Netherlands (n=37)		China (n=53)		The Netherlands (n=33)	
Values	$\Sigma$	Values	$\Sigma$	Values	$\Sigma$	Values	$\Sigma$
<b>Lawfulness</b>	70,0	<b>Transparency</b>	58,0	<b>Obedience</b>	70,0	<b>Effectiveness</b>	51,0
<b>Expertise</b>	69,0	<b>Expertise</b>	40,0	<b>Lawfulness</b>	65,0	<b>Efficiency</b>	38,0
<b>People-oriented</b>	65,0	<b>Reliability</b>	39,0	<b>Efficiency</b>	61,0	<b>Expertise</b>	37,0
<b>Impartiality</b>	63,0	<b>Incorruptibility</b>	37,0	<b>Effectiveness</b>	54,0	<b>Loyalty</b>	35,0
<b>Incorruptibility</b>	61,0	<b>People-oriented</b>	36,0	<b>Cooperativeness</b>	49,0	<b>Prudence</b>	34,0
<b>Efficiency</b>	54,0	<b>Lawfulness</b>	34,0	<b>Expertise</b>	47,0	<b>Lawfulness</b>	32,0
<b>Equality</b>	46,0	<b>Impartiality</b>	32,0	<b>Impartiality</b>	46,0	<b>Reliability</b>	27,0
<b>Effectiveness</b>	40,0	<b>Righteousness</b>	29,0	<b>Loyalty</b>	46,0	<b>Responsibility</b>	24,0
<b>Accountability</b>	39,0	<b>Honesty</b>	27,0	<b>Diligence</b>	37,0	<b>Transparency</b>	24,0
<b>Responsibility</b>	39,0	<b>Responsibility</b>	27,0	<b>People-oriented</b>	34,0	<b>Propriety</b>	22,0
.		.		.		.	
<i>Innovativeness</i>	3,0	<i>Courage</i>	4,0	<i>Responsiveness</i>	8,0	<i>Equality</i>	5,0
<i>Responsiveness</i>	3,0	<i>Equality</i>	4,0	<i>Courage</i>	7,0	<i>Innovativeness</i>	5,0
<i>Propriety</i>	0,0	<i>Obedience</i>	0,0	<i>Righteousness</i>	7,0	<i>Righteousness</i>	3,0

**Table 3: Views on how Western and Eastern administrative values differ (n=70)**

Yes, the differences mainly refer to serving the public or people (the Netherlands), or obeying the superior (China) (n=20)
Yes, the differences mainly refer to the different political and civil service systems (n=10)
No difference. The fundamental values are universal or similar ('bureaucratic') (n=10)
Yes, the differences mainly refer to efficiency and effectiveness (n=8)
Yes, the differences mainly refer to fairness and impartiality from rationality and laws (n=5)
Yes, the differences mainly refer to the public involvement and democracy (n=4)
Yes, the differences mainly refer to political neutrality or political (party) orientation (n=4)
Yes, the differences mainly refer to balancing power and responsibility (n=3)
Other differences such as targets, religious beliefs, etc. (n=3)
I don't know (n=2)

**Table 4: Mean scores of agreement with propositions (n=84)**

	Proposition	China (n=53)	The Netherlands (n=31)	P
		M	M	
1	My professional ethos as a civil servant is nurtured by my personal development rather than by laws and regulations	3.04	3.48	.129
2	As a civil servant, personal values are more important to me than rules and regulations	3.06	3.06	.977
3	My private time behavior is irrelevant in judging whether I am a good civil servant	2.81	2.57	.456
4	As a civil servant I am as neutral as possible irrespective of my personal opinions and political preferences	3.10	3.19	.710
5	Politicians exercise influence and control over my work in reality	4.08	3.74	.130
6	Loyalty to my superior or organization is more important than impartiality towards persons, groups or organizations	3.74	2.61	.000***
7	I show more obedience towards the <i>person</i> than towards the <i>position</i> of my superiors	2.92	3.19	.356
8	Building and maintaining good personal relationships (with superiors, colleagues, etc.) is crucial for my career	4.49	3.87	.000***
9	I consider it necessary to make all administrative decisions and actions visible to the public	3.28	2.87	.146
10	I strictly adhere to rules and procedures as they provide equality, even if they prevent me from being flexible	3.19	2.45	.001***
11	I value involvement of employees and responsiveness to clients more than efficiency	3.13	3.32	.380
12	I do a better job when I follow the requirements of bureaucratic hierarchy than when I act with maximal autonomy	2.94	2.77	.513

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, values are also used by individuals and groups (in this case: civil servants) to judge and evaluate good conduct. We characterize the values in the two administrative cultures as Ethics-based values and Law-based values.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Traditional’ means the time from the pre-Qin Period to the 1911 Xinhai Revolution (Lu Yu 2009). This time distinction is quite rational and understandable. The Xinhai Revolution ended the Qing Period, which signalled the death of feudal times in China. After the building of the Republic of China in 1912, China entered a brand new phase. The ‘pre-Qin Period’ is a general term indicating the whole time before the Qin Period (221BC). It contains the Xia Dynasty, Shang Dynasty, Zhou Dynasty, the Spring-Autumn, and the Warring States Period. Confucius lived in the Spring-Autumn Period, and that is the time from which Confucian thought stems.

<sup>3</sup> The ‘Four Principles’ according to Guanzhong are: propriety (Li), integrity (Yi), incorruption (Lian), and shame consciousness (Chi).

<sup>4</sup> According to Dong Zhongshu, the ‘three cardinal guides’ (San-gang) are “ruler guides subject, father guides son and husband guides wife,” and the ‘five constant virtues’ (Wu-chang) are “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and integrity.”

<sup>5</sup> Sun Yat-sen was the first provisional president when the Republic of China (ROC) was founded in 1912 and later the first leader of the Chinese National People’s Party or Kuomintang (KMT).

<sup>6</sup> These consisted of ‘eight virtues’: loyalty and filial devotion (Zhong-xiao), kindness and love (Ren-ai), faithfulness and justice (Xin-yi), and harmony and peace (He-ping).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Lai (1995) names several Confucian concepts that are relevant to the Confucian moral outlook: “Cheng-ming, jen, li, Hsiao, shu and tao” (250). Lu (2009) identifies fourteen moral principles from Confucian thought: loyalty (Zhong), filial piety (Xiao), forgiveness (Shu), righteousness (Yi), propriety (Li), integrity (Xin), respectfulness (Gong), humility (Rang), courageousness (Yong), love (Ai), benevolence (Ren), self-reliance (Ziqiang), diligence and thrift (Qinjian), and modesty (Qian).

<sup>8</sup> To decide on the most suitable English word, we have combined the meaning of a value in Chinese with the corresponding word in our European research. The word might not always be the most exact translation, but due to our aim of conducting the survey both in China and the Netherlands, it might nevertheless be the proper and most understandable one. Explanations and brief definitions are given for each value included in the questionnaire.

<sup>9</sup> The moral related values derived from classical Confucian texts:

Confucian value	Related values
Ren	Humaneness Kindness Benevolence Friendliness Serviceability

Li	Propriety Courteousness Cautiousness Humility Responsibility
Yi	Righteousness Justice
Zhong	Loyalty Obedience Selflessness Reliability
Xiao	Filial piety Loyalty / Obedience
Cheng-xin	Integrity Trustfulness Faithfulness Honesty Reliability
Qian-rang	Humility/ Modesty Respectfulness Generousness
Shu	Tolerance Consideration Reciprocity

Qin-jian	Diligence Thrift Incorruption Self-reliance Dedication
Zhi	Wisdom Expertise
Yong	Courage Righteousness

<sup>10</sup> Cluster results for the administrative ethics literature (Van der Wal 2008:55):

Cluster	Total		
1 Honesty	434	16 Cooperativeness	191
2 Humaneness	422	17 Responsiveness	184
3 Social justice	402	18 Dedication	183
4 Impartiality	380	19 Effectiveness	181
5 Transparency	379	20 Innovativeness	179
6 Integrity	365	21 Lawfulness	152
7 Obedience	357	22 Loyalty	146
8 Reliability	329	23 Consistency	111
9 Responsibility	327	24 Autonomy	99
10 Expertise	314	25 Stability	99
11 Accountability	294	26 Representativeness	88

12	Efficiency	276	27	Competitiveness	77
13	Courage	254	28	Profitability	59
14	Prudence	220	29	Collegiality	48
15	Serviceability	215	30	Self-fulfillment	16

<sup>11</sup> Each value in the Confucian context is defined based on its meaning for both personal moral and governance perspectives. The definitions of the values in the European context are derived mostly from Van der Wal's (2008) research, with some values defined based on a dictionary definition or other literature (e.g. de Graaf 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Listed values in Chinese governmental codes of conduct:

<b>Position</b>	<b>Core values</b>	<b>Percentage of codes in which value is listed (n=26)</b>
1	Lawfulness	92,3
2	Innovativeness	88,5
3	People-oriented	88,5
4	Diligence	84,6
5	Efficiency	84,6
6	Incorruptibility	80,8
7	Propriety	80,8
8	Loyalty	76,9
9	Cooperativeness	73,1
10	Responsibility	73,1
11	Serviceability	73,1

12	Honesty	61,5
13	Reliability	61,5
14	Righteousness	61,5
15	Justice	53,8
16	Courteousness	50,0
17	Pragmatism	50,0
18	Expertise	46,2
19	Thrift	46,2

<sup>13</sup> The Chinese state codes of conduct are: the ‘State Civil Service Code of Conduct’ and the ‘Program for Improving Citizens’ Moral Education.’ The provincial codes come from: Jilin province (3 codes); Shandong; Inner Mongolia; Hubei; Sichuan; Guangxi; Beijing; and Shanghai. The municipal codes are from: Nanjing (in Jiangsu province); Jiaozuo (in Henan province); Huangshan (in Anhui province); Guangzhou (in Guangdong province); Anqing (in Anhui province); Baoji (in Shaanxi province); Chengdu (in Sichuan province); Dongguan (in Guangdong province); Qingdao (in Shandong province); Shenzhen (in Guangdong province); Urumchi (in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region); Xi-an (in Shaanxi province); Jilin (in Jilin province); and Hangzhou (in Zhejiang province).

<sup>14</sup> Core values in the Dutch public sector codes of conduct (Ethicon 2003):

Core values	Percentage of codes mentioning the value (n=59)

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1.	Integrity	98
2.	Transparency/openness	88
3.	Responsibility	78
4.	Trust/trustworthiness	76
5.	Carefulness	76
6.	Independence	75
7.	Reliability	68
8.	Professionalism	44
9.	Restraint	39
10.	Functionality	36
11.	Credibility	31

<sup>15</sup> Based on the core values published in all twenty-nine OECD countries, the eight most important frequently stated core public service values were impartiality, legality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, equality, responsibility, and justice (OECD Public Management Policy Brief: September 2000).

<sup>16</sup> We applied the following rules to decide which values to include in the final set.

1. Those values that appear in the top ten of all three lists.
2. Those are both highly rated and ranked, or both highly rated and frequently mentioned, or both highly ranked and frequently mentioned in the codes of conduct.
3. Those were both rated and ranked, or both rated and mentioned, or both ranked and mentioned in the codes of conduct.
4. Those were highly rated, highly ranked, or mentioned frequently in the codes of conduct.

5. Omit those were lowly rated, lowly ranked, or mentioned relatively infrequently.

<sup>17</sup> An MPA (Master of Public Administration) program is an important element in young civil servants' training in China, aiming to improve their abilities in administration and the quality of governance. According to the eligibility for applicants, the participants are usually less than forty years old and have been working no less than three years with a Bachelor diploma (no less than two years with a Master or Doctor diploma). The same goes for the part-time students at the MPA program at the VU University Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. The majority of the participants in both countries work at the municipal and regional level, at various departments and in various functions, making up a broad and 'general' sample of civil servants.

<sup>18</sup> The respondents in both countries are relatively young and of junior level (100% in China and 90.3% in the Netherlands were under 45 years of age; 88.6% in China and 80.6% in the Netherlands had less than ten years of professional experience as a civil servant), and predominantly work at the local and regional level (67.9% in municipal and district level government in China, 58.1% in the same categories in the Netherlands).