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Rule of Morality vs. Rule of Law?
An Exploratory Study of Civil Servant Values in China and the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This article assesses whether civil servant values in China and the Netherlands reflect different administrative traditions (i.e., rule of morality vs. rule of law). The question is highly relevant because both countries have recently undergone reform and modernization, and their mutual dealings and interactions have increased and gained importance. A pilot survey and a content analysis of codes of conduct were used to establish a value set that was tested in an exploratory survey of Chinese ($n = 68$) and Dutch ($n = 45$) civil servants. The results revealed that value preferences reflected administrative traditions less clearly than expected, and values associated with the rule of law tradition were in some instances more important for Chinese than for Dutch respondents. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are offered.

KEY WORDS

administrative culture, China, Netherlands, public values

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have studied public values in order to establish how they influence civil servants' conduct. Most definitions of "values" suggest that they imply preferences or desires and therefore can be ranked. Since every value is important in some way to someone, although no value holds the same importance for everyone, this means that values can be "ordered by relative importance" (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987, 551).

Value preferences "reflect cultural (and individual) ideals that motivate behavior" (Schwartz, Struch, and Bilsky 1990, 186). Van Wart 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 a variety of value types and cultural regions: Asian countries emphasize "hierarchy," whereas "intellectual autonomy" is quite important in Western Europe, and America belongs to the English-speaking region emphasizing "mastery." Respondents from the same cultural region tend to share the proximate value types. In this sense, administrative culture is partly reflected by the values of civil servants. Here, the term "values" refers 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).¹

This article studies the administrative cultures of China and the Netherlands, traditionally referred to, respectively, as "rule of morality" and "rule of law" (e.g., Fallon 1997; Scalia 1989). Descended from the administrative system of "Confucian scholar-officialdom" (Cheung 2010, 38), Chinese traditional culture is ethics-centered and based on the moral system attributed to Confucius (Lu 2009), who died in 479 b.c.e. In contrast, a law-adherent culture prevails in Western Europe (van der Meer 2011). Each tradition prescribes different values as being most important for civil servants.

The values associated with the Confucian rule of morality tradition emphasize personal morals and qualities attained by self-cultivation, such as righteousness, honesty, diligence, and impartiality. Since official posts in China's imperial courts and governments were monopolized by "the Confucian intelligentsia" and the idea of "only one ruler under heaven" (Cheung 2010, 39), values related to personal attachment, such as obedience and loyalty, are also included in the Confucian "morality-based value group." Law-based values, by contrast, prevail in a rule of law context, which emphasizes professionalism, including such values as expertise, efficiency, transparency, lawfulness, and accountability (De Graaf and van der Wal 2010).

It is unclear, however, to what extent these traditional cultural differences still characterize the civil service ethos in China and the Netherlands. Studying this question is relevant for at least three reasons. First, even though a few empirical studies indicate that values differ between Confucian and other cultural contexts (e.g., Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, and Yu 2008; Whitcomb, Erdener, and Li 1998; Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, and Beom 2005), there have been no recent empirical studies of the values or morals of Chinese civil servants (let alone studies comparing values preferences between East and 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, each community would benefit from

insights into what drives civil servants on the other side of the table. Thus, a comparison not only adds to academic knowledge but also serves practical purposes.

Second, Communist China claims that “China’s communitarian traditions are based on Confucianism” (de Bary 1998, 8), but at different stages in the course of China’s modern political development, Confucian morality has been rejected and then accepted. The “anti-Confucianism campaign” launched during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s “attacked every aspect of Confucius’s thought” (Zhang and Schwartz 1997, 200), but after the revolution, the “critical inheritance” of Confucius was revamped to help the Communist regime seek “a place in the modern world” (203). The current situation might therefore be best characterized as “value vagueness”; it is not known whether Confucian values have been 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 (e.g., Xue and 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 equal in importance to the rule of morality, and some argue that this approach is necessary to achieve better governance (e.g., Guo 2008; Wei 2010; Zheng 2009). But the extent to which value preferences have converged due to China’s “open-door policy” and the global public management revolution is unknown (Kettl 2005). Recent evidence suggests that administrative reforms in China since the 1980s have been inspired by similar reforms in the West (Christensen, Dong, Painter, and Walker 2012; Xue and Zhong 2012). The present study examines whether the Western rule of law approach has had any real effect on the value preferences of civil servants in China. Do they 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 public employees also look beyond their tradition, and are they too adopting “new” civil service values?

The analysis that follows explores these issues by seeking to determine whether the value preferences of Chinese and Dutch civil servants differ, and whether their preferences reflect the administrative cultures of their respective countries (rule of morality vs. rule of law)? The discussion makes methodological as well as empirical contributions. In addition, the results can be helpful for the practice of public management and leadership. It is essential for leaders to know what values are promoted and supported by members of their organization, for if standards of good conduct are in conflict with the value orientation of civil servants, they will be unable to cultivate an “ethical culture in the workplace” (Menzel 2007, 10).

CRUCIAL VALUES IN EASTERN AND WESTERN CONTEXTS

Values related to Confucian morality and governance are found predominantly in classic Confucian works like *The Analects* and in a small body of academic literature. But Confucian morality is mostly studied conceptually and historically, with scholars trying to show “philosophic understanding” of the “classical Chinese mind” from a Western linguistic perspective (Hall and Ames 1987). Whereas empirical data on Confucian values are largely absent from the Chinese literature, there is a considerable body of work on the core values of European civil servants (e.g., Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007; Rutgers 2008; van den Heuvel, Huberts, and Verberk 2002; van der Wal 2008; van der Wal, Pevkur, and Vrangbaek 2008).

Values in Confucian and Other Classical Texts

The concept of morality has a rich meaning in Confucian thought because it encompasses personal morals, rules to coordinate interpersonal relationships, and ways to run a country. Confucianism considers the cultivation of personal morality as “necessary in becoming a complete human being” (Legge 1971, 279). As Finer states, “China was regarded as Kuo-chia, a ‘family state’ . . . ideally it was ruled by a service aristocracy of literary talent” (1997, 443). Confucius connected personal morals with the methods of state administration, which thus constitute two aspects of the main body of Confucian political thought.

According to the idea of “internal sage and external king,” personal moral cultivation to make oneself “like a sage” is the foundation of governance. The combination of moral norms and expressions that comprise the corpus of Confucian works has long been accepted in China. For instance, Guan Zhong (725–645 b.c.e.) argued that the state would collapse without Confucius’s Four Principles (si wei)—propriety (li), integrity (yi), incorruption (lian), and shame consciousness (chi). The philosopher Dong Zhongshu (179–104 b.c.e) promoted Confucianism and made it China’s dominant philosophical system, combining 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)—respectively comprising “ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife,” and the values of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and integrity.

Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the first president of the Republic of China, insisted that traditional morality should not be totally discarded, and that its positive values should be preserved (Sun 1985, 37). Several more recent researchers (e.g., Lai 1995; Lu 2009; Wang 1999; Wright, Twitchett, and Dien 1962; Wu 2010) compiled lists of what they regarded as the primary Confucian or Chinese values, but none of these lists has been accepted as definitive. Based on an analysis of Confucian works, traditional Chinese moral norms, and a limited number of contemporary studies, we have elicited 11 important values that are relevant in the Confucian context: ren (humaneness), li (propriety), yi (righteousness), zhong (loyalty), xiao (filial piety), chengxin (integrity), qianrang (humility), shu (tolerance), qinjian (diligence and thrift), zhi (wisdom), and yong (courage).² These were used in compiling a value list for the pilot survey, discussed below, in which Chinese civil servants were asked to select and rank what they saw as the most important Confucian values (see Table 1).

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 the aspects of public administration or organization affected, they identified 72 values and classified them in seven constellations (p. 359). The ensuing public values universe offers a structure with which to conduct an empirical study of values in an administrative context, and emphasizes such values as responsiveness, robustness, transparency, effectiveness, and the rule of law.

Table 1. Values Derived from Classical Confucian Texts

Confucian value	Related values
<i>Ren</i>	Humaneness Kindness Benevolence Friendliness Serviceability
<i>Li</i>	Propriety Courteousness Cautiousness Humility Responsibility
<i>Yi</i>	Righteousness Justice
<i>Zhong</i>	Loyalty Obedience Selflessness Reliability
<i>Xiao</i>	Filial piety Loyalty/Obedience
<i>Chengxin</i>	Integrity Trustfulness Faithfulness Honesty Reliability
<i>Qianrang</i>	Humility/Modesty Respectfulness Generousness
<i>Shu</i>	Tolerance Consideration Reciprocity
<i>Qinjian</i>	Diligence Thrift Incorruption Self-reliance Dedication
<i>Zhi</i>	Wisdom Expertise
<i>Yong</i>	Courage Righteousness

Rutgers (2008, 94–95) mentions no fewer than 63 values that are important to the topic of civil service, and finds that the most important question relates to how values are ordered. He puts forward a simple approach to creating order, namely “by focusing on core values in terms of the most frequently referred to values” (p. 97). An empirical study offers a way to test a value hierarchy in a specific context. Different examples are available in the literature, such as Beck Jørgensen and Sørensen’s forthcoming investigation of codes of good governance for different countries and public organizations. Related to the Dutch context, there have been value rankings by public and private sector managers (Maesschalck, van der Wal, and Huberts 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 studies of the proportion of the

codes of conduct of Dutch government organizations that mention certain values (Ethicon 2003).

The most useful example of this approach comes from van der Wal's (2008) overview of seven relevant books on administrative ethics and values, and of 46 issues of the journals *Public Administration Review* and *Public Integrity*. Based on content analysis of these works and empirical clustering of the more than 500 values mentioned, van der Wal produced a list of the 30 values that were most prominent in relation to public administration (2008, 55).

Table 2. Value Clusters in Administrative Ethics Literature

	<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	Honesty	434	15	Cooperativeness	191
2	Humaneness	422	16	Responsiveness	184
3	Social justice	402	17	Dedication	183
4	Impartiality	380	18	Effectiveness	181
5	Transparency	379	19	Innovativeness	179
6	Integrity	365	20	Lawfulness	152
7	Obedience	357	21	Loyalty	146
8	Reliability	329	22	Consistency	111
9	Responsibility	327	23	Autonomy	99
10	Expertise	314	24	Stability	99
11	Accountability	294	25	Representativeness	88
12	Efficiency	276	26	Competitiveness	77
13	Courage	254	27	Profitability	59
14	Prudence	220	28	Collegiality	48

METHODOLOGY

Pilot Study Value Sets

To begin with, it is necessary to explain the need for a pilot survey. There are so many values in the Chinese and Dutch administrative contexts that they could not all be empirically tested. The pilot needed a value set made up of crucial values embodying both traditions for use in the survey. Which values were deemed crucial? Since there is no conclusive empirical evidence, particularly for the Chinese administrative context, the best approach was to let civil servants in each context decide which values were most important. The pilot employed two different value sets, based on Confucian literature and existing empirical research results. The final value set for the main survey was constructed based on the pilot results and the content analysis of codes of conduct.

The definitions of Confucian values were based on their meaning from the perspectives of both personal morality and governance. The definitions of the European values were derived mostly from van der Wal's (2008) research, but some were defined based on a dictionary definition or other literature (e.g., de Graaf 2010).

Pilot survey and analysis of codes

The pilot surveyed 15 civil servants of the municipality of Shanghai and eight civil servants of the municipality of Amsterdam. The respondents all worked in agencies specifically involved with professional ethics issues and therefore were very

suitable for the pilot study. The pilot questionnaires were administered by mail, and 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 rates of the questionnaire were 100 percent in Shanghai 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) explains, 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; thus the codes for civil service employees revealed an image of the “ideal” civil servant, and the relative frequency of mention of certain values in the codes indicated the importance of each value.

The values most frequently mentioned in the Chinese codes of conduct were obtained by reviewing two Chinese state codes, 10 provincial codes, and 14 municipal codes (see Table 3).³ It is necessary to mention that before the implementation of the State Civil Service Code of Conduct in 2002, the conduct of civil servants was principally regulated by Communist Party doctrines and discipline (Zhang 2004). Although some values related to the Party, such as political loyalty, are still included in the code of conduct, two distinct ethics entities exist in China today: “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). Norms and codes are promulgated at multiple levels of government. Because the pilot focused on civil servants, it excluded Communist Party doctrines and focused on formal civil service regulations. The Netherlands survey utilized Ethicon (2003), shown in Table 4, and data published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2000) that provided frequency results for values mentioned in codes of conduct in the Netherlands and several other European countries.⁴

The respondents in the pilot were first asked to score each value to show its importance (10 = very important; 1 = not important at all), and this produced a mean (M) score for each value. Then they were asked to rank the five most important values out of the list of 30, ordering them from 1 (most important) to 5 (fifth most important). The sum of squares (Σ) for each value made up the final hierarchy.

The value ratings by civil servants in Shanghai showed that incorruptibility, lawfulness, righteousness, justice, and responsibility were of particularly high importance. Incorruptibility and lawfulness were ranked in the first and second positions; loyalty, people-oriented, obedience, and diligence also ranked in the top ten. The respondents in Amsterdam rated incorruptibility, transparency, honesty, impartiality, and reliability as the most important values. Transparency, reliability, incorruptibility, impartiality, and accountability were also in top positions.

Final Value Set for the Main Survey

The final value set was constructed based on the pilot results and the investigation of the codes of conduct. Once again, however, it was impossible to include all of the values in the final value set. Only those values that were in high positions in the pilot and codes were selected, excluding values ordered below the tenth rank. The most important values in both the Chinese and the Dutch context were based on three lists: the 10 most important values as determined by rating, by ranking, and by the codes of conduct. The following rules decided which values to include in the final set:

- They appeared in the top ten of all three lists.
- They were highly rated and ranked, highly rated and frequently mentioned, or highly ranked and frequently mentioned in the codes of conduct.
- They were rated and ranked, rated and mentioned, or ranked and mentioned in the codes of conduct.
- They were highly rated, highly ranked, or mentioned frequently in the codes of conduct.
- Those that were low rated, low ranked, or mentioned relatively infrequently were omitted.

Table 4. Core Values in Dutch Codes of Conduct

<i>Core value</i>	<i>% of codes mentioning value (n = 59)</i>
Integrity	98
Transparency/openness	88
Responsibility	78
Trust/trustworthiness	76
Carefulness	76
Independence	75
Reliability	68
Professionalism	44
Restraint	39
Functionality	36
Credibility	31

Selection of Respondents and Survey Distribution

We collected the data by distributing hardcopy questionnaires to a convenience sample of participants in university M.P.A. programs in Shanghai, Chengdu, and the VU University Amsterdam.⁵ In China, the response rate was 100 percent, and 53 of the 67 questionnaires (79.1%) were valid. In the Netherlands, questionnaires were distributed in hardcopy, via e-mail, and through an online survey. Thirty-seven valid questionnaires were obtained from the 54 administered (68.5%). The main survey thus involved 53 Chinese civil servants and 37 Dutch civil servants. The respondents in both countries were comparable in many respects: They were relatively young (under 45 years old) and of junior level (100% in China, 90.3% in the Netherlands); 88.6 percent in China and 80.6 percent in the Netherlands had less than 10 years of professional experience as civil servants, and they predominantly worked at the local and regional levels in municipal and district governments (67.9% in China, 58.1% in the Netherlands).

The respondents were asked to select and rank the five values they ideally considered most important for being a good civil servant, the three values they ideally considered least important, and the five values they considered to be actually most important in their daily work (see van der Wal 2008). Two propositions were formulated to assist in answering the central research question:

Proposition 1: 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.

Proposition 2: 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.

Table 5. Final Value Set as a Survey Research Instrument

<i>Most important values in Chinese civil service</i>	<i>Most important values in Dutch civil service</i>	<i>Final value set</i>
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

MAIN SURVEY: RESULTS

This section presents the results of the three value-ranking exercises: the values selected as ideally most and least important for being a good civil servant, and the values actually most important in the daily life of a civil servant. Table 6 shows the ideal 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 $\Sigma(N \times M)$ for each value. The values ranked in the top ten are in boldface and the five values in the lowest positions are in italic.

The value preferences in both countries showed considerable contrasts between the ideal and actual rankings, and a number of unexpected differences and similarities.

Ideal Value Preferences

Six of the top ten values for both groups were shared: lawfulness, expertise, people-oriented, impartiality, incorruptibility, and responsibility. Moreover, Chinese

respondents ranked lawfulness, the most literal expression of the rule of law tradition, as number one, whereas Confucian values such as honesty and righteousness were valued more highly as ideal values by Dutch respondents than by Chinese respondents. Somewhat more expected were 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 were considered quite important by Chinese civil servants, but were ranked relatively low at twenty-second and twenty-fourth by their Dutch counterparts.

The results showed that Chinese respondents considered some legalistic values to be very important for an ideal civil servant. Similarly, some moralistic values enjoyed higher priority among Dutch respondents. On the one hand, the Confucian values of righteousness, incorruptibility, and honesty appeared among 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 were (relatively) less important in the Netherlands. This means that these results supported the previously mentioned notion of value change: Confucian values characterized the ideal civil service ethos in China as much as rule of law values, and respondents from both countries showed more shared values than differences in their respective top ten hierarchies.

Actual Value Preferences

The values considered actually important in the daily life of a civil servant showed more differences between the two countries than the ideal-type values. In the respective top ten hierarchies, only four values were 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 actually important values for Chinese civil servants were quite Confucian, or at least much more traditional than the ideal-type values. The picture in the Netherlands was more Western. Obedience, loyalty, and diligence were included in the Chinese actual top ten hierarchy, but not in the ideal top ten.

Least Important Values

The following five values were most frequently considered to be least important by Chinese civil servants: courage (35%), propriety (28%), efficiency (24%), transparency (22%), and innovativeness (20%).

The five values most frequently selected as least important by Dutch respondents were courage (53%), obedience (50%), innovativeness (36%), responsiveness (31%), and social justice (22%).

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

Table 6. Value rankings for civil servants in China and the Netherlands (n=80)

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

Civil servants speaking out

After they ranked the values, the respondents were asked the open-ended question “Do you think being a ‘good’ civil servant in Western and Eastern administrative cultures requires different values?” It is given that many of the respondents had 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 us a some insight into whether actual value differences are smaller than perceived differences in values, or the other way around (see van Steden, van der Wal, and Lasthuizen 2013).

The answers of 40 Chinese respondents and 30 Dutch respondents were classified into the categories shown in Table 7. A small minority of respondents stated that they expected no differences, saying: “The difference is cosmetic. Obedience and submissiveness are important values inherent to a bureaucratic organization,” or “The fundamental [value] in both culture[s] is obeying [the] superior or ruler’s interest.” Others held that there should be no differences: “The meaning of the civil service in the East and in the West is different, but the premise in both cases should be to make no mistakes, as well [as that] we [meet] other basic requirements like impartiality, incorruptibility, people-oriented, and so on,” or simply “The value requirements are universal.”

Almost all the respondents, however, assumed that there were considerable, sometimes even fundamental, differences between the values of the two administrative cultures. Whereas some argued that Eastern bureaucrats might be more ethical, most respondents (from both sides of the aisle) thought that Chinese civil servants were more loyal and obedient, but also more prone to serve their own group, whereas Dutch civil servants were said to have more (or, according to some, too much) autonomy, and to 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 a Netherlands provincial government: “In the East, being a good civil servant requires that one execute or carry out the superior’s intention; in the West, being a good civil

servant requires that one act in accordance with procedures and regulations.” Another Dutch civil servant put it even more directly: “The biggest difference is the attitude toward law.”

Dutch respondents also maintained that Western civil servants act more individualistically and Chinese civil servants more holistically (Chinese respondents did not have such opinions). Furthermore, and unsurprisingly, the Dutch respondents often portrayed their own ethos as 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; one stated, for instance: “I personally consider Western civil service emphasizes more of servicing [the] public; in the East, more of loyalty and being loyal to the party. But some changes are happening.”

These qualitative statements lend more support than the quantitative results to the continued existence of traditional views in each country—namely that the values of Chinese civil servants are morality-based and the values of Dutch civil servants are law-based.

Table 3. Do 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)

How Respondents View Their Profession

The survey included 12 propositions about professional morality, often involving choices or (moral) dilemmas (see Table 8). Respondents had to indicate whether or not they agreed with each proposition on a scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree). The mean score (M) for each proposition is shown in Table 8. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to show which differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

As can be seen in the table, the results were significantly different for propositions 6, 8, and 10. Chinese civil servants showed more loyalty toward their superiors than the Dutch respondents. They also considered personal relationships to be more crucial for their career development than their Western counterparts. So far, the results for both groups support traditional differences. Intriguingly, however, and contrary to the ideal-type value hierarchies, Dutch survey participants (2.87) considered 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 valued personal morals as more important than rules or regulations (Proposition 2).

Table 8. 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	0.129
2 As a civil servant, personal values are more important to me than rules and regulations	3.06	3.06	0.977
3 My private time behavior is irrelevant in judging whether I am a good civil servant	2.81	2.57	0.456
4 As a civil servant I am as neutral as possible irrespective of my personal opinions and political preferences	3.10	3.19	0.710
5 Politicians exercise influence and control over my work in reality	4.08	3.74	0.130
6 Loyalty to my superior or organization is more important than impartiality towards persons, groups or organizations	3.74	2.61	0.000***
7 I show more obedience towards the <i>person</i> than towards the <i>position</i> of my superiors	2.92	3.19	0.356
8 Building and maintaining good personal relationships (with superiors, colleagues, etc.) is crucial for my career	4.49	3.87	0.000***
9 I consider it necessary to make all administrative decisions and actions visible to the public	3.28	2.87	0.146
10 I strictly adhere to rules and procedures as they provide equality, even if they prevent me from being flexible	3.19	2.45	0.001***
11 I value involvement of employees and responsiveness to clients more than efficiency	3.13	3.32	0.380
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	0.513

n* = 52; *n* = 50.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main survey presented unexpected and sometimes even contradictory results. What do the results mean in relation to the research propositions we formulated? To start with, the ideal-type value preferences certainly lend support to the second proposition, which presupposes similarities rather than differences: Six of the nine values ranked as most important by the respondents were similar across both countries. Moreover, the Chinese ideal-type administrative values were certainly not completely in accordance with traditional Chinese “merit-based” morality (Aufrecht and Bun 1995, 181) supported by the “rule of virtue according to Confucian teaching” (Cheung 2010, 38). The Chinese respondents even ranked such “Western” values as lawfulness, impartiality, expertise, and accountability among the most important.

The actual work values, however, had a much more traditional Eastern and Western flavor, and lend support to the first proposition, in particular when we take into account how respondents reacted to the statements on proper civil servant conduct. As mentioned, the notion of “only one ruler under heaven,” and the long history of “the Confucian intelligentsia” monopolizing imperial courts and governments (Cheung 2010, 39), may over time have influenced the strong degree of personal attachment in Chinese civil service circles—“Confucian values of filial loyalty, reinforced by the tradition of *guanxi* (personal relationship)” (Aufrecht and Li 1995, 181). Relationships with superiors (obedience, diligence), colleagues (cooperativeness), and political officials (obedience, loyalty) are considered more

crucial for a civil servant's 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" (Aufrecht and Li 1995, 175).

Arguably, with respect to the ideal, or "should be," situation, Chinese respondents increasingly appreciate the Western professional civil service ethos, but their actual value preferences show more traditional differences. Conversely, a considerable number of Confucian values were highly ranked by Dutch respondents, and they too value self-cultivation and personal morality as elements in their professional ethos. One may wonder what this contrast between actual and ideal implies for the future development of civil servant values in the two countries.

In addition, it is clear that there are some "common core values" (see 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 demonstrated that these values are simply part of the bureaucratic ethos regardless of context (van den Heuvel et al. 2002; van Thiel and van der Wal 2010). The commonalities between the two groups of respondents are also depicted strongly by the ideal values they considered least important. Courage and innovativeness were not important for civil servants in either country. Civil servants usually have "high job security" and "less volatile wage compensation" than workers in the private sector, and it is often argued that they are "more risk averse" (Buurman, Delfgaauw, Dur, and van den Bossche, 2009, 1, 12). The survey results corroborated this rather classical (extrinsically motivated) image of the civil servant.

To conclude, the results show that the value preferences of the respondents in both countries were not simply Chinese/Confucian vis-à-vis Western, especially when ideal-type values are considered. The important values embody the characteristics of the respective administrative cultures, but the 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 originally assumed, but the lack of comparative empirical research, especially from more than a decade ago, makes it impossible to adequately answer this question. In addition, while some values, such as loyalty, were very prominent for both groups, the key question is whether and to what extent such values have different meanings in the two cultural contexts. In reference to loyalty, for instance, were the respondents thinking of loyalty to the political party, to the country, to the public at large, or to the government? Qualitative follow-up studies would help to answer these questions, as would more survey data from a wider field of civil servants at different levels of government.

The authors plan to conduct such studies in the years to come. To reiterate what was stated earlier, this study was exploratory rather than comprehensive or confirmatory. Follow-up studies will help to answer the question of the extent to which the public sectors in the two countries are likely to converge and why, and to identify those dimensions in which traditions will remain or will be replaced by new ideas on how to be a good civil servant. Such knowledge will improve interactions between Western and Eastern countries and will enable public managers, politicians, and diplomats to decrease mutual prejudice, build stronger relationships, and engage in more effective communication.

One final note: It is not just that this study was exploratory, but the sample size was extremely small as a basis for generalizing in any way to the large population

of 300,000 civil service personnel in the Netherlands and even more to the 7 million in China. The value of the study lies primarily in its completion of a well-developed research instrument for testing comparative value preferences between Western and Asian countries, and between different countries and regions in general.

NOTES

¹ Thus, values are used, both by individuals and by groups (in this case, civil servants), to judge and evaluate good conduct. The values in the two administrative cultures treated in this article can be characterized as either ethics-based or law-based.

² In trying to select the most suitable English renderings for these terms, we combined the meaning of the values in Chinese with the corresponding words in our European research. The English terms selected in this way may not always be the most accurate translations, but because it was necessary to conduct the same survey in China and the Netherlands, they were nevertheless the most understandable and therefore the best possible.

³ The State Civil Service Code of Conduct and the Program for Improving Citizens' Moral Education; provincial codes from Jilin (3 codes), Shandong, Inner Mongolia, Hubei, Sichuan, Guangxi, Beijing, and Shanghai; and municipal codes from Nanjing (Jiangsu province), Jiaozuo (Henan province), Huangshan (Anhui province), Guangzhou (Guangdong province), Anqing (Anhui province), Baoji (Shaanxi province), Chengdu (Sichuan province), Dongguan (Guangdong province), Qingdao (Shandong province), Shenzhen (Guangdong province), Urumchi (Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region), Xi'an (Shaanxi province), Jilin (Jilin province), and Hangzhou (Zhejiang province).

⁴ Based on the core values published in the 29 OECD countries, the eight most important and most frequently stated core public service values are impartiality, legality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, equality, responsibility, and justice (OECD 2000).

⁵ An M.P.A. (master of public administration) program is an important element in the training of young civil servants in China. The aim is to improve their administrative capabilities and the quality of governance. Applicants for the program have at least three years' work experience with a bachelor's diploma, or at least two years with a master's or doctoral diploma. The same goes for the part-time students in the M.P.A. program at the VU University Amsterdam. The majority of the program participants in both countries work in various departments and various functions at the municipal or regional level, making up a broad general sample of civil servants.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lijing Yang is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Amsterdam. Her dissertation compares the civil service ethos in China and the Netherlands. She obtained her master’s degree in public management from East China University of Science and Technology in 2009.

Zeger van der Wal is an associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. He obtained his Ph.D. in public administration (cum laude) from the VU University Amsterdam. His research interests are public and private sector values, elite behavior, and public service motivation. His work has been published in *Public Administration Review*, *Public Administration*, *American Review of Public Administration*, *Public Management Review*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Public Integrity*.