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Changes in work values across the regions of China

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Abstract This study examines changes in values of Chinese professionals across high, moderate, and low development regions between 1993/94 and 2004/05 and as such explores values in China's recent past. The 1993/94 to 2004/05 period was crucial during China's evolution from a socialist state to one more open to capitalism. The foundation of our investigation is crossvergence theory, which we extend by developing a multilevel-crossvergence perspective of national and regional influences on work values/behaviors. We test hypotheses specific to national-level and to regional-level changes in the importance of individualism, collectivism, and Confucianism values. Our study demonstrates that differences in hypothesized predictions result from the level on which a study is focused. This, in turn, results in differing support for study findings, which is a significant limitation of single-level studies. In sum, this study reveals the importance of delving beneath the national-level to gain a

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more fine-grained, regional-level understanding of values evolution in China. This is a finding that we believe may generalize to other countries, in particular, developing countries.

Keywords China · Crossvergence · Multilevel analysis · Regional/national · Multi-period · Work values

China, there lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep, for when he wakes he shall shake the world.

While pointing to China on a map, Napoleon Bonaparte is reputed to have uttered this declaration in the late nineteenth century (Clark, 1960). Although prophetic, it is not likely that Napoleon envisioned how long China would slumber or what the awakening of China in the technologically sophisticated twenty-first century would mean for the rest of the world. In this regard, Ralston, Yu, Wang, Terpstra, and He (1996: 79) noted, "China is a sleeping economic giant that has already begun to awaken." Subsequently, Fitzgerald (1998) provided a comprehensive tracking of China's early global emergence. Today, China has awakened, economically and politically, with some arguing that the center of the world's economy is moving towards the Asian Pacific, especially China (Quer, Claver, & Rienda, 2012). With little debate, one of the most momentous developments over the past two decades has been the rise of China to a position of global prominence as the largest emerging economy in the world (Cheung, Kong, Tan, & Wang, 2015; Ralston et al., 2015; Zheng, 2010). This rise has not gone unnoticed, with a myriad of influence attempts by organizations and other actors existing in China's external environment that range from the World Trade Organization or WTO (Brau, Dahl, Zhang, & Zhou, 2014) to the rise of innumerable international joint ventures (Shi, Sun, Pinkham, & Peng, 2014) to the proliferation of Internet companies and social media users (Duan & Dholakia, 2015).

The period between 1994 and 2004 has been highlighted as particularly important in marking China's evolution from a socialist state to one more open to capitalism. Thus, while these data are not contemporary, they mark the crucial period of China's entry as a serious player on the world stage. Hu and Khan (1997), for example, noted that pre-1994 four out of five people in China worked in agriculture, but post-1994 this decreased to one out of two. These authors noted that expanded property rights and the rise of nonagricultural businesses post-1994 led millions of people into manufacturing jobs and away from agriculture. Furthermore, during this decade, China's exports to the US increased more than three times (Lederman, Olarreaga, & Perry, 2009). Additionally, the 1994–2005 period is significant due to the 1994 formalization of the cooperation through promoting common economic interests and strategic interdependence between China and the European Union (EU). This launched a new era of trade and investment (Lambridis & Koukoulis, 2005), with the export of EU services expanding six-fold (Wei, 2011).

However, the impact of China's awakening onto the global scene has been uneven with a widening gap in economic development among its regions (Koveos & Zhang, 2012; Shi, Sun, & Peng, 2012). As reported by Wang, Wan, and Yang (2014), economic development rates and income levels in China are highest along the coast and lowest in the least populated, mostly rural inland. Despite recent government efforts to promote economic development across the country, rural-urban inequality and regional economic disparities have grown (Chan, 2013; Koveos & Zhang, 2012). The result has been the evolution of more clearly defined "have" and "have-not" entities within China. These regional disparities have led to increased tensions and protests in more rural "have-not" areas, and to the influx of millions of "have-not" migrant workers into burgeoning coastal "have" areas.

From a broader theoretical perspective, epitomizing the intra-national differences found in China, Tung (2008) has argued that a major problem with current cross-cultural management theories is that they typically are founded upon two interrelated fallacious assumptions: first, the assumption of homogeneity of values within nations, which overlooks the likely existence of significant intra-national values diversity; and second, the assumption of stability of societal values over time. To date, most cross-cultural research has ignored the likely inaccuracy of these two assumptions and employed only cross-sectional, country-level designs. The complexity of multi-period comparisons illustrates why, in part, there has not been more research of this nature. The extended time required to conduct such a study also plays a role in why multi-period research has been so scant in the literature.

Nonetheless, based on both theoretical logic and empirical evidence (e.g., Ralston et al., 2006), it is clear that we need to go beyond the traditional country-level of analysis to understand the evolution of values. And, no place is this more relevant today than Bonaparte's sleeping giant. Accordingly, our study attempts to address both concerns raised by Tung (2008) by empirically examining the dynamics of Chinese values over-time evolution, with a multi-region research design that allows us to examine both regional differences and time changes in values orientations across the regions of China. To this end, we utilized the trichotomy of values crossvergence (TVC) theory (Ralston, 2008). The three models subsumed within the TVC are: conforming-crossvergence, static-crossvergence and deviating-crossvergence. These models and their relationships to one another are discussed in the subsequent sections of our paper. Accordingly, the overarching goal of our study is to bring data to the discussion of the degree of evenness/unevenness of development across the regions of China. The decade in focus is particularly significant due to China's concerted efforts toward globalization that ushered in historic changes in its business and sociocultural dynamics (Melchior, 2010; Whyte, 2009).

In the following sections, we present an overview of the theory of values evolution with a focus on how crossvergence theory (Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung, & Terpstra, 1993) can be extended beyond the national level to also examine values evolution at the intra-national (i.e., regional) level. Such multilevel theories, which can encompass the whole of a situation, seem crucial in today's global environment (Bruton & Lau, 2008; Froese, 2013; Jaeger, Kim, & Butt, 2016). We next discuss specific influences upon Chinese work values at national and regional levels, and develop sets of hypotheses for each level across the decade spanned by this study. We use this approach because it clearly demonstrates that differences in hypothesized outcomes depend upon the level on which a study is focused. Accordingly, this approach also illustrates the limitations and consequences of single-level studies.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Cultural values represent the implicitly or explicitly shared abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society (Offermann & Hellmann, 1997). Cultural values therefore serve as a normative basis to indicate appropriate behavior in different situations. The importance of understanding values in and across various cultures has been discussed and examined in a wide variety of studies (e.g., Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Ralston et al., 2011; Voegtlin, Patzer, & Scherer, 2012). Many of these studies have been grounded within one of a few cultural values frameworks including: Hofstede's (2001) values survey module, the GLOBE project (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), the world values survey (Inglehart, 1997), and the Schwartz values survey (SVS) (Schwartz, 1994). Of these frameworks, the SVS is the only one that was developed and normed at the individual level.

Our study is a replication and extension of Ralston et al.'s (1996) cross-sectional regional values of China study, which used the SVS framework. Thus, we also utilize the SVS framework to examine values differences and changes across a decade (1993/94–2004/05) for the regions of China. However, we differ from the Ralston et al. (1996) study in that our primary focus is on the higher-order values dimensions of individualism and collectivism (Ralston et al., 2011; Schwartz, 1990, 1992). We examine collectivism and individualism as dependent measures because a review of the major frameworks of values (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004; Inglehart, 1997; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1992; Triandis, 1995; Trompenaars, 1994) identifies one impressive result, all of these frameworks include the essence of the individualism and collectivism constructs. Thus, there is strong empirical support showing that these constructs are valid variables to use in a study of values differences.

Collectivism has been defined as "…the extent to which it is believed that people are born into groups and they are expected to look after the interest of their group. This group might be the extended family, the tribe or the village. Implicit is that the freedom to pursue one's own goals is subservient to the goals of the group" (Ralston et al., 2011: 20). Individualism has been defined as "…the extent to which the person looks after self-interests and perhaps those of the nuclear family" (Ralston et al., 2011: 20). Additionally, because this is a study of China, we also focus on the oft-explored Confucianism dimension of the SVS (Jia, You, & Du, 2012). This dimension is comprised of unique Chinese sub-dimensions of societal harmony, personal and interpersonal harmony, and virtuous interpersonal behavior (Ralston, Egri, Stewart, Terpstra, & Yu, 1999; Schwartz, 1992). Finally, we replicate the Ralston et al. (1996) design by grouping the six regions of China into the same three regional clusters used by Ralston et al. (1996). Thus, we combined Guangzhou and Shanghai to represent the high economic development region cluster, Beijing and Dalian to represent the moderate economic development region cluster, and Chengdu and Lanzhou to represent the low economic development region cluster.

In summary, most research to date on values evolution has adopted a cross-cultural perspective that anchors the discussion at the level of the nation (e.g., House et al., 2004). Maintaining this "nation" focus, however, ignores possible within-nation characteristics (e.g., ethnic or regional differences) that may also be shaping an individual's values (Tung, 2008). Specific to China, there are forces exerting substantial pressure for rapid change to an open economy, with accompanying changes in workforce values/behaviors. National-level policies, while not rejecting change, exert substantial constraints to closely manage the desired speed of change. And, the substantially under-explored regional-level forces/factors, such as poor infrastructure and harsh topography, may have a more significant impact on the change timeframe than the one preferred at the national level. Consequently, there is a need to ascertain differences in direction and degree of influence on values across both national and regional levels.

The implication for research is that the direction and/or significance of hypothesized values change could vary substantially depending upon the specific level of theory being utilized. Thus, we discuss and develop hypotheses for both levels. We extend the application of the traditional crossvergence model by demonstrating that integrating regional influences on values orientations with national influences creates a multilevel model that provides a more holistic picture of values/behaviors development than would the traditional approach of only considering national-level influences. While we concentrate the development of our hypotheses at the regional level, as it is the focal level of our replication study, we likewise take into consideration the influences in play at the national level during this time period.

Forces for change in China

Globalization and modernization forces

In general, globalization brings about a myriad of changes to every aspect of a nation's economic and social life. Due to globalization, nations increasingly become embedded in webs of interconnectedness permeated by supranational, intergovernmental and transnational forces (Held & McGrew, 2007). The outward turn initiated by Deng Xiaoping's Social Reform Era (1978–1987) started the processes for China's transformation on the global stage (Fan, 1995). As China entered the new world order, it found itself surrounded by unprecedented levels of global economic activity fueled by the surge in cross-border trade and business collaboration; increasing scales of technology; and cross-border integration of information flows (Phan, Zhou, & Abrahamson, 2010). Growing incentives for foreign investments and joint ventures as well as the development of technology and telecom infrastructure drove China's rapid globalization (Duan & Dholakia, 2015). The number of empirical studies examining various aspects of China and globalization is impressive and continues to grow (e.g., Alon, Child, Li, & McIntyre, 2011; Jiang, 2011; Liang, Ren, & Sun, 2014; Sun, Peng, Lee, & Tan, 2015; Tuan, Ng, & Zhao, 2009; Whyte, 2009; Yao & Wei, 2007). Four aspects that we believe capture the essence of the globalization of China relate to opening up to globalization, embracing of technological developments, as well as the balancing between state control and political change, and between state control and the revival of Confucian values. We will discuss each.

China's openness

Globalization has moved China to become the largest trader in the world (WTO, 2015) and the largest recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2015 (UNCTAD, 2015). With the 2001 accession to the WTO, China cut import tariffs, became a major exporter of manufactured goods, abolished quota and license arrangements for products, and modified a number of laws and regulations inconsistent with WTO rules (Brau et al., 2014; Jiang, 2011; Wan, Lu, & Chen, 2007). These have resulted in marked positive economic development for China overall, with a dramatic increase in foreign trade placing China at the top of the global list (Zheng, 2010). Inward FDI has also been considered a critical factor contributing to sustained economic growth in China (Tuan et al., 2009; Zhao, 2013), attracting over a third of total world investment (Jiang, Liping, & Sharma, 2013).

Taken together, this increase in market-orientation has encouraged nation-wide steps toward modernization, industrialization, and the development of infrastructure and social capital that could support such a competitive open market system (Jiang, 2011). This national reformulation was accomplished through top-down, state-driven policies and initiatives that privatized many state-owned enterprises as the Chinese government gave back various powers to the business community and society as a whole (Zheng, 2003). The effect of these policies was to reduce the importance of state-ownership in China, while enhancing the staying power of the Communist Party of China (CCP) (Fan, 1995).

Opening the door in China has provided an opportunity not only for economic growth, but also for sociocultural changes. FDI and joint ventures may have played a significant role in putting into practice more Westernized knowledge, skills, and perspectives (Tuan et al., 2009; Zheng, 2014) suggesting that FDI has been a critical factor in facilitating innovation and "know-how" through training, education and demonstration effect. Furthermore, globally focused market-based economic developments have given rise to a growing middle class that, in turn, has encouraged political participation and commentary not previously seen in China. Some researchers assert that the opening up of political, economic and development processes to newly rising socio-economic classes is resulting in values changes toward social openness (Lin, 2011; Zheng, 2010).

China's technological development

China's economic expansion has been greatly facilitated by the technological development of Chinese firms (Yang, Liu, Gao, & Li, 2012). Substantive growth in China's information and communications infrastructure and industry has facilitated China's global integration and interactions. Every major foreign firm has a presence in China (Song, 2008). Over 100 of the world's biggest companies are now headquartered in China (Breen, 2016). Starting in the 1990s, China increasingly organized and restructured its economy around information technologies (Song, 2008). Internet use by citizens has increased more than 200 fold from 1997 (620,000 users) to 2006 (123 million users), and by 2012 there were 564 million users (CINIC, 2016). This growth in information technology has boosted China's economy and encouraged the restructuring of some business practices.

Furthermore, shifts in technology and the Internet place an unprecedented level of business ideological emphasis on ideas and human capital over physical capital (Sohmen, 2001). These shifts also suggest increased access to global and independent news sources, as well as political interaction and exchanges both within and outside of

China. These changes contribute to the development of a globally minded information society within China. Such developments have ushered in new forms of associational activity for civil discussions, with Chinese websites and social media tools (e.g., microblogging) serving as arenas for discussions of contemporary political and social affairs where people can (and do) express their own government-sanctioned and/or non-sanctioned political views (Zheng, 2013). Considered alone, these technological changes are monumental. However, perhaps even more important is that they have resulted in being a conduit to introduce Western consumerism to the Chinese who have embraced this (Gerth, 2010). Thus, these technological developments are significant forces that have paved the way for long lasting sociocultural change in China away from the more traditional values long-revered by the CCP (Song, 2008). From the CCP perspective, due to the growth of information-related sectors, China is faced with the challenge of balancing change with control and transparency (Zheng, 2013). The CCP has the difficult challenge to achieve both growth in usage, while maintaining strict control and censorship through a myriad of state regulatory agencies and policies (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013; Shi et al., 2012).

Political change and state control

The CCP's national strategies for market reforms and technological advancements have demonstrated persistence of Leninist-Maoist socialist philosophy, but with major changes in application and interpretation (Lin, 2011). In this context, the CCP's challenge has been to try to implement reforms for modernization, while at the same time preserving Chinese socialist values and CCP control. Weber and Jia (2007) describe this as posing an ideological problem for the Chinese government with a desire for modernity, technological advancement, and economic efficiency on the one hand; and a desire for control on the other. Thus, the CCP found its control challenged by its own political reform for modernization (Kojima, Choe, Ohtomo, & Tsujinaka, 2012), and by the realization that technology presents both a major opportunity for their nation and a major challenge to their control.

Furthermore, advocating entrepreneurial activity and upward mobility appears to have re-emerged in the CCP's dialogue over the last few decades. However, this re-emergence is tempered by the traditional political institutions of the CCP whereby it maintains firm control over the mechanisms needed for economic development and works to disallow oppositional perspectives from engaging in legitimate political dialogue (Whyte, 2009). Dickson (2008) demonstrated this point well through the depiction of China's private sector leaders who, instead of pushing for major political reforms toward greater rights for economic development and individualist accumulation of wealth, continue to support the CCP's gradualist approach to economic reform grounded in communist state control.

State control and the revival of Confucian values

Similar to CCP discussions on market capitalism, national-level discourse emerging from the CCP around Confucianism also seems to advocate changes that previously would likely have reviled as being anti-communist. Generally, there appears to be a strong positive association between CCP and this ancient philosophy across China (Bell, 2008). Compared to the embracing of market capitalism, the re-embracing of Confucianism has been much more rapid and widespread (Bell, 2008). In 1994, for example, the

International Society of Confucianism was inaugurated in Beijing. Zurndorfer (2004) posited that this symbolized that the CCP had realigned itself with the traditional sociocultural ideologies that ultimately linked their own strategies in a globalized world with the 2000-year old cultural legacy of Confucianism. Bell (2008) argued further that the revival of Confucianism was intentional by the CCP in order to fill a moral vacuum hence explaining its considerable revival. The intent, he asserts, was to bring in an ancient and venerable tradition in lieu of pockets of Christian sects and/or Falun Gong followers emerging across China. In the early 2000s, the government led a push for Confucian classics to be taught in mainstream classrooms and a rich array of conferences and books to be made visible (Yu, 2008).

Hypotheses for national-level change in values

At the national level, business ideology (economic/technological and political) are the primary influences over a short period of time such as 10 years (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Yu, 1997). Accordingly, we build our national-level hypotheses based on these influences during the period of our study.

We begin by noting that Triandis (1995) first proposed that individualism and collectivism are separate constructs, and subsequent empirical research has confirmed that these two constructs are independent of one another, while still having a tendency to move in opposite directions (Egri, Ralston, Murray, & Nicholson, 2000; Ralston et al., 1997; Ralston et al., 2014). With regards to the relationship between Confucianism and collectivism, these two values tend to be positively related, especially at the country level (e.g., Tse, Francis, & Walls, 1994). However, collectivism is not theoretically or empirically synonymous with Confucianism values (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Schwartz, 1992). A key differentiating factor is that collectivism is primarily focused on the in-group and is not region-specific (e.g., there is high collectivism in Latin America), whereas Confucianism encompasses other aspects and is Chinese culture specific. This opens the door to the possibility that these two constructs may not necessarily be intertwined depending upon the context and situation. The period of this study is clearly one that we see as a unique situation. During China's "opening up" period, which our study covers, its central government did an about-face from its previous position of denigrating Confucianism, to one that initiated a nationwide campaign to promote a return to Confucian values (Bell, 2008; Ip, 2009; Yu, 2008). It did so to provide a stabilizing effect during this period of economic turbulence instigated by China's evolution towards a more market-driven economy. At the same time, this market-driven economic turbulence translated into China being more influenced by Western ways (Tuan et al., 2009; Zheng, 2014), which in turn resulted in a more individualistic, as well as less collectivistic values perspective. Thus, nationwide, we expect economic change to have positively (upwardly) impacted individualism and negatively (downwardly) impacted collectivism. At the same time, we see a powerful central government exerting influence to reignite a positive (upward) commitment on the part of its citizenry to Confucian precepts. Thus, in this specific period, we argue that economic forces have relatively more influence on individualism and collectivism values, whereas political forces have relatively more influence on Confucianism values.

In sum, the legacy of state control coupled with socialist market reforms suggests that Chinese business professionals are encouraged to pursue capitalistic economic reforms and technological development but to also not forget their Chinese-ness. Even so, the scale and scope of the economic and technological changes that have taken place suggest that political influences would not have counteracted the impact of modernization forces on changes in individualism and collectivism values. In contrast, CCP initiatives promoting Confucianism during this time period suggests that Chinese business professionals increasingly re-embraced Confucian values. Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 1a Over the decade of this study, the importance of individualism for business professionals in China will have significantly increased.

Hypothesis 1b Over the decade of this study, the importance of collectivism for business professionals in China will have significantly decreased.

Hypothesis 1c Over the decade of this study, the importance of Confucianism values for business professionals in China will have significantly increased.

Regional forces within differing environments

China is a large country with an array of significant regional differences, including economic development, infrastructure, topography and climate (Koveos & Zhang, 2012). In our regional-level analysis, we acknowledge the presence of globalization and national forces that are coming to bear on these regions. Thus, we present an overview of regional historical background beginning with the Mao era, since the economic strategy that Mao planned and operationalized is crucial to the subject of regional differences within China. Also, we discuss Mao's plan at the regional level because its primary objective was segmenting China into three distinct economic zones. Although this regional segmentation strategy was legislated at the national level, we discuss this effect at its most relevant level (Rousseau, 1985).

The influence of Mao upon the flying dragon

For Mao, socialist ideology and defense were the two driving forces behind his policies. He began his plan by segmenting the country into three sectors, with each sector designated to fulfill a specific set of overall national objectives, but also with each sector ensured to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. Mao's vision for China has been described as one where inter-regional trade would mirror international trade such that each sector functioned as essentially independent local economies rather than a single national economy (Keng, 2006; Lyons, 1987). Ironically, trade rivalries and local-level protectionism developed, resulting in limited trade among sectors (Young, 2000). It is within this context that the 1978 post-Maoist reform policies were initiated.

The 1978 reforms specified that the coastal sector would specialize in export-oriented industries and foreign trade, with the inland sectors specializing in agriculture and energy, as well as animal husbandry and mineral exploration (Fan, 1995). As noted by Ralston et al. (1996), there were some exceptions to these reforms. For example, Beijing received economic assistance despite its inland location thereby accelerating development in the areas in and around this city. This model of intra-national (regional) specialization and division of labor was referred to as a plan of preferential policies which ultimately led to greater autonomy in matters relating to finance and foreign trade, and circumvented the inefficiencies of the central Chinese authority (Fan, 1995). While put into place to increase efficiency, these preferential policies ultimately have been viewed as the root cause of the steady increase in uneven regional development and disparate income levels during the 1990s, and into the new millennium (Fujita & Hu, 2001; Jiang, 2011).

Exacerbating regional inequality was the shift toward greater international trade openness. The three-sector strategy initiated by Mao for an isolationist country was now, in China's era of global openness, only benefiting cities in the coastal provinces (e.g., Guangzhou, Shanghai, Dalian) plus Beijing, at the expense of the inland parts (e.g., Chengdu, Lanzhou) of the country (Goh, Luo, & Zhu, 2009; Melchior, 2010). The dynamics of China's trade openness with the global community resulted in a significant reduction in intra-national trading, which only further isolated the inland regions from the development and prosperity being experienced on the coast (Poncet, 2003, 2005). A number of other factors are viewed as contributing to uneven regional development including topography, variations in inward FDI, labor migration, and infrastructure development (e.g., Fu, 2004; Henderson, Tochkov, & Badunenko, 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2003). In sum, the Mao-initiated process of development and growth has not been uniform across regions, but rather it has been fragmented, discontinuous and often incomplete leading to greater regional disparities that have favored the coastal region (Giddens, 2000; Hurrell & Woods, 2000).

Turning our attention to the decade of interest for the current study, in the context of its global integration, China has come a long way as a nation in the development process. However, the changes occurring over this decade also reflect an overall trend toward augmenting significant inter-regional differences in the pace and extent of positive developmental change (Fan, 2006; Goh et al., 2009; Henderson et al., 2007). This uneven development has also been captured by indices published by national research institutes or bureaus in China, such as: level of industrial output in region (Goh et al., 2009); income inequality (Keng, 2006); domestic capital (Demurger et al., 2002; Zhang & Zhang, 2003); economic growth (Goh et al., 2009; Yao & Zhang, 2001); FDI and other foreign investment (Boermans, Roeldsema, & Zhang, 2011; Tuan et al., 2009); human capital development (Fleischer, Li, & Zhao, 2010); infrastructure development (Demurger, 2001); NERI marketization index (Fan, Wang, & Zhu, 2003); as well as population statistics such as GDP (per capita PPP; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2005); Internet users (Zhu & Wang, 2005); and in-migration patterns (Chan, 2013).

As such, there is substantial empirical evidence demonstrating that Chinese policies for national growth have increased regional differences and inequalities (e.g., Hurrell & Woods, 2000; Jiang, 2011). Further, one might argue that globalization influences played an unintentional role in exacerbating these regional differences. That is, foreign businesses simply went where the opportunities in China were available, the coast. Nonetheless, whether intentional or not, both of these sets of influences have worsened the inequalities. Thus, the question we investigate is: Have these enumerated regional differences resulted in differences in individual work values among the regions in this study?

To begin to address this question, we note that a variety of within-region differences (e.g., rural versus urban) complicate the analysis of business ideology and sociocultural influences at the regional level. Taking these issues into consideration, and moving beyond Ralston et al. (1996), our approach is to focus on two primary indicators: trade openness and intra-national migration. In the context of regional differences, these indicators represent business ideology and sociocultural influences, as well as identify key aspects of regional disparity. Our discussion of the business ideology influences centers on trade openness (e.g., FDI and exports), but it is restricted to the local dynamics. Our discussion of the local sociocultural influences centers on intra-national population migration.

Impact of trade openness within China

Despite China having gained from opening up and expanding overall international trade, it is clear that only some, in particular the coastal regions, have gained from these changes (Melchior, 2010). Similarly, the rapid pace of growth for the national economy masks substantial differences in the growth rate and per capita income levels across different areas of China (Aziz & Duenwald, 2001; Koveos & Zhang, 2012). Likewise, other economists have reiterated evidence of regional disparities due to more trade openness (e.g., Kanbur & Zhang, 2005; Zhao, 2013).

The explosive growth of FDI that flowed into China after 1992 has been coupled with growing inequalities between social groups (Zheng, 2003). The geographic location of coastal regions is advantageous in attracting large inflows of FDI, as well as domestic capital, and in functioning as export hubs (Aziz & Duenwald, 2001; Zhang & Zhang, 2003). Differences in inward FDI available to fuel development of coastal labor-intensive export industries have served to attract migrant labor from the interior regions (Fu, 2004; Fujita & Hu, 2001).

In a discussion of mechanisms through which these regional disparities have been created and maintained, Jiang (2011) identified the primary factor to be preferential policies geared to benefit the coastal regions. These preferential policies offered tax breaks and the establishment of special economic zones that ultimately facilitated positive business conditions for inward FDI, foreign firms, and joint ventures (Henderson et al., 2007). The unbalanced, coast-oriented development strategy contributes substantially to the continued discrepancy in inter-regional growth rates and income levels (Demurger et al., 2002; Liu, Daly, & Varua, 2012). For example, in 2005, the per capita GDP of the regions in the Coastal sector was more than 250% that of regions in the Western sector (Zhu, Lai, & Fu, 2008).

Intra-national migration

Although intra-national population migration in China was low historically, research on spatial patterns of migration since the 1980s indicates that mobility levels and rates have increased substantially (Fan, 2008b). Studies of migration within China have found a considerable increase in regional migration with interprovincial migration rapidly increasing from 10.66 million in 1990–95 to 38.04 million in 2000–05

(Chan, 2013; Fan, 2008a). This surge of intra-national migration represents one of the most profound changes in China since it embarked on its economic reforms (Fan, 2008a). Migration is not open and free in China, but rather is monitored and regulated by the state (Fan, 2006). A migrant person can be state sponsored, as is the case with privileged migrants; or a migrant can be fined or refused social services, as is the case with peasant migrants (Fan, 2002; Wu & Treiman, 2004). Notably, the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS) estimates that 12% (100 million) of the Chinese population are a "floating population" who are not living in the place where they are registered and therefore fit the latter class of migrants (NBS, 2006).

Fan (2008a) noted that during the 1990s and into the 2000s, permanent (typically more skilled, highly educated and sponsored by the state) and temporary (typically lower socio-economic status and general laborers) migrants continued to move between regions of China. The largest in-migration has been to the coastal sector cities (e.g., Guangzhou, Shanghai, Dalian), plus Beijing, which are also among the highest GDP per capita locations. Conversely, the largest out-migration has been from inland provinces in the Central and Western sectors (e.g., Chengdu, Lanzhou), which have relatively low GDP per capita (Chan, 2013; Fan, 2008a). Census data shows that the coast accounted for 78.4% of the inter-regional in-migration in 2000, significantly higher than the 57% in 1990 (Fan, 2008a). The inland sectors also lost population during these two periods of time (Chan, 2013).

Hypotheses for regional-level forces

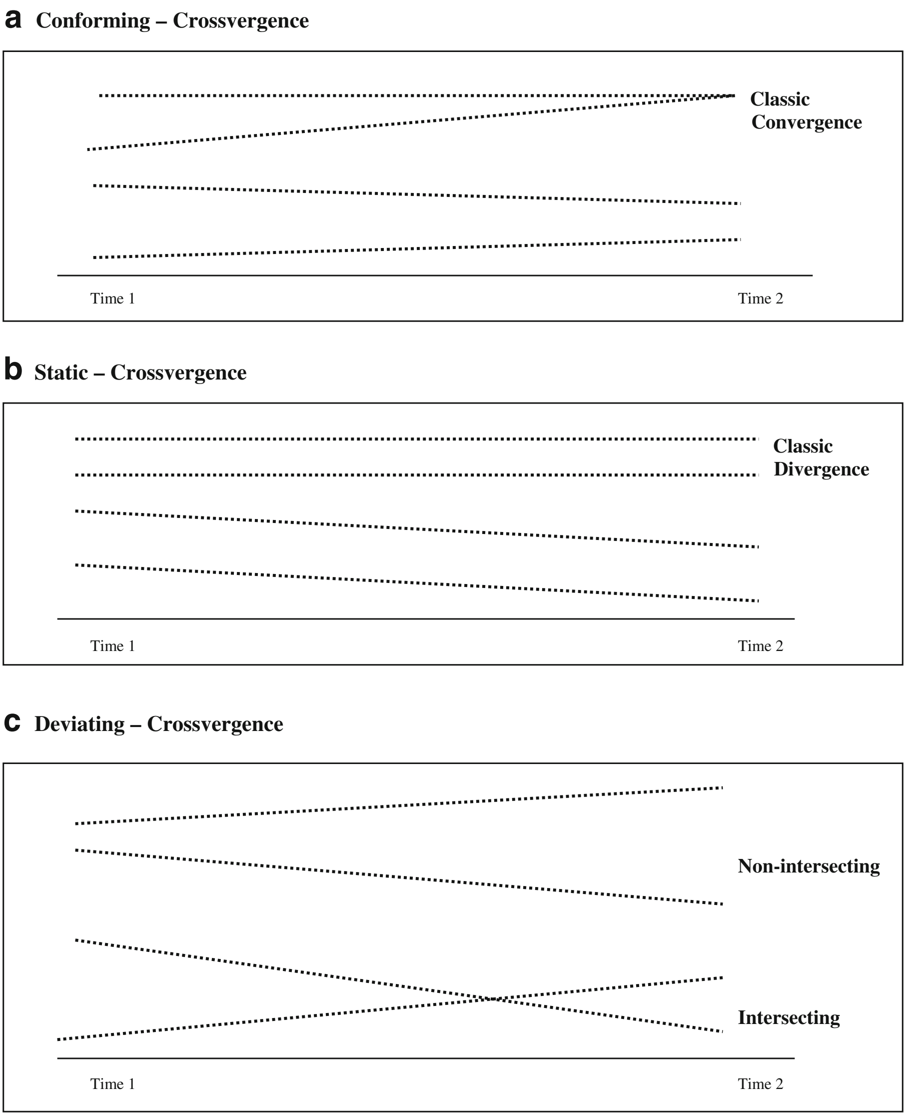
The foundation for our hypotheses is the crossvergence theory of acculturation that was developed as an alternative explanation to the diametrically opposing convergence and divergence theories (Ralston et al., 1993). Convergence theory argues that values are solely determined by business ideology influences, most notably technology, while divergence theory argues that values are solely determined by sociocultural influences (Webber, 1969). In contrast, crossvergence theory argues that both business ideology (economic/technological and political) and sociocultural forces synergistically interact to shape values. Thus, values formation is not solely determined by either business ideology or sociocultural influences (Ralston, 2008; Ralston et al., 1993). Accordingly, crossvergence theory logic focuses on using the relevant business ideology and sociocultural influences specific to a particular societal group (e.g., country, region, community) to predict the individual work values and behaviors of that group (Karam et al., 2013). As we next discuss, crossvergence theory is proving to be the most realistic of the three perspectives for understanding the values formation process.

Crossvergence theory has been utilized in a variety of cross-cultural studies. For example, crossvergence theory was the theoretical foundation in a study by Ralston et al. (1997) investigating value differences across four diverse countries (China, Japan, Russia and the US). Overall, this study's findings supported the crossvergence hypothesis with sociocultural influences being dominant. Froese's (2013) study of work values in three countries (China, Japan and Korea) which incorporated historical data found support for deviating crossvergence, which is one of the three TVC theory models (Ralston, 2008). Karam et al. (2013) applied crossvergence theory to investigate the propensity for favor giving in 11 Asian countries. Their study supported the validity of crossvergence theory, while identifying a wider spectrum of business ideology and sociocultural influences that should be considered in operationalizing crossvergence. Additionally, Rao and Pearce's (2016) study on the impact of power distance on superior-subordinate relations in global teams found support for the relevance of crossvergence theory.

Crossvergence theory has also been utilized in studies focusing on meso and macro levels of analyses. Andrews and Chompusri (2005) used crossvergence theory to study the impact that the Western home-office corporate culture and the ASEAN societal culture in the subsidiary's location had on the organizational culture of the subsidiary. They concluded that the crossvergence theory model best explained findings regarding these two diverse influences on the subsidiary's organizational culture. In a similar vein, Sarala and Vaara (2010) studied the effect of societal and organizational influences on a set of Finnish acquisitions. Their empirical results fully support the perspective that knowledge transfer in acquisitions is positively impacted by organizational cultural crossvergence. However, all of these studies were cross-sectional, and an essential element of crossvergence theory is the importance of change over time, a dynamic addressed in Ralston et al.'s (2006) study of values change across China, Hong Kong and the US. This was the first multi-period evaluation that used crossvergence as its theoretical framework, and was instrumental in laying the foundation for the trichotomy of values crossvergence typology (Ralston, 2008).

Ralston (2008) enhanced the fundamental crossvergence theory when he developed the models for the TVC theory. In this typology, Ralston (2008) proposed that sociocultural influences lead to values change over generations and centuries, whereas business ideology influences (i.e., economic/technological, political) have much shorter time horizons (e.g., years or decades) for bringing about change. Hence, a multi-period research design is needed to explore the varying temporal impacts of both these sets of influences on values evolution (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). The TVC models focus upon three possible types of over-time values evolution: conforming-crossvergence, static-crossvergence and deviating-crossvergence. In this study, we use the TVC typology, rather than the classic convergence-divergence-crossvergence typology, because as noted by Ralston (2008: 35), "crossvergence is a theory that encompasses both the classic convergence and divergence concepts" as well as expanding beyond these two concepts. In sum, this refined and expanded set of crossvergence models delves into the roles that business ideology and sociocultural influences have upon work values/behaviors over time. The TVC models are described in the following sections and illustrated in Fig. 1.

Conforming-crossvergence is philosophically similar to convergence theory, which argues that, over time, values will become the same because of the preeminent importance of business ideology influences (Webber, 1969). Conforming-crossvergence presents a more practical perspective in predicting that cultural values of different groups (e.g., regions, countries) will change over time, with the values difference becoming less over time (Ralston, 2008). Thus, classic convergence theory may be viewed as one specific case of the array of possible conforming-crossvergence outcomes.



[a] Ralston (2008).

Fig. 1 Theories of individual values evolution[a]

Static-crossvergence is philosophically similar to divergence theory, which argues that, over time, values will not change, because of the preeminent importance of sociocultural influences (Webber, 1969). Static-crossvergence theory further argues that while the values of comparison groups (e.g., regions, countries) may change, there will be no relative change in values among these groups. That is, values *differences*, but not necessarily values *level*, between groups remain constant across time, and are depicted by parallel lines. Thus, classic divergence theory may be viewed as one specific case of the array of possible static-crossvergence outcomes.

Deviating-crossvergence is philosophically similar to crossvergence theory, which argues that, over time, values change is driven by the dynamic interaction of the business ideology and sociocultural influences which results in a complex hybridization of work values (Ralston et al., 1993). However, the original crossvergence definition did not directly address the longitudinal aspect of values change. Based on subsequent research (e.g., Ralston et al., 2006), the concept of deviating-crossvergence extends the classic crossvergence definition by identifying two distinct types of longitudinal outcomes: non-intersecting deviating crossvergence and intersecting deviating crossvergence. As illustrated in Fig. 1, non-intersecting occurs when the values of the two groups become less similar. Conversely, intersecting occurs when the values of the different groups move in opposing directions to the degree that they initially intersect before they continue on in opposing directions, such that the group that was initially at a higher level than the other group on certain values is now at a lower level on those values.

As earlier identified, the business ideology and sociocultural changes at the regional level suggest variant directions of values change that would be consistent with a deviating-crossvergence pattern. First, the high development region has benefited most from trade openness and has experienced more in-migration, and is where business ideological influences have been more towards modernization and capitalistic values. Further, the moderate development region has experienced more modernization as a result of the open-door policy enacted earlier, albeit to a lesser degree than in the high development region. While not devoid of modernization influences during this time period, the low development region has experienced less socioeconomic change than the other two regions. Thus, based primarily upon the impact of economic development influences and inter-regional migration, we would expect a significant increase in individualism values for those in regions that have experienced greater external—technologically sophisticated—influences (Shi et al., 2012), with this increase being greatest in the high development region and least in the low development region. Following the same logic, we would expect the decrease in the importance of collectivism values to have been greatest in the high development region and least in the low development region.

Based primarily upon the impact of political system influences due to the government's unrelenting efforts to promote Confucianism, we would expect the greatest increase in Confucianism values in the high development region, which had more to lose (Bell, 2008; Ip, 2009) if it did not comply with government desires. Further, we would expect that the importance of Confucianism values would have increased to a lesser extent in the moderate development region, and least in the low development region.

In sum, the commitment of each region to the dictates of the central government becomes a prime issue (e.g., Jiang, 2011). We argue that the more developed a region was, the more it had to lose; and in turn, the more a region did not want to offend the central government which had been instrumental in providing the favored treatment that had allowed that region to flourish. Therefore, the higher economic development regions were more likely to conform to the political demands of the central government. Similarly, we argue that the central government's campaign to reignite Confucian values will have a greater impact on the more highly developed (wealthier) regions. These more highly developed regions also had more engagement (commerce) with the West. Thus, we argue that due to higher levels of economic contact with the West, these regions consequently would attach higher importance to individualistic values and lower importance to collectivistic values. Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 2a Over the decade of this study, the importance of individualism values for business professionals in China will have increased significantly more in the high development region than in the moderate development region, and significantly more in the moderate development region than in the low development region.

Hypothesis 2b Over the decade of this study, the importance of collectivism values for business professionals in China will have decreased significantly more in the high development region than in the moderate development region, and significantly more in the moderate development region than in the low development region.

Hypothesis 2c Over the decade of this study, the importance of Confucianism values for business professionals in China will have increased significantly more in the high development region than in the moderate development region, and significantly more in the moderate development region than in the low development region.

Method

Sample

Data locations

Study participants were obtained in two waves of surveys in three regions of Mainland China: (1) high development [South-Central (Guangzhou)/East (Shanghai)]; (2) moderate development [North-Central (Beijing)/Northeast (Dalian)]; and (3) low development [Southwest (Chengdu)/Northwest (Lanzhou)]. Time period 1 (TP1) was 1993–94, and time period 2 (TP2) was 2004–05. The TP1 sample was comprised of 728 business professionals and managers located in the high ($n = 206$), moderate ($n = 255$), and low ($n = 267$) development regions. The TP2 sample was comprised of 645 business professionals and managers located in the high ($n = 205$), moderate ($n = 195$), and low ($n = 245$) development regions.

Data collection

The data collection for TP1 (1993–94) survey involved a Chinese researcher administering questionnaires at the beginning of management education programs for state-owned enterprises. Participants were advised that there were no right or wrong answers and assured of the anonymity of their responses. All individuals in the programs participated. Following survey completion, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the research. The TP2 (2004–05) data collection procedure involved distributing survey questionnaires to business acquaintances of contact persons in each city. Participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses. The majority of the surveys were returned by mail using a self-addressed stamped envelope; the contact person collected the remaining surveys in groups. After accounting for non-returned surveys in the TP2 collection and after extensive data cleaning procedures to remove unusable surveys (see Karam & Ralston, 2016), the effective response rates were 97% for TP1 and 28% for TP2.

Measures

The initial survey questionnaire was developed in English and standard translation/back-translation procedures were used to develop the Chinese language version (Brislin, 1986). The same translated questionnaire was used for both survey waves.

Dependent variables

The Schwartz value survey (SVS) was used to measure values orientations (Schwartz, 1992, 1994). The SVS consists of 56 items to which participants were asked to the extent to which each is important as a "guiding principle" in their lives (9-point Likert scale; −1 = "opposed to my values" to 7 = "of supreme importance"). Schwartz's (1992, 1994) values typology identifies 10 values. Schwartz (1992) allocated eight of these values to the higher-order values dimensions of individualism (achievement, hedonism, power, self-direction, and stimulation) and collectivism (benevolence, conformity, and tradition). The Confucianism measure is comprised of the unique Chinese culture values subdimensions: societal harmony (6 items), virtuous interpersonal behavior (9 items), and personal and interpersonal harmony (6 items) (Schwartz, 1992). For the total China sample, scale reliabilities (Cronbach's α) were: individualism $\alpha = .84$ (18 items), collectivism $\alpha = .84$ (14 items), Confucianism $\alpha = .86$ (21 items).

We examined the data to determine whether data normality and sample heteroscedasticity assumptions were met (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). For the total sample and the year of survey subsamples, the skewness (range of −.048 to .077) and kurtosis (range of .059 to .263) statistics were at an acceptable level. Levene's test of equality of error variances showed between-region heteroscedasticity (at $p < .01$ level) for individualism and collectivism. Hence, we used Hanges' (2004) within-subject standardization procedure to adjust scores for analyses.

Independent variables

Dummy-coded variables were used for time period (0 = 1993/94, 1 = 2004/05), and development region (high development, low development; the reference group was moderate development). Time period-by-development region interactions were two dummy coded variables (time period × high development, time period × low development; reference group was time period × moderate development).

Control variables

Participant demographic and organizational characteristics were covariates to control for their influences on values orientations. These control variables were: age level (1 = less than 25 years, 2 = 25–30, 3 = 31–35, 4 = 36–40, 5 = 41–45, 6 = 46–50, 7 = 51–55, 8 = 56–60, 9 = more than 60 years); gender (1 = male, 0 = female); and education level (1 = less than 10 years, 2 = 10–12 years, 3 = Bachelor degree, 4 = graduate degree); position level (1 = professional/non-supervisory, 2 = first level manager, 3 = middle level manager, 4 = upper level manager), company size (1 = less than 100 employees, 2 = 100 to 1,000 employees, 3 = more than 1,000 employees), and industry (1 = heavy/light industry, 0 = services/other).

Analyses

To test hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical regressions using the total sample in which the dependent variables were individualism, collectivism, and Confucianism values. The first step included the demographic (age, gender, education level) and organizational (position level, company size, industry) covariates. The second step added the time period variable to test H1 regarding values differences between respondents in TP1 (1994–95) versus TP2 (2004–05). The third step added the two development region dummy-coded variables, and the fourth step added the two time period-by-development region interaction variables to test H2. Development region differences in values change between time periods is indicated by significant changes in variance explained (ΔR^2) for the final models. To interpret these findings, we plotted values scores for development regions in both time periods, and conducted subsidiary regressions to estimate the slope of values change for each development region, and development region values differences in each time period (per Aiken & West, 1991). For the final models, the collinearity diagnostic statistics were average VIF = 2.023 (range 1.071 to 3.439) and condition index = 8.802 which are below levels (VIF = 10, condition index = 15) indicating a multicollinearity issue (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, correlations, scale reliabilities) for the study variables. Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical regressions testing hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that over the decade of this study, there would be a national-level increase in the importance of individualism values (H1a), decrease in collectivism values (H1b), and increase in Confucianism values (H1c). Our tests of H1 were the main effects for time period (Model 2 in Table 2). Inconsistent with H1, there were nonsignificant time period effects for individualism values ($\beta = -.04$, $p > .10$; H1a not supported) and collectivism values ($\beta = -.01$, $p > .10$; H1b not supported). Consistent with H1c, there was a significant increase in the importance of Confucianism values ($\beta = .08$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 2 proposed non-intersecting deviating-crossvergence patterns of values change for business professionals in the three development regions during the period of this study. For each values dimension, the presence of crossvergence patterns are indicated by significant development region differences (Model 3 $\Delta R^2 = .017$ to .035, all $p < .001$), and significant time period by development region interaction effects (Model 4 $\Delta R^2 = .011$ to .042, all $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 2a proposed that the importance of individualism values would increase over time across the three regions, with increases for the high development region greater than the moderate development region, and then the low development region. As shown in Table 2, the high and moderate development regions had similar changes in individualism values (β = .05, p > .10), whereas there was a significant difference in individualism values change between the low and moderate development regions (β = .19, p < .001). Figure 2a illustrates the nature of individualism values change for the three development regions. Inconsistent with H2a, there were nonsignificant changes in the importance of individualism values for the high (β = −.04, p > .10) and low (β = .05, p > .10) development regions, and the importance of individualism decreased (rather than increased) for the moderate development region (β = −.15, p < .01).

Hypothesis 2b proposed that the importance of collectivism values would decrease over time across the three regions, with decreases for the high development region greater than the moderate development region, and then the low development region.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations, correlations, and scale reliabilities

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Individualism	3.92	.45	(.84)										
2. Collectivism	3.88	.49	−.63	(.84)									
3. Confucianism	4.27	.40	−.75	.58	(.86)								
4. Time period[a]	.48		.01	−.07	.00								
5. High development region[b]	.29		.15	−.21	−.16	.06							
6. Low development region	.38		−.13	.15	.09	.00	−.50						
7. Age level[c]	3.42	1.88	−.17	.21	.20	−.25	−.13	.04					
8. Gender[d]	.65		.05	.10	−.03	−.23	−.03	.06	.17				
9. Education[e]	2.63	.75	.08	−.12	−.09	.17	−.02	−.11	−.18	−.01			
10. Position level[f]	2.20	1.01	−.09	.15	.12	−.18	−.16	.07	.34	.22	−.02		
11. Company size[g]	2.05	.72	−.04	.03	.05	−.15	−.03	−.06	.14	.09	.09	.08	
12. Industry[h]	.38		−.09	.10	.07	−.30	−.08	.17	.20	.19	−.14	.17	.12

N = 1373. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach α) on the diagonal. Correlations $r \geq |.06|$ significant at $p < .05$ level, $r \geq |.07|$ significant at $p < .01$ level, $r \geq |.09|$ significant at $p < .001$ level

[a] Time period coded 0 = 1993/94, 1 = 2004/05

[b] Development region dummy coded with moderate development as reference category

[c] Age level coded 1 = less than 25 years, 2 = 25–30 years, 3 = 31–35 years, 4 = 36–40 years, 5 = 41–45 years, 6 = 46–50 years, 7 = 51–55 years, 8 = 56–60 years, 9 = more than 60 years

[d] Gender coded 0 = female, 1 = male

[e] Education level coded 1 = less than 10 years, 2 = 10–12 years, 3 = Bachelor degree, 4 = graduate degree

[f] Position level coded 1 = professional/non-supervisory, 2 = first level manager, 3 = middle level manager, 4 = upper level manager

[g] Company size coded 1 = less than 100 employees, 2 = 100 to 1000 employees, 3 = more than 1000 employees

[h] Industry coded: 1 = heavy and light industry, 0 = services and other

Table 2 Hierarchical regression results

	Individualism				Collectivism				Confucianism			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Age	−.14***	−.15***	−.14***	−.14***	.15***	.15***	.14***	.13***	.17***	.18***	.17***	.17***
Gender	.09***	.08**	.09**	.09**	.05	.05	.05	.04	−.08*	−.07*	−.06*	−.06*
Education level	.04	.05	.05	.05	−.08**	−.08***	−.09***	−.10***	−.06*	−.07*	−.07**	−.07**
Position level	−.05	−.05	−.03	−.04	.08**	.08**	.06*	.06*	.07*	.07*	.05	.06*
Company size	−.03	−.03	−.04	−.03	.00	.00	.01	−.00	.03	.04	.04	.03
Industry	−.06*	−.06*	−.05	−.04	.04	.04	.02	.01	.03	.04	.04	.03
Time period		−.04	−.04	−.15**		−.01	−.01	−.02		.08**	.08**	.18***
High development			.09**	.06			−.17***	−.31***			−.13***	−.12**
Low development			−.07*	−.18***			.04	.14***			.01	.12**
Time period × High development				.05				.21***				−.02
Time period × Low development				.19***				−.16***				−.19***
ΔR^2		.001	.019***	.011***		.000	.035***	.042***		.005**	.017***	.014***
Model R^2	.042	.043	.062	.073	.063	.063	.097	.139	.053	.058	.075	.088
Model F	9.72***	8.67***	9.81***	9.54***	15.02***	12.87***	16.03***	19.63***	12.62***	11.83***	12.04***	11.76***

Standardized coefficients shown

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

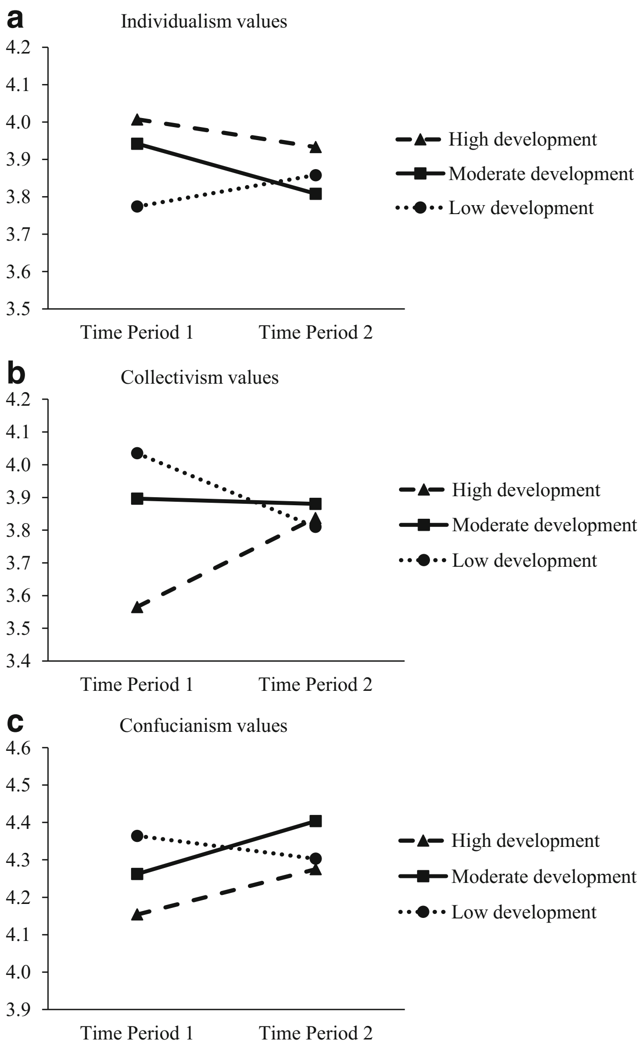


Fig. 2 Changes in values across development regions and time period

There were significant region differences in collectivism values change between the high and moderate development regions ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$), and between the low and moderate development regions ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .001$). As shown in Fig. 2b, consistent with H2b, the importance of collectivism values decreased in the low development region ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .001$). However, H2b was not supported in that the importance of collectivism values increased for the high development region ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), and did not significantly change for the moderate development region ($\beta = -.02$, $p > .10$).

Hypothesis 2c proposed that the importance of Confucianism values would increase over time across the three regions, with increases for the high development region greater than the moderate development region, and then the low development region. The high and moderate development regions had similar changes in Confucianism values ($\beta = -.02$, $p > .10$), whereas there was a significant difference in Confucianism values change between the low and moderate development regions ($\beta = -.19, p < .001$). The subsidiary regression confirmed a significant difference in Confucianism values change between the high and low development regions ($\beta = .16, p < .001$). As shown in Fig. 2c, consistent with H2c, the importance of Confucianism values increased for both the high and moderate development regions (respectively, $\beta = .12$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), and these increases were significantly greater than the nonsignificant change in Confucian values for the low development region ($\beta = -.02$, $p > .10$).

The nature of the patterns of values crossvergence among the development regions is illustrated in Fig. 2, and Table 3 summarizes development region differences in values within time periods. Between the high and moderate development regions, there is a non-intersecting deviating-crossvergence for individualism values, conforming-crossvergence for collectivism values, and static-crossvergence for Confucianism values. Between the moderate and low development regions, there is conforming-convergence pattern for individualism and collectivism values, and an intersecting deviating-crossvergence pattern for Confucianism values. Between the low and high development regions, all three values exhibit a conforming-crossvergence pattern.

Robustness test of demographic differences in time period subsamples

We also conducted additional regression analyses to assess whether demographic differences in the two time period subsamples had a significant effect on findings. As shown in the Table 1 correlations, the TP2 sample of respondents was younger, had a higher proportion of females, higher education and lower position levels, and were employed in smaller and more services sector companies ($r = -.30$ to $r = .17$, all at $p <. .001$ level). For these analyses, we constructed time period interaction variables for each of the six demographic and organizational covariates, and added this set of variables in a step 5 to the final regression models [average VIF = 2.886 (range 2.106 to 5.566),

Table 3 Type of crossvergence between development regions

	High development region vs. Moderate development region	Moderate development region vs. Low development region	High development region vs. Low development region
Individualism	Non-intersecting deviating-crossvergence	Conforming-crossvergence	Conforming-crossvergence
Time period 1	High ~ Moderate	Moderate > Low	High > Low
Time period 2	High > Moderate	Low ~ Moderate	High ~ Low
Collectivism	Conforming-crossvergence	Conforming-crossvergence	Conforming-crossvergence
Time period 1	Moderate > High	Low > Moderate	Low > High
Time period 2	Moderate ~ High	Moderate ~ Low	High ~ Low
Confucianism	Static-crossvergence	Intersecting deviating-crossvergence	Conforming-crossvergence
Time period 1	Moderate > High	Low > Moderate	Low > High
Time period 2	Moderate > High	Moderate > Low	Low ~ High

Development region differences in values importance based on within time period regressions; differences significant at the $p < .05$ level condition index = 12.080]. As shown in Table 4, there were no significant time period interactions for participant age, education level, and company size, whereas there were significant time period interactions with gender (collectivism, $\beta = .10$, $p < .05$), position level (individualism, $\beta = .10$; collectivism, $\beta = -.08$, both $p < .05$), and industry (individualism, $\beta = .14$, $p < .001$; Confucianism, $\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$).

However, inclusion of these time period-covariate interaction variables did not change the Model 4 regression results (nature and significance levels of coefficients) for the hypothesized independent variables (time period and development region main effects, and their interactions). As such, these analyses indicate that the findings of regressions testing hypotheses are robust to demographic differences in the two time period subsamples.

Table 4 Subsidiary regression analyses of time period differences in demographic characteristics

	Individualism		Collectivism		Confucianism	
	M4	M5	M4	M5	M4	M5
Age	−.14***	−.18***	.13***	.16***	.17***	.19***
Gender	.09**	.14***	.04	−.02	−.06*	−.10*
Education level	.05	.05	−.10***	−.112**	−.07**	−.09*
Position level	−.04	−.10*	.06*	.11**	.06*	.10*
Company size	−.03	.01	−.00	−.01	.03	−.02
Industry	−.04	−.13**	.01	.04	.03	.08*
Time period	−.15**	−.16**	−.02	−.06	.18***	.18**
High development	.06	.06	−.31***	−.30***	−.12**	−.12**
Low development	−.18***	−.16***	.14***	.13**	.12**	.11*
Time period × High development	.05	.07	.21***	.20***	−.02	−.02
Time period × Low development	.19***	.16***	−.16***	−.16***	−.19***	−.17***
Time period × Age		.05		−.02		−.03
Time period × Gender		−.09		.10*		.06
Time period × Education level		−.01		.04		.02
Time period × Position level		.10*		−.08*		−.06
Time period × Company size		−.04		.00		.07
Time period × Industry		.14***		−.06		−.09*
Δ R^2	.011***	.018***	.042***	.008*	.014***	.009*
Model R^2	.073	.091	.139	.147	.088	.097
Model F	9.54***	7.85***	19.63***	13.52***	11.76***	8.394***
Average VIF (range)	2.023 (1.071–3.439)	2.886 (2.106–5.566)				
Condition index	8.802	12.080				

Standardized coefficients shown

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

This study examined values evolution within China over a critical decade of national economic growth and transformation on the global stage (Fan, 1995; Jiang, 2011). Opening the door in China to foreign direct investment, to greater entrepreneurial and private business endeavors, and to technological restructuring and development (Song, 2008; Tuan et al., 2009; Zheng, 2010) has given rise to a growing middle class of professionals while simultaneously widening the gap in economic development among its regions (Koveos & Zhang, 2012; Poncet, 2005) and the gap in income among its citizens (Chan, 2013; Fan, 2008a). Taken together, these examples help paint a complex and protracted picture of the multilevel forces shaping workplace values in China over this decade, and likely over the decades to come.

By developing and testing hypotheses for both national and regional levels, we highlight the differing relevancies of these multilevel forces, and how each distinctive perspective (level of analysis) on values evolution in China can be investigated. Our findings also show that Confucianism and collectivism values do not necessarily change in lock-step with one another, particularly at the regional level of analysis. That is, regional-level influences lead to different patterns of regional values evolution for Confucianism and collectivism. Thus, our findings empirically demonstrate the relevance of Tung's (2008) argument that it is important, perhaps crucial, to go beyond the national level to understand the lack of consistency in values/behaviors across geographic areas of a country. In this regard, the results of our study highlight some interesting, as well as theoretically important, patterns of values evolution.

Values change in China

If our study had focused solely on the country-level, a primary deduction would have emphasized that the importance of Confucianism increased over this period, while the importance of collectivism had not. Thus, while it has been argued that Chinese collectivism is rooted in Confucian philosophy (Michailova & Hutchings, 2006), our findings indicate that these two values are not surrogates for one another. Further, a country level focus would have concluded that the importance of individualism values had not changed during the decade of our study. However, when we delve beneath the country-level of analysis, our findings reveal a far more complex pattern of values evolution across this important decade in China's history. The complexity of these relationships is evident in our findings. We discuss these cross-region relationships in terms of the types of crossvergence they epitomize (Ralston, 2008).

Individualism

For individualism, we found two different types of longitudinal crossvergence relationships. There was a conforming-crossvergence of individualism values for the moderate and low development regions. Whereas the moderate development region had a significantly higher level of individualism in the earlier time period, the significant decrease for the moderate development region along with the significant increase for the low development region yielded a cross-region similarity in the later time period. However, the later time period crossover of trend lines for these two regions hints at the potential for an intersecting deviating-crossvergence relationship in the future.

There was also a conforming-crossvergence pattern between the high and low development regions. The nonsignificant difference in the level of individualism for the high development region, accompanied by the significant increase in individualism for the low development region, resulted in a later cross-region similarity in the importance of individualism. Further, these development regions were significantly different in the earlier time period but not significantly different in the latter time period, due substantially to the increased level of individualism for the low development region. A question this raises is: Will these trend lines continue on these paths to a true convergence position over a longer timeframe, or possibly to an intersecting deviating-crossvergence position? Further tracking of these trend lines over time will help answer this question. Regardless, what we can say definitively is that our current results show, that for the decade being studied, the importance of individualism values for these two regions have become significantly more similar.

In contrast to the preceding two region comparisons, there was a non-intersecting deviating-crossvergence pattern between the high and moderate development regions. Both regions were not significantly different in the earlier time period, but were significantly different in the later time period. This was due to a significant decrease in individualism values for the moderate development region with no significant change for the high development region. Thus, one may conclude that individualism values in China's regions are taking different paths over the period of this study. The high development region, while declining numerically, remained statistically stable, the moderate development region decreased significantly, and the low development region increased significantly. We discuss possible reasons for these changes in the conclusion section.

Collectivism

For collectivism, we found only one type of crossvergence relationship, conforming-crossvergence. The significant region differences in the earlier time period were not found for the later period as a result of the importance of collectivism having increased for the high development region, decreased for the low development region, and remained stable for the moderate development region. However, as depicted in Fig. 2b, there is an interesting crossover in levels of collectivism, which while not significant, suggests the possibility of this becoming a deviating-crossvergence effect in the future.

Over this decade, the consistent conforming effect across China is due to different patterns of values evolution. This is the converse of what was expected from the national perspective on the influences of modernization and development. Instead, our findings indicate that the high development region had the greatest increase in collectivism, while the lowest economic development region attached significantly less importance to collectivism over the period of this study.

Confucianism

For Confucianism, there were three different crossvergence relationships, which strongly contrast with the one—conforming-crossvergence—pattern found for collectivism. There was a static-crossvergence pattern between the high and moderate development regions. The importance of Confucianism increased significantly and at a similar rate over time for both regions, with the moderate development region exhibiting a higher level of Confucianism in both time periods.

There was an intersecting deviating-crossvergence pattern between the moderate development and the low development regions, which was attributable to the significant increase in Confucianism values for the moderate development region, and no significant change for the low development region. Interestingly, the net effect is a reversal of the relationship between these regions such that Confucianism values were significantly more important for the moderate development region in the earlier time period, while significantly more important for the low development region in the later time period.

Finally, there was a conforming-crossvergence pattern between the high and low development regions. This was attributable to a significant increase in the high development region accompanied by no significant change for the low development region. Similar to collectivism, these two regions were significantly different in the earlier time period but not significantly different in the latter time period.

Country-level vis-à-vis regional-level perspectives

What we found at the country-level for individualism and collectivism (no significant change) was essentially the result of an averaging-out effect across development regions where we found both significant increases and decreases across the time of this study. Further, the country-level increase in Confucianism is attributable to an increase for two of the three development regions. Perhaps more importantly for future research endeavors, if we had based our study on only data collected in the high development region, our findings for all three of these work values would be totally different than if we had based our study on data collected in the low development region. This point appears crucial in terms of interpreting the results of country-level studies, especially when "country data" is collected in only one geographic region of a country. Further, this study demonstrates the theoretical relevance of the multilevel perspective. Not only do different relevant factors emerge from focusing on the different levels, but also different perspectives on what the outcomes should be likewise emerge. Thus, integrating these diverse multilevel perspectives into a single cogent theory of values evolution becomes the challenge that our research endeavors now need to address.

Regional cluster summary

We found a conforming-crossvergence pattern for six of the nine region-by-values comparisons, with this pattern being fairly consistent across the three values for the high and low development regions. Thus, the values trend lines for the regions—the moderate development region being a partial exception—suggest a slow, although uneven evolution toward a more homogeneous set of values across China. The question is: What drives this values evolution? We identified economic/technological development and political system as the two potential drivers of values evolution. While there is substantial literature that discusses the importance of the political influence of the central Chinese government in all affairs Chinese (Ip, 2008; Whyte, 2009), empirical evidence from a 41-country study (Ralston et al., 2009) identified economic development level as significantly related to individual work behavior. Accordingly, we relied on economic/technological development to formulate our individualism and collectivism hypotheses. Conversely, due to a strong government (communist party) advocacy for a return to Confucian values (Bell, 2008; Dickson, 2008; Whyte, 2009), we focused on this political initiative to formulate Confucianism hypotheses.

Inconsistent with our hypotheses, we found that, over the period of this study, the level of individualism did not significantly change for the high development region, significantly decreased for the moderate development region, and significantly increased for the low development region. These findings run counter to the economic development argument that increases in individualism would have occurred for all three regions, with the greatest increase in the high development region and the least increase in the low development region. Similarly, our collectivism findings indicate that the economic argument does not hold in that the level of collectivism increased over time for the high development region, while there was no significant change for the moderate development region and a significant decrease for the low development region. In sum, our findings indicate that the high development region moved most significantly in the directions preferred by the national government (i.e., lower individualistic and higher collectivistic values). Further, the region of lowest economic development was the contrarian with an increase in individualistic values and a decline in collectivist values over this period.

As predicted, we found that the level of Confucianism increased for the two most economically developed regions over this period, while remaining unchanged for the least economically developed region. These findings could be considered positively from the perspective of the Chinese government, which has ardently supported Confucianism.

Limitations

While multi-period values research is sufficiently challenging with a two-period model, because of the length of time needed for values to change (e.g., Inglehart, 1997), having data from three or more time periods would be beneficial for assessing and interpreting the evolution of values. Data from more time periods would more clearly reveal which regions were in the early stages of values evolution and which were in the more mature stages. Further, our data points, 1994 and 2004, might be described as not contemporary. However, they do cover the truly pivotal period in international business when China made its presence felt in the global marketplace. As a result, the data points of our paper present the opportunity for others to engage in a present-day data collection that could be developed into a three-period study, using our article as the foundation.

One particular challenge with multi-period research, as well as cross-cultural research in general, is obtaining equivalent samples in terms of demographic characteristics, especially for countries (and regions) undergoing rapid socio-economic change. To address this concern, we statistically controlled for the influence of respondent demographic characteristics, and conducted subsidiary analyses that showed that study findings are robust to differences in time period subsample characteristics. Although we had a relatively large sample across the two time periods, larger regional samples would allow for values differences and change for generation cohorts in China. This would serve to extend previous studies of values and attitudes of Chinese generation cohorts that have relied on cross-sectional data (e.g., Egri & Ralston, 2004; Hung, Gu, & Yim, 2007).

Conclusion

This study delved beneath the superficial (national) level to explore the evolving work values in China at the regional-level across the crucial time period (1993/94–2004/05) that captured China's emergence as a world power. Our study clearly showed important differences in the set of findings at the regional level vis-à-vis those at an aggregated national level. Further, while not always supporting hypothesized outcomes, the question remains: What are the likely explanations for our findings about values change in China? In response, we propose three potential, antecedent influences on the work values of Chinese business professionals during this crucial period of recent Chinese history.

Economic/technological development influence

Since prior cross-national research has found that economic development level plays a major role in values evolution (e.g., Ralston et al., 2009), one might postulate that the low development region trends may be a function of this region being the last to start the economic transition process in China. That is, their results are consistent with what was predicted for the high development regions during their early stage of economic reform and trade openness (Ralston et al., 1996). Thus, the later time period of our study may be the "early stage" of transition for the low development region in this study.

Political influence

One might postulate that in one-party countries, such as China, the political system influences are more important than the economic development influences on values evolution. Thus, those in the "have" (high and moderate development) regions may be political astute and thus protecting their favorable positions with the government by adhering to government's edicts, while those in the "have-not" (low development) region may be somewhat rebellious by going against the wishes of the government (e.g., becoming more individualistic). This may be particularly true when a highly autocratic central government is the focus of the regional study. Thus, a question that this raises is: for a multi-regional study, is it typical for political influence to be the primary driver, as it conceivably is in this study, or is the primary driver determined by some other factor(s), such as level of democratization?

Regional migration influence

Beyond the national-level influences, there may be regional-level influences in play. For example, intra-nation migration throughout this period has been well documented

(Henderson et al., 2007). Individuals in China migrated during this period for different reasons based on these individuals' perceptions of potentially better opportunities in other regions (i.e., the grass is greener phenomenon). Thus, one might also postulate that the migration of individuals from the low development region (more collectivistic in TP1) to the moderate and high development regions during the period of this study has led to these regions becoming more collectivistic in TP2. Hence, these changes in population demographics on work values may be due to the migratory influx of those holding more collectivistic values. While less likely, the lesser migration of individuals from the more individualistic high and moderate development regions to the low development region during this period might have led to this region becoming more individualistic later. In sum, we identify two potential national-level antecedent influences and one potential regional-level influence. Further, we do not discount that other relevant, but not identified, influences may be at play.

Consequently, two overarching deductions might be drawn from this study. One, the national-level, business ideology antecedent influences (economic/technological and political) may vary substantially for the comparison of one region to the next. Two, no one level (national or regional) by itself, appears able to clearly predict values evolution. We found that national level and the regional level influences tend not to effect values change in a uniform direction. Thus, determining the synergistic outcome from multiple influences across multiple levels requires future research to address the question: Which influence(s) at each level of influence carry the most weight in determining workplace values? We contend that the relative impact of each level in relationship to other levels needs to be determined for each unique situation (e.g., country of study, level of democratization, local demographics).

In sum, the plethora of questions raised by this study illuminates the need for substantially more and diverse research initiatives to investigate these nuanced issues associate with multilevel, multi-period research (Bruton & Lau, 2008; Tung, 2008). Clearly, a multilevel model that also compares multiple regions across time periods is complex, as our results bear out. However, we believe that research at this level of complexity is a truly relevant undertaking in which future empirical research should engage. Accordingly, we advance that our multilevel, multi-period study makes a unique contribution to our discipline's understanding of this important, albeit substantially understudied, segment of the literature. Further, it also provides a foundation for future multi-period and/or multilevel (e.g., regional) research endeavors.

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