

Influence of ethnic values on public sector performance management

Comparative study between Canada and Hong Kong

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine whether deeply rooted ethnic values persist in public administration in spite of strong foreign influence in education and administrative culture.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper presents the theories and concepts on ethnic values, in particular Chinese and Canadian administrative values in order to examine their differences. Victoria of Canada and Hong Kong of China, both former British colonies, have been selected as the study sites due to their similarity in British education and administrative culture. Comparable samples of human subjects were drawn from the public sectors of Hong Kong and Victoria, who were either students or graduates of a master of public administration program. A questionnaire containing questions on program evaluation and staff promotion was administered to participants.

Findings – The survey results show that, while organizations may have similar administrative systems and cultures, employees revert to their ethnic values for matters concerning their immediate well-being – staff promotion in this case. The findings also suggest that employees endorse good practices and reject bad ones more often than they believe their organizations do.

Research limitations/implications – The purpose of this study is to examine whether lengthy foreign influence can change deeply rooted ethnic culture. The research results are not aimed at and may not be relevant to explaining a current situation.

Practical implications – The research findings may help improve public administration, in particular regarding issues of human resources management.

Social implications – The research findings may provide a better understanding of social behavior in the work place.

Originality/value – This paper contains original data for a comparative analysis that appears to have never been done before. It provides empirical proof that deeply rooted ethnic values are very difficult to change in spite of a long history of foreign influence.

Keywords Hong Kong, Culture, Values, Canada, Performance assessment, Staff promotion

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Hofstede (1980b) contended that changing local culture is difficult when applying western management theories abroad. O'Connor (1995), in examining budget participation of Chinese managers in Singapore's local and foreign manufacturing firms, found that it is possible to have employees subscribe to western administrative culture in spite of their Chinese ethnic origin. This finding raises the question of whether imported administrative culture could be dominant enough to completely overshadow ethnic culture. Adler (1997, pp. 61-63) argued that national culture has a stronger impact on employees than an organization's culture. However, it is undeniable that education, indoctrination, leadership style, working environment, performance assessment criteria, reward system and various other organizational elements have an impact on employees' perceptions and beliefs. In this paper, it is assumed that ethnic values that are tied to people's immediate well-being, such as job security, financial rewards and survival, are the most pervasive and impervious to the



influence of imported culture. In order to examine this, public sector employees with very similar western education backgrounds and administrative cultures but different ethnic origins, in this case Western Canada and Hong Kong, were surveyed using a questionnaire to find out whether deeply rooted ethnic values persist in spite of strong foreign influence. Performance assessment, at both program and individual levels, was selected as the policy area for examining cultural influence in this study. At the program level, performance assessment is referred to as program evaluation. At the individual level, considering that routine employee assessment exercise may just be a matter of formality, to be done and filed, rather than the actual assessment of consequences, explicit and implicit criteria for staff promotion are examined instead. Significant differences in ethnic values might not be shown at the program evaluation level, but they are expected to appear in staff promotion as this is very close to the employees' immediate well-being.

Scope and rationale

This study explored the value differences between the public sectors in Hong Kong and Western Canada by examining employees' perceptions of program evaluation and staff promotion criteria. Hong Kong, a former British colony, was chosen because it is one of the most westernized cities in the world that has a predominately ethnic Chinese population. The public sector was used for sampling because this sector would have been heavily subjected to British influence. The Chinese culture was preferred for comparative analysis because old countries such as China and India have been found to hold values and ideas that are stable over time (Bèteille, 1977, p. 25), hence harder to change. Western Canada was chosen because it had once been a British colony but, unlike Hong Kong, has an Anglo-American culture. Samples were drawn from the larger public sector rather than the smaller civil service because numerous government services in Canada have been corporatized or privatized to become public entities. Program evaluation and staff promotion were chosen as the policy areas for this study because they are management exercises of consequences and their criteria should reflect core administrative and personal values.

Literature review

It is necessary to separate ethnic culture from administrative culture. Otherwise, it would be hard to attribute reasons for the results observed in this study. Ethnic and administrative cultures can be different in an organization, but they are not mutually exclusive.

Ethnic culture

Ethnic culture is constituted of perceptions, values and beliefs shared by people over a long period of time. Hofstede (1980a), based on a survey of IBM employees in 72 countries, identified five dimensions that distinguish work-related values between western and Asian cultures: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism vs collectivism; masculinity vs femininity; and long-term vs short-term orientation. Regarding Chinese values, he (pp. 114, 211, 225-226) highlighted the five basic relationships (wulun) in Confucianism: master-follower; father-son; elder brother-younger brother; husband-wife; senior friend-junior friend, as well as the emphasis on respecting the power hierarchy and placing the collective ahead of the individual. Hong Kong ranked high on power distance, masculinity and long-term orientation, low on individualism and uncertainty avoidance. Robbins and Langton (2000, p. 89) later renamed and redefined the dimension "masculinity vs femininity" as "quantity vs quality of life" due to the sexist connotation of the former. Mintzberg mentions the dimensions of organizational culture in different words but similar content: innovation and risk taking; attention to details; outcome orientation; people orientation; team orientation; aggressiveness; and stability[1]. House *et al.* (2002) modified

Hofstede's five dimensions and extended them to nine: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; societal collectivism; in-group collectivism; gender egalitarianism; assertiveness; future orientation; performance orientation; and humane orientation.

Lockett (1988) found Chinese culture to have four main features that may cause problems: respect for age and hierarchy; group orientation; saving face; and the emphasis on relationships. These problems resonate with the Chinese values of respecting the five basic relationships (i.e. power hierarchy) and collectivism. Regarding the emphasis on relationship, Yeung and Tung (1996) found that using personal connections (guanxi) is a common phenomenon in Confucian societies. Chau (1966) pointed out that Confucianism emphasizes virtue, natural order and quality rather than quantity but, due to the rapid growth in Southeast Asia, achieving economic results has been heavily valued in Confucianism-influenced societies. Chau's assertion creates a dilemma as economic results, such as GDP growth, are often of a quantitative nature, which conflicts with the Confucian value of emphasizing quality. Perhaps, Chau's assertion points to the increasingly pragmatic nature of the modern Chinese. Being pragmatic has no conflict with the Confucian values. In fact, regarding the tasks in life, Confucius says a virtuous man should acquire skills and education, work hard, spend prudently, be patient and persevere – all pragmatic means to a stable life (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Values can be instrumental or terminal in nature. Achieving economic results may just be the instrumental value for building a good life, the terminal value.

In short, the above literature suggests that Hong Kong's ethnic values, Chinese in origin, should show a strong tendency to lean toward high power distance, collectivism, masculinity, long-term orientation, personal connections, quality (such as virtue) rather than quantity, and pragmatism.

Administrative culture

Adie and Thomas (1987, pp. 123-124) contend that Canadian administrative culture has been shaped by Caucasian middle-class bureaucratic values and conforms to basic rules. Kernaghan and Siegel (1995, p. 314) showed historical evidence to suggest that Canada's administrative values emphasize neutrality, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, integrity and, in the last few decades, equality has emerged as the core. While some of these values have no conflict with the Chinese culture, accountability, integrity and equality would contradict the Chinese emphasis on personal connections, a key issue for this study.

A comprehensive study of Canadian administrative culture is found in the work of Dwivedi and Gow (1999, pp. 20-21) which asserts that administrative culture is "conditioned by existing structural and conjunctural circumstances and challenges" and is "part of a larger attitudinal matrix, containing values, practices, and orientations towards the physical environment, the economy, the social system, the polity, and culture itself." A major challenge for the Canadian Government in the last few decades has been the growing national debt, with political pressure to cut spending while the public demanded more and better services. This challenge encompasses economic, social and political elements and should show up as some form of important administrative value in the Canadian public sector.

Dwivedi and Gow consider the Canadian administrative culture to have the following main features: parliamentary system on liberal democratic ideals; federal system of governance; freedom and human rights; rule of law. According to Public Service 2000, a government study, the Canadian civil service embraces, among other elements, the duty to provide client services, merit principle, unionism and collective bargaining and spending prudence. On unionism, Dwivedi and Gow state that civil service associations have existed since 1907 and collective bargaining, started in the 1940s, has become a common occurrence

since the 1960s. Furthermore, they show that administrative culture is changing continuously and, in the case of the Canadian Government, affected by program evaluation and comprehensive auditing since the 1970s, decentralization in the 1980s, and further administrative reform in the 1990s. In 1993, a reform with an aim to reduce the government budget required all existing programs to be reviewed and, if necessary, cut to improve the civil service. The changes shifted administrative culture from policy oriented to management oriented, emphasizing meeting and evaluation, spending cuts, resisting central control, group loyalty and protecting others in the same unit[2]. According to a government document (Scratch, 2010), the 1993 reform came as Canada was facing a deficit of Cdn\$38.5 billion and accumulated debts of Cdn\$487.5 billion. In the fall of that year, the government introduced external program review and, between April 1995 and December 1996, more than 30,000 civil service jobs were cut. Apparently, financial difficulty had threatened job security and heightened the sense for self-protection. Indeed, Phidd and Dwivedi (2007b) observe that the reform efforts went from, originally, downsizing the government to eventually strategic personnel planning.

The Hong Kong civil service, having a British origin, shares many aspects of the Canadian system and culture. However, phenomenal economic growth put little to no pressure on the government to cut spending. For decades, rising tax revenue from economic activities allowed the government to expand services and increase spending without accruing debts (Lam, 2000a). The same was obviously not the case in Canada, as previously shown. Nevertheless, whether it was due to Chinese pragmatism or the colonial style of governance (i.e. not to financially burden Britain), the Hong Kong Government has a proud tradition of financial prudence. Not only was budget deficit rare, having a surplus has been the norm (Lam, 2000b). Therefore, although spending cuts were not emphasized, getting value for the money spent and achieving results were leading to a high regard for productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Without a parliamentary system, Hong Kong's civil service evolved with little political pressure until it reverted back to China. As Jermain Lam (1994) and Norman Miners (1995) point out, the Hong Kong Government has a centralized structure with political power held in the hands of government executives (known as executive-led government). It was only in the years prior to its reunification with China that accountability and administrative reforms emerged as a serious issue in the government (Cheung, 2011). In administrative reform, Hong Kong's initial and key policy, Performance Pledge, a variant of Britain's Citizen's Charter, aims to improve overall productivity and effectiveness, with serving the community and developing a client culture given important emphasis (Lo, 1993)[3]. Various studies (Burns, 1994; Wong, 2013) have shown that the reforms in the 1990s were to deal with political rather than administrative issues. In comparison, Canada has placed a strong emphasis on cost-effectiveness in its policy[4]. Again, cutting cost is a core value in the Canadian administrative culture but not in Hong Kong.

Civil service reforms in western countries have emphasized the 3Es principles (efficiency, effectiveness, economy). The 3Es may not be all improved at the same time, as the most effective service may not be cheap. Equity was later added to become 4Es. This makes maximizing all the Es more difficult as equitable services may not be efficient or economical (e.g. providing public transportation to remote areas). The emphasis is therefore on balancing the 4Es to achieve the best result (Norman-Major, 2011). The above analysis suggests that the civil service in Hong Kong has emphasized economy (valuing budget surplus), efficiency (productivity) and probably effectiveness (performance pledge). However, equity may not be emphasized as much in Hong Kong as it is in western countries. This is most evident in Hong Kong's personal income tax system. Hong Kong has progressive tax rates but the average tax is pegged at a maximum rate of around 15 percent of income (Lam, 2000a, b). Furthermore, Hong Kong's Gini Coefficient has been hovering

around a high level of 0.5, indicating a serious income gap. The government's lack of emphasis on equity may be filtered into personnel management, causing equity not to be emphasized in the actual practice of performance assessment.

As mentioned previously, Canada has a strong union culture. In 1992, the Public Service Reform Act further strengthened fair treatment of employees, meritocracy in recruitment and the system for collective bargaining and grievance adjudication (Phidd and Dwivedi, 2007a). Obviously, equity and employees' welfare and well-being have been emphasized in Canada. Hong Kong, on the other hand, has a low level of union membership in the workforce and lacks a collective bargaining law (Snape and Chan, 1997)[5]. Equity and employees' welfare should in comparison be more often neglected.

In short, Hong Kong and Canada's administrative cultures, although sharing an identical origin, should show different emphasis in financial and personnel management. In financial management, Hong Kong should emphasize productivity (efficient use of resources) and effectiveness (achieving objectives) and Canada should be more concerned with cutting costs, while both advocate balancing the budget. Efficient use of resources and cutting cost, although conceptually related, are not seen as the same since the former emphasizes how to use resources and the latter to use less. In personnel management, equity and employee satisfaction should be emphasized in Canada but not in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the use of *guanxi* apparently is still prevalent in the Hong Kong civil service. For example, the former chief executive, C.Y. Leung, has been criticized often of cronyism[6]. Chinese has a saying that "what the upper echelons do, the lower echelons follow." It would therefore be expected that civil servants in Hong Kong would be more receptive to *guanxi* and using it more often to gain promotion. This would lead only to increasing public distrust of the government and higher likelihood of civil unrest, as witnessed in Hong Kong's current news.

Hypothesis

As mentioned previously, the aim of this study is to find out whether deeply rooted ethnic culture persists in an administrative environment of heavy western influence. The null and alternative hypotheses are therefore stated as follows:

- H_0 . There is no difference attributable to ethnic values in program evaluation or staff promotion between the Canadian and Hong Kong public sectors.
- H_A . There is at least one difference attributable to ethnic values in program evaluation or staff promotion between the Canadian and Hong Kong public sectors.

In light of O'Connor's finding that western administrative culture can be forged within a Chinese society, differences in ethnic value were expected only in matters close to the employees' immediate well-being, and in this case, staff promotion.

Research methodology

Design

A survey questionnaire was designed to collect the data required for this study. This choice of data collection method is based on the fact that the survey method is most suitable for collecting descriptive data (Saris and Gallhofer, 2007, pp. 4-9) on questions related to opinion, attitude, behavior and preference (Majumdar, 2008), and is appropriate for answering the "what" question of an issue (Yin, 2003, pp. 5-7). Other methods, such as in-depth interview or focus group, are more suitable for exploring the "why" or "how" aspect of a phenomenon. The main research issue of this study is to find out "what" the value differences between the public sectors of Western Canada and Hong Kong were, not "how" or "why" the differences had occurred. Values are shown in opinions, attitudes and preferences as well as in behavior. Hence, the survey method is suitable to use. In addition,

using a questionnaire for collecting data in this study had the advantage of cost-effectiveness, which allowed a larger sample to be collected to reduce sampling bias. Furthermore, the differences between the Chinese and western cultures have already been well studied as shown in the literature review. There is no difficulty in designing well-defined questions to formulate an effective questionnaire.

For program evaluation, a series of questions were asked about whether a number of commonly known program evaluation criteria were used in the respondents' organizations and whether the respondents consider the criteria appropriate. Since policies reflect the values of an organization but an individual's beliefs may be different, the data serve to compare the organizational and individual value differences on program evaluation. Similarly, for staff promotion, the questionnaire consists of a set of questions on the staff promotion criteria perceived as used in the respondents' organizations and another set on whether they consider the criteria appropriate. Perceived rather than official criteria were preferred because certain criteria, such as personal connections, office politics and party politics, are unlikely to be mentioned in official documents but may be known to have been used in practice. In addition to these two sets of questions, the questionnaire contained items on the respondent's personal profile (age, education, etc.), which were used for analyzing the suitability of the samples for this study. Samples were taken from Hong Kong and Victoria, provincial capital of British Columbia in Canada.

Sampling

It was not the purpose of this study to draw samples representative of the Canadian and Hong Kong public sectors. Instead, the purpose was to draw two samples that were highly comparable in terms of personal profile and administrative culture but not in ethnic background. In order to achieve this, two sets of samples were drawn, one from the students and graduates of postgraduate public administration programs at the University of Victoria (UVic), Canada, and the other from the University of Hong Kong (HKU). UVic is a leading comprehensive university in Western Canada offering public administration programs that have been a popular choice of mid-career students. Their equivalent programs in HKU had an arrangement with the Hong Kong Government to facilitate education upgrade of civil servants at the time of this study.

The questionnaire was distributed, between 1999 and 2002, either by mail or by hand in an envelope to all the current students and traceable graduates of the respective postgraduate programs in the two universities. The respondents were allowed to answer the questionnaire at their convenience and either mail or hand it back to their respective universities. Due to the concern for low response rates and the limited number of traceable graduates, each respondent, whether in Canada or Hong Kong, was given an additional questionnaire. They were asked in a letter to invite a colleague to answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained a screening question asking the respondents to identify the type of organization for which they were working. Those not working in the public sector were deemed invalid and excluded from this study. The number of valid respondents totaled 149 from Victoria and 95 from Hong Kong.

Since the data were collected more than a decade ago, the findings of this study may not reflect the situation today. However, the purpose of this study is not to examine the current situation but to answer the general question of whether lengthy foreign influence can change deeply rooted ethnic values. Furthermore, ethnic values usually take decades to change. Therefore, the collected data should still be valid for use in this study.

Comparability of the two samples

The profiles of the two samples were examined to determine whether they were comparable for the purpose of this study. Since the respondents were mostly graduates of public

administration programs, the two samples show no significant difference in their education level. The Canadian respondents were significantly older ($p < 0.001$) with 71 percent above the age of 40, compared to only 35 percent in the Hong Kong sample. The data do not provide evidence to explain this age difference between the two samples. However, it is well known that Chinese culture has a heavy emphasis on education. Chinese people would have sought higher education at a younger age and, consequently, the HKU respondents would be younger than their UVic counterpart. The survey data also showed significantly more Canadian respondents considered themselves in a position of policy design and planning rather than policy implementation or delivery (Canada 54 percent, Hong Kong 7 percent, $p < 0.001$). This could be attributed to the Canadian respondents being older and more likely to be in a policy-making rank. Alternatively, this phenomenon could also be an effect of Hong Kong's executive-led government in which the responsibility for policy design and planning is entrusted only to the very few at the top level, whereas in Canada, decision-making authority has been more decentralized.

To ensure that the variables "age" and "level of position" would not affect the results of this study significantly, separate χ^2 tests were conducted on the two samples. The variable "age" was grouped into two categories – "40 or under" and "over 40" – and cross-tabulated with the opinion variables. Selecting the Canadian cases only, a weak association was observed between "age" and the variable on whether managing within budget limits should be an appropriate criterion for promotion. The results, at $p = 0.05$ and $\phi = -0.168$, show that 9.9 percent of the "over 40" group disagreed whereas none of those in the younger category did. The difference is therefore quite small and could easily have been insignificant (i.e. $p > 0.05$). All other opinion variables showed no significant difference between the age groups. Selecting the Hong Kong cases only, no significant difference was observed between the age groups on any of the opinion variables.

The variable "level of position" was also grouped into two categories – policy design and planning vs policy implementation and delivery – and cross-tabulated with the opinion variables as before. The results showed that there were no significant differences between the different levels of position on the opinion variables for either the Hong Kong or Canada samples.

Therefore, in light of the results from the above tests, the two samples collected from Canada and Hong were considered reasonably comparable and suitable for the purpose of this study, in spite of their differences in the distributions of age and level of position.

As mentioned previously, the respondents were asked to help increase the sample size by asking a colleague to fill out the questionnaire. In the Canadian sample, 47 of the valid cases were colleagues of the initial respondents. These respondents are referred to as "non-program" respondents, as they were most likely not the graduates of the university programs involved in this study. In the Hong Kong sample, 18 of the respondents were of the non-program type. Similar to the previous sampling checks, χ^2 tests were conducted by cross-tabulating respondent type with the opinion variables. In the Canadian sample, only one variable showed a weak significant difference while all other variables indicated no significant differences due to respondent types. On the variable of whether achieving objectives is appropriate for program evaluation, none of the subjects from the university programs and 4.5 percent of those in the non-program group said "no." However, the 4.5 percent amounts to only two subjects. This difference, although slightly significant in a statistical sense ($p = 0.042$), can be considered negligible.

In the Hong Kong sample, two variables showed a significant difference between the program and non-program types. On the variable of whether achieving individual performance objectives is an appropriate criterion for staff promotion, 22.2 percent of the non-program type said "no" while only 5.5 percent of the program type said the same ($p = 0.036$). A similar difference was also observed on the variable of whether improving

client service is appropriate for staff promotion, where again 22.2 percent of the non-program type said “no” and only 3.6 percent of the program type said so ($p = 0.012$). However, the number of subjects contributing to these differences amounts to only three, as the Hong Kong sample had only 18 respondents who were of the non-program type (i.e. each accounting for 5.6 percent of the total). Similar to the Canadian sample, all other opinion variables showed no significant difference between the two respondent types.

Since the differences between the two types of respondents are very small, this study included them both.

Program evaluation

Regarding the criteria and methods used for program evaluation (evaluation items), the patterns of use observed from the two samples were almost identical with few significant differences (Table I). This indicates that the policies of the two public sectors were very similar, reflecting similar administrative cultures as suggested in the literature review. In χ^2 tests, two variables were found to have significant differences between the samples. The Hong Kong sample showed a heavier emphasis on using resources efficiently than their Canadian counterparts (77 vs 56 percent, $p = 0.006$). This indicates that Hong Kong is more pragmatic and productivity oriented, as the literature review has also shown. On the other hand, the Canadian organizations seem to have used the criterion “employee satisfaction” more often than Hong Kong (43 vs 26 percent, $p = 0.022$). This finding is again consistent with the findings in the literature review.

Regarding whether the evaluation items are considered appropriate by the employees, similar patterns were again observed between the two samples. Again, there were only two items that showed a significant difference. Employee satisfaction, again, was one of the items. In the Canadian sample, 90 percent of the respondents considered employee satisfaction an appropriate criterion, compared to 79 percent in the Hong Kong sample ($p = 0.018$). The variable “efficient resource use,” however, did not show any difference between the two samples this time, with both showing an overwhelming support for this criterion (Canada, 97 percent; Hong Kong, 96 percent). Instead, “internal evaluation/audit” showed a significant difference (Canada, 97 percent; Hong Kong, 90 percent; $p = 0.024$), with the Canadian respondents valuing this activity more than their Hong Kong counterparts. The literature review shows that Canada introduced compulsory external program review in 1993 with an agenda to cut existing programs and staff. Internal evaluation/audit, in the Canadian context, might therefore carry a different level of importance than in Hong Kong. In light of the severe consequence of external program review in Canada, internal evaluation/audit would be essential for finding out problems and ironing out wrinkles before facing the program review, hence the overwhelming support.

Criteria/methods	Used		Considered appropriate	
	Canada (%)	Hong Kong (%)	Canada (%)	Hong Kong (%)
Effective strategic planning	58	68	94	94
Achieving objectives	77	86	99	98
Linking plans to budget	71	81	96	90
Performance-based budgeting	24	27	72	64
Efficient resource use	56	77**	97	96
Internal evaluation/audit	74	77	97	90**
Client/customer satisfaction	75	63	96	94
Employee satisfaction	43	26*	90	78**

Notes: * $0.01 < p < 0.05$ for χ^2 test; ** $p < 0.01$ for χ^2 test

Table I.
Program evaluation
criteria/methods
used or considered
appropriate

A noteworthy finding was that all eight evaluation items received more support from the respondents than their frequency of being used, indicating that employees supported these measures more than their organizations. This finding appears to contradict the frequently reported phenomenon of civil servants resisting reforms and changes (Dent and Goldberg, 1999). The findings presented here, nevertheless, have to be interpreted cautiously in light of the fact that the respondents in both samples were highly educated in the discipline of public administration, in which reform ideas such as New Public Management were taught and often advocated. Therefore, the respondents might have had a higher tendency for endorsing reform measures.

Discriminant analysis

Because the χ^2 test is a bivariate test and does not take relationships among all the variables into consideration, discriminant analysis was used to provide a multivariate analysis to identify the most salient variables for distinguishing the differences between the two samples. The analysis may show more or fewer significant variables than the individual χ^2 tests. If certain variables are eliminated in this analysis, it does not mean that the eliminated variables are insignificant but that they are covered by one or more salient variables with which they are highly correlated. As shown in Table II, discriminant analysis identified three variables for distinguishing the differences between the Canadian and Hong Kong samples in the evaluation items used: efficient resource use, employee satisfaction; and client/customer satisfaction. The result is consistent with the analyses using χ^2 , indicating that the Hong Kong public sector was more concerned than the Canadian with productivity (efficient resource use) while the Canadian sample was more concerned than the Hong Kong with human issues (employee satisfaction and client/customer satisfaction).

A discriminant analysis was also conducted using the items considered appropriate for program evaluation. The resulting discriminant analysis identified only one significant variable, internal evaluation/audit. In testing the discriminant function, a very low success rate of 10.4 percent was yielded in classifying the Hong Kong samples. Hence, the results from this analysis were considered not accurate enough for further exploration. Besides, as shown in Table I, both samples show overwhelming supports for all the evaluation items, leaving very few cases to show any differences.

The above findings, therefore, show that the administrative systems and cultures in Victoria of Canada and Hong Kong were very similar. The differences observed were affected by policy emphases rather than ethnic values.

Staff promotion

Unlike the items for program evaluation, which can all be considered appropriate and good, the criteria for staff promotion consist of problematic or potentially “bad” criteria: personal connections, party politics and office politics. As shown in Table III, all the positive criteria received majority supports, most of them overwhelming, from the respondents in both samples. Again, in comparison to the overwhelming support, these criteria appeared to have

Table II.
Discriminant analysis
on criteria/methods
for program
evaluation

<i>Criteria used</i>	Standardized canonical Function coefficient	Sig level (<i>p</i>)
Efficient resource use	-0.890	=0.012
Employee satisfaction	0.639	<0.001
Client/customer satisfaction	0.504	<0.001

Note: Test of function ($\chi^2 = 23.4$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$)

Table III.
Staff promotion
criteria used or
considered
appropriate

Criteria	Used		Considered appropriate	
	Canada (%)	Hong Kong (%)	Canada (%)	Hong Kong (%)
Achieving program objectives	50	71**	95	92
Achieving individual objectives	48	58	95	87*
Managing within budget	56	56	93	79**
Cutting program costs	37	31	69	46**
Improving client services	57	70	94	90
Effective staff management	62	86**	97	97
General ability	80	97**	97	99
Personality	74	86*	73	92**
Personal connections	59	59	14	50**
Office politics	61	54	11	21*
Party politics	33	25	8	14

Notes: *0.01 < p < 0.05 for χ^2 test; ** p < 0.01 for χ^2 test

been under-used by their organizations. On the other hand, potentially negative criteria appeared to have been used more often than they were viewed as appropriate. The results suggest that employees prefer meritocracy and integrity more so than their organizations. This raises the issue of whether bad management is a problem of individual practices or that of the organization.

Examining the criteria used, significant differences between the samples were found for four items. The largest difference was observed in "effective staff management," to which the Hong Kong sample yields 86 percent support and the Canadian sample only 62 percent ($p < 0.001$). It seems that an administrative culture with lower emphasis on employee satisfaction may need to focus more on managing (or controlling, monitoring) the employees. The Hong Kong sample also showed a higher score for achieving program objectives (Hong Kong, 71 percent; Canada: 50 percent; $p = 0.003$), confirming Hong Kong's pragmatic culture. Also, the criteria "general ability" (Hong Kong, 97 percent; Canada, 80 percent; $p = 0.001$) and "personality" (Hong Kong, 86 percent; Canada, 74 percent; $p = 0.043$) were also more often used in Hong Kong. These results are consistent with Confucian values, in that the quality of a person is important.

It is of interest to note that achieving program objectives was much more frequently used (71 percent) than achieving individual objectives (58 percent) in the Hong Kong sample, whereas not much difference was observed between the two in the Canadian sample (50 vs 48 percent). Regarding appropriateness, achieving program objectives yielded more support (92 percent) than achieving individual objectives (87 percent), but the difference was not statistically significant. Nevertheless, these results show that the Hong Kong culture places the collective (the program) ahead of the individual, which is again a Confucian value.

Furthermore, more significant differences were found between the two samples as to what was considered appropriate (Table III). For the positive criteria, the Canadian respondents showed more endorsement for cutting program cost (Canada, 69 percent; Hong Kong, 46 percent; $p = 0.001$), managing within budget (Canada, 93 percent; Hong Kong, 79 percent; $p = 0.003$) and achieving individual objectives (Canada, 95 percent; Hong Kong, 87 percent; $p = 0.032$) than their Hong Kong counterparts, whereas the Hong Kong respondents more often saw personality as relevant (Hong Kong, 92 percent; Canada, 73 percent; $p < 0.001$). The results suggest that the Canadian respondents were more preoccupied with reducing spending and meeting the budget limit, which is identified in the literature as a Canadian administrative value. The emphasis on achieving individual objectives is consistent with individualism, vs Hong Kong's emphasis on collectivism. Hong Kong's emphasis on personality is consistent with the previous findings. These results confirm the differences in

ethnic culture as discussed in the literature review, in that Chinese values emphasize more on quality (of person) and collectivism.

The more revealing results are in the negative criteria. The Hong Kong respondents saw personal connections (Hong Kong, 50 percent; Canada, 14 percent; $p < 0.001$) and office politics (Hong Kong, 21 percent; Canada, 11 percent; $p = 0.043$) as appropriate criteria more often than their Canadian counterparts. In particular, half of the Hong Kong respondents considered personal connections relevant in spite of their western education and western administrative culture. These results provide evidence that ethnic values persist when it comes to matters close to an individual's own well-being.

Discriminant analysis

Again, discriminant analyses were conducted to offer more insight. Table IV shows that, considering only the criteria used, the analysis yielded two variables for distinguishing the Hong Kong respondents from the Canadian ones: effective staff management and achieving program objectives. The results again confirm Hong Kong's emphasis on pragmatism and collectivism (i.e. achieving program objectives vs individual objectives).

When analyzing the criteria considered appropriate, three significant variables emerged: personal connections, managing within budget and cutting program costs. The standardized coefficients indicated personal connections for distinguishing the Hong Kong respondents, while managing within budget and cutting program costs for distinguishing the Canadian. The findings are again consistent with the previously reported results in that Canada was more preoccupied with spending cuts and Hong Kong with personal connections.

Associations among criteria

Since promotion criteria include positive and negative ones, it would be of interest to see how the criteria are related in use and in perception. However, the relevant variables are binomial, hence rendering them unsuitable for correlation-based statistical tools such as Cronbach's α or factor analysis. Instead, χ^2 -based statistics, ϕ , is used to show the degrees of association among the variables. As shown in Tables V-VIII, the variables are arranged from positive to negative, or from good to bad, for ease of showing the contrast. The criteria are abbreviated as follows for display purpose:

- Prog Obj: achieving program objectives;
- Gen Abty: general ability;
- Persn Obj: achieving individual objectives;
- Persnality: personality;

	Standardized canonical Function coefficient	Sig level (<i>p</i>)
<i>1. Criteria used</i>		
Effective staff management	-0.685	=0.001
Achieving program objectives	-0.648	<0.001
<i>2. Criteria considered appropriate</i>		
Personal connections	-0.871	<0.001
Managing within budget	0.566	<0.001
Cutting program costs	0.336	<0.001
Notes: Test of function ($\chi^2 = 19.2$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$); test of function ($\chi^2 = 47.7$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$)		

Table IV.
Discriminant analysis
on criteria for staff
promotion

φ	Prog Obj	Persn Obj	Bdgt Mgt	Cut Cost	Serv Impr	Staff Mgt	Gen Abty	Persnality	Persn Cnct	Office Poli
Persn Obj	0.49									
Bdgt Mgt	0.42	0.42								
Cut Cost	0.28		0.38							
Serv Impr	0.51	0.40	0.48	0.30						
Staff Mgt	0.29	0.45	0.35		0.37					
Gen Abty	0.21	0.24	0.19		0.32	0.44				
Persnality							0.36			
Persn Cnct		<i>-0.20</i>					<i>-0.28</i>	<i>0.22</i>		
Office Poli		<i>-0.26</i>			<i>-0.21</i>	<i>-0.30</i>	<i>-0.20</i>		0.66	
Party Poli						<i>-0.22</i>	<i>-0.29</i>		0.57	0.54

Table V.
Association of staff
promotion criteria
used in Canada

Notes: All φ statistics meet the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$, those with $p \leq 0.001$ are shown in bold type. Negative associations are shown in italic

φ	Prog Obj	Persn Obj	Bdgt Mgt	Cut Cost	Serv Impr	Staff Mgt	Gen Abty	Persnality	Persn Cnct	Office Poli
Persn Obj	0.47									
Bdgt Mgt	0.38									
Cut Cost	0.25	0.26	0.63							
Serv Impr	0.28	0.27	0.39	0.47						
Staff Mgt		0.25								
Gen Abty										
Persnality						0.41	0.29			
Persn Cnct				0.32						
Office Poli						<i>-0.27</i>		<i>-0.27</i>	0.34	
Party Poli						<i>-0.51</i>			0.45	0.51

Table VI.
Association of staff
promotion criteria
used in Hong Kong

Notes: All φ statistics meet the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$, those with $p \leq 0.001$ are shown in bold type. Negative associations are shown in italic

φ	Prog Obj	Persn Obj	Bdgt Mgt	Cut Cost	Serv Impr	Staff Mgt	Gen Abty	Persnality	Persn Cnct	Office Poli
Persn Obj	0.40									
Bdgt Mgt	0.32	0.21								
Cut Cost	0.17	0.25	0.31							
Serv Impr	0.51	0.21	0.27	0.28						
Staff Mgt	0.17	0.21	0.30	0.23						
Gen Abty		0.17								
Persnality	0.28				0.19		0.19			
Persn Cnct								0.21		
Office Poli							<i>-0.23</i>		0.53	
Party Poli									0.40	0.65

Table VII.
Association of staff
promotion criteria
seen appropriate
in Canada

Notes: All φ statistics meet the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$, those with $p \leq 0.001$ are shown in bold type. Negative associations are shown in italic

Table VIII.
Association of staff
promotion criteria
seen appropriate in
Hong Kong

φ	Prog Obj	Persn Obj	Bdgt Mgt	Cut Cost	Serv Impr	Staff Mgt	Gen Abty	Persnality	Persn Cnct	Office Poli
Persn Obj	0.42									
Bdgt Mgt	0.53									
Cut Cost	0.26		0.42							
Serv Impr	0.32	0.22		0.24						
Staff Mgt		0.31								
Gen Abty										
Persnality							0.41	0.37		
Persn Cnct			0.33							
Office Poli			0.29						0.31	
Party Poli		-0.29							0.41	0.39

Notes: All φ statistics meet the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$, those with $p \leq 0.001$ are shown in bold type. Negative associations are shown in italic

- Bdgt Mgt: managing within budget;
- Persn Cnct: personal connections;
- Cut Cost: cutting program costs;
- Office Poli: office politics;
- Serv Impr: improving client services;
- Party Poli: party politics; and
- Staff Mgt: effective staff management.

Use of criteria

In the Canadian sample (Table V), those organizations that had employed the good criteria tend to reject the bad criteria, and vice versa. The results suggest a dichotomous situation in the Canadian public sector, with organizations of extremely different value preferences. It is worthwhile to note that personality has positive associations with two criteria: general ability (0.36) and personal connections (0.22), suggesting that the word “personality” does not mean virtue in the Canadian context. It could mean both good and bad things.

In comparison, the picture was not as dichotomous in the Hong Kong sample (Table VI). In general, the good criteria have medium to strong positive associations among themselves, showing that they formed a cohesive larger concept. However, unlike the Canadian case, they have few significant negative associations with the bad criteria. This finding suggests that the bad values might be too pervasive in their culture that they were inevitably used, even in organizations that employed the good criteria. In contrast, those organizations that favored the bad criteria tend to reject the good criteria of personality and effective staff management. Effective staff management is associated positively with personality, general ability and achieving personal objectives. These three criteria together imply a good manager. In addition, personality is associated positively with general ability and effective staff management and negatively with office politics. Unlike the Canadian case, the word “personality” implies everything good here. Perhaps, it carries a meaning closer to the notion of a virtuous person in Confucianism. The findings, therefore, suggest that organizations with bad management practice have very little room for a good person. The findings also suggest cultural tolerance for certain pervasive bad practices.

An inexplicable finding is that cutting program cost has a moderate, positive association with personal connections. Common understanding suggests that those with connections would have more ways to find additional resources and would have less need to cut costs. Why these two criteria are positively related in the Hong Kong public sector might deserve further study. Perhaps, those valuing personal connections might have the tendency of allocating more resources to building relationships and less to running programs, hence creating a bigger need for cutting program costs.

Appropriateness of criteria

Regarding whether the criteria were appropriate, the associations between the good and bad criteria appear murky even in the Canadian sample (Table VII). The good criteria have positive associations among themselves to various degrees, but only one negative association between general ability and office politics. Obviously, the incompetent would more likely rely on playing office to gain promotion. The bad criteria have strong positive associations with each other. The results suggest that the bad criteria were tightly connected, more so than the good criteria, implying that bad practices might be difficult to break. The two types of criteria do not appear to preclude each other very much, as in Table V (criteria used), suggesting tolerance of bad practices in “good” people’s mind but not in “good” organizations.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Hong Kong respondents showed more distinction between the good and bad criteria. As shown in Table VIII, those who subscribed to the good criteria, except budget management, tended to disapprove of office politics and party politics, and vice versa. Compared with the results shown in Table VI, this shows that, while the public sector in Hong Kong tolerates bad practice, the employees can distinguish the good from the bad and have clearer preferences. Personal connections and office politics, though bad criteria, are moderately and positively associated with managing within budget. There are two possible explanations to this phenomenon. First, as previously shown, the criterion “personal connections” is positively associated with cutting program costs. Cutting program costs would certainly help to manage within the budget. Second, in a culture that emphasizes relationships, playing office politics and building personal connections might help managers secure a sizeable budget, which is easier to balance.

Similar to the results observed on the criteria used, personality is again strongly and positively associated with effective staff management in the Hong Kong sample, but not in the Canadian sample, confirming that the Chinese culture associates good staff management with good personality.

Conclusion

Summarizing the above findings, it is apparent that there are more similarities than differences between the Canadian and Hong Kong public sectors in the criteria and methods used for program evaluation. The observed variations can mostly be attributed to differences in administrative history or policy emphases, except that the Hong Kong public sector placed more emphasis on efficient resource use, which is consistent with the emerging Asian pragmatism. The employees’ preferences were largely in line with those of their organizations. However, the evaluation items were more often supported by the employees than they were used, suggesting that the employees were more progressive than their organizations in accepting reforms.

Regarding staff promotion, significant differences in ethnic values were found. The results showed that the Hong Kong respondents considered personal connections and office politics appropriate for staff promotion more often than their Canadian counterparts. Forging personal connections is an essential part in playing office politics. The finding is consistent with the observation that “guanxi” is important in the Chinese culture. Furthermore, the criterion “personality” was more often used and considered appropriate in the Hong Kong sample. The term “personality” was found to carry different meanings in the

Canadian and Hong Kong contexts. In the Canadian context, it is associated with both good and bad criteria, while its connotation is totally clean and good in the Hong Kong context. The findings suggest that personality means something of a good quality in the Chinese culture and this is consistent with the Confucian emphasis on quality and virtue. There is also evidence that the Hong Kong respondents placed achieving program objectives over achieving individual objectives, hence confirming the Chinese emphasis on collectivism. On the contrary, the Canadian respondents valued achieving individual objectives more.

Examining the associations among the criteria, the results demonstrate that the Canadian organizations showed a clear and dichotomous preference regarding the good and bad criteria in their use, in that the good and the bad tended to be negatively correlated, but their mutual exclusion is not observed in the employees' preferences. In the Hong Kong public sector, the opposite was observed, suggesting that good and bad practices are mixed in management but not in people's mind. Nevertheless, significantly more Hong Kong respondents subscribed to the bad practices of using personal connections and office politics for seeking promotion, which is identified as one of the problematic areas of Chinese values in the literature review. Other Chinese values such as power distance, masculinity and long-term orientation were not tested in this study.

In conclusion, the findings were consistent with the alternative hypothesis and confirmed that deeply rooted ethnic values persist in matters close to the employee's immediate well-being in spite of strong foreign influence. This study also suggested that employees seem to endorse the good criteria and reject the bad criteria more often than they are being used in their organizations. This finding, however, lacks generalizability since the two samples were selected for comparative purpose rather than for representativeness of their public sectors. Further study therefore is warranted.

Notes

1. See p. 381 of Robbins and Langton's *Organizational Behavior: Concepts, Controversies, Applications*.
2. See pp. 43-44, 57, 61-83, 133-151, 161 and 170-178 of Dwivedi and Gow's *From Bureaucracy to Public Administration: The Administrative Culture of the Government of Canada*.
3. See also Hong Kong Civil Service Bureau, 1999, "Performance Management Guide"; Hong Kong Legislative Council Panel on Public Service, 2001, "Promoting a Customer Service Culture in the Civil Service."
4. See Canada: Treasury Board Archive, 2009-03-31, "Policy on Evaluation."
5. See also the archive of *South China Morning Post*, "Labour Unions Hindered by Lack of Collective Bargaining Law", April 18, 2013.
6. See web articles of *Oriental Daily*, May 10, 2010; *Sing Tao Daily*, January 7, 2013; www.post852.com, May 31, 2016, and July 2, 2017.

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