

Chinese Ethics: An Empirical Study of Idealism and Relativism

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Abstract

The purpose of this empirical study is to examine the relationships between ethical views of certain Chinese demographics and to consider different trends that may affect academic and business considerations in the future pertaining to East-West interaction. This study utilizes Forsyth's Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) to assess the ethical views of 401 Chinese undergraduate students in a rural province of Central China. Regression analyses are applied to investigate the following hypotheses: In a new Chinese context, the EPQ is applicable for assessing the ethical views of Chinese undergraduate students in rural China. Rural Chinese undergraduate student EPQ results are demonstrative of, and, in view of prior studies, are predictive of changes in Chinese ethical considerations. Rural Chinese undergraduate student EPQ results reflect long held Eastern worldview approaches however, in view of prior studies, there is some increasing similarity with Western EPQ outcomes. The findings of this study support the acceptance of the first and third null hypotheses. The practical implications of this study include an understanding that China, though it is rapidly equating with Western levels of market technology and sophistication, continues to resist Western ideals and ethics. Rather, the blending of Western and Eastern principles will continue to evolve and the Chinese worldview will continue to be dominated by the goals and needs of the Chinese State in a reflection of the millennia old culture. The value of this study is that it updates data relating to Chinese ethical approaches in a fast-changing Chinese and global marketplace. Secondly, it clarifies the different considerations and approaches needed when Westerners are dealing with Chinese counterparts in academia and/or business. Lastly, it posits current and future trends likely to affect East-West relationships in these realms.

Keywords: China, ethics, cross-cultural, business, management, academia

1. Introduction

Management theories today reflect Western worldviews and research (Chemers, 1995; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007; Perkins, 2009). Nonetheless, because of globalization, a great deal of research has been performed to understand differences between cultures for more effective cross-cultural interaction (Giddens, 2003; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Zimmerman, 2015). With this knowledge, leaders in the global environment today must develop cross-cultural competency skills to successfully do business (Beechler & Javidan, 2007; Bird, Medenhall, Oddou, & Stevens, 2010; Goldsmith, 2000; House et al., 2004; Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2008).

In this context, *culture* refers to a shared system of behaviors, assumptions, values and beliefs unique to a specific group of people (Cheng, 2005; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1992; Schwartz & Davis, 1981). An individual culture in essence is the window through which all that happens in the world outside must pass in order to make sense (Hofstede et al. 2005). Based on one's own culture, all people decipher, predict and explain the behavior of those from another culture (Repacholi, Meltzoff, Toub, & Ruba, 2016) and they learn to do this from an early age (Repacholi et al., 2016) as a life skill (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). These learned skills and techniques result in the formation of stereotypes (Repacholi et al., 2016) that enable cross-cultural interaction with some degree of confidence.

Additionally, individuals rely on philosophical and moral assumptions when making ethical decisions (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). For example, in a series of experiments conducted on high school seniors and college undergraduates, two factors of idealism-pragmatism and rule-universality were found to account for individual differences in ethical ideologies, which drive such decisions (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977). The associated instrument is known as the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) which was developed by Forsyth to measure these two factors - renamed idealism and relativism -

through a series of 20 questions (Forsyth, 1980). Idealism is the degree to which an individual believes that the ethically correct action is always obtainable in a given situation, and relativism is the degree to which an individual rejects universal moral absolutes and rules when making judgments (Forsyth, 1980).

In the almost 30 years since it was introduced, the EPQ was used in at least 139 studies in 20 countries, according to a 2008 meta-analysis (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008). Its widespread international and cross-cultural application has resulted in a large body of empirical research seeking to address these questions:

How do levels of idealism and relativism vary by culture?

How do EPQ factor structures vary by culture?

How do demographic correlations, if there are any, vary by culture?

This desire to more broadly and deeply understand culture builds upon Redfield's (1941) definition of culture as, "shared understandings made manifest in act and artifact." In the effort to increase a global understanding of culture, Huntington (1996) mapped out eight major civilizations: Western, Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, African, Latin American, Sinic, and Japanese. House et al. (2004) contributed further in the *GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* to provide the basis for developing and understanding 9 cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, humane orientation, institutional and group collectivism, assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, future orientation and performance orientation). The GLOBE model differentiates between which of these dimensions are valued in a culture, and what is actually practiced. An alternate model for mapping cultural dimensions provides the six dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long/short term orientation, and indulgence/restraint (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2011).

Specific to Chinese culture, Dong and Liu (2010) performed a meta-analysis of studies pertaining to cross-cultural management issues in China. Because traditional Chinese culture is influenced by Confucianism (emphasis on hierarchical interpersonal relationships), and Taoism, (emphasis on harmony and tradition), the contemporary Chinese culture of communism and socialism reflects a deference to leadership which is more transactional with egalitarianism as a valued principle (Dong et al., 2010). Compared to the United States, Chinese culture is more collectivistic, whereas American culture is more individualistic, according to a study which compared Chinese and U.S. data in the GLOBE study with Hofstede models (Shi & Wang, 2011). That study also found that China scored higher on performance orientation and future/long term orientation, as well as power distance, compared to the United States (Shi et al., 2011).

This study aims to further the understanding of the EPQ's applicability in the Chinese cultural context. It seeks to build upon the EPQ's empirical literature by providing two additional data points concerning:

Idealism and relativism levels of students in a rural Chinese university in 2018, and

Factor structure of EPQ responses from students in a rural Chinese university in 2018.

2. Conceptualization and Hypotheses

2.1 Understanding the EPQ and Applying It to the Chinese Cultural Context

Forsyth mapped similarities between EPQ factors and the deontological, teleological, and skeptical approaches to moral philosophy (Forsyth, 1980). Deontologists appeal to natural law and universal rules as the basis for ethical decision-making, while teleologists hold consequences as the ultimate guide to the morality of actions. Skepticism refers to a category of moral philosophy which rejects the existence of universal moral codes (Schlenker et al., 1977).

Forsyth posits a 2 x 2 classification of ethical ideologies with the four possible combinations of idealism and relativism levels (Forsyth, 1980). Situationists, or those with high idealism and high relativism, advocate individualistic analysis of ethical dilemmas, reject moral rules, and are relativistic. Subjectivists, or those with low idealism and high relativism, rely on personal values and perspectives rather than universal rules. Absolutists, or those with high idealism and low relativism, believe that universal rules can always lead to the best outcome. Exceptionists, or those with low idealism and low relativism, hold to moral absolutes in theory but are pragmatic and utilitarian in practice and are open to exceptions to the rule (Forsyth, 1980; Forsyth, 1992).

Forsyth contends that absolutists, with high levels of idealism and low levels of relativism, tend to agree with the deontological approach. Forsyth also contends that exceptionists, who similarly score low on relativism but also have low levels of idealism, are utilitarian and pragmatic with a focus on outcomes, and tend to agree with the teleological approach. Subjectivists and situationists, which are relativistic, hold positions which are similar to skepticism, which allows for both high and low levels of idealism (Forsyth, 1980).

Redfern (2004) suggested that Forsyth may not have intended the EPQ to be applied to non-Western samples, such as China, where different moral philosophies are prevalent. However, Redfern's factor analyses of the EPQ, which was

administered to 115 Chinese-born managers in Guangdong, Fujian, and Beijing, revealed two predominantly orthogonal dimensions which overlap substantially with idealism and relativism as defined in Forsyth's original study (Redfern, 2004).

Redfern noted that Confucian moral philosophy appears to explain some of the differences in the factor analyses of his study compared to Forsyth's original study. Questions loading high on the Chinese idealism factor (EPQ 10, 5, 3, 1, 13, 7, 4, and 3) mostly focus Confucian notions of "humanity and kindness, avoidance of harm and a focus on the welfare of others." The questions loading high on the Chinese relativism factor (17, 19, 15, and 20) mostly focus on individualistic interpretations of the situation, which is consistent with Confucian emphases on heart intuition and harmony as guides for ethical decision-making (Redfern, 2004).

A separate study, which administered the EPQ to a sample of physicians from China's Shandong Province, found that a four-factor structure best represented EPQ responses (MacNab, Malloy, Hadjistravropoulos, Sevigny, McCarthy, Murakami, Paholpak, Natarajan, & Liu, 2011). The four factors consisted of Idealism A (EPQ 1, 2, 6, 8, and 9); Idealism B (EPQ 3, 4, 5, 7, 10); Relativism A (EPQ 11, 12, 13, 19, 20); and Relativism B (EPQ 14-18). Overall, EPQ 1, 8, 9, 11, 13, and 20 did not load significantly. The study noted that the Redfern (2004) analysis also had low loadings for EPQ 8, 9, 11, and 20, although there were additional low-loading questions in that study. MacNab et al. (2011) also noted that a study which administered the EPQ to a population in Hong Kong similarly shared low loading variables (Cui, Mitchell, Schlegelmilch, & Cornwell, 2005).

Forsyth et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 139 studies from 29 countries which used the EPQ to assess levels of idealism and relativism in the countries of study. The meta-analysis aggregated unreported statistics as well as unpublished articles. China was grouped in the "Eastern" region group, one of three groups in the analysis; the other two groups were the "Western" and "Middle Eastern." Overall, levels of idealism in the Eastern group were higher than in the Western and Middle Eastern groups, but levels of difference were not statistically significant. Levels of relativism were found to be higher in the Eastern group than in the Western group; levels of relativism in the Middle Eastern group were lower than in the Eastern group, but levels of difference were not statistically significant.

The meta-analysis identified five studies which surveyed a total of 1,081 respondents. Aggregating these studies, the analysis found the mean idealism score in China to be 0.716 and the mean relativism score to be 0.687; translated into the original 9-point EPQ metric with scores ranging from 10 to 90, the mean scores for idealism and relativism are 64.44 and 61.83, respectively. The standard deviations for idealism and relativism were 0.04 and 0.146 translating into 3.6 and 13.14 for the original EPQ metric. That study also found Chinese respondents tended to fall into the subjectivist category, and that Chinese respondents were less idealistic.

Referenced in the meta-analysis was one of the first applications of the EPQ in a Chinese population, a study by Redfern (2005) where 206 Chinese-born managers responded to the 20 questions along a nine-point Likert scale. The study found that the mean idealism score was 63.5 and the mean relativism score was 57.2. The mean manager age in the study was 35. Based on these prior findings, this research addresses the gap in the literature related to the specific demographic of this study.

H1. In a new Chinese context, the EPQ is applicable for assessing the ethical views of Chinese undergraduate students in rural China.

2.2 Idealism, Relativism, and Age Considerations With EPQ Assessment of Different Chinese Demographics

A correlation between age and ethical ideology is supported by Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which holds that individual moral philosophies evolve as one moves through life stages and experiences (Kohlberg, 1976). Forsyth, who found no relationship between EPQ responses and Kohlberg's (1976) individual stages of moral development, argued that the EPQ may be more useful than Kohlberg's model for determining idealism and relativism levels for adults (as opposed to individuals in earlier stages of development) (Forsyth, 1980). It would appear that Forsyth's definition of adults includes college-age students, as the original EPQ study sampled psychology students between ages of 17 and 42; the average age in his study was 21, with a standard deviation of 3.9 years (Forsyth, 1980).

With the exception of Forsyth's 1980 study, studies examining the relationship between age and EPQ responses have been limited to adult professionals, where there has been general agreement that levels of relativism tend to decrease with age, while levels idealism tend to stay the same or increase. Karande, Rao, and Singhapakdi (2002), sampled marketing managers from the United States, Malaysia, and Australia and found age to be negatively related to relativism. The same study did not find a significant relationship between age and idealism at the 5% level, but noted that idealism scores increased in each of the age groups sampled. Similarly, a study of 3,300 randomly selected senior managers in Australia, who were subjected to the EPQ, identified no relationship between age and idealism, but found age to be significantly negatively correlated with relativism (Fernando, Dharmage, & Almeida, 2008). Kim and Choi (2002) administered the

EPQ to three generations of respondents (Civic Generation, or those older than 55; Baby Boomers, or those between 37 and 55; and Generation X, or those younger than 37) and found that older respondents scored higher in idealism and lower in relativism.

Notably, Forsyth (1980), the only study to have included college-age students, found age to be negatively correlated with idealism (as well as relativism). Regarding the early adult transition from college to the professional world, the literature review does not identify studies focusing on whether EPQ responses change after college, when students enter into the professional world. Davis, Andersen and Curtis (2001) examined the construct validity of the EPQ factor structure in two studies on undergraduate and graduate business students, and noted that insights from student samples are not necessarily transferred to non-student or manager samples. We posit that college-age students may exhibit higher levels of idealism before entering the “real world,” when idealism levels drop as more nuanced understandings of ethical dilemmas are first learned. This does not deny the possibility that levels of idealism may go back up as one further matures in life.

Regarding relativism, while the studies mentioned here are consistent in their findings that relativism tends to decrease with age, there may be larger countervailing Chinese generational trends. Previous studies have found a progressive lowering of generational reliance on a formal belief system in China and an increased emphasis on required Marxist ideological education in Chinese schools (Allen, 2019). We hypothesize that the impact of this generational educational emphasis is larger than the impact of age, such that the net impact will be that average levels of relativism in our sample will be higher. This study compares its empirical findings to prior studies and demographics in an effort to identify trends and changes in Chinese ethical decision making outcomes.

H2. Younger Chinese university students in 2019 without professional experience will have higher levels of idealism than the aggregate from the Forsyth et al. (2008) meta-analysis and Redfern’s (2005) Chinese manager sample. Similarly, younger Chinese university students in 2019 will have higher levels of relativism than the Chinese samples from Forsyth et al. (2008) and Redfern (2005), in part due to their increased exposure to Marxist ideologies in primary and secondary school.

2.3 Evidence of Changing Chinese Ethics in Business Environments

This research seeks to fill gaps in an understanding of Chinese ethics by administering the EPQ to an undergraduate student population and examining whether a two-factor structure persists in China. As has been demonstrated in previous EPQ studies, the factor loadings of the EPQ questions should vary when administered in different cultural contexts. In the Chinese context, it is noted that a number of questions under Forsyth’s idealism dimension (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9) are associated with the Confucian “golden rule” that an individual should seek to avoid harming others. Similarly, questions 11, 17, and 18, which fall under Forsyth’s relativism dimension, are associated with codes of ethics, and may elicit certain responses from China’s collectivist society that run counter to individual notions of relativism.

Questions 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16, which are also part of Forsyth’s relativism dimension related to the notion that individual ethical interpretations are candidates for comprising a separate latent variable. Questions 19 and 20, which are related to truth-telling, are also candidates for a separate latent variable; Davis et al. (2001) found these two questions to form a third factor, which was named “veracity.” Based on the foregoing understanding, this study compares its empirical findings to prior studies and demographics in an effort to identify trends and changes in the Chinese ethical approach in business environments.

H3. Rural Chinese undergraduate student EPQ results reflect long held Eastern worldview approaches however, in view of prior studies, there is some increasing similarity with Western EPQ outcomes.

3. Methods

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

Survey data was gathered at an undergraduate university in rural Central China. The sample size was 401 out of a student population of approximately 28,000. IRB approval was obtained from the researchers’ American university with authorization received as well from the Chinese partner university.

This study used the snowball method of respondent recruitment (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Nietzen & Mathijssen, 2014) during the fall semester of 2018. The survey was administered electronically through popular Chinese social media platforms, which included Weibo, QQ.com, and WeChat. The participation of survey respondents was strictly voluntary and they were not identifiable. Informed consent was collected electronically before students had access to the survey instrument. If the student denied consent, access to the survey was terminated.

3.2 Measures

The survey instrument used in this study was Forsyth’s Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ), which asks a series of

questions concerning ethical ideology. A series of mock survey administrations were conducted with four different translators in order to translate the questions from English to Chinese. Back-translation was undertaken however test-retest procedures were not (Erdvik, Overby, & Haugen, 2015). The survey instrument included 21 questions. The first question asks for consent, and the remaining 20 questions asked for the participant's agreement or disagreement on a nine-point Likert scale. The substantive questions were as follows:

1. People should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.
2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.
3. The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.
4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.
5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.
6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.
7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.
8. The dignity and welfare of the people should be the most important concern in any society.
9. It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.
10. Moral behaviors are actions that closely match ideals of the most "perfect" action.
11. There are no ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of any code of ethics.
12. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.
13. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.
14. Different types of morality cannot be compared as to "rightness."
15. Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.
16. Moral standards are simply personal rules that indicate how a person should behave, and are not to be applied in making judgments of others.
17. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.
18. Rigidly codifying an ethical position that prevents certain types of actions could stand in the way of better human relations and adjustment.
19. No rule concerning lying can be formulated; whether a lie is permissible or not permissible totally depends upon the situation.
20. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.

4. Results

Binary logistic regressions were conducted to address the research questions. It is acknowledged that the data captured only a fleeting moment in time much the same as a camera taking a single photograph of an ongoing activity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Respondents numbered 404 students however, three respondents did not finish the survey and their responses were not considered in this study, leaving a sample size of 401.

Sample characteristics are derived from a companion study (Allen, 2019) assessing a broad range of variables. The majority of students were women (64%), most were in their third year of undergraduate studies (32%), business majors were most common (42%), the father's occupation was most heavily identified as "small business owner" (25%), the large majority of parents were not college educated (71%), and most respondents were members of the Chinese Communist Party (9%) or the Chinese Communist Youth League (87%). Most respondents reported no formal belief system (83%), no belief in life after death (67%), no belief in any form of judgement or accountability after death (87%), and approximately half agreed that traditional Chinese values are important to maintain (55%). Note EPQ response results in Table 1.

Table 1. EPQ Response Results

EPQ	Mean	SD
1	7.57	1.84
2	8.00	1.51
3	7.18	1.98
4	7.61	1.94
5	7.87	1.62
6	7.73	1.62
7	6.14	2.69
8	6.74	2.20
9	6.70	2.13
10	6.40	2.15
11	5.70	2.55
12	6.39	2.35
13	7.30	1.94
14	6.35	2.29
15	6.61	2.39
16	5.82	2.48
17	7.14	1.96
18	5.30	2.54
19	6.78	1.90
20	7.23	1.59

This results in an average idealism score of 71.99 and an average relativism score of 64.67.

4.1 Factor Analysis

SPSS software was used to test for sampling adequacy and reliability of the data. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy demonstrated that the data was suitable for factor analysis, (0.810) at the meritorious level (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977). A test of sphericity showed the overall model was significant ($p < 0.001$) and with an approximated chi-square of 2224.74. Reliability for the data was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Results indicate good reliability ($\alpha = .778$). Factor analysis was conducted using principal axis extraction and the Oblimin rotation model was employed to simplify structure of the data.

Root-one criteria resulted in five separate factors being extracted. However, the scree-plot showed a clear distinction between the eigenvalues of the first two factors (3.943, 3.565) and factors three, four, and five (1.424, 1.284, 1.117). Moreover, in each of these last three factors, there were two or fewer loadings that were significant. As a result, this analysis adopted a two-factor solution, and removed the remaining factors. Table 2 shows the items that loaded on the two factors, as well as a comparison to the results from the Redfern and Crawford (2004) comparison study. Items that loaded at 0.50 or above were included in the factor categorization, and are bolded in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Forsyth's (1980) EPQ in College Students in China

Items	Idealism	Relativism	Redfern & Crawford (2004)	
			Idealism	Relativism
EPQ 1 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.36	0.19	0.69	not loaded
EPQ 2 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.54	0.19	0.62	not loaded
EPQ 3 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.63	0.22	0.62	not loaded
EPQ 4 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.62	0.29	0.75	not loaded
EPQ 5 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.64	0.25	0.63	not loaded
EPQ 6 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.55	0.24	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 7 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.26	0.24	not loaded	0.57
EPQ 8 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.29	0.30	0.72	not loaded
EPQ 9 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.56	0.31	0.72	not loaded
EPQ 10 (<i>idealism</i>)	0.31	0.24	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 11 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.09	0.42	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 12 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.23	0.50	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 13 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.27	0.53	not loaded	0.59
EPQ 14 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.31	0.64	not loaded	0.52
EPQ 15 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.32	0.71	not loaded	0.55
EPQ 16 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.17	0.64	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 17 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.08	0.46	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 18 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.19	0.42	0.52	not loaded
EPQ 19 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.30	0.44	not loaded	not loaded
EPQ 20 (<i>relativism</i>)	-0.24	0.44	not loaded	not loaded
Factor Eigenvalue	3.57	3.94	5.30	2.52

Factor pattern loadings greater than 0.50 appear in bold

Percent of variance explained = 37.54%

The factors are in line with Forsyth's dichotomized variables of idealism and relativism. Table 3 shows the items loaded on the first factor reflect idealism and the items loaded on the second factor reflect relativism. It is important to note that not all of the idealism items loaded under the first factor, and not all of the relativism items loaded on the second factor. These results support the validity of these measures in the sample.

Table 3. Items loading above 0.5 on each factor

<i>Factor 1</i>	
EPQ3	It is always wrong to bring potential harm to others, no matter how much benefit it will bring.
EPQ4	People can never exert mental or physical harm on others.
EPQ5	A person should not do anything that threatens the dignity and interests of others.
EPQ6	If one behavior hurts another innocent person, then you should not do it.
EPQ9	There is no need to sacrifice the interests of others
<i>Factor 2</i>	
EPQ12	Morality is different in any situation and society.
EPQ13	The views of ethical standards are different from person to person.
EPQ14	Holding different kinds of moral values cannot be commented, right or wrong.
EPQ15	The question of what morality is is not certain, because it depends on the individual.
EPQ16	Moral standards are simply rules that show one's behavior.

4.2 ANOVA

A meta-analysis conducted by Forsyth et al. (2008) investigated the difference of EPQ scores across 29 countries, which included 139 independent samples from 81 studies. Forsyth et. al. (2008) categorized these studies into three regions of the world (East, West, and Mid East) as a basis for their ANOVA. The descriptive statistics of their findings can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for idealism and relativism in (3) world regions (Forsyth, O'Boyle, & McDaniel, 2008)

Nation	n	Mean Idealism	Mean Relativism	Region	
Australia	1,419	0.73	0.536	West	0.032
Austria	298	0.76	0.576	West	0.086
Belgium	1,048	0.59	0.539	West	0.094
Britain	289	0.79	0.69	West	0.035
Brunei	153	0.82	0.709	East	
Canada	331	0.72	0.447	West	0.029
China	1,081	0.72	0.687	East	0.146
Egypt	1,466	0.79	0.55	Mid East	0.044
Hong Kong	877	0.70	0.669	East	0.012
India	114	0.78	0.682	East	
Indonesia	120	0.75	-	East	
Ireland	193	0.73	0.687	West	
Israel	284	0.67	0.542	West	
Japan	463	0.72	0.686	East	0.061
Lebanon	592	0.76	0.626	Mid East	
Malaysia	408	0.78	0.625	East	0.051
N. Ireland	193	0.89	-	West	
New Zealand	160	0.68	0.589	West	0.014
Poland	202	0.81	0.542	West	
Russia	378	0.73	0.597	West	0.048
Saudi Arabia	198	0.77	0.605	Mid East	
S. Africa	256	0.78	0.467	West	
S. Korea	297	0.80	0.604	East	0.013
Spain	152	0.87	0.638	West	
Thailand	98	0.73	0.622	East	
Turkey	607	0.81	0.641	Mid East	0.007
UAE	208	0.76	0.618	Mid East	
Ukraine	30	0.79	0.609	West	0.077
US East	6,699	0.71	0.577	West	0.062
US mixed	8,235	0.72	0.547	West	0.044
US West	3,197	0.74	0.626	West	0.076
	30,046	0.73	0.59		

Their analysis allows for a comparison of our results to the findings of previous studies. To determine if our results varied significantly from these previous EPQ studies, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of region. The regions constituted four independent groups (East, West, Mid East, and current study) to gauge the effect on EPQ outcomes of idealism and relativism. Data was collected using a nine-point Likert-type scale. Given the bounded range of the Likert scale (1:9), data was not reviewed for outliers, and no univariate data cleansing was necessary. This coincides with the findings of Aiken and West (1991), who argued that outliers in categorical ordered data sets with limited scale items did not significantly impact Cronbach's alpha. Missing data was filled in using the mean for each dependent variable level, following the recommendation of Ping, Su, and Meng (2016) for orthogonal variables.

Finally, Forsyth et al. (2008) discovered in their meta-analysis that EPQ studies varied in the range of Likert scales (some used 5, other 7 or 9 points). To conduct their analysis, they converted the scores of the variant EPQ results to a composite score by taking the average score and dividing it by the highest rating of the Likert scale used for each study. Consistent with their methodology, the scores from our sample were converted to a composite score by dividing the average scores for idealism and relativism by nine (the highest possible score in our Likert score).

4.3 Idealism

Results of the omnibus test for idealism indicated that there was not a significant difference between regions and idealism means, $F(4, 30) = .908$, $p = 0.449$. Levene's test for homogeneity of means ($p = 0.09$) showed that the variance in groups was equivalent between the four groups. These findings suggest that the difference in means between regions cannot be explained by the geographic differences of the samples. The mean score from our sample of Chinese students (0.81) did not vary from the means of the other regions.

A planned contrast was conducted to determine if the Chinese sample was significantly different from the three other treatment groups. Results confirmed that no statistical significance exists in the variance of the groups. The purpose of conducting this post-hoc test was to reduce the risk of a Type II and to further explore the relationships between the variables. The post hoc test confirmed that the respondents in our sample responded to idealism questions within the same levels of variance as those of the other three regions.

4.4 Relativism

The results of the one-way ANOVA for relativism means showed a statistically significant variance between the regions, $F(4, 30) = 6.49$, $p = 0.02$. Levene's test for homogeneity of means ($p = 0.173$) showed that the variance in groups was equivalent between the groups. Note Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA results for relativism means between group

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between groups	0.059	3	0.02	6.494	0.002
Within groups	0.088	29	0.003		
Total	0.147	32			

A planned contrast was conducted to determine if the results from our sample were significantly different from the other three regions at the 0.05 significance level. Results indicate that our sample does significantly differ from the other groups $t(30) = 2.612$, $p < 0.02$, assuming equal variances. Participants in our sample reported higher levels of relativism ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 0.26$) than the West ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.05$), East ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.05$), and Mid East ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.03$) groups.

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD multiple comparison procedure support the planned contrast between our sample and the West group. No statistical difference was found between our sample and the East or Mid East groups for relativism scores. Table 6 shows these differences.

Table 6. Tukey HSD Post Hoc testing comparing Chinese sample to regions

Region	Comparison	Mean Difference	St. E	Sig.
Chinese sample	West	0.141*	0.04	0.01
	Mid East	0.110	0.05	0.10
	East	0.065	0.04	0.44
West	Chinese sample	-0.141*	0.04	0.01
	Mid East	0.031	0.03	0.68
	East	0.076*	0.02	0.01
Mid East	Chinese sample	-0.110	0.05	0.10
	West	0.032	0.03	0.68
	East	-0.045	0.03	0.48
East	Chinese sample	-0.065	0.04	0.44
	West	0.07625*	0.02	0.01
	Mid East	0.045	0.03	0.48

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Consistent with the findings of Forsyth et al. (2008), there was a difference in the East and West scores for relativism, but no difference between Mid East and either region. The Chinese sample we studied varied from the East region, but not the West or Mid East.

5. Discussion

This research in general terms reveals the EPQ is a valid instrument for assessing the ethical opinions and considerations of Chinese nationals from a variety of backgrounds. It offers a qualified first time EPQ assessment of rural Chinese undergraduate students in Central China who are attending an atypical university where official government funding and support of students is not the norm. This study also provides some insight as to the possible evolution of Chinese ethical attitudes based on comparisons to prior EPQ studies of Chinese nationals.

The first hypothesis stated: In a new Chinese context, the EPQ is applicable for assessing the ethical views of Chinese undergraduate students in rural China. The empirical data results indicate good reliability ($\alpha = .778$) as noted above therein providing assurances that a repeat study on this same sample population would yield similar results. In addition, the factors in this study pertaining to idealism and relativism are in line with Forsyth's dichotomized variables of idealism and relativism therein supporting the validity of these measures in the sample. This first null hypothesis is therefore accepted. The EPQ used in this study is an accurate measure of the ethical attitudes of this sample population.

The second hypothesis stated: Younger Chinese university students in 2019 without professional experience will have higher levels of idealism than the aggregate from the Forsyth et al. (2008) meta-analysis and Redfern's (2005) Chinese manager sample. Similarly, younger Chinese university students in 2019 will have higher levels of relativism than the Chinese samples from Forsyth et al. (2008) and Redfern (2005), in part due to their increased exposure to Marxist ideologies in primary and secondary school.

Our initial findings identified that the average levels of idealism and relativism in our 2019 Chinese undergraduate sample were in fact lower than Forsyth et al. (2008) and Redfern (2005):

Table 7. Comparison of average levels of idealism and relativism.

	Allen, Lloyd, Peer (2019)	Redfern (2005)	Forsyth (2008)
Count	401	206	1081
Idealism Average (Likert)	72	63.5	64.44
Relativism Average (Likert)	64.67	57.2	61.83
Idealism Average	0.8	0.706	0.716
Relativism Average	0.719	0.636	0.687

However, the ANOVA panel did not identify the differences between our study and Redfern (2005) to be statistically significant, as the p-value for relativism is 0.56 and idealism is 0.40. Similarly, the differences between our study and Forsyth et al. (2008) were also not statistically significant. Therefore, this second hypothesis was not supported. However, although these differences are not statistically significant, the likelihood of a significant difference is not zero, and an increase in idealism and relativism should not be ruled out. Further administration of the EPQ in similar populations in China may yield statistically significant differences.

The third hypothesis stated: Rural Chinese undergraduate student EPQ results reflect long held Eastern worldview approaches however, in view of prior studies, there is some increasing similarity with Western EPQ outcomes. Similar to the Redfern's (2005) findings, factor analysis identified two latent variables comprised of one grouping of six questions, and one grouping of five questions, which overlapped significantly with Forsyth's (1980) original idealism and relativism dimensions.

Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9, which were part of Forsyth's (1980) idealism dimension, form a factor which is associated with an individual belief that it is never ethical to harm others. This is consistent with the Confucian ethic of, "Do not do unto others what you do not want done unto you." An additional question which also formed part of Forsyth's 1980 idealism factor (#1) is also related to this concept and had the highest remaining factor loading (0.36). The remaining questions (#7, 8, and 10) in the initial idealism grouping are associated with idealism but not connected with the idea that an individual should never harm others.

Questions 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16, which were part of Forsyth's (1980) relativism dimension, form a factor which is associated with the position that ethical interpretations vary by individual, which is also an emphasis consistent with Confucianism as noted by Redfern (2004). Three of the remaining questions in the original Forsyth factor (11, 17, and 18) have to do with codes of conduct. In a collectivist society such as China, codes of conduct are not seen as contrary to individual appeals to relativism. Notably, the remaining two questions (19 and 20) have to do with honesty and were found in a separate study to form a third factor, "veracity" (Davis et al., 2001). Our analysis identified two latent variables which could be described as idealism and relativism, respectively, with "Chinese characteristics." This third

null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

From the perspective of Western managers working in China, the following possible implications are offered. Chinese culture and history must be regarded as an integral and immovable aspect of Chinese ethical analysis and any Western manager who fails to try to understand that truth does so at their own peril. Western reliance on international rules and sanction mechanisms are helpful and necessary however an expectation that Chinese business behavior is moving toward a similar worldview on ethical issues is misplaced. The Chinese counterparts that Western managers deal with are increasingly likely to bend toward State interests.

Finally, Western managers and Westerners in general attempting to understand the Chinese culture and worldview must first assess the depth and breadth of Chinese history to appreciate that neither worldview is inherently right or wrong. In other words, without rejecting Western culture, Westerners need to consider which aspects of Chinese culture can make a lasting contribution to Western thinking in the interest of true global partnerships.

7. Conclusion

The outcomes of this study are limited because the study drew participants from only one university in rural China. In addition, students at the university used in this study may be a different cross-section of the more general undergraduate university population in China because the school is known as a Tier Three school. In China, high school students all take a national exam known as the Gaokao. That exam result determines what school they will attend. Top performing students attend Tier One and Tier Two schools.

It is possible that the sample in this study is not representative of Chinese students. Relationships and findings from this data do not indicate causation and only offer data for the formulation of possible relationships. Furthermore, because data were collected at a single time, there is the possibility that data collected at another time might produce different results and thus the relationships identified above may be over or underestimated.

A further study that would significantly add to the efforts in this paper might consider an EPQ longitudinal study of Chinese participants who eventually achieve managerial positions from college age through midlife. One obvious challenge for such a study is the reality that China as a society is rapidly changing.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical approval: The authors received IRB approval for this study and have complied with ethical standards. This article involved human participants and each respondent agreed to participate through an informed consent.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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