Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Measuring Confucian values among East Asian consumers: a four country study

Lien Le Monkhouse[a]*, Bradley R. Barnes[a] and Thi Song Hanh Pham[b]

[a]*The Management School, The University of Sheffield, 9 Mappin Street, Sheffield S1 4DT, UK;*
[b]*Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB, UK*

This study aims to make a conceptual and empirical contribution by developing and operationalizing suitable scales to capture certain Confucian values (face saving, humility, group orientation, hierarchy and reciprocity) that can influence East Asian consumers. Based on the pertinent literature, focus group discussions with extended East Asian families and East Asian scholar interviews, we develop and validate our measures on data from over 400 respondents across four East Asian cities (Tokyo, Hanoi, Beijing and Singapore). Despite some variance, our findings signal that East Asians are highly influenced by such traditional values. Several implications are extracted and future research directions suggested.

Keywords: confucianism; consumer; culture; East Asia

Introduction

In recent times, significant growth in the East Asian economies has made this region particularly attractive for academic scholars and businesses at large (Zhou *et al.* 2010). The region has been fuelled by strong market performance, rapid urbanization and a high concentration of wealth among the upper classes of society (Yeung and Tung 1996, Howard 2009). Culturally, East Asia has been characterized as a group of societies that are influenced by Confucian dynamics and for over 2500 years, the teachings of Confucius have had a significant impact on the lives of people and their behaviour (Yan and Sorenson 2004).

Confucian values have been the subject of much social and anthropological research and in recent times have been the topic of increased discourse among business and management scholars (Zhu and Warner 2000, Rowley and Benson 2002, Zhu *et al.* 2007, Cooke 2008). Given the fact that Confucianism has been identified as an important factor influencing East Asians (Ackerman *et al.* 2009), an appreciation of such cultural values is considered to be instrumental for better understanding people's motivational tendencies in this region. Moreover, whilst on the one hand, there may be evidence to suggest that rapid modernization and wealth creation are eroding certain Confucian traditions; on the other, some argue that such values prevail and continue to have a pervasive influence on human values and norms (Keller and Kronstedt 2005, Rowley and Warner 2010).

*Corresponding author. Email: l.l.monkhouse@sheffield.ac.uk

Purpose of the study

Although certain research has been useful in advancing our understanding of the cultural traits in East Asia, notably the 'cultural connection' notably the work of Hofstede and colleagues (see The Chinese Cultural Connection, 1987) who developed a 40-item, unidimensional questionnaire to examine cultural values, their findings were somewhat limited due to a lack of sophisticated analytical techniques available at that time. This work was also criticized for failing to encompass broader aspects that underlie such attributes, thus causing comprehension difficulties and confusion (Newman and Nollen 1996, Fang 2003). In a more recent study, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) maintained the use of single-item scales to measure Asian values and in research where multi-item measures were developed, their use and wording often makes them unsuitable for researching consumer markets.

In seeking a response and to further broaden our understanding of the subject, this study aims to make a conceptual and empirical contribution by developing and operationalizing suitable scales to capture values that can influence contemporary East Asian consumers. Specifically, it extends earlier research by providing fresh multi-item measures that can be easily understood and applied in a consumer context. In a bid to discover similarities and subtle differences that may be associated with a number of countries in this region, this study is among one of the first that attempts to piece together and develop several dimensions based on the literature as well as building on inductive insights from East Asian consumers and scholars, before validating them across four countries that are influenced by Confucian values.

Confucian Asia has been recognized and confirmed as one of the 10 cultural clusters in global studies (Gupta *et al.* 2002). We argue in this article that differences among sub-cultures make it impossible to simply cluster groups of consumers and instead advocate that similarities, yet significant differences are likely to coexist across such countries (Warner 2000, Rowley and Benson 2002). Despite rapid interest, there has been a paucity of research that has systematically attempted to draw on multiple samples of respondents in several countries within this region of the world (Phau and Teah 2009). By developing and testing scales to measure such values and compare these across four different country samples, our study will have interesting implications for both scholars and practitioners at large.

Search/review: East Asian culture

National cultures have been characterized using several dimensions in three influential frameworks (*cf.* Hall 1976, 1983, Hofstede 1980, 1997, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1999). Although researchers have found such frameworks to be useful for understanding national cultures (Kale and Barnes 1992), a number of scholars have expressed concerns with such typologies. First, some appear to lack empirical evidence (Hall 1983), and in other cases the sample of respondents may not be representative (Hofstede 1980, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1999). Second, those work-related values in Hofstede's study may not necessarily coincide with the priorities of people in other roles (Dahl 2004). Third, items used to measure the cultural dimensions may not always have the same meaning in different countries and certain values may also hide particular attributes. These factors make such concepts rather difficult to apply and generalize (Ng *et al.* 2007).

With concern that those dimensions posited in the original Hofstede (1980) framework may be limited in an Asian context, a number of Chinese social scientists joined forces to undertake a survey of Chinese values. This research was named as the Chinese Culture Connection (1987). The study established a list of 40 values, which represented four

underlying dimensions, i.e. 'integration', 'human-heartedness', 'moral discipline' and 'Confucian ethos'. Although the first three dimensions were found to be associated with attributes of culture in earlier classical models, the Confucian values were not found to be significantly associated with Hofstede's original dimensions. This was therefore considered to represent a dimension that is salient and unique to the East Asian culture.

In recognizing the importance of Confucianism, a fifth dimension – 'Confucian Dynamism' was later added to Hofstede's (1980) original framework and labelled 'long-term orientation' (Hofstede and Bond 1988, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). It was claimed that people with long-term orientation are expected to continue to develop their self-esteem, sacrifice today's pleasures for tomorrow's success and avoid improper behaviour that could ruin their honour or reputation. They are also likely to obey rules and conform to social expectations or norms (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987).

Unfortunately, despite the potential utility of this fifth dimension, researchers in this area tended to avoid its use, including those who have referred extensively to Hofstede's work, such as Triandis (1993). One reason for this may relate to the difficulty in understanding the dimension (Newman and Nollen 1996). Meanwhile, Kale (1996) claimed that the conceptual and empirical support for this dimension was not exhaustive. There has also been criticism that distinctions between the two ends of the scale are unclear, contradictory and misleading (Redpath and Nielsen 1997). As with the *Yin* and *Yang* concept, where values have interwoven aspects and no opposite effect, Confucian societies have often been described as being nonlinear (Smith and Bond 1998, Faure and Fang 2008). Due to such potential flaws surrounding Confucian dynamism, further research is required in order to provide greater understanding of such values that are rooted in East Asian societies in order to provide appropriate measurement scales.

Although the background relating to Asian values and the Confucian ethos from a sociological context (The Chinese Culture Connection 1987, Matthews 2000) has been useful in highlighting a significant number of values that may influence Asian people, many of these tend not to relate to consumers at large, nor were they operationalized in order to develop suitable and valid measurement scales. Moreover, in recent times, a growing number of academics have attempted to draw on cultural values in consumer research in East Asia (Wong and Ahuvia 1998, Lin and Wang 2010). However, such studies tended to be either conceptual or qualitative in nature and where certain values were developed they often focused on just one or two dimensions in isolation.

With the aim to operationalize several pertinent Asian dimensions, we identify five Confucian values from the literature that can have an influence on East Asian consumers. These include *face saving*, *humility*, a sense of *group orientation*, respect for *social hierarchy* and *reciprocity* in exchange.[1] Although these values have been the subject of much discourse in previous research (for example Lee and Green 1991, Chung and Pysarchik 2000, Cheung *et al.* 2001, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003, Kim *et al.* 2005), such studies tend not to focus on the general consumer context. An overview of these five values is now provided:

Face saving

Face saving refers to maintaining one's public dignity and the avoidance of threats to public image (Lim 2003, Merkin 2006). Face is lost when an individual does not satisfy essential requirements corresponding to his or her social position (Chung and Pysarchik 2000). The loss of face can vary in its impact on one's social life, from being a small scale issue on one extreme to the extent that it impedes totally on one's entire social intercourse.

The face concept according to Ho (1976) is quite distinct from other related concepts such as pride and dignity. It is a function of social standing, which can either be obtained through personal qualities or derived from non-personal characteristics such as wealth, status, occupation and authority. The concept does not only relate to one's own face but also those of others that matter to them (Wang *et al.* 2011).

Humility

In order to control the possible negative consequences arising from envy among others, Confucian societies tend to emphasize the importance of *humility* in expressing wealth and knowledge (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). The reason for this stems from the collectivist culture that encapsulates a sense of community – whereby everyone would live happily and no one would be richer or too different from others (Tran *et al.* 2008). Even when a person is better off than others, he or she should keep a low profile to maintain harmony in the community. One should not boast about oneself in public and crude display of one's wealth may not be seen as appropriate to others, as it can damage harmony in society (Tran *et al.* 2008). The Confucian tradition teaches people about humility, yet it allows for a more elaborate display of wealth and knowledge if it is seen as appropriate to one's social stature (Tu 1998).

Group orientation

Group orientation relates to a sense of community, solidarity and harmony in society, where an individual coexists with others (Tran *et al.* 2008). Confucian values and guidelines provide the primary basis for collective characteristics of East Asian societies (Yan and Sorenson 2004). In Confucius teachings, people do not exist in isolation but are part of a larger and more complex family, where harmony can be achieved by acting appropriately with one another. This value has originated from the commune culture in the past, where people lived dependently on each other and had very close relationships (Tran 2000). According to Wright (1962), the concept of *Ren* (benevolence) has a very strong collective orientation which is the basis of all other Confucian virtues. Here, the individual is part of an encompassing social relationship and is considered to be insignificant without the community.

Hierarchy

Respect for *hierarchy* can be traced back to the Confucian notion of *lun* (hierarchical relationships; Keller and Kronstedt 2005). The prime meaning of *lun* pertains to the paramount importance of human relationships and social order. Of the great variety of relationships, the most important ones were known as the *Wu Lun* (the five cardinal relationships; Berling 1982). According to Confucius, everyone has a fixed position in society and each person should behave according to his or her rank. In most East Asian societies, affluence is a relatively new phenomenon, and as a result, it is understandable why economic achievement has started to become a determinant of social hierarchy in East Asia (Wong and Ahuvia 1998, Lim 2003).

Reciprocity

In Confucian societies, *reciprocity* represents a golden rule that governs almost all kinds of interpersonal relationships (Tu 1998). It refers to the exchange of favours between

individuals and groups. The rules of reciprocity imply that if someone acts positively or provides a favour, this should be returned in the future with a significantly greater payback. The obligation to return favours stems from one's own feelings and is not forced on by the other party. Confucius teachings strongly advocate treating others as one would like to be treated. Reciprocity should be practiced throughout one's life. However, like many other concepts in Confucian societies, reciprocity is conceptual. If one does not manage it properly, it can have a negative impact on social life and business.

Methodology

As alluded to earlier, because many of the existing studies surrounding East Asian cultural values have not tended to focus on consumers, we undertook a multi-method research approach to study this area in greater depth. In initiating the primary research process, we first conducted focus group interviews with five extended East Asian families in order to clarify the relevance of such dimensions in the context of consumers among different generations of East Asians. These proved useful for generating further insights across different generations of family members relating to the teachings of Confucius and how such cultural values may influence consumers at large. The group dynamic confirmed the importance of the five values studied and helped to widen the meaning of each construct compared with the original literature review (for example the consideration of others' face and new determinants of social hierarchy). These discussions also helped to clarify certain terminologies associated with the research, as well as providing useful tips to help administer the final survey.

In order to further clarify the relevance and significance of the five dimensions in question and validate our proposed measurement scales relating to the items captured by the five values, personal interviews were conducted face-to-face with eight East Asian scholars. Specifically, the scholars were presented with a list of measurement scales that had been used in earlier studies to capture such Asian values among contemporary consumers. For each of the dimensions in question, the scholars were asked to (a) consider a number of scales for measuring a particular construct, (b) select a scale that they felt could be used as a main scale to build from, (c) gradually consider additional items that could also capture the meaning of that particular East Asian value and (d) comment on the wording and tense of all the items in order to eventually recommend appropriate scales that would be used in the final instrument. This procedure enabled us to confirm several pertinent dimensions that may have an influence on East Asian consumers. These discussions were particularly helpful in evaluating the appropriateness of questions, wording, phrasing and to develop scales that would be suitable in the modern consumer context.

Following this phase and based on the dimensions described, five multi-dimensional scales for measuring perceptions of Confucian cultural values were developed. These consisted of 24 items. A list of the measurement items and the sources that influenced the scale development can be seen in Appendix. Each item consisted of a seven-point Likert scale anchored by -3 'strongly disagree' to $+3$ 'strongly agree'. The full research instrument was then pilot tested in English with a sample of 52 East Asian graduate management students. This process helped refine and validate the measurement scales further. The instrument was then translated into Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese using a back-translation technique (Craig and Douglas 2000).

China (Beijing), Japan (Tokyo), Singapore[2] and Vietnam (Hanoi) were selected as locations for this study. The main reason being they are all in some degree influenced by Confucianism (Hofstede and Bond 1988, Triandis 1989, Yan and Sorenson 2004). The cities are also dynamic and represent different levels of economic development.

The research was undertaken in over 20 different shopping malls throughout these four cities. One in three shoppers was approached on a pseudo-random basis and the survey was self-administered. Based on feedback from the focus groups, it was decided to undertake the survey during weekends and evenings, when urban shoppers typically have more leisure time. In each city local people were employed to assist with the research in terms of providing an introduction and explaining the rationale and purpose of the study. In total, over 600 shoppers were approached and this yielded 443 fully completed questionnaires that were eventually used for the analysis. These included at least 100 responses from each city. The sample was representative of different gender, age, income, educational levels and professions.

Data analysis

Exploratory factor analysis

First, exploratory factor analysis was administered on the 24 items using a Varimax rotation. This is a tried and tested approach that frequently yields simple structure (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007) and resulted in the extraction of five factors, with each item significantly loading on the factor as predicted. These 24 items explained 63% of the variance and each communality value exceeded the 0.50 minimum level recommended by Hair *et al.* (2009). The analysis proved useful for purifying the scales and resulted in 24 items that represented the five underlying dimensions presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor loading matrix.

Items		Component				
		1	2	3	4	5
Face saving	FS1			0.69		
	FS2			0.67		
	FS3			0.81		
	FS4			0.69		
	FS5			0.67		
Humility	HUM1		0.85			
	HUM2		0.74			
	HUM3 (R)		0.69			
	HUM4		0.69			
	HUM5		0.78			
Group orientation	GO1	0.85				
	GO2	0.74				
	GO3 (R)	0.75				
	GO4	0.73				
	GO5 (R)	0.77				
Hierarchy	HIE1					0.75
	HIE2					0.65
	HIE3					0.59
	HIE4					0.78
Reciprocity	REC1				0.74	
	REC2				0.65	
	REC3				0.58	
	REC4				0.66	
	REC5				0.63	

Notes: Extraction method, factor analysis; Rotation method, Varimax with Kaiser normalization. (R) denotes a reverse item scale.

Testing for measurement invariance

Equivalent measurement is an important first step in order to make claims concerning the generalizability of the constructs tested on the different samples. In this study, we use mean and covariance structures (Little 1997) to examine the equivalence of the Confucian value constructs across the four countries of Japan, Singapore, China and Vietnam. We therefore followed those procedures outlined by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) and Vandenberg and Lance (2000) by focusing on three types of measurement invariance, i.e. configural, metric and scalar (Hair *et al.* 2009). In order to assess the extent of measurement equivalence, we conducted multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA) on the group covariance matrices (see Table 2). The fit of each of the MGCFA models was assessed using traditional model fit statistics, i.e. comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Each model was evaluated by examining their absolute fit relative to the generally accepted rules of thumb (Hu and Bentler 1999).

Based on the threshold, the goodness of fit for the Configural model is acceptable (CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.951 and RMSEA = 0.023). Similarly, the goodness of fit for the Metric model is also within the threshold (CFI = 0.959, TLI = 0.955 and RMSEA = 0.022). Finally, although the Scalar model is lower than the Metric model, this is still acceptable based on the threshold (CFI = 0.902, TLI = 0.903 and RMSEA = 0.032). The outcome confirms full Configural invariance, Metric invariance and equality of the five factors, thus suggesting measurement equivalence across the four country samples.

Confirmatory factor analysis and scale validation

Following this procedure, the entire data were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), see Table 3 (Joreskog and Sorbom 1984). Although the χ^2 statistic tested significant, a favourable outcome was evident in terms of the χ^2/df ratio at 1.73. In addition, the other fit indices [goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.93, CFI = 0.96, non-normed fit index (NFI) = 0.92 and RMSEA = 0.041] suggest that the overall model fits the data well.

Convergent validity was judged satisfactory as all the standardized loadings exceeded 0.60 and the *t* values were all statistically significant. Likewise, the squared multiple correlation (R^2) statistics exceed the 0.30 cut-off value recommended by Byrne (2001) and Hair *et al.* (2009). Discriminant validity was evident, as the squared correlation between each pair of constructs was less than their individual average variance extracted. Construct reliability was high, well above the threshold of 0.70 recommended by Hair *et al.* (2009). As such, the Cronbach's (α's ranged from 0.76 to 0.91 and the composite reliability coefficients ranged from 0.78 to 0.87. Overall, it can be concluded from the statistics that the procedure outlined was thorough and the items and constructs were able to accurately reflect the Confucian values that they set out to measure.

Comparisons across East Asia

Following on from the invariance testing, a series of ANOVA and Scheffe's *post hoc* tests were administered to identify similarities and statistically significant differences across the samples of respondents. Table 4 provides an overview of these findings for each of the five dimensions. In observing the mean averages and the fact they are all positive (except one, the Japanese mean value of 0.00 for humility), this suggests that East Asians generally agree that such Confucian values have a role to play in their society. It is particularly apparent when studying the data that reciprocity is something that is particularly highly

Table 2. Measurement equivalence tests.

Equivalence tested	Comparison	RMSEA	90% CI	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	ΔTLI	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)
Configural	–	0.023	0.017–0.027	0.958	–	0.951	–	971.05 (792)	–
Metric	1 vs 2	0.022	0.016–0.026	0.959	0.001	0.955	0.004	1015.33 (843)	44.28 (51)
Scalar	2 vs 3	0.032	0.028–0.036	0.902	–0.057	0.903	–0.052	1322.38 (909)	307.05 (66)

Table 3.   CFA for the cultural values.

Construct	Item	Factor loading	t Value	R^2	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Face saving	FS1	0.63	–	0.40	0.80	0.78	0.52
	FS2	0.60	10.74	0.36			
	FS3	0.87	13.60	0.77			
	FS4	0.58	10.41	0.34			
	FS5	0.67	11.64	0.45			
Humility	HUM1	0.94	–	0.89	0.85	0.81	0.56
	HUM2	0.71	18.26	0.50			
	HUM3	0.64	15.73	0.41			
	HUM4	0.69	17.70	0.48			
	HUM5	0.71	18.28	0.50			
Group orientation	GO1	0.97	–	0.95	0.91	0.87	0.71
	GO2	0.82	27.74	0.68			
	GO3	0.76	23.29	0.58			
	GO4	0.79	25.46	0.63			
	GO5	0.79	27.84	0.68			
Hierarchy	HIE1	0.82	–	0.72	0.82	0.77	0.56
	HIE2	0.70	15.67	0.49			
	HIE3	0.71	16.01	0.50			
	HIE4	0.71	16.10	0.51			
Reciprocity	REC1	0.67	–	0.45	0.76	0.76	0.52
	REC2	0.61	10.79	0.37			
	REC3	0.61	10.86	0.37			
	REC4	0.60	10.67	0.36			
	REC5	0.64	11.23	0.41			

Notes: Fit indices: $\chi^2 = 418.24$, df $= 242$, $p = 0.00$, GFI $= 0.93$, CFI $= 0.96$, NFI $= 0.92$, RMSEA $= 0.041$.

and equally valued among the four different country group respondents (relatively high mean averages ranging from 1.60 to 1.79, with no significant differences). The practice of exchanging favours and being honourable is therefore something that is highly apparent across all four countries. The sample suggests that respondents from each of the four countries implement the reciprocity rule, suggesting a high degree of cultural convergence exists in this respect.

In stark contrast, however, some degree of variation was apparent for the face saving dimension. The data also reveals that the level of face saving among the Japanese respondents is lower than that of the Singaporean, Chinese and Vietnamese (mean $= 0.62$ compared to 1.20, 1.75 and 1.98). The ability to save face appears particularly pertinent for both the Chinese and Vietnamese group of consumers, which may reflect historical and political values whereby Vietnam has tended to follow in the footsteps of China over the years (Tran *et al.* 2008).

A similar pattern also emerged for the humility dimension, with the Japanese sample on average holding a somewhat neutral view (mean $= 0.00$). The Vietnamese, Singaporean and Chinese sample of consumers all appeared to be statistically more humble (means ranging from 1.00 to 1.28). By and large the Japanese are less humble, which could relate to their economic and business success over the last three decades. It may also relate to their international exposure to mass media and the impact that globalization has had on Japan.[3]

In terms of group orientation, Singapore respondents (with a mean of 1.97) have the highest inclination towards group activity. This may relate to the size, significance and location of Singapore, along with its dependence on the region for economic stability.

Table 4. Comparisons between respondent groups.

Cultural values	Respondent groups: mean (SD)				ANOVA test		Statistics
	Tokyo (I)	Singapore (II)	Beijing (III)	Hanoi (IV)	F value	p Value	Scheffe's test
Face saving	0.62 (1.61)	1.20 (0.95)	1.75 (0.93)	1.98 (0.71)	34.69	0.00	II > I, III > I, IV > I, III > II, IV > II
Humility	0.00 (1.18)	1.13 (0.95)	1.28 (0.99)	1.00 (0.84)	36.03	0.00	II > I, III > I, IV > I
Group orientation	0.20 (2.07)	1.97 (1.16)	1.68 (1.27)	1.25 (0.72)	33.66	0.00	II > I, III > I, IV > I, II > IV
Hierarchy	1.46 (1.40)	1.58 (1.05)	1.82 (1.06)	1.41 (0.63)	3.40	0.02	III > IV, III > I*
Reciprocity	1.60 (1.21)	1.72 (0.93)	1.79 (0.91)	1.68 (0.57)	0.81	0.49	

Notes: I, Tokyo; II, Singapore; III, Beijing; IV, Hanoi. *Significant at $p < 0.1$ level.

This makes Singapore a very collective and group-orientated society at large. As with the previous dimension, the Vietnamese, Chinese and Singaporean samples all have significantly greater mean averages than the Japanese sample of consumers. Interestingly the Japanese mean of 0.20 has an excessive standard deviation (SD) of 2.07. It would appear that Japanese people tend not to think alike, which provides some evidence that they may be less homogenous than other East Asian consumers.

Finally, a more common appreciation of the hierarchy dimension was apparent among the four groups that were sampled. Although it would appear on first glance that the Chinese sample of consumers is more hierarchy orientated (mean = 1.82), there was only one statistically significant difference compared with the other three samples, and this was related to the Vietnamese sample (mean = 1.41). Thus, whilst the Vietnamese appear relatively less hierarchical than the Chinese, by and large it would appear that all four groups of respondents consider status and hierarchy as an important construct and some degree of cultural convergence therefore exists among the respondents of the four countries.

Discussion

Implications for theory

Overall, this research has contributed to the literature by developing and testing new scales to illustrate some significant findings relating to Confucian values among East Asian consumers.

Although earlier studies by Hofstede and colleagues were useful for helping to pave the way in further advancing our understanding of such cultural traits in East Asia and recognizing the importance of 'Confucian Dynamism', unfortunately researchers in this area have tended to avoid its use (Fang 2003). This may relate to not only the difficulty in understanding the dimension, but also the fact that unidimensional measures have been the subject of criticism, particularly in terms of them failing to encompass broader aspects that can underlie such values (Newman and Nollen 1996).

In attempting to further enhance our understanding, this study therefore extends earlier research through providing new and comprehensive multi-item scales that can be easily understood and applied in an East Asian consumer context, and even beyond. In brief, this is one of the first studies that have attempted to successfully piece together and develop several dimensions based on the literature and inductive insights from East Asian consumers and scholars before testing them across four different countries that are influenced by Confucian values.

Implications for readers

In general, the findings suggest that East Asian consumers appreciate such values, which form part of their deep-down beliefs (Tran *et al.* 2008). Among them *reciprocity* had the relatively highest overall mean and lowest SD. This suggests a consensus among respondents that *reciprocity* appears to be an extremely important social norm. *Hierarchy* also had similar results across the data-set, implying that the sample of the four countries held consistent opinions for these two constructs. *Humility* meanwhile had the lowest overall mean value. Despite this, findings from our earlier focus groups signalled that East Asian families still stressed the importance of 'maintaining a low profile'. One possible reason for this contrasting finding is that the *humility* value may have changed with modern society. Take, for example Tokyo Japan, which for a long time has been on centre stage for state-of-the-art innovation and technology. As a result, such innovation and technological advances have steadily diffused into society to become a way of life.

An examination of each nationality group revealed that Vietnamese and Chinese consumers held similar views relating to safeguarding *face*. Although this finding provides corroboratory evidence to support the *face* concept being particularly salient for people of a Confucian culture (Merkin 2006), very little prior research has been concluded on Vietnam. The finding that our Vietnamese sample had the highest value for this construct is of interest and particularly worthy of future research. The findings regarding the relatively higher *group orientation* among Singaporeans also represent a potential interesting topic that could be investigated in further research.

In contrast with the Chinese, Singaporean and Vietnamese consumer samples, the Japanese respondents had very low mean values for *face saving, group orientation* and *humility*. It was surprising to see that the mean values for the latter two were at, or close to zero and the SD statistics were large. It has also been debated that Japan is experiencing a sophisticated transitional change, whereby sometimes conflict between traditional and adopted Western values can lead to extreme beliefs and behaviour (Silverstein and Fiske 2003). Although on one extreme a fraction of society is moving away from traditional values, particularly the younger generation, others are strongly averse to newly adopted values and are in support of protecting tradition at any cost (Ornatowski 1996, Okazaki 2004).

Implications for practice

At a practical level, several of these issues have implications for managers. First, due to such high values that are associated with *reciprocity* across all four nationalities, business people should be conscious of the tendency among East Asian people to exchange favours. This often creates a strong bond and allegiance where individuals tend to be honourable and frequently depend on one another. Suppliers of consumer goods need to bear this in mind as well as the gift giving culture, as these have implications in terms of product design, packaging and service in appealing to both givers and receivers in such societies.

It appears from our research that the Japanese may not only be different to other East Asian groups, but the high SDs relating to the consumer responses suggest they may represent a mix of consumers that are less homogenous. Although subsequent statistical tests that we administered did not reveal any significant differences in terms of age and education in the Japan sample, this is something that practitioners should be cautious of and further research with larger samples of different demographics needs to address. This provides an added challenge, as it may be possible that different pockets of customer segments exist.

Totally, adopting Confucian values into marketing and ad campaigns is therefore likely to have a mixed reaction from consumers and will certainly not appeal to all. For these reasons, it may be useful to incorporate such values along with promoting the technological advancements that such products can provide. For example, as earlier hinted, appealing more to individuals' needs may generate greater success in Japan. However, and despite this, *reciprocity* is still highly valued and the gift giving culture probably plays a more crucial role in this society than any other, so those points raised earlier deserve particular attention.

The influence of peer *groups* should not be under-estimated when targeting East Asians, particularly Singaporean and Chinese consumers. There is some evidence to suggest that people in this region of the world share a collective culture and are group orientated at large. Practitioners may therefore find it useful to communicate family values, a group ethos and effective teamwork in order to appeal to such values. By and large, the research suggests that such messages could be standardized for the region; however, some modifications, as explained earlier, may be needed in order to appeal to larger groups of the Japanese society.

Conclusions

This study has successfully demonstrated how we have developed and tested scales to measure the influence of certain Confucian values among East Asian urban consumers. Also, the scales proved useful for identifying similarities and differences associated with such values across a sample of four different East Asian countries. In general, it can be concluded that these societies are under strong influence of such traditional cultural values, they are often nurtured within a person's family and social life and are part and parcel of the official education system in East Asian countries. Traditional values are therefore disseminated and strengthened not only in the early years of life, but also in higher education. Prevailing group values also lead to resistance to change, as going against traditional norms is not socially acceptable.

Although a robust effort was made to conduct this research in four different countries, this too could also be a limitation of the study, as a significantly greater number of respondents could have been accessed through undertaking the study in one or possibly two markets. The relatively small sample size in each country market is therefore acknowledged, thus the findings need to be interpreted with subsequent caution, particularly in terms of the cross-country analysis. For these reasons, we cannot make any generalizations from these data for the four markets in question; however, we feel the findings provide some useful insights on urban consumers that will interest and provide a useful reference point for both practitioners and academics alike.

Further research should therefore seek to extend this study by drawing on a larger sample of respondents to allow for greater cross-sample comparisons. Future investigations could also seek to take this study a step further by introducing a dependent variable to the equation, in order to test such scales for their ability to predict attitudes, behaviour or purchase intention. Such research is likely to provide fruitful findings that will interest managing practitioners. Finally, further empirical research could be undertaken in the region to re-address the standardization versus adaptation debate and the use of Confucian values. This could be developed through an experimental research design across nations with different groups of consumers. Studies in these areas are likely to provide fruitful findings that will make a useful contribution within this research discipline and be highly valued by academics, practitioners and consumers alike as we strive to learn more about Confucian values and their influence on individuals in East Asia.

Notes

1. The relevance and significance of these five values were also confirmed during our focus group discussions and interviews with scholars. Further detail and explanation can be found in 'Methodology' section.
2. In Singapore, the entire respondents were of Chinese origin.
3. Due to such propensity among the Japanese respondents to emphasize face saving and humility, a series of further statistical tests were also administered to examine this sample in more detail. Interestingly enough, we found no significant differences based on age and education. Future research with larger demographic data may, however, yield more significant findings.

Notes on contributors

Lien Le Monkhouse is a Lecturer in marketing at the Management School, University of Sheffield. She obtained her first degree in International Business from Hanoi Foreign Trade University, Vietnam. She then completed her MBA and PhD at the University of Leeds. Prior to joining

academia, Lien spent several successful years at the position of country PR and marketing manager for Clinique (Estee Lauder) in Vietnam.

Bradley R. Barnes is Professor of International Management and Marketing at Sheffield University Management School. He obtained his first degree from Sheffield Business School, before completing his Master's degree at Huddersfield and his PhD in Leeds. Prior to working in academia, Bradley, worked in international marketing at the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce & Industry. His research has appeared in *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management* and *Journal of Marketing Management* among others.

Thi Song Hanh Pham is a Senior Lecturer in International Business at Sheffield Business School. She obtained her first degree in International Business from Hanoi Foreign Trade University, Vietnam. She then completed her MSc in Economics at the University of Birmingham and PhD in International Business at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. Prior to joining academia, Hanh spent several years as Marketing and Sales Manager for Unilever in Vietnam.

References

Ackerman, D., Hu, J. and Wei, L.Y., 2009. Confucius, cars, and big government: Impact of government involvement in business on consumer perceptions under Confucianism. *Journal of business ethics*, 88, 473–482.

Berling, J.A., 1982. Confucianism. *Asian religions*, 2 (1), 5–7.

Byrne, B.M., 2001. *Structural equation modelling with AMOS: Basic concepts, applications and programming*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cheung, F. *et al.*, 2001. Indigenous Chinese personality constructs: Is the five-factor model complete? *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 32, 407–433.

Chung, J-E. and Pysarchik, D.T., 2000. A model of behaviour intention to buy domestic versus imported products in a Confucian culture. *Marketing intelligence and planning*, 18 (5), 281–291.

Cooke, F.L., 2008. Enterprise culture management in China: Insiders' perspective. *Management and organization review*, 4 (2), 291–314.

Craig, S.C. and Douglas, P.D., 2000. *International marketing research*. New York: Wiley.

Dahl, S., 2004. Intercultural research: The current state of knowledge, *Middlesex university discussion paper No. 26*, 12 January 2004.

Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B., 1979. *The world of goods*. New York: Basic.

Fang, T., 2003. A critique of Hofstede's fifth national culture dimension. *International journal of cross cultural management*, 3 (3), 347–368.

Faure, G.O. and Fang, T., 2008. Changing Chinese values: Keeping up with paradoxes. *International business review*, 17 (2), 194–207.

Gupta, V., Hanges, P.J. and Dorfman, P., 2002. Cultural clusters: Methodology and findings. *Journal of world business*, 37, 11–15.

Hair, J. *et al.*, 2009. *Multivariate data analysis*. London: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Hall, E.T., 1976. *Beyond culture*. New York: Anchor Press.

Hall, E.T., 1983. *The dance of life: The other dimension of time*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Double Day.

Ho, D.Y.F., 1976. On the concept of face. *American journal of psychology*, 81 (4), 867–884.

Hofstede, G., 1980. *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G., 1997. *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. and Bond, M., 1988. The Confucius connection: From cultural roots to economic growth. *Organizational dynamics*, 16 (4), 5–21.

Hofstede, G. and Minkov, M., 2010. Long- versus short-term orientation: New perspectives. *Asia Pacific business review*, 16 (4), 493–504.

Howard, E., 2009. The transformation of retailing in Asia Pacific. *Asia Pacific business review*, 15 (1), 1–7.

Hu, L. and Bentler, P.M., 1999. Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural equation modeling*, 3, 424–453.

Hyun, K.J., 2001. Sociocultural change and traditional values: Confucian values among Koreans and Korean Americans. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 25, 203–229.

Joreskog, K.G. and Sorbom, D., 1984. *LISREL VI user's guide*. 3rd ed. Mooresville, IN: Scientific Software.

Kale, S., 1996. How national culture, organisational culture and personality impact buyer–seller interaction. *In*: P. Ghauri and J.C. Usunier, eds. *International business negotiations*. Oxford: Pergamon, 21–37.

Kale, S.H. and Barnes, J.W., 1992. Understanding the domain of cross-cultural buyer-seller interactions. *Journal of international business studies*, 23 (1), 101–132.

Keller, G. and Kronstedt, C., 2005. Connecting Confucianism, communism and the Chinese culture of commerce. *The journal of language for international business*, 16 (1), 60–75.

Kim, B.K., Li, L.C. and Ng, G.F., 2005. The Asian American values scale – multidimensional: Development, reliability and validity. *Cultural diversity and ethnic minority psychology*, 11 (3), 187–201.

Lee, C. and Green, R.T., 1991. Cross-cultural examination of the Fishbein behavioral intention model. *Journal of international business studies*, 22 (2), 289–305.

Lim, V.K.G., 2003. Money matters: An empirical investigation of money, face and Confucian work ethic. *Personality and individual differences*, 35, 953–970.

Lin, X. and Wang, C.L., 2010. The heterogeneity of Chinese consumer values: A dual structure explanation. *Cross cultural management: An international journal*, 17 (3), 244–256.

Little, T.D., 1997. Mean and covariance structures (MACS) analyses of cross-cultural data: Practical and theoretical issues. *Multivariate behavioral research*, 32, 53–76.

Matthews, B.M., 2000. The Chinese value survey: An interpretation of value scales and consideration of some preliminary results. *International education journal*, 1 (2), 117–126.

Mavondo, F.T. and Rodrigo, E.M., 2001. The effect of relationship dimensions on interpersonal and interorganizational commitment in organizations conducting business between Australia and China. *Journal of business research*, 52 (2), 111–121.

Merkin, R.S., 2006. Uncertainty avoidance and facework: A test of the Hofstede model. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 30, 213–228.

Newman, K.L. and Nollen, S.D., 1996. Cultural and congruence: The fit between management practices and national culture. *Journal of international business studies*, 27 (4), 753–779.

Ng, S.I., Lee, J.A. and Soutar, G.N., 2007. Are Hofstede's and Schwartz's value frameworks congruent? *International marketing review*, 24 (2), 164–180.

Oetzel, J.G. and Ting-Toomey, S., 2003. Face concerns in interpersonal conflict. *Communication research*, 30 (6), 599–624.

Okazaki, S., 2004. Does culture matter?: Identifying cross-national dimensions in Japanese. *Electronic markets*, 14 (1), 58–69.

Ornatowski, G.K., 1996. Confucian ethics and economic development: A study of the adaptation of Confucian values to modern Japanese Economic Ideology and Institutions. *The journal of socio-economics*, 25 (5), 571–590.

Phau, I. and Teah, M., 2009. Devil wears (counterfeit) Prada: A study of antecedents and outcomes of attitudes towards counterfeits of luxury brands. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 26 (1), 15–27.

Redpath, L. and Nielsen, M.O., 1997. A comparison of native culture, non-native culture and new management ideology. *Canadian journal of administrative services*, 14 (3), 327–339.

Rowley, C. and Benson, J., 2002. Convergence and divergence in Asian human resource management. *California management review*, 44 (2), 90–109.

Rowley, C. and Warner, M., 2010. Managers, markets and the globalized economy in China: epilogue. *Asia Pacific business review*, 16 (3), 483–491.

Schwartz, S.H. and Bilsky, W., 1987. Toward a theory of the universal content and structure of values: Extensions and cross-cultural replications. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 58, 878–891.

Silverstein, M. and Fiske, N., 2003. *Trading up: The new American luxury*. Boston, MA: Boston Consultancy Group.

Smith, P.B. and Bond, M.H., 1998. *Bond Social psychology across cultures: Analysis and perspective*. London: Prentice Hall.

Steenkamp, J.E.M. and Baumgartner, H., 1998. Assessing measurement invariance in cross-national consumer research. *Journal of consumer research*, 25, 78–90.

Tabachnick, B.G. and Fidell, L.S., 2007. *Using multivariate statistics*. 5th ed. Boston, MA; London: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987. Chinese values and the search for culture-free dimension of culture. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 18 (2), 143–164.

Tran, N.T., 2000. *Nguon Goc Van Hoa Vietnam (The cultural root of Vietnam)*. Hanoi: The Education Publisher (published in Vietnamese language).

Tran, Q.V. *et al.*, 2008. *Co So Van Hoa Vietnam (Fundamentals of Vietnamese culture)*. Hanoi: The Education Publisher (published in Vietnamese language).

Triandis, H.C., 1989. The self and social behaviour in differing cultural contexts. *Psychology review*, 96 (3), 506–520.

Triandis, H.C., 1993. Book review: Hofstede's cultures and organisations: Software of the mind. *Administrative science quarterly*, 38 (1), 132–134.

Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner, C., 1999. *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business*. 3rd ed. London: Nicholas Brealey.

Tu, W.M., 1998. Confucius and Confucianism. *In*: W.H. Slote and G.A. DeVos, eds. *Confucian and the family*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Vandenberg, R.J. and Lance, C.E., 2000. A review and synthesis of the measurement invariance literature: Suggestions, practices, and recommendations for organizational research. *Organizational research methods*, 2, 4–69.

Wang, K.Y., Fang, W. and Teo, S.T.T., 2011. The moderating effect of face values: Information sharing and initiative encouragement in China's civil service. *International journal of cross cultural management*, 11 (3), 325–340.

Warner, M., 2000. Introduction: The Asia-Pacific HRM model revisited. *International journal of human resource management*, 11 (2), 171–182.

Wong, N.Y. and Ahuvia, A.C., 1998. Personal taste and family face: Luxury consumption in Confucian and western societies. *Psychology and marketing*, 15 (5), 423–432.

Wright, A.F., 1962. The Chinese family firm: A model. *Family business review*, 6 (3), 327–340.

Yan, J. and Sorenson, R.L., 2004. The influence of Confucian ideology on conflict in Chinese family business. *International journal of cross cultural management: CCM*, 4 (1), 5–17.

Yeung, I.Y. and Tung, R.L., 1996. The importance of Guanxi (connections). *Organisational dynamics*, 25 (2), 54–65.

Zhou, L., Yang, Z. and Hui, M.K., 2010. Non-local or local brands? A multi-level investigation into confidence in brand origin identification and its strategic implications. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 38 (2), 202–218.

Zhu, Y. and Warner, M., 2000. An emerging model of employment relations in China: A divergent path from the Japanese? *International business review*, 9, 345–361.

Zhu, Y., Warner, M. and Rowley, C., 2007. Human resource management with 'Asian' characteristics: A hybrid people-management system in East Asia. *International journal of human resource management*, 18 (5), 745–768.

Appendix

Face saving (Cheung *et al.* 2001, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003).

- I am concerned with not bringing shame to myself. (FS1)
- I am concerned with not bringing shame to others. (FS2)
- I pay a lot of attention to how others see me. (FS3)
- I am concerned with protecting the pride of my family. (FS4)
- I feel ashamed if I lose my face. (FS5)

Humility (Kim *et al.* 2005)

- I avoid singing my own praises. (HUM1)
- I try not to openly talk about my accomplishments. (HUM2)
- I like to draw others' attention to my accomplishments. (R) (HUM3)
- Being boastful is a sign of weakness and insecurity. (HUM4)
- I only tell others about my achievements when I am asked to. (HUM5)

Group orientation (Kale 1996, Kim *et al.* 2005).

- I recognize and respect social expectations, norms and practices. (GO1)
- When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I try to do the same as what others do. (GO2)

- I usually make decisions without listening to others. (R) (GO3)
- When I buy the same things my friends buy, I feel closer to them. (GO4)
- If there is a conflict between my interest and my family's interest, I will put priority on mine (R). (GO5)

Hierarchy (Hyun 2001).

- I am happy if people look up to me. (HIE1)
- We have a vertical order in the society that we should respect. (HIE2)
- A person with high personal achievements is considered to have high social standing. (HIE3)
- Wealth and power are becoming important determinants of social status. (HIE4)

Reciprocity (Mavondo and Rodrigo 2001).

- The practice of 'give and take' of favours is an important part of social relationships. (REC1)
- I feel a sense of obligation to a person for doing me a favour. (REC2)
- It is bad manners not to return favours. (REC3)
- When I receive a big favour, I try to go an extra mile to do something nice in return. (REC4)
- When I buy a gift to say thank you to someone I try my best to make sure the person will appreciate it. (REC5)
- (R) denotes a reverse item scale.