Socioeconomic Changes and Value Modernization in China:

Changes and Continuity 1993-2011

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Abstract

As China's economic development brings the country out of poverty and into modernity, a long-lasting debate concerns whether the Chinese public's value system is also changing toward the so-called "modern values," or whether some distinctly traditional Chinese values remain unchanged. Using empirical data collected at three points in time during the 1990s and the first two decades of the 21st Century (1993, 2002, and 2011), I found that Chinese citizens who benefitted from urbanization, rising levels of education and employment in non-farm, knowledge-based industries displayed stronger modern values. People with stronger modern values are more likely to emphasize individual autonomy, competition, gender equality, and market transaction, among others. Some characteristics of the Chinese people, most importantly family values, however, seem to remain stable amidst rapid social changes.

Keywords: China, modern values, individual modernity, modernization

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Introduction

China since the 1980s has seen economic development, institutional reforms, and social changes on a large scale. Throughout this period, more and more people moved to live in the cities, received higher levels of education, and left farming to work in manufacturing, managerial, and service jobs. These changes fit into the concepts and debates related to "modernity," "modernization," or "human development" discourses in social science. According to past scholarship, such socioeconomic changes will lead to changes in people's values. The "individual modernity" paradigm, for example, argues that with industrialization, urbanization, and expansion of mass education, individuals will acquire certain values that are common across all "modern" societies (Inkeles, 1966, 1985; Inkeles & Smith, 1974). Furthermore, when a society's socioeconomic structure becomes post-industrialized, as the service and knowledge sectors claim a larger share, a new set of social values start to emerge, a process known as "postmodernization" (Bell, 1976; Inglehart, 1997).

Using comprehensive survey data, in this paper I examine the so-called "modern values" as conceptualized by the "individual modernity" and "modernization" paradigms. I study the value differences between rural and urban residents, and between people of different occupations and different levels of education in China. My study will present the first systematic test of these hypotheses with large representative samples of the Chinese population, and reveal the trends of value changes in the period of roughly twenty years, i.e. from 1993 to 2011.

The paper is organized as follows. After briefly reviewing the relationship between socioeconomic developments and value changes, I will first account for how the study of "individual modernity" and modern values has been applied in the China context. Next, I present the "modern values" of Chinese citizens measured in 1993. I will show that stronger modern values in China are related to urban residency and higher levels of educational attainment, among others. The same analysis is then performed on a 2002 and

a 2011 dataset. These two sections will give a clear picture of the changes in Chinese people's values brought about by urbanization, industrialization, and rising education levels. Regression analyses are then introduced to understand the relative importance of the different socioeconomic factors contributing to value differentiations. In other words, modernization appears to be a multi-dimensional process in which many kinds of changes come together to transform a society.

Modern Values, "Individual Modernity," and China

The process of socioeconomic change that often comes with economic development, industrialization, urbanization, spread of education and information, and increased social complexity is often referred to as modernization (Weiner, 1966). It results in an environment drastically different from the agrarian traditional society. An urban and industrialized society with widespread modern institutions such as public education, mass media, and a modern government is often believed to have acquired "modernity" (Eisenstadt, 2003). This social transformation forcefully leads to changes in human values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Citizens socialized in such a modern environment assume modern values that are different from those values held by people living in a traditional, agrarian society. As a theoretical paradigm for understanding such complex dynamics of value change, the "individual modernity" theory specifically argues that modern experiences, such as schooling and participation in modern economic activities, help produce modern values and attitudes. This is often referred to as an "environmental explanation;" people adopt values that enable them to thrive in their living environment. In a sense, while modernization refers to societal traits, such as industrialization and urbanization, "individual modernity" refers to personal values and beliefs that emerge in the process of these societal changes. Based on empirical studies conducted in developing countries such as Argentina, India, and Bangladesh, the values or attitudes of the "modernity syndrome" include:

Taking an active role as a citizen (1);

Aspiring to advance oneself economically (2);

Stressing individual responsibility (3);

Freedom from absolute submission to received authority in family (4); and

Granting of more autonomy and rights to those of lesser status and power, such as minority groups and women (5). (Inkeles & Smith, 1974).

This paradigm represents only one stream of a theoretical effort to understand value change in developing societies. The attitudes listed here may, for example, echo concepts proposed by other studies such as (1) "civicness" (participating in public and civic affairs), (2) self-efficacy and entrepreneurship, (3) agency, (4) autonomy, and (5) tolerance (toward and inclusion of minorities or disliked groups). The "Postmaterialism" paradigm argues that individuals socialized with improved economic security are likely to disregard material interests but emphasize freedom of expression and individual autonomy (Inglehart, 1977). The "civic culture" paradigm argues that with economic development and modernization, citizens discard parochial culture and acquire self-efficacy and participatory outlooks (Almond & Verba, 1963). An Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS) also looks into dimensions of characteristics or values such as autonomy, achievement, order, change, exhibition, and aggression, among others (Yang, 1986). Besides such typical sociological or social psychological explanations, evolutionary biology can also help interpret such value changes: while traditional social environments press humans to adopt social norms that help increase in-group genetic fitness, modernization enables individuals to discard such norms. Compared to traditional society, for example, in a modernized society individuals emphasize linkages to groups that are not based on kinship but on common interests, reduce their respect of family elders but emphasize cooperation with non-family members. Also, reduced social pressure in maintaining the family means that the disruption of family (divorce) will become more common, and people's sexual attitudes will become more permissive. Children will emphasize fewer of those goals parents believe worthy, and are more likely to seek approval from their peers instead of from their parents (Armer & Isaac,

1978; Bengtson, Dowd, Smith, & Inkeles, 1975; Holsinger & Theisen, 1977; Masemann & Welch, 1998).

Among others, the "individual modernity" paradigm has had a big impact on social and political psychology. This line of scholarship, however, has seen very scarce empirical testing in China. Inkeles, Broaded, and Cao surveyed a sample of 900 urban and rural residents in Tianjin and its suburbs in 1990. They found that the impact of industrialization, urbanization, and education on Chinese people's modern values contradicted the general "individual modernity" theory. Their data showed that those employed in industrial firms held weaker modern values compared to rural farmers and workers of the township enterprises. Furthermore, among urban residents, more educated people also held weaker modern values than the less-educated (Broaded, Cao, & Inkeles, 1994; Inkeles, Broaded, & Cao, 1997).

The work of cultural psychologist Yang Guoshu (Yang Kuo-Shu) represents the most enduring effort to test this and other paradigms of formation and changes of national character within the Chinese context, and resulted in an impressive scholarly record of understanding individual modernity among Chinese living in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and several other locations. Most of the work Yang and his associates conducted was based on university students, and comparisons were done with similar pools of subjects in the US, India, Japan, and other countries to arrive at an understanding of the personality and traits of the Chinese. Taiwanese society was going through rapid socioeconomic modernization in the 1960s and 1970s, and Yang and his colleagues' research captured some of the changes in Chinese personalities, values, and attitudes caused by the societal changes. But after thirty years of study Yang arrived at the conclusion that the Western definition of traditionalism vs. modernism should give way to indigenously developed concepts (Yang & Bond, 1990), and argued that region specific or country-unique traditional values can persist despite the rise of modern values in some areas (Hwang, 2003; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). A major theoretical and methodological contribution of Yang is an extended list of the psychological characteristics of Chinese people that may either increase or decrease as

affected by socioeconomic developments (Yang, 1996). Yang argues that traditional Chinese values were shaped by the ecological structure of the locations at which the Chinese civilization emerged and developed, the genetic traits of the Chinese race, and the Chinese agricultural system that existed before the arrival of modern industrialization. These factors together lead to a social structure of Chinese society featuring hierarchical organization, collective functioning, generalized familization, structural tightness, and social homogeneity. Such socio-structural factors led to the formation of Chinese characteristics such as collectivistic orientation, other-orientation, relationship orientation, submissive disposition, and inhibited disposition, among others. Whether such characteristics are distinctively Chinese can be intensively contested, but Yang does argue that once modernization takes place, the Chinese will adopt more individual-oriented characteristics, such as individualistic instead of collectivistic orientations, self- instead of other-orientation, and competitive instead of relationship orientation, among others (Yang, 1986). In any case, Yang established an important intellectual tradition that greatly defined sociological research in Taiwan. This is most evidently manifested by the Taiwan Social Change Survey (TWSCS) run by the Institute of Sociology and Center for Survey Research of the Academia Sinica. This Survey has continued to measure value change in Taiwan for almost thirty years, resulting in a large amount of data made available for public usage.

Empirical value studies using survey methods started to pick up in Mainland China after the 1980s. The issue of traditionalism vis-à-vis modernism in Inkeles's "individual modernity" lineage was picked up by a survey conducted by political scientists in 1993. In 2001/2002, the first wave of the East Asian Barometer was conducted in several Asian societies, including Mainland China. Although predominantly focusing on citizens' political behaviors and beliefs, these two surveys both included a small battery on modern vis-à-vis traditional values. By 2011, the East Asian Barometer (now named the Asian Barometer) had collected three waves of surveys from China. The sections that follow will examine these changes using the 1993 China survey and the China part of the Asian Barometer survey of 2002 and 2011.

Research Design

The empirical part of this paper consists of the following steps. First, display the distribution of responses to a number of survey questions as observed in the 1993, 2002, and 2011 surveys, respectively. This will show that the Chinese public's responses to some questions have changed over the years, but have remained stable when responding to other questions. Next, I use a few items that were measured at all three time points to show changes in people's responses over time. Between 1993 and 2011, percentages of people showing modern orientations when making value statements show some changes predicted by the "individual modernity" argument, while changes in a few others appear either negligible, or contradict what an "individual modernity" theory would have predicted. As such, we are led to the conclusion that with the impact of socioeconomic modernization, some value changes take place but some values and beliefs remain roughly stable. To the extent that value changes do take place, the comparison of the 1993 and 2002 datasets shows that this takes place largely through three paths: by increases in the population's education obtainment, by an increase in the urban proportion of the population, and by the coming of age of new generations.

Secondly, I use the 1993, 2002, and 2011 datasets to generate factor scores for the Chinese population's modern values. With these factor scores, I show that at all three time points, the Chinese public's value orientations displayed patterns consistent with general theories of individual modernity. Urban residency, higher levels of education obtainment, and modern occupations all have a positive impact on the rise of modern values as defined by the "individual modernity" paradigm.

Thirdly, I introduce regression analyses to show value changes in China as affected by urbanization, education, and modern occupations. I will show, for example, whether those working in service jobs represent stronger modernist outlooks than those working in manual occupations and farming. Living in an urban environment, as well as acquiring

more schooling, seems to be a strong factor promoting a modern outlook among Chinese people.

From 1993 to 2011: Changes and Continuities

In all three surveys, a number of questions were included to measure the respondent's traditional vs. modern values. In the 1993 survey, 11 questions were used. Nine questions were used in the 2002 survey, and 14 were used in the 2011 survey. As a result, a few questions were included in all three surveys, providing an opportunity for comparison across the three time points. Table 1 shows the percentage of people showing pro-modern tendencies when responding to these questions at the three time points.

Table *1*

Percentage Changes between 1993 and 2011

Survey Statement	Percentage of disagreeing			
	1993	2002	2011	Change *
A. Ordered according to the scale of change 1993-2011				
One should not show off one's ability and knowledge.	36	67	n/a	+31
One should not insist on his or her opinion if people disagree with him/her.	36	48	53	+27
If one can only have one child, it is better to have a son than a daughter.	69	n/a	80	+11
We should let elder people resolve disputes	17	28	n/a	+11
One gets ahead in order to honor one's ancestors.	57	64	n/a	+7
It is embarrassing to take rewards for helping a friend to solve some issues.	28	32	n/a	+4
Children should always obey parents' demands.	64	66	65	+1
Wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate.	68	76	68	0
Jobs should be given to relatives and friends first even if a stranger is more qualified.	65	63	n/a	-2
A wife should always obey her mother-in-law.	42	46	39	-3

Table 1

Percentage Changes between 1993 and 2011 (Contd.)

Survey Statement	Percentage of disagreeing			
	1993	2002	2011	Change *
B. Ordered according to the strength of value at 1993				
We should let elder people resolve disputes	17	28	n/a	+11
It is embarrassing to take rewards for helping a friend to solve some issues.	28	32	n/a	+4
One should not show off one's ability and knowledge.	36	67	n/a	+31
One should not insist on his or her opinion if people disagree with him/her.	36	48	53	+27
A wife should always obey her mother-in-law.	42	46	39	-3
One gets ahead in order to honor one's ancestors.	57	64	n/a	+7
Children should always obey parents' demands.	64	66	65	+1
Jobs should be given to relatives and friends first even if a stranger is more qualified.	65	63	n/a	-2
Wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate.	68	76	68	0
If one can only have one child, it is better to have a son than a daughter.	69	n/a	80	+11

* When all three years' data were available (shaded ones), change is measured as between 1993 and 2011. Otherwise, it is measured as between 1993 and the second time it was asked, be it 2002 or 2011.

Table 1 shows evidence for both changes and continuities in Chinese people's values between 1993 and 2011. Between these two surveys, socioeconomic modernization advanced significantly in China. A long wave of economic transition and growth expanded throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, accompanied by large increases in urbanization, education obtainment, and industrialization and post-industrialization. According to official data, from around 1993 to 2011 urban residents increased from 26% to 52% of the population. In terms of education, the average years of education increased from 6.4 years

in 1990 to 7.85 years in 2000, and 9.05 years in 2010. In terms of industrialization and post-industrialization, in 1990 the primary, industrial, and service industries accounted for 31%, 27%, and 41%, of China's GDP, respectively, while by 2011, this changed to 10%, 47%, and 43%, respectively. There was a clear decline in the agricultural sector and a huge increase in the industrial sector.[2]   These changes were well captured by the samples this paper is analyzing. For example, the urban/rural residency was 21.4% and 78.5% in the 1993 sample. In the 2002 sample, however, originally urban residents made up 55% while the proportion of rural residents decreased to 45%. This sample was weighted so that the urban/rural proportion adjusted to 37/63. The 2011 sample first recorded a urban/rural ratio of 55/45, and is weighted to be 52/48. Education make-up and employment structure also changed between the 1993 and 2011 surveys.

Table 1 shows changes in value that take place in some common questions that were administered in two or all three of the surveys. In the upper panel of the table (Panel A), the questions are ranked according to the scale of change that had taken place, i.e., the far-right column. Four questions saw a change of more than ten percentage points toward a pro-modern direction. For example, the percentage of people disagreeing with the statement "one should not show off one's ability and knowledge" changed from 36% in 1993 to 67% in 2002 (not measured in 2011), while those rejecting the idea that "one should not insist on his or her opinion if people disagree" changed from 36% to 48% in between 1993 and 2002, and to 53% in 2011. Three more questions saw smaller but positive changes, while one question remained unchanged ("Children should always obey parents' demands"). Two statements saw a slight decrease in percentage of pro-modern people.

Panel B re-orders these questions according to their strengths as measured in 1993. It can be argued that, with the possible exception of the last statement (regarding a preference for boys in child bearing), those statements showing weaker pro-modern tendencies in 1993 tended to see bigger gains toward the pro-modern orientation through

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[2] All these figures are from China Statistical Yearbook, 2003, 2007, and 2013.

the years. In other words, in statements or value dimensions in which Chinese people showed a weaker modern orientation in 1993, in the years between these surveys we tend to find bigger changes toward the pro-modern direction. For example, regarding "We should let elder people resolve disputes," in 1993 only 17% rejected such a statement, but there is an 11 percentage point change by 2002. In contrast, for those statements that recorded a more pro-modern position in 1993, with about 60-70% of people showing pro-modern tendencies, in the 2002 or 2011 survey, not much change was found.

Research Results

Finding 1

Chinese people's values have changed in some dimensions during the period of rapid modernization between the 1990s and early 2010s, while remaining stable in some other dimensions.

Differentiation of Value Dimensions

Based on Table 1, it is difficult to argue which values are more likely to change and which are not. My analytical strategy now is to determine which values these survey questions are indeed measuring; therefore I employed factor analysis to see if certain underlying constructs would emerge. For the 1993 data, 8 of the total 11 questions load into one factor, while three other items did not go well with the potential value dimensions. The 1993 data therefore produces a one factor solution (Panel A in Table 2). Both the 2002 and 2011 data, by contrast, generate three separate factors, as reported in Panel B and Panel C, respectively.

Table 2

Differentiated Value Dimensions Extracted by Factor Analysis

A. Factor Extracted out of 1993 Data	Factor Loading
The main objective for us to get ahead in our life is to honor our ancestors.	.646
A couple should maintain their marriage even if they do not love each other anymore.	.644
Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children should still do what they ask.	.634
A wife should always obey her mother-in-law.	.618
Wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate.	.612
When there is a conflict, the best way to deal with it is to accommodate the other person.	.562
Jobs should be given to relatives and friends first even if a stranger is more qualified	.537
If there is a quarrel, we should ask an elder to resolve the dispute.	.430

B. **Factors Extracted out of 2002 Data**

Family Values	Factor Loading
Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children should still do what they ask.	.709
A wife should always obey her mother-in-law.	.687
For the sake of the family, an individual should put his personal interest second.	.438
Social Values	
When one has a conflict with a neighbor, the best way to deal with it is to accommodate the other person.	.606
If there is a quarrel, we should ask an elder to resolve the dispute.	.565
A person should not insist on his own opinion if his co-workers disagree with him.	.771
Professional Values	
Wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate.	.599
Jobs should be given to relatives and friends first even if a stranger is more qualified	.554
A man will lose face if he works under a female supervisor.	.632

Table 2

Differentiated Value Dimensions Extracted by Factor Analysis (Cont.)

C. Factors Extracted out of 2011 Data

	Factor Loading
(Anti-Patrimonalism)	
Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children should still do what they ask.	.657
Wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate.	.618
Being a student, one should not question the authority of the teacher.	.615
If one could have only one child, it is more preferable to have a boy than a girl.	.563
A wife should always obey her mother-in-law.	.499
Individualism	
For the sake of the family, the individual should put his personal interests second.	.678
When dealing with others, developing a long-term relationship is more important than immediate interests.	.645
When dealing with others, one should not only focus on his immediate interests but also plan for the future.	.613
In a group, we should sacrifice our individual interest for the sake of the group's collective interests.	.558
A person should not insist on his own opinion if his co-workers disagree with him.	.771
(Rejecting) Conflict Avoidance and Group Conformity:	
Even if there is some disagreement with others, one should avoid conflict.	.689
In a group, we should avoid open quarrel to preserve the harmony of the group.	.662
A person should not insist on his own opinion if his co-workers disagree with him. (also loads to factor 1)	.524
When dealing with others, one should not be preoccupied with temporary gains and losses. (also loads to factor 2)	.413

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

The eight questions that form one single factor in the 1993 dataset relate to various value dimensions, such as family, inter-gender relations, marriage, social issues (conflict with another person), and professional relations (hiring a relative vis-à-vis a non-related candidate, and the role of fate in one's life and career). They nonetheless form one single factor, which seems to mean that they capture the traditional-modern dimension in Chinese society very well. In fact, they had been well tested in earlier studies to measure traditional Chinese values in Taiwan. Hence this eight-question factor serves as a very good indicator of individual modernity in the Chinese context around 1993. Those who tend to reject more of these statements harbor a more modern outlook. A more modern mainland Chinese respondent around 1993, for example, tends to place less importance on honoring their ancestors, be less willing to maintain a broken marriage, while he or she is more supportive of gender equality. In family relationships, he or she certainly places more importance on children (and daughter-in-law)'s autonomy than parental demands. A more modern respondent would also tend to downplay the importance of fate, but instead emphasizes one's agency. Socially, such a person would reject having an elder solve a dispute, and is more willing to face a quarrel than simply accommodate the other party. When employing someone, he or she is more willing to first take the candidate's quality into account, instead of blindly favoring family members or relatives.

While the sample's responses to the eight questions form a coherent factor in 1993, interestingly, by 2002, this stops being the case. A factor structure emerged out of the 2002 data shows that Chinese respondents displayed three latent value orientations (Panel B, Table 2). Three of the survey questions captured people's orientations about family life, another three captured their social values, yet another three their professional values. In terms of family values, those with stronger modern values tend to reject the idea that a daughter-in-law should always obey her mother-in-law, that children should always obey parents' demands, and that an individual should sacrifice his or her personal interests for the sake of the family. In terms of social values, those with stronger modern values tend to reject the idea that an individual should try to accommodate his or her neighbor in a

conflict, that elders are more able to resolve people's disputes, and that one should not insist on his or her opinion if people around him or her disagree. In terms of professional values, those with stronger modern values tend to reject the idea that wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate, that one should consider hiring a relative or friend first even if a stranger is more qualified, and that a man will lose face if working under a female supervisor.

The 2011 dataset included a total of 14 questions to measure the respondents' modern vis-à-vis traditional values (although only five of them overlap with those asked in the 1993 survey). Three factors emerged with generally high loadings for variables represented by these questions (Panel C in Table 2). The underlying value dimensions of these factors, however, differ quite substantially from the three factors produced by the 2002 data. While the questions regarding family, social, and professional lives neatly form three separate factors in 2002, in 2011 this is no longer the case. Attitudes or values regarding family, social, and professional relations seem to mix with each other, and form into various clusters. Carefully reviewing the questions of each factor enable us to derive the underlying value represented by these factors.

1. (Rejection of) Patrimonialism: The first group of questions seems to measure a person's attitude or disposition regarding to patrimonialism----Those who agree with these statements represent a male-centric, hierarchical, and authority respecting orientation. For example, they tend to think children should always be obedient to parents, a student should not challenge the teacher, and a wife should obey her mother-in-law. They also prefer male descendants over female, and hold a strong belief in fate. A person rejecting these statements would be more in line with a modernist world view.

2. Individualism: The second group of questions would help differentiate an individualistic from a collectivist, group-oriented worldview. A modern orientation would mean a person disagrees with these statements, such as an individual should sacrifice for

the family or a collective, emphasize broader or longer goals over immediate ones, and maintain harmony with those who disagree.

3. (Rejection of) Conflict Avoidance and Group Conformity: Questions in the third factor reflect an individual's tendency toward conflict and group conformity. A traditionally-oriented worldview would tend to agree with these statements, i.e., to avoid conflict with others or quarrel with others in the same group, and to avoid disputes or conflict with co-workers. The last two questions also load on to either the first or the second factor, showing some overlapping of these three value dimensions.

That the three datasets produced clearly different factor structures may already represent a significant finding in itself. True, the set of survey questions employed in each survey differ from each other. But nonetheless, questions pointing to the same value dimensions are included in all three surveys. For example, questions that fall into the family, social, and professional value factors in 2002 were included in both the 1993 and the 2011 survey, while questions that fall into the partimonalism, individualism, and conflict avoidance/group conformity factors were included in both the 1993 and 2002 survey. If the public's responses to these questions had remained stable throughout the period covered by the three surveys, we would expect the three datasets to generate similar factor structures. The differentiations and variations of factor structures between 1993 and 2011 reflect changes that took place in the Chinese public's values during this period. The changing factor structures probably reflect the multi-dimensional nature of such value change: changes have taken place faster in some dimensions than others, and values have remained stable in some other dimensions. Such a mechanism would be reflected in the changed factor structures through the years: at one time point, a certain number of survey questions capture a latent value dimension. After a period of time, because value changes take place in different degrees in different value dimensions, the same set of questions would fail to form a coherent value factor, and new latent value dimensions have now emerged.

Another way to look at this is, in 1993, as the rapid modernization had just began in China, Chinese people held more or less homogenous values when it came to various dimensions of human, collective/communal/family, and professional life. Therefore, the 1993 survey shows various value statements extracting similar kinds of responses from any given individual respondent. Statistically, this means the large number of survey questions turned out to form one single factor. By 2002, the same individual's attitudes in regards to some of these statements have changed, and changed by a larger degree for some of these statements than in some others. As a result, a factor analysis on the same survey questions will lead to a different factor structure compared to 1993. The same process carries on between 2002 and 2011, resulting in another different factor structure then.

Finding 2

The changes and the various degrees of these changes in some value dimensions and continuity in some others in China between 1993 and 2011 are captured by the different factor structures resulting from the datasets collected at these time points based on a similar set of survey questions.

Cross-Sectional Differences

With these factor scores, we can compare the strengths of modern values among Chinese people as recorded in 1993, 2002, and 2011. The key findings of Inkeles, Broaded, and Cao (1997) from their 1990 data are: 1) urban residents in China showed weaker modernity scores comparing to rural residents, 2) education's impact on modernity level was marginal, and 3) professional or occupational backgrounds contradicted expected differences in individual modernity – that is, the individual modernity score of factory workers was lower than the farmers, for example. Now using modern value factors, we can re-test their findings. I will first look at the 1993 data in full detail, and then present the 2002 and 2011 data.

Figure 1 shows the differences in the modern value factor scores between various social groups of people. It includes the mean score of rural residents and that of urban residents, that of people with different levels of education, and that of people with different occupational backgrounds.

Figure 1

Value Differences according to people's rural-urban residency, education levels, and employment types, 1993
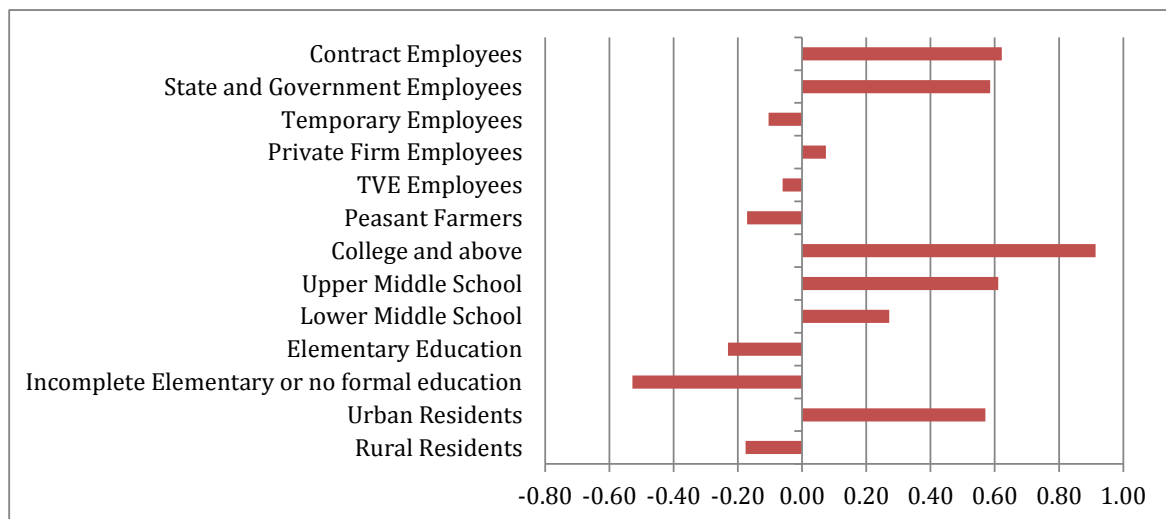
Rural-Urban Difference, 1993

From the 1993 data, the urban-rural differences are clear-cut. Urban residents hold stronger modern values than rural residents (the lowest two bars in Figure 1). Given the mathematical meaning of the factor score, the figure shows that rural residents' mean modern value score is below the national level (which is zero for a factor score). That of the urban residents, however, is above the national average by 0.6 standard deviations. The urban-rural differences are very consistent in the 2002 and 2011 datasets, therefore they will not be reported in the following figures.

Impacts of Education, 1993

I coded the sample's educational background into five categories: (1) lower than elementary (no formal education or incomplete elementary education); (2) elementary (complete elementary education); (3) lower middle (junior middle school education); (4) upper middle (senior middle school education); and (5) college and above.[3] Figure 1 clearly shows that the levels of Chinese people's modern values in 1993 were higher among people with higher levels of education. The people with no formal education or without a complete elementary education had the lowest modernity score levels, while those with college education or above have the highest. The national average seems to fall between those with complete elementary school and those with lower middle school education, as the mean factor score turns from negative to positive between these two groups. People with college or post-graduate education clearly hold the strongest modern values.

Occupational Differences, 1993

The 1993 survey recorded the respondent's occupational information in two ways. One question recorded the respondent's "type of employment." Based on this variable, all respondents' occupational background fell into the following categories:

Contractual Employee (hetong gong), with 110 reporting (3.3% of the whole sample)

Temporary Employee (linshi gong), with 120 reporting (3.7%)

State Employee (guojia zhengshi zhigong, including government officials-cadres), with 719 reporting (21.9%)

TVE (Township and Village Enterprise) Employees, with 81 reporting (2.5%)

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[3] This in 1993 included those who received their education from evening colleges, a category that was instrumental in expanding access to college education for a large portion of people in the 1980s.

Rural Farmers (61.3%)[4]

In Figure 1, from low to high, the order of Chinese citizens' modern values in 1993 goes as follows: farmers, temporary employees, TVE employees, people in private business (geti), state and government employees, and finally, contractual employees. Hence it shows that in the early 1990s, in terms of modern values, Chinese citizens fell into three groups: the rural farmers were the lowest, TVE employees and temporary employees in the cities were in the middle, and contract employees and SOE employees were the highest. This falls in line with general modernization theory arguments, that is, individual modernity increases as people move out of rural farming into manufacturing. Between the state sector and TVE, which is half-rural and half-industrial, the workforce in the state sector acquired higher individual modernity scores.

The reason that "contractual employees" demonstrated higher individual modernity scores was probably due to a trend that began in the early 1980s and continued through the early 1990s, which saw many of the most enterprising people leave their state jobs and move into newly emerged sectors, which hired people using contracts, then a rather new institution in Chinese human resource practice. The extreme example would be those moving to take newly available jobs in joint-ventures or foreign firms that were being set up in China's coastal cities, many of which opened to foreign capital in 1984. If this is the case, it supports the point that the economic reform and opening-up policies introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s resulted in higher labor mobility and a more efficient labor market. It also shows the market was a "sorting" institution that channeled those with higher modern values into the more dynamic foreign and private sector.

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[4] 2015 respondents reported "Not Applicable," accounting for the whole sample. These are apparently those not employed in any manufacturing or service industries, hence I coded them as rural farmers. Six point two percent of the sample reported their employment type as "other;" they are not included in this analysis due to lack of further information to classify them. Thirty-nine respondents reported their employment type as "private enterprise employees" (siying qiye gugong). I excluded this category from analyses because it accounted for only 1.2% of the whole sample and is too small a proportion for statistical analysis.

Cross-Sectional differences, 2002 and 2011

The 2002 and 2011 datasets present more complicated cross-sectional patterns in value difference. In short, because each dataset resulted in three dimensions of values, the cross-sectional pattern may differ from one dimension (e.g., social values) to another (e.g., professional values). Figure 2 shows the comparisons for the 2002 data. The comparisons are presented in three panels in the Figure.

Figure 2

Different levels of modern family, social, and professional values among different educational and occupational groups.
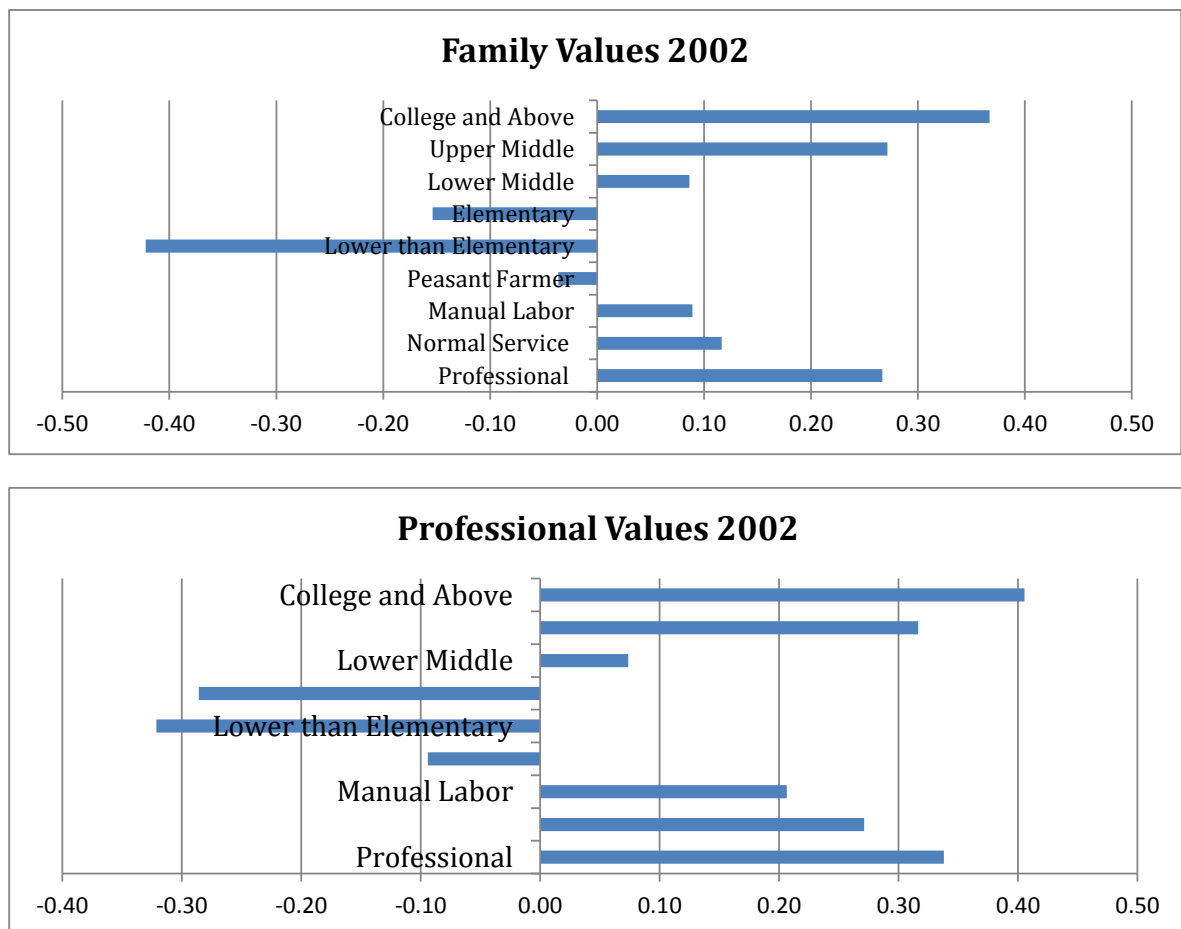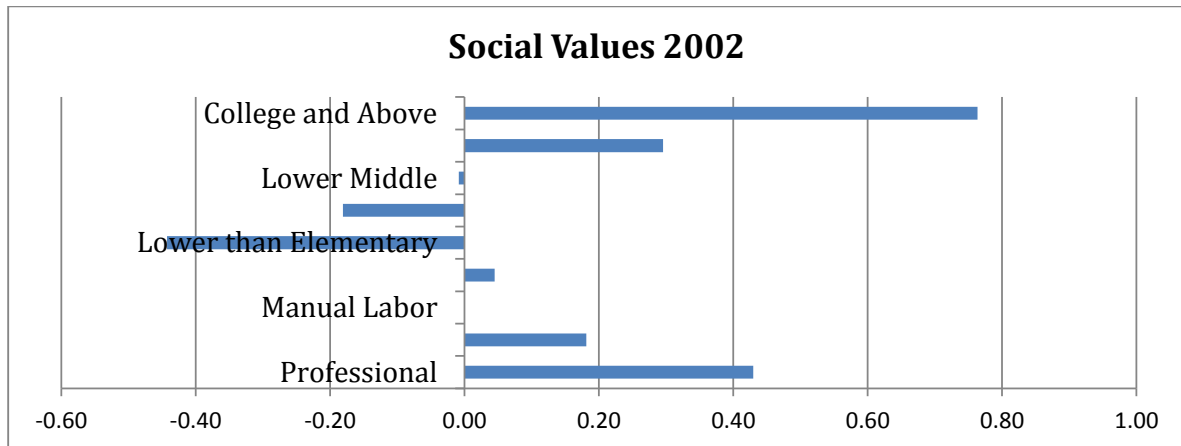
Figure 2

Different levels of modern family, social, and professional values among different educational and occupational groups. (Contd.)


Urban-Rural differences are very clear for the 2002 data, therefore to save space, I omitted all figures related to these differences. The three panels in Figure 2 present the cross-sectional differences regarding education and occupation. In all three value dimensions, the strength rises from people with lower levels of education to those with higher levels of education, and from those in the primary economic sector (agriculture) to the industrial, service, and professional/managerial sectors. The trend is consistent with the modernization/individual modernity theories, which predict these values to be stronger among the more educated, more urban, and more knowledge-intensive occupations.

The picture is much less clear as presented by the 2011 dataset. Again, I produced three panels to display the cross-sectional differences of values. The 2011 survey did not register the respondents' occupational information in China, therefore only education-related differences are captured (Figure 3). (The urban-rural difference, again not presented here, is clear, in that urban residents show stronger pro-modern values in all three value dimensions).

Figure 3

Educational differences in modern values, 2011

Rejecting Patrimonalism 2011

Rejecting Conformity 2011

Embracing Individualism 2011
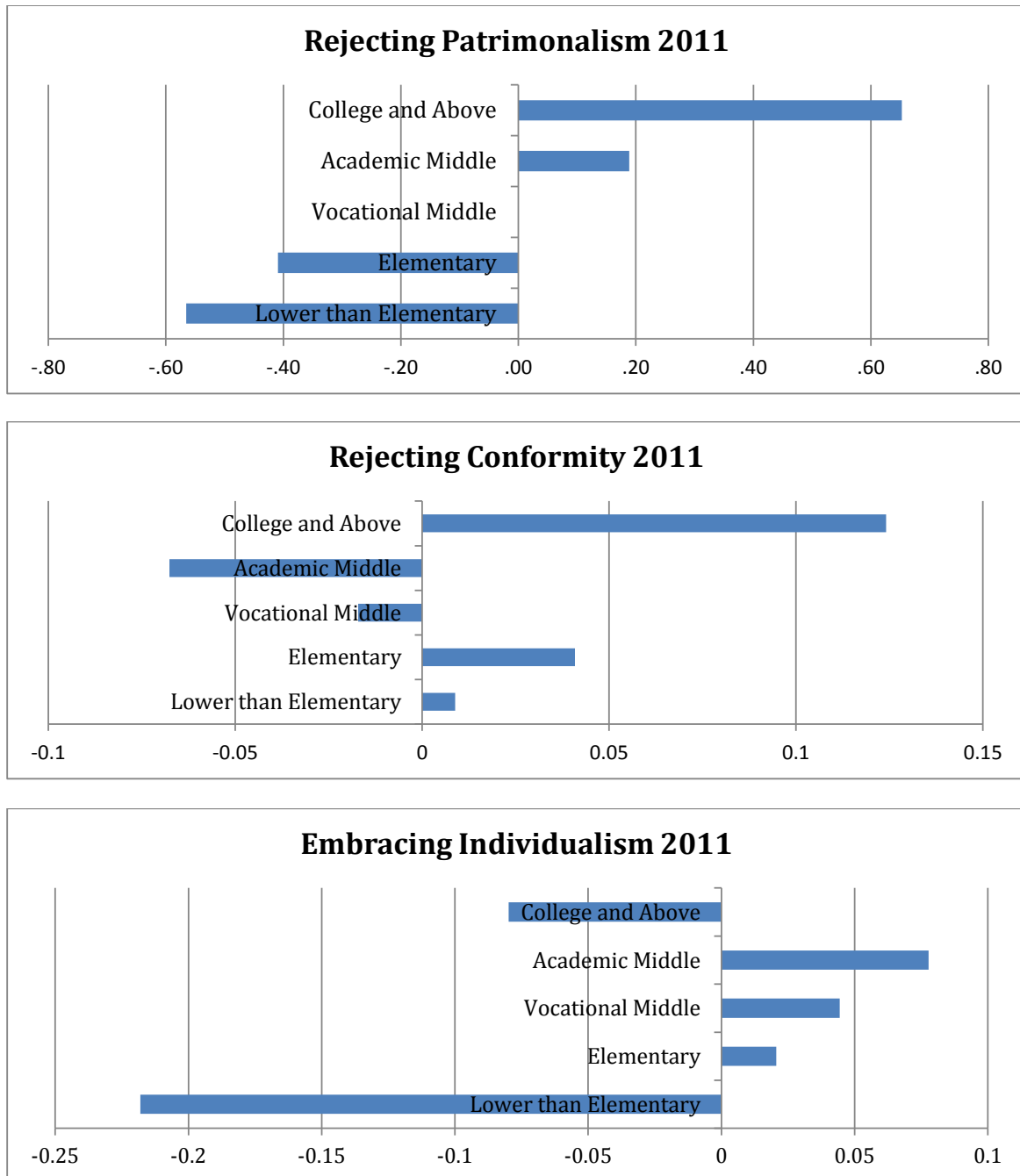
Regarding the tendency to reject partrimonialism (Panel 1, Figure 3), the trend is consistent with the individual modernity theory, i.e., the more educated people clearly demonstrate stronger pro-modern tendencies. In terms of rejecting group conformity or embracing individualism (Panels 2 and 3), however, the trend is highly complicated. Panel 2 shows that from those with less than a complete elementary education to those with lower middle education, the tendency to reject conformity increases. However, people with an upper middle school education and those with a college education show a rather weak tendency in rejecting conformity. That finding is highly puzzling. Panel 3 shows a similar pattern, from low to high education levels, the tendency to embrace individualism increases, but up to a point. College-educated people display a weak tendency in embracing individualism.

Finding 3

Toward the 2010s, the impact of education on various dimensions of modern values appears to be complex. Not every type of modern values changes in the same direction as an individual's level of education increases.

Multivariate Analyses

The analysis so far shows that urban residents show higher modernity levels (measured by factor scores) than rural residents, as did more educated than less-schooled, and employees in the urban state sector than those in the collective and rural firms. T-tests confirmed the significance of these differences.[5] To further this inquiry, I introduced multivariate regressions, to examine how these different factors work together to determine the strength of modern values among different types of Chinese citizens. When there is only one modern value factor (the 1993 case), I used one dependent variable. In the cases of 2002 and 2011, where three modern value factors have emerged, I conducted regression analysis on all three value dimensions (family values, social values, and professional values). To find out the modernizing effects on these values, the regression models included the socioeconomic variables such as urban residency, level of education, employment or occupational types, and age (generation). Depending on the availability of data, some of these concepts were operationalized differently when analysis was done on the datasets from different years.

Urban Residency and Education

To avoid technicalities, I only report the sign of the coefficients and the level of significance (Table 3). Urban Residency and Education seem to be the most consistent variables differentiating the strengths of modern values. This is the most obvious in the

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[5] There are cases in which the t-scores were not significant, but those did not negate the overall finding.

1993 data. The regression results showed that, around that time point, more educated and urban residents hold significantly stronger modern values than other members of the society. After these two factors were controlled, other factors seem to not matter much. The very clear advantages enjoyed by the state and contract employees as displayed in Figure 1 vis-à-vis other employment types seemed to have been explained by the education levels and urban residence of these two employment groups.

Table 3

Regressions on Modern Value 1993, 2002, 2011

Dependent Variables	1993	2002			2011		
	Modern Values	Family Values	Social Values	Profess-ional Values	Reject Partri-monalism	Indivi-dualism	Reject Conflict Avoidance
(Constant)	-***	-***	-***	-***	+**	-	-α
Male	+	-***	-**	-	-	+	+*
Age	-	+	+**	+	+***	-	-
Age Square	+	+***	-	-*	+**	+	+
Urban	+***	+***	+	+*	+α	-	-
Years of Formal Education	+***	+***	+***	+***	+***	-	-
State employee (farmers=0)	+						
Contract Employee (farmers=0)	+α						
Private Employees (farmers=0)	-						
TVE employees (farmers=0)	-*						
Temporary Employees (farmers=0)	-						
Managerial/Profess-ional (farmers=0)		+	-	-			
Ordinary Service Job (farmers=0)		+	-	-			
Manual worker (farmers=0)		+	-	-			
Control Age Cohorts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R-Square	.220	.070	.134	.131	.124	.012	.005
N	2698	2222	2222	2222	2713	2713	2713

* α<.05 ** α <.01, *** α <.001, ᵃ, α<.1
Data source: China Social Mobility and Social Values Survey, 1993; Asian Barometer, 2002, 2011, China.

Generational Effects

Another significant finding is that the youngest generation entering the population during the 1980s showed higher levels of modern values comparing to older generations. The socioeconomic changes of the 1980s and early 1990s have already socialized a new generation of Chinese citizens. In the 1993 data, those born after 1980 had not grown up. The 2002 and 2011 datasets, however, both show clear generational patterns. As Table 3 shows, younger people appear to hold stronger modern values in two 2002 models and one 2011 model. Nevertheless, age fails to show significant effects in two 2011 models and one 2002 model.

The findings may appear weak if only education and urban residency have a consistent effect on modern values. The generally hypothesized effects of occupation, for example, failed to materialize. But the explanation arises from how the regression models work. In fact, if these variables are introduced into the models by blocks, the fuller story emerges. Across all three value dimensions for the 2002 data, for example, when the first block includes sex and urban residency, the results show that males are less modern than females, and urban residents are more modern than rural residents, with both differences being highly significant. Next, when occupational backgrounds are introduced, the models clearly show that people in management and professional jobs are significantly more modern than those working as farmers. Next, when generation variables are included, the models show that the 1970s and 1980s generations are clearly more modern than the 1930s generation, again across all three value dimensions. All this changes remain when education is introduced into the models. Sex still plays a significant role in two of the value dimensions: males are more traditional than females when it comes to family values and social values. In addition, the 1980s-generation is more modern than the 1930s-generation in terms of social values. Other than these, it is only education that makes a big difference. (The multi-stage regression models available upon request).

Besides these regression results, the important role of education in shaping people's outlooks can be shown in a much simpler way. In our 2002 dataset, considering the statement "When hiring someone, even if a stranger is more qualified, the opportunity should still be given to relatives and friends," Among the people with a lower than elementary education, 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The figure is 87% for those with a college or above education. Considering the statement: "Wealth and poverty, success and failure are all determined by fate," the rejection rate is 97% for those with a college or above education, and only 53% for those with a lower than elementary education.[6]

The central role of education in accounting for changes in people's values and behaviors, as indicated by these regression results, traces back to some very strong previous scholarship. Educational sociologists, political sociologists, and political psychologists all pointed out that education helps define people's value through two paths. On the one hand, the education experience fundamentally shapes an individual's outlook and behavior according to a generally defined modern, urban, and civic vision. On the other hand, education helps place individuals into more modern, urban, and socially and politically engaging positions in society. More educated individuals take up jobs and have a life in more knowledge intensive, dynamic, and complex environments, hence acquiring values and behaviors more in line with what sociologists and political scientists define as modernist or civic (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996).

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[6] Interestingly, compared to the cohorts born before 1940, those born between 1950 and 1980 somehow show lower levels of modernist values (that is, after controlling education and other variables). Such differences are actually significant in one dimension, Professional Values. Several explanations may be offered. First, those born before 1950 were largely socialized in the early years of the New China (1949-1966), before the catastrophic Cultural Revolution set in. China in the mid- to late-1950s actually enjoyed a period of rapid industrialization and a stable social environment. Hence this "New China Generation" shows stronger modernist values in our data. A contrasting explanation would be that those born in the 1950s and 1960s grew up during the chaotic era of the Cultural Revolution, hence suffering a serious loss in the acquisition of more urban, modernist outlooks. Hence it may be that the "New China Generation" benefited from the relatively bright and forward-looking 1950s, or it may be that the Cultural Revolution years have led to a lost generation or two. Or, both factors might be at work.

Finding 4

The changes to people's values toward modernity is most importantly a result of education; and education affects people through two mechanisms: by affecting people's values directly and by placing people in more modern social and professional positions in the society.

Discussions and Conclusions

Whether socio-economic changes brought about by economic development has led to value changes in China has been the main focus of this paper. The general debate in social sciences tends to argue that such changes will take place, and they will take place in patterns comparable to those found in other settings. In developing societies from Turkey to India to Mexico, for example, earlier scholarship pointed to patterns of value change that take place when a society moves from rural to urban, from farming to industry, and from low literacy to widespread education. The cultural and institutional contexts of individual societies may differ, and such differences will help shape the specific ways in which value changes take place. In this regard, value changes may occur in path-dependent ways (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). This is why empirical research continues to identify the "persistence of the tradition" or "Asian Values" when trying to apply a general paradigm to specific cases. That is also why scholars like Yang Kuo-Shu argue that the meaning of "modernity" needs to be developed endogenously.

While Inkeles, Broaded, and Cao (1997) found, based on data collected in 1992 in northern China's Tianjin City and the countryside nearby, that urbanization, rising education, and participation in non-farm jobs, did not help make Chinese citizens more modern, using three nationally representative datasets collected between 1993 and 2011, I found no anomalies in Chinese citizens' values. Instead, the patterns of Chinese citizens' value changes are fully explainable by general modernization or individual modernity

theories: those benefiting from urbanization, rising levels of education, and the expansion of non-farm, knowledge-based industries display stronger modern values. This is so in every value dimension: family, marriage, and social and professional lives. Continuity and stability do exist in certain value dimensions, but they represent no contradiction to general theories of value changes.

In general, by 2002, lingering institutional impacts from the Maoist past have completely disappeared. The 2002 data, especially, display a perfectly normal picture in China. If individual modernity is measured holistically using factor scores, those who live in an urban environment, with more education, and work in more knowledge-intensive jobs, clearly harbor stronger modern values. Furthermore, it appears those brought up in the late 1970s and the 1980s show clearly stronger modernist outlooks, indicating that the long-term trend of value change in China might follow a "generational shift" pattern that has characterized the 1970s and 1980s in industrial societies (Inglehart, 1990). The urban-rural difference can largely explain away the differences found between non-farm employees and rural farmers. In turn, large portions of the differences brought by urban residence and income rise can be accounted for by the rise in education levels: those more educated are more likely to live in urban areas and earn higher incomes, and vice versa.

The actual "meaning" of being modern, however, must be continuously debated. My analysis shows that, at different time points, the Chinese public's values form into very different clusters and dimensions. The survey tools we use to measure values must continue to evolve, and they are very likely to generate different empirical results regarding the same value constructs when applied in different countries and societies. This paper therefore only attempts to point to the importance of continuous empirical attention to the questions of values and value change, while urging caution against sitting comfortably on a small number of general beliefs that were based on a fixed conceptual framework as well as empirical data collected from within certain geographical and cultural limits.

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