

Nation-State Contexts and Authoritarian Value Changes of Ethnic Chinese

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The recent global populist wave has reignited interest in how authoritarianism gains momentum in different nation-state contexts. A central question remains: under which conditions do individuals abandon or embrace authoritarian values? In the context of ethnic Chinese, this paper argues that Confucianism still plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes and values. Specifically, it asserts that the Confucian value of meritocracy maintains importance in the ethnic Chinese value system. The study utilized the Chinese social media platform WeChat to deploy a four-question, snowball sample survey of 1,763 ethnic Chinese in seven regions from around the globe to evaluate their levels of authoritarianism. It tested six hypotheses derived from previous theories concerning assimilation, individual/ family resources, group competition, communist influence, and generational gap. The empirical results, however, provide the strongest support for the theory of meritocratic and conditional authoritarianism, which suggests that ethnic Chinese around the world will become more authoritarian when they perceive a threat to their status quo and will become less authoritarian when they perceive threats to their upward mobility.

Keywords: ethnic Chinese, authoritarianism, political culture, immigration, meritocracy

Introduction

The recent success of populist movements in Western countries has led to a new wave of scholarly interest in the effect of authoritarianism on the performance of electoral systems and the fate of democracy itself (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, Liu et al. 2020, Müller 2016, Pettigrew 2016). Though many scholars concur that the authoritarian value system consists of some key ingredients, such as the insistence on value conformity and reliance on "right" authority (Adorno et al. 1950, Altemeyer 1996, Stenner 2005), one major disagreement among scholars is whether authoritarianism is a predisposition determined by personality, or it is, in fact, a product of societal conditions. In other words, are certain people born with authoritarian traits? Or are all people more or less authoritarian dependent upon the circumstances? Scholars who study authoritarianism as a predisposition tended to treat authoritarianism as an independent variable and focus on *who* in

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democracies and *which* authoritarian regimes are likely to help put authoritarian political figures, such as Donald Trump, in power. For these scholars, people with an authoritarian disposition may live in any culture or political system. People of an authoritarian disposition are different from the rest of the population because they react to threats differently from others, and they may even have some cognitive differences (Stenner 2005).

More recently, the literature on authoritarianism has moved away from the predispositional approach. For example, using the survey data from the American National Election Studies, Hetherington and Weiler (2009) stated that "When those scoring lower in authoritarianism do perceive a significant threat, we suggest that they are not heroic, small 'd', democrats. In fact, under such conditions, their preferences on issues become indistinguishable from those who score high in authoritarianism" (Hetherington and Weiler 2009, p. 7). The reason why threats may "reduce the difference in preferences between the more and less authoritarian" is because threats force the less authoritarian to use "instinct" rather than "cognition". In doing so, they became authoritarians who always seek order, security, and safety through authority (Hetherington and Weiler 2009, p. 110).

According to Hetherington and Weiler (2009), a community may become more authoritarian as more members of the community perceive specific threats. The same community may become less authoritarian as the perception of the threats fades from the memories of its members. Nevertheless, one question remains: what types of threats tend to make a community more authoritarian? To put it differently, is it possible that some threats may make authoritarianism less attractive, or even offensive, to members of a community, thus reducing the level of authoritarianism in the community? Arguably, people do not always appeal to authority when they perceive threats. But under what conditions are they likely to rely on non-authoritarian values to cope with threats? This question is difficult to answer. Two factors have limited the scope of the past research on authoritarianism, including Hetherington and Weiler (2009).

First, most members of a community who share the same value system only live in one nation-state context. For example, Americans may already have a particular value system, e.g., egalitarianism, which limits the chance of Americans to become authoritarian (King and Smith 2005). However, one cannot generalize the findings from the American nation-state context to other contexts where the political culture may be drastically different from the American one rooted in its White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant (WASP) culture. Second, to study the possibility of the different threat-based-effects on authoritarianism, dependent upon the types of threats, one cannot just simply engage in a comparative study of different nations (e.g., Stenner 2005). A multi-national study may obtain empirical results that are only concomitant to different cultures instead of different types of threats. Even for those nations who share deep cultural roots, e.g., those western, traditionally Protestant, European countries, or those Eastern Asian, traditionally Confucian, countries with arguably varied national characters may be significantly different, which will contribute to any observed differences between each country.

One way to address the aforementioned limitations is to study migrants who left their home country and live in a different nation-state. The advantage is that

these migrants have subjected themselves to at least two cultural influences (i.e., home country and a host country). However, if a study only focuses on migrants, a problem may still exist because the comparison with the home country may not persist over time in the host country. In this case, it is impossible to evaluate whether a more or less authoritarian position is due to assimilation into a new culture. Furthermore, it is also significant to compare the migrants from the same home country to different nation-states to study whether the new nation-state contexts matter to them in terms of increasing or decreasing authoritarian values.

This study is designed to remedy the limitations of the past research on authoritarianism by empirically investigating the ethnic Chinese in not only Mainland China but also other six regions of the globe (i.e., overseas Chinese). This study is interested in the comparison of ethnic Chinese in different nation-state contexts. Overseas Chinese, broadly speaking, may include descendants of earlier migration waves in Southeast Asia, the United States, and Australia, or it may include Chinese citizens who have migrated abroad, maintaining their Chinese citizenship. According to this definition of ethnic Chinese, the largest Chinese populations overseas are in Indonesia (8 million), Thailand (7.5 million), Malaysia (6.5 million), Singapore (5.2 million), the Philippines (1.2 million), and Myanmar (1 million) in 2011. According to the 2017 data from the U.N. (the Migration Policy Institute), the top destinations for Chinese migrants that host more than 100,000 Chinese are the following countries: United States (2.42 million), Hong Kong (2.34 million), Japan (0.74 million), Canada (0.71 million), South Korea (0.61 million), Australia (0.47 million), Singapore (0.46 million), United Kingdom (0.21 million), Italy (0.2 million), Bangladesh (0.17 million), Spain (0.16 million), France (0.11 million), and Germany (0.1 million). Surprisingly, Southeast Asian countries (except for Singapore) are absent from the countries that host more than 100,000 Chinese, according to the 2017 estimates. The recent migration patterns demonstrate the Chinese's preference to migrate to developed countries in the West or East (e.g., Japan, South Korea, and Singapore). This research primarily focuses on how Chinese immigrants in the West may or may not change their value orientation to more or less authoritarian. It first reviews the literature on the Chinese political culture in Mainland China, where these Chinese immigrants originate.

Confucianism and Authoritarianism

Confucianism is a primary source of civilization for ethnic Chinese. In his landmark study of major competing civilizations in the modern world, Samuel Huntington classified the East Asian countries as those practicing Confucianism originated in China (Huntington 1996). The authoritarian tendency of Confucianism manifests itself through its emphasis on a hierarchical society; important examples are: *Junwang* (*junwang* 君王 rulers as hold authority over to their ranked officials *chen* 臣), *Fuqin* (*fu* 父 fathers hold authority to their sons *zi* 子), and *Zhangfu* (*zhangfu* 丈夫 husbands hold authority over their wives *qizi* 妻子). Also, Confucianism in practice has adopted a clearly defined system of social

customs centered on good manners and community rituals of Han China. Despite the pressure of westernization and democratization since the last period of the Qing Dynasty, the political system in China has gone through "many forms of authoritarianism" (Huntington 1996, p. 66), and the most recent version is the "one-party-dominant authoritarian system" (Huntington 1996, p. 219).

To equate Confucianism, or the Chinese civilization in general, with authoritarianism completely fails to capture the rich contents of Chinese political culture and the nuanced effects of Confucianism, which has been revised many times throughout Chinese history. Scholars such as Fukuyama (1995) argued that Confucianism, as one form of traditional values, may embrace liberal democracy during the process of modernization. Bell (2015) recently proposed that a unique effect (even a defining feature) of Confucian thought on social, economic, and political progress is much more salutary than the prevailing opinion of western scholars. The main reason that people need to consider the Chinese political culture as a realistic and productive, and perhaps even a better alternative than the western-style "one person, one vote" democratic principle, is that the Chinese cultural tradition has always prioritized meritocracy.

This research revisits the new theoretic perspective of Bell on China's meritocratic tradition in a later section of this article. It is imperative, at this point, to examine the rapid changes both inside and outside Mainland China that may have led to more or less authoritarian attitudes among ethnic Chinese beyond the limit of Confucianism. First, the study focuses on the effect of assimilation of Chinese immigrants into other cultures.

Immigration, Assimilation, and Ethnic Chinese Authoritarianism

Park and Burgess (1921, p. 734) defined assimilation as "the process by which the culture of a community or a country is transmitted to an adopted citizen", and for immigrants' assimilation "is a process of denationalization". If Chinese immigrants are successful in this assimilation process, they become "denationalized" from their homeland culture (Confucian thoughts) to be assimilated to the dominant culture in the host society (e.g., the WASP egalitarian culture in the USA). If the assimilation thesis is correct, one would expect that the Chinese immigrants become less authoritarian than their counterparts in Mainland China who have never left the home country.

The assimilation process, as historians repeatedly remind us, is not merely a one-way train running out of its original station. The complexity of who gets assimilated and by whom often takes on the dynamics of group politics. Gordon (1964) conceived assimilation as the maintenance or loss of group identity affecting "friendship patterns, organizational affiliations, civic participation, self-identification, value conflict, and value integration, political life, prejudice and discrimination" (Gordon 1964, p. 8). For Gordon, successful assimilation is not solely measured by its process. More importantly, it is about how the assimilation ends. He concludes that assimilation is only complete when in the interaction between the immigrant groups and the host society's prejudice and discrimination

are absent (Gordon 1964, p. 63). If one adopts this view of assimilation, there is abundant evidence against the smooth transition of Confucian thought to Western societies' more egalitarian values for millions of Chinese immigrants, as evidenced by Chinese immigrants have historically been discriminated against as a racial and ethnic minority in Western societies (Lien 2001, Zhou 2009).

What are the factors that may slow down the assimilation process or even reverse it into a re-discovery of the homeland values among immigrants? More relevant to this research is: who among the ethnic Chinese immigrants in Western societies may become even more authoritarian after they migrate to a host country such as the USA, Canada, Australia, or other European countries? In this vein, the literature on other ethnic immigrants may help shed some light on this question. For example, in the United States, ethnic minorities have been found to have higher levels of authoritarianism compared to the white majority (Austin et al. 1987, Varela et al. 2004). Dornbusch et al. (1987) found that Black and Latino parents applied a higher level of authoritarian parenting than do white parents. One possible explanation for such a disparity in parenting is reportedly the lower socio-economic status and education level among the minority families (Noel and Pinkney 1964). The findings on lower-class authoritarianism within the ethnic minority communities are in line with the general findings of the masses in all Western societies, which were presented noticeably in Lipset's (1959) classic work *Political Man*. According to Lipset, "the lower-class individual is likely to have been exposed to punishment, lack of love, and a general atmosphere of tension and aggression since early childhood", which contributes to the authoritarian orientation (Lipset 1959, p. 114).

Based on the empirical results of the experimental design and a sample of 273 participants from various racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Henry (2011, p. 419) rejected the notion that ethnic minority endorsement of authoritarianism is "a function of lack of sophistication or cognitive simplicity". The reason why authoritarianism may be especially potent for ethnic minorities is because of its "psychological vigilance or protective quality" (Henry 2011, p. 423). In short, the authoritarian thoughts may be especially useful for minorities to manage the effects of "chronic stigmatization" and authoritarianism, in particular, serves as a "self-regulatory process" for the "stigmatized" groups (Henry 2011, p. 433).

Authoritarianism may also find echoes from the individuals who have the so-called "superiority complex", which was vividly depicted in Chua and Rubenfeld (2014). According to them, there are certain minority groups, including the Chinese, who have achieved unprecedented successes in the USA despite their historical minority status. Superiority (i.e., in their culture and their achievements) and impulse control (e.g., strict rules on conduct) are the two essential characteristics that make them successful. The Asians in general and the Chinese, in particular, are the so-called "model minority" in the post-1965 immigration era in the USA. Amy Chua documented, in detail, how she raised her two daughters in the Chinese authoritarian way (Chua 2011). Disagreeing with Western parents who "try to respect their children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions, supporting their choices, and providing positive reinforcement and a

nurturing environment", the Chinese "just have a totally different idea" of how to raise their children (Chua 2011, p. 63). Two critical components of Chua's Chinese parenting, both of which show an authoritarian orientation, are ultimate control of playtime and the ultimate authority of parents on educational priorities.

In sum, the literature on assimilation and ethnic minorities in Western societies call for competing hypotheses concerning how an immigrant from China who was primarily influenced by Confucianism may or may not become less authoritarian than his/her counterparts who remained in China. The classic assimilation theory (Gordon 1964, Park and Burgess 1921) would expect:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): a Chinese immigrant who chooses a Western country as his/her host country may become less authoritarian due to the denationalization process and the completed integration into the Western egalitarian value systems.

On the other hand, a resource model (Lipset 1959) suggests that:

H2: an ethnic Chinese with fewer resources (represented by lower SES and/or limited cognitive capability) may become more authoritarian than his/her fellow co-ethnics in Western societies.

Furthermore, a more nuanced understanding of immigrant experiences suggests that whether one becomes more authoritarian is related to how he/she perceives the relative position of his/her group in a host society. We call this expectation the group competition hypothesis (Hypothesis 3), which states:

H3: the higher the perception of being "stigmatized" (Henry 2011) or "superior" compared to other groups, the higher the level of value changes to authoritarianism.

Authoritarianism and the Political Changes in Mainland China

Lung-kee Sun, a renowned historian of the 20th-century Chinese culture, has repeatedly warned the danger of over-simplification of Western scholarships on China, especially its exaggeration of the Confucian influence in China's modern history. The penchant for degeneration theories, which devalued Confucianism in the global context, for example, was a major force among the May Fourth intellectuals in the first thirty years of the 20th century, among whom Lu Xun, as a national salvationist and an icon, constantly derided the "stupidity" of the traditional Chinese thoughts (Sun 2002). The numerous struggles in finding the appropriate Western ideas (or tools) to help China's modernization eventually led to the political domination of Leninist-style communism.

One line of research suggests that individuals who experienced a communist political legacy (especially the Leninist legacy) would hold more authoritarian values (Jowitt 1992). This legacy includes civic politics, Stalinist economics, egalitarian social structures, and norms (Kopstein 2003). Communism surpasses other authoritarian regime types in its project to add a supplemental layer of political socialization to its citizens as opposed to merely ruling over citizens.

Communist citizens must transcend mere compliance, and they must adopt and integrate socialism into their political worldviews. Communist regimes implemented systematic programs to restructure societal life using socialist precepts through party-controlled education systems, party integration in the workplace, and party meetings (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017). The eventual goal is to create the ideologically-inculcated, class-conscious "Socialist Man" (Deutscher 1967). Arguably, the Chinese Communist Party took this socialization one step further by emphasizing absolute selflessness, nationalism, and Maoist thought, all of which contributed to the authoritarian leadership style (Chen 1969). Pye (1992) explains the Chinese acceptance of communism based on the psychological need espoused by Confucianism to mitigate emotional pressure in order to create social harmony, which in turn created an ideology that dictated proper behavior in all aspects of social life and a clear hierarchical authority with specifically Mao as a father figure. For Lieberthal (1995), authoritarian socialization is particularly strong within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as Mao organized the governing party with a mixture of traditional Confucian cultural norms, Stalinist organization, and his vision for China.

The communist-style leadership under Mao, however, did not always lead to the strengthening of authoritarianism at the mass level. Mao almost singlehandedly launched his radical agenda of the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s-1970s. Targeted at the long-term adverse effect of the Confucius values, particularly the "Four Olds" (old customs, old cultures, old ideas, old habits), Maoism called for egalitarian principles that favored the poor and less powerful at the expense of the authority (Perry 2012). In sum, the influence of communism and its continued success in post-Mao China seemed to lead to two opposing hypotheses—

H4A: on the one hand, an individual that resided in Mao's communist China may be expected to exhibit a high level of authoritarianism, which stresses the forms of obeying publicly and reverence to authority (Chien 2016).

H4B: on the other hand, an individual that resided in Mao's communist China may be expected to possess an egalitarian value or less authoritarian tendency, which encourages the challenge to an authority that is considered to be against the masses.

Egalitarian values may be further incorporated into the new political culture in the post-Mao era. This is primarily due to the historical success of Deng Xiaoping's opening-up and reform policies after the death of Mao in China. The rapid economic development in China has integrated China into global economic systems. Along with unprecedented economic success, China has witnessed the influx of Western popular culture, sports, and new social customs. The egalitarian and democratic values associated with the call for political reform may have shaped the new political culture in China to be much less authoritarian in the post-Mao era. The fifth hypothesis (H5) concerns the generational gap in China:

H5 expects that the younger-generation Chinese, especially those who were born in post-Mao China, are less likely than the older Chinese to be authoritarian.

Meritocracy and Conditional Authoritarianism: A New Theory of Chinese Political Culture

After a critical review of the applications of previous theories on authoritarianism concerning ethnic Chinese, this section proposes a new theoretical model to study authoritarianism in the global ethnic Chinese communities. This new theory attempts to resolve some competing, sometimes conflicting, expectations of the previous theories, as discussed above. It aims to establish a unified model that can explain not only the variations inside China about who is authoritarian and who is not but also the differences seen in ethnic Chinese communities across the globe. In other words, the theory asks in what contexts ethnic Chinese become more or less authoritarian after they are exposed to a new culture such as WASP egalitarianism in English-speaking countries. This new theory will bring a new light on these tough questions. In doing so, it borrows insights from the previous theories reviewed above.

Moreover, the model presented in this paper was inspired by a new scholarly work on China by Bell (2016). Different from other Western scholars such as Samuel Huntington, who discussed how the Confucian thoughts in China (or in the global Chinese communities called *Hanren* 汉人) may negatively lead to the authoritarian and/or other values that are contrary to the democratic (and more Western) values, Bell calls attention to a unique aspect of Confucianism that may produce some salutary effects on progress. For Bell, the defining feature of the Chinese political culture and the dominant norm of its political system is a meritocracy. Bell identified three components of meritocratic principles that have been used in Chinese history to select government officials, which are superior performance in exams, proved social skills, and good virtue. According to Bell, meritocracy is the main reason why China has experienced rapid economic growth, and the stability of China's political system persists in the Post-Mao era. To change the meritocratic rule of its political system to any alternatives, including the Western democratic rule of "one person, one vote", will only lead to disasters for China as well as the rest of the globe.

Meritocracy has worked in China because it reflects its culture and tradition and is a universally recognized and accepted social norm in the Chinese communities. In other words, the Chinese are meritocrats in their "habits of the heart" by using Tocqueville's terminology on social mores. However, are the Chinese meritocrats are authoritarians who value authority and obedience over independence and equality? Bell did not provide a clear answer in his recent book. A natural corollary of reading deeply into the Confucian thoughts leads to the logical connection between meritocracy and authoritarianism. For instance, Confucius himself famously argued that "A good scholar who studies with relative ease can become an official" (*xue er you zi shi* 学而优则仕), and the Confucian tradition of official rank as the sole criterion as one's worth (*guan benwei* 官本位) makes a strong case that the Confucian belief connects merits in the academy with earning a position in government which in turn adds one's stake in government authority. Indeed, as Bell remarked that in China's meritocratic system, a natural

question is whether it is "really possible to structure political meritocracy so that it is seen as legitimate by the people and avoids the abuses of authoritarian rule" (Bell 2016, p. 2).

The abuses of an authoritarian rule can turn a meritocrat against government authority. This is because meritocrats are especially sensitive to how they are treated by an authority. If there is clear evidence that an individual of merits is prevented from having the opportunities for upward mobility, then the whole political system, and especially the government officials in power, can be considered an injustice. It is in this sense that the Chinese meritocratic value system has had deep roots in egalitarianism instead of authoritarianism. Even under the authoritarian rule of Mao, the communist government was fully aware of the power of the masses. As Wenfang Tang (2016) observed, the adoption of the so-called "Mass Line" policy allowed "political activism" and even "mass protests" against the "corrupted" authority, especially at the local government level (also see Distelhorst and Fu 2019). Indeed, the part of the stability of political regime since Mao is rooted in the meritocratic tradition in China.

Now, this study is ready to derive two hypotheses based on "the theory of conditional authoritarianism for ethnic Chinese people", which evaluates the perception of threats to meritocrats in this way:

H6A: An individual meritocrat will become more egalitarian (i.e., less authoritarian) when he/she perceives a threat to his/her opportunity for upward mobility.

The next question is, of course, under what conditions an individual meritocrat may become more authoritarian (i.e., less egalitarian). Clearly, in a meritocratic system, those people in power (or enjoy a more advantageous position) are more likely to perceive a threat to the status quo. It is natural for them to feel that they are in power because they deserve to be there based on their merits. Thus, the next hypothesis of conditional authoritarianism is the following:

H6B: An individual meritocrat will become more authoritarian (i.e., less egalitarian) when he/she perceives a threat to the status quo.

Turning to the empirical tests of the six sets of hypotheses, derived from different theoretical approaches to the formation and changes of political cultures concerning Chinese authoritarianism and meritocracy, follows the description of the data collection process for this study.

Data and Method

To examine the extent to which the ethnic Chinese communities throughout the globe exhibit the traits of authoritarianism, this paper uses the data collected between the December of 2017 and February of 2018 through WeChat, the most popular Chinese social media network not only in Mainland China but also globally. WeChat is a mobile messaging app developed by the Chinese company Tencent in 2011, and during the first quarter of 2018, the number of WeChat users

had already reached 1.04 billion.¹ A total of 1,763 respondents responded to the survey on WeChat. This research utilized targeted snowball sampling as the data collection method. First, it is necessary to explain why this method was adopted for this research.

The targeted population of this study is the ethnic Chinese who reside not only in Mainland China but also in almost every major region of the world. It is not feasible, even if financially manageable, to collect samples based on the traditional probability sampling methods from the massive geographic areas simultaneously. To deal with the difficulty concerning a "hard to reach population", researchers have increasingly used snowball sampling as the means for data collection, in which the "sampling is undertaken when a qualified participant shares an invitation with other subjects similar to them who fulfill the qualifications defined for the targeted population" (also see Berg 2006, Dusek et al. 2015).

The snowball sampling method has been used in qualitative research on hard-to-reach and/or hidden populations (Atkinson and Flint 2001, Coleman 1958, Faugier and Sargeant 1997). Through the networks of these populations, which are not generally open to researchers, snowballing sampling is especially effective in enlarging the sample size and obtaining high-quality data in quantitative research. This method also helps deal with the high rejection rate problem in random sampling surveys because the data collectors have more trust from members of their networks who answer the survey questions more truthfully and fully. As Dusek et al. (2015) indicated, traditional surveys "received from unknown researchers on sensitive topics" are usually not welcomed by the respondents "if no relationship, particularly a trusting one, exists" (Dusek et al. 2015, p. 281).

The data-collection method based on snowball sampling has also been used by scholars of ethnic Chinese who took advantage of modern social media, especially WeChat (e.g., Zhang 2018). One clear weakness of snowball sampling is that due to the non-probability nature of this method, the generalization of its research findings to the whole population can be called into question. Certain measures need to be made to enhance the external validity of snowball sampling research. To make the sample more closely representative of the population, the key to snowball sampling research is to avoid homogeneous respondents who do not reveal the necessary variations in variables used for hypothesis testing. The sample size may also become a problem when it is too small to capture the dispersions in variables. Drawing enough subsamples from different demographic segments of the population is a common way to increase the external validity of the study. In short, "Nearly all studies of hidden populations are carried out in circumstances that do not permit true random sampling. Under these conditions, and if properly conducted and tied to what is known or can be learned about population parameters, targeted sampling provides a more powerful sampling mechanism than convenience sampling and a more feasible approach than random sampling" (Watters and Biernacki 2014, p. 427).

¹<https://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>.

To sufficiently address the potential limitation on the validity of snowball sampling, this study collected data from three main ethnic Chinese communities located in Mainland China, the USA, and Canada in addition to those ethnic Chinese in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Australia, Europe, and the Middle East. The subsample sizes from these various Chinese communities are 1343, 242, 95, 27, 23, 12, and 7, respectively. As reported above, the Chinese communities number at least 2.42 million in the USA, 0.71 million in Canada, and 0.47 million in Australia in 2017. Immigration to Europe is a more recent phenomenon. According to the United Nations (2017), since 1990, more than two million Chinese have migrated abroad. Of those, 0.7 million have migrated to the more developed regions, and 130 thousand Chinese have migrated to Europe. The relatively small number of Chinese immigrants in Europe makes data collection difficult, despite snowball sampling's strengths of including hard to reach populations in research. While attempts were made to collect data from all seven regions, caution needs to be exercised that the responses do not yet support a large enough sample size from the Taiwan/Hong Kong, Australia, Europe, or Middle East regions. Ultimately, the lack of responses in some areas reveals another limitation of snowball sampling because the recruitment method is respondent-driven instead of researcher-driven, resulting in some respondents choosing not to forward the survey to new respondents, thus resulting in some regions underreporting responses.

The survey was first sent through WeChat to the representatives from these seven different regions. After sending back their responses, these representatives were asked to forward the original survey to their WeChat friends without informing their friends of their own answers to the survey questions. Once the responses from their WeChat friends were received and recorded, the representatives were also asked to provide detailed information regarding the respondents' age, gender, profession, education, and religious affiliation (if known). Three waves of data collection took place between December of 2017 and February of 2018 to enhance the dispersions of descriptive statistics for the subsamples.

The survey was conducted in Chinese (simplified Mandarin) and composed of four questions concerning authoritarianism (See the Appendix for the original survey). Similar to MacWilliams (2016) and Hetherington and Weiler (2009), the measure authoritarianism is based on a battery of four child-rearing questions asked in American National Election Studies (ANES). MacWilliams (2016) provided a detailed description of the history of these questions adopted by scholars in the last three decades: "These questions first appeared on the 1992 ANES survey and have since been used by some authoritarian scholars to estimate authoritarianism (Feldman and Stenner 1997, Hetherington and Suhay 2011, Hetherington and Weiler 2009, Stenner 2005). These questions tap into deep-seated preconceptions about children and child-rearing: whether it is more important for a child to be respectful or independent, obedient or self-reliant, well-behaved or considerate, and well-mannered or curious. Survey respondents who pick the first option in each of these pairs are strong authoritarians" (MacWilliams 2016, p. 718). As in Hetherington and Weiler (2009, p. 48) and Stenner (2005), the

score of 0.5 is used to represent those who answered "both" on the four authoritarian questions (0 for anti-authoritarian answers and 1 for authoritarian answers).

Results

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the authoritarian tendency for all respondents (the authoritarianism index is standardized to be a value between 0 and 1). Overall, the ethnic Chinese throughout the globe exhibited a normal distribution with the mode located at the center of the authoritarian index value. However, the distribution also shows a slightly positive skew with more respondents located toward the left of the mode, which suggests an overall greater tendency toward the non-authoritarian direction (median=0.375, mean=0.387, sd=0.204, skewness=0.177). This finding naturally raises the question of what are the factors contributing to the lesser authoritarian features among all Chinese and who are more likely to be authoritarian. This study turns to hypotheses testing in order to answer this question.

Figure 1. *Authoritarian Distribution based on the 2017–2018 WeChat Chinese Survey*

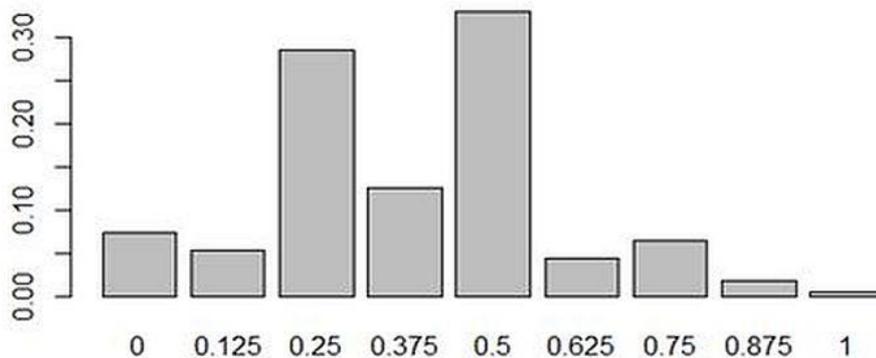


Table 1. OLS Regression for the Ethnic Chinese Authoritarianism

| | Equation 1 | Equation 2 | Equation 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | regression coefficient (standard error) | regression coefficient (standard error) | regression coefficient (standard error) |
| <i>Reside in Australia</i> | -0.04 (0.22) | --- | -0.10 (0.24) |
| Canada | 0.31 (0.18)# | --- | 0.28 (0.19) |
| Mainland China | 0.04 (0.16) | --- | -0.08 (0.17) |
| Europe | -0.18 (0.28) | --- | -0.18 (0.30) |
| Middle East | -0.54 (0.35) | --- | -0.59 (0.36) |
| USA | -0.26 (0.17) | --- | -0.23 (0.17) |
| Teen | -0.30 (0.11)* | -0.50 (0.15)** | --- |
| Young | -0.22 (0.04)*** | -0.24 (0.05)*** | --- |
| Senior | 0.03 (0.08) | 0.09 (0.10) | --- |
| <i>Generation</i> | --- | --- | 0.09 (0.04)* |
| Male | -0.13 (0.04)** | -0.10 (0.07) | -0.10 (0.05)# |
| Born in USA | 0.12 (0.09) | -0.06 (0.08) | -0.06 (0.12) |
| Christian | 0.01 (0.08) | -1.00 (0.30)** | 0.01 (0.09) |
| Male x Middle-aged | --- | -0.06 (0.09) | --- |
| Male x Senior | --- | -0.19 (0.18) | --- |
| Male x Teen | --- | 0.15 (0.23) | --- |
| <i>Profession in Science Technology</i> | --- | --- | 0.06 (0.16) |
| Medicine | --- | --- | -0.14 (0.11) |
| Law | --- | --- | 0.07 (0.10) |
| Business | --- | --- | 0.05 (0.17) |
| Arts | --- | --- | 0.06 (0.07) |
| Military/Police | --- | --- | 0.16 (0.22) |
| Sports | --- | --- | 0.37 (0.27) |
| Sports | --- | --- | -0.63 (0.49) |
| Multiple Professions | --- | --- | 0.16 (0.32) |
| Cheap Labor | --- | --- | 0.22 (0.12)# |
| Unemployed/Retired | --- | --- | 0.16 (0.10) |
| Government | --- | --- | 0.29 (0.11)** |
| R Squared | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.06 |
| Adjusted R Squared | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.04 |
| N | 1737 | 1737 | 1087 |

Note: Two-tailed test.

#p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 1 provides three OLS models on the determinants of authoritarian characteristics. Equation 1 focuses on three groups of explanatory variables, which are: the locations in which the survey respondents resided, the generational gaps, the gender effect, as well as, the control variables concerning the birthplace and religious influence. With respect to the location as a contextual effect, Equation 1 lists six dummy variables that are all used to compare the base group: those ethnic Chinese reside in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In other words, the signs of the variables in the first group in Equation 1 indicates whether the Chinese residing in a certain location are more or less likely to be authoritarian than those from Taiwan and Hong Kong. But the statistical test shows that only the Chinese residing in Canada are more authoritarian than the base group from Taiwan and Hong Kong at the $p<0.10$ level, a finding certainly inconsistent with the assimilation thesis (H1), which suggests migration to a Western country may lead

to less authoritarian orientation. The next section examines which one of the hypotheses discussed above actually provides the best explanation for this "disturbing" finding.

Equation 1 of Table 1 also revealed a clear generational effect on Chinese authoritarianism, which supports H5 capturing the effect of possible value changes among the younger generations in the Post-Mao era. This can be seen from the second group of independent variables, which compare a particular generation to the base group, the middle-aged Chinese who are older than 35 and younger than 59 years of age. Equation 1 shows that the teenage and young-age group Chinese are less likely to be authoritarian than the middle-age group, though the senior group (older than 60) is not statistically different from the middle-age group. Finally, Equation 1 also shows a clear gender effect: male Chinese are less likely to be authoritarian than female Chinese (statistically significant at the 0.01 level). This finding seems to confirm H2 derived from the resource model. Female Chinese traditionally possess fewer resources and social prestige, and thus according to the resource model (Lipset 1959), they may become more authoritarian than their male counterparts.

To further investigate the gender gap, Equation 2 adds three interactive terms between gender and generational variables. Interestingly, none of the interactive terms turned out to be statistically significant, though religious effect (being Christian) became notable as it passed the statistical test at the $p < 0.1$ level. The Chinese Christians overall tended to be less authoritarian than non-Christians. The generational gap revealed by Equation 2 remains the same as that in Equation 1, which once again shows that teenage and young Chinese are less likely to be authoritarian than middle-aged and senior Chinese.

Equation 3 adds the final group of twelve dummy variables that compare the respondents' professions to the base group (i.e., those who work in education, humanities, and journalism-related professions). The OLS model shows that two categories of professions are statistically more likely associated with authoritarian characteristics than are those who work as educators, humanitarians, and journalists in the base group. The more authoritarian professions among ethnic Chinese are those who work as cheap labor—a finding once again confirms H2, i.e., the resource model of authoritarianism. At the same time, the empirical finding also suggests that government officials are more likely to be authoritarian. This important finding provides the first piece of evidence that the conditional authoritarian thesis, stated in H6B, which suggests that the meritocratic tradition in China lead to a greater authoritarian tendency among those who are in power and are concerned with the threat to the status quo.

It also should be noted that gender once again is a statistically significant factor (at the $p < 0.1$ level), with females more authoritarian than males. Furthermore, the generation effect (now measured as an ordinal variable instead of dummy variables in Equations 1 and 2) continues to present itself as a contributing factor to authoritarianism (at the $p < 0.05$ level). The older the generation, the more authoritarian it becomes for ethnic Chinese, even after controlling for variables such as gender, profession, and the host country.

The fact that ethnic Chinese in Mainland China are not statistically different from those from Taiwan and Hong Kong in terms of authoritarian orientation (or lack of) also suggests that the expectations (H4A and H4B) based on the possible effects of communist influence in Mainland China are not supported. Moreover, the importance of location needs to be further scrutinized, as the assimilation hypothesis (H1) leads to the potential contextual effect of living as an immigrant in a host country. In this vein, the subsamples from Mainland China, the USA, and Canada are large enough to make some statistical analyses. Running ANOVA allows seeing whether the mean of the authoritarian values from these three contexts are statistically different from each other. The F-test concludes that statistically significant different means of authoritarian values exist among Chinese from Mainland China and the Chinese who immigrated to the USA and Canada ($F=21.34$, $p<0.001$). Which of these three groups of ethnic Chinese had the highest mean of the authoritarian values? Table 2 shows the result of the Tukey multiple comparisons of a means test.

Table 2. *Tukey Multiple Comparison of Means Test for Three Groups of Ethnic Chinese*

| | Difference | Lower bound | Upper bound | p-value adj. |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| China-Canada | -0.335 | -0.537 | -0.134 | 0.00 |
| USA-Canada | -0.607 | -0.836 | -0.377 | 0.00 |
| USA-China | -0.272 | -0.404 | -0.139 | 0.00 |

As shown in Table 2, the mean authoritarian value (MAV) of the Mainland Chinese group is between the MAV of the Chinese immigrants in the USA and the MAV of the Chinese immigrants in Canada, as the three differences are all negative in Table 2. The lower and upper boundaries of these differences and the corresponding adjusted p values all indicate that statistically speaking, the Mainland Chinese are more authoritarian than the Chinese immigrants in the USA and less authoritarian than the Chinese immigrants in Canada. This finding is puzzling in that it seems to support the hypothesis derived from the assimilation theory (H1) if one uses the mean comparison between Mainland China and the USA, but it is contrary to the expectation of the mean comparison made between Mainland China and Canada.

Table 3 lists the results from the OLS models in the three contexts. The different findings from these three contexts reveal more clues about the puzzle from Table 2. In Mainland China, the continuing generational gap (again, supporting H5) is evident, that is, the older the generation, the higher the tendency to hold authoritarian principles in child-rearing practices. This generational gap, however, does not exist for those Chinese who migrated to North America. Furthermore, the OLS result for the USA context shows that those US-born Chinese-Americans are not significantly different from their parent generation in terms of child-rearing beliefs. These findings strongly suggest that contexts mattered in the formation and durability of the authoritarian value system. The immigrant experience in a different host country can have a profound impact on

how they abandon or embrace the authoritarian belief system for ethnic Chinese, and the changes can have a lasting effect on their children as well.

Table 3. OLS Regressions for the Ethnic Chinese Authoritarianism in Three Contexts

| | Mainland China | USA | Canada |
|---|---|---|---|
| | regression coefficient (standard error) | regression coefficient (standard error) | regression coefficient (standard error) |
| <i>Generation</i> | 0.10 (0.05)# | -0.08 (0.10) | 0.23 (0.17) |
| Male | -0.09 (0.07) | -0.23 (0.13)# | 0.15 (0.18) |
| Born in USA | --- | -0.13 (0.15) | --- |
| Christian | -0.04 (0.15) | 0.17 (0.14) | --- |
| <i>Educated in Mainland</i> | 0.48 (0.24)* | -0.13 (0.17) | --- |
| HK/Taiwan Educated | --- | 0.40 (0.40) | 0.04 (0.17) |
| Educated in Europe | 0.10 (0.66) | -0.64 (0.60) | --- |
| <i>Profession in Science Technology</i> | -0.32 (0.62) | 0.35 (0.21) | -1.18 (0.44)** |
| | -0.06 (0.18) | 0.11 | -0.78 (0.30)* |
| Medicine | 0.11 (0.14) | 0.24 (0.21) | -0.81 (0.31)** |
| Law | 0.10 (0.21) | 0.87 (0.86) | -1.18 (0.58)* |
| Business | 0.02 (0.09) | 0.09 (0.23) | 0.18 (0.26) |
| Arts | 0.04 (0.27) | 0.90 (0.43)* | --- |
| Military/Police | 0.35 (0.27) | --- | --- |
| Sports | -0.26 (0.61) | --- | -1.79 (0.76)* |
| Multiple Professions | 0.57 (0.44) | -0.30 (0.51) | --- |
| Cheap Labor | 0.17 (0.14) | 1.03 (0.45)* | -0.40 (0.30) |
| Unemployed/Retired | 0.14 (0.12) | 0.58 (0.28)* | -0.66 (0.32)* |
| Government | 0.28 (0.12)* | 0.37 (0.60) | --- |
| R Squared | 0.04 | 0.13 | 0.24 |
| Adjusted R Squared | 0.01 | 0.04 | 0.14 |
| N | 731 | 191 | 95 |

Note: Two-tailed test.

#p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

One may reject the conclusion on the contextual effect of an immigrant host country on authoritarianism by suggesting that the results of the ANOVA perhaps only captured a self-selection process, which is based on the notion that those immigrants who now reside in North American were non-authoritarian, to begin with, and their decision to move to the West suggested that they are more independently minded people in relation to other Chinese who never migrated out of the country. The findings from Table 3 offer contrary evidence for this self-selection thesis. As shown in Table 2, the host countries in the West do not necessarily suggest that the Chinese immigrants are less authoritarian than those who stay in China. Furthermore, to test whether the migration history is a function of self-selection for those Chinese who are less authoritarian in the first place, the Chinese immigrants who once were educated in the USA but chose to go back to China are compared to those Chinese who were educated in China and never had an immigration history. Note the third group of independent variables about educational differences in Table 3 is all dummy variables compared to the base

group representing those who were educated in the U.S. and went back to China after their American education.

The first equation of Table 3 shows that those Chinese who were educated only in China are more authoritarian than those so-called *Haigui* 海归 (those who were educated in the U.S. and/or Europe and went back to China after their western education). In short, it is not whether or not one is authoritarian that drives the decision to migrate out or back in China, and a Western-educated ethnic Chinese who are non-authoritarians may simply choose to live in China just like those Chinese authoritarians who had never migrated to the West.

The second and third equations of Table 3 further show that, contrary to the assimilation thesis stated in H1, the immigrant Chinese in the USA and Canada do not change their authoritarian values simply because they are educated in the host country. In other words, it is the various content of western education that has a potential impact on an immigrant's child-rearing values concerning authoritarianism. It is the immigration experience itself that had a major effect on the value system. Equation 2 of Table 3 presents the findings from the ethnic Chinese in the USA.

The statistical significance of gender is at the $p < 0.1$ level, indicating males, compared to females, are less likely to be authoritarian in the USA. One possible explanation, based on the resource model stated in H2, females with fewer resources, lower SES status encounter more difficult times to be assimilated to the egalitarian American values than do their male counterparts. The same explanation can be offered for the findings that those Chinese immigrants working as cheap labor or being unemployed/retired are more likely to be authoritarian than other professionals due to their limited resources. The immigrants who work in the Arts industry may also encounter greater hardship than other immigrants in science, technology, and so on, which can be transformed into a more authoritarian orientation. It is also important to note that the above findings concerning immigrants with limited resources may be validly explained by H3, which suggests that the group competition between the ethnic Chinese and other racial and ethnic groups may especially produce a feeling of "stigmatization", as these lower SES immigrants are more likely to compete with other working-class Americans. The stress of group competition may cause these immigrants to trigger authoritarianism as a protective mental mechanism against marginalization, as suggested by Henry (2011).

The largest challenge is, however, as mentioned above, the puzzling difference in immigration experiences between the ethnic Chinese in the USA and those in Canada. None of the previous theories presented as Hypotheses 1 through 5 fully explain why the immigrants to the USA are less likely to be authoritarian, and their counterparts in Canada are more likely to be authoritarian than those Chinese who never left Mainland China. An explanation from the meritocracy and conditional authoritarianism theoretical perspective is provided in the next section.

Ethnic Chinese in the USA and in Canada: The Meritocrats in Two Different Contexts

While Table 2 shows that ethnic Chinese become much more authoritarian after migrating to Canada, a quick examination of Equation 3 of Table 3 suggests that the immigration experiences in Canada are drastically different from those in the USA. Beyond already possessing a higher level of authoritarianism among the ethnic Chinese in Canada as a whole, two professional groups are even more authoritarian (arguably the most authoritarian subgroups among all ethnic Chinese anywhere). These are the base-group professions (i.e., those who work in education, social sciences/humanities, and journalism) and the business group. These two groups, in comparison with other professions examined in Equation 3 of Table 3, are those with greater resources, information, and critical thinking on political and social issues. One would expect, based on Hypotheses 1 through 5, these two groups to be less authoritarian than other groups in Canada. But the findings showed exactly the opposite.

To find a plausible explanation for this puzzling result, the theory of meritocracy and conditional authoritarianism is revisited. To recap, this theory suggests that the best explanation of candidates from the ethnic Chinese communities for becoming more authoritarian are those meritocrats who are in power and/or in advantageous positions. This is because these meritocrats are more likely to perceive threats to the status quo and their advantaged positions, and authoritarianism becomes a protective mental check on those who represent threats and dangers. Empirical evidence from Mainland China for this conditional authoritarian model shows that those elites working inside governments are more likely to be authoritarian than the rest of the population. What happened in the context of Canada?

Canada, as in the USA, has attracted millions of high-skilled immigrants from China and other countries. But as explained by migration scholars such as Li and Lo (2012), the experiences after the arrivals have been very different in these two North-America countries. "Compared to the Canadian-born and white immigrant groups from Europe, a larger percentage of [Chinese immigrants] were unemployed or underemployed" (Li and Lo 2012, p. 10). The lack of economic opportunities in addition to "discrimination" and "foreign credential devaluation" all contributed to the harsher experiences of the Chinese communities in Canada. In contrast, the United States has used an immigration admission quota system that focused on family reunion. Furthermore, as "a response to the global race for talent, the 1990 Immigration Act triples the worldwide annual quota for employment-based immigrants", and the H-1B visa category has attracted numerous Chinese students to stay and gain a green card for themselves and their family members (Li and Lo 2012, p. 10). Li and Lo also noted that multiculturalism had been adopted by the Canadian federal policy to let Chinese immigrant develop Canada into a pluralist society, whereas "the dominant paradigm of immigration adaptation in the U.S. academia, media, government policy, and public's mindset remains assimilation" (Li and Lo 2012, p. 11).

The relatively harsher economic condition and intense perception of threats from other newer immigrants that may take their jobs away may have contributed to the enhanced authoritarianism in ethnic Chinese in Canada, as empirically demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2. Furthermore, it is the business groups, who enjoyed more economic success in the past, and the informed professionals in social sciences, education, and journalism who are more likely to perceive a threat to their status and advantages. In other words, these meritocrats are the most likely candidates to become authoritarians, according to the conditional authoritarianism theory (H6B).

In the United States, the greater economic security and more successful assimilation, as suggested by Li and Lo, have contributed to the lesser authoritarian orientation among the ethnic Chinese (H6A). In other words, the meritocrats who share the same cultural backgrounds back in China develop different patterns of cultural changes due to the different types of threats perceived in different nation-state contexts. In Canada, the primary fear among the ethnic Chinese is toward other newer immigrants who may change the status quo enjoyed by the Chinese immigrants who migrated earlier. The mode of reaction to this threat is to embrace more authoritarian values, and of recent note is the push to help elect more right-wing political candidates who promised to cut skilled-worker immigration and refugees, especially from Muslim countries.

In the United States, the perception of threat among the ethnic Chinese, after their relatively more successful assimilation, is the loss of opportunity for upward mobility. This is especially reflected by the fight against affirmative action policy led by the Chinese community activists (Kim 2018). The mode of coping with the potential threats from other minority groups such as African Americans and Latinos in the college admission process includes protests, demonstrations, and lawsuits, which are all forms of egalitarian political participation, rather than authoritarian responses. In sum, better than all previous approaches introduced in this paper, the theory of Chinese meritocracy and conditional authoritarianism provides the most plausible explanation for the conflicting findings from the ethnic Chinese communities in Canada and the USA.

Conclusion

The existing migration studies suggested that the political integration of immigrants includes the "support for the core political values" of their host country (Bilodeau 2016), and yet assimilation may follow a number of different pathways (Samson 2014). It is still uncertain, however, which nation-state contexts may provide a value system that allows effective political integration of immigrants. This paper examines whether or not the philosophical bedrock of Chinese civilization (Confucianism) is likely to translate to authoritarian orientation and the extent to which the Chinese diaspora modify their traditional value system in different nation-state contexts.

Based on the survey data collected through WeChat, the most popular Chinese social media, this study analyzes the authoritarian tendencies of ethnic

Chinese in Mainland China and abroad. The findings, on the one hand, reveal the minimal impact of communist influence on authoritarianism. On the other hand, the paper shows that the Chinese immigrants in the U.S. are indeed more likely to share the Western egalitarian values than the ethnic Chinese in Mainland China and other regions of the world. However, it is also discovered that the ethnic Chinese in Canada become much more authoritarian, which ran afoul with the expectation from the classic assimilation theory. In addition, this study shows the effects of gender, education, and generational cohorts on ethnic Chinese's authoritarian traits.

To solve the puzzle concerning the differing effects of Western nation-states on the Chinese immigrants, this research proposes a meritocracy and conditional authoritarian model to explain the conditions on which a meritocrat may become authoritarian. Empirical findings confirm that the perception of threat to the status quo leads to a greater tendency to authoritarianism while the perception of threat to opportunities for upward mobility may, in fact, reduce that tendency and cause more egalitarian political participation. In sum, this study demonstrates that Confucianism still plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes and values among ethnic Chinese. Specifically, the Confucian value of meritocracy maintains importance in the ethnic Chinese communities in Mainland China and abroad. This continuing importance of meritocracy may or may not lead to more authoritarian value changes, dependent on the nature of threats that Chinese meritocrats perceive in the nation-state contexts in which they live. In order to better represent Chinese in the West, future research can improve an understanding of the Chinese experience by increasing sample sizes in European countries and Australia. Studying the Chinese in the different Western European societies will help understand whether ethnic Chinese are influenced by the host society culture.

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Appendix

The 2017–2018 Global Ethnic Chinese WeChat Survey Questionnaire

我最近有一个研究课题，需要大家帮忙，回答四个简单问题。

不同的人会在教育上有不同的价值体系和侧重点。根据你的个人意见，你认为以下四组价值中，是a还是b，对教育孩子相对来说更重要？

- 1) (a) 拥有主见，还是(b) 尊重传统
- 2) (a) 充满好奇，还是(b) 好的教养
- 3) (a) 服从领导，还是(b) 独立自主
- 4) (a) 体贴他人，还是(b) 行为检点

对于第一个问题，如果你觉得“拥有主见”比“尊重长辈”对教育孩子更重要，就请回a；否则回b；如果你觉得两个原则一样重要（无先后次序），就请回c

请依次回答全部四个问题。（比如，如果你认为b是所有四个问题的答案，就回bbbb）。

为了不影响他人，请私下用微信将你的回答传给我。

谢谢你的参与！