culture and decision making in china, japan, russia, and the united states  
Fritz Gaenslen*

Human beings are suspended in webs of significance they themselves have spun. To add specificity to the metaphor, we can think of the filaments of these webs as assumptions—assumptions about such things as human nature; causality; the possible, the desirable, and the appropriate; the nature of the physical environment; and the relationship of human beings to their fellows. Where these assumptions are shared, where they define a “life-world” for a collectivity of people, they constitute what is commonly referred to as a culture. In this study, I shall focus on shared assumptions about the relationship of human beings to their fellows. More specifically, I shall present evidence that suggests (1) that Chinese, Japanese, and Russians tend to have somewhat different conceptions of “self” and “others” than do Americans, and that the former tend to be more collectivist than the latter; and (2) that these different conceptions have implications for collective decision making under conditions of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Observing differences in the processes by which persons in a disagreement try to influence one another, I offer a particular sort of explanation for these differences—a cultural explanation.

* I would like to thank John P. Burke, John Creighton Campbell, Michel Oksenberg, Robert D. Putnam, Ronald Rapoport, Martin K. Whyte, and William Zimmerman for their comments and suggestions.

The metaphor is borrowed from Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

cultural explanations and political science

Cultural explanations are not currently a prominent feature of mainstream political science research. In fact, although the concept of “culture” enjoyed a certain popularity in the 1960s and early 1970s, and although one occasionally receives an indication of isolated pockets of continuing interest, cultural explanations have largely fallen into disfavor in recent years. They continue to appear in the literature, but as straw men—as explanations to be demolished in order to build “better” ones. These latter explanations generally conceive of man as universal *homo economicus* and focus on the material incentives associated with various alternative behaviors. Such universalist, materialist accounts of human action are often powerfully compelling; at the same time, they are not usually as damaging to cultural accounts as their authors might have us believe.

Consider the following examples. DiFranceisco and Gitelman have observed that most people in the Soviet Union apparently do not think they can make, or even influence, government policy; indeed, they are not even interested in doing so. Should we come to the “cultural” conclusion, then, that most Soviet citizens are passive, deferential, and conformist in their orientation toward governmental authority? No, say DiFranceisco and Gitelman, for the seeming passivity of Soviet citizens in the face of government policy makers disappears when these same citizens confront those who implement policy. Working the “output side” of the Soviet system, people pursue their interests with an imagination, cunning, and zeal that would make a businessman blush. In the Soviet Union, to influence policy making is difficult; to influence policy implementation is both necessary and possible.

Susan Shirk sets up a similar argument and analysis in her study of the political behavior of urban Chinese high school students. By Shirk’s account, the behavior of Chinese students in ordinary public schools in the early 1960s was characterized by acrimonious political competition, the avoidance of political activists, and a retreat into the private world of friends and family. Should this behavior be interpreted as reflecting the persistence of traditional cultural orientations in the face of the regime’s efforts to
create a ‘new socialist man’? No, says Shirk, for students in specialized technical schools and in private, ‘people-run’ schools behaved differently: the former could meet regime demands for political activism secure in the knowledge that such activism would harm neither their friendships nor their careers; they were virtually guaranteed good city jobs after graduation. The latter could ignore political demands altogether; no matter how they behaved, they had virtually no chance of being admitted to a university or being assigned to a good city job. The ordinary high school students behaved the way they did, then, not because they were ‘feudal remnants,’ but because they were subject to a set of a regime-designed opportunity structures and incentives that were different from those in technical and private schools. Opportunities for advancement were present for ordinary high school students, but the demand far exceeded the supply.

Finally, Robert Marshall, looking at collective decision making in rural hamlets in Japan, offers a similar analysis. While he was doing his field work, Marshall found a strong tendency toward unanimity in decision making in the hamlets. Is this tendency to be seen as reflecting a national inclination toward harmony, consensus, conformity, solidarity, and tradition? No, says Marshall. Where community action involves committing resources that are already corporate property, and where implementation is possible without the active support of each member, no member will find it worthwhile to voice opposition; thus, where a majority agrees, unanimity results. But where community action depends on individuals committing privately held resources, the structure of incentives is different, and in these cases open division often occurs.

For our purposes, each of these studies makes a valuable, if familiar, point: a focus on national culture is likely to obscure one’s vision of the variety of behavior that can occur within societies. Moreover, reference to national culture cannot satisfactorily account for such variation. Indeed, the authors of these studies convince us that most people (Americans included) are likely to respond to the variety of situations described in much the manner as the Chinese, Japanese, and Russians. That is to say that these studies, insofar as they are about culture at all, are about similarities among societies. Cultural explanations, however, are not about similarities; they cannot be if the explanations are to be compelling. Cultural explanations are essentially explanations of differences; if a study is to say anything about such differences, it must be—as the above studies are not—comparative between societies.

Although comparison is a necessary condition for a compelling cultural explanation, it is not a sufficient one. The following example concerns how citizens make up their minds how to vote: Do they give the greatest weight to their party identification, their evaluation of the candidates, or their evaluation of the issues? Evidence suggests that Japanese voters give greater weight to the candidate component than do Americans or West Europeans; many analysts have interpreted this difference as reflecting the greater ‘personalism’ of the Japanese. More convincing, however, is Thomas Rochon’s explanation that the difference lies in Japan’s unusual electoral system. Because Japan employs multimember, single-vote districts, with the seats going to the top finishers in the district, the larger Japanese political parties often nominate more than one candidate per district. As a result, a candidate’s party label cannot by itself determine a voter’s choice; voters must eventually consider the individual candidates.

Another example concerns a difference in industrial practice between the Soviet Union and China in the 1950s. In the view of a number of writers, Chinese leaders abandoned the piece-rate incentive system employed in Soviet industry because they regarded it as too individualistic and contrary to traditional Chinese orientations whereby people are to be motivated through their attachment to a group. Andrew Walder argues, however, that China simply did not have the trained personnel necessary to administer such a system properly, that supply shortages and administrative confusion in the wake of Liberation undermined the successful operation of this system, and that the piece-rate system impeded the efforts of the party to establish control over industrial managers.
In both of these comparative examples, a cultural explanation of differences is pitted against a structural explanation—and found wanting. Why do the structural explanations seem more persuasive? It is not because structural explanations are necessarily correct or because cultural explanations are necessarily wrong-headed. The problem is of the chicken-and-egg variety: people hold beliefs, attitudes, and values that lead them to create particular institutions (for example, electoral systems); institutions lead people to hold particular beliefs, attitudes, and values; and so on. Implicit in each explanation is an understanding of human motives and behavior which, by itself is inadequate to the complexity of real life.

Cultural explanations—those that account for differences in human behavior by reference to differences in the enduring, internal dispositions of individuals—understate the extent to which individuals can be made to behave contrary to their dispositions as well as the extent to which the dispositions themselves can be changed. In other words, purely cultural accounts of human behavior portray man as less malleable than we suspect he really is.

Structural explanations fall victim to the opposite error. Structural explanations—those that account for differences in human behavior by reference to differences in the structure of rewards and punishments associated with various social arrangements—assume that a shift in the structure of rewards and punishments will automatically produce a shift in what individuals think and do. Such explanations overstate the extent to which people are able to discern the structure of rewards and punishments inherent in any situation, and underestimate the extent to which people find meaning and satisfaction in adhering to their beliefs, attitudes, and values. A purely structural understanding of human motives and behavior cannot, for example, satisfactorily account for the persistence of certain attitudes about the role of government among Soviet emigrés to Israel or among Chinese emigrés to Hong Kong despite a marked change in the structure of incentives these emigrés face. In other words, purely structural accounts of human behavior portray man as more malleable than we suspect he really is.

The question then is, under what circumstances is a cultural explanation likely to seem most persuasive? The above discussion suggests two rules. First, the smaller the conceptual distance between cultural variables and what one wishes to explain by them, the more compelling a cultural explanation is likely to be. The direct connection between “culture” and a dependent variable like “level of economic development” or “degree of democratic stability” will always seem tenuous. Second, cultural explanations are likely to seem most persuasive when the individuals whose behavior is to be explained are unclear about the structure of rewards and punishments they face—when their situation is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity.


8 Walder, “Work and Authority in Chinese Industry: State Socialism and the Institutional Culture of Dependency,” Ph.D. diss. (University of
interpersonal relations and decision making

Do assumptions about the relationship of individuals to their fellows affect the collective decision processes of political elites? This question is part of a larger one: Are there grounds for believing that interpersonal relations affect the decision processes of political elites? Do concerns about such things as friendship, status, and loyalty have an impact on how political leaders conduct themselves with one another in the context of small-group decision making? A voluminous laboratory literature suggests that such concerns do indeed affect the behavior of decision makers.

How might the skeptic respond to this literature? Beyond questioning the face validity of most bargaining games, and beyond noting that laboratory participants are not usually political elites, a skeptic might argue that laboratory studies are able to show the effects they do precisely because the “noise” of the real world has been eliminated, and that aspects of interpersonal relations affect group decision processes in the laboratory because there the tasks that confront decision makers are not particularly compelling. Real-world decision makers may agree with this assessment. High public officials and managers in large organizations commonly understand their own behavior—and certainly represent that behavior to outsiders—largely in terms of objectives external to the decision-making group. “Important events have important causes,” we are told, and interpersonal concerns take a backseat to “getting the job done.”

The skeptic, however, overestimates the extent to which “getting the job done” is a straightforward source of motivation for political leaders. As Alexander George and others have observed, the issues confronting top decision makers are often characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Leaders may find it difficult to devise a single yardstick capable of reconciling the multiple and competing values and interests embedded in a particular issue; they frequently lack the information needed to assess the outcomes associated with various alternatives; and they may even find it difficult to determine their preferences in a given situation in the first place.

In these circumstances, interpersonal concerns are likely to intrude on decision making for two reasons. First, insofar as complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity induce psychological stress in decision makers, a focus on interpersonal concerns can help to relieve this stress. In one version of this process, participants test their beliefs not against external reality but against the beliefs of their fellow decision makers, seeking certainty in the converging opinions of other people. In another version, participants import into the decision-making arena such private concerns as their self-esteem, their career prospects, their bureaucratic resources, and the approval or disapproval of others because they find it easier to act with confidence on the basis of these concerns than on the basis of the public issue with all its murkiness.

Second, to the extent that decision-making situations are characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity, those who evaluate the performance of decision makers will have little choice but to base their judgment, in substantial measure, on the quality of an individual’s relations with his colleagues. As studies of corporations show, the higher one climbs in an organization, the more vague the evaluative criteria are likely to become, and the more one is likely to be evaluated on the basis of such things as how well a person gets along with others.
as trustworthiness, loyalty, and being "a good team player." This conclusion is also supported by evidence which shows that, generally speaking, the higher the rung of both the political ladder and the corporate ladder, the more socially homogeneous the occupants. In other words, the greater the complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity associated with an organizational level, the greater the likelihood that elites will select recruits in their own image. Decision makers who realize the importance of interpersonal relations for their careers, then, can be expected to view decision-making situations as opportunities to demonstrate the proper behavior toward their colleagues—perhaps to the neglect of the decision problem itself.

To these theoretical reasons for the impact of interpersonal relations on elite decision making we can add the testimony of elite decision makers themselves. Affection, esprit de corps, respect, the desire for the regard of one's colleagues, the desire to be part of the group, the perception of status differences, the formality or informality of meetings, and loyalty—all appear in the reminiscences of former government decision makers as having an impact on group decision processes and as affecting the definition of decision problems, the quality of information brought to bear on these problems, the number of alternatives considered, and the scrutiny to which these alternatives are subjected.

In sum, grounds exist for believing that interpersonal relations often affect the decision processes of political elites. The impact of cultural assumptions about the meaning of "self" and "others" can be thought of as a subset of these concerns. Because decision makers carry around with them conceptions of what particular people (their fellow decision makers) are like, we may reasonably suppose that they also carry around with them conceptions of what people in general (including their fellow decision makers) are like; these conceptions may vary from one society to another.


18 See George (fn. 16), 26–27; Steinbruner (fn. 17), 145.


21 See Irving L. Janis, Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decision and Fiascoes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982); Larry Berman, Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam (New York: Norton, 1982); George (fn. 16). We should not dismiss the possibility, however, that the reminiscences of political elites are distorted by memory and by the desire to impose meaning on the past.

**data and methods**

Although the data are unusual enough to merit detailed discussion, limitations of space require that I restrict myself to the essentials.
The complete data consist of one thousand interpersonal disagreements drawn from contemporary Chinese, Japanese, Soviet Russian, and American fiction. An interpersonal disagreement was said to exist whenever at least two characters verbally expressed to one another that they had opposing interests or contradictory evaluations of some state of affairs. Examples of disagreements include a student arguing with a professor over a course grade, a rickshaw puller and his customer haggling over the fare, two peasants arguing about which is the best spot in the market for selling their cooperative’s vegetables, a party organizer in a publishing house and the head of the secretarial pool arguing over who should be in charge in the absence of the latter, a geisha and her patron arguing about the nature of their relationship, and a mine chief and a district engineer arguing about whether to emphasize innovation or the fulfilling of production quotas.

I construe such disagreements to be an opportunity for these persons to attempt to influence each other, and the resolution of the disagreement, whatever form it takes (including nonresolution), to be the decision. That is not as much an oversimplification of decision-making reality as might at first appear. Although analysts of decision processes commonly distinguish between the stages of search, evaluation, and choice, evidence suggests that these stages are seldom distinct in practice, and that the process of choice tends to structure or bias the activities of search and evaluation. In focusing on interpersonal disagreements, and on who says what to whom with what effect, I focus on the deliberations associated with choice.

Disagreements were drawn, in order of their appearance, from short stories and novels selected at random from six different lists: (1) government-controlled Chinese fiction published between 1951 and 1976 in Beijing; (2) Chinese fiction not subject to government control published in China between 1918 and 1949; (3) Soviet Russian fiction, government-controlled and published in Moscow between 1946 and 1970; (4) samizdat fiction, written in the Soviet Union but smuggled to the West without undergoing Soviet censorship; (5) Japanese fiction published between 1900 and 1970; and (6) American fiction published between 1900 and 1970. Although these lists do not define the universe of published fiction for each society, they are adequate for present purposes: we require (1) a sufficient number of disagreements and sufficient dispersion of these disagreements on the variables thought necessary to describe them and (2) a sufficient number of authors so as not to be overly dependent on the particular worldviews of particular authors. Of the 514 works by 272 different authors that were read, 337 contained disagreements; 1000 of these disagreements were examined.

Can fiction be read reliably? Each disagreement was identified and coded by two persons working independently of each other. Coders were college seniors or graduate students with backgrounds in literature. An example of a codebook entry is:

An “expert argument” consists of one disputant explaining to the other, “Do it this way and the environment will cause such-and-such a consequence,” or “Do it this way because it will work best.” How prominent in the attempt to resolve this dispute is expert argument?

1. Prominent.
2. Present.
3. Absent.

For some thirty variables, the range of intercoder agreement extended from a high of 99.9 percent to a low of 82.4 percent. What was found in the fiction, then, is not the result of idiosyncratic reading; it is really there, or more accurately, intersubjectively “there” to be found.

What about validity? Or, put another way, what is the relationship between fictional descriptions of disagreements and real disagreements? Our hypothesis proposes that, although authors of fiction choose their outcomes, they tend to be constrained by reality in depicting the processes that produce these outcomes. Thus, frequency distributions on single variables may not reflect reality, but relationships between variables should. This hypothesis was put to a test in which 36 findings were culled from the
social psychology literature on conflict resolution and from the anthropological literature on dispute settlement. Two examples of such findings are that:

A. The more equal the disputants in status, the more likely a contested good will be divided according to the principle of equality rather than equity.

B. Arbitrated disagreements are more likely than mediated disagreements to result in outcomes in which one disputant dominates.

The 36 social science findings were compared with each set of fictional findings. Three results merit our attention. First, the correlations in the fiction subject to government censorship (Chinese and Soviet) were generally lower than the correlations in the corresponding uncensored fiction (pre-1949 Chinese and samizdat). Second, where there was a substantial difference between a pre-1949 Chinese correlation and a post-1949 correlation, there also tended to be a substantial difference between the two Soviet correlations. Together, these findings suggest that government control in both China and the Soviet Union has worked to reduce somewhat the mimetic power of Chinese and Soviet fiction. The most important result, however, is that 87 percent of the social science findings, on the average, were supported in each of the four sets of uncensored fiction. Moreover, the supported findings overwhelmingly tended to be the same ones in each set. In short, the data suggest that authors do, indeed, tend to describe human action in realistically probable terms, and that fiction can be a valid source for the exploration of regularities in human social behavior.

Lest the reader remain doubtful as to the potential value of fiction, let us adduce some of the advantages that fiction has over conventional ways of studying decision making. First, it eliminates the problem of ‘social desirability’ that we may encounter when we ask people how they make decisions. Whatever the extent of a reader’s involvement in fiction, the behavior of the characters remains undisturbed. Second, the problem of ‘observer contamination’ in connection with decision processes that are observed directly is also eliminated, for the same reason. Third, the problem of limited access often experienced in field research is no longer so overwhelming. We need not draw inferences based on a meager number of cases; fiction permits us to make a large number of observations not only in the United States, but also, as in the present study, in China, Japan, and Soviet Russia. Finally, the problem of verisimilitude often associated with laboratory studies is also resolved. Fiction tends to have natural settings: characters have ‘real’ relationships with one another, and the issues they confront have ‘real’ meaning.


individualism and collectivism

No universally agreed-upon dimensions exist for describing the different ways people might conceive of self, others, or an individual’s relation to his fellows. However, the individualist-collectivist dimension, while no doubt oversimplifying a complex and variegated reality, remains useful. Not only do the concepts of individualism and collectivism enjoy wide currency in political and social thought; they are also part of the everyday language of peripatetic journalists and scholars—including those traveling back and forth between China, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States. In ideal-typical terms, individualists conceive of people as if they were unconnected atoms, whereas collectivists conceive of people as if they were interdependent parts of a larger organic whole. In the former conception, individuals are “pictured abstractly as given,” autonomous from society, “with given interests, wants, purposes [and] needs.”

In the latter conception, man does not constitute society, but society constitutes man. Community is “an integral part of the human psyche, united in consciousness with individuality, so that sociality and individuality … are not antagonistic but mutually supportive.” These ideal-type conceptions may be thought of as defining the end points of a continuum along which, in principle, the real conceptions of real people can be located. In this view, real people embody tensions within themselves between desire or interests on one hand and duty or obligation on the other; between belief in equality and the demand for differential reward, status, and prestige; between the liking for privacy and the enjoyment of collective activity; … and between selfishness and altruism.

In other words, I do not conceive of Americans as individualists and of Chinese, Japanese, and Russians as collectivists, nor of Chinese, Japanese, and Russians as sharing an identical understanding of self and other persons. I argue only that Chinese, Japanese, and Russians tend to be closer than Americans to the collectivist end of the individualist-collectivist spectrum. If this understanding is correct, then we should expect the processes of social influence of Americans to differ from those of Chinese, Japanese, and Russians in predictable ways, at least under conditions of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity.


hypothesis 1: the power of normative arguments

Individualists value autonomy, the sense that their thought and actions are not determined by agencies or by causes outside of their control. Collectivists, on the other hand, find satisfaction in being part of some larger social entity and in submitting their will to the needs and goals of the group. The individualist, then, is a stronger supporter of liberty, while the collectivist is a stronger supporter of hierarchy and authority. The individualist finds the idea of rights congenial, but is troubled by the notion of duties and obligations; for the collectivist, it is the reverse. In addition, the individualist believes that each individual knows his own interests best; the collectivist, by contrast, finds it conceivable that others know better.
It follows that, in disagreements between superiors and subordinates, collectivist superiors will enjoy an advantage over their subordinates that their individualist counterparts do not possess in the same degree: collectivist subordinates, more than individualist ones, are likely to find the normative arguments of their superiors compelling. First, collectivists will be more likely to share the values of their superiors, to be members of the same moral universe. Second, even in those instances where they do not share the values of their superiors, collectivists will be more inclined to fulfill the duties and obligations of their subordinate status. Conceiving of themselves and others as parts of a larger organic whole collectivists will more readily submit to their superiors because this is the subordinate’s role. “Role” should be a better predictor of collectivist behavior than of individualist behavior.

A normative argument consists of saying or implying, “Do it this way because it is right,” or “Do it this way because it is proper.” It is an appeal to morality, ethics, ideology, or legitimacy. Table 1 shows the association between the prominence of normative arguments (prominent, present, absent) in each disagreement and the likelihood of different disagreement outcomes. The more prominent the use of a normative argument, the more frequently the superior wins in the Chinese, Japanese, and Russian disagreements, but not in American ones. How should we interpret the absence of this tendency in the American case? Two explanations seem plausible. First, normative arguments may not be especially likely to produce victories for American superiors because they do not produce victories in general. If a normative argument is to convince, disputants must share the same values. Where this circumstance does not exist, we would expect a disagreement that is framed ultimately in terms of normative arguments either to remain unresolved or to end in a compromise, in an integrative (or log-rolling) solution, or in avoidance. Thus, one explanation for the lack of association between normative argument and victory by the superior in the American disagreements may be a relative lack of value consensus in American society. If this explanation were correct, however, we would expect to find a positive association in Table 1 between the prominence of normative arguments and the likelihood of “other outcomes” – but we do not. A second explanation, then, holds that there is sufficient value consensus in American society, but that this consensus favors subordinates and superiors equally. In this view, little positive association exists between normative argument and the success of superiors because subordinates have at their disposal norms, rules, and rights that have grown out of that American tradition which invests sanctity in the individual and which seeks to protect the individual against unwarranted claims from the more powerful. The data are consistent with this interpretation. Table 1 shows that the more prominent the use of normative arguments, the less frequently the subordinate wins in Chinese, Japanese, and Russian disagreements, but not in American disagreements. In China, Japan, and Soviet Russia, superiors thus appear to have an advantage over their subordinates not possessed to the same degree by their American counterparts.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Superior Wins</th>
<th>Subordinate Wins</th>
<th>Other Outcomes</th>
<th>n</th>
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</thead>
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<td>-.27</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Japan</strong></td>
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<td>-.28</td>
<td>105</td>
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<td><strong>Soviet Union</strong></td>
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<td>-.43</td>
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<td>63</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Censored China</strong></td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>126</td>
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file:///Macintosh%20HD/fritzgaenslen.us/wrldp.html (9 of 19) [8/24/2004 6:19:43 PM]
Japanese, and Russians appear to have a more collectivistic understanding of self and others than Americans do.

Observers who have attended meetings in China, Japan, and the Soviet Union ostensibly devoted to decision making have frequently noted their quality of orchestrated ritual. The present findings help to make sense of this ritual. Once again, Chinese, Japanese, and Russians appear to have a more collectivistic understanding of self and others than Americans do.

Table 2 presents a measure of the extent to which, in the uncensored fiction, subordinates are at a disadvantage in arguing with their superiors in public. The measure was obtained by subtracting the likelihood of a subordinate’s victory in a public setting from the likelihood of a subordinate’s victory in a private one (eliminating all cases involving the intervention of intermediaries or allies). The table shows, for example, that whereas Japanese subordinates are 14.1 percent worse off in public than in private, American subordinates are only 6.2 percent worse off. More generally, the setting of the disagreement makes less of a difference to American subordinates in their chances for victory than to Chinese, Japanese, and Russian subordinates.

The presence of an audience appears to disadvantage Chinese, Japanese, and Russian subordinates more than American ones. Observers who have attended meetings in China, Japan, and the Soviet Union ostensibly devoted to decision making have frequently noted their quality of orchestrated ritual. The present findings help to make sense of this ritual. Once again, Chinese, Japanese, and Russians appear to have a more collectivistic understanding of self and others than Americans do.
### Table 2

Extent to which subordinates in a disagreement with superiors are disadvantaged by public settings (likelihood of a subordinate’s victory in public subtracted from the likelihood of a subordinate’s victory in private)

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>74</td>
</tr>
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<td>Soviet Union</td>
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<td>United States</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal Relations and Behavior**

Individualists adhere to the principle of the supreme and intrinsic value of the individual human being. Collectivists, in contrast, believe that the collectivity is valuable in a way that cannot be reduced to the benefits, advantages, and enjoyments accruing to particular individuals. The individualist, then, is a stronger supporter of equality, for a belief in inherent human dignity implies that respect is equally due to all persons simply by virtue of their being persons. The hypothesis that follows is that the behavior of participants in a disagreement between individualists will be less contingent upon their relationship to one another than the behavior of participants in a disagreement between collectivists. Individualists are more likely to treat different people the same than collectivists are.

In order to assess the social relationship between participants in decision making, we need to know what categories people use to define the nature of their bonds with one another. Here I have relied on the work of Myron Wish and his associates. These authors presented a long list of interpersonal relationships (between close friends, between business partners, between political opponents, between parent and teenager, and so forth) to American subjects, asking them to rate these relationships on 25 bipolar scales (relaxed-tense, fair-unfair, interesting-dull, etc.). Using a multidimensional scaling technique, the authors then identified several dimensions necessary and sufficient to describe how their subjects perceived these relationships. The relationships were perceived as varying in the extent to which they were equal or unequal, friendly or hostile, intense or superficial, and socioemotional or task-oriented. Although comparable Chinese, Japanese, and Russian subjects might construe social relationships along somewhat different dimensions, I have used the categories identified here as a guide. (See Appendix.)

Five questions were asked about each pair of disputants in the fiction; the answers were taken as defining the nature of the social relationship between disputants.

For a measure of behavior, I focus on the various sorts of arguments disputants use as they attempt to influence one another. Not
only do I distinguish between the normative arguments and expert arguments described above, but also between coercive and referent arguments. A coercive argument essentially consists of saying or implying, “See it my way and I will reward you,” or “See it my way or I will punish you.” A referent argument takes the form of “See it my way because I ask you to.” One person asks another to identify with him, to take him as a referent, or to do him a personal favor.

What is the impact of the social relationship between disputants on their behavior toward one another in a disagreement? One way to answer this question is to assess the combined effects ($R^2$) of the various dimensions of the disputant relationship on the prominence of each type of argument, and average the results. The findings are presented in Table 3. The social relationship among Chinese, Japanese, and Russians appears to have a greater impact on the way they argue with one another than it does among Americans. Americans, more than Chinese, Japanese, and Russians, appear to treat different people the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
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<td>impact of social relationship between disputants on the prominence of coercive, normative, expert, and referent arguments (mean $R^2$)</td>
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<th></th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>200</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


continuity or change?

Do the findings presented above persist over time? Unfortunately, the data do not permit a complete answer. Sufficient disagreements are available, however, in Japanese and American fiction; they are distributed over a wide enough expanse of years to permit a tentative conclusion about two of the findings. The picture is clearly one of continuity rather than change. The association between the prominence of normative argument and the frequency of victory by the superior in prewar Japanese fiction (.37) is only slightly greater than the association between these variables in postwar Japanese fiction (.34). In the American case, comparison of prewar fiction (.05) with postwar fiction (.09) reveals a similar continuity. When we consider the impact of the social relationship between disputants on the way they argue with one another ($R^2$), we find the same pattern. The impact varies only slightly in Japanese fiction (.15 prewar, .17 postwar) and not at all in American fiction (.10). Although these results hardly add up to a firm position on the nature of cultural stability and change, they do suggest that we should beware of too easily equating an individualist conception with modernity and a collectivist conception with tradition. Urbanization, industrialization, and widespread literacy appear to be congruent with a wide variety of understandings about the relationship of human beings to
The first two findings of this study suggest that, other things being equal, the advantage of superiors over subordinates is likely to be greater for Chinese, Japanese, and Russians than for Americans; because of different cultural assumptions, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian superiors are likely to have at their disposal a resource not possessed to the same degree by their American counterparts. What are the implications of this difference between superiors and subordinates for decision making? Laboratory studies provide useful insights for two reasons. First, they allow the investigator to vary the amount of resources available to either a superior or a subordinate while holding the behavior of the other constant. Second, laboratory conditions permit the investigator to attribute the behavior of either a superior or a subordinate directly to these resources rather than to, say, a sense of efficacy acquired over a long period of success or failure, praise or condemnation.

Let us consider first the behavior of superiors. Different laboratory studies have varied the expertise, the formal authority, and the capability to reward and punish available to superiors, while holding the behavior of subordinates constant. These studies found that the greater the disparity in resources between superiors and subordinates, the more superiors developed a heightened sense of their own worth and devalued the worth of those below them. The findings imply the following sources of superior behavior. When a subordinate complies with the wishes of a superior, the superior will attribute the cause of the subordinate’s compliance to some combination of his own advantage over the subordinate and the latter’s desire to perform well. The greater the advantage the superior has over the subordinate, the more he will attribute the subordinate’s compliance to this advantage rather than to the private motivation of the subordinate. Thus, the greater this advantage, the more the superior will feel that if he did not have this advantage, the subordinate would not comply; therefore, the more he will strive to maintain or increase this advantage, and the more closely he will monitor his subordinate’s behavior.

Several propositions follow concerning the behavior of Chinese, Japanese, and Russian superiors as compared to American ones. First, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian superiors may be expected, more than American ones, to prefer that true decision making not take place between superiors and subordinates at all, but rather that it take place among peers. Second, they may be expected, more than American superiors, to desire that occasions of ostensible decision making which involve superiors and subordinates in fact serve the functions of socializing subordinates and enhancing the legitimacy of superiors. Third, they may be expected, more than American superiors, to prefer secrecy in decision making; secrecy aids a superior in maintaining psychological distance from his subordinates and in helping to maintain his public persona while actually getting some work done. Fourth, they may be expected, more than American superiors, to wish to cloak their goals for subordinates in myth, ritual, and ideology. Finally, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian superiors, more than American ones, may be expected to desire to monitor and control their subordinates closely.

Now let us consider the behavior of subordinates. Laboratory studies generally support a conclusion that complements the findings noted above. The studies concerned with subordinate behavior imply that the greater the advantage of a superior over a subordinate, the weaker will be the striving of the subordinate to reduce this advantage. In order to obtain a clearer picture of this dynamic, however, we need to look elsewhere. A finding of long standing in organizational research is that there is often a discrepancy between the influence subordinates believe they have and the influence they are judged to have by an outside observer: some subordinates believe they have less influence than they actually have, and some believe they have more. In both cases, we may conjecture that the evaluations depend upon how much influence subordinates believe they should have. A subordinate who believes that there are only a few matters over which he should have some say will...
be inclined to exaggerate his actual influence. A subordinate who believes that there are many matters over which he should have some say will be inclined to underestimate his actual influence. Who are the likely exaggerators and who are the likely underestimators? Evidence suggests that the exaggerators will tend to be found at a *lower level in the social hierarchy* than the underestimators. These results are consistent with survey findings which show that lower-status adult Americans are less likely than upper-status adult Americans to believe that people like them do not possess enough political power. Thus, the above implication proves to be correct: the greater the advantage of a superior over a subordinate, the weaker will be the striving of the subordinate to reduce this advantage.

Once more, several propositions follow. First, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian subordinates, more than American ones, may be expected to desire to push responsibility onto those above them. Second, they may be expected, more than their American counterparts, to desire to present superiors with unanimous recommendations rather than confronting them directly as individuals. Finally, they may be more reluctant than American subordinates to participate in decision making in the first place.

The third finding of this study suggests that, other things being equal, the behavior of Chinese, Japanese, and Russian decision participants will be more contingent on their relationship to one another than that of Americans. What implications follow from this difference? Research by Jeffrey Rubin and his colleagues is suggestive. In the mid-1970s, Rubin and Brown, reviewing laboratory studies of bargaining behavior, encountered a large number of contradictory and apparently irreconcilable findings. In Prisoners’ Dilemma-type games in particular, they found a pattern of relationships between gender and bargaining. In some studies, males were more cooperative than females, while in other studies males were more competitive. Closer examination revealed that the studies were not strictly comparable. In some studies subjects played against a fixed strategy that gave the greatest reward to consistently competitive behavior, while in other studies subjects played against an adversary whose behavior was contingent on the subject’s own—games that gave the greatest reward to consistently cooperative behavior. This distinction helped to make sense of the disparate findings about gender and bargaining. In the games that rewarded consistent cooperation, males tended to be more cooperative than females. In the games that rewarded consistent competition, males tended to be more competitive than females. Males; then, appeared to be more oriented toward the impersonal task of maximizing their own earnings. Females, in contrast, seemed more sensitive and reactive to the interpersonal aspects of their relationship. Males and females do not differ in their propensity to bargain cooperatively, Rubin and Brown concluded; they tend to differ in *interpersonal orientation*.

The confidence of these authors in this conclusion was bolstered by two other findings. First, the bargaining-game literature showed that females were more likely than males to be influenced by (1) the gender of their bargaining partner, (2) the gender of the experimenter, (3) the attractiveness of their bargaining partner, (4) equity considerations, and (5) the opportunity for communication. Second, Swap and Rubin found that when they measured “interpersonal orientation” directly among a sample of American undergraduates, females scored higher than males. Females were more likely to agree with such statements as (1) I am interested in knowing what makes people tick; (2) I am greatly influenced by the moods of the people I am with; (3) it’s important for me to work with people with whom I get along, even if that means I get less done; and (4) I am very sensitive to criticism. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to agree with such statements as (1) I would rather think about a personal problem by myself than discuss it with others; (2) what others think about my actions is of little consequence to me; (3) one good turn does not necessarily deserve another; and (4) I generally view myself as a person who is not terribly interested in what other people are like.

For our purposes, what is striking about this discussion is the considerable overlap between the “interpersonal orientation” construct and the “individual-collectivist” construct. Individualists are low in interpersonal orientation, while collectivists are high in interpersonal orientation. Thus, the behaviors that distinguish these two groups may also be expected to distinguish Americans from Chinese, Japanese, and Russians. The research of Rubin and his colleagues suggests two propositions. First, Americans are
likely to be less reactive to each other’s bargaining behavior than Chinese, Japanese, or Russians. That is to say, given the slightest hint of intransigence or exploitation on the part of a fellow countryman, Chinese, Japanese, and Russians will be more likely than Americans to overreact with vengeance; and, given the slightest hint of goodwill, Chinese, Japanese, and Russians will be more likely to overreact with cooperation.

Rubin and his colleagues also report a second finding. Subjects high in interpersonal orientation were more likely than subjects low in interpersonal orientation to attribute the success of another person to internal, personal factors (ability and effort) rather than to situational factors (luck and task difficulty). This finding raises the possibility that Chinese, Japanese, and Russians will be more likely than Americans to assign personal credit or fault in evaluating decisions.

There are two additional propositions. First, to the extent that Chinese, Japanese, and Russians are more sensitive than Americans to interpersonal relations, they are more likely to give attention to the design of decision-making procedures, to the composition of decision-making groups, and to the particular forums in which decision making takes place. Various structural arrangements can contribute either to the effectiveness of decision making or to the power concerns of particular individuals; but in China, Japan, and the Soviet Union, more than in the United States, we should expect such arrangements to be less a matter of chance than of conscious intent. Those decision makers who are more aware that interpersonal relations can affect decision processes should want to devote more time to shaping these processes.

Finally, to the extent that interpersonal relations are important in decision making, the study of decision making is difficult. The study of Chinese, Japanese, and Russian decision making, then, is likely to be more complicated than the study of American decision making. This proposition, and the others discussed above, are summarized in ideal-typical terms in Table 4.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collectivist Decision Makers</th>
<th>Individualist Decision Makers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interpersonal relations have much impact on decision making.</td>
<td>1. Interpersonal relations have little impact on decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Much attention is given to design procedures, composition of decision making group, and forum of decision making.</td>
<td>2. Decision procedures, group composition, and forum of decision making are often left to chance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Decision makers are overly reactive to behavior of fellow participants.</td>
<td>3. Decision makers are primarily concerned with task environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Evaluation of decision is likely to involve assignment of personal credit or fault.</td>
<td>4. Evaluation of decision is likely to take external circumstances into account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Decision participants are particularly attentive to superiors.</td>
<td>5. Decision participants are not overly concerned with superiors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Decision making among equals is preferred.

7. Superiors believe that meetings involving unequals should serve socialization functions.

8. Secrecy is preferred in decision making.

9. Superiors desire to control subordinates.

10. Subordinates desire to avoid responsibility.

11. Subordinates often use delegates in communicating with superiors.

12. Subordinates are reluctant to participate in decision making.

13. Study of decision making is difficult.

6. Decision makers are not overly concerned about status differences among them.

7. Meetings involving unequals are seen as useful for decision making.

8. Public decision making is often acceptable.

9. Superiors are willing to grant some autonomy to subordinates.

10. Subordinates are willing to accept responsibility.

11. Subordinates are willing to act as individuals in communicating with superiors.

12. Subordinates are willing to participate in decision making.

13. Study of decision making is not difficult.


37 In the following discussion, I am indebted to Laurence B. Mohr, “Authority and Democracy in Organizations,” Human Relations 30 (October 1977), 919–47.


41 Ibid., 172–73.

42 Walter C. Swap and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, “Measurement of Interpersonal Orientation,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 44 (January 1983), 211. None of the differences found in the fiction is an artifact of different proportions of female disputants in the different sets of fiction.
culture revisited

A recent review asserts that political science has abandoned “the Parsonian view of man as essentially . . . nonrational, governed by en culturated norms and values,” and has accepted instead “homo economicus, man as the rational maximizer of his own advantage.” My quarrel with a conception of man as homo economicus is not that it fails to give a powerful account of a great deal of human behavior, but that it gives an inadequate account of the nature and variety of human values. I agree that, in seeking to understand human behavior, we do best to assume that people are rational pursuers of their own self-interest. I object, however, to the notion that the meaning of “self-interest” is the same everywhere. If the meaning of “self” can vary, then so can the meaning of “self-interest.”

There are two reasons for paying attention to even small cultural differences. First, they can matter a great deal in group decision making. Perhaps this would not be so if human information-processing were relatively error-free and if decision making always proceeded along the rational route so often prescribed for it. Not only is human social judgment beset by a number of shortcomings and biases, however, but real decision-making processes are often extremely fluid, ad hoc, and even chaotic; the definition of the situation frequently only emerges as participants think up and make known their objections to an initial suggested course of action. In a process so fluid and ill-defined, cultural conceptions about the individual’s relation to his fellows can easily leave their mark.

As an illustration, consider Robert Axelrod’s finding when he coded participants’ causal assertions (expert arguments) as these appeared in transcripts of foreign policy meetings in three different settings: the British Eastern Committee in 1918, the meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain in Munich in 1938, and the Japanese Council on National Security in 1970. Axelrod found that Japanese participants were more than twice as likely to disagree with something they themselves had said than participants in the other two settings. In Japan more than in the West, I suggest, expert arguments can have at least two meanings. First, they can be assertions about the real world in which speakers have confidence. Second, as particularly inoffensive arguments, they can be expressions of group solidarity, concern, and respect. This conclusion is supported by evidence from Japanese fiction showing expert argument to be positively associated with compromises, logrolling solutions, and avoiding the issue altogether.

If cultural conceptions about man’s relation to his fellows can affect group decision making, there are several implications for further research. First, much basic work needs to be done on how these conceptions can vary and on the conditions that elicit them. In lumping Chinese, Japanese, and Russians in a single category, I most certainly do an injustice to differences among them. Second, analysts should pay closer attention to particular relationships among particular decision makers; in other words, gossip about people in high places may turn out to be data. Third, analysts should devote more effort to identifying the mechanisms by which personal connections are formed in different societies, and the precise nature of the bonds that characterize phenomena (said to be especially significant in China, Japan, and the Soviet Union) such as factions and patron-client networks. Finally, analysts should consider a wider range of interpretations in assessing the meaning of particular decisions.

The second reason for paying attention to even small cultural differences is more humanistic: if such differences exist, we should
try to document them. If we fail to do so because no agreed-upon method for identifying cultural attributes exists, or because it is difficult to make cultural explanations convincing, we yield to mere convenience. Such convenience comes at the cost of adopting a theoretical position in which one assumes (1) that societies do not have a cultural aspect, or (2) that culture has no consequence for behavioral variables, or (3) that different cultures have the same consequences for these variables. Western social scientists who specialize in Chinese, Japanese, and Soviet affairs do not generally hold these assumptions; it is only the demands of formal scholarship that often make it appear so. In informal conversation, reference to culture as an explanatory factor is not uncommon. In cold print, however, the Chinese, Japanese, and Russians are usually portrayed as desiring—like the rest of us—money, status, and power, never mind a few peculiar ideas. A model of mankind that ignores these ideas is incomplete.


See, for example, Paul A. Anderson, "Decision Making by Objection and the Cuban Missile Crisis," Administrative Science Quarterly 28 (June 1983), 383–403.


Gaenslen (fn. 22, 1984), 201.

This point is made by John Child, "Culture, Contingency, and Capitalism in the Cross-National Study of Organizations," in L. L. Cummings and Barry N. Staw, eds., Research in Organizational Behavior, III (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1981), 307.

appendix

dimensions of the relationship between disputants

1. Would you say that the disputing characters generally consider each other to be peers (status equals), or do they perceive each other as unequal in status?

1. They are peers.

2. One is of slightly higher status than the other.

3. One is of much higher status than the other.

2. Which of the following do you think best describes the affective bond between the disputing characters just prior to the dispute?

1. Very warm; they were friends.

2. Slightly warm; they were acquaintances.

3. Neutral; they were strangers.

4. Cold; they were enemies.

3. Given the context of the story, how often would you say the disputing characters came into contact with each other prior to
their disagreement?

1. Often; enough to have some familiarity with each others' general values, beliefs, and customary behavior.

2. Occasionally; enough to have formed definite but very generalized impressions of each other (e.g., whether X is a nice person or not, "serious," "sense of humor," etc.).

3. Seldom; the two have met before, but they really know little about each other.

4. Never.

4. Given the context of the story, how often do you think the disputing characters expect to have dealings or contact with one another following their disagreement? (N.B.: This includes involuntary contact.)

1. Very often; every day without fail.

2. Often; more than once a week to possibly every day.

3. Occasionally; at least twice a month.

4. Seldom.

5. Never.

6. Unclear.

5. In your judgment, is the basic interpersonal relationship between the two disputing characters just prior to the dispute primarily a task-oriented one or primarily a socioemotional one?

1. Task-oriented.


3. Socioemotional.