

ployed Somali fishermen, as well as politically and financially motivated buccaneers, from seizing ships for ransoms that can run to millions of dollars. The resulting piracy not only impinges on freedom of the seas but undermines basic economic development and the rule of law in one of the poorest areas in the world.

OTHER NATIONS

Breaking the Chinese Mold

THE SOURCE: "Chinese Political Attitudes and Values in Comparative Context: Cautionary Remarks on Cultural Attributions" by Steve Chan, in *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Dec. 2008.

IF THERE IS ANYTHING AMERICANS know for sure about the Chinese, it is this: They are nationalistic, authoritarian, conformist, and deferential. They also follow the ancient Confucian tradition of filial piety, place great store in maintaining "face," and manifest the Middle Kingdom syndrome of belief in Chinese moral and cultural superiority. Such traits go a long way toward explaining why the Communist Party remains in power while communism has succumbed almost everywhere else, and why growing national wealth has failed to trigger popular pressure for democratic rule.

But nearly every one of these presumptions is wrong. The World Values Survey, in which citizens in more than 80 countries responded to questions about culture and values, showed that between 1990 and 2000, Chinese people expressed the opposite of conventional wisdom on

many of the most important issues of the day, writes Steve Chan, a political scientist at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Hypernationalism? Only 26 percent of Chinese said they were proud of their nationality, compared with 72 percent of Americans. Authoritarianism? A total of 19 percent of Chinese said that it would be good to have a "strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections," compared with 30 percent of Americans. Conformity? Three-quarters of the Chinese found independence an important quality for children to learn in the home, compared with 61 percent of Americans. Deference? Fifteen percent of Chinese stressed obedience as an important attribute, compared with 32 percent of those surveyed in the United States. Filial piety? More than 60 percent of Chinese said it is important to make parents proud, compared with 83 percent of Americans.

The World Values Survey does not inquire directly about the importance of not losing face, but surely this concern is akin to worry in many parts of America about being disrespected, or "dissed." The survey also doesn't ask about the Middle Kingdom syndrome, but it is hard to believe that the average Chinese thinks the nation morally and culturally superior when only slightly more than one in four indicated pride in country, Chan says. Chinese people, according to the survey, actually thought slightly more highly of democracy than Americans, perhaps, Chan says, because of their "lack of experience" with it.

Some stereotypes did turn out to be true. Chinese parents were two

and a half times more likely than Americans to consider it important that their children learn thrift. Chinese respondents were almost totally irreligious, yet they indicated vastly less tolerance of homosexuality, prostitution, abortion, divorce, and euthanasia than people polled in the United States. They also had more traditional views about women, with more than a third believing that women need to have children to be fulfilled compared with 15 percent in America, and half saying that men make better leaders, compared with 23 percent in the United States.

How can the conventional wisdom be so wildly out of sync with the expressed views of the people in question? Chan wondered if the findings were wrong, and compared them with those for similar cultures (China to Taiwan, and the United States to Canada). He found that the Canadian responses corresponded "generally" to the American ones. And he noted that the Taiwanese survey results also undercut stereotypes. He discounted the possibility that the Chinese respondents felt strong pressure to give "politically correct" answers to some of the questions, because nine out of 10 said that democracy is the best form of government—hardly a response likely to please Chinese authorities.

Chan thinks that differences between East and West were exaggerated in the beginning and have lessened over time. Political culture changes, Chan emphasizes, and it fails to account for the influence of environmental factors. Using cultural proclivities to explain contemporary events may be a mistake—even if we judge the proclivities correctly.