

Career Values of Public Administration and Public Policy Students in China, Malaysia and the United States

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With governments around the world needing to attract talented professionals, this exploratory, cross-cultural research analyzes career values of 384 MPA and MPP students at major universities in the capitals of China, Malaysia and the United States. Malaysians and Americans structured 23 goals along dimensions that contrasted sharply to those of the Chinese. Moreover, Malaysians and Americans cared more about self-actualization and less about co-worker comradeship than did the Chinese. All three groups prioritized elements of altruism and affluence. Segmentation analysis uncovered six distinct subgroups (Acheivers, Altruistic Analysts, Administrators, Altruistic Affluents, Acquiescents, and Apathetics) with their distributions varying by country.

Keywords: public service, education, MPA, MPP, career values, motivation, China, Malaysia, United States, motivation

INTRODUCTION

China, Malaysia, and the United States face the challenge of attracting talented professionals to careers in the public sector. Companies in China (both state-owned and private) are now drawing educated professionals away from government jobs. In Malaysia and the United States, the pending retirement of the baby boom generation will create a huge personnel shortage, with over half (52 percent) of the nearly two million civilian federal workers in the United States eligible for retirement in the next few years (Lavell, 2005).

Higher salaries are generally viewed as more likely in the private sector (Spahr, 2005; Thornton, 2006) and in all three countries the expanding nonprofit sector is competing for new graduates who have public-service oriented career goals.

Despite these and other hurdles, some factors draw young professionals into public-service careers. Public sector jobs have the reputation of greater security and better benefits (Foster, 1997, Adams, 2000a, 2000b), particularly in China (Xu, 2006; Fan, 2007). Public administration has become increasingly important in China's process of reform and opening to the outside world (Yu, 2006), thus gaining some stature. In the United States, unemployment in the private sector and the allure of a new administration also may have increased the appeal of careers in government (Adams &

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Infeld, 2009). Moreover, many may be motivated by the deep desire for public service, regardless of pay scales, benefits, and prestige.

Given the need for bright, educated public servants in rapidly developing as well as in highly developed countries, this research is a comparative analysis of the extent to which a range of job characteristics and career values motivate students who want to work in public service and who enrolled in MPA or MPP programs at major universities in the capitals of the United States, Malaysia, and China. More specifically, the key research question asks: What are the characteristics of the public service jobs preferred by such graduate students in the United States, Malaysia, and China? As reviewed below, these three important countries have different levels of development plus distinct regimes and cultures, thereby providing a valuable opportunity to test the extent to which public sector career values tend to be universal or country-specific.

This cross-cultural research is highly exploratory. Prior research on public service motivation (especially studies following the lead of Perry & Wise, 1990) has focused on individual predisposing factors such as attitudes toward politics and social programs rather than career aspirations related to job characteristics. A few studies have examined motivations for public service careers among American graduate students. However, the extent to which those perspectives may be shared across the Pacific is, at this point, more a matter of speculation based on cultural studies of the general public in those countries. Before turning to the topic of culture, it is worth briefly surveying the status of public administration historically and as a field of study in all three countries.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN CHINA

Public administration in China dates back 2,000 thousand years to the Ch'in dynasty. Historically, positions were awarded based on aristocratic status until, following the British modernization pattern, China began using examinations for civil service employment (Drewry & Chan, 2001). While early civil servants held high social status, more recent studies of occupational prestige in urban China have found that both high and middle-level officials are ranked at a similar level to those in other countries, in the top fourth out of 50 occupations, below teachers and civil engineers and above electricians and accountants (Lin & Xie, 1988; see also Unger, 2006). Income of civil servants is above average and job security is high (Xu, 2006), so job competition is intense, with 37 applicants for each civil service position (Lan, 2005).

In 1997, in China's vast bureaucracy, only 10 percent had a college degree, less than one-half of one percent had a graduate degree, and few had studied public administration (Yang, 2005). Recognizing the need for a bureaucracy more compatible with a marketized and globalized

economy, in 2001 the government launched the Master's of Public Administration (MPA) degree at 24 universities (Yang, 2005). From the outset, the central government was heavily involved in accreditation, curricula, and academic policies (Miao, 2004; Ngok, 2005; Halachmi & Kinglun, 2009). Admission required a high score on a national exam, strong undergraduate grades, and a minimum of four years of work experience (Tong & Straussman, 2003); a majority of the students must be from the civil service. As of 2008, the MPA in China was only 8 years old compared to the United States, where it was 80 years old. Nevertheless, enrollments have rapidly soared, with over 10,000 students in about 100 programs (unpublished data, National Committee on MPA Education, China).

Studying the curriculum, Yang concluded that the government allows a balance of globalization and localization without entirely adopting Western models, accepting accountability and managerial efficiency while still emphasizing "regime stability and legitimacy of the Communist Party" (2005, p. 110). China's MPA uses international benchmarks and even some American models and textbooks, but incorporates its specific ideology with the objective of producing "applied professionals." Yang argues that professionalism in China includes political party loyalty, so the goal of MPA education is to "establish an efficient, harmonious, and ordered public management system *in order to promote socialistic market economy*" (italics by author, 2005, p. 110).

Dong and Wu (2004) concluded that many topics covered by MPA courses in China are comparable to those in MPA and MPP programs in the United States, although teaching styles differ (Infeld, 2009). On the specific topic of public policy analysis, Ngok (2005) found limited coverage, with poorly developed teaching modes and inadequate syllabi. He blamed the lack of qualified instructors, lack of clarity about how Western approaches apply, and the topic's lack of popularity with the government.

In response to globalization and perceived weaknesses in the traditional approach to administration, increased attention has been given to the New Public Management (NPM) ideas of downsizing government, simplified hierarchies, contracting, and deregulation (Drewry & Chan, 2001.) Wu and He (2008) examined introductory courses in public administration and management in China and the United States and found that NPM receives considerably more attention in China, while U.S. instructors appear to be more critical of NPM and give more time to competing paradigms. (For additional reviews of the study of public administration in China, see Yang, 2007; Holzer & Zhang, 2009.)

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia's nearly 30 million inhabitants are a fraction of China's 1.3 billion people or the United States' 310 million,

but Malaysia is easily among the world's top 50 countries in population size as well as in total gross domestic product and in GDP per capita (World Bank, 2008). Despite that standing and its dramatic economic growth, many people may be less familiar with its history and government so some additional background should be reviewed.

The Federation of Malaya (as Malaysia¹ was then known) was granted independence from Britain in 1957 with a relatively peaceful period of transition that was largely achieved by granting concessions to the main ethnic groups (Means, 1996). A social contract "bargain" was struck at independence, whereby the Malays were accorded special rights as "Bumiputeras" (literally, "sons of the soil") in return for citizenship rights for the Chinese and Indians. Malays continue to constitute a majority (66 percent) while citizens of Chinese (25 percent) or Indian (8 percent) descent compose most of the balance (Malaysia, 2006). These ethnic distinctions are compounded by language, religious, economic, geographic, and political differences along communal lines.

Based on the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and ceremonial monarchy, Malaysia operates a federal system of government with a bicameral parliament and functions divided into legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Each state also has its own constitution and a unicameral assembly, although the constitution also created a strong central government lead by a powerful Prime Minister. Malaysian public administration was inherited from the British but has evolved its own style of administration "influenced by the culture, history, and politics of Hinduized, Islamic, colonial and independent Malaya" (Tilman, 1964). The federal executive branch consists of two dozen Ministries, plus five powerful central agencies that control many budgetary and personnel matters and formulates national financial and economic policies (Ahmad, Mansor, & Ahmad, 2003).

The national parliament is dominated by a ruling coalition, now called the Barisan Nasional (National Front) that has governed Malaysia since independence and includes leaders from each of the three main communal groups. As Crouch (1996, p. 13) noted, all political issues have been inextricably "interwoven with communal considerations—economic policy, regional development, language, education, immigration, recruitment to the civil service and armed forces, and many more."

Six universities, all in Kuala Lumpur, now offer the MPA degree. The oldest and largest MPA program is at the University of Malaya (UM) where the Department of Administrative Studies and Politics in the Faculty of Economic and Administrations began offering an MPA in 1967, one of the first such programs in Asia. Many of the UM instructors hold graduate degrees from institutions in

the United Kingdom or the United States and the curriculum has drawn heavily on U.K. and U.S. models. The other five MPA programs have been introduced only since 1997. The country's sole MPP program is offered through the University of Malaya's International Institute of Public Policy and Management.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Public administration in the United States is not much more than two centuries old, no match for China's two millennia. However, both the Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) degrees originated in the United States. In 2008, over 11,000 students graduated from over 250 accredited and unaccredited MPA, MPP, and closely related professional public affairs programs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Moreover, the United States pioneered various administrative innovations during this relatively brief history. In the late 1800s, Woodrow Wilson, considered the father of American public administration, propounded the ideas that politics and administration should be separate and that government could be run efficiently and effectively. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1883 introduced merit pay, protection from political interference, and greater transparency in government operations.

A few decades later, the roots of the American MPA were planted in the Progressive Era's climate of advancing professional nonpolitical administration (Stokes, 1996), with graduate programs springing up around the country in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, the MPP degree was developed, propelled by the growing view that public programs needed to be evaluated critically by sophisticated analysts with improved methodological skills (Rivlin, 1971). Despite this newer distinct degree, Koven, Goetzke, and Brennan (2008) concluded that typically, despite extra MPP courses in microeconomics and quantitative methods and extra MPA courses in management and budgeting, the two degrees "do not differ dramatically in their curricula" (p. 704). (See also Averch & Dluhy, 1992, and White, 2007) While a number of prestigious MPP programs have been established, the few dozen MPP programs are still far outnumbered by the more than two hundred MPA programs. (See, for example, gradschools.com)

In the 1990s, *Reinventing Government* (Osborne & Gabler, 1992) promoted a more "customer driven" and "market oriented" approach to public administration that came to be called the New Public Management. More recently, Janet and Robert Denhardt (2003) challenged this approach with an alternative they called New Public Service, viewing members of the public not as customers but as citizens and active participants in government, and emphasizing the "public servant" role of administrators. These key themes in American

¹The country became known as Malaysia in 1963 when Singapore and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in north Borneo joined the Federation. Singapore was expelled from the Federation in August 1965.

public administration have been adopted or at least debated throughout much of the world (Perry, 2008).

What Motivates American Students to Want Government Careers?

In this U.S. setting, what type of careers are the students who take the time and spend the money to earn an MPA or MPP seeking? What motivates them to want careers in government? The most extensive research to date is the Adams survey (2000b) of 477 mostly MPA students (plus a few in MPP and allied degrees) enrolled in 28 programs across the United States. This study found that the single most powerful predictor of wanting to work for the federal government was the belief that such jobs allow “a real impact on national issues.” The secondary predictor was valuing personal growth, with the desire for job security adding a little additional explanatory power. Likewise, in a nationwide survey of college seniors in Phi Beta Kappa, Adams (2000a) found that among these high academic achievers, the few (13 percent) who were most interested in working for the federal government wanted careers that would let them “have a real impact on national issues” and believed federal jobs would enable them to do that. They also valued and were optimistic about advancement opportunities and federal starting salaries. In both studies (Adams, 2000a, 2000b), the strongest predictor by far was a measure of altruism impact, followed by an intrinsic characteristic that allowed for personal growth and an extrinsic economic factor (either starting salary or job security). (For a more recent analysis of MPA and MPP students, see Infeld & Adams, 2011.)

This same pattern was found more recently in Canada where Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2006) explored how work values stimulate public sector career choice. They conceptualized work values as organized around the distinct dimensions of altruistic, intrinsic (self-actualizing), extrinsic (affluence, benefits, security), social (comradship with co-workers), and prestige values, and their factor analysis confirmed that most variables loaded as expected on one of those dimensions. Comparing private sector, public sector, and “parapublic” (“nonprofit” and mixed public-private) sector employees in professional, technical, or administrative positions, they found differences in general values and work values across sectors. Most importantly, public sector employees were more likely than their private sector counterparts to value work that makes a contribution to society (altruism) and is intellectually stimulating and challenging (“intrinsic” values). In short, the findings tracked quite well with the results found earlier among American students. This study is of specific importance because their instrument was used as the basis for data collection in this study.

Expectations about the career values of American MPA and MPP students in 2009 can easily default to predicting a replication of patterns of the U.S. student data that Adams collected ten years earlier, supported by the later comparison

of Canadian employees. However, extrapolating to Asia is more problematic. In China, for example, Liu, Tang, and Zhu (2008) sought to validate the concept and measurement of “public service motivation” (PSM) as constructed by Perry and Wise (1990). In China, however, the scale did not work as well and the authors concluded “the generalizability of the construct” as used in the West “is limited” (p. 684). In the absence of prior research on career values of MPA students in China and Malaysia, what about prior research regarding broader cultural values?

GENERAL CULTURAL AND REGIME DIFFERENCE

The literature on cultural differences across countries is extensive and far more detailed than can be or need be reviewed here. Some relevant highlights should be noted, however, starting with the most recent wave of the ongoing World Values Surveys conducted during 2005–2008 in 54 countries with over 77,000 respondents (World Values Survey, 2010). The numerous questions of this lengthy survey reveal complex cultural differences across the three countries, sometimes large, sometimes subtle, sometimes inconsistent with other research, and not always with clear implications for our study. Consider, for example, the question about job selection.

Respondents were asked which of four options was most important when looking for a job. Most Americans wanted either a “good income” or an “important job,” while most Malaysians wanted a “good income.” Most Chinese wanted either a “good income” or a “safe job with no risks.” (See Table 1.) These results would suggest that salary should trump other considerations for a plurality of people in all three countries, but, as noted above, that was not at all what Adams found for the large samples of MPA students (2000b) and Phi Beta Kappa students (2000a) in the United States. Apparently, the values of the general public are not necessarily a guide to predicting the values of these graduate students.

TABLE 1
Job Priorities of the General Public

<i>First choice, if looking for a job</i>	<i>United States (n = 1,239)</i>	<i>Malaysia (n = 1,175)</i>	<i>China (n = 1,705)</i>
A good income	38%	57%	39%
Doing an important job	31%	13%	13%
A safe job with no risk	23%	26%	35%
Working with people you like	9%	13%	13%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: World Values Survey, 2006, online database

To get some perspective on the cultural differences across the three countries of interest in this study, an especially useful tool and a widely cited product of the World Values Surveys is the “Inglehart-Welzel Cross-Cultural Map of the World” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) shown in Figure 1. Of special interest is the distinctiveness of China, Malaysia, and the United States on the two complex, constructed scales that form the scatterplot. While China ranks high on the “secular-rational” side, both Malaysia and the United States were on the “traditional values” side. However, the United States ranked very high on the composite of measure of “self-expressive values” while China was on the opposite side (“survival values”) of this continuum, with Malaysia nearer the middle. Those patterns put the United States in the English-speaking cluster, China near the opposite corner in a region Inglehart calls “Confucian” but in the midst of many formerly communist European states, and Malaysia closer to the center of the scatterplot in the South/Southeast Asia grouping.

These data certainly suggest that “postmodern” self-expressive values would dominate in the United States and that is indeed what Adams found (2000b) with altruism and intrinsic values acting as the major motivators for graduate students who want careers in public service. If that scatterplot pattern holds, the Chinese students ought to be more concerned about getting paid well and reliably. However, the dominant values of a country may not entirely apply to the subset of a younger generation of students who are sufficiently successful to earn a college degree and to choose to embark on an MPA or MPP at a major university. Just because the Chinese public at large ranked low in self-expressive values does not mean the Chinese graduate students will care only about salaries and security. Moreover, the ambitious global culture scatterplot cannot capture all important aspects of culture.

One frequent issue in Asian and American cultural comparisons is individualism versus collectivism. Hwang (1987) made the classic argument that the Chinese are

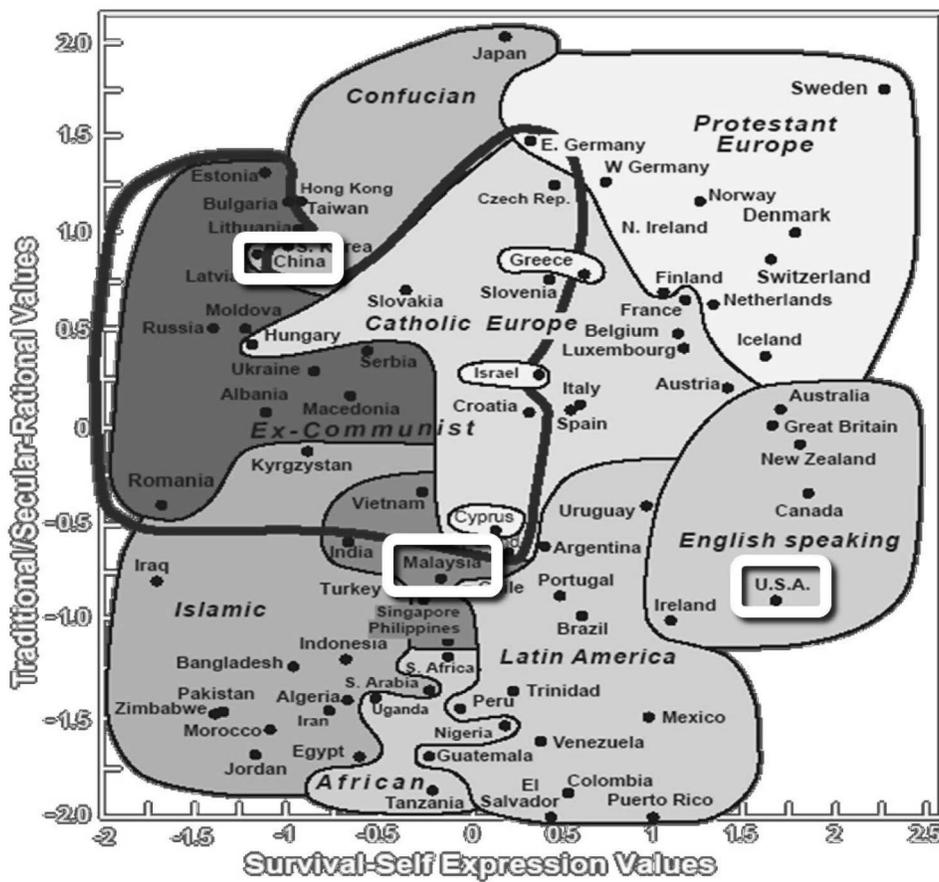


FIGURE 1 Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World.

Source: Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005: p. 64 based on the World Values Surveys, see www.worldvaluessurvey.org. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

more likely than Westerners to base decisions on norms of reciprocity, shaped by hierarchical social relations, with a goal of maintaining harmony and social order, rather than using an explicitly self-interested basis. That theme of individual-orientation versus social-orientation has continued to dominate much of the study of Chinese values and personality (Lu, 2008). According to most studies, Chinese have much more group-oriented, collectivist values than do Americans (e.g., Hume et al., 2003; Peppas, 2004; Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). A meta-analysis (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002) reaffirmed the consistent finding that Chinese feel the pull of group obligations more than do Americans who prize their individualism and personal independence.

The individualism-collectivism continuum has also been investigated in Malaysia. Bochner (1994) found that self-concepts in Malaysia are more group anchored and less individualist than in Britain and Australia. However, that may be changing. Noordin, Williams, and Zimmer (2002, p. 46) found that, compared to Australian managers, Malaysian managers “are still basically collectivists in terms of their social relations, self-sacrifice and family integrity but, at the same time, they have inculcated the elements of competition, an individualist factor, at least in their working life.” This study joins others in finding that Malaysians strongly value social harmony and avoiding interpersonal social conflict (Sulaiman, 1981; Goddard, 1997; Jin & Cooper, 2000; Noordin & Jusoff, 2010). Also, Geert Hofstede’s various studies of cultural dynamics (2010) find Malaysians and Chinese to be much more accepting of hierarchical power arrangements and much more integrated into groups than are Americans.

These supposedly overarching cultural differences may be increasingly minimized or obliterated by generational change. As Chan (2008, p. 226) observed, “Culture is a variable and not a constant.” Especially in countries changing as rapidly as China and Malaysia, and arguably the United States as well, generational effects and subgroup variation may show profound differences. Astonishingly, when Gao and Newman (2005) compared independence and interdependence among Chinese and U.S. college students, they found that the Chinese students had significantly stronger levels of independence than did the American students. They concluded that due to China’s large population, limited employment opportunities, and one-child policy, the new generation is actually more independent and more competitive than are U.S. students. Once again, it is not clear that generalizations about nationwide cross-cultural differences will predict the values of a particular subset of educated young adults.

Setting aside cultural differences, these three countries vary enormously in the scope and nature of their public sectors, thus the roles and powers of their public administrators will vary substantially. While China has liberalized its economy during the past few decades, it continues to have a large

and powerful administrative apparatus with great regulatory powers along with many enterprises still owned and operated by the state. During that same period, the United States has also deregulated but in some instances re-regulated parts of its economy. Malaysia is somewhere between the two, having privatized and liberalized since the early 1980s but retaining many elements of government control. Most comparisons of economic liberalization typically rank the United States in the top 10 countries with the least government control, Malaysia in the top 60, and China in the top 100 or 150 (cf. Gwartney & Lawson, 2008; Miller & Holmes, 2010). Of course, the roles played by these three governments outside the economic sphere vary dramatically as well with the cumulative result that graduate students may have widely different expectations of what it means to work in the public sector in each of these countries.

HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

Deducing hypotheses from the literature is problematic with regard to the Chinese and Malaysian students. For the U.S. students, many of the expectations are a simple extrapolation from the prior research by Adams (2000b) and Lyons et al. (2006), but this study goes into uncharted territory regarding the Asian comparisons. We should expect, at least for Americans, factors that are easily identifiable as altruism, extrinsic, intrinsic, social, and New Public Management. We hypothesize that one or more of the altruism variables will be the top career priority, followed by one or more intrinsic characteristics, with some extrinsic aspect of the job (such as salary or security) having tertiary status.

At a general level, the literature suggests that, compared to Americans, Chinese and Malaysian students will place a higher priority on social and comradeship elements; on collective rather than individual endeavors; on obtaining a good salary, benefits, and job security; and perhaps more interest in applying ideas of the New Public Management. The evidence is too mixed to hint at whether they will be more or less likely to care about aspects of altruism and intrinsic job characteristics.

The questionnaire employed items drawn from the Lyons Work Value Scale (2003), an instrument grounded in the vocational work values literature that focuses on how and why people make employment choices. (For its application and validation, see Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006). The basic question was: “How important is it that your future career offers the following characteristics?” Job characteristics were rated on a 5-point scale arrayed from “extremely important” to “not very important.”

To assure its full relevance to public service, the items were reviewed against Denhardt and Denhardt’s framework of motivations for public sector work (2003). Lyons’ extrinsic variables match the perspective of what the Denhardts’ term Old Public Administration where motivation is driven

by pay and benefits. His measures of altruism relate to their New Public Service where motivation is based on the desire to contribute to society. However, none of the Lyons measures touched on values the Denhardt's ascribe to the New Public Management, so four items were added to assess this business and entrepreneurial orientation. Altogether, this research examined 23 variables that measure students' preferred job characteristics and goals.

In all three countries, the instrument was printed in both English and Chinese, conveying that this was an international undertaking; also, the Chinese students had studied English for many years. Initially written in English, it was translated into Chinese and then back-translated to assure comparability. English is the language of instruction for graduate students at the University of Malaya so there was no need to translate the survey into Bahasa Melayu.

Target participants for this study were graduate students enrolled in courses offered by the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration at The George Washington University,² by the School of Public Administration at Renmin University of China, and by the Department of Administrative Studies and Politics at the University of Malaya. All three are among the longest-established MPA programs in their country and all are located in major universities in the national capital city.³ The MPA programs are similar in length, typically taking about two years to complete all campus course work, and cover substantial common topics in their curricula. All three degrees require 40 campus course credits. As shown in Table 2, similar core requirements include basic public management, research methods, applied statistics, public finance, and policy analysis. (The RUC core is more extensive and varied; the UM core courses are each four credit hours, rather than three.)

Characteristics of Graduate Student Samples

Not all students in public administration and public policy programs want to work for the government or nonprofits. (See Table 3.) Because this research focuses on students who are interested in futures in public service, subsequent analysis excludes those who preferred the private sector, leaving

²In the earlier Adams study (2000b), students at GWU did not diverge in statistically significant ways from overall national sample, suggesting that they are unlikely to be particularly atypical. While they cannot substitute for a genuine nationwide sample, the best available evidence is that they are not odd outliers.

³In the fall of 2009, the MPA program at RUC had 655 students enrolled; the MPA/MPP programs at GWU had 306; and the MPA program at UM had 77. Both the GWU and UM programs offer courses in the evening. While most MPA programs in China are designed for working professionals, RUC offers a program for full-time cohort students as well as an executive program for working professionals, thereby creating a pool of students similar to those at GWU and UM. (See Tables 3 and 4.) A comparison of requirements for GWU's Master of Public Policy and RUC's MPA with a concentration in public policy also found substantial overlap.

TABLE 2
Comparative MPA Curricula

<i>United States: GWU</i>	<i>Malaysia: UM</i>	<i>China: RUC Cohort</i>
Total = 40 course credits, plus noncredit professional experience	Total = 40 course credits	Total = 40 course credits, plus five-credit internship
Core = 22 credits	Core = 29 credits	Core = 30 credits
Introduction to Public Service & Administration		Public Management
Research Methods and Applied Statistics	Research Methodology (includes statistics)	Research Methods Social Statistics
Economics for Public Decision-Making		Practical Economics
Leadership	Management Theory and Practice	Management
Public Budgeting, Revenue, & Expenditures	Financial Administration in Developing Countries	Public Finance
Policy Analysis	Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation	Policy Analysis
Capstone Seminar	Research Paper	
Cross-Sectoral Governance in the United States	Politics, Development and Governance	Administration Law Ancient Chinese Governing Theories E-Government Foreign Language Politics Socialism Theory/Practice
Plus field/elective courses	Plus optional courses	Plus field/elective courses

TABLE 3
Sector Preference by Country

	<i>United States</i> (<i>n</i> = 173)	<i>Malaysia</i> (<i>n</i> = 67)	<i>China</i> (<i>n</i> = 186)
Public Sector	53%	87%	86%
Nonprofit	31%	3%	4%
Private Sector	14%	10%	5%
No Preference	2%	0%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

148 U.S. students, 60 Malaysian students, and 176 Chinese students.⁴

The U.S. and Malaysian programs both had female majorities; in China the gender distribution was evenly matched. China had the most full-time students with half not working compared to one third not working in Malaysia

⁴International students were not attending RUC and were excluded from data analysis of the UM students; however, the first wave of GWU surveys included unidentified responses from a few international students (perhaps five or six) before a citizenship question was added.

TABLE 4
Student Characteristics by Country

	<i>United States</i> (<i>n</i> = 148)	<i>Malaysia</i> (<i>n</i> = 60)	<i>China</i> (<i>n</i> = 176)
Gender			
Male	36%	38%	51%
Female	64%	62%	49%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Work Status			
Full-time Work	37%	40%	30%
Part-Time Work	43%	26%	20%
Not Working	20%	34%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Mean Age	25.9	25.7	26.4
Mean yrs of work experience	3.3	2.6	2.4
Mean semesters in graduate school	2.1	2.3	2.8

and one-fifth in the United States. Otherwise, the student groups did not differ much in terms of age or experience. As shown in Table 4, there was little difference in the mean age, although the American students had slightly more work experience. In all three countries, the students surveyed were typically in their second semester of graduate school.

Factor Analyses

How did these students prioritize the characteristics of the kinds of careers they want in public service? Factor analyses were conducted to explore the dimensions on which the 23 job features clustered. U.S. and Malaysian results tended to be similar,⁵ so their surveys were combined to run a standard factor analysis (principal components method with varimax rotation) that extracted six factors (with eigenvalues greater than one) that cumulatively explained 60 percent of the variation in career goals and values. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was a good .81 and Barlett's sphericity test was easily passed as well ($p < .001$). Table 5 reports results that loaded higher than .45 on any of the six factors.

The six factors can be summarized as follows:

- Factor 1 — Intrinsic characteristics: This factor combines six variables that all deal with personal intellectual fulfillment, enrichment, and invigoration.
- Factor 2 — New Public Management: These four variables link key features of this entrepreneurial, business-oriented, efficiency-maximizing, partnership-linking approach.

⁵The combined Malaysian-American factor analysis is also reported here because the Malaysian sample alone was too small to meet the KBO threshold of sampling adequacy for factor analysis (.56 instead of .80); nevertheless 18 of the 23 variables in an exclusively Malaysian factor analysis clustered the same as in U.S. results.

- Factor 3 — Altruism: This grouping encompasses all four variables that focus explicitly on the values of serving the community and society.
- Factor 4 — Leadership and advancement: Five variables covaried around wanting (or not wanting) to lead, supervise, or team with co-workers, along with career advancement opportunities.
- Factor 5 — Extrinsic characteristics: This materialistic bundle consists of the trio of job salary, job security, and job benefits.
- Factor 6 — Comradeship: The two remaining variables overlapped more than enough to create a factor of convivial work environment and co-worker friendships.

These results are noteworthy because they are so consistent with prior North American studies. This evidence suggests that the graduate students at these two universities are not outliers and conceptualize the issues associated with public service careers on the same dimensions that Adams found in the nationwide survey of U.S. MPA students in 1999 (2000b) and that the Lyons' team found more recently among Canadians (2006). Moreover, the addition of four variables associated with elements of the New Public Management produced a new dimension directly in line with this construct.

Despite consistency between North America and Malaysia, the dimensions are not universal. The Chinese students produced quite distinctive results. Using the same method, five factors were extracted accounting for 58 percent of the variation in career priorities. (Sampling adequacy based on KMO was a respectable .80 and Barlett's sphericity test was again passed with $p < .001$). Table 6 reports loadings above .45.

Public administration students in China produced the following five dimensions:

- Factor 1 merges altruism with resourceful leadership, a provocative cluster indicating that for these Chinese students concern for one is closely linked to the other.
- Factor 2 is a sort of "juggling" dimension involving manipulating and coordinating people, organizations, techniques, and ideas.
- Factor 3 comes closest to resembling U.S.-Malaysian results by loading all three extrinsic variables (job security, benefits, and salary) together, along with career advancement, but adds "fair and impartial" program administration.
- Factor 4 consists of a sort of "good times" cluster of lively work, in a fun environment with co-worker friends, doing creative and exciting things.
- Factor 5 shows that the Chinese students paired work involving challenging projects and (perhaps the challenge of) doing work that is consistent with personal moral values.

TABLE 5
Factor Analysis of United States and Malaysian Students

<i>Preferred work characteristics</i>	<i>Rotated Component Matrix</i>					
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Intellectually stimulating work	.827					
Continuous learning & development	.671					
Work using creativity & originality	.606					
Exciting, engaging, interesting work	.532					
Projects that challenge your abilities	.524					
Independence to develop new ideas	.453					
Business methods to help productivity		.813				
Entrepreneurial approaches		.705				
Foster collaboration of organizations		.610				
Use skills to maximize org. efficiency		.593				
Administer programs fairly & impartially			.760			
Work consistent with your moral values			.706			
Respond to community needs			.560			
Make a contribution to society			.556			
Be a leader influencing org. outcomes				.711		
Be a manager directing work of others				.687		
Opportunity for career advancement				.648		
Work effectively in teams				.507		
Good benefits					.783	
Good salary					.741	
Job security					.722	
Lively and fun work environment						.673
Agreeable co-workers who'd be friends						.645
Factor eigenvalues	2.65	2.64	2.36	2.33	2.18	1.54
Percent of total variance explained	11.51	11.49	10.24	10.11	9.46	6.70

Principal Component Analysis. Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization

As an exploratory cross-cultural endeavor, it is important to have discovered that the prior North American dimensions “worked” well in Kuala Lumpur and continued to work in the United States, but did not at all reflect how students in Beijing sorted out these matters.

Studies sometimes use the scores on individual factors for subsequent data analysis, but the absence of stable cross-cultural factors eliminates that option here. Instead, we will turn to the mean scores on the 5–1 scale given on each of the 23 variables by country, an approach that has the added benefit of showing interesting item-by-item differences. We will arbitrarily use the U.S. and Malaysian factors as an organizing tool for that review.

Means by Country

To a statistically significant degree (using Mann-Whitney U tests for ordinal variables), students in the United States and Malaysia placed more importance on five of the six intrinsic variables than did the Chinese. In two similar cases (wanting “stimulating work” and wanting “exciting” work), the Americans also scored higher than the Malaysians. (See Table 7.) In contrast, on the four “New Public Management” variables, American students were surpassed twice by the

Chinese (ironically, more interested in using business methods and more interested in fostering organizational collaboration) and three times by the Malaysians (also more interested in promoting organizational efficiency). Turning to altruism, two of the four variables failed to produce any statistically significant cross-cultural differences, although both American and Malaysian students did express a greater desire to aid the local community and the broader society.

On the leadership dimension, no statistically significant differences emerged on the priority given career advancement opportunities and organizational leadership. However, the Americans scored lowest in wanting a supervisory role where they direct the work of others and scored higher than the Chinese, surprisingly, in the priority of work using effective teamwork. (See Table 7.)

The three extrinsic variables did not show any statistically significant differences between the U.S. and Malaysian students or between the Chinese and Malaysians; however, the Chinese, as expected, scored higher than the Americans in the premium they placed on a good salary. Students in all three countries expressed similar levels of interest in the two comradeship variables.

Some country-specific differences were found in the overall means. The Chinese students had a slightly lower

TABLE 6
Factor Analysis of Chinese Students

<i>Preferred work characteristics</i>	<i>Rotated Component Matrix</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Be a leader influencing org. outcomes	.771				
Be a manager directing work of others	.739				
Use skills to maximize org. efficiency	.673				
Make a contribution to society	.600				
Respond to community needs	.600				
Entrepreneurial approaches	.511				
Foster collaboration of organizations		.737			
Independence to develop new ideas		.719			
Intellectually stimulating work		.654			
Work effectively in teams		.602			
Business methods to help productivity		.432			
Good benefits			.788		
Job security			.695		
Opportunity for career advancement			.540		
Administer programs fairly & impartially			.504		
Good salary			.464		
Lively and fun work environment				.715	
Exciting, engaging, interesting work				.663	
Work using creativity & originality				.629	
Agreeable co-workers who'd be friends				.498	
Continuous learning & development				¹	
Work consistent with your moral values					.790
Projects that challenge your abilities					.463
Factor eigenvalues	3.06	3.01	2.72	2.63	1.57
Percent of total variance explained	13.30	13.07	11.84	11.43	7.91

Principal Component Analysis. Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization

¹ < .40

overall mean (4.01) on the 23 variables than did the Americans (mean 4.15) or Malaysians (mean 4.21). Of course, it may well be that the Malaysians are in fact slightly more enthusiastic about these career features and Chinese are slightly less so, with the Americans in between. However, it may also be that the Chinese are culturally disposed toward a more midrange stance on a 1–5 scale (cf. Chen, 1995). While this research cannot solve that puzzle, we can examine the relative rankings of priorities to compensate for any systematic cultural response proclivities.

From this perspective, differences narrow but do not disappear and some new insights emerge. Examining the top ten career characteristics as summarized in Table 9, Americans and Malaysians again put a higher relative priority on more intrinsic facets, just as they had in the comparison of absolute means in Table 7. However, the Chinese students were not oblivious to such desires, elevating two (exciting, engaging, interesting work and continuous learning and development) into their top ten.

Similarly, as seen in Table 7, the Chinese students had appeared a bit less motivated by altruistic concerns compared to the absolute scores of the Malaysians and Americans. However, on a relative basis, making a contribution to society, fair and impartial administration, and work consistent with moral values were among the top ten

priorities for students in all three countries. Malaysians also put “being able to respond to the needs and values of the community” in their top ten (i.e., all four of the available altruism measures). Altruism ranked high, but was not accompanied by a desire for a long-term “Mother Theresa” or “Peace Corps” lifestyle since “good benefits” ranked high in all three countries, with “job security” at tenth place in China and the United States, and eleventh in Malaysia. Likewise, students in all three countries put a relatively high priority on a career with advancement opportunities.

As noted in Table 7, the means of the two comradeship variables did not differ significantly by country. However, the relative rankings in Table 8 tell a different story with the Chinese caring relatively more about social bonds in the workplace than did Americans or Malaysians.

Cluster Analysis

The country means may mask some important patterns in the ways that different groups of students think about careers in public service. An alternative approach was employed using the SPSS k-means clustering analysis to sort cases into the most homogeneous groups possible based on ratings of the 23 job characteristics. With six clusters specified, output shows, among other things, the means of each cluster

TABLE 7
Means of Career Values by Country (Standard deviations in parentheses)

	<i>United States</i> (<i>n</i> = 148)	<i>Malaysia</i> (<i>n</i> = 60)	<i>China</i> (<i>n</i> = 176)	<i>p</i> < .05
<i>Intrinsic</i>				
Doing work that is intellectually stimulating	4.59 (.57)	4.31 (.70)	3.87 (.93)	U.S. > M > C
Doing work that you find interesting, exciting, and engaging	4.82 (.39)	4.43 (.74)	4.13 (.99)	U.S. > M > C
Working on tasks and projects that challenge your abilities	4.28 (.74)	4.20 (.77)	3.70 (.91)	U.S. & M > C
Doing work that involves creativity and original thought	4.14 (.80)	4.13 (.83)	3.83 (.96)	U.S. & M > C
Having the independence to develop new ideas and programs	4.18 (.87)	4.32 (.66)	3.68 (1.19)	U.S. & M > C
Having the opportunity to continuously learn and develop new knowledge and skills	4.49 (.71)	4.55 (.63)	4.43 (.82)	n.s.
<i>New Public Management</i>				
Using business methods to achieve improved productivity	3.03 (1.12)	3.58 (.98)	3.45 (.99)	M & C > U.S.
Doing work that fosters collaboration across organizations	3.54 (1.11)	4.04 (.74)	3.95 (.97)	M & C > U.S.
Utilizing your skills to maximize organizational efficiency	3.86 (.97)	4.26 (.84)	3.89 (.96)	M > U.S. & C
Using entrepreneurial approaches in your work activities	3.27 (1.01)	3.51 (1.02)	3.27 (1.05)	n.s.
<i>Altruism</i>				
Being able to respond to the needs and values of the community	4.20 (.88)	4.34 (.79)	3.85 (.96)	U.S. & M > C
Doing work that makes a contribution to society	4.71 (.55)	4.49 (.86)	4.24 (.84)	U.S. & M > C
Working in a setting where policies and programs are administered with fairness and impartiality	4.23 (.84)	4.38 (.68)	4.23 (.79)	n.s.
Doing work that is consistent with your moral values	4.53 (.69)	4.52 (.60)	4.37 (.88)	n.s.
<i>Leadership and Advancement</i>				
Having the authority to organize and direct the work of others (be a manager)	3.61 (.94)	3.98 (.88)	3.90 (.98)	M & C > U.S.
Working effectively in a team	4.63 (.61)	4.46 (.71)	4.31 (.80)	U.S. > C
Having the opportunity for advancement in your career	4.64 (.62)	4.47 (.60)	4.49 (.79)	n.s.
Having the ability to influence organizational outcomes (be a leader)	4.14 (.87)	4.07 (.86)	3.89 (1.08)	n.s.
<i>Extrinsic</i>				
Having benefits (for example vacation pay, health insurance, pension plan) that meet your needs	4.48 (.73)	4.45 (.72)	4.37 (.77)	n.s.
Doing work that offers a good salary	3.80 (.80)	4.02 (.67)	4.09 (.82)	C > U.S.
Having job security	4.22 (.86)	4.28 (.92)	4.10 (.96)	n.s.
<i>Comradeship</i>				
Working in an environment that is lively and fun	3.99 (.90)	4.13 (.95)	4.18 (.89)	n.s.
Working with agreeable co-workers with whom you could form friendships	3.96 (.91)	4.02 (.93)	4.11 (.81)	n.s.

Note: This table provides the exact item wording used in the survey.

TABLE 8
Rankings and Means of the Top Ten Variables by Country

	<i>United States</i>		<i>Malaysia</i>		<i>China</i>	
INTRINSIC CHARACTERISTICS						
Exciting, engaging, interesting work	4.82	1	4.43	6	4.13	8
Continuous learning & development	4.49	6	4.55	1	4.43	2
Intellectually stimulating work	4.59	4	4.31	10		
Projects that challenge your abilities	4.28	8				
Independence to develop new ideas			4.32	9		
ALTRUISM						
Make a contribution to society	4.71	2	4.49	3	4.24	5
Work consistent with your moral values	4.53	5	4.52	2	4.37	3
Administer programs fairly & impartially	4.23	9	4.38	7	4.23	6
Respond to community needs			4.34	8		
EXTRINSIC						
Good benefits	4.48	7	4.45	5	4.37	4
Job security	4.22	10			4.10	10
LEADERSHIP						
Opportunity for career advancement	4.64	3	4.47	4	4.49	1
COMRADESHIP						
Lively and fun work environment					4.18	7
Agreeable co-workers who'd be friends					4.11	9

TABLE 9
Cluster Segmentation

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Preferred work characteristics</i>	<i>Achievers</i>	<i>Altruistic Analysts</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Altruistic Affluents</i>	<i>Acquiescents</i>	<i>Attendants</i>
Continuous learning & development	4.79	4.73	4.46	4.48	4.18	3.29
Exciting, engaging, interesting work	4.79	4.87	4.29	4.25	4.20	3.46
Intellectually stimulating work	4.58	4.69	4.21	3.48	4.12	3.44
Projects that challenge your abilities	4.69	4.40	3.83	3.26	3.76	2.75
Work using creativity & originality	4.60	4.40	3.83	3.38	3.77	2.91
Independence to develop new ideas	4.59	4.40	4.08	2.86	3.78	3.18
Entrepreneurial approaches	4.17	2.83	3.86	2.87	3.10	2.13
Business methods to help productivity	3.99	2.34	3.76	2.98	3.65	1.91
Foster collaboration of organizations	4.50	3.35	4.12	3.56	3.69	2.29
Use skills to maximize org. efficiency	4.71	3.72	4.26	3.74	3.51	2.51
Make a contribution to society	4.87	4.93	4.21	4.28	4.19	3.46
Work consistent with your moral values	4.82	4.85	3.78	4.60	4.16	3.94
Administer programs fairly & impartially	4.67	4.35	3.88	4.70	3.95	3.42
Respond to community needs	4.73	4.33	3.91	4.09	3.79	2.85
Opportunity for career advancement	4.87	4.68	4.71	4.88	3.94	3.80
Work effectively in teams	4.81	4.64	4.54	4.42	4.29	3.35
Be a leader influencing org. outcomes	4.67	4.26	4.50	3.80	3.32	2.56
Be a manager directing work of others	4.34	3.53	4.32	4.23	2.89	3.18
Good benefits	4.73	4.35	4.44	4.92	3.85	4.08
Job security	4.52	3.96	4.36	4.60	3.86	3.89
Good salary	4.16	3.47	4.29	4.31	3.77	3.79
Lively and fun work environment	4.73	3.84	3.80	4.46	3.52	3.46
Agreeable co-workers who'd be friends	4.59	3.55	3.85	4.40	3.95	3.13

Black, above 4.50; dark gray, 4.25–4.50; light gray, 4.24–3.75; white, below 3.75

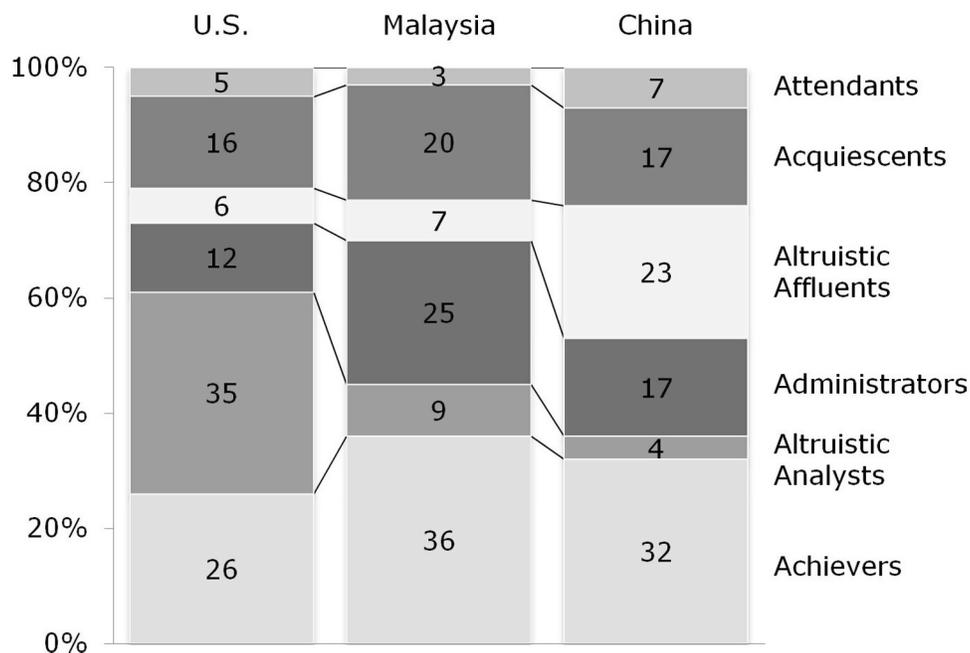


FIGURE 2 Cluster Type by Country.

on each characteristic, and allows the cluster membership of each case to be saved for additional analysis.⁶

Summarized in Table 9, the six clusters show some distinct views of the kinds of job priorities students have for careers in public service. The six types can be distinguished and labeled as follows:

- **Achievers:** Students in this group are ambitious, have high expectations, and want it all. Their career goals are relatively high on every front, especially in terms of intrinsic characteristics, altruism, advancement, and leadership. Also, no other group shows as much support for the New Public Management.
- **Altruistic Analysts:** These students stand out as both intellectually engaged and highly altruistic, without a strong concern for a high salary. They are not so sociable and not very interested in supervising others. They have little interest in the New Public Management.
- **Administrators:** Cluster three shows a particular interest in management and leadership as well as

career advancement. They want the benefits, security, salary trio too, but fall behind the first two clusters in their desire for personal growth. This was the only cluster besides the achievers to have much interest in the New Public Management.

- **(Affable) Altruistic Affluents:** These students want to be paid well for doing good. They surpass all others in wanting a public service job that offers good benefits, pays a good salary, and provides job security, along with career advancement opportunities. At the same time, they are not entirely materialistic and had high marks on three of the four altruism measures. Next to the Achievers cluster, this is the most sociable group, wanting co-workers as friends in a fun work environment and using effective teamwork. They are not eager for that fun to be spoiled by the hassle of challenging projects, developing new ideas, or entrepreneurship.
- **Acquiescents:** This cluster consists of students who seem to anticipate being relatively self-satisfied, socially indifferent, not terribly ambitious, and content with a good livelihood. They have little interest in supervising or leading people; working in teams is more appealing.
- **Attendants:** This least ambitious cluster in this group. They have the least interest in intrinsic characteristics and are rather negative toward the New Public Management. They shy away from leadership and supervisory roles. While they express a general interest in being ethical, they are less eager to have to work at community responsiveness and social betterment. Otherwise, their top priorities are getting paid well,

⁶To control for possible cultural bias, responses were normalized prior to running the cluster analysis. Prior research suggested that Chinese respondents have a cultural gravitational pull away from extreme answers on scales (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995) and indeed the Chinese students in this research had a cumulative mean on the five-point scales that was slightly lower (-.14) than the American students. Overall, scores of the Malaysian students were slightly higher (.06) than the American mean. Adding .14 to the Chinese scores and subtracting .06 from the Malaysian scores normed the cumulative country-by-country results around the U.S. middle-country mean. The segmentation results were not dramatically different with or without this cautionary step.

getting good benefits, getting a secure job, and, oddly enough given their lack of work interests, getting promoted.

The distribution of these segments varies by country. As shown in Figure 2, the United States has by far the largest proportion of Altruistic Analysts. Malaysia stands out with an extra high share of Achievers and Administrators, while China has more Altruistic Affluents. Of course public organizations in all countries need good staff support as well as executives, good team players as well as effective leaders. It is probably healthy that there are a variety of career types who are interested in futures in public service, although recruiters might want to minimize the number of Attendants they hire. Relatively few in each country fall in the Acquiescent and Attendant categories.

CONCLUSIONS

Using factor analysis, this exploratory, cross-cultural research found that Malaysian and American graduate students structured 23 job preferences along dimensions that contrasted sharply to those of the Chinese, demonstrating that conceptualizations of public service careers do not fall into obvious, universal patterns. While results from these three universities cannot definitively represent all MPA students in all three countries, as the first international study of this kind the findings reveal some noteworthy patterns of similarities and differences.

Despite differences in cultures and regimes, ultimately all three groups of graduate students wanted public service jobs that allow them to serve the public fairly, ethically, and meaningfully. While serving the public, they nonetheless did not want to take vows of poverty and prioritized jobs with security and good benefits that would allow for career advancement. At the same time, aspects of personal growth and other intrinsic characteristics were particularly important for the American and Malaysian students. Although such interests were not absent from the Chinese cohort, they placed a relatively higher priority on co-worker friendships and a convivial work environment.

Cluster analysis revealed some particularly noteworthy sets of career priorities: aggressive Achievers, egghead Altruistic Analysts, focused Administrators, affable Altruistic Affluents, contented Acquiescents, and introverted Attendants. Using means, without segmentation, to describe all students blurs over these distinct types. Overall, for example, the self-actualizing, intrinsic characteristics of a job were very important for three of the six clusters but not nearly so important to those in the other clusters.

Overall, most students strongly cared about jobs where they could “make a difference” and make the world a better place. Yet, two clusters of students did not. This

segmentation approach adds a cautionary reminder that not all the students who sign up to work in “public service” automatically care very much about serving the public. These results also demonstrate the utility of going beyond means and factor analysis to explore subgroup configurations of attitudes that have implications for recruitment and curriculum as well as the nature of the future government workforce.

Our findings of nontrivial differences among students across three countries and sizeable differences among the six segments of students within these countries suggest that we are ultimately unlikely to be able to construct a single theoretical model for predicting or explaining the career values that drive students aspiring to careers in public service. Rather, we may need to consider a series of models to characterize the six discrete subtypes.

Additional promising future directions to build on our exploratory study include expanding the scope to additional universities in these same countries as well as to move beyond these three. While China, Malaysia, and the United States have distinct regimes, cultures, and stages of development, graduate students interested in public service may well have different job priorities in other Asian countries, Latin America, Europe, Africa, and elsewhere. The Inglehart-Welzel Cross-Cultural Map could be used to identify other countries that differ on traditional and survival/self-expression dimensions. Supplementing quantitative with qualitative research can also prove valuable. It might be especially interesting to conduct in-depth interviews or focus groups with students in each of the six identifiable segments to explore their thinking about their career priorities.

The next generation working in government and other public service organizations will face new challenges and unresolved old ones that will test their talents, values, drive, and career skills. Universities in China, Malaysia, and the United States are producing a growing number of MPAs and others graduates who want careers in public service. The best available evidence suggests that their students share some surprisingly similar as well as certain dissimilar career priorities and that there are important differences in the career values of distinct segments of students as well.

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