

# Crossvergence and cultural tendencies: A longitudinal test of the Hong Kong, Taiwan and United States banking sectors

Lane Kelley<sup>a</sup>, Brent MacNab<sup>b</sup>, Reginald Worthley<sup>c,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Posthumously, University of Hawaii, College of Business Administration, 2404 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA*

<sup>b</sup> *The University of Sydney, Faculty of Economics and Business, School of Business, NSW 2006, Australia*

<sup>c</sup> *University of Hawaii, College of Business Administration, 2404 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA*

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## Abstract

Cultural attitudes in two, sometimes assumed similar, regions of Greater China (Hong Kong and Taiwan) were compared and examined within the context of an often assumed, dissimilar region (the United States) for the banking industry during 1985 and 2000. The potentially dynamic nature of national culture, as opposed to a more static approach that is often assumed in management research using a Hofstede framework, is examined. The evidence of relative sample convergence, particularly in relation to collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, along with select, individual region static positions for cultural dimensions provide support for the crossvergence theory [Ralston, D., Holt, D, Terpstra, R., Kai-Cheng, Y., 1997. The impact of national culture and economic ideology on managerial work values: a study of the U.S., Russia, Japan and China. *Journal of International Business Studies* 28, 177–207]. Pragmatically the research suggests organizational policies and practices should be updated for maximum effectiveness in relation to crossverging realities and that culture is not static. Academically the research cautions use of approaches that rely on dated rankings for cultural indicators as a basis for current examination since relative cultural positions among regions and nations are also not static.

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\* Corresponding author. 2404 Maile Way, College of Business, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI 96817, USA.

*E-mail addresses:* [brentmacnab@yahoo.com](mailto:brentmacnab@yahoo.com) (B. MacNab), [worthley@hawaii.edu](mailto:worthley@hawaii.edu) (R. Worthley).

## 1. Introduction

The social and economic web of interaction between the East and West facilitated by Hong Kong and Taiwan has been significant on many levels. As China moves into an ever heightened position on the global economic arena, accurately understanding vital regions in that geography becomes critical to management science and managers. However, dated cultural studies (Hofstede, 1980), although holding valuable theoretical contribution, may no longer be the most accurate gauge for actual and current standing of comparative cultural disposition. The theory of crossvergence (Ralston et al., 1997) holds important implications relating to the potential for evolving cultural disposition in relation to increased socio-economic interaction. In this regard, it could be argued that important and meaningful socio-economic developments have occurred in the region of this study's focus, over the past 25 years since the original Hofstede (1980) findings.

For example, Hong Kong, held as a special British interest for 99 years<sup>1</sup> ending in the year 1997, is now a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China and has been directly influenced by Western culture, systems and practices. Because of this influence, Greater China and Hong Kong grapple with the reality of integration which can arguably be considered a current social, political and economic experiment with concepts related to crossvergence. Some have referred to this integration of a free-market capitalistic system with a socialist system as the "super paradox" (Chan, 2002). Recently a popular protest involving over 500,000 people in Hong Kong prevented the passing of a new law that would potentially restrict the number of fringe political parties and potentially place certain restrictions on the press.<sup>2</sup> Such mass demonstrations in Hong Kong since the 1997 transition have not been uncommon. As China and Hong Kong continue to merge from the political handover, critical questions surface regarding the cultural influence one region potentially has over the other. The idea of "one country two systems" itself seems to be a profound staging ground for the influences of crossvergence.

The theoretical platform of crossvergence is an important position from which this study examines current cultural rankings in this region (Hong Kong, Taiwan) and relates to both past findings (Hofstede, 1980) and a common Western comparative anchor (the U.S.). The potential for crossverging cultural activity is examined and related to implications for both management research and practice.

## 2. Culture

A cultural system can be defined as people sharing similar beliefs, customs, norms and "mental programming" (Brislin et al., 1973; Hofstede, 1980, 1997). Triandis (1977) emphasizes a subjective context to culture by which he means people's response to the man-made part of the environment, or to a group's characteristic way of perceiving its social environment. Most definitions about culture share the following elements: (1) human made elements that are (2) shared and passed along through communication (3) which increase the probability for survival and (4) result in greater satisfaction for those in the community.

Hofstede's (1980) seminal work provides a good foundation from which to benchmark the traditional perspectives of a country's culture. Although this work has received some valid

<sup>1</sup> Britain was granted a 99-year rent-free lease of the region which ended in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *The Economist*. July 7, 2003. 368(8332), 10.

critique from others, it does hold value as a general framework from which one can view culture (Oyserman et al., 2002). The Hofstede study sampled 116,000 employees of IBM, representing 40 different countries over a 2-year period, and constructed four basic cultural identifiers. The Hofstede dimensions are, in part, used in this review as a framework with the realization that there are other frameworks, with highly valuable components, that could also be used with this type of review (Triandis et al., 1972; Triandis, 1983; Fiske, 1992; Trompenaars, 1993; Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars, 1998). It is recognized that universally applicable cultural maps are a complicated endeavor and that, as mentioned, the Hofstede dimensions have not escaped some valid critique, suggested improvements, new dimensions and exceptions (Bond, 1987; Schwartz, 1990; Trompenaars, 1993; Triandis et al., 1995; Trompenaars, 1998; McSweeney, 2002). For example, since Hofstede only sampled from IBM employees, some have argued that the results lack strength of ecological validity. Despite these critiques, the Hofstede dimensions retain value as a theoretical framework from which to launch regionally explicit management studies (Heuer et al., 1999; Kuchinke and Ardichvili, 2001) and are specifically valuable in examining cultural phenomena like crossvergence (Ralston et al., 1997).

Asians are sometimes culturally, and arguably carelessly, lumped together in the treatment of management issues on the basis that they have a common value system (Fukuda and Wheeler, 1988). This “similarity assumption” is dangerous for researchers and practitioners alike, as several studies have demonstrated tendencies for cultural differences among various Asian groups and within Greater China (Head and Sorensen, 1993; Birnbaum-More et al., 1995; Cheung and Chow, 1999). Recent research has demonstrated that cultural dispositions, as manifest through management practice, may be more dynamic than static. A serious problem for the country-specific approach in general, which often rely on dated cultural rankings and indicators, is that business systems, as cultural manifestations or artifacts, change over time (Casson and Lundan, 1999; MacNab, 2000; Kelley et al., 2004).

Local phenomena should be studied and have a place within cultural psychology and management research. Oyserman et al. (2002) suggest a multi-dimensional framework within which different levels of cultural mapping can be developed and understood, including distal (history, philosophy, religion, language), systems (educational institutions, legal institutions, child rearing systems), individual and situational levels (shifts in context resulting in shifts in a person’s cognition). With earlier support to this framework, Brislin (1981) clearly suggests that culture can be understood on historical, individual, group, situational/task-specific and organization-specific levels.

Adding more richness to the understanding of the multi-dimensional platforms from which to understand culture, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis supports the distal/historic levels by suggesting that language and language patterns provide a set of concepts that effect a person’s overall enculturation and cognition (Whorf, 1956; Miller and McNeil, 1969). While Triandis et al. (1985) advocate the potential value and importance of individual or ideocentric tendencies that can be different from the normal patterns. There is also support for more disaggregate approaches to understanding culture, whereby the analysis is taken to a level of detail beyond the generalized grouping of culture under the umbrella of national identity. Casson and Lundan (1999) specifically suggest that analysis be taken to the regional or local level in order to better understand and emphasize the cultural diversity that can be found within each country. This research effort, in part, delves into a disaggregate approach by comparing areas of Greater China. However, it is recognized that even greater levels of regional detail could be examined not only in China but also in the U.S.

### 3. Convergence, divergence, crossvergence and economic evolution

Convergence is normally viewed as a type of cultural evolution that results from the increased circulation of cross-cultural ideas, thinking and contact. Some argue that with the development of improved technology and communication, the pace of potential convergence is only quickened. Indeed, Hofstede (1997) argues that influences like education and economic development can affect a country's position on certain cultural dimensions, but he qualifies this by stating the relative positions of countries will tend to stay the same. However, non-synchronized economic (and educational) development, part of our global reality, could result in change of relative positions. In a Hofstede world, the deep, historical cultural patterns of a nation are so compelling, that external environmental factors like economic development, although having an effect, will not be so strong as to change between-country comparisons in the short run. As stated by Hofstede (1997, p. 46), "this does not mean, however, that the differences between the countries described should necessarily have changed. Countries could all have moved [to different levels on cultural dimensions] without changes in their mutual ranking." If the Hofstede approach is accurate, one would potentially observe shifts in a nation's longitudinal score on particular cultural dimensions but one would not observe profound ranking changes among the nations studied – something our longitudinal research is specifically examining. Additionally, Hofstede argues that these comparative differences, deeply rooted in national culture will survive for a long time, but one is left to determine exactly what a long time actually means (Hofstede, 1997).

On the other hand, divergence can be understood as a movement away from cultural similarity. For example, the significant interaction between the West and Hong Kong over the past century may have allowed potential convergence between those regions but also may have created the potential for some divergence between Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Diverging and converging longitudinal observations develop a relevant argument – that not only will a nation's score on particular cultural dimensions shift over time, but that the rankings between nations may also shift, enhancing cross-cultural similarities or dissimilarities – again a view not absent from the literature (Webber, 1969; Casson and Lundan, 1999).

Economic challenges and increased globalization and competition during the time frame of this study provide a good context from which to contrast these earlier studies. It has been noted that businesses tend to imitate more successful organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), and at this particular juncture, we may find that certain practices and cultural patterns change in order to make adjustments and stay competitive. Is this change driven by convergence or is it driven more by a complex interplay of simultaneous converging and diverging reactions to external pressures in a drive to gain efficiency and remain competitive? Ralston et al. (1997), in an empirical study examining cultural differences between socialistic and capitalistic nations, examined the convergence–divergence–crossvergence (CDC) phenomena. Ralston et al. (1993) defined crossvergence as a value set "in between" those values found in national culture and economic influences (ideology, policy, and trends). Later, Ralston et al. (1997) submitted another perspective whereby individuals and sub-groups synergistically integrate both national culture influences and economic influences to form a different, unique value system. Economic influences could allow cross-national influencers to migrate to new national boundaries in the form of foreign direct investment, partnerships/IJVs (international joint ventures), new competition (and necessary response to new competition), and in a host of other formats. In relation and as direct support, Child and Yan (2001) found evidence that the importation of

foreign management practices might particularly be prone to cross-border migration through IJVs with transnational organizations.

The concept of crossvergence is vital to our position as it addresses the idea that as economies develop, interact and evolve, there will be an impact on culture, creating a unique type of identity. Altered blends of past standard cultural identity may evolve in order to meet new challenges and to respond more effectively to external pressures like global competition. For example, it may become less accurate to generally refer to Asians as highly collectivistic without clearly identifying the specific context or region.

#### **4. Disaggregative approaches in cultural examination**

Examining regional areas of culturally complex nations can improve understanding of cross-cultural psychology while gaining a better appreciation for the richness of cultural diversity. In fact, disaggregative approaches are now encouraged by some as a “best practices” approach to cultural research (Schaffer and Riordan, 2003). Earlier studies have demonstrated that there are differences in values among managers from different regions of China as exemplified in Ralston et al. (1996). Some researchers have suggested that similarities of managers in Southern China may be apparent and due to likeness in both culture and dialect and those differences in management attitude between the mainland and certain regions of China may be more influenced by differing subcultures (Cheung and Chow, 1999). Triandis (2002) specifically suggests that linguistic and regional nuances can provide meaningful anchor points in research interested in targeting a higher level of detail. Our research moves in this direction of disaggregation by examining two specific regions of Greater China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. It is also recognized that other regions of potentially significant diversity exist both in China and within the U.S.

Static treatments of culture can create potentially misleading results for those operating in dynamic environments like business and management where global competition and market forces render heavy and meaningful influences on style, strategy and other variables. Culture can be thought of as currently manifesting itself through certain institutions or industries, yet another level of detail in disaggregative approaches, and it is possible to experience meaningful shifts as contextual conditions, including the competitive environment and technology, change (Kagitcibasi, 1996). One may be able to examine shifts within industries that might be representative of larger cultural shifts. However, one could more convincingly argue that the reality is a hybrid, or combination approach – where such institutional, systems or industry shifts sometimes represent larger shifts in culture and sometimes they are simply shifts specific to the given industrial framework. This research effort delves into this level of detail with specific examination of the banking industry.

The current research effort examines a disaggregative and dynamic approach to culture on the following levels of detail as encouraged by previous researchers: a) regional level understanding; b) systems level in that the sample is industry-specific within banking; c) dynamic effects on culture in longitudinal terms (1985 and 2000) as potentially influenced by the theory of crossvergence (Ralston et al., 1997).

#### **5. Cultural dynamism: potential crossverging realities**

Hofstede (1997) suggests that if culture is stable, then there should be little change in relative cultural values and positions between the subject regions of our study. Hofstede does make the

distinction that individualism can be influenced by economic development; however, our subject regions can all be considered economically developed during the data gathering periods. If culture is influenced by environmental changes and crossvergence then values like the Hofstede dimensions may reflect variation, and potentially change relative position over time (Heuer et al., 1999; McGrath et al., 1992). Our research hypothesis will put the idea of static culture to the test using crossvergence as the theoretical avenue.

**Hypothesis.** Relative positions on the examined cultural dimensions between the U.S., Hong Kong and Taiwan will change from the 1985 data to the 2000 data.

Potential crossverging realities of the subject nations have been suggested in a non-exhaustive manner in previous sections. Because of this crossverging interaction, it is expected that some noticeable change in relative cultural positions of the three regions might have occurred. If the relative positions of the subject nations are not static during the longitudinal period in review, the findings could lend some support to the phenomena of crossvergence.<sup>3</sup>

The cultural dimensions included within the research hypothesis include individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance. Since the original study did not specifically address the masculinity/femininity cultural dimension of the Hofstede framework, it cannot be included in this current effort.

Individualism is typical of loose knit social frameworks in which people are expected to watch out for themselves and where in-group/out-group<sup>4</sup> distinctions are less of a focus. Collective societies are organized by tight social frameworks with high degrees of loyalty and in-group/out-group distinction. Collective cultures can develop specific and complicated systems for establishing loyalty and exchanging favors between in-group members. Guanxi, an intricate system of favor exchange found in China (Luo and Chen, 1996), can lead to favorable activity extended to in-group members (Yang, 1994; Ang and Leong, 2000; Au and Wong, 2000), which could be seen as less acceptable in other cultures. The collectivism dimension of cultural comparison has received much attention (Triandis, 1995; Fiske, 2002; Oyserman et al., 2002) and arguably can be viewed as the most influential of the Hofstede dimensions.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree that a culture has acclimated to the acceptance of risk. Some societies prefer to operate with formalized rules and prefer that business be clearly regulated with little left to interpretation. This dimension indicates how threatened a society will be by ambiguous contexts and the degree to which it will attempt to avoid these situations. Not tolerating deviant ideas or behaviors, with a belief in absolute truths is indicative of high uncertainty avoiding cultures. High uncertainty avoidance can create greater overall anxiety and a heightened work ethic (Hofstede, 1980). The essence of uncertainty is that the future is largely unknown and that individuals and societies must find ways of coping with that reality. High uncertainty avoiding cultures are comfortable with formalized codes of conduct and written contracts, which attempt to make the future more predictable, tending to avoid ambiguous situations. On the other hand, cultures of lower uncertainty avoidance might breed more entrepreneurs than a high uncertainty avoiding culture as the associated ambiguity

<sup>3</sup> This is dependent upon the final type of change observed as well. Relative positional change and cultural dynamism are an initial requirement.

<sup>4</sup> In-group is typified by relatives, affiliations, clans and organizational membership where out-groups are those not represented in those closer spheres.

of such ventures may create too much stress for the latter acculturation. Although uncertainty avoidance should not be automatically associated with risk avoidance, uncertainty avoiding behaviors tend to reduce ambiguity which some might view as inherently risky (Hofstede, 1997).

Power distance refers to the degree that a culture recognizes the importance of position and other inherent dimensions that might separate one socially from another member of society. For example, within a high power distance society it would be more unusual to address elders or senior-level managers in a casual manner (Hofstede, 1980; Cushner and Brislin, 1996). This type of measurement (i.e. low power distance) reflects a more egalitarian structure.

## 6. Data

### 6.1. Participants

As part of a recent large-scale study on organizational trust (Huff and Kelley, 2004) that involved seven countries, survey data was collected during the period 1998 to 2000 (referenced later as “2000 data”) from mid-level managers working for large indigenous banks in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States. The choice for indigenous organizations was made to closer reflect values of the national culture as opposed to using large, multinational organizations. Since the authors were primarily interested in cross-cultural differences, the effect of organizational culture was hoped to be minimized by choosing the same industry and the same level of management within the industry. Standardized procedures were used in collecting the data. First, the English version of the questionnaire was translated to Taiwanese, back-translated and then translated again to ensure the meaning of the questions was as consistent as possible (Brislin et al., 2004). Because of its prevalence as a business language in the region, English was used in Hong Kong. Second, key people from the largest indigenous banks were sought out and asked to help administer the survey to a random sample of mid-level managers. A letter from Huff and Kelley was included with the survey to explain the purpose of the survey. The sample size for Hong Kong was 147, for Taiwan 211, and for the United States 271. Part of this recent study by Huff and Kelley replicated questions that were asked in another management study (Kelley et al., 1987) that took place in the early to mid 1980s (referenced later as “1985” data). That study had sample sizes of 75 for Hong Kong, 105 for Taiwan and 133 for the United States and used exactly the same protocol as the more recent study. Except for the passage of time, the respondents were equivalent. See Table 1 for a summary of the demographics of the respondents. Although other demographics were collected in the two surveys, age, gender, and education level were common to both. The biggest change over this time period is that middle managers in Taiwan now include a much larger percentage of females. Middle managers in large banks in all three countries in

Table 1  
Demographics of respondents

Variable	Hong Kong		Taiwan		United States	
	1985	2000	1985	2000	1985	2000
Male (%)	45	61	86	56	60	64
Age mean	27	32	36	45	39	44
Education mean	15	17	12	16	14	16

the recent survey are older and have more experience than their counterparts in the earlier survey.

## 6.2. Survey instrument

Although the more recent study emphasized organizational trust, nine Likert scale items representing constructs of collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance were common to both studies and are listed below. Using a seven-point Likert scale, managers were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with a particular statement. These items were developed in the early 1980s in response to the items originally developed by Hofstede for these constructs. It was felt by the authors at that time that items were needed that better addressed organizational values and practices as opposed to work factors. Although there is still support for the original Hofstede measures, many researchers since the early 1980s have developed alternative constructs that have proved useful. In order to shed some light on potential changes over this extended time period the authors chose to continue to use the measures that were in the earlier survey. These measures along with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values from the 1985 sample are given below:<sup>5</sup>

Collectivism: Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.62$

- C1. Individuals in work groups in this organization work together more than strive for individual recognition.
- C2. Managers in this organization take an interest in the personal problems of their subordinates.
- C3. This organization rewards cooperative behavior.

Uncertainty avoidance: Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.70$

- UA1. Managers in this organization spend time preparing formal plans such as budgets.
- UA2. In this organization, policies and procedures are strictly followed.
- UA3. In this organization job, duties are described in detail by written procedures.

Power distance: Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.58$

- PD1. Employees in this organization are afraid to disagree with their boss.
- PD2. In this organization, respect is given based on one's position in the organization.
- PD3. Managers in this organization make most decisions without consulting subordinates.

While the power distance alpha is less than ideal, two of the scales demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability with coefficients in excess of 0.60 (Hatcher, 1994). Because of the multi-cultural reality of the study and complexities related to cultural measures, there is some support for acceptance of lower  $\alpha$  coefficients in measurement of cultural dimensions that attempt to achieve bandwidth<sup>6</sup> (Triandis et al., 1995; Sue-Chan and Ong, 2002; Thomas and Au, 2002). The measures of this study went beyond replication of the same variety of question for culture and therefore an argument for higher bandwidth can be made.

<sup>5</sup> Cronbach Alphas for the 2000 sample were similar but slightly improved for collectivism and power distance.

<sup>6</sup> Bandwidth relates to the "richness" of a set of cultural measures (i.e. measures that go beyond asking a variety of the same question multiple times). Higher bandwidth in cultural measures often relate to lower alpha coefficients.

## 7. Findings

### 7.1. The measurement model

The test for our hypothesis depends upon whether a reliable and valid measurement model can be established. A multiple group confirmatory factor analysis was performed through Jöreskog and Sörbom's (1996) LISREL software. The overall test of model fit for the hypothesized full model was statistically significant (see Table 2, Model 1.0), rejecting the null hypothesis of perfect model fit, but this measure has widely known limitations and other well established measures of fit, RMSEA=.025, CFI=0.94, and  $\chi^2/df=1.34$  all reflected excellent model fit. A test for factorial invariance suggested that factorial invariance was not present (see Table 2, Model 2.0). However, it was not clear if all three constructs lacked factorial invariance, or if only a subset did. To test which specific construct(s) lacked factorial invariance three separate models (see Table 2, Models 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3) were created, each constraining only a single construct. Results showed that only power distance lacked factorial invariance, and that collectivism and uncertainty avoidance were factorially invariant across all groups. Although the tables and charts show results for all three constructs for completeness, the power distance construct should not be interpreted in exactly the same way as the other two constructs. Differences in latent means for power distance may reflect a lack of factorial invariance and not necessarily actual differences in latent means.

Next, each latent construct was examined for differences in means across groups, with the results showing that the means differ significantly in some way. Table 3 provides a list of estimates and standard errors for the factor loadings ( $\lambda$  values) and latent means ( $\kappa$  values). Fig. 1 gives a visual representation of the latent means and Fig. 2a through c present the results from the Duncan's multiple range test which is based on the latent means and standard errors in Table 3. These results will be used to specifically address the hypothesis developed earlier in this paper.

### 7.2. Relative cultural dynamism hypothesis

Our hypothesis examines if relative positions on the examined cultural dimensions between the U.S., Hong Kong and Taiwan changed from the 1985 data to the 2000 data, allowing us to

Table 2  
Tests of factorial invariance and latent mean differences

Model		$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	RMSEA	CFI
1.0	Full model (form invariance)	193.3	144	–	–	0.025	0.94
2.0	Factor loadings invariant: all	250.6	174	57.3*	30	0.028	0.90
2.1	Invariant: C	211.0	154	17.7 <i>ns</i>	10	0.026	0.93
2.2	Invariant: UA	207.3	154	14.0 <i>ns</i>	10	0.025	0.93
2.3	Invariant: PD	218.6	154	25.3*	10	0.027	0.92
2.4	Invariant: C and UA	224.6	164	31.3 <i>ns</i>	20	0.026	0.92
3.1	Latent means invariant: C	241.3	169	16.7*	5	0.028	0.91
3.2	Latent means invariant: UA	261.6	169	37.0*	5	0.031	0.90
3.3	Latent means invariant: PD	327.7	169	103.1*	5	0.041	0.82

C – collectivism; UA – uncertainty avoidance; PD – power distance.

Models 2.x are compared against Model 1.0 and Models 3.x are compared against Model 2.4.

\* $p < 0.005$ ; *ns* indicates  $p > 0.05$ .

Table 3

Maximum likelihood estimates and standard errors of factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ) and latent means ( $\kappa$ )

Parameter	Across-group equivalences		U.S. 1985		U.S. 2000		Taiwan 1985		Taiwan 2000	
	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.
$\lambda_{11}$	1.00	–								
$\lambda_{21}$	0.92	0.10								
$\lambda_{31}$	1.08	0.11								
$\lambda_{42}$	1.00	–								
$\lambda_{52}$	1.00	0.09								
$\lambda_{62}$	0.98	0.09								
$\lambda_{73}$	1.00	–								
$\lambda_{83}$			0.61	0.20	0.34	0.20	1.67	0.52	1.235	0.38
$\lambda_{93}$			1.59	0.62	0.40	0.23	0.41	0.32	1.02	0.31
$\kappa_1$			4.23	0.09	4.18	0.09	4.53	0.12	4.17	0.11
$\kappa_2$			4.59	0.08	4.58	0.09	5.03	0.12	4.91	0.12
$\kappa_3$			4.01	0.09	4.99	0.09	4.01	0.12	3.92	0.12

Parameter	Across-group equivalences		Hong Kong 1985		Hong Kong 2000	
	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.
$\lambda_{83}$			0.67	0.34	1.12	0.45
$\lambda_{93}$			0.77	0.36	1.13	0.46
$\kappa_1$			3.85	0.12	4.05	0.12
$\kappa_2$			4.08	0.11	4.55	0.11
$\kappa_3$			3.99	0.12	4.84	0.12

Values are obtained from Model 2.4.

explore the potential relative dynamism of culture between the sampled regions over two points in time. This test for cultural dynamism, although by itself not conclusive of crossvergence, is one necessary condition because a set of relatively static cultural indicators and positions would basically exclude the possibility of crossvergence.

One can see from Figs. 1 and 2a, b and c this was the case. For all three cultural constructs, the Duncan’s multiple range tests reported in Fig. 2a, b, and c show significant movement away from the relative positioning in the 1985 data. Results reported under time differences in Fig. 2a, b, and c show that for collectivism, the Taiwan mean significantly decreased (Fig. 2a) and for uncertainty avoidance (Fig. 2b) and power distance the Hong Kong mean significantly increased (Fig. 2b and c) from the prior time period. Both the U.S. and Hong Kong means increased for power distance (Fig. 2c) compared to the earlier study. The changes occurring longitudinally, above, not only indicate cultural dynamism (that culture is not static for the individual regions) but there is also evidence for differences in

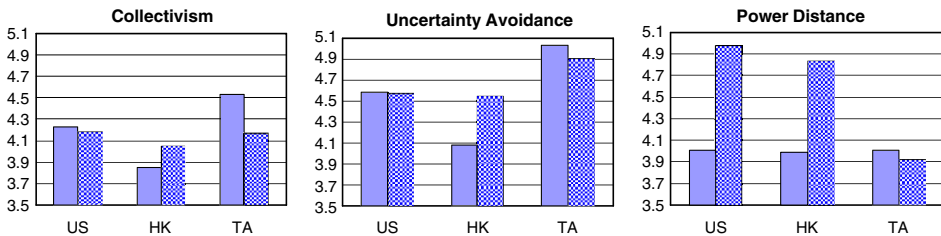
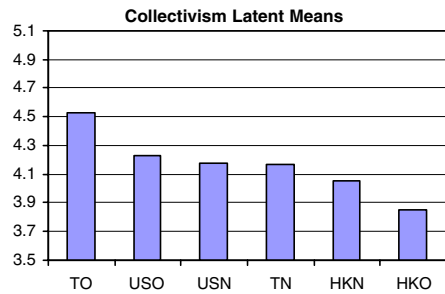


Fig. 1. Graphs of latent means: solid bars: 1985; cross-hatch bars: 2000.

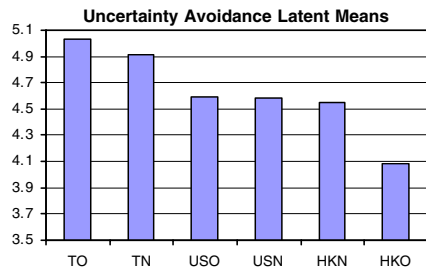
a

Results of Duncan's Multiple Range Test	
1985 Data	(T = US) > HK
2000 Data	HK = T = US
Time difference	T85 > T00



b

Results of Duncan's Multiple Range Test	
1985 Data	T > US > HK
2000 Data	T > (US = HK)
Time difference	HK00 > HK85



c

Results of Duncan's Multiple Range Test	
1985 Data	US = T = HK
2000 Data	(US = HK) > T
Time difference	US00 > US85, HK00 > HK85

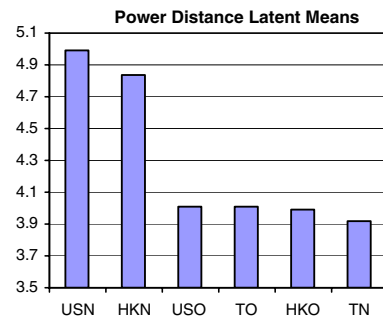


Fig. 2. (a) Collectivism latent means; (b) uncertainty avoidance latent means; (c) power distance latent means. USO, HKO, TO=1985 data; USN, HKN, TN=2000 data.

relative positioning (that relative to each other, the regions demonstrated some positional cultural changes over time) shown in the same figures used. This is incrementally supportive of crossvergence because the phenomena not only requires cultural dynamism but also requires some specific types of relative change. The U.S. position relative to Taiwan changed significantly with respect to power distance because of a significant increase (Fig. 2c) in power distance for the U.S. from the prior time period. There was no significant change in the other two dimensions. The U.S. and Hong Kong have moved closer together over time in their relative positioning. The 1985 data revealed significant differences between the U.S. and Hong Kong with respect to both collectivism and uncertainty avoidance means. However, the 2000 data shows no significant difference on any of the cultural constructs between the U.S. and Hong Kong, once again showing a significant change in the relative positioning.

In summary, because of significant changes for at least one nation in each of the three cultural latent means from the earlier study to the newer one, the relative cultural dynamism of our hypothesis is supported. The nature of the relative position changes generally provides support

for crossvergence within the context of this study. We find a relative cultural dynamism of converging and diverging realities blended with some static positions for specific regions depending on what cultural parameter is being evaluated.

### 7.3. Potential demographic influences

Since some of the demographic variables showed relatively major changes over the period of time between the two surveys, we tried to address this fact by adding age, gender and work experience as covariates. Age was significantly related to collectivism ( $P < 0.01$ ) and uncertainty avoidance ( $P < 0.01$ ) but not to power distance. Education level was related to uncertainty avoidance only ( $P < 0.01$ ) and gender was not significantly related to any of the three constructs. The relative positioning of the constructs changed in only one construct, collectivism, where Hong Kong and Taiwan changed their relative positioning. Otherwise, the results remained basically unchanged when adjusting for age, gender, and education.

## 8. Discussion

Our longitudinal research has developed some interesting perspectives, including:

1. Comparisons of potential change between the U.S. and regional Chinese management mindsets within the banking industry. The largest shift in our longitudinal sample for the U.S. was in relation to a significant increase in power distance. While the magnitude of this shift was relatively matched in Hong Kong, it was not in Taiwan.
2. Changes in the regional Chinese management mindset for the given industry. In relation to Hong Kong, the most significant change that directly varies from Taiwan is in an increased level of observed uncertainty avoidance (while Taiwan decreased) and a significant increase in power distance (again, while Taiwan decreased). Increased uncertainty avoidance for Hong Kong during this time could be directly related to the 1997 handover of power from the United Kingdom to China for Hong Kong as a special administrative region.
3. Changes in the U.S. management mindset for the given industry. Again, in the U.S., the largest observed shift related to cultural dimensions comes from an increase in power distance. Banking consolidation, mergers and savings and loan crisis for the U.S. during the time between the initial sample of 1985 and the second sample 2000 could be one plausible explanation. As middle management is squeezed out through layoffs and consolidation, there could be fewer “intermediaries” between lower level managers and high level officers, creating greater power stratification in the industry and thus higher measures on power distance.

One critique that cross-cultural studies have not escaped is that, too often, they are developed and constructed within a framework that seeks to separate one national group from another, establishing suspiciously clear and clean lines (Yoneyama, 1999). Although this clear-cut type of approach provides easy-to-digest constructs and conclusions, it can ignore certain realities that may exist within organizational contexts. For example, individuals may be compelled to adopt industry attitudes and behaviors in order to comply with organizational attitudes and competitive nuances within the given context (Kelley et al., 1987).

### 8.1. Convergence, divergence, static and crossvergence

In regard to the convergence hypothesis, there is a history of debate (Webber, 1969; Kelley and Worthley, 1981) that continues today. Our research demonstrates that, while we observe converging tendencies between the U.S. and two areas of Greater China, we also view divergence and some fairly static positions<sup>7</sup> for regional samples in relation to specific cultural dimensions as well. These findings support the work of Ralston et al. (1993, 1997), advocating crossvergence whereby unique cultural patterns can arise from certain external socio-economic stimulus, developments and evolution. Cultures will change, both individually and relatively in some respects, as an influence from global contact and interaction, but will also remain static and different in other respects. Fig. 1 may help in examining these observed patterns in the following related sections.

### 8.2. Collectivism

The maximum difference between the three latent means (U.S., Hong Kong and Taiwan) in 2000 decreased by more than 50% of 1985 maximum difference for collectivism (see graphs in Fig. 1), which is indicative of a general case for convergence in this area. The Taiwanese measure on collectivism decreased, conforming much closer to U.S. and Hong Kong measurements. Explanation of this tendency could come from the external environmental factors (economic, globalization and technological changes already discussed). However, the U.S. mean for collectivism remained largely static during this time.

Hong Kong did have a smaller latent mean than Taiwan in the 1985 data set but there was no significant difference in the 2000 data set. Perhaps more interesting, in both samples, the U.S. measured higher than Hong Kong on the collectivism measure. This is counter to the original Hofstede (1980) findings that show the U.S. as the highest ranking individualistic country and Hong Kong as relatively higher on collectivism which could be indicative of our specialized, banking sample. This positioning, and relative difference to the Hofstede rankings, seemed to hold during the research period with some converging tendency (see Fig. 1).

### 8.3. Uncertainty avoidance

With respect to this dimension, we generally observe converging movement comparing the three sample regions (U.S., Hong Kong and Taiwan) over the longitudinal period. For this construct, the Hong Kong latent mean changed the most, increasing in value. The Taiwan mean was slightly smaller also making the three means converge toward the U.S. which was generally static during this time.

### 8.4. Power distance

Our samples generally demonstrate that for this dimension divergence actually occurred. The research results show a movement away from the results obtained in 1985 where the power distance means were virtually the same. This time frame has seen a large increase in power distance for both Hong Kong and the United States, with only a slight decrease, and almost

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<sup>7</sup> For example, during the longitudinal period and in relation to our hypothesis, the U.S. demonstrated almost no change in uncertainty avoidance, while Taiwan showed almost no change power distance – see Fig. 2.

static, for Taiwan. One suggestion for the significant increase in power distance within the U.S. (given the industry) is that the elimination of mid-level management positions within the financial sector might leave an atmosphere of increased power distance between the remaining, fewer mid-level managers and the more senior and high ranking executives, a stratification of positions. The U.S. experienced a savings and loan crisis during the same longitudinal period, producing a trend of mergers and acquisitions that led to downsizing in an effort to increase profitability by eliminating duplication. Why the power distance observation might have occurred in Hong Kong and not in Taiwan, however, may be due to the problem of establishing factorial invariance for this dimension.

The above discussion about the longitudinal movement both relative to other nations and as separate regions suggest a mix of converging, diverging and individual region static position in relation to certain cultural dimensions. This specific mixture of observed cultural evolution is more supportive of cultural crossvergence (Ralston et al., 1997) than it would be of either a pure cultural convergence or divergence position.

### 8.5. *Concluding discussion*

The results of our study point toward several conclusions that are particularly useful within a management framework. One is that subjective cultural parameters, and relative positions, may not be as static as some have claimed. Particularly in commercial activity/contexts, where competition, quality and advantage constantly pressure organizations to improve, an assumption of culture as more static than dynamic does not seem reasonable. Our longitudinal approach provides evidence to support crossvergence.

Another major element observed is that cultural diversity is regionally significant for certain nations and that this level of disaggregative understanding may provide a better platform for management research than other approaches (Schaffer and Riordan, 2003). In this current study, the research targeted regions of Greater China and found significant differences between Hong Kong and Taiwan. In fact, the research indicated areas where the U.S. and Hong Kong are closer than Hong Kong and Taiwan. Perhaps not surprising to some, especially given certain arguments like crossvergence, it specifically promotes Cheung and Chow's (1999) position that regional significance should be examined when considering Greater China in management research. This same argument could be extended to encourage more detailed research in other nations with potentially diverse and robust cultural mosaics as recommended by Kelley et al. (2004). The similarity between the U.S. and Hong Kong might also be explained by the structure of the Hong Kong political system under recent British influence.

## 9. **Limitations**

This research examined both culture and the relative position of culture among nations specifically within one defined segment, the banking industry. The ecological validity of the findings to a larger population would require further follow up and research. While the banking industry is an important socio-economic system in any developed or developing context, other important segments could also be examined.

Our findings examined two specific regions of Greater China (Hong Kong and Taiwan) but there are other significant regions of the nation that could be further examined within this context of research to provide meaningful, incremental insight. And while these regions of Greater China provide some level of sub-regional examination, it would be highly relevant to include samples

from what would be known as mainland China. Additionally, the U.S. has regional cultural complexity that could be valuable if examined within a similar research context.

Our choice of language used in conducting the research was largely based on practical use in the respective professional population at that time (English was used in Hong Kong and not in Taiwan). Although a process of careful back translation for the instrument was followed, it is possible that differences in instrument language could have presented some bias in comparison of these samples.

The longitudinal nature of this study, while providing some distal relevance imperative for the examination of crossvergence, also presented challenges. For example, the original survey was conducted using the assistance of indigenous banking confederates. Because the original sample was gathered using banking industry collaborators and direct mailing, it was decided, for consistency, that the follow up should also be conducted in a similar manner. While this approach was reasonable, more consistent sampling conditions, and potentially higher reliability, might have been achieved if a forum was used which would have allowed more direct researcher contact and administration of the instrument to participants. As a result, some Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients are less than ideal in this study.

## 10. Future research

Our longitudinal research takes an important step in examining the possibility of crossvergence, more research is called for. Although intuitively suggestive in our research framework, more direct empirical links could be developed to show how specific external environmental pressures (e.g. increased global competition within home country markets, industry bankruptcy rates, political systems and unemployment) might specifically affect different elements of culture at the organizational level. Work could be developed to examine how the effects of cultural change within institutions may permeate from the organization into larger cultural contexts for assimilation, a *spillover effect*. The study could be expanded to include more countries (or regions of the current countries) and industries, providing a broader base from which to draw conclusions.

## Appendix A

Prior to running the confirmatory factor analyses, missing data were replaced by the mean values for the respective country groups. For example, if an individual from Taiwan who filled out the survey in 1985 left a question blank, the value was replaced by the mean of the given question for the 1985 Taiwan group. Missing values were handled in this way to ensure that the correlation matrix of the data was positive definite (when this condition is not satisfied statistical analyses are sometimes suspect). Although listwise deletion of cases would have ensured positive definiteness, this was avoided because it would have resulted in the removal of all of a participant's data, even if only one question was blank. A total of 35 missing values were imputed in this way out of the original sample of 942. To examine the assumption that data were missing randomly, dummy variables were constructed that divided the cases into two groups, those with missing values for a given measure and those without. Mean differences on other variables were then compared and no significant violations were found.

Variables were checked for multivariate outliers by calculating the Mahalanobis distances (the distances from the multivariate centroid). With an  $\alpha=0.001$  cutoff level, only one of the 942 participants produced scores that identified them as outliers. Analyses with the full data and

analyses with this outlier excluded were run, and results were virtually identical. The outlier was therefore left in for the final results. Randomly selected pairwise scatterplots of the variables (there were too many plots to examine them all) were visually examined to make an assessment of non-linearity, and no evidence of nonlinearity was found.

Because the items were measured on a Likert-type scale, which is clearly not continuous, the covariance matrix was not used as the basis for any of the analyses. Using the PRELIS package that accompanies LISREL, polychoric correlations (between two ordinal variables) were calculated and used for all analyses. Maximum likelihood estimation was employed to estimate all models. The overall  $\chi^2$  (chi-square) test, the RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), the CFI (comparative fit index), and the  $\chi^2/df$  (chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio) were examined to assess model fit.

The overall  $\chi^2$  test, which tests the null hypothesis of perfect model fit, was provided because of its ubiquitous reporting in the confirmatory factor analytic literature and because of its usefulness in comparing nested models (models with identical structure but an unequal number of free parameters). However, because of its sensitivity to sample size, the  $\chi^2$  test is generally considered to be an appropriate measure only when the total sample size is less than 200 (Bollen and Long, 1993). Further, this test is affected by the correlations within the model, with higher correlations suggesting poorer fit. The present analyses have a sample size greater than 200 and the correlations within the model were expected to be fairly high (because all variables were hypothesized to reflect management style). Therefore, the  $\chi^2$  test was not viewed as an appropriate fit index for the present study, except when comparing nested models.

Because of the problems involved with the  $\chi^2$  test, alternative fit indices have been provided. These include the RMSEA, defined as  $\sqrt{[(\chi^2/df) - 1]/N}$ , with values below 0.05 considered to reflect good model fit; the CFI, defined as  $1 - (\chi^2 - df)/(\chi^2_{\text{Ind}} - df_{\text{Ind}})$  where Ind is the independence model (no free parameters), with values greater than 0.90 considered to reflect good fit; and the  $\chi^2/df$ , with values less than 2.0 considered to reflect good model fit (Bollen, 1989).

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