

Children's Nurturance and Self-Determination Rights: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Increasing awareness of children's developmental needs and rights has led to a global move toward giving children and adolescents a greater degree of autonomy in the decisions affecting their own lives. This article presents two studies examining the role of culture and religion in 12-year-old children's perceptions of their rights across three cultures. The first study showed that U.S. and Swiss children advocated for more self-determination rights than Chinese-Malaysian children; U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children advocated for more nurturance rights than Swiss children. Within the Chinese-Malaysian sample, Buddhist children were more likely to advocate for self-determination rights as compared to Christian children. Using a revised Children's Rights Interview (rCRI), the second study showed that on average U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children were more likely to advocate for self-determination rights than nurturance rights. However, there were no significant differences between the two cultural groups in terms of the overall responses. The results of the studies are discussed in terms of the cultural orientation and constructivist frameworks.

Children are often described as the world's most valuable resource. Unfortunately, they continue to be neglected, abused, and exploited (Glotzer, 2005). Due to their subordinate status in society, children are very often unable to assert their own rights. These rights are largely defined and controlled by the adult population. However, increasing awareness of children's developmental needs and rights has led to a global move toward giving children and adolescents a greater degree of autonomy in the decisions affecting their own lives and development (see Ruck &

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Horn, this issue). The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) serves to improve the quality of children's lives by providing guidelines in defining and implementing children's rights. As Limber and Flekkoy (1995) contended, the Convention's articles should be viewed within the context of three overarching themes, namely that the primary consideration in any action should be in the "the best interests of the child" (Article 3), that states will provide children with rights "in a manner consistent with [their] evolving capacities" (Article 5), and that children's dignity be respected (Preamble).

One can anticipate that basic cultural differences affect how the very meaning of the term *children's rights* is understood. Understanding these types of differences would facilitate the success with which the CRC (1989) could be effectively used to guide children's policies in different countries. A major detraction for the convention is the debate over whether the rights are universal or culturally bound (Murphy-Berman, Levesque, & Berman, 1996). In addition to a potential cultural bias in the drafting of the convention, there is also disagreement over the basic definition and parameters of childhood. This disagreement demonstrates major cultural differences that are likely to hinder the implementation of children's rights, and it raises the question of whether an international governing body can adequately legislate such rights on an international level. It is therefore essential to examine which rights are culturally bound, which rights, if any, are universal, and ultimately, how the definition of a child influences the impact of this convention.

Research on children's rights is relatively sparse. In one of the earliest studies, Rogers and Wrightsman (1978) drew a distinction between nurturance rights and self-determination rights. The nurturance orientation stresses society's obligations to make decisions "in the best interests of children," to protect them from harm, and to mold their development. The determination of what is considered good or desirable *for* a child is made by the child's authority figures. It is essentially a paternalistic (or parentalistic) view. On the other hand, the self-determination orientation stresses the importance of allowing children to exercise control over various facets of their own lives, even when those decisions might conflict with the views of adults charged with the children's care. Self-determination rights are characterized by giving the child developmentally appropriate freedom in their own development.

Melton (1980, 1983) was one of the first researchers to provide an account of the development of children's reasoning about their rights. He developed the Children's Rights Interview (CRI), which contains 12 vignettes to assess when and under what circumstances children would assert a right. The vignettes involved conflict-laden situations in which the child might assert a right. His findings showed that the development of reasoning about children's rights is dependent on age and socioeconomic status (SES). He reported that high-SES children and 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th graders asserted more positive attitudes toward their rights approximately 2 years before the same-aged low-SES children. Consideration of

Melton's work suggests, despite some possible confounding between SES and cognitive level, socioeconomic and developmental explanations for differences in same-aged children's conceptions of their rights. Although Melton (1980) did not explicitly distinguish between nurturance and self-determination rights, his framework can best be applied to self-determination rights. It does not, however, fully capture the development of reasoning surrounding nurturance rights (see Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998).

Cultural Orientations and Their Consequences on Children's Rights

A fundamental question in cross-cultural research and research on children's rights is the extent to which the conception of autonomy or the emphasis on individual freedom and self-determination is culturally dependent or universal. Particular goals related to autonomy may, at the same time, vary by developmental periods (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000). As children develop skills and abilities related to psychological needs for self-expression and competence, they actively pursue areas of autonomy that are being afforded by different cultural environments. These conceptions of personal autonomy and individual freedom presumably vary across cultures and environments, with limitations set by societal controls and individuals' opposing claims for personal jurisdiction.

Some researchers contend that conceptions of the self vary between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Kim, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987; Triandis, 1989). For example, in individualistic societies, the self is regarded as separate from the social order, leading to a morality of autonomy and emphasis on individual rights. In contrast, in collectivistic societies, the self is interdependent, defined by the unique social roles that individuals occupy in the family and society. If different cultures encourage varying amounts of autonomy during childhood, then, according to a cultural explanation, individualistic cultures such as those of North America, and to a lesser extent, those of Western Europe would place a primary value on the autonomy of the individual member, whether adult or child. On the other hand, cultures that are more collectivistic, such as Asian and African societies, lead individuals to conform to the existing social roles, and to uphold the hierarchy to maintain social harmony (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). This view would place higher priority on the nurturance and protection of children. Therefore, as different cultures encourage varying amount of autonomy during childhood, cultural variability should affect children's perceptions of their rights. One way to examine such differences is to assess cultural differences in countries embracing varying degrees of individualistic and collectivistic orientations.

In relation to the orientations of children's rights, individualism implies that judgment and reasoning of human rights are oriented toward and based on the individual rather than the social context or situation, and the protection of the

individual rights tends to be emphasized. Thus, individualism is in line with self-determination rights. On the other hand, collectivism implies that judgment and reasoning are bound with mutual obligations of individuals within the social context. The care and well-being of those in need, such as children, is guarded by the adults. Furthermore, nurturance and compliance are encouraged, and fulfillment of one's duty to the group rather than the expression of one's personal rights tend to be rewarded (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003; Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, collectivism is in line with nurturance rights. Similarly, cultural psychology (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993; Triandis, 1989) would predict that children from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Malaysia from Southeast Asia) would be less likely to endorse self-determination rights than those from individualistic cultures (e.g., United States).

Despite the useful dichotomous conceptualization of cross-cultural differences, Cherney and Perry (1996) postulated that the differentiation of social and moral concepts become increasingly complex throughout development. Similarly, the constructivist perspective of social development proposed by Turiel and colleagues (Neff & Helwig, 2002; Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 1998) rejected the idea of global stage approaches toward reasoning (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1970). This *social cognitive domain approach* postulates that children construct multiple forms of social understanding through their encounters with different types of social experiences (see Ruck & Horn, this issue). In other words, children develop understandings that simultaneously include concerns with justice, fairness, and rights, as well as social-conventional conceptions based on authority, tradition, and social rules. Thus, individuals give priority to different concerns depending on a variety of factors, such as salient situations and the way different types of conflicting concerns are interpreted at different points in development (Helwig, 2006b; Neff & Helwig, 2002). The active stance of individuals in relation to their social environment results in both shared and nonshared aspects of culture.

Religious Background and Influences on Perceptions of Rights

It is important to consider how cultural practices are evaluated by individuals, and to account for the role of diverse concepts that individuals bring to bear in interpreting and evaluating their social reality. One such concept and a potentially important variable that has not received much empirical attention in previous studies is religion. Parents play an important role in instructing their children about religious tenets and practices. It is their responsibility and right to direct and educate their child in a way that promotes their religion (or lack of religion). The Catholic Church can be considered a rather paternalistic religion because it has a distinctly stratified hierarchy (Sampson, 2000). Thus, Catholics would be expected to embrace nurturance rights in that what is good or desirable is determined for the child. While there are differences in beliefs and values among

Christian denominations, there are also differences between Western-based and non-Western-based religions. Ben-Arieh, Khoury-Kassabri, and Haj-Yahia (2006) found differences between Israeli Jewish youth and Muslim Palestinian youth. Regardless of the country of residence, Jewish youth and adults generally reported more positive attitudes toward children's rights than did the Palestinian groups. These findings demonstrate that judgments and reasoning may vary by religion regardless of the country of origin. An important question that arises is the extent to which the patterns found in this research extend to other—especially non-Western—religious and cultural contexts. Chinese family life and religion, for example, is often portrayed as a fixed hierarchy, with elders held in high esteem and obedience (Pye, 1992). How do these differences affect adolescents' view of children's rights? Thus, similar to the individualistic and collectivist orientations, Christians' and Buddhists' precepts may differ in important ways influencing children's perceptions of their rights.

The Current Studies

These studies examined children's perception of their own rights using samples of children from a collectivistic culture (Chinese-Malaysian), an individualistic culture (United States), and for the first study, a Western European culture (Switzerland). Specifically, children of moderate-SES Chinese-Malaysian ethnic background living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and U.S. children of moderate SES were interviewed using a slightly modified version of the Children's Rights Interview (CRI) in the first study and the revised version (rCRI) in the second study (see list of vignettes in Table 1).

Twelve-year-old adolescents were chosen as the participants of these studies because the balance between nurturance and self-determination is of particular interest at this age. While nurturance is still necessary, children's quest for autonomy is increasing as a developmental task. As Melton's (1980) findings suggested, 12-year-old children are capable of making judgments that are based more on criteria of fairness and competence to exercise self-determination than on what authority figures actually allow children to do. At that age, children's views have shifted toward positive attitudes about children's self-determination rights and children are therefore more apt to make informed decisions about issues that may or may not affect their lives.

Malaysia is a multicultural country in Southeast Asia. In 2000, 65.1% of the Malaysian population was Malay, 26% Chinese, and 7.7% Indian (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2001). In terms of religious practice, Islam is the most widely professed religion (60.4%, mostly practiced by Malay ethnic group). Malaysia, being a multireligious nation, also has a fair share of other religions such as Buddhism (19.2%), Christianity (9.1%), Hinduism (6.3%), and Confucianism/Taoism/other traditional Chinese religion (2.6%).

Table 1. Revised Children's Rights Interview Vignettes (rCRI; Cherney, 2003) Used in Studies 1 and 2 According to U.N. Convention Rights and Article

Types of Rights (United Nation Convention Rights and Article in Parenthesis)	Wording of Vignettes
	Self-determination vignettes
Right to be heard in custody dispute (<i>Participation right; Art. 12</i>)	1. Mary's parents are getting a divorce. Her mother wants Mary to live with her, but her father wants Mary to live with him.
Right to due process (<i>Participation right; Art. 12</i>)	2. Jim saw how a boy jumped over a neighbor's fence and how the angry neighbor hit the child repeatedly with a stick.
Expressing opinion in school newspaper (<i>Participation right; Art. 12 & 13</i>);	3. Mark wrote a story for the school newspaper. In his story he said that he didn't like the school rules. The principal told him that he couldn't print his story.
Voting (<i>Participation right; Art. 16</i>)	4. Lucy would like to vote for a political leader. Her parents told her that she was too young to vote.
Keeping a secret diary (<i>Participation right; Art. 16</i>)	5. Betty kept a diary, and she said that nobody else could read it, not even her parents.
Due process (<i>Participation right; Art. 12</i>)	6. Larry got into a fight at school. The teacher said that he would have to do extra homework for school. Larry said, "Wait! You have to hear my side of the story first."
Right to health care (<i>Right to health care; Art. 24 & 25</i>)	7. John wanted to go to a doctor to talk about some things that were bothering him, but his parents would not let him.
Right to choose own religion (<i>Participation right; Art. 15</i>)	8. Becky doesn't want to practice her parents' religion. She wants to try some other religions or maybe have no religion at all.
	Nurturance vignettes
Right to refuse vaccination (<i>Right to health care, Art. 24 & 25</i>)	9. Joan went to the doctor and he told her that she should take a vaccination. Joan said that she would not take one.
Protection from movie content (<i>Participation right; Art. 16</i>)	10. David wanted to watch a movie on television, but his parents did not think it was a good movie for him to watch.
Protection from child labor (<i>Protection right; Art. 32</i>)	11. Linda wanted to work in Mr. Smith's grocery store. Mr. Smith said that she was not old enough to have a job.
Parental oversight (<i>Participation right; Art. 15</i>):	12. Debbie wanted to go and visit her friends, but her parents would not let her because they didn't like her friends.
Providing food and clothing (<i>Protection right; Art. 12 & 13</i>)	13. Carrie's parents decided that she should have to pay for her own food and clothing. Carrie thinks that her parents should pay.
Parental assistance with peer-related conflict (<i>Participation right; Art. 12 & 13</i>)	14. Kelly had an argument with her best friend and was very upset. She wanted to talk to her parents about it but they were too busy.
Child protection (<i>Development right; Preamble</i>)	15. Terry's parents are never there when he gets home from school. Terry doesn't like being left home alone.
Parental assistance with homework (<i>Development right; Preamble</i>)	16. Randy was having trouble with his math homework. He needed his parents to help him with it. But his parents said that he had to do it himself.

According to the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau (census.org) estimates, 80.1% of the U.S. population is of Caucasian, 14.8% is of Hispanic or Latino origin, 12.4% is of African-American origin, and 4.4% is of Asian origin. Most citizens adhere to Christianity (78.5%), with roughly 52% Protestant, 24.5% Catholic, and 2% Mormon. Fifteen percent of the U.S. population has no religious affiliation. Switzerland is ranked in between Malaysia and the United States in terms of individualism (Hofstede, 2001) and can thus serve as a reasonably good comparison. Switzerland, like Malaysia and the United States, is a multicultural country. Forty-two percent of the population is Catholic and 35% is Protestant. Over 4% of the population considers Islam as their religion (swissworld.org).

Based on historical factors, and similar to Chinese society that is described as collectivistic (e.g., Helwig et al., 2003; Triandis, 1989), it seems plausible that the Chinese-Malaysian society holds a collectivist orientation, and thus a more nurturance orientation toward children's rights than children from the United States who would be expected to hold an individualistic orientation. Switzerland's political, economic, educational, and cultural complexities as well as its rich traditional history suggest that both nurturance and self-determination rights might be equally important in the decision-making process. However, such simple categorization may not be sufficient in capturing the complexity of the cultural context. For example, Lau (1992) found no distinct pattern of collectivistic value preference among the Chinese samples (from China, Hong Kong, and Singapore). Rather, Chinese from different regions differentially showed individualist and collectivist concerns as they develop complex and heterogeneous social orientations that are influenced by the multifaceted social world. Thus, rather than a strong proposition from cultural psychology (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993; Triandis, 1989) perhaps the constructivist model should be considered (Neff & Helwig, 2002). Therefore, in the case of Chinese-Malaysian, it is likely that the recent rapid social and economic changes have resulted in a transformation of conceptions of human rights and a more autonomous children's rights regime within the society.

Study 1

The first study was designed to extend Cherney and Perry's (1996) study with a sample of Chinese-Malaysian and U.S. children using a slightly modified version of Melton's (1980) CRI. For comparison purposes, we contrasted their answers with those of the Swiss children who participated in their original study (Cherney & Perry, 1996). It was hypothesized that based on the cultural perspective, Chinese-Malaysian children would be more likely to advocate for nurturance rights than Swiss and U.S. children. Conversely, U.S. children would be more likely to advocate for self-determination rights than Swiss and Chinese-Malaysian children, with the Swiss sample falling between the two other samples. Following a constructivist model (Neff & Helwig, 2002), we also hypothesized that,

regardless of the cultural background, children would not advocate indiscriminately for either nurturance or self-determination rights. Rather, they would take into account the social, cultural, and economic context in which they were raised. In addition, because of the paternalistic aspect of Christianity, Christian children were hypothesized to advocate for more nurturance rights and children's rights in general than Buddhist children.

Method

Participants

The total sample consisted of 100 children (44 boys and 56 girls) between the ages of 11 and 13 ($M = 12.11$, $SD = .36$). Twenty children came from the capital of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and 18 children from the midwestern United States. Their interviews were added to the existing 62 interviews of Swiss children interviewed in Geneva. In the sample, 14% of the participants were Buddhists, 21% were of Protestant denominations, 32% Catholic, and 33% did not claim any religion. All Buddhists came from Malaysia, 19% of the Protestants were from Malaysia, 5% from the United States, and 76% from Switzerland. Forty-one percent of the Catholic sample came from the United States and 59% from Switzerland. Finally, 6% of the Malaysian, 12% of the U.S., and 82% of the Swiss sample did not associate with any religion. The Chinese-Malaysian and U.S. children came from predominantly low- to middle-SES backgrounds attending public schools, and the Swiss sample from a middle- to high-SES background with most of the children attending private school. The children were given flyers of the study and consent forms to bring home to their parents. Those who returned their signed parental consent form were invited for the interview.

Materials

The first part of the CRI (Melton, 1980) questionnaire asked four preliminary questions about rights in general (e.g., definition of children's right, etc.), and the second part consisted of 12 conflict-laden vignettes (see Table 1; Vignette 1–12 were included in Study 1). Each vignette was followed by questions designed to elicit whether the participant thinks that the child or the authority/adults in the story situation should be the one to make the final decision. After the participant selected a response, she or he was asked to provide a rationale for her or his selection and at what age she or he thought that the decision of the particular right should be accorded to the child (see Table 1 for examples). The situations involved rights to information, to due process, to expression of opinion, to make medical treatment decisions, to work, and to privacy. Because several vignettes in the original version involved situations that could not be applied appropriately to the

international samples, we adapted some of the stories and added questions to elicit more detailed responses from the U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children. For example, Melton's (1980) CRI included a question asking children to decide whether a child should receive medical treatment when the parents cannot pay. We chose to omit this question because it is not relevant in countries where children have access to free medical care or where all children are insured through the government (e.g., Switzerland). After each question, the child was asked to tell the experimenter why and at what age a child could make such a decision. In total, there were eight items relating to self-determination rights (Vignettes 1–8) and four items relating to nurturance rights (Vignettes 9–12). The vignettes were categorized by matching to the definitions of rights made by the U.N. Convention's articles. Specifically, most of the nurturance vignettes adhered to the developmental and protection rights of children with parental involvement, whereas most of the self-determination vignettes adhered to the participation rights, in which the child attempts to reach out for some form of autonomy. Because the Swiss sample had been collected previously using slightly adapted CRI questions, 8 of the 12 original questions applied to all three cultural samples and 4 applied to the U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian samples only (Vignettes 2, 8, 10, and 12).

Trained raters who were blind as to the individuals' identity and the hypotheses coded each transcript. Responses to the vignettes were scored on a 3-point scale, indicating the degree to which the participant advocated for the child in the story as the decisionmaker. A score of +1 indicated that the participant advocated for the choice or decision to be made by the child in the vignette. Responses where the participant did not advocate for the child to make the decision in the vignette were coded as -1 . Therefore, for vignettes involving self-determination rights, more positive scores denote more support for self-determination rights because the child in the story is advocated for making the decision. On the other hand, for vignettes involving nurturance rights, more negative scores denote more support for nurturance rights because the adult/authority involved, instead of the child, is advocated for making the decision. Finally, responses where the participant did not advocate for or against ("it depends") the choice or opinion of the child or had no opinion were coded as zero. Interrater reliability was based on 20% of the vignettes ($\kappa = .98$). The individual scores in Part 2 were summed across items and proportionalized. Self-determination and nurturance rights were also summed and proportionalized separately. Thus, the proportional scores ranged from -1.00 to $+1.00$.

Procedure

The questionnaire and consent forms were translated from English into Chinese for the Malaysian sample and into German and French for the Swiss sample. The questionnaires were translated back into English by another translator to assess the accuracy of the translation. After obtaining the parents' consent and

children's assent, each child participated in a personal interview in his or her preferred language at their local school conducted by one of the three trained experimenters. The order of presentation of vignettes was counterbalanced. The conversations were tape recorded. All verbatim responses were later translated into English and transcribed. Children were debriefed at the end of the interview, which lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Results

Part 1: Rights in General. Twenty-two percent of the children defined a right as "something you are allowed to do" and 10% as "being able to do something you want." Twelve percent did not know how to define a right. The remaining children defined a right as a privilege, an entitlement, or mentioned a specific right (e.g., freedom of speech). A majority of the children (76%) said that everyone has rights, and 24% mentioned that mostly adults, parents, or elders have rights. Seventy-four percent believed that children have rights and 80% that children should have rights. In terms of cultural differences, the Swiss children tended to be more hesitant in their answers. Only 66.1% of the Swiss children thought that children have rights as compared to 90% of the Chinese-Malaysian children and 83.3% of the U.S. children. Similarly, 72.6% of Swiss children thought that everyone should have rights compared to 80% of the Chinese-Malaysian children and 83.3% of the U.S. children. Only 77.4% of the Swiss children thought that children should have rights (80% of the Chinese-Malaysian and 88.9% of the U.S. children), and 17.7% said that children should only have some rights (compared to 10% of the Chinese-Malaysian children and 5.6% of the U.S. children). Buddhist children were the most likely to say that children have rights (92.9%), followed by Catholics (75%) and Christians (71.4%). Children without a religious affiliation were the least likely to believe that children have rights (66.7%).

Part 2: Responses to Vignettes. We first performed a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the eight responses to vignettes that were common among the three countries with country as the between-subject variable. The results of the omnibus ANOVA showed significant main effects of country, $F(2, 97) = 4.99, p = .009, \eta^2 = .09$, responses to vignettes, $F(7, 91) = 54.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .81$, as well as a significant interaction between responses to vignettes and country, $F(14, 182) = 2.08, p = .015, \eta^2 = .14$. As can be seen in Figure 1, Chinese-Malaysian, U.S., and Swiss children answered differently to certain items. Simple effects adjusted for type I error revealed that the responses of the three samples differed significantly only on three of the vignettes, $F(2, 97) = 3.45, p = .017$. First, Chinese-Malaysian ($M = -.60$) and Swiss ($M = -.35$) children did not think that children should be allowed to vote, whereas U.S. children favored the right to vote ($M = .22$), $F(2, 97) = 4.82, p = .017, \eta^2 = .09$. Second, Swiss children ($M = .27$) advocated for the right to work, whereas U.S. ($M = -.33$) and Chinese-Malaysian ($M = -.20$) children did not think that children should be

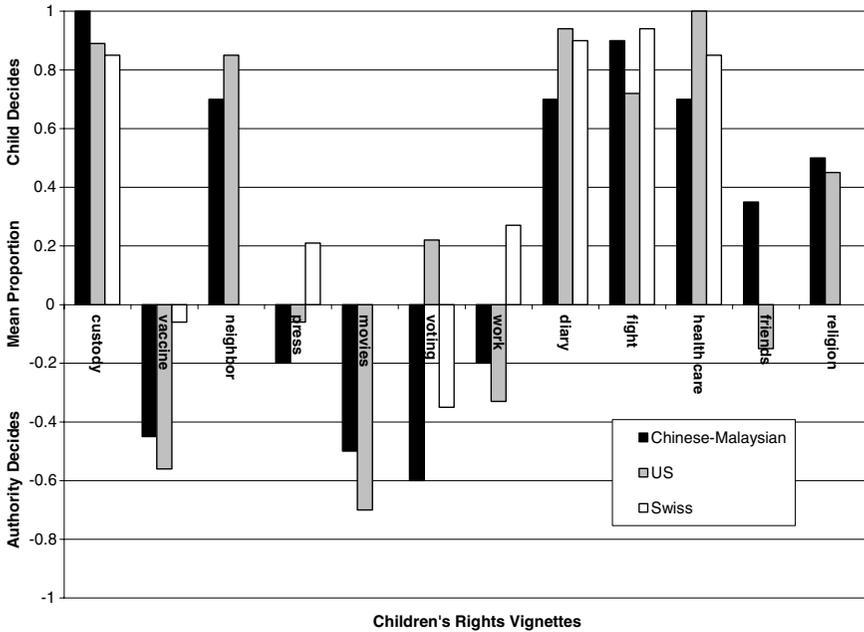


Fig. 1. Chinese-Malaysian, U.S., and Swiss children's responses to the CRI vignettes (Study 1). *Note.* Figure includes answers to all 12 CRI vignettes for the Chinese-Malaysian and U.S. children. Scores from 0 to +1 signify that the child decides; Scores from 0 to -1 signify that the parent/authority decides.

permitted to work, $F(2, 97) = 3.48, p = .021, \eta^2 = .08$. Third, Chinese-Malaysian children ($M = -.45$) and U.S. children ($M = -.55$) were less likely to advocate for the right to refuse a vaccine than the Swiss sample ($M = -.06$), $F(2, 97) = 2.80, p = .05, \eta^2 = .07$.

Although the two main effects may be subsumed by the interaction, it is important to note that, on average, Swiss children were significantly more likely to advocate for the child in the eight vignettes to make the decision ($M = .45, SD = .76$) than the Chinese-Malaysian children ($M = .23, SD = .26$). The U.S. children ($M = .35, SD = .45$) did not differ from the Swiss or Chinese-Malaysian children (Tukey's HSD, $p < .05$). These findings are not necessarily consistent with the cultural hypothesis that individualistic societies would advocate for more rights than collectivistic societies. It is noteworthy that the U.S. children's responses did not differ significantly from the two samples, and that children in all three cultures advocated for rights (means are all positive).

Furthermore, on average, children favored the right to choose where to live after their parents' divorce ($M = .92$), to keep their diary secret ($M = .85$), to

be heard in case of a dispute ($M = .85$), and to have access to a physician ($M = .85$). They did not advocate for the right to refuse a vaccination ($M = -.36$) but were neutral regarding the right to publish the school newspaper ($M = -.02$), to vote ($M = -.24$), or to work ($M = -.09$). These findings reveal that children did not advocate indiscriminately for autonomy. Qualitative responses revealed that participants reasoned that children would be too inexperienced to handle a cash register or that child labor was dangerous. Many also mentioned that children should not have the right to vote because they would be unduly swayed by political figures. Children from each country agreed that children should be consulted in case of parental divorce, they should not divulge their private thoughts, and that they should be allowed to talk to a physician without parental consent. U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children also agreed that they should receive due process in disciplinary hearings, and be able to freely choose their religion. They also agreed that children should not be allowed complete autonomy in choosing movies. Helwig et al., (2003) found a similar trend in Chinese and Canadian adolescents.

We also performed one-way ANOVAs on the mean proportion scores for self-determination and nurturance rights, separately. The results showed significant differences among the samples for self-determination rights, $F(2, 97) = 3.06$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$ and nurturance rights, $F(2, 97) = 6.57$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Consistent with a cultural explanation, on average, U.S. ($M = .62$, $SD = .20$) and Swiss ($M = .57$, $SD = .29$) children tended to advocate for more self-determination rights than Chinese-Malaysian children ($M = .42$, $SD = .28$). The first two did not differ significantly from one another (Tukey's HSD). At the same time, U.S. children ($M = -.44$, $SD = .54$) were significantly more likely to want their parents or the authority involved to make decisions about nurturance rights (lower scores) than Swiss children ($M = .10$, $SD = .70$). The Chinese-Malaysian children ($M = -.33$, $SD = .61$) were significantly more likely to prefer adults or the authority making decisions about nurturance rights than Swiss children, but they did not differ from the U.S. children (Tukey's HSD, $p < .05$). These findings are not entirely consistent with the cultural hypothesis, suggesting that children in a collectivistic culture are more likely to endorse nurturance rights than children in individualistic countries. Although the Chinese-Malaysian children advocated for nurturance rights, so did the U.S. children. Interestingly, the Swiss children were rather neutral regarding advocating for nurturance rights.

We also wanted to examine the influence of religion within each country and across the three countries. Separate one-way ANOVAs on the total, nurturance, and self-determination proportion scores for each country showed significant main effects for self-determination rights $F(1, 18) = 4.85$, $p = .041$ and total rights $F(1, 18) = 5.48$, $p = .031$ for the Chinese-Malaysian sample. Buddhist children ($M = .50$, $SD = .28$) were more likely to advocate for self-determination rights than Christian children ($M = .22$, $SD = .17$). Overall, Buddhist children ($M = .31$, $SD = .23$) advocated more for the child in the vignettes to make the decision

than Christian children ($M = .04$, $SD = .24$). To examine religious influence across the countries, and because of the relative lack of power, rather than using religious groups and countries as two between-subject variables within the same set of analyses, we performed an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the total, nurturance, and self-determination rights proportion scores with the religious groups as between-subject variable and country as the covariate. There were no significant effects. These findings, however, may be due to a lack of experimental power. A power analysis revealed that with a doubling of the sample size, there may be a main effect (assuming a medium effect size) for nurturance rights and total rights, with Buddhist children advocating for more nurturance rights as compared to Christian children, and children with no religious affiliation. However, this conjecture needs to be corroborated with further empirical evidence.

Finally, we performed independent t -tests (adjusted with an alpha level of $p = .01$ to control for type 1 errors) on the age at which children from the U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian samples believed that the child in the vignette would be ready to make the decisions described. The U.S. children differed significantly from the Chinese-Malaysian children on five questions, advocating for self-determination rights earlier. On average, the two samples differed in the following rights: right to due process (U.S.: $M = 10.73$, $SD = 2.89$; Chinese-Malaysians: $M = 13.89$, $SD = 4.40$), the right to vote (U.S.: $M = 15.87$, $SD = 2.98$; Chinese-Malaysians: $M = 18.73$, $SD = 2.84$), the right to see a physician (U.S.: $M = 11.59$, $SD = 2.31$; Chinese-Malaysians: $M = 14.72$, $SD = 4.25$), and the right to choose one's own religion (U.S.: $M = 12.07$, $SD = 1.92$; Chinese-Malaysian: $M = 15.00$, $SD = 3.48$). The Chinese-Malaysian children advocated for the right to be heard in a dispute earlier ($M = 8.84$, $SD = 2.67$) than the U.S. children ($M = 11.45$, $SD = 1.83$). In general, U.S. children advocated for many of the rights earlier than Chinese-Malaysian children. These differences could be due to the historical factor that Chinese and Asian social and moral thinking is dominated by Confucianism (Pye, 1992). An adherence to the maintenance of existing hierarchical social structures, and the virtue of *filial piety*, may lead to Chinese adolescents to advocate for rights later than U.S. adolescents (also see Ruck et al., 1998).

It is important to note that this study relied on semistructured interviews using hypothetical vignettes that were generated by adults and we did not systematically investigate children's qualitative answers, although we examined them to interpret some of the findings. While a semistructured interview format allows detection of the reasoning used by the child, it also increases the possibility of experimenter effects. In addition, the Swiss sample was interviewed 10 years prior to the two other samples. Children currently living in Switzerland may think about rights differently than those interviewed a decade earlier. It is also unclear how old the participants thought the hypothetical child in the story may have been. It was reasonable to assume that participants identified with a same-aged child, but we do not have evidence to validate this assumption other than anecdotal

evidence that children referred to themselves when explaining their reasoning. Future studies should not only examine children's qualitative responses, but they should also address the developmental, social, religious, and economic factors related to children's conceptions of rights. Mixed methodologies within culturally diverse cohorts should be utilized (see Peterson-Badali & Ruck, this issue). Also, extension of a study to a wider age range and to a longitudinal design will be desirable for charting out the developmental ordering of children's perception of their own rights.

Study 2

The vignettes utilized in the first study were based on Melton's original CRI (Melton, 1980), which involved situations that were not always easily applicable to the cultures examined in the present studies. Study 1 showed that the modification and adaptation made on the questionnaire yielded interpretable and encouraging outcomes for the investigation of children's perception of their own rights across the different cultural and religious samples in our study. However, the questionnaire did not adequately address several important rights addressed by the UN CRC (1989). In addition, it did not have the same number of self-determination and nurturance rights, and we wanted to draw participants of similar SES background more effectively in this second study. Thus, as a follow-up study and replication of Study 1, we designed a new inventory, the revised CRI (rCRI) (see Cherney & Shing, 2003) that was administered to a new sample of 12-year-old children from Malaysia and the United States.

Method

Participants

A total of 65 children (40 boys, 25 girls) between the ages of 11 and 13 ($M = 12.01$, $SD = 1.26$) were interviewed. Thirty-six were from Malaysia and 29 from a midwestern town in the United States. Forty-five percent of the participants were Buddhists, 32% were of Protestant denominations, 14% Catholics, and 8% did not claim any religion. Of the Chinese-Malaysian sample, 83% were Buddhists, 14% were Protestants, and 3% indicated no religious affiliation. The U.S. sample consisted of 55% Protestants, 31% Catholics, and 14% with no religious denomination. The children were recruited from local public and private schools and came from similar middle-SES backgrounds (mean family income was comparable across the two samples). They were given pencils as a token of appreciation for their participation at the end of the session.

Materials

Table 1 illustrates parts of the revised CRI (rCRI) that were included in Study 2. A full version of the rCRI can be found in Cherney and Shing (2003). From the CRC, we included the right for protection from physical, and psychological abuse (Article 19), the right to grow up in a family environment (Preamble), and the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27). In total, in Study 2 there were 6 items relating to self-determination rights (Vignettes 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7) and 6 items relating to nurturance rights (Vignettes 11–16).

As in Study 1, a score of +1 indicated that the participant advocated for the choice or decision to be made by the child in the vignette. Responses where the participant did not advocate for the child to make the decision in the vignette were coded as –1, and responses where the participant did not advocate for or against a right were coded as 0. For nurturance rights, the scores were reversed scored wherever appropriate as the advocacy of a nurturance right could be based on the child's advocacy for the particular right (e.g., a secure environment, support from parents), and also protection of the child from something harmful (e.g., refusing vaccination or seeing bad friends). Trained raters who were blind as to the individuals' identity and the hypotheses coded each transcript. Interrater reliability was based on 20% of the vignettes ($\kappa = .97$). The individual scores in Part 2 were summed across items and proportionalized. Self-determination and nurturance rights were also summed and proportionalized separately. Thus, the proportional scores ranged from –1.00 to +1.00.

Procedure

Similar to the first study, the questionnaire and consent forms were translated into Chinese for the Malaysian sample and translated back into English to assess their accuracy. The personal interviews were tape recorded, and all verbatim responses were later translated into English and transcribed. Children were debriefed at the end of each interview that lasted about 30 minutes.

Results

Part 1: Rights in General. Thirty-five percent of all children did not know what a right was (58.3% of the Chinese-Malaysian children). Sixteen percent said that a right "is something you can do." Other children described a right in terms of privileges (6%), decision making (3%), legal entitlements (15%), or specific rights (25%). Seventy-one percent of the children believed that everyone has rights (44.4% of the Chinese-Malaysian children as compared to 75% of the U.S. children), 6% did not know, and 23% believed that only adults (elders, parents, presidents) have rights. A majority of children believed that children have

rights (76.4%) and that children should have rights (80.6%). Taken together, these findings are quite similar to the findings of Study 1. It is noteworthy that only 48% of Buddhist children were able to provide a definition of a right, compared to 79% of the Christian children. Similarly, only 44.8% of Buddhist children believed that children should have rights, compared to 75% of the Christian children and 100% of the children without a religious denomination. Even though all denominations believed that children should have rights, this belief was more likely to be embraced by Christians than Buddhist children.

Part 2: Responses to Vignettes. An omnibus repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the vignettes and type of right (self-determination vs. nurturance rights) with country as the between-subject variable showed a main effect for the vignettes, $F(5, 52) = 8.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .46$, a main effect for type of right, $F(1, 56) = 11.04, p = .002, \eta^2 = .17$, and a highly significant interaction between vignettes and type of right, $F(5, 52) = 25.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .71$. There was, however, no significant interaction involving country. In other words, there were no cross-cultural differences.

Similar to the first study, children discriminated between those rights that they thought children should have and those that they thought children should not have. They clearly differentiated between self-determination and nurturance rights, advocating for more self-determination rights ($M = .42, SD = .05$) than nurturance rights ($M = .22, SD = .05$). On average, the children in our sample did not advocate for a child's right to work ($M = -.48, SD = .88$), the right to vote ($M = -.15, SD = .98$), nor the right to express one's opinion in the school paper ($M = -.16, SD = .98$). These results partially replicated those of Study 1, although the children in the first study were more neutral about these rights. U.S. and Malaysian children agreed that children should be allowed to express their custody preference following a divorce ($M = .83, SD = .53$), should have the right to due process ($M = .52, SD = .69$), should have the right to make medical decisions ($M = .38, SD = .93$), should be allowed to choose their own friends ($M = .21, SD = .95$), should receive the help from their parents in various situations ($M = -.40, SD = .86$), and that parents should provide food and clothing ($M = -.71, SD = .59$). These findings are consistent with a constructivist hypothesis. Taken together, these findings converge with the findings of the previous study, indicating that there are many similarities in the perception of the children from the United States and Malaysia concerning their own rights.

A repeated measures ANCOVA was also conducted on the total, nurturance, and self-determination rights proportion scores with the religious groups (Buddhists, Protestants, and Catholics) as the between-subject factor and the two countries as the covariate. There were no significant differences among the religious groups. To assess within-country differences, we performed separate one-way ANOVAs on the religious groups. There were no significant differences among answers of Buddhist, Christian, and children reporting no religious affiliation.

The rCRI also included questions regarding the age at which participants thought the children described in the vignettes should be granted the various rights. Independent *t*-tests between the U.S. and Malaysian samples showed that, on average, U.S. children ($M = 12.35$, $SD = 2.78$) and Malaysian children ($M = 14.33$, $SD = 3.41$) responded similarly, $t(22) = -1.55$, ns. The exceptions were that U.S. participants suggested that children should have the right to due process ($M = 9.9$, $SD = 5.47$; $t(26) = 2.52$, $p = .018$) the right to vote ($M = 15.87$, $SD = 2.98$; $t(40) = 3.03$, $p = .004$), and the right to work ($M = 15.08$, $SD = 3.49$; $t(35) = 3.06$, $p = .004$) at significantly earlier ages than the Chinese-Malaysian children ($M = 18.00$, $SD = 0.00$; $M = 18.73$, $SD = 2.84$; $M = 18.61$, $SD = 3.06$, respectively).

Similar to the first study, it is important to note the methodological limitations of using semistructured vignettes and a small sample size. In Study 1, samples of different SES were compared, possibly confounding the results. With that in mind, we attempted to recruit children from similar SES in the second study. The results showed few differences across the two studies, suggesting that difference in SES may not be a confounding factor in our findings. However, we acknowledge that it is difficult to ascertain how closely we were able to match children on SES.

General Discussion

The purpose of these two studies was to compare 12-year-old children's attitudes toward their rights from three cultures: Malaysia, Switzerland, and United States, and to replicate Cherney and Perry's (1996) findings using a different instrument. The first study revealed a substantial degree of cross-national and cross-cultural commonality in reasoning about rights. It also showed that, consistent with a cultural explanation (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the children's responses to some of the vignettes were different among the cultures. In general, U.S. and Swiss children advocated for significantly more self-determination rights than Chinese-Malaysian children. U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children were more likely to want adults to make decisions about nurturance rights than Swiss children who remained neutral about nurturance rights. However, there is also a considerable amount of variability in children's responses in addition to the general pattern. Similar to Ruck and colleagues (1998), we found that individual rights were endorsed at different levels, suggesting that children reason differently depending on specific kinds of rights. In general, children favored the right to choose where to live after their parents' divorce, to keep their diary secret, to be heard in case of a dispute, and to have access to a physician. However, they did not advocate for the right to refuse a vaccination, to publish the school newspaper, to vote, or to work. The evidence suggests that conceptions of personal autonomy, and rights are not tied to Western cultural traditions but also appear in Asian

society that is often characterized as collectivist and oriented to obedience and the maintenance of hierarchy and traditions (Helwig, 2006b).

Interestingly, the results also revealed differences among religious groups within Malaysia. Buddhist children were more likely to advocate for self-determination rights as compared to Christian children. De Bary and Weiming (1998) have argued that fundamental Confucian values of human dignity, self-cultivation, and justice, as important tenants of Buddhism, may be compatible with modern notions of human rights and individual autonomy. The finding may be explained by the differing levels of paternalism (Cherney, Greteman, & Travers, in press) in the different religions. A generally Western philosophy, paternalism suggests that there is a hierarchy of power, in which those with authority (e.g., religious hierarchies) can limit the personal freedoms of those without authority in order to obtain the betterment of the society as a whole (Worsfold, 1974). On a continuum of paternalism, the Christian Church may be considered a rather paternalistic religion because it has a more distinctly stratified hierarchy than the Buddhist religion (Sampson, 2000).

The second study introduced the rCRI. It was designed to include additional rights that are adapted to the cultural backgrounds and to interview children from similar SES backgrounds. The omnibus analysis did not show any cross-cultural differences. Rather, consistent with a constructivist explanation and replicating the first study, the second study showed that children differentiated between children's rights, advocating proportionally for more self-determination rights than nurturance rights. They also did not indiscriminately advocate for just any self-determination rights but carefully examined which rights they thought they could handle. There were no differences among religious groups across the two cultures. This may, in part be due to a lack of power. There were only seven Catholics who took part in the interviews. Taken together, the longer interview in the second study and covering wider ranges of rights resulted in even fewer differences between the samples.

Children's conceptions of rights develop and change with age. As children develop abilities related to self-expression and competence, they will claim areas of autonomy related to the exercise of these abilities (Helwig, 2006a). We asked the participants to tell us at what age children would perceive the hypothetical child in each vignette to assert the right. A clear pattern emerged between U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children. With the exception of the right to be heard in case of a dispute, U.S. children advocated for having rights at an earlier age than Chinese-Malaysian children. Generally, U.S. children advocated for rights between the ages of almost 11 (right to due process) and 12 (choose own religious creed and the right to see a physician) to about 17 (parents to pay for food and clothing), whereas the Chinese-Malaysian children advocated for children having these rights almost 3 years later than those of the U.S. children. U.S. children were more likely to advocate for self-determination rights earlier than Chinese-Malaysian children.

Ruck and colleagues (1998) found that the age appropriateness of rights was dependent, in part, on the degree to which participants at various ages supported the story character's requests for rights. Older children (12- to 16-year olds) were more likely to be aware of the universal nature of various rights, whereas younger children (8- to 12-year-olds) viewed their entitlement to certain rights as related to their age.

In general, the results suggest that the global dichotomous orientation (individualism or collectivism; nurturance or self-determination) does not fully capture children's perceptions of their rights. The cultural transmission of social and moral reasoning of individuals through participation in cultural, political, religious, social, and economic practices suggests cultural and social differences in conceptions of children's rights. Findings from these studies suggest that culture, and to a lesser extent, religion, play an important role. In addition, our findings also suggest that the diverse social contexts and situations are important in affecting how children perceive their own rights. A constructivist (e.g., Neff & Helwig, 2002) approach to social reasoning proposes that children and adults interpret their experiences and reflect upon them, accepting and rejecting some social norms. Although in the first study, the U.S. and Swiss children tended to advocate for self-determination rights or autonomy more frequently than the Chinese-Malaysian children, a significant proportion of Chinese-Malaysian children also advocated for many self-determination rights. In fact, there were no significant differences between the U.S. and Chinese-Malaysian children in the second study, and in the first study, all children advocated for rights (positive means). To better understand the children's reasoning and decision-making process, we examined the responses given to certain questions in more details. In their reasoning, children mentioned concepts of fairness, autonomy, and democratic decision making. In contrast, support for adult authority was justified by their superior competence, wisdom, and existing laws. In many respects, proximal variables such as social contexts and situations may possess more explanatory power than global indicators such as culture in explaining differences in people's behavior.

Overall, these results provide little support for an individualist–collectivist difference in terms of how children perceive their rights. We suggest that future cross-cultural research should explore alternatives to the perhaps oversimplistic individualistic and collectivistic classifications. Furthermore, as Matsumoto (1999) suggested, future research on international perspectives of children's rights should measure more than one group within a particular nation. For example, children from different subcultures in a single nation should be compared to assess the within-nation differences and how those differences relate to the differences of similar groups in multiple nations. In order for the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N. General Assembly, 1989), written and agreed to by numerous nations, to produce changed behavior and conditions and improvements in the lives of children, much work lies ahead. Perhaps, criteria for making judgments

about progress and change could be done by adapting the targets for progress drawn along the lines set by the Convention, but adapted to the particular nation's cultural traditions, economic circumstances, and children's social circumstances.

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