

Older adults' trait ratings of three age-groups around the Pacific rim

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Abstract. In this paper, we assess the traits that older adults associate with younger, middle-aged, and older adults in five Pacific Rim nations from Western and Eastern cultural traditions (Australia, People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Philippines, Thailand). We find cross-cultural trends which replicate patterns found in the US context. In most cultures, attractiveness, strength, activity, liberalism, health, and flexibility are seen to decline with increasing age. Kindness assessments are positively associated with age across cultures. Mixed patterns are found with assessments of wisdom and generosity, with respondents from the PRC and Hong Kong being notably more negative about increasing age than other respondents. Implications for the aging process across cultures are discussed, and suggestions made for future research.

Keywords: Age stereotypes, Cross-cultural, Older adults, Pacific Rim

Introduction

The expectations that people have as they pass through the life-span are crucial in determining the limits placed upon them by others, and indeed themselves, as they age. One important dimension of such expectations are the traits that are associated with different age groups. That such expectations might vary across cultures is important in terms of understanding the variation that exists in the aging process around the world. The Pacific Rim is a fascinating context for examining these issues, as it contains multiple cultures which traditionally have fostered very different attitudes towards age and aging. In this paper we examine the traits associated with three different age groups by older adults in five Pacific Rim nations. Previous research examining similar topics is described briefly as an introduction.

Considerable research has investigated trait-based stereotypes of older adults in Western cultures, and particularly the United States (O'Connell & Rotter 1979; Perdue & Gurtman 1990). Kite and Johnson (1988) using a meta-analysis, conclude that such stereotypes are primarily negative when compared to stereotypes of younger adults (although not uniformly so). Research appears to show positive evaluations of older adults on traits such as wisdom and generosity, but negative evaluations on competence-related dimensions (Braithwaite, Lynd-Stevenson & Pigram 1993; Branco & Williamson 1982). Recent research has demonstrated that multiple stereotypes of older adults exist in society (Brewer, Dull & Lui 1981; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner & Strahm 1994). This is important in terms of understanding that in real life, conceptions of older adults are probably more complex than some research acknowledges. Little research has examined stereotypes of the middle-aged (although, see Harwood & Giles 1993; Levin 1988).

Asian cultures are often characterized in the West as having more positive attitudes toward old age (Tobin 1987), a stereotype that is grounded in Confucian ideals of filial piety (or *Xiao*: Cheung 1989; Ho 1994; Yum 1988). In particular, increased age is associated with increased respect, and tremendous social power in certain Asian cultures (Cheung 1989; Koyano 1989; Park & Kim 1992). Some research has suggested that these norms are associated with reduced levels of negative stereotyping compared to the West (Levy & Langer 1994).

However, a number of recent studies have begun to paint a less positive picture concerning attitudes towards older adults in East Asia (Chang, Chang & Yung 1984; Chow 1999; Giles, McCann, Ota & Noels, in press; Ikels et al. 1992; Koyano 1989). This includes work specifically examining stereotypes and perceptions of the sociostructural power of age groups in Hong Kong versus North America (Giles, Harwood, Pierson, Clément & Fox 1998; Harwood, Giles, Clément, Pierson & Fox 1994), as well as in linguistic analyses of texts produced by Hong Kong Chinese students (Ng 1992).

Central to the rationale for the current study, Harwood et al. (1996) examined trait ratings of age groups provided by over 1000 younger adults in six nations around the Pacific Rim (Hong Kong, Korea, Philippines, USA, New Zealand, Australia). These authors found that ratings of activity, strength, and the like tended to decline with increasing age across cultures. Ratings of wisdom and generosity tended to increase, but with a notable exception. Hong Kong respondents actually rated declines in wisdom and generosity with increasing age. Combined with responses from Korea and the Philippines that were certainly no more positive than those from the Western nations, Harwood et al. concluded that there was little evidence of Asian filial piety in these trait-rating tasks. Similar negative patterns have

also been uncovered recently in Taiwan (Giles, Liang, Noels & McCann, in press). Similarly, Giles, Noels et al. (in press) found that assessments of the sociostructural power of older adults tend to be lower in the East than the West, and are particularly low in Korea, the PRC and Singapore. Harwood et al. (1994) found similar trends in ratings of age-based sociostructural power in Hong Kong. It has been suggested that traditional values have been eroded by the industrialization and urbanization of Asia in recent years (Bengtson & Smith 1968). An alternative explanation is that public avowals of filial piety belie private ascriptions to a negative view of aging and older adults (see McGee & Barker 1982), and that norms of filial piety may actually lead to private resentment towards older adults (Sharps, Price-Sharps & Hanson 1998).

Thus, we have evidence that evaluations of aging (and old age) differ across cultures: Cultural differences in demography, philosophy, and family structure would seem to ensure such variation. In addition, we have evidence that these differences may not be as simple as might be suggested by a cursory examination of Capitalist versus Confucian cultural norms and values.

The examination of these differences across a broad range of cultures has been rare in the literature. Such multicultural examinations are important to remind us that the experience of aging (in terms of societal expectations) is not universal, and is therefore changeable/malleable. It is possible that by examining cross-cultural variation in perceptions of aging we can come closer to an understanding of how to improve the experience of aging within specific cultures. Only studies examining multiple cultures with standardized instruments and at similar points in time can truly provide sensible comparative data concerning cultural differences in perceptions. This is one goal of the current study.

Unfortunately, very little research in this vein has examined *older adults'* perceptions of the aging process. In many ways, the older population is most at risk of the harmful consequences of pejorative stereotyping. In particular, if they internalize negative images of aging it is likely to have substantial negative consequences for their self-concept (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci & Henwood 1986). Older people are perhaps most informed of the realities of the aging process, and can view the process from a life-span perspective. Hence, the current research will examine older adults' perceptions of three different age groups in five Pacific Rim nations.

RQ: Do older adult respondents in different cultures exhibit different patterns of age stereotyping?

Method

A total of 615 respondents participated in the study. All were volunteer adults over the age of 48 ($M = 68.79$, $SD = 6.71$). The respondents were drawn from five sites around the Pacific Rim: Australia (Queensland), the People's Republic of China (PRC – Nanchang, Jiangxi Province), Hong Kong, the Philippines (Manila), and Thailand (Chiang Mai and Bangkok), with sample sizes ranging from 60 (Hong Kong) to 172 (PRC). These are not scientifically representative samples from each site, however they are similar in terms of their functional abilities (all could complete the questionnaire), and their educational background (almost all had completed some level of college education). The precise age distribution in each culture varied somewhat. As can be seen from Table 1, the PRC sample was somewhat younger than the others. This reflects cross-cultural variation in self-identification as 'older' (see Giles, Noels et al., *in press*). The gender mix across the different contexts ranged from 67% female (Australia) to 45% female (PRC) (see Table 1). As can be seen from Table 1, the gender mix varied significantly across cultures.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sample

	Australia	PR China	Hong Kong	Philippines	Thailand	Comparison
Mean age	71.35 ^b	64.06 ^a	70.40 ^b	71.91 ^b	70.53 ^b	$F(4,606) = 48.357, p < 0.001$
Age range	55–86	48–86	65–84	60–91	62–96	
Male	32 (33.3%)	109 (55.3%)	32 (51.6%)	35 (35.0%)	59 (37.6%)	$\chi^2 (4) = 22.08$
Female	64 (66.7%)	88 (44.7%)	30 (48.4%)	65 (65.0%)	98 (62.4%)	$N = 612, p < 0.001$
Total N	96	197	62	100	157	

Means with different superscripts differ significantly ($p < 0.05$).

Data for the current study were collected as part of a lengthy questionnaire which measured various impressions of the aging process. The data to be reported here covered evaluations of young (20–30 years old), middle-aged (45–55 years old) and older (65–85 years old) adults (three target ages) on nine trait-adjectival semantic differential scales (see Table 2 for the traits). Respondents were asked to evaluate each age group, in general, on each of the traits using five-point semantic-differential scales. These were translated into the language appropriate for the particular context, and back-translated to check for reliability of translation. The traits were derived from previous work by Harwood et al. (1996, described earlier) and Giles et al. (1998). Those studies developed a set of traits that seemed fundamental to intergenerational evaluations across cultures (e.g., based on cultural prescriptions of filial piety, previous research on stereotypes of aging). The traits were derived from an extensive literature on multiple stereotypes of aging in the West (e.g., Hummert, Garstka, Shaner & Strahm 1994) and from the liter-

ature on representations of aging in Eastern cultures (e.g., Koyano 1989; Yum 1988). Given length constraints in the survey, our goal was to achieve broad coverage of potentially important trait dimensions while retaining an economy of items.

Analysis

Initial factor analysis did not reveal any consistent factor structure across nations. Therefore, separate 3 (Target Age Group: younger, middle-aged, older) \times 5 (Nation) ANOVAs were performed on each trait. In order to answer the research question, our primary interest is in the Nation \times Target Age Group interaction. Throughout, main effects for Nation are not reported. Our interest is in cultural differences in patterns of evaluations, not differences in the use of the rating scale. In cases in which the interaction effect was significant, the effect was further decomposed by examining the target age trends in each nation in turn. Specifically, contrasts comparing ratings of young versus middle-aged, and middle-aged versus older targets were calculated in order to understand the trend with increasing age. These are reported in terms of effect size and statistical significance of the comparison in Table 2. As is noted on the Table, the signs associated with each effect size indicate both the level of significance and the direction of the effect. The role of sex in these effects was examined by running identical analyses with sex as an additional between subjects factor. No significant interactions involving the sex and target age terms emerged, hence the details of sex effects are not reported. There was one main effect for sex and one interaction between sex and nation, neither of which were relevant to the examination of perceptions of age stereotypes.

Results

For the attractiveness variable, both the main effect for target age and the interaction were significant [main effect: $F(2,1176) = 156.67, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.21$; interaction: $F(8,1176) = 14.60, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.09$]. As can be seen from Table 2, attractiveness is perceived to decline with increasing age across all groups of respondents – the overall decline is somewhat weaker between youth and middle-age than between middle-age and old-age. The interaction reveals the effect to be strongest between youth and middle-age for the Filipino and Hong Kong respondents. Meanwhile, the Filipino and PRC respondents perceive the sharpest declines in attractiveness between middle-age and old-age.

Table 2. Effect sizes (partial η^2) and direction of pairwise comparisons between age groups

Trait		Australia	PRC	Hong Kong	Philippines	Thailand	Total
Attractive	Y → M-A	0.05 ⁻	0.08 ⁻⁻	0.16 ⁻⁻	0.22 ⁻⁻	0.02	0.08 ⁻⁻
	M-A → O	0.14 ⁻⁻	0.46 ⁻⁻	0.07 ⁻	0.36 ⁻⁻	0.07 ⁻⁻	0.19 ⁻⁻
Strong	Y → M-A	0.00	0.06 ⁻⁻	0.21 ⁻⁻	0.02	0.01	0.02 ⁻⁻
	M-A → O	0.14 ⁻⁻	0.16 ⁻⁻	0.38 ⁻⁻	0.53 ⁻⁻	0.30 ⁻⁻	0.24 ⁻⁻
Active	Y → M-A	0.02	0.31 ⁻⁻	0.23 ⁻⁻	0.23 ⁻⁻	0.18 ⁺⁺	0.06 ⁻⁻
	M-A → O	0.46 ⁻⁻	0.40 ⁻⁻	0.17 ⁻⁻	0.51 ⁻⁻	0.07 ⁻⁻	0.28 ⁻⁻
Generous	Y → M-A	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.17 ⁺⁺	0.08 ⁺⁺	0.01 ⁺⁺
	M-A → O	0.08 ⁺⁺	0.16 ⁻⁻	0.21 ⁻⁻	0.06 ⁻	0.01	0.04 ⁻⁻
Liberal	Y → M-A	0.28 ⁻⁻	0.31 ⁻⁻	0.27 ⁻⁻	0.48 ⁻⁻	0.50 ⁻⁻	0.33 ⁻⁻
	M-A → O	0.25 ⁻⁻	0.40 ⁻⁻	0.24 ⁻⁻	0.44 ⁻⁻	0.41 ⁻⁻	0.31 ⁻⁻
Healthy	Y → M-A	0.02	0.27 ⁻⁻	0.08 ⁻	0.00	0.04 ⁻⁻	0.05 ⁻⁻
	M-A → O	0.26 ⁻⁻	0.50 ⁻⁻	0.24 ⁻⁻	0.16 ⁻⁻	0.32 ⁻⁻	0.27 ⁻⁻
Flexible	Y → M-A	0.04	0.31 ⁻⁻	0.02	0.11 ⁻⁻	0.10	0.03 ⁻⁻
	M-A → O	0.23 ⁻⁻	0.52 ⁻⁻	0.02	0.39 ⁻⁻	0.15 ⁻⁻	0.23 ⁻⁻
Wise	Y → M-A	0.23 ⁺⁺	0.09 ⁻⁻	0.07 ⁻	0.15 ⁺⁺	0.02	0.01
	M-A → O	0.09 ⁺⁺	0.34 ⁻⁻	0.15 ⁻⁻	0.00	0.00	0.04 ⁻⁻
Kind	Y → M-A	0.01	0.25 ⁺⁺	0.00	0.09 ⁺⁺	0.10 ⁺⁺	0.06 ⁺⁺
	M-A → O	0.11 ⁺⁺	0.06 ⁺⁺	0.13 ⁺⁺	0.00	0.09 ⁺⁺	0.06 ⁺⁺

Y → M-A indicates contrast between young and middle-aged target age groups.

M-A → O indicates contrast between middle-aged and older target age groups.

⁺ indicates significant increase in evaluations with increasing age ⁺ = ($p < 0.05$), ⁺⁺ = ($p < 0.01$).

⁻ indicates significant increase in evaluations with increasing age ⁻ = ($p < 0.05$), ⁻⁻ = ($p < 0.01$).

For the strength variable, both the main effect for target age and the interaction were significant [main effect: $F(2,1190) = 158.07, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.21$; interaction: $F(8,1190) = 5.46, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$]. The main effect again reveals a general pattern of perceived decline in strength with increasing age, with the decline between middle and old-age being particularly strong (Table 2). Table 2 also reveals that this perceived decline is particularly powerful between youth and middle-age in Hong Kong. This contrast is nonsignificant in Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The results are more consistent across cultures between middle-age and old-age, with all cultures perceiving substantial and significant declines. Respondents from Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Thailand report somewhat stronger declines than those from Australia and the PRC.

Ratings of activity again resulted in significant effects for target age and for the target age by nation interaction [main effect: $F(2,1176) = 228.41, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.28$; interaction: $F(8,1176) = 37.35, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.20$]. The main effect was associated with a broad trend of perceived

decline in activity across cultures. However, in this instance the effect was moderated quite dramatically by the interaction effect. Most notably, ratings of activity actually increased significantly between youth and middle-age in the Thai respondents, while no significant trend emerged for the Australians. The nations were more consistent in perceiving decline between middle and old-age, however the effects here were noticeably smaller among Thai and Hong Kong respondents.

Generosity levels were associated with a significant main effect and interaction [main effect: $F(2,1176) = 10.94, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$; interaction: $F(8,1176) = 13.90, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.09$]. The main effect was characterized by a slight but significant increase in generosity evaluations between youth and middle-age, and a larger (but still relatively small) decrease between middle and old-age. However, this variable exhibited substantial cross-cultural variability, as can be seen in Figure 1. Examination of the pattern within cultures indicates no difference between younger and middle-aged targets in perceptions of generosity, except in Thailand and the Philippines. In these two cultures significant and substantial increases in generosity were perceived. Between middle-age and old-age, Hong Kong, PRC and (to a lesser extent) Filipino respondents perceived a decrease in generosity. In contrast, Australian respondents perceived a significant (although relatively small) increase in generosity.

Ratings of liberalism were the most consistent of all the traits. A highly significant main effect revealed general patterns of declining liberalism (increasing conservatism) with increasing age [$F(2,1182) = 502.98, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.46$]. The interaction effect was relatively small but significant [$F(8,1182) = 5.09, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$]. As shown in Table 2, the pattern of declining liberalism seems to be perceived as somewhat weaker in Australia and Hong Kong.

Perceptions of health were again associated with a significant main effect and interaction [main effect: $F(2,1182) = 192.68, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.25$; interaction: $F(8,1182) = 11.00, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.07$]. The main effect revealed a pattern of general decline with age, but a substantially steeper decline between middle and old-age (see Table 2). Interpretation of the interaction effect reveals non-significant declines in health between youth and middle-age in Australia and the Philippines, and particularly sharp perceived declines in the PRC. The PRC respondents also perceived the sharpest declines in health between middle and old-age, with the smallest declines perceived in the Philippines. All cultures reported a significant decline between middle and old-age.

Both the main effect and the interaction effect were significant in participants' perceptions of flexibility [main effect: $F(2,1176) = 140.82, p < 0.001$,

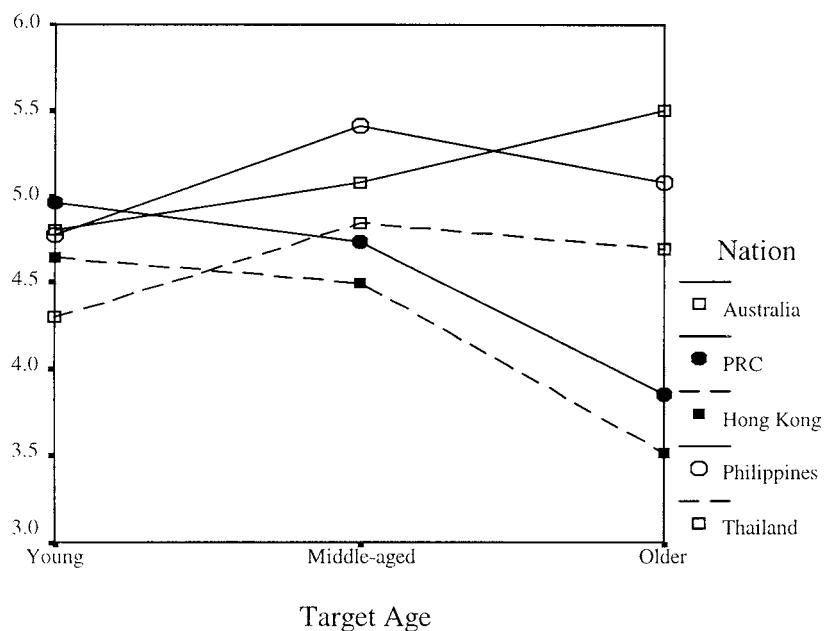


Figure 1. Mean levels of perceived generosity across the life-span by nation.

partial $\eta^2 = 0.19$; interaction: $F(8,1176) = 25.03, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.15$. The main effect revealed a decline in flexibility with increasing age. These effects were stronger between middle and old-age than between youth and middle-age. The interaction is a result of particularly strong perceived decline in flexibility between youth and middle-age in the PRC data, and nonsignificant perceived changes in the Hong Kong data across both age comparisons. Nonsignificant changes were also present between youth and middle-age in the Australian and Thai data.

Both the main effect and the interaction effect were significant in participants' perceptions of wisdom [main effect: $F(2,1182) = 10.44, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$; interaction: $F(8,1182) = 30.71, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.17$]. Decomposition of the main effect indicated no significant change in wisdom between youth and middle-age, and then a small but significant decrease in perceptions of wisdom between middle and old-age. The interaction effect moderates this main effect substantially, as can be seen in Figure 2. Wisdom was seen to increase across the life-span among the Australian respondents. In the PRC and Hong Kong, wisdom was seen to decline across the life-span. In the Philippines, wisdom was perceived as increasing between youth and middle-age, but remaining stable between middle and old-age. No significant changes in wisdom were perceived by the Thai respondents.

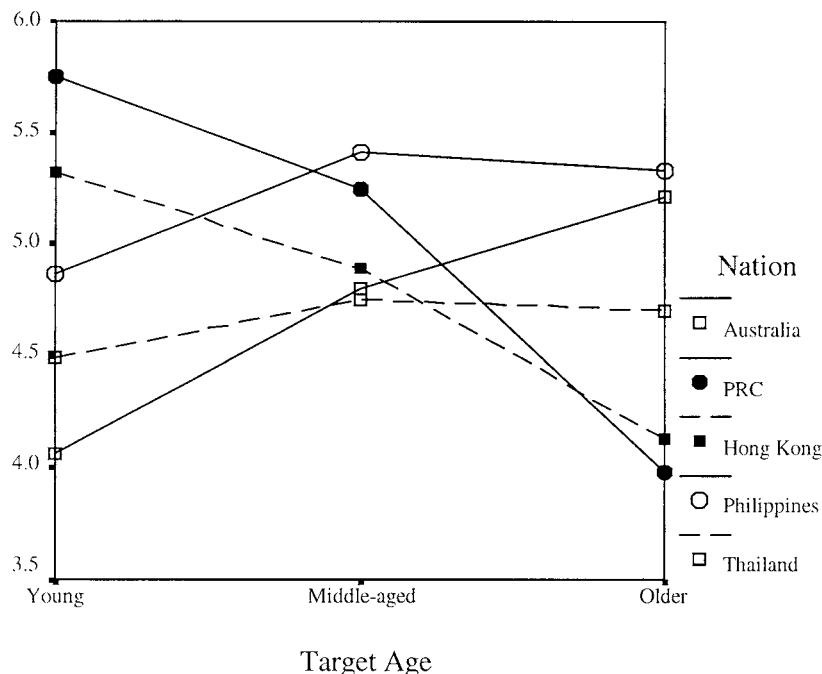


Figure 2. Mean levels of perceived wisdom across the life-span by nation.

Finally, ratings of kindness revealed a significant main effect and interaction [main effect: $F(2,1186) = 64.52, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$; interaction: $F(8,1186) = 6.62, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$]. The main effect for kindness revealed increases in perceptions of kindness across the life-span. The interaction effect is illustrated by the patterns in Table 2. In Australia and Hong Kong, changes between youth and middle-age were nonsignificant, however significant increases in kindness were perceived from middle-age to old-age. Respondents in the PRC and Thailand perceived significant increases across both age comparisons. Respondents in the Philippines perceived significant increases in kindness between youth and middle-age, but no significant change between middle-age and old-age.

Discussion

To summarize, across cultures, increasing age is generally associated with declines in attractiveness, strength, activity, liberalism, health, and flexibility. It is also associated with increased evaluations of kindness. These patterns reflect the general evaluations emerging from earlier research with younger

subjects (Giles et al. 1998; Harwood et al. 1996). Exceptions to these patterns are found in a few nonsignificant results, and in one instance involving data from Thailand. The older Thai respondents perceived activity levels as increasing from youth to middle-age (but not thereafter). Most pertinent among the nonsignificant findings are the evaluations of flexibility from Hong Kong, which reveal no perception of change across the entire life-span.

More cross-cultural variation is exhibited in evaluations of generosity and wisdom. In terms of generosity, three broad patterns emerge. In Australia, there is a general pattern of increases in perceptions of generosity across the life-span, albeit nonsignificant in the comparison between young and middle-aged targets. This is consistent with previous studies examining positive stereotypes of older adults in the West. In Thailand and the Philippines, the pattern is one of increase between youth and middle-age, and then decrease with the move towards older age (non-significant for Thai respondents in the comparison between middle-aged and older targets). These patterns may reflect current trends whereby middle-aged individuals possess the most wealth and power in these societies. Younger adults tend to be viewed as apprentices, and hence in little position to be generous – hence the particularly low evaluations for this group. Older adults may be viewed as providers of wisdom, but again they are somewhat constrained in their ability to be generous. It seems likely that the trait ‘generosity’ in this context was interpreted in terms of financial resources, and these are heavily weighted in favor of the middle-aged. In the PRC and Hong Kong, the pattern is one of steady decline across the life-span (again, non-significant in the comparison between young and middle-aged targets). Similar trends to those described in the Philippines and Thailand probably account for the perceived decline in generosity between middle-age and old-age in the Chinese and Hong Kong respondents. Recent years have seen a shift in the locus of financial power in families from the older generations to the middle generations. As a result, older adults in these cultures may not view themselves as having the resources necessary to demonstrate generosity, and may feel increasingly dependent upon the generosity of their adult children.

Evaluations of wisdom are the most disparate across cultures. Australian respondents report a steady and significant increase in levels of wisdom across the life-span, consistent with previous Western studies of age stereotypes. In contrast, respondents from the PRC and Hong Kong report steady and significant declines in levels of wisdom with increasing age. Finally, Thai and Filipino respondents report increasing wisdom from youth to middle-age, and then stabilized levels into old age. These findings are surprising in the context of traditional values. In contrast with the norms of *Xiao* (filial piety) described in the introduction, the two Chinese sites (Hong Kong and

PRC), displayed markedly negative attitudes towards old age on a variable that is apparently central to conceptions of the value of old age (wisdom). Close examination of the translation offers one explanation for this seemingly anomalous result. The term 'wisdom' was translated into the Chinese term chong ming, a term that is perhaps closer to the English words 'clever' or 'smart'. In contrast, it is possible that the term zhi hui might have been closer to the conventional notion of wisdom, and might have revealed the expected pattern of increases in wisdom in old age. That said, the evaluations of our Chinese older adults reveal a striking pattern of decline virtually across the board in terms of the trait evaluations (evaluations of 'kindness' being the only exception: see Table 2). In other words, the evaluations of wisdom may reveal a more general pattern of decline in the norms of filial piety, and an awareness among these respondents that their stock is not particularly high in contemporary Chinese society.

In the context of recent work on younger adults' attitudes towards aging, the results are not hugely surprising. As was described earlier, young people in Hong Kong and Taiwan have demonstrated ageist attitudes to a greater degree than those in the West in previous similar research (Giles, Liang et al., *in press*; Harwood et al. 1996). It is possible, at least in the Hong Kong context, that the older adults have themselves 'bought into' some of the negative attitudes towards aging espoused by younger people. Chow (1999) notes that while norms of filial piety remain in Hong Kong, the structural responsibility and status traditionally associated with the 'elder' role have declined dramatically in recent years (see also Gallois et al. 1999). In addition, Noels, Giles, Gallois & Ng (*in press*) have found that older adults in these cultures perceive their own age group to be more nonaccommodating in conversations than younger adults. In other words, older adults themselves appear to subscribe to a view of their own age group as perhaps more 'difficult' in conversations than younger people.

Other authors have suggested that negative evaluations of older adults in cultures characterized by filial piety may be the result of resentment from younger adults. For instance, Sharps et al. (1998) find relatively negative attitudes towards older adults in a sample of young Thai respondents. They suggest that these younger individuals resent the advantages provided older adults by a gerontocratic power structure, and hence take the opportunity to downgrade their elders in an anonymous evaluation task. Our data from older adults suggest that the resentment explanation may not account for all negative evaluations of older people that emerge in the literature. We would not expect resentment to lead to negative evaluations among older adult respondents themselves. Therefore, we would conclude that at least part of these responses are due to substantive declines in the core cultural

values themselves. The patterns from China and Hong Kong are particularly disturbing. Of the traits that we examined, older adults appear to be left with kindness as the one area in which they can differentiate positively from other age groups. We would suggest that this is not a particularly empowering trait on which to base a positive age identity (Harwood, Giles & Ryan 1995).

A couple of other response patterns are worth noting. First, in most cases effect sizes for differences between young and middle-aged targets are notably smaller than for differences between middle-aged and older targets. In only about a third of the comparisons performed was this pattern reversed. This may reflect a position of special status for older adults. The transition from youth to middle-age appears, cross-culturally, to be a less dramatic one than the shift from middle-age to old age. This pattern appears to be particularly strong in the PRC and Australia, and less pronounced in Thailand. Second, different cultures illustrate differing general trends in terms of effect sizes. Overall, the Philippines and PRC have substantially higher effect size scores than the other three nations. Perhaps this might tentatively suggest that these nations differentiate more strongly on age-based concerns, at least when age is salient in the environment. Future research is warranted on these issues.

We would caution that the current analysis is only intended as suggestive of cross-cultural patterns of age evaluations or stereotypes. The limited number of trait terms used and the closed-ended nature of the questionnaire inevitably restrict the types of responses that we can receive. Moreover, it is clear that stereotypes are complex cognitive structures that can only partly be described via lists of traits, albeit that this is a conventional method of accessing such cognitive structures (e.g., Biernat & Crandall 1996). In combination with work such as ours, we would recommend examining qualitative and open-ended evaluations to understand more about locally-defined representations and evaluations of the aging process (e.g., Sharps et al. 1998; Zhang & Hummert 2001). Inevitably, our understandings of the ways in which aging processes occur and are influenced by stereotyping will only develop from the incorporation of multiple methods and approaches.

Future directions for research are suggested by these findings. In particular, we see a need to generate culturally sensitive lists of traits. It is probable that the closed-ended questions used in the current study may have accessed only partial accounts of age stereotypes in each of the cultures. As noted above, open-ended methods will be essential in generating more comprehensive understandings of how cultures differ not only in terms of how they rate age groups, but also the culturally unique dimensions along which such ratings occur. In addition, as mentioned in the Introduction, research in the United States has described particular subtypes of the elderly stereotype. It would be fascinating to uncover whether such subtypes exist in other cultures,

and whether they are parallel to those uncovered in North America (Zhang, Hummert & Garstka 2000). Finally, there is a need to examine how these stereotypes relate to important behaviors. What can we understand about intergenerational communication across these cultures from the stereotype ratings reported in this paper (Noels, Giles, Cai & Turay 1999; Williams et al. 1997)?

In closing, we would reiterate the importance of these findings. The ratings indicate that older individuals' perceptions of the life-span in these cultures display substantial similarities, but also some differences. The similarities are notable in enhancing our understanding of some apparently universal themes associated with aging (Kogan & Mills 1992). They suggest that similar problems may be faced by older adults in very different cultural contexts. The observed differences suggest that older adults' experiences of their own aging, and their perceptions of life-span development, may differ in subtle ways. Uncovering more detailed components of these attitudinal differences and their behavioral manifestations is a crucial next step, and one which will have implications for the nature of aging in each of the cultures.

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