

Asian American Students from Mainland China and Taiwan and Sexual Violence in American Universities

Shicong Fang, B.A. Candidate
Brandeis University

Asian Americans, from all South and East countries, are one of the fastest rising group of immigrants in America today. As of 2010, the census estimates that there are roughly 3.8 million Asian Americans living in the country.¹ As of 2018, 14% of Brandeis undergraduate students and 5.7% of the graduate students identify as Asian American.² The methods which Brandeis University uses need to take greater account of those students belonging to different ethnicities. There are three core points which I hope to make clear. The first is that there are certain differences between Eastern and Western culture, namely the way that the Chinese government treats its citizens as well as cultural aspects, that Asians Americans have ingrained within themselves with the result that individuals who experience unwanted sexual advances may react differently from what Western society expects. The second is that because of these cultural differences, Brandeis University as a whole must work to change how it handles cases of sexual misconduct in order to be more inclusive towards students of color, particularly Asian American students.

The word *values* is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something.” Intrinsicly, each individual has their own set of values that they hold as most important. We need to always recognize that different ethnicities place different levels of emphasis on different values

¹ <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2010/demo/popest/modified-race-data-2010.html>, United States Census Bureau, *Modified Race Data 2010*

² <https://www.brandeis.edu/about/facts/schools.html>, Brandeis University, *Schools and Enrollment*

In 2018, researchers from the University of Hong Kong conducted a three-part study. The first portion of the study was done with a group of 363 mainland Chinese Undergraduates and aimed to better understand the importance of Chinese Traditional Values in their lives. These students were given a set of 118 proverbs and were asked, using the Likert Scale, to measure how much they agreed or disagreed with each proverb. The proverbs which most students agreed with were then organized into four different social values; diligence, integrity, self-preservation, and self-interest. As two researchers from the University of Hong Kong note, “Compared with Westerners, Chinese people tend to put higher emphasis on conservation and self-transcendence (i.e., social focus values) and lower emphasis on openness to change and self-enhancement.”³

Out of all the data gathered and examined, one of the values stands out in particular and that self-preservation. Self-Preservation is one of the factors which, according to the study conducted by researchers from the University of Hong Kong, plays heavily into the lives of the Chinese. Self-Preservation can be traced back to ideas promoted by Daoism and Confucianism.⁴ In Daoism, the concept of Self Interest is closely associated with the concept of “无为” (Wú wéi) which is translated as “nonaction”.⁵ In terms of applicability, those who internalize the concept of “无为” keep a low profile, avoiding conflict by not speaking out and fighting against injustice.⁶ If this was not alarming enough, those who viewed Self Preservation as a central

³ Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu, “Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and validation of an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values,” *Asian Journal of Social of Social Psychology*, no. 3 (September 2018): 156.

⁴ Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu, “Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and validation of an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values,” *Asian Journal of Social of Social Psychology*, no. 3 (September 2018): 168

⁵ Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu, “Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and validation of an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values,” *Asian Journal of Social of Social Psychology*, no. 3 (September 2018): 168

⁶ Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu, “Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and validation of an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values,” *Asian Journal of Social of Social Psychology*, no. 3 (September 2018): 168

factor in their lives also showed strong affinity towards social cynicism and fate control.⁷ Social Cynicism is the belief that the world is a mean spirited place where others cannot be trusted.⁸ Fate control is defined as the belief that one person or group has absolute control over the fate or outcomes of another person or group.⁹ Often times fate control, under certain circumstances, can induce learned helplessness. A phenomenon first described by US psychologists J. Bruce Overmier and Martin E. P. Seligman, learned helplessness is the result of repeated exposures to stressors out of the victim's control. Individuals subjected to these stressors eventually become accustomed to their situation and adopt the mindset that they have no control. Learned helplessness is characterized by a motivational deficit that causes one to not respond when challenged with aversive situations, an associative deficit characterized by inability to cope with both present and future stresses, and finally an emotion deficit that causes one to lack emotion when confronted with painful events.¹⁰ Due to the cultural factors that contribute to the upbringing of an individual in China, when Chinese women attending American universities are sexually assaulted, it is within the realm of likelihood that they will fall into the dangerous spiral of learned helplessness. This inevitably results in victims being less inclined to report as they come to believe that nothing can be done to change their situations.

Although this study only scratches at the surface of the many distinctions between Chinese and Western culture, their findings nonetheless reinforce the necessity for a culturally competent approach to sexual misconduct cases. Social Psychologist Shalom H. Schwartz of the

⁷ Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu, "Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and validation of an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, no. 3 (September 2018): 160

⁸ <http://businessschool.mandela.ac.za/article/the-corrosive-effects-of-social-cynicism>, Steve Burgess, *The Corrosive Effects of Social Cynicism*

⁹ <https://dictionary.apa.org/fate-control>, American Psychological Association, *Fate Control*

¹⁰ <https://dictionary.apa.org/learned-helplessness>, American Psychological Association, *Learned Helplessness*

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, explores how cultural values influence the meaning of life for individuals. Schwartz defines values as “conceptions of the desirable that guide the way social actors (e.g. organizational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons) select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations.”¹¹ In other words, for Schwartz, values are guiding principles in our lives which ultimately determine how we act. By collecting and analyzing data from over 49 nations around the world, Schwartz identifies seven overarching values. He then organizes these seven values into three dimensions: Conservatism¹² versus Intellectual¹³ and Affective Autonomy,¹⁴ Hierarchy¹⁵ versus Egalitarianism,¹⁶ and Mastery¹⁷ versus Harmony.¹⁸ Schwartz then finally proceeds to group nations according to their cultural differences. The mainland Chinese samples were high on hierarchy and mastery values, low on the egalitarian commitment values, and average on the conservatism and autonomy values.¹⁹ To summarize, Schwartz’s findings reveal that individuals from mainland China or with cultural ties to mainland China are ambitious and yearn for success in all that they do while simultaneously recognizing that there is an inherent power structure in the world that places

¹¹ Shalom H. Schwartz, “A Theory of Cultural Values and Some Implications for Work,” *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (1999): 25

¹² Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on maintenance of the status quo, propriety, and restraint of actions or inclinations that might disrupt the solidary group or the traditional order” (27).

¹³ Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on the desirability of individuals independently pursuing their own ideas and intellectual directions” (27).

¹⁴ Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on the desirability of individuals independently pursuing affectively positive experience” (27),

¹⁵ Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on the legitimacy of an unequal distribution of power, roles and resources” (27).

¹⁶ Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on transcendence of selfish interests in favor of voluntary commitment to promoting the welfare of others” (28).

¹⁷ Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on getting ahead through active self-assertion” (28).

¹⁸ Schwartz, “Theory”: “A cultural emphasis on fitting harmoniously into the environment (trying to fit in rather than to change or exploit it)” (28).

¹⁹ Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu, “Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and validation of an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values,” *Asian Journal of Social of Social Psychology*, no. 3 (September 2018): 157

some, unfairly, below others. Furthermore, they place very little importance on issues such as equality, social justice, freedom, responsibility, and honesty.

Putting all of this information into context reveals a potentially dangerous and very worrisome problem. While there are many different types of sexual assault, what all forms of sexual assault have in common is that they are psychologically damaging and degrading for those that experience such cruelties. When students from mainland China, or with cultural ties to mainland China experience degrading acts of sexual violence, they may not only be filled with feelings of shame and degradation, but also their notion of an unfair hierarchy in the world may be further underscored.

Prostitution is a problem for many different societies around the world. A dangerous and exploitive occupation, women who choose, either willingly or unwillingly, to pursue this line of work inevitably face the harsh consequences. Since 1983, China has recognized the recurrence and growth of prostitution as a phenomenon previously thought to be under control when the country was relatively isolated from the rest of the world.²⁰ While prostitution is a problem that is not exclusive to China, the way that China deals with the issue is drastically different from any other and, I would argue that actually damages the mentality of prostitutes and Chinese women as a whole. The Chinese government takes this one step further and actually believes prostitution to be one of the ‘Six Evils.’²¹ Not only are prostitutes seen as an “immoral symbol of corruption,” but they also represent direct opposition to the Chinese Government's need for social control, control of individual morality/behavior, and control of political ideology. Committing a crime and committing an “evil” have very different connotations, and to say that a

²⁰ Gil, Wang, Anderson, Lin, “Plum Blossoms,” 319

²¹ Gil, Wang, Anderson, Lin, “Plum Blossoms,” 320

prostitute guilty of committing “evil” in effect puts her at a status lower than that of a criminal. Furthermore, it is a devaluing statement that puts women in an extremely demeaning light. By classifying prostitutes as such, the Chinese Government promulgates the idea that they are individuals who cause disunion and unrest in society, the “evil” wrongdoers who are lower than even criminals.

Even though Chinese students may not know the specific details behind how the government deals with cases of prostitution, they would still have an understanding of how the government deals with similar situations. The primary method that the Chinese Government uses to deal with incarcerated prostitutes is to place them in re-education centers. While the state does view prostitutes as “redeemable commodities” who can be rehabilitated, the aim of these rehabilitation camps is not to teach sex workers to view themselves in a humane and respectful light, but rather to teach them productive labor skills, patriotism for the country,²² and ultimately to help women resume normal useful roles in society.²³ Furthermore, in China prostitution has increasingly become much more of a political issue than a moral issue. It is frequently the case that the loudest opponents of prostitution, who advocate for the harshest crackdowns against prostitutes, are the factions in the government who are the most corrupt, using their criticism as a way to simultaneously mask their own corruption as well as project an image of moral purity.²⁴ The fact that the government seems to be more concerned with how productive a woman is in society rather than her worth and that it views prostitution as a political issue rather than a moral issue portrays the government as not prioritizing the welfare of women in these situations.

²² Vincent E. Gil, Marco Wang, Allen F. Anderson, Guao Matthew Lin, “Plum Blossoms and Pheasants: Prostitutes, Prostitution, and Social Control Measures in Contemporary China,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 331

²³ Gil, Wang, Anderson, Lin, “Plum Blossoms,” 331.

²⁴ Gil, Wang, Anderson, Lin, “Plum Blossoms,” 330.

Needless to say, when Chinese women become aware to how the government handles these situations, it is not a surprise that they become less inclined to trust authority when it comes to similar situations. Even though Chinese students residing in the US may not know the governmental handling of prostitution cases in china, some are certainly not satisfied with the way that the government treats its citizens. Having lived in and become acquainted to a society whose government cares more about appearance and aesthetic ability rather than actual welfare of the people, these students are undoubtedly less inclined to report.

People living in China, especially women, are already constantly being filled with ideas that nothing can be done and that the government does not care about their welfare. In recent years, microblogging sites have experienced a surge of users residing in China. The use of microblogging sites has increasingly posed a challenge to the Chinese Communist Party's ability to manipulate information and control its reputation in the face of malfeasance.²⁵ While at first glance this seems like a step forward for the Chinese people as they are slowly beginning to be able to express their opinions freely, what one does not realize is that the daily lives of the people had to be so atrocious that the Chinese people would resort to small, relatively obscure microblogging sites in order to share their opinions. While in America freedom of speech and press are considered constitutionally granted rights, in China news outlets largely act as "part assigned mouthpieces," broadcasting what the Communist Party allows them to.²⁶

Apart from censorship in the media, the government furthers its control and dominance over the people by imposing harmful laws and guidelines that only serve to benefit those in

²⁵ Michelle Chen, Christina Zhang, "Framing Corruption in the Chinese Government: A comparison of Frames Between Media, Government, and Netizens," *International Journal of Communication (Online)*, October 2016: 5494

²⁶Chen, Zhang, "Corruption in the Chinese Government," 5494

power. Currently, China stands as the most densely populated country in the world. There are over 1.4 billion Chinese people; however, over half of these people still live in poverty and can be classified as “modern day peasants.”²⁷ Inequality runs rampant across China. As Professor Qiang Wang, currently teaching constitutional law at Beijing University Law School, notes, “One need not deliberately search the Internet to find dramatic headline stories. The recurring episodes of air, water, soil, and food pollutions are attributed as much to the morally irresponsible economic actions as to the relentless official drive for economic development as the primary source of its authoritarian legitimacy at the expense of the nation’s environment”(45).²⁸ Professor Qiang Wang observes that these instances occur so frequently that the public has begun to exhibit fatigue in the face of flagrant injustices inflicted upon them.

These factors in conjunction with one another—mistreatment by the government, censorship of media, the long history of a hierarchically structured society, the devaluing of women in the family structure, and hopelessness that circumstances will change—put ethnically Chinese students studying in American Universities in a very precarious position. Brandeis as a whole does an excellent job of addressing sexual violence as a prevalent issue on college campuses. Furthermore, it does an excellent job at making clear that it will “respond to complaints, reports, allegations and information about sexual misconduct.”²⁹ Not only can reports be filed privately, but also one has a choice whether or not to follow through with the report. Support services for survivors are both comprehensive and inclusive. A full eight page

²⁷ Qianfan Zhang, “Humanity or Benevolence? The Interpretation of Confucian Ren and Its Modern Applications” in *Human Dignity in Classical Chinese Philosophy: Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 45

²⁸ Zhang, “Humanity or Benevolence,”45

²⁹ <https://www.brandeis.edu/humanresources/policies/Sexual-Harassment-Policy.pdf>, Brandeis University, *Sexual Harassment Policy*

manual details the different resources available for victims, as well as outlines the process of adjudication.³⁰

The implementation of these policies on sexual violence and harassment needs, however, to change in order to better take into account the mindsets of Chinese students, which often times are dramatically different than students of other ethnicities. Due to an inclination to be non-confrontational (无为), when Chinese students become victims of sexual violence, they may be unlikely to report out of the belief that it is not in their best interest to do so as it will only cause meaningless conflict. This is only amplified by the fact that to this day, the Chinese government often times shows flagrant disregard towards the welfare of the people, instead focusing on factors such as economic growth. This mistrust of authority is further amplified by the way that the Chinese government deals with prostitution, as a political problem rather than one concerning the moral degradation of Chinese women. Chinese students may be more inclined to be socially cynical and to believe in fate control, especially when they observe the Chinese government. They become even less inclined to trust authority figures and to begin to believe even more strongly that any unfortunate circumstances that befall them cannot be changed. Although these may seem separate events, each occurrence only serves to intensify feelings of helplessness, mistrust of authority, and non-confrontation.

In order to better benefit Chinese Students, I propose a few a recommendations.³¹ Instead of focusing on the victims of sexual harassment and how to best assist them, it would be more beneficial for more ethnically Chinese students if Brandeis placed greater emphasis on changing

³⁰ <http://www.brandeis.edu/sexual-misconduct-title-ix/documents/survivor-guide/survivors-guide.pdf>, Brandeis University, *A Resource Guide for Sexual Assault Survivors*

³¹ <http://www.brandeis.edu/humanresources/policies/sexual-misconduct-policy-final12-22-16-2.pdf>, Brandeis University, *Sexual Misconduct, Harassment and Discrimination Policy for Student on Student Conduct*

the existing mindsets that these students have developed. I will divide my suggestions into three categories which I view as most important.

The first is that Chinese Students are inclined to be distrustful towards authority. As a first-year student, coming into college and into a new environment can be intimidating enough. This environment only serves to amplify a student's distrust. While Brandeis does dedicate a time during orientation where speakers talk about University Policy towards sexual harassment cases as well as the steps to take if one becomes the victim of sexual assault, the issue lies in the fact that Chinese Students are attuned to see figures of authority as untrustworthy. In order to facilitate an environment where these students feel more comfortable and as a result are more receptive, Brandeis should have these presentations done by people of similar ethnic backgrounds and, preferably, of similar ages. Placed into a drastically different and completely new environment, seeing familiar faces would be a welcome breath of relief for students. Furthermore, by having people of similar age groups present, this in theory allows students to feel more connected and as a result view the information as more applicable to their lives.

As previously mentioned, Brandeis does an excellent job of acknowledging the severity of sexual assault/harassment on the university campus. Brandeis states that all accusations will be taken seriously. However, in order to combat skepticism that there can and will be change, when possible, the University should use publicly available stories by Chinese and Taiwanese survivors in trainings for students. Not only would this be extremely empowering and a testament to the resilience and bravery of these individuals, but would also give students a sense of trust that the University is always on their side and will work in any way possible to help survivors recover.

The last suggestion I have to offer is that Brandeis should, in addition to existing material, educate ethnically Chinese students about the inherent value each person has. As previously mentioned, China is still a largely male dominant society to this day. Often times women would be seen as liabilities as they could not provide income and food for the family. While it is good that Brandeis has so many tools to help survivors, all of these tools would go to waste if the situation were not reported. Brandeis should incorporate into its programming such principles as self-worth and esteem. The perfect place for this would be in the “Health, Wellness and Life Skills” curriculum already required of students entering in Fall 2019. The mindset needs to be corrected that some people are inherently superior to others and that there is a hierarchical system that determines how much one is worth. I believe that this will be the single most helpful suggestion, as it not only will help Chinese students avoid situations where they may be sexually assaulted or taken advantage of, but also will empower these students to seek justice if they are sexually assaulted.

In writing this essay, I hope to have outlined factors which set Chinese students apart from the rest. Because of the differences in values between most Chinese and most American students, Brandeis should make an effort to amend its current programming on sexual harassment in order to be more inclusive towards those of different cultures. By presenting information in a way that makes it more accessible and applicable, Chinese students will be more inclined to trust those in authority. Working with Chinese survivors’ stories and experiences can empower individuals to believe that there can and will be change if sexual assault does occur. Finally, by educating Chinese students that they are worthy of respect and dignity, this should in effect decrease the number of sexual assault cases on campus as well as increase the percentage of cases which are reported.

How Chinese Cultural Aspects influence Sexual Assault Cases among Asian Women

Shicong Fang, B.A. Candidate
Annotated Bibliography

Religious Aspects:

Zhang, Qianfan. *Human Dignity in Classical Chinese Philosophy: Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism*. New York, UNITED STATES: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. (17-100)

In this study, Zhang Qianfan, a constitutional law professor at Beijing University, explores how Confucian values such as liberty, dignity, and duty have changed since their original conception. The author argues that rapidly changing societal norms in modern society have raised questions among scholars regarding the applicability of Confucius' observations about humanity. The author in particular discusses how the Western Concept of Dignity is inherently different than that of the East, stating that "like the notion of individual rights, human dignity is a western concept"(4). The author then proceeds to examine how the Chinese government's adoption of Confucian concepts of "ren" [仁] and "renzheng" [仁证] influence their treatment of the Chinese people.

Cultural Aspects:

Schwartz, Shalom H. "A Theory of Cultural Values and Some Implications for Work." *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 1999, 48 (1) 23-37.

By conducting research and collecting data from 49 nations around the world, Professor Schultz confirmed his theory that there are seven "core" values that are pervasive throughout the world. Schwartz argues that these core values can be categorized into three central groups: Conservatism versus Intellectual and Affective Autonomy, Hierarchy versus Egalitarianism, and Mastery versus Harmony. Based on data collected, Schwartz organizes each nation into specific category based on what values their respective cultures seems to prioritize. These cultural values are then examined in an effort to test their compatibility/incompatibility with work centrality, different societal norms about work, and the pursuit of goals in society.

Leung, Kwok, Fuli Li, and Fan Zhou. "Sex Differences in Social Cynicism Across Societies: The Role of Men's Higher Competitiveness and Male Dominance." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 43, no. 7 (October 2012): 1152-66.

By conducting polls and gathering evidence, researchers test the validity of the theory that male dominance in society causes women to be more socially cynical. Data was gathered from university students in 40 societies and adults in 17 societies. Contrary to the hypothesis that women would be more socially cynical than men, results generally showed that men were more socially cynical than women as well as having a higher reward for application. However, in societies where women had lower status than men, the difference between social cynicism levels

between both sexes was drastically smaller, implying that the the more dominant males are in society, the more socially cynical women become.

Shengquan Ye, Zewei Ma, Ting Kin Ng, and Erin Yiqing Lu. "Chinese Proverb Scale: Development and Validation of an Indigenous Measure of Chinese Traditional Values." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 21, no. 3 (September 2018): 156–77.

The aim of this study was to develop and validate an indigenous measure of Chinese traditional values using Chinese proverbs. A sample of 363 Mainland Chinese undergraduates participated in Study 1, in which a 26-item Chinese Proverb Scale (CPS) was developed through factor analysis on an initial pool of 118 Chinese proverbs. Four factors were clearly identified: (a) Diligence, (b) Integrity, (c) Self-Preservation, and (d) Self-Interest.

Governmental Aspects:

Gil, Vincent E., and Allen F. Anderson. "Case Study of Rape in Contemporary China: A Cultural-Historical Analysis of Gender and Power Differentials." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 14 (1999) 1151–1171.

This article analyzes and deconstructs two narratives from a victim of rape in contemporary China from a sociocultural and historical perspective. The authors cite a "patriarchal and phallogocentric culture" as systemic reasons for many rape occurrences. The article contextualizes the narrative by looking at the everyday realities of the victim as well as cultural ideologies to show "how a Chinese woman metamorphoses her trauma in ways consistent with Sinitic history and culturally gendered forms of coping" (1151). In the end, the authors argue that "violence against women must be eventually linked to their still subordinate position in Chinese society" (1167).

Chen, Michelle, and Christina Zhang. "Framing Corruption in the Chinese Government: A Comparison of Frames between Media, Government, and Netizens." *International Journal of Communication (Online)*, October 2016, 5494-5513.

This study conducted was conducted by researchers at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and examines the connection between the rise of microblogging sites and the tightly controlled flow of information in China. To clarify, microblogging is related to blogging in the sense that both are mediums that allow one to share their own opinions to others. Where microblogging and blogging differ; however, is the fact that microblogs are typically brief and easily accessible. While blogs can range from a few paragraphs to a large essay about a particular topic, microblogs are typically within two hundred words and can be accessed via text message or video/audio messages. Due to the fact that mainstream news media is controlled by the government and is only allowed to share information to a certain extent, microblogging has been on the rise in China as Chinese people wish to "voice their opinions, expose incidents of, and engage in discussions about corruption and social injustice"(1).

Gil, Vincent E., Marco Wang, Allen F. Anderson, and Guao Matthew Lin. "Plum Blossoms and Pheasants: Prostitutes, Prostitution, and Social Control Measures in Contemporary China." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 319–37

This report examines unobtrusive data on prostitutes from the People's Republic of China through an analysis of prison arrest records from 13 facilities. Collectively, these data represent 2,057 prostitution cases, and span the years 1988-1990. Demographics are used to distinguish and describe the different types of prostitutes, and reveal marked differences from official characterizations. Prostitutes are further differentiated by drawing on ethnographic interview information. Discussion of factors affecting women's involvement with prostitution is engaged. Control measures for prostitution, at both national and provincial levels, are examined and critiqued.