Rule of morality versus rule of law? A Multi-method comparative study into the values that characterize a good civil servant in China and the Netherlands
Yang, L.

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Chapter 6

Worlds Apart? Worlds Aligned? The perceptions and prioritizations of civil servant values among civil servants from China and the Netherlands* 

* This chapter is based on an article that is currently under review.
Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions and prioritizations of five key civil servant values among 22 Chinese and 20 Dutch civil servants, based on a series of 42 in-depth qualitative interviews. It shows that Chinese and Dutch respondents interpret loyalty differently, as referring respectively to the political party or to the organization for which they work. The common difficulty in upholding people-orientedness is attributed to different reasons, although both groups consider the public interest as ideally important. Interestingly, both view full transparency as unnecessary, and similarly, both value effectiveness more important than efficiency.

This study offers substantial insight into civil servant values and a new perspective on cross-cultural value studies, along with implications for public value research and civil service practice.

Key words: civil servant, interview, values, tradition

Introduction

When people discuss a value, either in a personal or a professional sense, are they discussing the same thing? Does a quantitative international comparison of values make sense, if values are contextual? As a concept that "contains a moral quality of like or dislike, desirable or undesirable, and should or should not" (Cherrington, 1989, p. 297), values convey individual preferences that motivate behaviour. However, cultural ideals also motivate behaviour (Schwartz, Struch & Bilsky, 1990). Social behaviour entails value preferences, which reflect a person's cultural origins and thus inherited tradition. To study values is, therefore, not just a matter of ascertaining how important a value is to different people, but rather what is actually valued according to whom: how do people interpret a value and why it is important to them?

In Public Administration, the study of values is certainly not a new topic. Aside from conceptual and theoretical work (e.g. Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Rutgers, 2008, 2010), many empirical studies have been conducted over the past decade (e.g. Van den Heuvel, Huberts & Verberk, 2002; Van der Wal & Huberts, 2008; Andersen, Beck Jørgensen, Kjeldsen, Pedersen & Vrangbæk, 2012; Yang & Van der Wal, 2014). Scholars have noticed that "very different things are addressed within the same debate" when public values are discussed (Van der Wal, 2011, p. 644), therefore it is relevant to identify "what actually are regarded [as] public values" (Rutgers, 2015, p. 30).

This can be achieved through the comparative study of the ways in which values are interpreted among different groups, for instance, values in decision making in the public versus the private sector (Van der Wal, De Graaf, & Lasthuizen, 2011).
Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions and prioritizations of five key civil servant values among 22 Chinese and 20 Dutch civil servants, based on a series of 42 in-depth qualitative interviews. It shows that Chinese and Dutch respondents interpret *loyalty* differently, as referring respectively to the political party or to the organization for which they work. The common difficulty in upholding *people-orientedness* in practice is attributed to different reasons, although both groups consider the public interest as ideally important. Interestingly, both view full *transparency* as unnecessary, and similarly, both value *effectiveness* more important than *efficiency*. This study offers substantial insight into civil servant values and a new perspective on cross-cultural value studies, along with implications for public value research and civil service practice.

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2008), and work motivations among administrative versus political elites (Van der Wal, 2013).

The currently available studies are, however, not cross-cultural. In this study, such a cross-cultural comparison is undertaken, based on the reasoning that values need to be studied contextually and with more consideration given for cross-cultural diversity\(^49\) (Haque, 2011). According to Rutgers (2014), the meaning of value is given by the observer: “a value can be any concept that expresses a positive or negative qualitative (or evaluative) statement and has a ‘motivating force,’ that is, it gives direction to people’s thoughts and actions” (p. 5). The study of values therefore largely relies on how people interpret the values, which includes the meaning of a value and how notions of a value’s importance differ from person to person, from case to case, or/and from culture to culture.

To study public values contextually raises the question of which values are relevant. Public values compose a long list and are spread across seven ‘constellations’ in the public domain, according to Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman (2007), such as values associated with the relationship between the public administration and politicians, and values associated with the relationship between public administration and the citizens. In this study, we focused on “values associated with the behavior of public-sector employees” (pp. 367-368), hereafter referred to as civil servant values. Based on the results of a large-scale survey conducted in China and the Netherlands (Van der Wal & Yang, forthcoming), which compared civil servants’ value preferences between the Confucian tradition (the rule of morality) and the Continental European Rechtsstaat tradition (the rule of law), five values were identified as being of specific interest: loyalty, people-orientedness, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency (with the latter two treated as a pair). The research question of this study, therefore, is as follows:

*How do perceptions and prioritizations of loyalty, people-orientedness, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency differ between civil servants in China and the Netherlands?*

**Why these five values?**

Previously undertaken quantitative comparative studies among Chinese and Dutch civil servants (cf. Yang & van der Wal, 2014; Van der Wal & Yang, forthcoming) have provided us with valuable “background data” (Mile &

\(^49\) Haque (2011) critiques the tendency towards the universal application of core values in public management, ethical standards and bureaucratic norms. Among these concepts, “values represent a set of relatively taken-for-granted beliefs or assumptions (embedded in culture, religion, and society)” (p. 172), which implies that values unconsciously deliver culture more than other ethics or norms.
Huberman, 1994, p. 41) on civil servant values. From these studies, we learn that the values of loyalty, people-orientedness, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency deserve particular attention because they were ranked either very differently or very similarly in terms of importance by the respondents in China and the Netherlands.

Moreover, it is relevant to include values that can be regarded as characteristic for the two countries (or traditions). Loyalty and people-orientedness are typical Confucian values, while transparency, effectiveness and efficiency are less emphasized in Chinese administrative tradition but highly valued in the Rechtsstaat and Weberian context (Yang & Rutgers, forthcoming). These five values all have broad meanings, which make it more likely that there are differences in interpretation (e.g. regarding loyalty) or in their impact on the everyday work of civil servants (e.g. regarding transparency and efficiency). Using loyalty as an example, in most codes of conduct for Chinese civil servants, loyalty is mentioned in conjunction with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the country. In Van der Wal and Yang’s study (forthcoming), it was demonstrated that Chinese civil servants link loyalty closely to their superiors, while Dutch civil servants primarily refer to loyalty in terms of the general public. This indicates that values such as loyalty do indeed have different meanings in both contexts.

Last but not least, this study provides empirical data on values that are widely debated, and investigated in different ways using different research paradigms. The loyalty of administrators, for instance, has been analysed from many different angles: it has been differentiated in terms of four types such as by-the-book professional loyalty, and neutral servants’ loyalty to the society and public values (De Graaf, 2011); has been discussed from the perspective of morality, culture and politics (cf. Levinson, Parker & Woodruff, 2013); and has been investigated in a Public Service Motivation study (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). However, none of them address the exact meaning of loyalty in different cultural contexts. The traditional Confucian value of people-orientedness is being increasingly studied by Chinese scholars, especially in relation to Western democratic ideas (e.g. Xiao, 2002; Jiang, 2008) and the government ideology of the CCP (e.g. Li, 2010). Studies in the West on governmental transparency are also increasing (e.g. Hood & Heald, 2006, Meijer, 2003, 2012; Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007; Cuillier & Piotrowski, 2009), but academic discussion on transparency is muddled (Meijer, 2012, p. 4), challenging insights into the effects of transparency on governmental behaviour. It thus makes sense to find out what transparency actually means in administrative practice. Finally, effectiveness and efficiency are discussed both conceptually (e.g. Rutgers & van der Meer, 2010) and empirically (e.g. De Graaf & Van der Wal, 2010; Andrews & Entwistle, 2010). In all these studies of the different values, however, there is limited insight into the meaning of these values in actual administrative practice, i.e. on the ‘shop floor’. How do civil servants perceive and prioritize these values, and to what extent can we detect cross-cultural differences in meaning?
Theoretical framework

Now, we discuss the meaning of the five values as they figure in the literature to provide the theoretical background with which to interpret the empirical findings.

Loyalty

In the Western world the Weberian ideal of the neutral and predictable bureaucrat still dominates, even after decades of managerial reforms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). This ideal implies that the loyalty of an administrator is associated with the execution of political leaders’ orders. Weber’s concern is, however, not the loyalty of the bureaucrat to the politician as a person, but rather his or her loyalty as a functionary to the laws and rules which constitute the legal (or just) and rational backbone of a bureaucratic organization (Fry & Nigro, 1996, p. 38). As Weber puts it, “modern loyalty is devoted to impersonal and functional purposes” (Weber, 1974, p. 199).

In opposition to this, loyalty has different associations in the Chinese context. Traditionally, loyalty concerns obedience to the emperor, and nowadays to the CCP. Loyalty is related to other traditional Confucian values, for example Xiao (孝), filial piety, involving loyalty towards family members, particularly one’s parents, and li (礼), ritual propriety, requiring a person to maintain allegiance to tradition (Higgins, 2013, pp. 22-23). Subordinating oneself to a superior was considered an important virtue, for “it is righteous to decide who has the power of decision making by the principle of respecting the superior; it is also righteous for the resource allocator to distribute resources by the principle of favoring the intimate” (Hwang, 1999, p. 167). The social network or interpersonal relationship (guanxi) is thus important in working fields.

In modern China, the Weberian rational bureaucracy is not unknown to Chinese civil servants, neither are the ideas of ‘new public management’ (NPM). With the broad influence of public management reform around the world, emphasis is increasingly being placed on values such as “service orientation” and “decentralization” (Kettl, 2005, p. 2). These developments are perhaps reshaping the value of loyalty, both in the East and the West. We are therefore interested in whether Chinese and Dutch civil servants indeed interpret and prioritize loyalty differently, and furthermore, to establish the extent to which their interpretations reflect either traditional or modern associations.

People-orientedness

In the Confucian tradition, people-orientedness is usually denoted as min-ben (民本), meaning ‘the people are the root of the state’. The traditional people-orientedness concept is usually argued to be a means of maintaining feudal
monarchy, as the emperor, not the people, is actually the root of the state (Liu & Zhang, 2012). Nevertheless, awareness of the importance of the people for government is inherited from tradition. Nowadays, this is reflected in the propaganda that the government “serves the people” under CCP rule, a notion that fits the Marxist ideology of “Volk” (see Liu, 2011, p. 108).

People-orientedness is a concept that means different things to different persons at different times. In the Confucian administrative ideal, it indicates the humaneness of an official in terms of caring for and loving the common people, while in the Western context it could imply public as well as individual rights. In the Chinese imperial era, it was a requirement of bureaucrats to have mercy on people (subordinates), but nowadays civil servants rather regard people-orientedness as being customer friendly.

The value of people-orientedness is related to the concept of ‘public’ or ‘public interest’, which is a primary principle within the public sector. However, what precisely is meant by ‘the public’ is open to debate: is it a group of people who pursue the same interests, a community in which people live, all citizens in a region, or the sum of the interests of individuals? According to Redford (1954), public interest needs to be determined in a particular instance, for it “may be a compromise among varied and perhaps conflicting interest[s]” (p. 1104). The public interest is thus a concept that involves a complex of situations, interests and values, which may be defined as “the best response to a situation in terms of all interest[s] and of the concepts of value which are generally accepted in our society” (p. 1108). So, what do Chinese and Dutch civil servants regard as ‘the people’ or ‘the public’ in relation to their day-to-day work, and do they give people-orientedness equal importance in their practical work?

Transparency

Transparency is out of the spotlight in Confucian ideal of government, even in the present day, we could not find it as a prominent value in modern ethical codes of Chinese civil servants (cf. Yang & Van der Wal, 2014, p. 193). However, transparency, like a trend worldwide in contemporary government, “has attained quasi-religious significance” (Hood, 2006, p. 3). A transparent government is one that should, more or less, make information available to the public, provide clear and fixed rules, and ensure that the processes of decision making and public fund usage are open. Heald (2006) maps four directions of transparency: upwards (the hierarchical superior observes the conduct of the subordinate), downwards (the subordinate observes the conduct of the superior), outwards (observing what is happening outside the organization) and inwards (the outside can observe what is going on inside the organization) (pp. 27-28). Full transparency is thus the presence of all four directions.

Transparency is treated as a measure against corruption, which enhances the accountability of government. In practice, transparency is not just the ability
of information that “can be approached from many angles” (Prat, 2006, p. 91), but more about the content of information and how available/useful it is to receptors (cf. Heald, 2006, p. 26). Hence, the most relevant issue for transparency is how the audience perceives the information; transparency extends beyond mere openness (ibid.) because it is a two-way interaction. Transparency may, however, have costs and negative effects, such as leading to low efficiency and effectiveness or violations of secrecy, or hindering compromises and negotiations among interest groups during policy making processes (cf. Stasavage, 2006, p. 169). In light of these complexities, this study investigated how indeed Chinese and Dutch civil servants view transparency.

### Effectiveness and efficiency

In their article on efficiency in public administration, Rutgers and Van der Meer (2010) outline two meanings of efficiency. The first is “the Aristotelian or substantive meaning: efficiency as the ability to get things done”; the second is the technical meaning of efficiency “as the best use of resources” (pp. 772-773). These two uses of efficiency are respectively embodied in two related values in our study: effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness is more about the results of government actions and quality of services delivered, while efficiency is related to the pathway towards specific results, such as the costs in terms of time and financial investments. These two values are usually discussed together as a technical cluster of public values, in order to measure the performance of a government or administrator: can there be equal or better public service at a lower cost? Just as in the West, where efficiency was not a common concept before the 20th century (p. 761), effectiveness and efficiency were not popular within the Chinese government until a series of public administration reforms beginning in the 1980s. We may then wonder if that means that the perceptions and prioritizations of these values are largely similar for civil servants in China and the Netherlands.

#### Methods and data analysis

Qualitative interviews can reveal “rich descriptions and explanations for processes in identifiable local contexts” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). This is particularly the case when a concept such as a value is involved, as it has strong links to personal beliefs, experiences and culture. For the purpose of this study, in order to learn “what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions” (Weiss, 1994, p. 1), we constructed an interview guide referring to the five values under investigation. Each respondent was asked essentially the same questions in generally the same order, a format defined by Patton (1987) as a semi-structured interview: “a set of questions carefully worded and
arranged for the purpose of taking each respondent through the same sequence, and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words” (p. 112).

We identified the majority of the interview respondents for this qualitative study through the aforementioned survey (Van der Wal & Yang, forthcoming). These initial survey respondents were recruited through civil servant training programs of Masters of Public Administration (MPA) and Party schools of CCP in seven Chinese cities and through MPA programs in three cities in the Netherlands. All students of these programs are either experienced civil servants or preparing themselves to be civil servants. All survey respondents were asked to write their contact information at the end of the questionnaires if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. In both countries, the interview respondents were relatively young (59.1% Chinese and 70% Dutch were under 35 years old), and the majority had less than 15 years of working experience (77.3% in China and 85% in the Netherlands). For more details of respondents’ characteristics, please see Table 6.1.

The respondents who were initially willing to take part in the interviews were quite randomly distributed. However, it is hard to ensure that such a willingness was equally distributed among functions, levels of government, senior and junior civil servants, etc. Moreover, due to the fact that civil servants, particularly in China, are quite cautious and hesitant about talking frankly about morals or values that we also used the snowball sampling method. Since snowball sampling is “particularly applicable... [to] a sensitive issue” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141), it was an effective way to access appropriate respondents through “referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (p. 141). The interviewees thus composed a “panel of knowledgeable informants” (Weiss, 1994, p. 17), which included professionals in public service. In total, we interviewed 22 civil servants in China and 20 in the Netherlands. After informing potential respondents about the purpose and methods of the interview, we conducted all interviews face-to-face and recorded the conversations with their permission.

Most interviews lasted around 45 minutes, though the length differed between the Chinese and Dutch interviewees because of language differences. The interviewer and Chinese respondents are all Chinese native speakers, whereas English is not the native language for either the interviewer or the Dutch respondents. Therefore, some of the Chinese interviews took less time, only about 30 minutes. The interview guide included three parts consisting of

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50 Party school aims to train CCP cadres. There are the highest institution of central party school, and party schools in all levels of governments.

51 The cities were: Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, Dazhou, Shenzhen, Suzhou and Hefei (in China); Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam (in the Netherlands). It should be noted that the students of the programs in each city are not bound to work in the same city.
eight questions. The core part referred to the five specific values (see Appendix 2). The first question addressed the background and professional experience of the respondents. The other questions refer to their general ideas about which values, how and why, are important in both ideal and actual values, as well as East-West comparisons. The latter topic, though very interesting, is not addressed here as it goes beyond the scope of this current article.

Since this study targets the meanings that civil servants in China and the Netherlands give to particular values, the data analysis was issue-focused. Issue-focused analysis “describes what has been learned from all respondents about people in their situation” rather than analyzing each respondent’s material separately (Weiss, 1994, pp. 152-153).

Although the overall coding began after the completion and transcription of all the interviews, some coding categories were mentally formed by the interviewer during the conducting of the interviews. Whether these codes were used or not was, however, only decided upon when all data had been obtained, because a “coding category is developed and defined through interaction with the data” (Weiss, 1994, p. 156). To sort through the rough data, a “monster-grid” (see De Graaf & Huberts, 2008; van der Wal, 2011) was applied to create data matrix cells, with respondents on one axis and the five values on the other. Each respondent’s statement was summarized into simple codes, and then filled into grid cells together with quotes, similar to the process of moving material into an “appropriate excerpt file” (p. 157). It is important to remember that in coding and categorizing, it is “not the words themselves but the meaning that matters” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The same word mentioned by two respondents could actually mean different things. For this reason, it is important for the interviewer to think about and understand the contexts in which the data was gathered, and to keep “going back and forth between data and codes” (Weiss, 1994, p.156), in order to be sure of what is meant by the categories. The number of codes per value was limited to between four and six, and the categories were created by the number of statements rather than the number of respondents.

Limitations

An issue that cannot be ignored here is translation. The interviews in China were conducted in Chinese, and the Dutch respondents spoke in English. The researcher was required to translate the Chinese transcripts into English for coding and reporting; however, for the purpose of easy and precise understanding, some words have not been translated exactly and literally from the original Chinese. Moreover, since English is not the native language of the Dutch respondents, it was inevitable that they could not express themselves as precisely as if they were speaking Dutch.

To deal with these issues, in the Dutch case the author has maintained the original wording of the Dutch respondents to the largest extent possible, in order
to ensure that they are not misread. With the Chinese respondents, since the interviewer is native Chinese, the slight linguistic changes made in the process of translation were made very carefully in order not to cause any distortion of the respondents’ meanings.

Table 6.1 Characteristics of Interview Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese respondents % (n=22)</th>
<th>Dutch respondents % (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years as civil servant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy-making</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and/or secretarial</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal, law enforcement, support (incl. police and fire brigade)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT and technology support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial advice and control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/supervision</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The total number of respondents is larger than ‘n’ because there is one Chinese respondent and one Dutch respondent made multiple choices.
Results

Loyalty: let’s go Party!

Loyalty was defined in our study as “Acting faithfully and with allegiance towards superiors or organizations”. This definition refers to a broad range of objects of loyalty, from a boss, political leader or authority (as “superior”), to a working group, colleagues, civil servants as a whole, the government or the political party (as “organization”).

The results in Table 6.2 show that the majority of statements of the Chinese respondents (14 of the 22) addressed loyalty as a value referring to the country and the political party. Some connected loyalty to the CCP as the duty of a civil servant: “The government is under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and I am a Party member so I must be loyal to the Party first”. Even in the case of one respondent who thought that loyalty should ideally not refer to the political party, he acknowledged that in real life situations he has to think about it when “facing powerful political pressure”. Five statements in this category also mentioned loyalty to law or an institution in an ideal situation, though the respondents either admitted that the actual law is not good enough to adhere to, or that “[whether] my job is done well or not is judged [by] my bosses” rather than by the law or institution. Compromises therefore have to be made when considering what superiors want.

In stark contrast, loyalty to the country was mentioned only slightly in two statements by Dutch respondents. The largest group of statements of Dutch respondents (15 of the 20) interpreted loyalty as commitment to the organization for which they work and to their colleagues. By loyalty to the organization, they usually meant the bigger picture of “the vision and mission of the organization”:

If the work is ok, and nobody complains about their work, they think that is loyal[ty] to the organization. But for me, it isn’t. You have to look more in the area that you work for. Just ask yourself: why is there a ministry of [X]? What are we doing? Why are we here? What do we have to finalize? What do we have to communicate about? Just reply [or answer] that in your own head to get a few [answers to] what am I doing, is it still working, is it still ok what I am doing, are we still working for the objectives of [the] organization?

This presents a major point of difference between the Dutch and the Chinese respondents, as only two Chinese civil servants talked about loyalty to their organization and only one connected the ‘organization’ to the notion of ‘superior’. It should be noted here that one Chinese respondent actually meant the political party when he spoke of loyalty to the ‘organization’, since
‘organization’ is a concept that has been politicized by the CCP. Furthermore, four Dutch respondents thought that loyalty to their colleagues mattered in terms of doing a better job, while none of their Chinese counterparts linked loyalty to colleagues.

The same number of statements (7) in both countries regarded loyalty as being loyal to leaders or superiors. However, they interpreted this in different ways. The Chinese interviewees tended to explain this as ‘obedience’, particularly in practice: “I personally prefer loyalty [to mean] by voicing my opinions and doing the right thing, but in [the] actual situation, it is just obeying them [my superiors]”. As the director of a municipal government revealed, this attitude is explained by the fact that “in most governmental sectors, the director makes the final decision, with no need to listen to others’ opinions”. A senior Chinese policy making advisor described the relationship between superior and subordinate as one of mutual dependence:

“In most cases, the leaders and subordinates will establish a common interest community: he gets promoted and you will get promoted as well; if you want a promotion, you need his help because he is your boss. This is a kind of relationship that you and your leaders need each other. So that is why the leader needs the people whom he likes and who are loyal only to him. If the relationship is broken, it could hurt both sides.”

The Dutch respondents, on the other hand, tended to think of loyalty less in terms of the leader as a person and more about the function and authority of the law, in a Weberian sense. None mentioned obeying orders; instead, they considered loyalty to the boss as meaning loyalty to the organization, because “The boss speaks for the organization, so I see it as pure loyalty to the organization, and [I] only do what is the best for my own organization”.

To conclude, there were significant contrasts between the Chinese and Dutch respondents with regards to loyalty. The largest category of Chinese respondents’ statements emphasized loyalty mainly to the country and to the CCP, whereas this view was only mentioned in two Dutch respondents’ statements. Conversely, the objects of loyalty for most of the Dutch respondents were the organization and colleagues, which were rarely considered by the Chinese respondents. Even in the category of “loyalty to the superior”, where both Chinese and Dutch respondents made statements in equal measure, their interpretations of ‘superior’ diverged. Nevertheless, despite the differences, there was a shared view between the two groups of respondents in terms of ‘the job’ serving society and the people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (with the most characteristic quotes)</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Loyalty to the country, to the political party, or to the laws and regulations</strong></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I\ am\ working\ in\ the\ system\ (political\ system),\ so\ the\ loyalty\ to\ the\ party\ and\ to\ the\ country\ is\ the\ first\ important.\ This\ is\ not\ only\ a\ political\ requirement;\ it\ is\ also\ a\ requirement\ as\ a\ person.\ Since\ you\ choose\ to\ believe\ in\ the\ party\ and\ to\ be\ a\ member,\ you\ should\ be\ loyal\ to\ the\ party.)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Loyalty to the job (function, position, responsibility, career)</strong></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“if you think it from the perspective of doing your job, such as serving the society and serving the people, that is what you need to be loyal to. If you don’t have that characteristic, being a civil servant means very little.”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Loyalty to the superior (boss, leader)</strong></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)ow generally the leader represents the organization, so I have to consider loyalty to the leader.”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Loyalty in the law is being loyal to your minister. It is loyalty to the function of the minister, not the person.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Loyalty to the people (the public, the citizen, the clients)</strong></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ideally speaking, I am loyal to the people. Because civil servant is supposed to serve the public. The target of public service is the common people, even in any country in the world.”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Loyalty to the organization (government, department) and colleagues.</strong></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In my opinion, if you talk to the citizen or you talk to the company, you represent your organization... you could have fight or argue with your colleagues, but when you are outside of the organization, you should behave like one organization.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Related to personal morals and other values, such as righteousness, serviceability, integrity and justice, etc.</strong></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Other aspects of loyalty include two points: righteousness and serviceability, as a person and attitude towards the work.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think it is about my own moral values... For me, be loyal to myself also means to be responsible to the stakeholders.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=the total number of respondents
People-orientedness: sweet talk is a politician’s thing

People-orientedness was defined in the survey as “Acting to achieve what is in the interest of the common people”.

As we can see in Table 6.3, the most dominant view in both countries was that the meaning and prioritization of people-orientedness depends on the function of government (category 1). Chinese respondents weighed people-orientedness as being more important for higher levels of government or policy makers. Seven of the 13 statements that fit into this category clearly show that people-orientedness was not often considered part of civil servants’ actual work because they should rather focus on “doing the very detailed and practical work” or on “how to execute the decision made by my superior”.

The views of Dutch respondents show more consideration of what is meant by ‘people’ and what they can do for ‘the people’ (category 1; 8 out of 13 statements). As one mentioned, “I think it is a part of my job to do [work] for people’s best interest. But sometimes it is hard to define what the best interest is, and it depends on the situation and depends on the person”. Therefore, Dutch respondents reported that they usually concentrate on their own clients in their practical work instead of the public interest in a broad sense. According to a team leader with more than 30 years of working experience:

“It is not always important in real life... When you talk about what the primary thing is for a civil servant, it is to serve the people. During [the] daily job, you just do your job, it is not so primarily in your mind, it becomes something you work with. It is totally built-in but not specially recognized.”

Another large group of Dutch statements emphasized the difficulties of enacting people-orientedness in actual situations (category 2) due to of all kinds of practical limitations. For example, time management or budget cuts force civil servants to prioritize, which may mean that they cannot treat all people equally. Other factors, such as efficiency, procedures, regulations and too much technology resulting in sparse interaction with citizens, also affect the practice of people-orientedness. Chinese interviewees attributed the difficulty to be people-oriented to reasons such as, the involvement of interest groups in policy making, the motivations of civil servants, and the political system. According to a junior civil servant in China working in the judicial department:

“It is related to [the] political system. For example, in the Netherlands, citizens have real votes, they can express what they want by voting [for] some politician. And politicians, even [if they do] not 100% satisfy what the public wants, they have to make their best effort... But things are different in China. Like I said before, in the single party system, I can’t only be loyal to the institution
because I have to consider what my boss wants. This makes it very, very difficult to work and decide according to what the people need.”

The respondents in both China and the Netherlands spontaneously compared the prioritization of people-orientedness in ideal and actual situations, implying that it is less considered in real life but, for instance, something primarily for top management or just a political promise made by politicians aimed at winning more votes.

Table 6.3 Respondents’ statements of ‘people-oriented’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (with the most characteristic quotes)</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> “People” means different things in terms of level of government, functions and situation.</td>
<td>CN 13  (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think this value is very important, but for the civil servant like us work in very local level, we focus more on serviceability, which is doing the very detailed and practical work. Because I think people-oriented is a value considered more by higher level of government working for a policy-making department.”</td>
<td>NL 13  (n=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> It is important but difficult in actual situation because of limits in practice.</td>
<td>CN 7  (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In this situation, the relationship among private, organization, the business and more general interests (is mixed)... Therefore, every sector in charge of supervision has to consider the companies’ (clients) interest and balance all aspects.”</td>
<td>NL 12  (n=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> It is important in both ideal and actual situations.</td>
<td>CN 3  (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is not ranked very highly in actual situation, but I don’t think it means people-oriented is hard to realize... I think (the whole country should do as our city), focusing more on people’s life rather than how to show what the government did, what the performance and ‘face’ of government. To improve the people’s life is not that difficult. At least, my organization and I, we respond to the people’s needs as soon as we know.”</td>
<td>NL 4  (n=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> Other values are mentioned and compared, like integrity, equality, efficiency, getting the job done and following the rules.</td>
<td>CN 0  (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“But it is truly a dilemma. You have to do a lot with efficiency and people-orientation. Informal you have the loyalty and orientation on the society, but formally, if a minister makes the decision, you have to do just that.”</td>
<td>NL 7  (n=20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=the total number of respondents
**Transparency: are you willing to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?**

Transparency was defined in the survey as “Acting openly, visibly and controllably”. For this value, the results show that respondents in China and the Netherlands held quite similar ideas about its necessity and importance (see Table 6.4). The importance of transparency was emphasized in most statements of the Chinese respondents, with the exception of two: one said that it was not important for him personally, but very much for the organization, and the other evaluated it as “one of the least important values”. It was widely recognised by the Chinese respondents (category 1) that their organization or the government in general does not do well in terms of being transparent, critically disclosing that transparency is more like a “decoration” for government: “They open some information to the public, and then they claim the government is transparent. But other information they want to hide, they won’t tell the public”. The Dutch civil servants felt similarly within their organizations: “They certainly hide things because I can feel that they know more than we do”, and even “You can ask for information, but sometimes you can’t put your finger on it”.

The largest category of Dutch statements and the second largest category of Chinese statements regarded transparency as not always necessary in practice (category 2). For example, Chinese respondents stated that “something can’t be transparent” or “full transparency might cause mess”. Dutch respondents gave more explanation about why and how transparency is or can be problematic, suggesting that the information could be misused by the media or misunderstood by the public. Therefore, the best way to be transparent should be “not just giving the information but also explaining”. Additionally, letting people know “why something is not transparent” is also a part of transparency, and particularly legitimacy, because:

“If you can let the people see the pros and cons, why it comes to one but not another, I guess the people will get more understanding on how the government works, what the dilemmas are, and [the] struggles government goes to, then the government gets more legitimacy.”

The respondents who thought that it is difficult or impossible to be totally transparent (category 4) attributed this to reasons such as the fact that it costs too much time and that too many interest groups have to be involved. As the top manager of a Chinese municipal department said:

“They [the governmental departments] open some [information] but also hide something. What the people really need to know might not be open, while the transparent parts are not very crucial... Everything referring to governmental expenditure is not that easy [to open]. It is not difficult [to be transparent], but
actually they are not willing to make things transparent. In the final deliberation, private interest is involved.”

Table 6.4 Respondents’ statements of ‘transparency’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (with the most characteristic quote)</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CN (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 It is important but the transparency is not good enough in reality.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think the governments now are magnifying how transparent they are. They open some information to the public, and then they claim the government is transparent. But other information they want to hide, they won’t tell the public.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Full transparency is not always necessary.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“So sometimes, it makes more sense to keep information within the government. That indeed could decrease the cost of administration and good for maintaining social stability.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 It is related to other values, such as impartiality, serviceability, incorruptibility, effectiveness and efficiency.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Accountability is the result of being transparent. Only people can see what is you function and how you take you responsibility, then they can ask you to be accountable.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 It is important but it is difficult or not possible in practice.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is no problem to public the regulations and policies, but when it refers to all kinds of interest, we can’t make sure them transparent to the public. On one hand, maybe the superior is not willing to disclose everything. On the other hand, publicity could have some negative effects on the organization, such as more questioning, more obstacles on the future policy implement, etc.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 It is very transparent in my organization.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In our department, all policies are open. The specified policies are made in terms of professional regulations and rules. All of these are open to the public.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 It is not important.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think now in fact transparency is just like a decoration for government. Even within the government, we don’t know how they make the decision, how much the annual income is, or how they spend the money.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=the total number of respondents
Adding to the issue of why transparency is (or is not) important or necessary, other values were frequently mentioned (category 3). For instance, both Chinese and Dutch respondents believed that transparency can improve impartiality and incorruptibility, but it can also cause low efficiency. One Chinese respondent pointed out that “accountability is the result of being transparent”, but one of his Dutch counterparts argued that “being transparent is just [done] out of fear of being accountable, because people don’t want to be blamed afterwards”.

One Chinese respondent understood transparency from a special angle: it is not about how open an organization is with information, but how true information is:

“In [an] ideal situation, [the] government should make its behaviour and decision[s] open to the public, but I think the thing [that] is more important than transparency is the truth. The precondition of transparency is that the information should be real. If not, then it is only fake transparency, and [there is] no need to talk about being under supervision or anything else.”

In general, in evaluating transparency from a practical perspective, both Chinese and Dutch respondents considered it either of low necessity or very difficult to achieve in practice. In concluding their statements, they also stressed that it is not only about whether an organization is transparent (are they willing to tell), but more about what information is made transparent (what to tell), and how true the information is (if they are telling the truth).

**Effectiveness and efficiency: soft fire makes sweet malt**

In the survey, we defined effectiveness as “Acting to achieve the desired results” and efficiency as “Acting to achieve results with minimal means”.

As the interview results in Table 6.5 show, civil servants from both China and the Netherlands had similar preferences regarding these values. The majority of statements from respondents in both countries considered effectiveness as more important than efficiency (category 1), saying that “quality comes first” (Chinese respondent), “efficiency with no good result is not efficiency” (Dutch respondent), and “the people care more about results” (Dutch respondent). Beyond expressing their preference for effectiveness over efficiency, respondents also outlined some very insightful viewpoints on this value. One Chinese respondent related effectiveness to the goal of government action, insisting that the goal and the actual result should be the same: “Any result far from the goal is not [a] good result, so it is not effectiveness. With no good result, efficiency means nothing”. One Dutch respondent complemented this point, saying that effectiveness is “the ability to work together for a goal” and “the process towards the goal actually is a goal as well”. Another Dutch respondent, a policy advisor in municipal department, expressed a similar idea:
“It is the most important thing first to ask what is the target [group] and why we are doing this... I really think a civil servant should be someone who can work really well in networks and get everyone aligned to the same goal. And only then we are going to talk about which means we need to work together towards that goal.”

A thought provoking question was posed by another Dutch respondent: “It is about how you view ‘result’. Is it output or outcome?”

There was also a large group of statements that demonstrate how respondents considered the situation in order to decide which one is more important, effectiveness or efficiency. For example, in the current situation of financial crisis in Europe, efficiency might outweigh effectiveness, or an emergency event like a police response might require a quick solution with a high input of resources. The Dutch and Chinese respondents also maintained that the preference for effectiveness over efficiency can differ between the perspectives of the public and the government, civil servants and politicians, as well as between one department and another.
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Table 6.5 Respondents’ statements of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘efficiency’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (with the most characteristic quotes)</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category (with the most characteristic quotes)</td>
<td>Number of statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 I think effectiveness is more important than efficiency. “Because you can be very efficient without be effective... I think it is more important that you get the results than the way you get to the results.”</td>
<td>9 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 It depends on to whom, governmental function, and situation, etc. “Those executive people, they find effectiveness important. But those who are more in policy-making process, they also want to give much weight on efficiency”.</td>
<td>7 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I think efficiency is more important than effectiveness. “I think the conflict between them is quite obvious. There are too many steps to get a thing done. The efficiency is really low.”</td>
<td>5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I can’t choose because both are important. “I think it is hard to say which one is more important. I will consider them both. Efficiency is improved, the effectiveness will be better as well, and vice versa.”</td>
<td>4 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Other values are mentioned, such as innovativeness, responsibility and accountability. “I think these two values (effectiveness and accountability) are tightly related. If your work can’t achieve desired result, then you are going to take the responsibility, which is accountability about...So I think accountability includes the importance of effectiveness.”</td>
<td>2 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=the total number of respondents

Discussion and conclusion: key findings

This study aimed to answer the question of how the perceptions and prioritizations of five civil servant values differ between civil servants in China and the Netherlands. The data reveal more differences than similarities in terms of the distribution of statements in each response category. Some of the strong differences reinforce the cliché image of civil servants in Eastern and Western contexts, such as obedient versus autonomous, which might refer to the presence of different administrative traditions (Van der Wal & Yang , forthcoming) and the current political environment. Nevertheless, there are
some similar views, particularly regarding transparency, effectiveness and efficiency.

To start with, political loyalty was largely emphasized by Chinese respondents. This finding is in line with neo-traditionalism under the leadership of the CCP, which reinforces its regime through “positive incentives offered for compliance” and rewards for political loyalty (Walder, 1988, p. 6). Party members (as well as civil servants) need to show their loyalty to the CCP in exchange for “senior positions, privileges, and grants” (He & Warren, 2011, p. 281). The system is also supported by the strong connection between loyalty and obedience, where the civil servants should fit in the strongly preferential system of guanxi, “a network of outstanding personal favors and obligations stemming from town or regional ties, school ties, and family tie[s]” (Aufrecht & Bun, 1995, p. 178); in other words, relationships resulting in the exchange of favours or connections for mutual benefit. According to the category of ‘loyalty to the job’, however, the loyalty of the Chinese civil servants also shows Weberian obligations to their profession and professional responsibilities (Petter, 2005).

On the contrary, Dutch civil servants regarded loyalty as being more applicable to the organization, the public and the function of authority, rather than personal attachment or political parties. Such emphasis embodies the classical Weberian bureaucratic values: be neutral and predictable, removed from political preference, but execute policies in order to serve the public good (cf. de Graaf, 2010). Nevertheless, according to the Dutch respondents, loyalty is not seen as “unquestioned obedience” (p. 286) to political authorities, but rather in terms of remaining loyal to the same target as one’s superiors. This requires two-way loyalty, of the organization towards the civil servant, and vice-versa. The Dutch respondents also showed confidence in terms of freely discussing any issues with their bosses, and they felt that their opinions may have an influence on policy making. Additionally, Dutch civil servants felt strong loyalty towards society and public values, a role defined by De Graaf as “society’s neutral servants” (2010, p. 296).

These result bring us to our first finding:

**Finding 1:** Chinese civil servants view loyalty as political, hierarchical and personal loyalty; whereas Dutch civil servants emphasize loyalty to the organization, colleagues and their commitment to society.

The results for people-orientedness reveal different definitions of ‘people’ and limits to the notion of a ‘common interest’. Chinese civil servants viewed people-orientedness as a political term, not being a main concern of work-focused administrators. The priority of this value is thus lower in practice because of, again, the higher importance of orders from superiors due to interest community composed their bosses. In Chinese traditional culture, the reliance on personal networks in social life and in terms of power and resource distribution, “by the
principle of respecting the superior” and “favoring the intimate” (Hwang, 1999, p. 167), determines the prioritization of the group to which a person directly associates over people-orientedness.

Differing from the Chinese respondents’ concern with group interest as it involves the self, Dutch civil servants distinguished their individual clients from ‘the people’ as a whole. They perceived people-orientedness more as responsiveness and serviceability to the citizens or customers for whom they are responsible. This fits the “outward-oriented, social[ly] responsive, and citizen and customer-friendly public management styles” common in the Western context (Van der Wal et al., p. 476). Public interest is therefore not only the common interest of the group/public, but also the potential conflict of interest between smaller groups and the wider public (cf. Bozeman, 2007).

Both Chinese and Dutch civil servants explained why it is difficult to be people-oriented in practice by indicating conflict with the values of efficiency and equality, and a primary concern that differs depending on function. In this sense, people-orientedness can be seen as closely connected to the notions of compromise and balancing interests (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). In short: the different perceptions and prioritizations of people-orientedness empirically support the claim that the common interest of ‘the people’ varies by state or political context, “which may be [the] identical interest of large portions of the public, or compromises of different interests, or some of both” (Redford, 1954, p. 1104).

We summarize our findings concerning people-orientedness as follows:

**Finding 2:** As an ideal type value, Chinese and Dutch civil servants both perceive people-orientedness in terms of achieving the public interest.

**Finding 3:** As a real life value, Chinese civil servants consider people-orientedness less relevant in their daily work; Dutch civil servants find direct clients more important.

Chinese and Dutch respondents’ statements regarding transparency show many similarities as they indicate a low evaluation of its necessity (though a majority of respondents state the value is important) and a high correlation with other values. Both groups differ in two ways: firstly, related to the reason for the low evaluation of transparency and the consequences of transparency in real life; and secondly, to the related values. First, Chinese civil servants attributed the difficulty in being transparent to the involvement of multiple interest groups (individuals); the government is therefore unwilling to be fully open. Dutch civil servants, on the other hand, worried about misuse of governmental information. Secondly, Chinese civil servants assess transparency can bring synergies in terms of corruption prevention, impartiality and accountability. According to Dutch civil servants, however, transparency can cause low efficiency and effectiveness and
violations of secrecy, and thus transparency needs to be balanced with co-values or opposing values such as the will of people, accountability, productivity and effectiveness (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Van der Wal, forthcoming).

The findings demonstrate transparency to be one of the instrumental values – “modes of behavior” (Rokeach, 1974, p. 222) – which nevertheless contains a set of contested relationships with other objects, which are sometimes trade-offs and sometimes synergies (Heald, 2006, p. 59), or both at the same time. For example, letting people know how a government makes a decision, which is also called demonstrating “process values” (p. 63), can achieve a greater understanding of government processes among the people; but disclosure of the whole process and all information runs the risk of being misread or of leading to dissatisfaction among some people. Due to these limitations, Heald (2006) claims that transparency “should not be elevated to an intrinsic value” (p. 70).

Based on the results, we formulate the following findings:

Finding 4: Both Chinese and Dutch civil servants evaluate transparency as being of high importance but low necessity, considering its problematic correlation with other values such as efficiency, accountability and incorruptibility.

Finding 5: Perceptions and prioritizations of transparency among Chinese and Dutch civil servants are more similar than they are different.

Regarding effectiveness and efficiency, the results reveal the largest similarities between both groups. One third of the statements from the Chinese respondents and almost half of the statements from the Dutch respondents view effectiveness as superior to efficiency. This echoes the claim, in opposition to NPM, that governments should pursue more than just efficiency to deliver good public services and public goods. The second largest category of responses reflect civil servants’ reluctance to choose between effectiveness and efficiency, based on their perception that it is “a balance” or “it depends”. This line of reasoning harks back to the question raised a Dutch interviewee: “is a result an outcome or an output?” Outcome would mean a real realization of targets, while output is the objective product or service. To evaluate these two different kinds of result, civil servants also need to think about doing the right thing, which refers to a conflict between “governing good” – integrity, democracy and legitimacy – and “governing well” – effectiveness and efficiency (De Graaf & Van der Wal, 2010, p. 625).

The findings on effectiveness and efficiency are therefore described as follows:
Finding 6: Both Chinese and Dutch civil servants prioritize effectiveness over efficiency, regarding the pursuit of these values as more important in terms of the ‘ends’ of government, rather than in terms of process values as a ‘means’ of government.

Finding 7: The perceptions and prioritizations of effectiveness/efficiency among Chinese and Dutch civil servants show more similarities than differences.

Overall, to answer the research question, the perceptions and prioritizations of loyalty, people-orientedness, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency presented in this study demonstrate intriguing differences between Chinese and Dutch civil servants. However, the devil is in the detail. On the one hand, we find cultural or traditional influences on how civil servants perceive values, as well as institutional and functional reasons for how and why these values are (or are not) important in their daily lives. On the other hand, the extent of differences in terms of perceptions and prioritizations varies from value to value, indicating that the meaning of some values (e.g., loyalty) is more dependent on culture or context than others (e.g., efficiency and effectiveness).

Implications and future study

This study contributes to scholarly debates on civil servant values and administrative practice in at least four ways. First of all, it enriches the concept – in terms of denotation and connotation – of the values of loyalty, people-orientedness, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency.

Additionally, the findings in this study reinforce the sentiment that values may conflict with one another, particularly in the daily life of civil servants (cf. De Graaf, Lawton, & Van der Wal, 2011). Such conflicts can be caused when civil servants have to cope with their relationship with a superior or political leader, with the outside environment and with citizens (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). This study adds acknowledgement, and contribute to the future study, on what potential conflicts and ethical dilemmas that civil servants could encounter, particularly regarding to loyalty, people-orientedness, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency. For civil servants, with awareness of value and interest conflicts, they can prepare better in advance by prioritizing certain moral principles.

This study also has practical implications for establishing codes of conduct and managing ethics in the public sector. As Kaptein, Huberts, Avelino & Lasthuizen (2005) have stated, “the first step in managing ethics is to establish a code of conduct” (p. 301). The findings in this study serve as a reminder of the importance of implementing a code of conduct, which specifies what the values
mean rather than simply enumerating them. For instance, loyalty should be
addressed clearly with objects that civil servants should be loyal to, and the code
of conduct should offer input in terms of prioritization when conflicts with other
values occur. For instance, should a civil servant execute the order of a superior
if he/she feels that it violates the organizational interest or goes against his/her
personal morals? Is it loyal to pursue what is best for the organization but not for
citizens? Is doing the best for the public a superior goal than doing the best for
the political party? In order to provide guidelines on such questions, managers
should have a clear view of their ethical environment, by conducting an ethical
review among civil servants in order to find out how they perceive and prioritize
ethical values (cf. Kaptein et al., 2005, pp. 306-307). Additionally, since
“managers and professionals in public organizations are confronted with various
‘wicked’ impossible situations” (van der Wal & van Hout, 2009, p. 226), civil
servant codes of conduct should include no “univocal set of moral values” (Pesch,
2008, as cited in van der Wal & van Hout, 2009, p. 223) but take into account
contextual differences. Consequently, in integrating organizational culture and
goals, attempts should be made to clarify value priorities as much as possible in
codes of conduct.

Finally, both Dutch and Chinese respondents in this study evaluated
transparency, effectiveness and efficiency as means rather than aims of public
service, and both groups also demonstrated more similarities regarding these
values than loyalty and people-orientedness. This brings us to the issue of
whether we can classify civil servant values as instrumental-terminal values or
moral-teleological values (cf. Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994). Can we claim that
instrumental or teleological values as means embrace little difference, while
terminal or moral values are perceived variously because they convey
distinguishable beliefs, ideas and cultures? Put differently, are “traditional or ‘old’
values” (Kernaghan, 2000, p. 95) more culturally distinct than “new” values
“arising from new approaches to organizing and managing public organizations,
including approaches based on private sector experience” (p. 91), which are
more similar due to the worldwide spread of NPM or global revolution of
public management (Kett 2005)? Answering this question may produce
criteria for classifying public values more effectively (cf. Rutgers, 2008).

As a concluding comment, our results show that administrative tradition
may still have explanatory power for different value preferences (Yang & van der
Wal, 2014). Confucian thought overwhelmingly dominates the Chinese
administrative tradition, while the doctrine of governance “according to fixed
and predictable rules” (Hood, 2006, p. 5) is practiced in the Western rule-
governed tradition.52

52 Hood (2006, p. 5) also correctly mentions the doctrine of Chinese Legalism as one the
“the oldest ideas” of the rule of law. Nevertheless, Chinese Legalism was abandoned after
the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), and Confucianism became the orthodox doctrine and official
References


government ideology for the following more than two millennia. As Yao (2000) says, “since then, right up until the beginning of the twentieth century, Confucian scholar-officials were influential in laying down the basis for government” (p. 5).


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