

**Chinese Cultural Values and International Human Rights:
How to Conduct Empirical Human Rights Fieldwork in China**

Sanna Eriksson

2009/2010

Professor Tom Zwart

Utrecht University

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to conduct empirical human rights research at a local level in China. It draws upon the receptor approach, which is a novel approach to human rights, attempting to go beyond the universalism-relativism divide in the discussion on human rights and local culture. This paper discusses previous suggestions on how to move beyond the divide and suggests the receptor approach as a new means to transcend it. This research is based on fieldwork conducted in Shanghai. The methods used are free listing, cultural consensus analysis and vignette methodology. The paper discusses the advantages and drawbacks of these methods in human rights research in China, as well as the challenges empirical human rights research encounters at local level in China. This approach attempts uncover local traditional values that would be receptive of international human rights norms. This paper draws on the idea that human rights can be implemented successfully at a local level only when human rights norms can be grounded in local values. The focus here is on Confucian values and how these can be connected to human rights.

Key words: China, human rights, empirical research, Confucianism, free listing, vignette methodology, cultural consensus analysis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank

*my supervisor Professor Tom Zwart for all his time, engagement and encouragement,
the Project Coordinator of the Receptor Approach, Mimi Zou, for her constructive
comments and all the logistical help,
Professor Ian Gow and Ms Katy Gow for hosting me in Shanghai, and for all the help they
provided in conducting the interviews,
Stephen Gow for all the support throughout this year,
my parents, Elina and Lasse Eriksson, for care and support,
as well as all the anonymous respondents in Shanghai for participating in this research
and thus making it possible in the first place.*

NOTE

The *pinyin* transliteration system is used for Chinese terms and names throughout. East Asian names are presented in the form surname/first name, as in Xia Yong. Only when the authors themselves use a Westernised form of their names, or when they have a Western first name, is the reverse order used, as in Joseph Chan.

ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Cultural Consensus Analysis
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 The Receptor Research Project.....	1
1.2 Research Questions and Research Goals.....	3
1.2.1 <i>Research Questions</i>	3
1.2.2 <i>Research Goals</i>	4
1.3 Methods of Data Collection and Data Analysis	5
2 CONCEPTUALISING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A RECEPTOR APPROACH IN CHINA	7
2.1 Conceptualising Culture and Rights	8
2.2 Universalism, Relativism, and the Asian Values Debate	11
2.3 Addressing the Dichotomy Through Cross-Cultural Dialogue	13
2.4 Discussions on Chinese Culture and Human Rights	18
2.5 A New Way Forward: The Receptor Approach	23
3 CONDUCTING FIELD RESEARCH IN CHINA	27
3.1 On-Site Research in Shanghai	27
3.2 Selection of Interviewees Through Snowballing.....	28
3.3 Socioeconomic Background of the Interviewees	31
3.4 Exposure to the West.....	32
3.5 Choice of Language in the Interviews.....	34
3.6 Impact of the Interviewer on the Research.....	36
3.7 Development of the Interviews.....	38
4 METHODOLOGY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE	41
4.1 Free Listing.....	41
4.2 Cultural Consensus Analysis	43
4.3 Vignette Methodology	45
4.4 What Was Asked and Why.....	48
4.5 Suggestions for Future Research Using Free Listing, CA, and Vignettes.....	53
5 ANALYSING RESEARCH RESULTS	56
5.1 The Answers: Main Themes and Prospective Results.....	57
5.1.1 <i>Values: Traditionally Confucian?</i>	57
5.1.2 <i>Confucian Duties?</i>	59
5.1.3 <i>'Rights Consciousness' Among the Urban Youth</i>	62
5.1.4 <i>Free Listing Responses: A Cultural Domain?</i>	64
5.1.5 <i>Values in Vignette Responses Potentially Receptive to Human Rights</i>	65
5.2 Human Rights and Chinese Values Revisited in the Light of Empirical Research... 67	
5.3 Specific Cases: Individual Attitudes towards Human Rights and Personal History . 75	
5.3.1 <i>Personal Values Combined with Histories</i>	76
5.3.2 <i>Factors Affecting Individual Views</i>	81
6 CONCLUSIONS	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	90

ANNEXES	100
Annex I: Free Listing Questions.....	100
Annex II: Vignettes.....	101
Annex III: Human Rights Statements.....	104
Annex IV: Newspaper Cases for Vignettes	113
Annex V: Comparison of Prevalent Values.....	124
Annex VI: Prevalent Duties and Rights	125
Annex VII: Occupational and Educational Background of Respondents	126