

China and the united states compared: rising and declining superpowers essay exam...

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



In the World Values Survey by Gert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars, China and the other Asian nations have very different cultures and political systems from the U. S., Canada and Britain and in many ways they are almost mirror images or exact-opposites. China is a traditionalist, authoritarian, and collectivist society, with Confucian values, while the U. S. is democratic, individualistic, diverse and pluralistic, with many different cultures and religions (Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner 2010). China is a very ancient civilization with a history, language and culture dating back at least 5, 000 years, while the U. S. is an infant in comparison, having begun as thirteen British colonies in the 17th Century and existing as an independent country only since 1776. Compared to China, the U. S. industrialized very early, starting in the 18th and 19th Centuries, while the Chinese economy mostly was agricultural and feudal until well into the 20th Centuries. Both countries have had revolutions, but the American Revolution moved the country in a liberal-democratic direction, while the Chinese Revolution of 1949 was Communist and established a highly authoritarian state based on one-party rule that continues up to the present. In the last thirty years, China has been urbanizing and industrializing very rapidly, and whether the creation of a new working class and middle class in the cities will eventually lead to a more democratic system remains to be seen. Certainly China is bound to become the largest economy in the world at some point in the 21st Century, while the U. S. has been losing many of its older industries and gradually slipping into economic and demographic decline. In the end, China may well be the world's leading superpower by 2050 or 2100.

In China's traditional, conservative, collectivist and authoritarian society, power is organized along very hierarchical and authoritarian lines, where managers and leaders expect to be obeyed and their subordinates are required to be deferential. There has never been any concept of equal rights and equal protections under the law for all citizens. Certainly the U. S. has a ruling class of wealthy persons, capitalists, managers and bureaucrats, just like any Western country, and these groups have most of the political power, but culturally it is still more individualistic and less deferential than China. Success in America is always measured in terms of competition and individual effort and achievement, while China places far more emphasis on the groups and the team. Law and regulations in the U. S. are generally formal and written, based on contracts, while in China they are informal, based on each person understanding his or her duties and 'place' in the hierarchy, which is always based on age and status (Workman 2008). In a country like China, power is simply a 'given' and understood immediately by every person and groups, while in the U. S. it is more subject to conflict, controversy and public disagreements, which often play out in the courts and legislative bodies. In China on the other hand, almost all of this takes place behind closed doors while maintaining a public face or order and harmony. This is not to say that there have been no conflicts, uprisings and civil wars in Chinese history, for there have been many, but the usual result is that new elites replaces the old 'dynasty'. As in every Confucian country, public shame, disgrace, humiliation and loss of 'face' is one of the worst fates any person or groups can suffer, far more so than in a more egalitarian and individualistic culture like that of the United States (Workman 2008). Of

course, with urbanization and industrialization, particularly among younger people, this traditional Chinese culture is undergoing strains and significant changes, probably in a more individualistic direction.

Since the 1960s, the U. S. has been changing demographically in ways that China never has, and by 2050 will probably become a 'majority-minority' country thanks to the new immigrants. In addition, the white population is aging, especially with the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation, which is creating social tensions across ethnic and age lines. Elderly people are still the most likely to vote, which means they will do everything possible to preserve the social programs that benefit them, even at the expense of education and other government spending that benefits other demographic groups, and the conflicts have become especially severe in the latest recession. This is already occurring in California, Arizona and Texas, due to Asian and Hispanic immigration, and means that the U. S. will no longer be a country dominated socially, politically and culturally by whites (Edwards et al Chapter 5).

This leads to the question of whether the U. S. is in economic and demographic decline compared to China, and whether (or how quickly) it will be surpassed as the world's leading superpower. China's trade, industry and economic and political influence is expanding rapidly, even in areas like Africa and Latin America that were once considered exclusive 'dominions' of the U. S. or European powers. In the future, the world is simply not going to look like it did in 1900 or even 1960, and the position of the Western imperial powers will not be so all-powerful. Even America's economic model of free market/laissez faire capitalism no longer looks as appealing as it did in the

1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the ‘ end of history’ was supposedly at hand. This turned out to be completely false, of course, but China still has many problems of its own, such as corruption, uneven social and economic development between the coastal regions and the interior, and an authoritarian political system and culture that may actually be hindering change and innovation. Yet as an ancient culture and civilization, with traditions that are highly respected in Asia, its influence in the world will certainly continue to expand while that of the U. S. decreases. In comparison, the U. S. and the West in general really do seem stuck in an era of stagnation, high unemployment and relative decline, while China continues to grow very rapidly.

WORKS CITED

Edwards, George C. et al. Government in America: People, Politics and Policy, 12th Edition. Pearson, 2010.

Trompenaars, F. and C. Hamden-Turner. Riding the Waves of Innovation: Harnessing the Power of Global Culture to Drive Creativity and Growth. McGraw-Hill, 2010.

Workman, D. Trade Culture Dimensions: Distinct Cultural Values, Attitudes and Trade Behavior, 2008.