

## A Cross-Cultural Study of Crime Judgment

The current research addressed three possible mechanisms through which culture shapes individuals' crime judgments: beliefs about punishment functions (i.e., individuals' motives in punishing), endorsement of moral foundations (i.e., individuals' beliefs about what is morally right or wrong) and cognitive styles (i.e., individuals' modes of thought and their social-cognitive tendencies). In two studies, the cultural effects on crime judgments were examined in four different ways: cultural priming, cross-ethnic comparisons, cross-country comparisons, and individual differences. In Study 1, bicultural Asian American ( $N=213$ ) and European American ( $N=118$ ) college students underwent cultural priming, performed computer-based cognitive tasks, read legal violation scenarios, and completed various surveys and questionnaires. Study 2 directly compared American college students ( $N=331$ ) from Study 1 to Chinese ( $N=295$ ) college students in China. In addition, individual differences were examined using a measure of cultural orientations.

Results revealed both cross-cultural similarities and differences in crime judgments. On the one hand, there was no cultural difference in crime judgments related to the deterrence function of punishment and those related to the modern moral foundations (i.e., harm and fairness) across cultural groups. On the other hand, culture influenced individuals' crime judgments related to the retribution function of punishment and those related to the traditional moral foundations (i.e., ingroup, authority). Specifically, first, consistent with my hypothesis, retribution was a greater concern for European Americans than for East Asian Americans in their crime judgments. Contrary to my hypothesis, however, retribution influenced Chinese people's crime judgments

more than it did Americans'. In addition, moderated-mediation analysis showed that country differences in crime judgments were explained by country differences in beliefs about the retribution function, especially when no mitigating circumstance was present.

Second, culture influenced individuals' crime judgments related to the "ingroup" moral foundation. As hypothesized, Chinese held stronger negative attitudes toward the criminal if the victim was an ingroup member. American people, however, reacted more negatively if the victim was a stranger. The individual-differences approach also confirmed the above findings in that the interdependent self-construal was related to more negative attitudes toward crimes related to the "ingroup" moral foundation. In addition, as shown by moderated-mediation analysis, individual differences in crime judgments were explained by individual differences in endorsement of the "ingroup" moral foundations, especially when the crime involved an ingroup member.

Finally, culture also influenced individuals' crime judgments related to the "authority" moral foundation. Supporting my hypothesis, Chinese held stronger negative attitudes toward the criminal if the victim was an authority figure. Americans, however, reacted more negatively if the victim was a person sharing a similar social status. In addition, as shown by moderated-mediation analysis, country differences in crime judgments related to the authority moral foundation were explained by the country differences in the ripple effect (a measure of social-cognitive style), especially when the crime involved an authority figure.

Findings of the current research provide a complex picture of the relationship between culture and crime judgments and have implications for future cross-cultural studies of crime judgments.