Original Article

Comparative Political Studies
2024, Vol. 0(0) 1–40
© The Author(s) 2024
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/00104140241283007
journals.sagepub.com/home/cps

Gender and Political Compliance Under Authoritarian Rule

Yingjie Fan[1], Jennifer Pan[2], and Tongtong Zhang[3]

Abstract

When autocrats do not impose explicit rules of behavior on their subjects, what does political compliance look like? Existing research suggests that such conditions generate uncertainty, leading risk-adverse individuals to self-censor in an effort to minimize the risk of punishment. In this paper, we find that women and men differ in how they express political compliance under conditions of uncertainty. Focusing on Confucius Institute teachers who are given broad objectives but no specific rules of political behavior, we use interviews, a global survey, and an experiment to show that women express compliance by increasing uncensored discussions to persuade host country students toward the Chinese regime's point of view. In contrast, men comply by vociferously defending the party line and censoring further discussions. These gendered strategies of political compliance are rooted in the differing gender socialization experiences of men and women, who face divergent expectations on how they should interact with others.

Keywords

gender, political compliance, Confucius institutes, China, interviews, survey experiment

[1]Department of Politics, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA
[2]Department of Communication, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA
[3]Department of Government, American University, Washington, DC, USA

Corresponding Author:
Tongtong Zhang, Department of Government, American University, 3590 Nebraska Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA.
Email: ttzhang@american.edu

Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article.

Introduction

Whether and how people living under authoritarian rule comply with the dictates of the regime is a central question to the study of authoritarian politics (Haber, 2007; O'Brien & Li, 2006; Scott, 1990; Svolik, 2012; Wedeen, 1998; Yurchak, 2003).[1] While authoritarian regimes sometimes try to obtain compliance by imposing explicit behavioral dictates (e.g., say this, do not discuss that), other times, they do not specify what people can or cannot do. Instead, autocrats prescribe broad principles and objectives to try to obtain voluntary compliance, leaving it up to people to decide how they should behave (Link, 2002; Stern & O'Brien, 2012a; Zhao & Sun, 2007). Existing research suggests that in the absence of behavioral dictates, ambiguity over what people can do and say under authoritarian rule—and importantly, what behaviors will lead to punishment—generates uncertainty (Kim, 2022) that in turn produces self-censorship in the form of not expressing any opinion (Greitens & Truex, 2020; Link, 2002; Stern & Hassid, 2012).

However, in this ambiguous environment, there are instances where remaining silent does not minimize the risk of punishment. In this paper, we find that socialization, in particular gender socialization, shapes political behavior under such circumstances.[2] This finding aligns with the fact that from childhood, women and men face divergent social expectations on how they should interact with others (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2019; Clayton & Zetterberg, 2021; Tong, 2003). While men are generally encouraged to be assertive in interpersonal interactions, women are generally expected to be agreeable and interact with others as equals (Adams et al., 2023; Eagly, 1987; Feng et al., 2024; Gneezy et al., 2009; Lawless, 2015; Wolak, 2020). Studies show that when individuals behave in a manner that is congruent with social norms associated with their gender roles, they are more likely to be accepted and liked by others in their community (Barnes & O'Brien, 2018; Clayton et al., 2020; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Wood & Eagly, 2012). When behavior is not explicitly dictated by some authority, research in business and social psychology find that gender-based socialization experiences drive women and men to habitually act in ways that conform to the gender stereotypes of their culture of origin (Bauer, 2015; Buss & Perry, 1992; Collins et al., 2014; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Similarly, our findings show that under authoritarian rule, women and men differ in how they behave because they are conforming to gender stereotypes when the regime does not give explicit instructions for behavior and when remaining silent is not viable.

We focus on the behavior of agents of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—Confucius Institute (CI) teachers—who are tasked with the broad objectives of "defending China's national interests" and "creating a positive image of China in host countries," but not told how they should achieve such goals as they teach Chinese language and culture around the world. CI

teachers are a substantively and theoretically important population. Substantively, CIs have been the subject of policy debates about whether CI teachers are spreading CCP censorship and propaganda. Theoretically, by examining a group that works outside of China's borders, which are not subject to day-to-day monitoring by the CCP, we can better understand the reach and limits of authoritarian compliance.

Using qualitative methods, we find that the Chinese government sets broad objectives without prescribing behavior to regulate CI teachers. Using a survey experiment conducted among 284 CI teachers located in more than 70 countries, we find that these broad objectives prescribed by the CCP regime lead men to assert CCP doctrine and censor subsequent discussion of politically contentious topics. In contrast, these same objectives lead women to increase open discussions of politically contentious topics. Evidence suggests that these divergent behaviors stem from differences in gender socialization because the behavior of women, but not men, is driven by a desire to minimize interpersonal conflict. In addition, women explain that being agreeable, willing to communicate, and persuading others to accept the CCP's position through open dialogue allows them to better achieve the CCP's goals, while men say that they can better realize the CCP's goals by strongly asserting the regime's position and suppressing opposition viewpoints. These results suggest that the divergent behaviors exhibited by women and men both represent political compliance. Strikingly, the behavioral divergence we observe is limited to gender, and not observed for other individual-level characteristics such as age, education, CCP membership, or geographical location.

This paper contributes to the study of authoritarian politics by showing that gender should be taken seriously in the study of political behavior in authoritarian contexts.[3] Gender socialization shapes political compliance and affects censorship. Prevailing understandings of political compliance under authoritarian rule do not account for gender and expect conformity to look the same for everyone—that all risk-averse subjects would self-censor on contentious topics when autocrats do not impose explicit behavior dictates. Findings of this study show that not all individuals self-censor to mitigate risks associated with uncertainty, and moreover that behaviors to demonstrate conformity diverge between women and men.

Finally, the study has real-world implications for policies related to Confucius Institutes, which have grown in the past two decades to become the world's largest government-funded culture and language promotion program. With 476 CIs in universities and 1154 Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools in over 150 countries, Confucius Institutes have surpassed the size and reach than older, more established language and culture promotion programs such as Alliance Française and Goethe-Institut.[4] Since their establishment, Confucius Institutes have faced accusations of being vehicles

for CCP propaganda (Hartig, 2015; Hoover, 2018; Senate, 2019) and CI teachers have been criticized for suppressing contentious political topics in the classroom (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2018; Hartig, 2015; Hoover, 2018; Peterson, 2017; Redden, 2018; Sahlins, 2018; Senate, 2019). This study challenges these views. First, although we examine the political behavior of CI teachers, we find no evidence that their primary role involves political work. Instead, our results suggest that their training and classroom activities focus mainly on teaching Chinese language and culture. Second, we show that not all CI teachers censor discussions of contentious political issues. Women CI teachers tend to allow for open discussion of these topics, though with the goal of promoting the Chinese regime's viewpoints.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the literature on political compliance in authoritarian settings and discuss the potential role of gender. Then, we introduce our qualitative methods and provide details about the experimental design. The next section shows how the Chinese regime uses broad objectives rather than specific rules to regulate the political behavior of Confucius Institute teachers. We then present the experimental results and finally, discuss the implications of this research.

Theory

A growing body of research has emphasized the role of voluntary compliance in securing political control (Black, 2008; Link, 2002; Stern & Hassid, 2012; Wedeen, 1998; Zhao & Sun, 2007). Research on political compliance has traditionally focused on behavioral dictates that explicitly specify how subjects are to behave and what punishments and rewards would be meted out for deviance and obedience, respectively (Dahl, 1961; Davenport, 2007; Schumpeter, 1962; Svolik, 2012; Wintrobe, 1998). However, the research on voluntary compliance argues that authoritarian rulers can obtain compliance by prescribing broad principles and objectives and creating ambiguity around what actions are permissible and what would lead to punishment. The argument is that autocrats prefer subjects to comply of their own accord because it reduces the cost of monitoring and places the burden on individuals to determine what actions conform to the autocrat's interests (Ang, 2016; Kim, 2022). Importantly, ambiguity gives autocrats ad hoc discretion over whether certain behaviors should be punished and the severity of punishment. This discretion relies on the autocrat's coercive capacity and generates substantial uncertainty over the possibility of punishment (Kim, 2022; Link, 2002; Stern & O'Brien, 2012b).

Prior research contends that for most, this uncertainty amplifies the threat of state coercion and pushes people to self-censor out of fear that saying or doing something increases the chance of punishment (Greitens & Truex,

2020; Link, 2002; Stern & Hassid, 2012). For example, Chinese citizens working overseas will self censor when they encounter politically sensitive topics that are censored within China because they have little experience dealing with such topics and hence have difficulty judging what are acceptable responses that will minimize risk (Greitens & Truex, 2020). In this way, Stern and Hassid (2012) suggests that given the deep-rooted uncertainty under ambiguous rules, the default response to any political controversy in an authoritarian context is self-censorship “for all but the most optimistic risk takers” (p. 1230).

Yet, ambiguity and uncertainty may not always lead to self-censorship because in some social and institutional contexts, self-censorship does not minimize risk. For example, for agents of an authoritarian regime tasked by the regime to promote certain narratives and viewpoints—e.g., this may be the case at times for public school teachers, street-level bureaucrats, and those who work for state-media or propaganda outlets—keeping silent in the face of controversy may represent non-compliance. In such contexts, we still expect individuals to minimize risk but instead of self-censoring or engaging in one type of behavior, we expect men and women to engage in different behaviors influenced by their socialization.

With gender socialization, the expectation is that men and women minimize risk of regime punishment by behaving in ways that conform to social norms associated with their gender roles. It is important to note that both men and women are, on average, risk-averse and would prefer choices that are less likely to cause harm or loss for them (Alvarez, 1998; Carlsson et al., 2005; Chetty, 2006; Mebane, 2000; Schubert et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2014). Therefore, we expect that, on average, women and men will both exhibit political conformity under conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty in authoritarian contexts. However, because women and men are socialized differently, how women conform will differ from how men conform. Numerous studies have shown that gender is a key dimension that shapes an individual’s socialization experiences and in turn their political behavior (Brulé & Gaikwad, 2021; Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2021; Fox & Lawless, 2014; Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006; Sapiro, 1981; Tong, 2003; Verba et al., 1997). While these studies largely investigate the role of gender in democratic contexts,[5] they have focused on gendered behavior in patrilineal cultures, which characterizes most authoritarian societies (Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021; Wang & Dai, 2013).

Gendered socialization can affect political behavior through role congruity (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). In patrilineal societies, women are generally expected to show communal characteristics when engaging with others such as being agreeable, nurturing, and focused on building consensus in domains of disagreement (Clayton & Anderson-Nilsson, 2019; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014; McClurg et al., 2013;

Prillaman, 2021). In contrast, men are expected to show agentic characteristics such as being assertive, forceful, and focused on taking the lead in social interactions (Bakan, 1966; Costa Jr., Terracciano and McCrae, 2001; Eagly, 1987; Feingold, 1994; Lynn & Martin, 1997; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2008).[6] Studies in social and political psychology find that both men and women experience prejudice from others when they assume a social role that is incongruent with the socially expected attributes and behaviors of their gender (Biddle, 1979; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Johnson et al., 2008; Sarbin, 1968). The role congruity theory implies that the more an individual behaves in line with the social expectations of their gender role, the less objection and resistance they will experience from others when pursuing their goals in social interactions (Costa, 2021; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Holman et al., 2011).

In democratic contexts, research shows that role congruity leads to divergent behavior between men and women in their political and social engagement (Funk, 2020; Karpowitz et al., 2012; Rae Atkeson & Rapoport, 2003). Because women face a stronger social expectation to be agreeable, women on average have a greater desire to avoid conflicts with others and to minimize assertiveness in comparison to men (Hansen, 1997; Schneider et al., 2016; Testa et al., 2014; Ulbig & Funk, 1999; Wolak, 2020). Also, since men are more likely to be socially encouraged to take the lead when engaging with others, studies show that men and women politicians adopt different strategies when faced with political disagreement with others in democratic contexts: while women prefer to communicate with their counterparts as equals, men prefer to dominate the conversation (Kathlene, 1995; Lawless, 2015; Sapiro, 1983; Weikart et al., 2007). This is because in patrilineal societies, men are socialized to perceive talking as a way to exert control and enhance status, but women are socialized to perceive talking as a way of cultivating harmony and mutual understanding (Cross & Madson, 1997; Holmes, 2013; Tannen, 2012; Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2018; Ye & Palomares, 2013). Because of these gender-based socialization experiences, women and men are also found to respond differently when faced with the same stimuli (e.g., same policy) from democratic authorities (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2020; Deckman & Cassese, 2021; Gottlieb et al., 2018; Inglehart & Norris, 2000; Palmer & Peterson, 2020; Skocpol, 1992; Smothers et al., 2020).

Since patrilineal culture is found in authoritarian countries across Asia, Middle East, and Africa (Glas et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2009; Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021), it is not a stretch to imagine that role congruity leads women and men to behave differently in authoritarian regimes. Studies in political and social psychology show that when there are no explicit rules of behavior imposed by an authority, women and men habitually act in ways that are consistent with the gender stereotypes in their culture of origin because they are socialized to believe that such behaviors are less likely to invite objection

or prejudice from others (Bauer, 2015; Buss & Perry, 1992; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Walters et al., 1998; Wood & Eagly, 2012). In this way, when autocrats set broad objectives rather than specific rules, role congruity predicts that men and women would adopt behaviors consistent with the social expectations of their gender roles—assertive for men, agreeable and communicative for women—to minimize resistance from others and be more effective in achieving the objectives of the regime.

There are three important scope conditions for this gender-based divergence in political compliance, which we have touched on: (1) patrilineal society, (2) the absence of explicit behavioral dictates, and (3) public-facing positions. First, the gendered socialization patterns we describe are a characteristic of patrilineal society. Second, the phenomenon we describe rests on there being ambiguity rather than explicit behavioral dictates, such that people have to decide for themselves how to behave. Third, this phenomenon is relevant in contexts where staying silent may increase rather than decrease risk. Specifically, these are public-facing positions where one is expected to speak. Examples include being a teacher, a representative of government or state-owned firms, or a street-level bureaucrat that directly interacts with citizens. In other situations and contexts where staying silent is an option for minimizing risk, such as expressing one's personal opinions on social media, we may not observe the same behavioral patterns.

An implication of these scope conditions is that regime type is not a necessary condition for gendered political compliance and that the extent to which we would observe this phenomenon in any regime depends on the presence of these three scope conditions. While the focus of this paper is on authoritarian settings and while the phenomenon we observe may be more likely found in authoritarian settings—where ambiguous behavioral dictates may be more common—the gendered divergence in compliance we observe could also be present in specific contexts in democracies—e.g., among teachers who teach abroad for other government-funded language and cultural programs. Furthermore, these gendered patterns of political compliance—assertive for men, communicative for women—may not apply to all autocracies. When and how women engage in politics is tied to the culture they live in. The patriarchal culture that forcefully deters women from political discussion may be stronger in some authoritarian countries than others (de Vries & Majlaton, 2021; Pratt, 2020).

Empirical Approach

We secured approval from our university IRB for all qualitative and quantitative aspects of this research. We obtained consent from all participants, and

no personally identifying information was collected. For a more in-depth discussion of ethical considerations, see Appendix A.1.

We focus on Confucius Institute teachers in this study because they are a substantively and theoretically important population who work in public facing roles. Confucius Institutes are substantively important because they are one of the most controversial aspects of the CCP's global activities, accused of spreading CCP censorship and propaganda;[7] however, there are few empirical studies of what happens in Confucius Institute classrooms. Theoretically, studying CI teachers, who are operating outside of China's border, and hence the immediate geographic control of the Chinese state, allows us to understand the limits and reach of authoritarian control.

Qualitative Methods

We use qualitative methods to determine whether the Chinese government sets broad objectives without prescribing behavior to regulate CI teachers. Over a five-month period in 2018, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 current and former CI teachers based in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia, teaching students from kindergarten to college in the host countries. We reached interviewees through snowball sampling. The interviewees' tenure with Confucius Institutes ranged from 10 months to three years (the maximum allowed). The interviewed teachers came from different regions of China, and ranged in age from 23 to nearly 50. Before joining CI, some were college students, others elementary school teachers, and still others university professors. We also interviewed two host-country directors, one Chinese director, and two CI administrators. For each interviewee, we spent several meetings building rapport before conducting the actual interview. All interviews were conducted in Chinese in private, one-on-one settings.[8]

We also collected CI teacher training and evaluation materials including curriculum, training handouts, slides, internal policy documents, and teacher evaluation forms from 14 CI teachers working in Asia, Africa, and North America. We observed two training sessions held by Confucius Institutes in the US—one aimed at the US and Chinese directors, and another aimed at training non-CI Chinese language teachers. Finally, we went through publicly available CI policy regulations and completed, but did not submit, the initial, online application for becoming a CI teacher.[9]

Survey Experiment

We also conduct a survey experiment that assesses the effects of political ambiguity and socialization on political compliance. The survey and experiment, including all the treatments and outcome measures, were preregistered with EGAP (now on OSF). The pre-analysis plan (PAP) focused on measuring how political and social factors influenced teachers' behavior. The pre-analysis plan did not include a theory or formal hypothesis that there would be major differences in political behavior between genders and instead included gender as one dimension out of 14 that was specified for subgroup analyses.[10] The PAP emphasized that one of the primary functions of the study was discovery given limited prior research.

Sample. The survey experiment was conducted in 2019. We recruited respondents by asking CI directors and teachers to distribute the survey in the US. Outside of the US, we recruited respondents through snowball sampling, starting with local CI teachers. All survey questions were presented in Chinese (only) to consenting respondents. A total of 284 respondents, including current and former CI teachers from more than 70 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, North America, and South America, completed the survey.[11] The largest share of respondents come from the US (50 teachers), followed by Australia (22 teachers) and Brazil (21 teachers). 165 identify as women and 119 identify as men.[12] The mean age is 34, and ranges from 23 to 69. The majority (79%) of respondents are younger than 40 (see Figure 1). Roughly

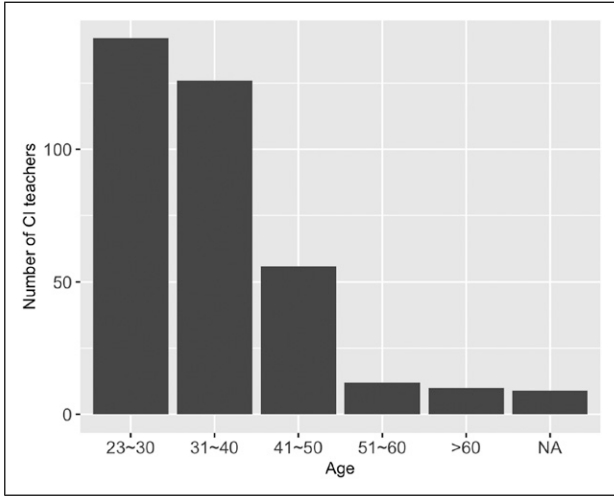

Figure 1. Age distribution of survey respondents.

half of respondents (48%) are CCP members, and most respondents are highly educated: 61% have a master's or doctoral degree and another 34% have a bachelor's degree. 97% of respondents primarily teach Chinese language and traditional culture while overseas and 48% had full-time teaching experience, ranging from a few months to over 10 years, prior to joining CI.

According to the Chinese government, over 40,000 CI teachers are working globally each year.[13] To minimize political bias in sample selection, we inform all participants that their responses are confidential and will only be used for academic research. While we do not know how representative our sample is of the population of CI teachers,[14] our sample exhibits characteristics—highly educated, relatively young, more women than men—that we expect of CI teachers based on our interviews and in-person observation at CI training sessions. For full descriptive statistics of our sample, see Appendix A.3.

Treatments. A survey experiment (outlined in Figure 2) was embedded at the end of the survey. Respondents are randomized into one of three treatment conditions. The first treatment condition (T1) primes respondents to think about the objectives prescribed by the CCP without providing any detailed guidelines of behavior (Objectives Prime) by stating:

> People conducting official business overseas should adhere to the disciplinary principles of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) when interacting with foreigners (因公出国人员在对外交往中应遵守中国国家纪律).

In our pre-testing,[15] we found that this prime made CI teachers think of the CCP's political objectives, such as "defend China's interests but be flexible in how you execute this goal (维护国家利益，但具体的做法要灵活)" and

Figure 2. Flow of survey experiment.

"create a positive image of China in the host country and reduce local people's misunderstanding against China (树立祖国的良好形象, 消除当地民众对中国的误解)," not any behavioral instructions from the CCP, or any rewards or sanctions that the CCP declare would tie to a specific behavior.[16] To ensure respondents read this treatment prime, they are immediately asked to write down one or two reasons why they think it would be important to adhere to the disciplinary principles of the CCP after they see the prime.

The second treatment condition (T2) primes respondents to think about avoiding social friction (Social Prime) in order to test the relevance of social expectation in shaping political behavior without any mention of the CCP or Chinese government. This condition states:

> In daily work and social interactions, people should avoid friction and conflict with others who have different points of view (在工作和生活中, 人们应避免和自己观点不同的人发生摩擦或冲突).

Here, we prime respondents to think about the social expectation of being agreeable and non-confrontational with others—an expectation women would, on average, be more willing to follow than men based on role congruity and gender socialization. In other words, the Social Prime would have different effects on the response of women versus men CI teachers given gender socialization. Again, we ask respondents in this treatment condition to write down one or two reasons why they think it would be important to avoid conflicts in their daily social interactions to ensure they read the prime.

The last condition, which serves as the control, shows respondents a neutral statement that reads:

> People may encounter different scenarios in life and at work (在工作和生活中, 人们会遇到各种情景).

We do not ask respondents in the control group to write any reflections on this statement.

The two treatment conditions allow us to assess whether the effects of political ambiguity on behavior work through socialization. The Objectives Prime assesses whether government objectives shape political behavior. The Social Prime assesses whether social dynamics shape political behavior. If gender socialization shapes political compliance when authoritarian regimes do not issue explicit dictates for behavior, we should observe significant heterogeneous effects by gender in both treatment conditions. If we only observed such effects in the Objectives Prime but not the Social Prime, then socialization may not be the mechanism through which government objectives affect behavior by gender. If we only observe significant heterogeneous effects in Social Prime but not in the Objectives Prime, then it would provide

support for the argument that socialization alone drives gender-based political behavior, not any action of the regime. In other words, if there is no gender heterogeneity in the effect of the Objectives Prime, then there is no gender difference in compliance to the regime.

Vignettes. As shown in Figure 2, after respondents read and reflect on the priming statement, they are shown vignettes that describe a hypothetical CI teacher encountering a political question about Taiwan sovereignty. The issue of whether Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China or an independent country is a topic that CIs reportedly censor (Peterson, 2017; Sahlins, 2015). Within China, state propaganda makes clear that Taiwan is part of the PRC. Outside of China, however, Taiwan is often presented on par with the PRC, and many people see Taiwan as an independent country because the CCP is not the ruling party in Taiwan.

These vignettes were designed to simulate real-world teaching scenarios where CI teachers encounter contentious political topics. Interviews with CI teachers revealed that political questions are not a daily or frequent occurrence in their overseas teaching. However, when such questions did arise, teachers reported that queries about Taiwan's sovereignty were more common than other political topics. These discussions typically surfaced during lessons on Chinese geography or while comparing traditional and simplified Chinese characters, occurring with both students and colleagues in the host country.[17] After drafting these vignettes, we sought feedback from CI teachers to ensure their realism. In the survey, we also asked all respondents whether the scenario described in each vignette could realistically occur during their overseas teaching. Over 80% of respondents said "yes" for each of the three vignettes. Among this 80%, 90% indicated that such scenarios occurred occasionally, while the remaining 10% reported that they happened frequently.[18]

The three vignettes are (differences in bold):

V1 "In-class student" vignette: "Suppose there is a CI teacher, called Teacher Liu, in your Confucius Institute who teaches classes **independently** in the local high school. One day, Teacher Liu is **teaching Chinese geography in class.** When **Teacher Liu mentions Taiwan,** a student asks: 'Teacher Liu, aren't Taiwan and China two independent countries?'"

V2a "Private student conversation" vignette: "Suppose there is a CI teacher, called Teacher Liu, in your Confucius Institute who teaches classes in the local high school. One day, Teacher Liu is **chatting with a local student in his/her class after school about Chinese characters.** When **it is mentioned in passing that Taiwanese people use traditional Chinese characters**, the student asks, 'Teacher Liu, aren't Taiwan and China two independent countries?'"

V2b "Private colleague conversation" vignette: "Suppose there is a CI teacher, called Teacher Wang, in your Confucius Institute. One day, Teacher Wang is **chatting with a local teacher that he/she works with after school about Chinese characters.** When **it is mentioned in passing that Taiwanese people use traditional Chinese characters**, the local teacher says, 'Aren't Taiwan and China two independent countries?'"

Liu and Wang are gender-neutral surnames in Chinese. We include vignettes in a private setting because CI teachers may stop classroom discussion of Taiwan's sovereignty not because they want to defend the CCP's claims but simply because it is not part of their lesson plan, and this concern might have a greater effect in the Objectives Prime condition, which could make respondents more attuned to their role as a teacher. We include a vignette where the conversation counterpart is an adult colleague rather than a student because the teacher-student relationship is one of unequal power and influence, and CI teachers may avoid discussing politics simply because they do not think a student is mature enough to handle the conversation or fully understand the issue. For each treatment group, 50% of respondents are randomly assigned to V1, and the remaining 50% of respondents in the same treatment group read V2a and V2b in randomized order.

Outcome Measures. After respondents read a vignette, they are asked to assume the role of the hypothetical CI teacher in the vignette and choose one from a set of randomly ordered, multiple-choice behavioral responses that include self-censoring on the issue, asserting the position of the PRC, stating different positions on the issue, and allowing for open discussion (see Appendix A.4). All these responses are those the CI teachers we interviewed said they had used to answer political questions from their students and colleagues. If respondents choose a response where they do not express any view on the Taiwan issue and prevent students and/or colleagues from further expressing their views, we code this as "self-censor." If teachers choose a response where they state that Taiwan is part of the PRC but prevent students and/or colleagues from further expressing their views, we code this as "one-sided." If teachers choose a response where they introduce the PRC's position and Taiwan's position on the issue but do not let students and/or colleagues respond or further express their views, we code this as "two-sided." If teachers choose a response where they allow an open exchange of views on the Taiwan issue with students and/or colleagues, we code this as "open discussion." All four outcome measures are dummy variables that take on the value of 1 if true, and 0 otherwise.

Because the same behavior can represent compliance in one context and resistance in another when rules are ambiguous, we determine whether CI

teachers are exhibiting political compliance by asking respondents to explain their rationale for the multiple choice response. Specifically, after respondents select a multiple-choice response to the vignette, we display the vignette and their response and ask them two open-ended questions. The first question asks them to state in 1–2 sentences why they selected their chosen response. The second question asks respondents to assume that the CI teacher in the vignette chose to openly discuss the Taiwan issue in that setting and then asks respondents to state in 1–2 sentences what consequence they think such open discussion may bring to the teacher.

Preference Falsification and Demand Effects. Respondents might engage in preference falsification and lie in response to the vignette. We use several approaches to assess the potential impact of preference falsification. First, we display a message to half of respondents, randomly selected, in each treatment group that their answers are anonymous and confidential before they read the treatment or control statement ("Anonymity reminder" in Figure 2). If all respondents report truthful preferences, we would expect no difference, on average, in the responses between CI teachers who get the anonymity reminder and those who do not. Second, we compare the responses between CI teachers in the US, whom we recruited through CI directors and hence are more likely to falsify preferences, versus teachers outside of the US. If preference falsification is not at work, we would expect no significant difference in responses between these two groups in the control condition. Third, if any treatment condition may generate fear or preference falsification, it would be the Objectives Prime by reminding CI teachers of the CCP authority. An observable implication of such fear is dropping out of the survey after encountering the treatment. Therefore, if there is no such fear, we should see no difference in attrition rates between treatment and control groups after respondents read the primes.

One may also be concerned that because the Objectives Prime mentions CCP authority, this treatment could lead respondents to feel that their teaching behavior is being monitored and evaluated in the experiment, causing them to respond insincerely in order to meet the experimenter's expectations. To address this demand effect, we show respondents a placebo vignette at the end of the survey experiment. The placebo vignette describes a hypothetical CI teacher encountering a non-political question ("whether high school students in China are allowed to date freely") from a host-country student or colleague. These vignettes use the same three settings as those used for the Taiwan sovereignty topic.[19] After reading each vignette, respondents are asked how they would respond if they were the CI teacher in the vignette, and are provided with the same multiple-choice outcomes described above. The CCP has no regulations related to dating in high school; thus, if CI teachers answer sincerely without thinking what the experimenter hopes to find for the Objectives Prime, we should see no effect of the Objectives Prime on responses to

this placebo topic. If there is a demand effect, we should observe that the Objectives Prime has the same effect on the political and placebo topics.

Political Control Through Ambiguity

Confucius Institutes, at the time of this study, was run and primarily funded by Hanban,[20] an agency of China's Ministry of Education. CIs around the world are established through agreements between a host-country university and a Chinese university. Each CI is led by a host-country director selected by the host university, who is often a faculty member in China Studies from the university and can speak fluent Chinese, and a Chinese director selected by Hanban (Gallagher, 2021).[21] Hanban acted on behalf of the Chinese government to recruit, train, and evaluate CI teachers as well as the Chinese directors of overseas CIs. Chinese directors, who are also responsible for reporting teachers' performance to Hanban, normally interact most with teachers while they are abroad.[22] Existing works on Confucius Institutes—from academic research to policy briefings to media reporting—largely hold the view that the Chinese government explicitly dictates how CI teachers should behave on political topics, including what they must say and censor, and rewards and sanctions teachers based on their political behavior (Brady, 2008; Hubbert, 2019; Ngamsang & Walsh, 2013; Peterson, 2017; Rawnsley, 2012; Sahlins, 2015; Wood, 2018).

Based on interviews, analysis of CI application and training materials, observation of CI training sessions, and review of monitoring and evaluation documents, we find no evidence that the Chinese government is providing explicit rules to dictate the political behavior of CI teachers. Instead, teachers are instructed to comply with a set of broad objectives.

Selection

We find no evidence that CI teachers are explicitly selected or placed for their political behaviors or beliefs. In the initial online application, there are no questions about how applicants would respond to political debates or how they would discuss political topics. None of the 25 CI teachers we interviewed recall any questions pertaining to their political orientation in the written test or the interview that follow the online application. Instead, interviews with these CI teachers suggest that the selection and placement decisions for them are based on their foreign language skills, teaching and academic credentials, and teachers' own interests.

However, the application process can exclude applicants who have an official record in mainland China of engaging in political dissent and prioritize those with stronger affiliations with the CCP. Specifically, the online application collects applicants' national ID number, political affiliation, and

requires applicants to verify that they "have never joined any illegal organizations and will not participate in any activities that harm China's national interests."[23] Furthermore, all applicants must be affiliated with a government-approved school in mainland China (either as a graduate student at a university or as a current teacher at a primary or secondary school or university) and their affiliated school must verify (审核) the applicant's information and recommend (择优推荐) their application to Hanban.[24] The national ID requirement means that all applicants are PRC nationals and background checks on them that would reveal criminal activity—including political dissent, which is criminalized, and participation in religious and social organizations outlawed by the CCP—can be run.

Political affiliation includes CCP membership as well as membership in other political organizations. While CCP membership is not required for becoming a CI teacher, CCP membership is highly correlated with academic merit and work performance in China due to the selection process for CCP members (Li et al., 2007; Walder, 1995; Xie & Zhang, 2017). This means that selection of CI teachers based on merit—having a Bachelor's degree, being proficient in at least one foreign language, being recommended by their affiliated school—makes CI teachers more likely to be CCP members.[25] Those who are CCP members have more ideological training and monitoring than the general population. Altogether, these factors mean that even if CI teachers are not explicitly selected for their political behavior, those who are selected to be CI teachers may have stronger formal and ideological affiliations with the CCP than the general Chinese population. The selection of CI teachers differs from "equal opportunity" hiring practices in countries such as the U.S. For more details about CI's recruitment process, see Appendix A.2.

Training

All CI teachers complete a training program (usually for a month) organized by Hanban in China before they start their overseas assignment.[26] The training focuses on Chinese cultural practices (e.g., how to write calligraphy, how to perform traditional Chinese dance) and strategies for effective teaching (e.g., using hands-on activities instead of lectures, how to prepare students for the HSK Chinese Proficiency Test). Teachers are also instructed on the basics of living outside of China—for example, what to do if you are robbed overseas, how to administer first aid, and how to deal with loneliness and homesickness.[27]

The only portion of the 30-day training that pertains to politics is one three-hour-long lecture. Slides of this lecture show that it instructs CI teachers to avoid being recruited by foreign intelligence agencies such as the FBI and CIA and to adhere to the laws, regulations, and customs of the host country, since CI teachers are conducting official business abroad (因公出国人员). During

this lecture, teachers are instructed to comply with a series of "disciplinary principles for foreign affairs" (外事纪律). These principles delineate three objectives that CI teachers should pursue during their overseas assignment, but how teachers should pursue these goals behaviorally is not specified.

The first objective is that CI teachers should defend China's interests and claims on politically contentious topics. The training slides state that "CI teachers should voluntarily defend China's national interests (自觉维护国家利益) on traditional sovereignty issues such as Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and South China Sea, as well as on emerging sovereignty issues like digital information controls and currency controls," and introduce CI teachers to China's main policy documents on these political issues.[28] Importantly, the training slides emphasize to CI teachers that "when defending China's interests and claims, you should be flexible and choose actions that are reasonable and effective" (在维护国家的利益主张时, 具体做法要灵活机动, 有理有力有节). The second objective prescribed to CI teachers is that they should create a positive and peace-loving image of China in their host countries. The training slides instruct CI teachers to "use your special status to promote a positive and healthy image of China to the world" (积极健康向上的中国形象), "avoid doing anything that will hurt the national dignity or your personal integrity," and "change host-country people's misunderstanding and mistrust against China." The third and last objective emphasized is that CI teachers should contribute to the realization of the "China Dream" (中国梦), a campaign initiated under the rule of Xi Jinping to pursue "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."[29]

Trainings do not provide teachers with specific instructions on what behaviors support or violate these objectives (e.g., there is no instruction on "censor topic X"). However, Hanban does threaten punishment for deviating from "disciplinary principles" (i.e., objectives). Although CI teachers are rarely punished for political reasons,[30] training materials explicitly say that teachers who "violate disciplinary principles for foreign affairs and are a bad influence" (违反外事纪律并造成恶劣影响者) may have their contracts terminated, called back to China, and in cases of serious violations, be punished by relevant regulations of the Chinese government. What constitutes "a bad influence" is also not specified, but it implies that the CCP regime has the discretion on a case-by-case basis to punish deviations from the regime's "disciplinary principles" and more importantly, that this threat of punishment is credible. CI teachers we interviewed agreed that the trainings emphasized objectives, rather than specific behaviors. One interviewed teacher said:

> Hanban didn't teach what to say specifically when facing questions like Taiwan and Tibet. It just gave us big principles like "Don't hurt the image of China." When working abroad, we have to explore by ourselves how exactly to handle political topics.

Because the topic of Confucius Institutes is contentious in countries like the United States and Australia, a potential concern is that CI teachers in our study report no prescription of behavior out of social desirability considerations or preference falsification. A second potential concern is that CI teachers who have been sanctioned for a specific behavior are excluded from our study. We alleviate these concerns by checking and corroborating interviews with evidence from internal CI documents (e.g., teacher training slides and evaluation forms), public documents (e.g., Hanban's policy documents and initial application form of CI teachers), as well as our own in-person observation of CI training sessions. While we cannot completely rule out social desirability effects in our study, the various pieces of evidence we obtained all suggest that the CCP regime is not enforcing political compliance by prescribing specific behaviors. Instead, the regime is enforcing compliance by prescribing objectives (the so-called "disciplinary principles") and making it ambiguous what behavior is and is not compliant with these objectives.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Rewards

If the Chinese government issued behavioral dictates to CI teachers, we would expect CI teachers' behavior to be monitored. However, when abroad, the Chinese government exerts little direct control over the actions of CI teachers and is, for the most part, unable to closely monitor, and hence reward or punish, what teachers do inside or outside the classroom. Although teacher evaluations can influence teachers' material compensation and future job opportunities, these evaluations do not include teachers' compliance with specific political behaviors.

When abroad, oversight of CI teachers is infrequent. Usually once a semester, the Chinese director of the CI will sit in on a CI teacher's class, occasionally along with visiting groups from China or other CIs. Formal evaluations occur once or twice a year, as determined by the Chinese director and the host country director at the CI. These evaluations include the submission of a work summary by the teacher and sample teaching materials the teacher thinks best represent their work. Some CIs also require evaluations from the host-country school. Based on these materials, the Chinese director of each CI submits reports about each teacher's performance to Hanban via an online system. When teachers leave CIs, they receive a final evaluation from Hanban, which has three tiers: "excellent," "qualified," and "unqualified." The final evaluation is based on a work summary written by the teacher and standardized forms completed by their CI directors and head of host-country schools. Negative evaluations can affect teacher income and future job prospects for teaching Chinese as a second language or pursuing a graduate degree in China.[31] None of the CI teachers we interviewed chose to work for the Chinese government after their overseas assignment. Instead, they mostly

work for private firms, pursue graduate study abroad, or resume their teaching jobs in elementary and middle schools in China.

Based on copies of teacher work summaries and Hanban teacher evaluation forms, we find that the focus of the evaluations is *not* on political behavior but on CI teachers' effectiveness in teaching language and culture, their research on teaching Chinese as a second language, and their contributions to cultural events organized by their CI (e.g., a Chinese New Year Gala). Three questions in the Hanban evaluation form pertain to adherence to rules and regulations, including whether the teacher has violated the rules and guidelines in CI regulatory documents, requirements of the host-country school, and host-country laws.[32]

Our review of CI regulatory documents mentioned in the first question—"Hanban regulatory measures of teachers sent abroad" (孔子学院总部/国家汉办国家公派出国教师管理办法) and "Matters that need attention for overseas volunteers" (志愿者出国注意事项)—[33] shows that these regulations focus on administrative matters such as teaching load, leaves of absence, and travel between China and the host country. No rules or guidelines in these documents dictate specific political behaviors for teachers or specific responses to political topics while abroad.

Gendered Expressions of Political Conformity

In the experiment, respondent characteristics—e.g., gender, age, CCP membership and education level—are balanced across treatment groups (see Appendix A.5.1). Respondents' open-ended reflection of the treatment primes confirms that respondents interpret the primes as we intended: CI teachers receiving the Objectives Prime were thinking of the objectives and outcomes prescribed by the CCP regime; Teachers receiving the Social Prime were thinking of the social expectation of minimizing friction and conflict with others.[34]

We do not find evidence of preference falsification. First, there is no statistically significant difference in responses between CI teachers who received the anonymity reminder and teachers who did not, no matter which outcome measure is used (self-censor, one-sided, two-sided, or open discussion). Second, when we compare the responses between CI teachers in the US, who were recruited through CI directors and thus were more likely to falsify preferences, versus teachers outside of the US, there is no significant difference in responses in the control condition, regardless which of the four outcome measures is used. Third, we found no statistically significant difference in attrition rates between treatment conditions after respondents read the primes, nor did we observe any significant difference in attrition between the treatment and control groups after respondents read the primes and the first

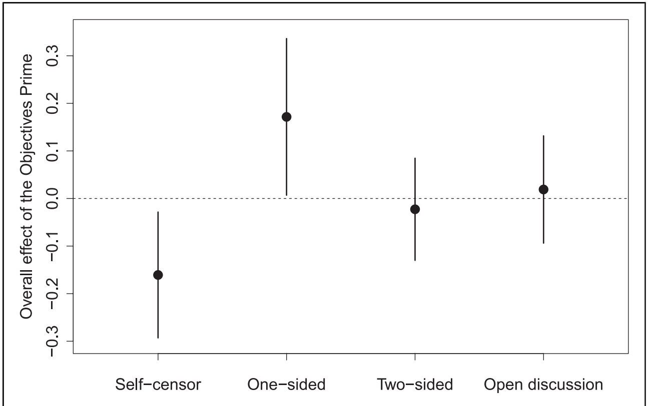

Figure 3. Overall effect of objectives prime.

vignette on Taiwan's sovereignty. For details of these checks, see Tables A3–A5 in Appendix.

Overall Effects

Figure 3 presents the overall effect of the Objectives Prime on the reported behavior of CI teachers (self-censorship, one-sided position-taking, two-sided position introduction, and open discussion).[35] Respondents are, on average, less likely to self-censor and more likely to engage in one-sided position-taking. Compared to the control group where self-censorship is 36%, CI teachers exposed to the Objectives Prime are 16 percentage points less likely to self-censor. In contrast, in the control group, 37% of respondents chose to assert the CCP position that Taiwan is part of PRC and censor further discussion (one-sided position-taking), and exposure to the Objectives Prime increases this behavior by 17 percentage points.

Gendered Political Behavior

However, these overall effects mask substantively important differences by gender. We examine effect heterogeneity by 14 covariates[36] and estimate the difference in treatment effects between subgroups, accounting for multiple comparisons using Benjamini-Hochberg correction, Holm correction, and Bonferroni correction. Statistically significant differences by gender withstand all three methods of correction, and no significant differences are observed in any other subgroup comparison (see Appendix A.6.6).[37]

Honing in on gender, Figure 4 presents the effects of the Objectives Prime for men and women CI teachers.[38]The figure shows that in response to the

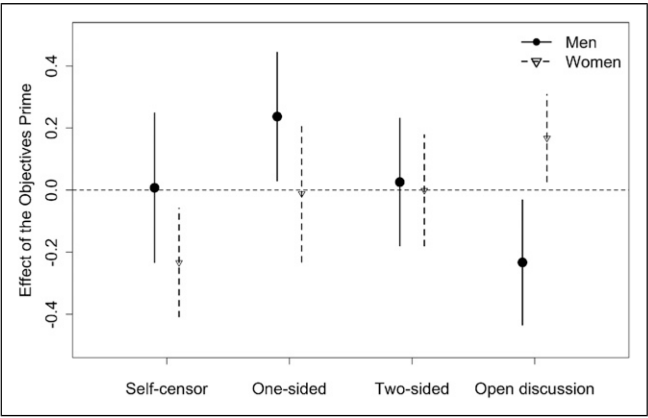

Figure 4. Effect of objectives prime by gender.

Objectives Prime, women CI teachers decrease self-censorship by 23 percentage points (men do not change their level of self-censorship) and increase open discussion of Taiwan's sovereignty by 17 percentage points. In contrast, men decrease open discussion by 23 percentage points and increase one-sided position-taking by 24 percentage points (women do not exhibit a statistically significant change in one-sided position taking). Due to these divergent effects between genders, in the overall sample, the Objectives Prime on average decrease self-censorship, increase one-sided position-taking, and has no effect on open discussion (see Figure 3).

These heterogeneous effects by gender remain substantively unchanged across the three vignettes in our experiment: in-class student setting, private student conversation setting, and private colleague conversation setting. In other words, the reminder of adhering to regime objectives moves women and men to engage in divergent political behaviors regardless of whether the CI teacher is in a classroom setting or in a private setting, and regardless of whether the person initiating the topic is a student or an adult co-worker; We also conduct the analysis using all the vignettes answered by respondents[39] and find that the heterogeneous effect by gender remains substantively unchanged (see Appendix A.6.3). Additionally, there is no statistically significant difference in these gender-based heterogeneous effects between CCP members versus non-CCP members (see Appendix A.6.2). Within subgroups of men and women, pre-treatment covariates are balanced across treatment conditions (see Appendix A.6.4). We find no evidence that this heterogeneous effect by gender results from imbalance between men and women on any other covariate, such as education or CCP membership, measured in the survey (see Appendix A.6.5).

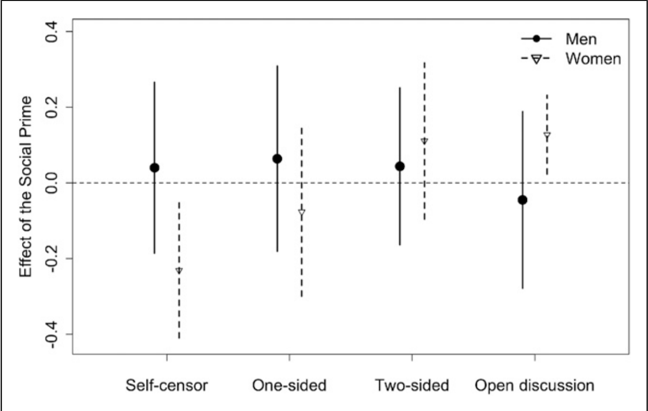

Figure 5. Effect of social prime by gender.

Role of Social Expectation

The Social Prime treatment as well as open-ended responses after the Objectives Prime vignettes provide evidence that the divergent political behavior between genders is related to differences in social expectations. Figure 5 presents the effects of the Social Prime, which reminds respondents of the expectation to avoid interpersonal conflict.[40]

The figure shows that, similar to the Objectives Prime, this treatment decreases self-censorship by 23 percentage points and increases open discussion by 13 percentage points for women. In contrast, the Social Prime has no statistically significant effect on any behavior (including self-censorship and open discussion) among men. This shows that women respondents, in line with social expectations of their gender role, care more about avoiding friction in their social interactions compared to men. Also in contrast to women, men decrease open discussion of Taiwan sovereignty by 5 percentage points when being reminded of reducing social conflicts with others who have different points of view, though this effect is not statistically significant. This suggests, in line with role congruity, that women favor using communication to resolve disagreement with others compared to men. Since the Social Prime has similar effects on women's behavior as the Objectives Prime, this suggests that these social expectations on women—being non-confrontational and agreeable to others—may be driving the effects of the Objectives Prime on women respondents.

When we examine the open-ended responses after the Objectives Prime vignettes, we find further evidence that differences in socialization are driving differences in behavior between men and women. These responses also

suggest that both men and women CI teachers act out of the desire to comply with the CCP regime's objectives.

First, when asked about the rationale for their chosen response to the Taiwan issue, CI teachers' responses show that men and women have divergent understandings of what behavior is effective at pursuing the regime's objectives. For women CI teachers, conformity to the CCP means trying to persuade people to the regime's position through open dialogue and being agreeable. For instance, two women respondents who chose "open discussion" after seeing the Objectives Prime said:

> I think open discussion is the best way to convince students that Taiwan has always been part of China because communication shows mutual respect. It is important to know why students think Taiwan is an independent country first before helping them understand our view.

> Most students asking about Taiwan's sovereignty really don't know the history of mainland China and Taiwan. We could help them get a correct understanding of this issue through open discussion because it means we are sincere and non-confrontational with them.

Men, however, are skeptical that open discussion can persuade host-country people to the position of the CCP regime and instead prefer to strongly assert the CCP's political position without opening up the topic for discussion. Below are two representative quotes from men teachers choosing "one-sided position-taking" after seeing the Objectives Prime:

> We must clearly state that Taiwan is part of China because this is a matter of principle. Teachers need to show authority in front of students, so I don't think we need to discuss this fact with students.

> Open discussion cannot persuade students or change their views. It is better to proclaim the conclusion directly that Taiwan is part of China and tell students to try to understand it by themselves.

These quotes suggest that compared to men shutting down conversations, women's choice of open discussion is a socially more agreeable response because when host-country students or colleagues ask the question about Taiwan's sovereignty, they are hoping for a conversation with the CI teacher. In this context, a non-agreeable, confrontational response would be to shut down that request for a conversation because it conveys the condescending view that "you do not deserve a discussion with me on this topic." We can see this perspective in men's open-ended responses, such as the quote "teachers should show authority in front of students, so I don't think we need to discuss this fact with students." In contrast, an agreeable response would be to be open

and willing to discuss the topic with people who ask for such a discussion. By openly discussing Taiwan, women may run the risk of having to deal with difficult questions, which could affect their working relationship with host-country students and colleagues. However, the findings show that women would rather bear this risk than censor discussion, because opening up for the discussion is a gesture of respect to their students, colleagues, and the norms in the host country.

That said, open-ended responses reveal that women and men attach different levels of risk when it comes to openly discussing the Taiwan issue with host-country students and colleagues. When asked what consequence this open discussion will bring to the hypothetical CI teacher in the vignette, multiple men respondents echo the sentiment in the following quote:

> This is a risky action because the more I talk with host-country people about the Taiwan issue, the more likely they will give bad political labels to me and the Confucius Institute. I do not want to cause such trouble for myself and the Chinese government.

In contrast, women do not see open discussion as risky as men do. Instead, multiple women, but no men, express views in line with the following:

> Open discussion will improve the relationship between Confucius Institute and the host-country community because local students will see teachers of CI as candid, open-minded, and respectful.

This implies that women and men have different understandings of what behavior minimizes their risk of being punished when faced with situations where there is no specific behavioral dictate and where they are tasked with goals that demand political participation.

Alternative Explanations

An alternative explanation for the results we observed is the idea that women engage in open discussion as an act of political resistance against the CCP (by choosing open discussion in the multiple choice section) and falsify their resistance (by explaining their multiple choice answer as compliance in the open-ended responses). We find little evidence of preference falsification among survey participants, but we take this concern seriously and conduct two additional checks to assess its potential impact. First, if women CI teachers are on average more likely to dissent against the CCP than men CI teachers, we would expect that after seeing the CCP Objectives Prime and the vignettes, women would drop out of the survey at a higher rate than men in order to avoid the psychological cost of falsifying their true preference in responses to the

Taiwan issue. However, that is not what we see. There is no statistically significant difference in attrition rate between women and men after they read the treatment prime and the first Taiwan vignette in the overall sample or in the Objectives Prime treatment condition. In the Objectives Prime treatment group, 1 out of 45 men dropped out and 2 out of 55 women dropped out after seeing the prime and the first vignette. Second, we check and confirm that among women respondents, there is no significant difference in any reported behavior (including open discussion) between respondents who receive the anonymity reminder and those who do not (see Table A3 in Appendix). In sum, these results suggest that women CI teachers are responding truthfully when they say they openly discuss the Taiwan issue to comply with the CCP regime.

Another alternative explanation for the results is that they are a reflection of the experimental setting, where women teachers choose to be more socially agreeable (have open discussion) because that is what is expected of them in settings where they are research subjects about their teaching behavior while men teachers do not face that expectation. In other words, there is a gendered experimenter demand effect driving the results. Recent research shows that in general, demands effects are minimal in survey experiments (Mummolo & Peterson, 2019). Nevertheless, we assess the potential impact of demand effects in two ways. First, if women are more willing to choose the socially agreeable answer (open discussion) to satisfy the experimenter, then in the control condition, women should choose open discussion more compared to men. However, in the control group, women are less likely to choose "open discussion" compared to men (see Appendix A.6.1). In addition, if the effects we observe in the main experimental vignette (both treatments increase open discussion among women compared to control) is because the two treatments make women become more aware that their teaching is being evaluated in the experiment and hence have a stronger desire to be seen as agreeable in teaching contexts, women should choose open discussion more in response to the treatments in all teaching topics and circumstances. However, we also do not observe this. We find no effect of the treatments on the probability that women CI teachers openly discuss the placebo topic (high school dating); nor do we observe any significant effect of the treatments on men in the placebo vignettes (see Table A6 in Appendix). These suggest that the gendered results are not likely driven by the experimental setting and demand effects.

Discussion

This paper shows that gender should be taken seriously in the study of authoritarian politics. Authoritarian durability requires that subjects comply. The results of this paper show that gender-based socialization influences political conformity in the case of Confucius Institute teachers. Our findings show that

when autocrats prescribe objectives but do not specify how subjects should behave to pursue these objectives, women and men will diverge in their behavior, and evidence suggests this difference in behavior is related to role congruity—where individuals behave in ways that are congruent with the socially expected attributes of their gender.

These findings have implications for our understanding of political compliance under authoritarian rule. While gender socialization affects political behavior in contexts beyond autocracies, the gendered behavior we find is unique. Previous studies in authoritarian politics have focused on how ambiguity, and accompanying uncertainty over what will incur punishment, would lead to the same, over-corrected behavior—not expressing one's opinions as a form of self censorship—among all individuals except a few who are devoted to political dissent and have high risk tolerance (Greitens & Truex, 2020; Link, 2002; Stern & Hassid, 2012). However, our results show that self-censorship is not the only action taken by individuals who aim to minimize the risk of punishment in an environment of ambiguity. Instead, individuals minimize the risk of punishment by engaging in behaviors shaped by their gender socialization in institutional and social contexts where remaining silent is not viable. We show this to be the case in the context of CI teachers, but similar contexts include domestic school teachers, street-level civil servants, and employees at state-run propaganda outlets, which merit examination for gender-based behavior in future research.

To comply with the regime's objectives, men assert the party line and censor further discussion of Taiwan's sovereignty, whereas women conduct uncensored discussions of this topic. The behavior we observe among men differs from self-censorship because men do not remain silent but exhibit greater willingness to assert the CCP's political position and then stop subsequent discussions of the topic with host-country students and colleagues. In other words, men comply by vociferously defending the CCP regime's interest, which contrasts with self-censorship and also with women's compliance, which is to have open discussion. Altogether, this suggests that gender socialization plays a role in shaping regime agents' political behavior beyond self-censorship.

Another implication of these results is that the divergent behavior of men and women in pursuing the same objective prescribed by those in power may in turn generate different effects on the audience. We do not know whether the discussion-based and persuasion-oriented strategy of women is more or less effective in changing audience views than the assertive and censorship-based strategy of men; however, these vastly divergent strategies may lead to different outcomes. In addition to how audiences are affected, these divergent strategies may also have different effects on CI teachers themselves. It is possible that by engaging in open discussion, women teachers themselves become more open to divergent political viewpoints. These potentially differing outcomes generated by men and women should be examined in future research.

Finally, these findings have policy implications for our understanding of Confucius Institutes. The results show that CIs, as an institution, are not directing their teachers to censor certain political topics in the classroom or parrot the party line; however, teachers do serve as agents of the CCP to pursue three broad goals—defend China's interest, create a positive image of China, and realize the China Dream—and hence, CI teachers may nonetheless engage in behaviors associated with censorship and propaganda when they encounter contentious topics and opposing views.

Acknowledgments

Our thanks to Tiffany Barnes, Daniel Butler, Wendy K. Tam Cho, Amanda Clayton, Guy Grossman, Yue Hou, Xinhui Jiang, Hanzhang Liu, Maria Repnikova, Susan Shirk, and participants at the UCSD workshop of the Empirical Study of Gender Research Network (EGEN), the Asian Politics Online Seminar Series (APOSS), the SPSA Mini-conference on Authoritarian Politics, and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center for helpful comments and suggestions; and to the Knight Foundation and Freeman Spogli Institute for research support.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University for research support.

ORCID iDs

Jennifer Pan https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4818-0122
Tongtong Zhang https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8525-0989

Data Availability Statement

Replication materials and code can be found at Zhang et al. (2024). We also provide an online supplementary appendix that provides additional details of the empirical methods and results.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. There is debate over the role of revolutionary mass mobilization on regime change (Beissinger, 2022; Kendall-Taylor et al., 2020; Svolik, 2012), but even assuming that protest and social mobilization do not always threaten the survival of an autocrat in power, political compliance is generally seen as essential to sustaining autocratic rule. The lack of political compliance makes it very difficult for autocrats to extract rents and can necessitate an expansion of the repressive apparatus, both of which make autocrats vulnerable to elite threats and challengers.
2. Replication materials and code of analyses in this paper can be found at Zhang et al. (2024).
3. Research in authoritarian contexts that take gender into account is limited, exceptions include Donno & Kreft, 2019; Feng et al., 2024; Kang & Tripp, 2018, 2019).
4. See https://bit.ly/3J3XciH (accessed on 1/16/2023). We refer to teachers of both Confucius Institute and Confucius Classroom teachers as Confucius Institute teachers. Alliance Française, founded in 1883, ran 830 institutes in 130 countries (https://bit.ly/384ZGK9, accessed on 1/16/2023); British Council, founded in 1934, ran 218 teaching centers in 111 countries (https://bit.ly/2MJSzQ2, accessed on 1/16/2023); Goethe-Institut, founded in 1951, ran 157 institutes in 98 countries (https://bit.ly/3sJAAsd, accessed on 1/16/2023). Other such programs, which are also smaller in scale, include Portugal's Instituto Camões, Italy's Dante Alighieri Society, and Spain's Instituto Cervantes.
5. Dahlerup and Nordlund (2004) and Tong (2003) are exceptions, and there are a few studies on the role of women in democratic transition (Aviel, 1981; Craske, 2012; Friedman, 1998).
6. There are other ways in which men and women are expected to behave differently. For example, women, who are socialized to a role of being agreeable and gentle, are thus socialized to avoid conflict and risk more compared to men (Byrnes et al., 1999; Costa, 2021; Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Deckman et al., 2020; Eckel & Grossman, 2008; Schubert et al., 1999; Sheffer, 2021).
7. A 2017 report by the National Association of Scholars (NAS) recommended that all universities close their Confucius Institutes (Peterson, 2017). A 2018 US House of Representatives proposal introduced by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) sought to require CIs to register as foreign agents in the United States. A number of US universities, including the University of Chicago, Pennsylvania State University, Texas A&M, and the University of Michigan, have terminated their CIs in recent years.
8. Host-country directors were also interviewed in Chinese as they are faculty members of ethnic Chinese descent focused on China Studies (e.g., Chinese Language and Culture) at the host-country university.
9. See https://www.cief.org.cn/kzxy.

10. After data collection, gender stood out in the subgroup analyses, even after implementing the most stringent multiple testing corrections. We were driven by these empirical results to focus on gender, which we hope future research will continue to build on.
11. As pre-registered, survey participants who finished the survey in less than 5 minutes were screened out. In addition, we do not include respondents who are not CI teachers (e.g., host-country CI directors) and those who are not Chinese nationals.
12. No respondent selected any other gender identity.
13. See https://bit.ly/2YC1Nju.
14. After conducting a comprehensive search and review of publicly accessible data and documents published by Confucius Institutes as well as existing research on Confucius Institutes, we did not find any demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age) of the population of CI teachers. Thus, a representative survey of this population would have to involve collaboration with the Chinese government, which we wanted to avoid to protect the anonymity of our respondents.
15. We pre-tested this prime by asking eight CI teachers—four in the US and the remaining four in Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America, respectively—what they thought of when they read the prime.
16. Note that by reminding CI teachers of the CCP's prescribed goals, the Objectives Prime also reminds teachers that the regime has the power and discretion to punish them on a case-by-case basis if they deviate from these objectives.
17. Taiwan came up more frequently than issues of religious and political freedom in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and other human rights issues in China.
18. 85% of CI teachers report that the scenario described in "in-class student" vignette happened occasionally or frequently during their overseas teaching, 82% answer the same for the "private colleague conversation" vignette, and 81% report the same for the "private student conversation" vignette.
19. An "in-class student" vignette, a "private student conversation" vignette, and a "private colleague conversation" vignette.
20. Hanban was the Office of Chinese Language Council International (国家汉语国际推广领导小组办公室). On July 5, 2020, China's Ministry of Education announced that Confucius Institutes would since be managed under the China International Chinese Language Education Foundation (中国国际中文教育基金会), a charitable civil organization sponsored by the Ministry of Education. See https://bit.ly/3f4ZA6P.
21. Similar to CIs, each Confucius Classrooms also has a host-country director appointed by the host-country school and a Chinese director appointed by Hanban.
22. The relative power between Chinese director versus host-country director varies by host country. While Chinese directors may influence the behavior of CI teachers, it is unlikely that the guidance these directors give to teachers would deviate from the guidance of Hanban because Chinese directors are also trained and evaluated by Hanban.

23. See https://bit.ly/4bKZu1j.
24. See https://bit.ly/43Y9Fg0 and https://bit.ly/444k7mf.
25. The percent of CCP members among CI teachers in our survey (48%) is close to the percent of CCP members among Chinese people who graduate from the top tier Chinese universities (44%). See Li et al. (2012). For details of these top Chinese universities (112 in total), see https://bit.ly/3wjSBF0 and https://bit.ly/3Qn6CID.
26. See "Administrative Regulation on Confucius Institute Chinese Teachers [孔子学院总部/国家汉办国家公派出国教师管理办法]" (https://bit.ly/2Lyq7vk), and "Program description of Confucius Institute Chinese Volunteer Teachers [汉语教师志愿者项目介绍]" (https://bit.ly/2CyaqBu). Among our survey respondents, nearly 75% were trained for one month or more. More experienced teachers had shorter training (see Appendix A.3).
27. Based on the training handouts and slides we collected from CI teachers, the content of the lecture on political topics does not vary substantively by host country or the location of training in China.
28. One example is the white paper on "One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue (《一个中国原则与台湾问题》白皮书)".
29. For details of the China Dream campaign, see Xie (2014).
30. No interviewee mentioned knowing of a case where a CI teacher was punished for his/her political behavior. We checked newspapers and social media posts about CI teachers in Chinese and English, within and outside of mainland China, between January 2010 and February 2020. We found only one related case in Canada, where a CI teacher who was a Falun Gong adherent quit her CI position and claimed refugee status (see https://tgam.ca/37Jo6ru).
31. Hanban pays teachers a fixed salary based on their teaching experience prior to joining the CIs. If teachers are evaluated as "unqualified," they forfeit the bonus at the end of their term, which amounts to one month of their salary. For teachers who wish to apply for a graduate degree after returning to China, they can get 10 bonus points during the graduate school entrance examination but an "unqualified" rating takes away that benefit. Finally, "unqualified" teachers have little chance continuing to work for CI and may have fewer chances teaching Chinese as a second language after they return to China.
32. The host-country director or the Chinese director of the CI is responsible for providing yes/no answers to these three questions of whether rules and guidelines have been violated.
33. For the first regulatory document, see https://bit.ly/3Qo7sDZ; The second document is an internal training material we collected from the interviewed CI teachers.
34. We do not observe gender difference in how teachers understood the words and phrases in the treatment primes. In the Objectives Prime treatment condition, for example, men and women all report thinking about "defending the PRC's interest and image" and "avoiding punishment" after they read the prime.

35. This analysis uses only the first vignette answered by each respondent. All models control for pre-treatment covariates including respondent's age, gender, educational level, CCP membership, years of work experience, current status and seniority at CI, motivations for joining CI, consumption of PRC and host-country media, and their frequency of interactions with host-country colleagues. Robust standard errors are used. Results are based on linear models, but remain substantively unchanged when other parametric models are used. For regression estimates, see Appendix A.6.1.
36. The 14 pre-registered covariates are gender, age group, CCP membership, education level, seniority in CI, teaching experience before CI, frequency of consuming PRC media, frequency of consuming local media, frequency of interacting with host-country teachers, agreeableness, whether perceive the host-country media is friendly to China, whether perceive the host-country community has antagonism toward China, whether perceive CI teachers have a political mission, and the US versus other host countries.
37. Note that we do not find difference in the heterogeneous treatment effect by gender between CCP members and non-CCP members. This provides further support for conformity as non-CCP members are still towing the CCP line despite being outside of the party.
38. The analysis uses only the first vignette answered by each respondent. All models control for pre-treatment covariates including respondent's age, educational level, CCP membership, years of work experience, current status and seniority at CI, motivations for joining CI, consumption of PRC and host-country media, and their frequency of interactions with host-country colleagues. Robust standard errors are used. Results are based on linear models, but remain substantively unchanged when other parametric models are used. For regression estimates, see Appendix A.6.1.
39. Half of respondents in the survey experiment answer two vignettes, the private student conversation vignette and the private colleague conversation vignette, in randomized order.
40. The analysis uses only the first vignette answered by each respondent. All models control for the same pre-treatment covariates as those used in Figure 4 and robust standard errors are used. Results are based on linear models, but remain substantively unchanged when other parametric models are used (see Appendix A.6.1 for regression estimates).

References

Adams, J., Bracken, D., Gidron, N., Horne, W., O'Brien, D. Z., & Senk, K. (2023). Can't we all just get along? How women MPs can ameliorate affective polarization in Western publics. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(1), 318–324. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055422000491

Allen-Ebrahimian, B. (2018). House proposal targets Confucius institutes as foreign agents. *Foreign Policy.*

Alvarez, R. M. (1998). *Information and elections*. University of Michigan Press.

Ang, Y. Y. (2016). *How China escaped the poverty trap*. Cornell University Press.

Aviel, J. A. F. (1981). Political participation of women in Latin America. *The Western Political Quarterly*, *34*(1), 156–173. https://doi.org/10.2307/447897

Bakan, D. (1966). The duality of human existence: An essay on psychology and religion.

Barnes, T. D., & Beaulieu, E. (2019). Women politicians, institutions, and perceptions of corruption. *Comparative Political Studies*, *52*(1), 134–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018774355

Barnes, T. D., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2018). Defending the realm: The appointment of female defense ministers worldwide. *American Journal of Political Science*, *62*(2), 355–368. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12337

Bauer, N. M. (2015). Emotional, sensitive, and unfit for office? Gender stereotype activation and support female candidates. *Political Psychology*, *36*(6), 691–708. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12186

Beissinger, M. (2022). *The revolutionary city: Urbanization and the global transformation of rebellion*. Princeton University Press.

Biddle, B. J. (1979). *Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors*. Academic Press.

Black, J. (2008). Egypt's press: More free, still fettered. *Arab Media and Society*, *4*(1), 1–13. https://www.arabmediasociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/20080114230358_AMS4_Jeff_Black.pdf.

Brady, A.-M. (2008). *Marketing dictatorship: Propaganda and thought work in contemporary China*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Brulé, R., & Gaikwad, N. (2021). Culture, capital, and the political economy gender gap: Evidence from Meghalaya's matrilineal tribes. *The Journal of Politics*, *83*(3), 834–850. https://doi.org/10.1086/711176

Buss, A. H., & Perry, M. (1992). The aggression questionnaire. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *63*(3), 452–459. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.63.3.452

Byrnes, J. P., Miller, D. C., & Schafer, W. D. (1999). Gender differences in risk taking: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *125*(3), 367–383. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.3.367

Carlsson, F., Daruvala, D., & Johansson-Stenman, O. (2005). Are people inequality-averse, or just risk-averse? *Economica*, *72*(287), 375–396. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0013-0427.2005.00421.x

Cassino, D., & Besen-Cassino, Y. (2020). Of masks and men? Gender, sex, and protective measures during COVID-19. *Politics and Gender*, *16*(4), 1052–1062. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x20000616

Chetty, R. (2006). A new method of estimating risk aversion. *The American Economic Review*, *96*(5), 1821–1834. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.96.5.1821

Clayton, A., & Anderson-Nilsson, G. (2019). Gender experiments in comparative politics. Working paper.

Clayton, A., Robinson, A. L., Johnson, M. C., & Muriaas, R. (2020). (How) do voters discriminate against women candidates? Experimental and qualitative evidence from Malawi. *Comparative Political Studies*, *53*(3–4), 601–630. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019858960

Clayton, A., & Zetterberg, P. (2021). Gender and party discipline: Evidence from Africa's emerging party systems. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(3), 869–884. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055421000368

Collins, B. J., Burrus, C. J., & Meyer, R. D. (2014). Gender differences in the impact of leadership styles on subordinate embeddedness and job satisfaction. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *25*(4), 660–671. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.02.003

Costa, M. (2021). He said, she said: The gender double bind in legislator–constituent communication. *Politics and Gender*, *17*(4), 528–551. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x19000862

Costa, P. T. Jr., Terracciano, A., & McCrae, R. R. (2001). Gender differences in personality traits across cultures: Robust and surprising findings. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *81*(2), 322–331. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.2.322

Craske, A. N. (2012). Remasculinisation and the neoliberal state in Latin America. In R. Vicky, & W. Georgina, eds. *Gender, politics and the state* (pp. 110–130). Routledge.

Croson, R., & Gneezy, U. (2009). Gender differences in preferences. *Journal of Economic Literature*, *47*(2), 448–474. https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.47.2.448

Cross, S. E., & Madson, L. (1997). Models of the self: Self-construals and gender. *Psychological Bulletin*, *122*(1), 5–37. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.122.1.5

Dahl, R. A. (1961). *Who governs?: Democracy and power in an American city*. Yale University Press.

Dahlerup, D., & Nordlund, A. T. (2004). Gender quotas: A key to equality? A case study of Iraq and Afghanistan. *European Political Science*, *3*(3), 91–98. https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2004.22

Dassonneville, R., & Kostelka, F. (2021). The cultural sources of the gender gap in voter turnout. *British Journal of Political Science*, *51*(3), 1040–1061. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123419000644

Davenport, C. (2007). State repression and political order. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *10*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.101405.143216

Deckman, M., & Cassese, E. (2021). Gendered nationalism and the 2016 US presidential election: How party, class, and beliefs about masculinity shaped voting behavior. *Politics and Gender*, *17*(2), 277–300. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x19000485

Deckman, M., McDonald, J., Rouse, S., & Kromer, M. (2020). Gen Z, gender, and COVID-19. *Politics and Gender*, *16*(4), 1019–1027. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x20000434

de Vries, M., & Majlaton, M. (2021). The voice of silence: Patterns of digital participation among Palestinian women in East Jerusalem. *Media and Communication*, *9*(4), 309–319. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i4.4391

Donno, D., & Kreft, A.-K. (2019). Authoritarian institutions and women's rights. *Comparative Political Studies*, *52*(5), 720–753. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018797954

Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Psychology Press.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.109.3.573

Eckel, C. C., & Grossman, P. J. (2008). Men, women and risk aversion: Experimental evidence. *Handbook of experimental economics results*, *1*, 1061–1073. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0722(07)00113-8

Feingold, A. (1994). Gender differences in personality: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *116*(3), 429–456. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.429

Feng, X., Hou, Y., & Liu, M. (2024). Underrepresented outperformers: Female legislators in the Chinese congress. *China Quarterly*, *257*(March), 59–74. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741023001157

Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2014). Uncovering the origins of the gender gap in political ambition. *American Political Science Review*, *108*(3), 499–519. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055414000227

Friedman, E. J. (1998). Paradoxes of gendered political opportunity in the Venezuelan transition to democracy. *Latin American Research Review*, *33*(3), 87–135. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0023879100038437

Funk, K. D. (2020). Local responses to a global pandemic: Women mayors lead the way. *Politics and Gender*, *16*(4), 968–974. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x20000410

Gallagher, M. (2021). Corporatist organization in a pluralist setting: The challenges of educational collaboration and exchange with the PRC. Working Paper.

Glas, S., Spierings, N., & Scheepers, P. (2018). Re-understanding religion and support for gender equality in Arab countries. *Gender & Society*, *32*(5), 686–712. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218783670

Gneezy, U., Leonard, K. L., & List, J. A. (2009). Gender differences in competition: Evidence from a matrilineal and a patriarchal society. *Econometrica*, *77*(5), 1637–1664. https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA6690

Gottlieb, J., Grossman, G., & Robinson, A. L. (2018). Do men and women have different policy preferences in Africa? Determinants and implications of gender gaps in policy prioritization. *British Journal of Political Science*, *48*(3), 611–636. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123416000053

Greitens, S. C., & Truex, R. (2020). Repressive experiences among China Scholars: New evidence from survey data. *The China Quarterly*, *242*(June), 349–375. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000365

Guo, X., Zheng, Y., & Yang, L. (2009). Women's participation in village autonomy in China: Evidence from Zhejiang province. *The China Quarterly*, *197*(197), 145–164. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741009000083

Haber, S. (2007). Authoritarian government. In B. Weingast, & D. Wittman (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political economy* (p. 68811). Oxford University Press.

Hansen, S. B. (1997). Talking about politics: Gender and contextual effects on political proselytizing. *The Journal of Politics*, *59*(1), 73–103. https://doi.org/10.2307/2998216

Hartig, F. (2015). Communicating China to the world: Confucius Institutes and China's strategic narratives. *Politics*, *35*(3–4), 245–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12093

Holman, M. R., Merolla, J. L., & Zechmeister, E. J. (2011). Sex, stereotypes, and security: A study of the effects of terrorist threat on assessments of female leadership. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *32*(3), 173–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477x.2011.589283

Holmes, J. (2013). *Women, men and politeness*. Routledge.

Hoover, I. 2018. Chinese influence and American interests: Promoting constructive vigilance.

Hubbert, J. (2019). *China in the world: An anthropology of Confucius Institutes, soft power, and globalization*. University of Hawaii Press.

Huckfeldt, R. R., & Sprague, J. (1995). *Citizens, politics and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. Cambridge University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2000). The developmental theory of the gender gap: Women's and men's voting behavior in global perspective. *International Political Science Review*, *21*(4), 441–463. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512100214007

Iversen, T., & Rosenbluth, F. (2006). The political economy of gender: Explaining cross-national variation in the gender division of labor and the gender voting gap. *American Journal of Political Science*, *50*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00166.x

Johnson, S. K., Murphy, S. E., Zewdie, S., & Reichard, R. J. (2008). The strong, sensitive type: Effects of gender stereotypes and leadership prototypes on the evaluation of male and female leaders. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *106*(1), 39–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2007.12.002

Kang, A. J., & Tripp, A. M. (2018). Coalitions matter: Citizenship, women, and quota adoption in Africa. *Perspectives on Politics*, *16*(1), 73–91. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717002225

Karpowitz, C. F., & Mendelberg, T. (2014). *The silent sex: Gender, deliberation, and institutions*. Princeton University Press.

Karpowitz, C. F., Mendelberg, T., & Shaker, L. (2012). Gender inequality in deliberative participation. *American Political Science Review*, *106*(3), 533–547. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055412000329

Kathlene, L. (1995). Alternative views of crime: Legislative policymaking in gendered terms. *The Journal of Politics*, *57*(3), 696–723. https://doi.org/10.2307/2960189

Kendall-Taylor, A., Frantz, E., & Wright, J. (2020). The digital dictators: How technology strengthens autocracy. *Foreign Affairs*, *99*(March/April), 103. https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/fora99&div=45&id=&page=.

Kim, J. (2022). At your own risk: A model of delegation with ambiguous guidelines. *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*, *2*(4), 483–508. https://doi.org/10.1561/113.00000046

Lawless, J. L. (2015). Female candidates and legislators. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *18*(1), 349–366. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-020614-094613

Li, H., Liu, P. W., Zhang, J., & Ma, N. (2007). Economic returns to communist party membership: Evidence from urban Chinese twins. *The Economic Journal*, *117*(523), 1504–1520. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2007.02092.x

Li, H., Meng, L., Shi, X., & Wu, B. (2012). Does attending elite colleges pay in China? *Journal of Comparative Economics*, *40*(1), 78–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2011.10.001

Link, P. (2002). The anaconda in the chandelier: Chinese censorship today. *New York Review of Books*. April 11.

Lynn, R., & Martin, T. (1997). Gender differences in extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism in 37 nations. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *137*(3), 369–373. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224549709595447

McClurg, S. D., Wade, M. L., & Wright-Phillips, M. V. (2013). He said, she said: Sex, social networks, and voting behavior. *American Politics Research*, *41*(6), 1102–1123. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673x13491489

Mebane, W. R. (2000). Coordination, moderation, and institutional balancing in American presidential and House elections. *American Political Science Review*, *94*(1), 37–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/2586379

Meyers-Levy, J., & Loken, B. (2015). Revisiting gender differences: What we know and what lies ahead. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *25*(1), 129–149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.06.003

Mummolo, J., & Peterson, E. (2019). Demand effects in survey experiments: An empirical assessment. *American Political Science Review*, *113*(2), 517–529. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055418000837

Ngamsang, S., & Walsh, J. (2013). Confucius Institutes as instruments of soft power: Comparison with international rivals. *Journal of Education and Vocational Research*, *4*(10), 302. https://doi.org/10.22610/jevr.v4i10.135

O’Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (2006). *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge University Press.

Palmer, C. L., & Peterson, R. D. (2020). Toxic mask-ulinity: The link between masculine toughness and affective reactions to mask wearing in the COVID-19 era. *Politics and Gender*, *16*(4), 1044–1051. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x20000422

Peterson, R. (2017). *Outsourced to China: Confucius institutes and soft power in American higher education*. National Association of Scholars.

Pratt, N. (2020). Gender and politics in the Middle East 1. In S. Larbi, eds. *Routledge handbook of Middle East politics* (pp. 319–334). Routledge.

Prillaman, S. A. (2021). Strength in numbers: How women's groups close India's political gender gap. *American Journal of Political Science*, *67*(2), 390. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12651

Rae Atkeson, L., & Rapoport, R. B. (2003). The more things change the more they stay the same: Examining gender differences in political attitude expression, 1952–2000. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *67*(4), 495–521. https://doi.org/10.1086/378961

Rawnsley, G. (2012). Approaches to soft power and public diplomacy in China and Taiwan. *Journal of International Communication*, *18*(2), 121–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2012.695744

Redden, E. (2018). *Reported censorship at a Confucius institute*. Inside Higher ED.

Robinson, A. L., & Gottlieb, J. (2021). How to close the gender gap in political participation: Lessons from matrilineal societies in Africa. *British Journal of Political Science*, *51*(1), 68–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123418000650

Sahlins, M. (2018). *Confucius institutes: Academic malware and cold warfare*. Inside Higher ED.

Sahlins, M. D. (2015). *Confucius institutes: Academic malware*. Prickly Paradigm Press.

Sapiro, V. (1981). Research frontier essay: When are interests interesting? The problem of political representation of women. *American Political Science Review*, *75*(3), 701–716. https://doi.org/10.2307/1960962

Sapiro, V. (1983). *The political integration of women: Roles, socialization, and politics*. University of Illinois Press.

Sarbin, T. R. (1968). Role theory. In *Handbook of social psychology*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.

Schmitt, D. P., Realo, A., Voracek, M., & Allik, J. (2008). Why can't a man be more like a woman? Sex differences in Big Five personality traits across 55 cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *94*(1), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.1.168

Schneider, M. C., Holman, M. R., Diekman, A. B., & McAndrew, T. (2016). Power, conflict, and community: How gendered views of political power influence women's political ambition. *Political Psychology*, *37*(4), 515–531. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12268

Schubert, R., Brown, M., Gysler, M., & Brachinger, H. W. (1999). Financial decision-making: Are women really more risk-averse? *The American Economic Review*, *89*(2), 381–385. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.89.2.381

Schumpeter, J. A. (1962). *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy* (3rd ed.). Harper & Brothers.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale university press.

Senate. (2019). Senators portman and carper unveil bipartisan report on Confucius institutes at U.S. Universities and K-12 classrooms. https://bit.ly/31maHnb (Accessed December 18, 2019).
Sheffer, L. (2021). Political accountability, legislator gender, and the status quo bias. *Politics and Gender*, *17*(3), 365–401. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x19000825
Skocpol, T. (1992). *Protecting soldiers and mothers: The political origins of social policy in the United States*. Harvard University Press.
Smothers, H., Burge, R., & Djupe, P. (2020). The gendered religious response to state action on the coronavirus pandemic. *Politics and Gender*, *16*(4), 1063–1074. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x20000306
Stern, R. E., & Hassid, J. (2012). Amplifying silence: Uncertainty and control parables in contemporary China. *Comparative Political Studies*, *45*(10), 1230–1254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414011434295
Stern, R. E., & O'Brien, K. J. (2012a). Politics at the boundary: Mixed signals and the Chinese state. *Modern China*, *38*(2), 174–198. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700411421463
Stern, R. E., & O'Brien, K. J. (2012b). Politics at the boundary: Mixed signals and the Chinese state. *Modern China*, *38*(2), 174–198. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700411421463
Svolik, M. (2012). *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press.
Tannen, D. (2012). *The argument culture: Stopping America's war of words*. Ballantine Books.
Testa, P. F., Hibbing, M. V., & Ritchie, M. (2014). Orientations toward conflict and the conditional effects of political disagreement. *The Journal of Politics*, *76*(3), 770–785. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381614000255
Tong, J. (2003). The gender gap in political culture and participation in China. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *36*(2), 131–150. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x(03)00022-9
Tripp, A. M. (2019). *Seeking legitimacy: Why Arab autocracies adopt women's rights*. Cambridge University Press.
Ulbig, S. G., & Funk, C. L. (1999). Conflict avoidance and political participation. *Political Behavior*, *21*(3), 265–282. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1022087617514
Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and political engagement. *The Journal of Politics*, *59*(4), 1051–1072. https://doi.org/10.2307/2998592
Walder, A. G. (1995). Career mobility and the communist political order. *American Sociological Review*, *60*(3), 309–328. https://doi.org/10.2307/2096416
Walters, A. E., Stuhlmacher, A. F., & Meyer, L. L. (1998). Gender and negotiator competitiveness: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *76*(1), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.1998.2797
Wang, Z., & Dai, W. (2013). Women's participation in rural China's self-governance: Institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural factors in a Jiangsu county. *Governance*, *26*(1), 91–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2012.01605.x

Wedeen, L. (1998). Acting "as if": Symbolic politics and social control in Syria. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *40*(03), 503–523. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417598001388

Weikart, L. A., Chen, G., Williams, D. W., & Hromic, H. (2007). The democratic sex: Gender differences and the exercise of power. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *28*(1), 119–140. https://doi.org/10.1300/j501v28n01_06

Wintrobe, R. (1998). *The political economy of dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press.

Wolak, J. (2020). Conflict avoidance and gender gaps in political engagement. *Political Behavior*, *44*(1), 133–156. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09614-5

Wood, J. T., & Fixmer-Oraiz, N. (2018). *Gendered lives*. Cengage Learning.

Wood, P. (2018). *China's pernicious presence on American campuses*. The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Wood, W., & Eagly, A. H. (2012). Biosocial construction of sex differences and similarities in behavior. In Z. Mark, eds. *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. *46*, pp. 55–123). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-394281-4.00002-7

Xie, G., & Zhang, Y. (2017). Seeking out the party: A study of the communist Party of China's membership recruitment among Chinese college students. *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, *3*(1), 98–134. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057150x16686678

Xie, T. (2014). *Is President Xi Jinping's Chinese dream fantasy or reality?* CNN.

Ye, Z., & Palomares, N. A. (2013). Effects of conversation partners' gender-language consistency on references to emotion, tentative language, and gender salience. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *32*(4), 433–451. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x13494832

Yurchak, A. (2003). Soviet hegemony of form: Everything was forever, until it was no more. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *45*(03), 480–510. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417503000239

Zhang, R., Brennan, T. J., & Lo, A. W. (2014). The origin of risk aversion. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *111*(50), 17777–17782. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1406755111

Zhang, T., Fan, Y., & Pan, J. (2024). Replication data for: Gender and political compliance under authoritarian rule. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/62TBIX

Zhao, Y., & Sun, W. (2007). Public opinion supervision: Possibilities and limits of the media in constraining local officials. In J. P. Elizabeth, & G. Merie, eds. *Grassroots political reform in contemporary China* (pp. 300–326). Harvard University Press.

Author Biographies

Yingjie Fan is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Politics at Princeton University. Her research focuses on political behavior and political economy in China.

Jennifer Pan is a Professor of Communication at Stanford University. Her research resides at the intersection of political communication, authoritarian politics, and digital media.

Tongtong Zhang is an Assistant Professor of Government at American University. Her research examines authoritarian institutions and their effects on political behavior, especially in the context of China.