

# **Knowledge and Beliefs of Ordinary People about Developmental Hierarchies<sup>1</sup>**

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April 9, 2010

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## **Acknowledgement**

This project has benefited from the support of many individuals and organizations. We acknowledge grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Aging through the Michigan Center for the Demography of Aging, the United States Institute of Peace, The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation through the Emory University Center for Myth and Ritual in American Family Life, Eastern Michigan University, the Population Studies Center of the University of Michigan, and the Survey Methodology Program of the University of Michigan. We thank Claudia Stilman for her work in the analysis of the data and in the preparation of the tables, Julie de Jong for data assistance, and Judy Baughn and Jana Bruce for administrative support and preparation of the manuscript. Errors of omission and commission rest with the authors.

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## **Abstract**

Scholars and policy makers have for hundreds of years used developmental hierarchies in thinking about different societies in the world. The hypothesis motivating this paper is that similar thinking about developmental hierarchies has been circulated widely around the world and is currently used by ordinary people in many diverse places. This paper uses data collected from population-based samples in twelve widely diverse countries to examine the extent to which developmental hierarchies are understood in everyday life around the world. We also compare the ways in which ordinary people rate countries on development with the United Nations ratings of the same countries in its Human Development Index (HDI). This permits us to see the extent to which hierarchies viewed by ordinary people overlap with those of the elite. Our research shows that in the twelve countries studied people recognize developmental hierarchies and use them in rating countries. Furthermore, the perceived development hierarchies are quite similar in the twelve settings. The ratings of ordinary people in these twelve settings are very similar to those of the UN HDI, with a substantial fraction of individual respondents rating countries on development very similarly to the ratings of the United Nations. These findings suggest that developmental hierarchies are widely understood around the world. One important implication of this finding is that such models of development are widely available to ordinary people as they make decisions about family, fertility, health, education, migration, politics, and other things.

## INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

This paper uses data gathered from ordinary people in fourteen regional or national data collections in twelve widely diverse countries to examine the extent to which developmental hierarchies are understood in everyday life. In each of these data collections we asked representative samples of individuals to rate several different countries on their levels of development. In this paper we summarize the scores that respondents gave to the various countries rated. We also compare the ways in which ordinary people rate countries on development with how the United Nations rates the same countries in its Human Development Index (HDI). This analysis shows how individuals perceive the international development hierarchy and the extent to which the perceived hierarchy matches that of international elites.

The motivation for this research comes from the understanding that scholars, policy makers, and other elites have for hundreds of years used developmental hierarchies in thinking about different societies. Some of the most important manifestations of the use of hierarchical thinking in rating countries are the centuries-old models of development or modernization which assume that each society progresses along the same developmental trajectory (Harris 1968; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969/1975; Sanderson 1990; Thornton 2001, 2005). Since the rate of development is assumed to vary in such models, at any one time societies are believed to be at different developmental levels, thereby, forming a developmental hierarchy. For centuries, scholars and other elites have located Northwest Europe and the migrant European populations in Australia and North America at the top of this developmental hierarchy, the indigenous peoples of America, Australia, and Africa at the bottom of the hierarchy, and other countries scattered elsewhere along the hierarchy of development.

The United Nations uses this model of development as it divides countries into categories of developed and developing, with a least developed subgroup divided out of the developing society group (United Nations Statistics Division 2009). The United Nations also regularly publishes a Human Development Index (HDI) that numerically rates countries on a scale from low to high development (United Nations Development Program 2007/2008). The World Bank categorizes countries into developing and industrial, while the International Monetary Fund uses a bit different wording in its development categories: the advanced economies; and the emerging and developing economies (World Bank 2010; International Monetary Fund 2009).

For centuries, and continuing to the present, this developmental hierarchy has not been perceived as a static conceptualization but as a dynamic model that describes the trajectory of countries along a developmental trajectory of progress (Harris 1968; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969/1975; Sanderson 1990; Thornton 2001, 2005). In other words, this hierarchy presents a picture of the unfolding of progress from lower to higher levels of development.

Our interest in studying the views of ordinary people concerning developmental hierarchies does not come from a belief that developmental models are useful paradigms for social science research or public policy. We know that developmental hierarchies and the related theories of modernization have been strongly challenged in the social science and policy literature (Amin 1989; Baker 1998; Boas 1940; Bock 1956; Böröcz 2000, Böröcz and Sarkar 2005; Césaire 1972; Chakrabarty 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Hodgen 1964; Jennings 1975; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969/1975; Szreter 1993; Tilly 1984; Wallerstein 1991). We are sympathetic to the critiques of developmentalism and modernization theory and understand that their influence in certain sectors of academia has been diminished. At the same time, we recognize that they continue to have influence in parts of academia and that they influence much

public policy and the language and programs of many international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund. We also believe that they are widespread in everyday life in much of the world.

Especially important is that this worldview of developmental hierarchies is much more than a system for categorizing countries and the trajectory of development and progress (Thornton 2001, 2005). Like other worldviews and systems of belief, it gives both elites and ordinary people models for understanding how the world is organized and operates and how they should act in the world (Geertz 1973; Fricke 1997a, 1997b, and D'Andrade 1984). Such models act as schema or frames in providing meaning and guidance for people to interact with their communities and lead their lives. They also provide frameworks for evaluating both end-goals and the methods for achieving those final goals.

More specifically, by locating the countries of Western Europe and North America at the apex of development, the model specifies that these societies and cultures define what it means to be modern. These societies come to reflect what Mannheim (1936) calls a utopia of liberal humanitarianism which gives people a model of the future to strive for and judge themselves by. Furthermore, the model often allots to societies at the top of the developmental hierarchy a designation and aura of goodness, which provides a measure of moral authority to such countries (Böröcz 2006). In this way many of the elements of society in Western Europe and North America--including government, economies, religion, family life, and human rights are defined as both modern and good (Thornton 2005).

Such views of developmental hierarchies have played prominent roles in international events. These views frame the ways that different groups present their political identities and their strategies in a global environment. European elites have long viewed Western Europe as

more developed than Eastern Europe (Böröcz 2006; Melegh 2006; Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994). Wolff (1994) has argued that this perception of Eastern Europe played an important role in the division of Europe between “east” and “west” following World War II. Böröcz (2000) has suggested that perceptions of this developmental hierarchy played a role in the ways in which countries were considered for admission into the European Union in recent years.

The dynamic nature of the model and the differential placement of countries in the hierarchy of development have also affected the ways in which history has been written (Chakrabarty 2000; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969/1975; Thornton 2005). Scholars have mistakenly assumed that the past state of a currently developed society could be proxied by the current state of a less developed society. Scholars also have assumed that the histories of societies seen as less developed were in some way following the histories of the more developed societies or, if they deviated from that “standard” trajectory, that they were following a “distorted” line.

The dynamic nature of the developmental model also assumes that social change is normal and expected. Furthermore, development and modernization can become individual and societal goals that motivate social change, with all having the capability of progress (Wallerstein 1991). The model thus delegitimizes old ways and legitimizes the new (Wallerstein 1991). The model also shows the direction of change—typically towards Western Europe and North America (Chakrabarty 2000; Wallerstein 1991). In this framework the only difference between societies seen as developed and societies seen as less developed is that the latter are just not developed yet.

The hierarchical model of development also indicates certain mechanisms for people to employ to accomplish further development. More specifically, it indicates that the patterns of

religion, government, family life, economics, and human rights in societies viewed as developed will bring development elsewhere, and they indicate that development will bring certain changes in these dimensions of human life (Thornton 2005).

This model of development and developmental hierarchies has been spread widely among the world's elite. For example, many colonial administrators, revolutionary leaders, feminist advocates, and leaders of family planning movements have relied on developmental models. We mentioned earlier the involvement of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund in promulgating country ratings of development. Similar developmental models are used by numerous other government and nongovernmental organizations around the world (Latham 2000; Meyer et al. 1997; Nisbet 1969/1975).

We also expect that knowledge of such development hierarchies and models have been disseminated widely around the world to ordinary people in everyday life through numerous mechanisms such as colonialism, education, mass media, social movements, foreign aid, and both government and nongovernment programs (Thornton 2005). The acceptance or rejection of developmental hierarchies and the developmental models associated with them have great potential for influencing the behavior of ordinary people, as those who accept such developmental hierarchies and models will behave differently than those who do not. This potential for influencing behavior does not depend on whether the elements of the model, themselves, are true or false, good or bad.

Ethnographic data from Sub-Saharan Africa, China, Egypt, India, Nepal, and New Guinea indicate that at least some ordinary people in everyday life understand developmental hierarchies and use them in their conceptualizations of the world (Abu-Lughod 1998; Ahearn 2001; Amin 1989; Blaut 1993; Caldwell et al. 1988; Dahl and Rabo 1992; Ferguson 1999; Gunaratne 1998,

2001; Justice 1986; Osella and Osella 2006; Pigg 1992, 1996; Wang 1999). Although there are limited survey data from Argentina and Nepal suggesting an understanding of developmental hierarchies in certain settings in these two countries (Binstock and Thornton 2007; Thornton Binstock and Ghimire 2008), such information is very recent and limited to just two countries. This lack of survey evidence from ordinary people concerning their beliefs in developmental hierarchies is important because, as we mentioned earlier, such models are a source of beliefs, values, and motivations that can influence people's decisions and behavior. Without more general survey data, we cannot judge how widespread such worldviews are among ordinary people around the world.

The research reported in this paper was designed to fill this gap in our understanding of how ordinary people view developmental hierarchies and models. Our paper evaluates two specific hypotheses growing out of the theoretical considerations discussed above. The first hypothesis is that the ideas of developmental hierarchies have been widely disseminated among ordinary people around the world. The second is that the ideas of developmental hierarchies held by ordinary people are similar to those held by international elites such as the United Nations.

Although there are many elements of developmental models that are of interest and in need of research, this paper focuses only on developmental hierarchies and the ways in which ordinary people view them. We investigated the ideas of individuals about developmental hierarchies by creating new ways of measuring people's views of such hierarchies in surveys and then administering these surveys in several countries to see how widespread such understanding is in the world today. We focus on developmental hierarchies by examining the ratings that survey respondents in several countries give to diverse countries on their levels of development. We then compare the answers of respondents to the ratings of the same countries provided by the

UN HDI. In this paper we include regional or national data from fourteen surveys conducted in twelve countries: Albania; Argentina; Bulgaria; China; Egypt; Iran; Iraq; Lebanon; Nepal; Saudi Arabia; Taiwan; and the United States. To preview our results, the evidence from these countries suggests that developmental hierarchies are widely understood in many diverse places around the world, and the notions that people have of such developmental hierarchies are very similar to those of the UN HDI.

Our paper proceeds in four steps. We first discuss the twelve countries where we conducted our research and describe the nature of the fourteen surveys that we examine in this paper. Our second step consists of a discussion of the methods that we used in our data collection and analysis. Third, we present our findings concerning the ways in which survey respondents in various places rate countries on development. The final section provides our conclusions.

### **RESEARCH SITES AND DATA COLLECTIONS**

As we mentioned earlier, our empirical data come from fourteen regional or national data collections conducted in twelve countries: Albania; Argentina; Bulgaria; China; Egypt (2); Iran; Iraq; Lebanon; Nepal; Saudi Arabia; Taiwan; and the United States (2). These data collections were conducted between 2004 and 2009. Summary information about these twelve countries is provided in Table 1.

The twelve countries are diverse geographically. Four of them (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia) are Middle Eastern countries of North Africa or West Asia, two are from South Central Asia (Iran and Nepal), two from East Asia (China and Taiwan), two from Southeastern Europe (Albania and Bulgaria), one from South America (Argentina), and one from North America (United States). Although Albania and Bulgaria are the only European countries

represented in this paper, both Argentina and the United States have majority populations composed primarily of migrants from Europe and their descendants.

The twelve countries are also diverse in terms of religion. Albania, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia have majority Muslim populations, although each has other religious faiths. Lebanon is very diverse religiously with significant numbers of both Muslims and Christians. Christianity has long been the majority religion in Argentina, Bulgaria, and the United States, with Argentina being primarily Catholic, Bulgaria primarily Orthodox, and the US primarily Protestant. China and Taiwan both have a long history of Buddhism and Taoism mixed with reverence towards ancestors, and China has significant populations of religious minorities, including Muslims. The majority religion in Nepal is Hindu, but with a significant number of Buddhists and other religions.

The twelve countries also represent extensive differences in education, although each country has experienced long-term increases in both school enrollment and literacy. Albania, Argentina, Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the US represent the top levels of literacy, with 98 percent or more of adults estimated to be literate. Nepal and Egypt have the lowest percentage of adult literacy, but substantially more than half of the adults in both countries are estimated to be literate. School enrollment levels are also high in each of the countries, ranging from lows of 61 percent in Iraq and Nepal to 95 percent in Taiwan.

GDP per capita also shows considerable variance, ranging from a low of just over a thousand dollars for Nepal to a high of more than 45 thousand for the United States. In between are the countries of Egypt, China, and Albania with relatively low income, Lebanon, Iran, Bulgaria, and Argentina with medium income levels, and Saudi Arabia and Taiwan with relatively high income levels. Compared with historical levels, life expectancy at birth is high in

each of the countries. The lowest levels are for Nepal and Iraq, respectively at 66 and 68 years, and extend up to 79 years for the US.

Also, when put in long-term historical context, fertility levels in the countries range from medium to very low. The highest total fertility rate (TFR) is 4.1 children per woman in Iraq, and three countries, Egypt, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia, have TFRs around 3. Four countries--Albania, China, Lebanon, and the US—have UN-estimated fertility levels near replacement levels of 2.1 children per woman. However, some demographers estimate that China's TFR is as low as 1.5 (Guo and Chen 2007), comparable to the very low fertility observed in Bulgaria (1.4) and Taiwan (1.1), which are among the countries with the very lowest fertility levels in the world.

As shown in Table 2, the fourteen data collections used in this paper represent a variety of sample definitions and interviewing approaches. This lack of uniformity was necessitated by budget limitations in each setting, the different methodological approaches required in the different places, and by the evolution of the project over time. As a result, we cannot make strict comparisons across settings, but we can examine the overall knowledge of developmental hierarchies in the various settings.

The fourteen surveys were conducted between 2004 and 2009. Six of the fourteen surveys were designed to be representative of the adult populations of their respective countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the two in the United States. The US data collection was conducted in two different 15 minute supplements to the Survey of Consumer Attitudes, a monthly telephone survey. The Argentina survey was also national in scope, but was limited to people living in urban agglomerates of 500,000 people or more, which includes approximately 60 percent of the country's population<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Except for Argentina, the samples were randomly selected at each stage. Although Argentina used a multi-stage procedure at every stage except the final selection of individual households, the households were chosen through a

Six surveys were designed to be representative of certain regions, provinces, or other geographical units. The China data collection was conducted in the Province of Gansu located in West-central China and having a large Muslim minority group and relatively low income. The Iran survey was conducted in the city of Yazd, with a population of more than 400 thousand people in central Iran. Yazd has extensive industry, maintains a high socioeconomic level, and is religious and conservative (Askari-Nodoushan and Abbasi-Shavazi et al 2009). The Egyptian adult sample was drawn from one district in Qaliubia Governorate located north of Cairo and one district in Fayoum Governorate located south of Cairo. We selected these two districts to broadly represent areas in northern and southern Egypt. The youth survey in Egypt was conducted among young adults ages 18-25 in the cities of Alexandria, Cairo, and El-Minya and their rural surroundings. The survey in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was conducted among young adults ages 18-25 in the cities of Jeddah, Riyadh, and Damman-Khobar and their surrounding rural areas.

The Nepal survey was conducted in the Chitwan Valley in South-central Nepal and combines data from two samples of adults. The first sample consists of adults aged 15-59 living in the study area in 1996, plus the non-resident spouses of these adults. The data were gathered in 2008 from the 1996 sample members who had moved elsewhere in Nepal between 1996 and 2008, as well as those who stayed in the study area. The second sample includes adults 15 and over in 2008 living in the study area, plus the non-resident spouses of married residents aged 15-34 in 2008 and the non-resident parents of unmarried residents in 2008 aged 15-34 years old.

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random walk to find whether an individual residing in the household fits a quota of gender and age previously locally established.

Our final data collection was conducted in Taiwan with college students at National Cheng-chi University located in Taipei. The students were interviewed several times during their college careers, with the data reported in this paper coming from their first year of college.

Table 3 provides basic background information for the people participating in the country surveys. A wide variety of attributes is reflected in the distributions shown in the tables.

### **MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS STRATEGY**

In all fourteen data collections we asked respondents to rate several countries on development. We did not define in the surveys what we meant by development, but let respondents use their own definitions. This approach was important to allow the respondents' definitions to enter into their ratings rather than being dictated by whatever definition we might have provided respondents. In all data collections respondents rated development levels for each specified country from zero to ten or from one to ten, with ten representing the highest level of development and either zero or one defined to be the lowest. Both the number and identity of countries rated varied across the various surveys. The countries rated in each data collection are listed in Table 4.

To some extent the exact form of the question asked of respondents evolved over time and depended on the auspices of the data collection. That said, a common questionnaire format was used in Argentina, Bulgaria, China, Iran, Nepal, the US, and the adult Egypt survey. In these surveys, the topic of development was introduced as follows<sup>3</sup>:

“We would like you to think about development in different countries around the world today. We'll be talking about countries as varied as England and Mongolia. Think of a development scale that rates countries from zero to ten. The least developed places in the world are rated zero and the most developed places in the world are rated ten. You can use both of those numbers for rating countries plus all of the numbers in between. Using this development scale, where would you put [Country X]?”

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<sup>3</sup> In Argentina the sentence “We'll be talking about countries as varied as England and Mongolia” was excluded from the introduction.

Some respondents indicated that they did not know where to rate Country X. For them, we asked the following probe: “Even if you don’t know exactly, about where would you put Country X?” The original question and probe were repeated as necessary for all of the countries rated<sup>4</sup>. We used the same approach in Albania, but with somewhat different wording, without example countries, and without specific probes being indicated:

“Now we would like you to consider how developed different places in the world are. Here is a scale of development—with the least developed place in the world being here (at number 0) and the most developed place in the world being (at number 10). And, moderately developed places here in the middle (at number 5).”

The same approach was used in Iraq, Lebanon, and the youth surveys in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but with somewhat different wording (and without probes specified). The wording in these surveys was as follows:

“Now we would like you to consider how developed different places in the world are. Here is a scale of development—with the least developed places in the world marked 1 at the left and the most developed places in the world marked ten at the right. And, moderately developed places marked 5 in the middle. I will read to you a list of countries that includes Saudi Arabia, China, Yemen, and the United States and ask you to rate the level of development in each country.”<sup>5</sup>

The students in Taiwan provided information about the ratings of countries through self-administered questionnaires. The wording of the question is as follows:

“Now we want to know your view about the developmental levels in some of the areas in the world, including Taiwan, Japan, India, China, Nigeria, Cambodia, the United States, and Nepal. If we rate the developmental levels from 0 to 10, 0 representing the lowest development, 10 representing the highest development, and 5 representing the development of moderate level (as shown in the figure below), what do you think the developmental scores of these countries are? (If you do not know this country, you can write down the answer based on any information you currently have.)”

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4 The introduction in the first US survey mentioned “France and Mongolia” rather than “England and Mongolia”. The Bulgaria survey mentioned “Japan and Mongolia”. In the Nepal study, the sentence telling respondents that they could use both zero and ten and all numbers in between was omitted.

5 In the Iraq survey the country of Iraq was inserted as the first country listed in the introduction. We have not listed Iraq as a country asked about because we have no UN HDI score for it.

We analyzed the data from these fourteen sets of country ratings in several ways. For each country rated in each survey, we calculated the average rating for all respondents who rated that country. We did so by aggregating ratings for respondents who answered with and without the follow-up probes. We followed this strategy because most respondents provided ratings without a probe and the distribution of responses for those who answered without a probe were very similar to the distribution for the total sample who answered with and without probes. These averages are reported in Table 4.

Table 4 also reports the United Nations HDI scores for all of the countries rated in any of the data collections. These HDI scores are for the year 2005. The HDI scores are created by the United Nations as a composite index consisting of the following four indicators: national adult literacy (% of population over age 15 who are literate); the gross school enrollment ratio in primary, secondary, and tertiary school; life expectancy at birth; and per capita GDP. Although the UN reports these scores from 0 to 1, we multiplied them by ten to make the metric more comparable to our survey ratings.

We compared average respondent ratings of countries on development with the United Nation's ratings of the same countries on development. We did this by comparing the pattern of individual country ratings. We also calculated Pearsonian correlations between the average scores reported by respondents for the countries and the UN HDI scores for the same countries. These correlations are recorded in the bottom panels of Table 4.

In addition to calculating the correlation coefficients between the United Nations scores and the average scores of respondents we computed correlations between each individual's ratings and the UN scores. That is, for every individual in every data set, we calculated the correlation between the UN scores and that individual's own ratings on development. The

procedures for calculating individual correlations with the UN HDI are identical to calculating the average correlations with the UN HDI. These individual correlations are summarized in Table 5 by listing the decile breaks for the correlations. Table 5 also provides the percentage of correlations in each data collection exceeding .50 and exceeding the even higher standard of .70.

Several conditions need to be fulfilled before the ratings of survey respondents will closely match the ratings of the UN HDI. First, respondents must have a conception of societal development that they can use in rating countries. Second, the conception of development held by respondents has to be very similar to the conception used by the UN. Third, respondents must be able to utilize reliably our crude scale for rating countries on development. Finally, respondents must have at least a rudimentary understanding of the countries they are asked to rate. All four of these substantial conditions must be met for the observed correlations to be high. To the extent that any of these four conditions are absent, the observed correlations will be driven towards zero.

## **RESULTS**

We now turn to the average ratings that individuals in the fourteen surveys gave for the various countries rated. Although the patterns of ratings for specific countries rated vary somewhat by the country where the ratings were conducted, there are also very important commonalities across all sets of ratings.

Beginning at the high end of the respondent ratings, we see that both Japan and the United States were universally rated highly. In all settings where they were rated, either Japan or the United States received the highest average rating, with the average ratings for the two countries often being very similar. Furthermore, with one exception, the average ratings given for both Japan and the United States exceeded eight, ranging from 7.2 to 8.8 for Japan and from

8.4 to 9.5 for the United States. These are exceptionally high ratings when the maximum possible rating is ten. The only average rating for either of these countries falling below eight was registered in our Chinese sample for the rating of Japan, which probably reflects the problematic history of relations between Japan and China.

The Western European countries of Austria, France, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom also received quite high average scores. The lowest average rating for any of these four European countries was 6.7 for Chinese respondents rating France and the highest was 9.4 for Saudi Arabian youth rating France. However, in all cases where one or more of these Western European countries was rated in the same survey as either Japan or the United States, the Western European country received a lower average score than did Japan and the United States.

Another country that is generally rated highly by ordinary people in our various surveys is China. In fact, the average ratings for China are generally in the same range as the ratings for the countries of Western Europe—sometimes higher, sometimes lower, and sometimes equal. The high ratings for China are especially prevalent in most of the surveys from the Middle East. We do not have an explanation for this phenomenon, although one possibility is that the survey respondents in the Middle East are recognizing China's enormous economic successes in the past several decades, without also recognizing that China continues to have large numbers of people with low levels of education and income.

An important exception to the high ratings for China comes from the college students of Taiwan who gave China an average rating of only 5.1 (in contrast to 8.8 for Japan, 9.2 for the United States, and 7.0 for Taiwan itself). This low rating of China by Taiwanese students probably reflects the knowledge that Taiwanese have of the parts of China that have low incomes

and educations. This low rating is also probably exacerbated by the political tensions existing between China and Taiwan, with China seen as a threat by many Taiwanese.

Another country that is consistently rated highly in the countries where it was rated is the United Arab Emirates—with average scores ranging from 7.2 to 8.2. Unfortunately, we asked only respondents in Middle Eastern settings to rate the Emirates—including Iraq and the two youth surveys in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, we do not know how development in the Emirates is viewed outside the Middle East.

We now switch our attention from the countries with high average ratings to the countries with low average ratings, where we again see substantial consistencies. The countries of Africa—including the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe are consistently rated at or near the bottom of the ratings. With the exception of ratings from Nepalis, the scores for these three African countries range from only 2.6 to 5.2, with the Nepali average ratings for the Central African Republic and Nigeria equaling 5.6. The three South Asian countries of India, Nepal, and Pakistan also consistently receive average scores at or near the bottom of the ratings. The average ratings for India ranged from 3.4 to 5.8 and the averages for Pakistan ranged from 2.9 to 5.6. Nepal was only rated in Nepal and Taiwan, with average scores between 3.3 and 3.4. Other countries receiving very low average ratings were Albania (from both Albanians and Bulgarians), Bulgaria (from Bulgarians and Americans), Cambodia (from Taiwanese), Kyrgyzstan (from Bulgarians), and Yemen (from three Middle Eastern surveys). Most of these countries were rated in only 1-3 surveys, giving us little insight into their ratings in the larger world community.

These data provide substantial evidence of the existence of developmental hierarchies in the minds of ordinary people around the world. On average, they rate some countries as high on

development and some countries low on development. Furthermore, the mental maps of the developmental hierarchy are very similar across the 14 surveys from 12 countries. Such consistency suggests that, although we did not define development for our respondents, there must be substantial similarities in the ways development is viewed in different places, at least as indicated by the ways in which they rate countries on a scale of development.

The data in Table 4 also provides considerable evidence that the maps of developmental hierarchies in the minds of ordinary people around the world are very similar to the developmental maps among the elites of the United Nations. We noted earlier that, on average, Japan and the United States were rated at the tops of the developmental hierarchies of people in our surveys and that China and the United Arab Emirates were rated highly but not at the top of hierarchies. The UN HDI scores also are very high for Japan and the US and moderately high for China and the United Arab Emirates. We also noted that our survey respondents rated quite low the three African countries of the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, the three South Asian countries of India, Nepal, and Pakistan, and Cambodia and Yemen. Here we note that the UN experts also rate these latter countries in the lower part of the distribution. This high level of correspondence corroborates the idea that both ordinary people and the UN are using similar concepts, definitions, and criteria in their ratings.

Despite this close correlation between UN and survey ratings, there are also some discrepancies. One notable discrepancy is that the five Western European countries of Austria, France, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom were rated between 9.4 and 9.6 by the United Nations, which corresponds almost exactly to the UN scores of 9.5 for both Japan and the US, whereas, as noted earlier, our survey respondents rated these five European countries a bit lower than Japan and the US. It is not clear why these Western European countries are generally rated

lower than Japan and the United States by ordinary people when their HDI scores are very similar to those of Japan and the United States.

The four countries of Western Europe are not the only ones rated higher by the United Nations than our survey respondents. Other countries with substantial discrepancies include the five countries of Southeast Europe and Central Asia, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, which were rated from 7.0 to 8.5 by the United Nations, but 5 or less in all our survey ratings. India and Nepal, two countries in South Asia, were also consistently underrated by survey respondents relative to the UN. So were the two Latin American countries of Argentina and Brazil and two Middle Eastern countries, Lebanon and Syria. The discrepancies between the survey ratings and the UN ratings could reflect several factors: people in our surveys may be using slightly different criteria in their ratings of these countries than is the UN; respondents are underweighting the scores of these particular countries on certain criteria, or respondents lack knowledge of these countries.

Interestingly, many of the survey ratings for countries that were underrated relative to the UN scores came from people living in those countries. For example, Albanians gave Albania an average score of 3.1 (UN gave 8.0), Bulgarians gave Bulgaria a score of 3.6 (UN gave 8.2), Nepalis gave Nepal a score of 3.2 (UN gave 5.3), and Argentinians gave Argentina a score of 5.6 (UN gave 8.7). Clearly, the relatively low ratings given to these countries were not only the result of people in other countries being ignorant of these countries, but were also provided by the residents of these countries themselves. This shows that self-perceptions may be affected by regional circumstances and may distort otherwise rather uniform global developmental hierarchies.

With these discrepancies in mind, we turn to the Pearson correlations between the sets of average survey ratings and the UN scores that are reported in the bottom row of Table 4. These correlations provide an overall summary of the extent to which the average scores of country ratings match the scores of the UN. All of the correlations are very high, ranging from a low of .75 in Bulgaria and Lebanon to a high of .97 in Iran. This indicates that, on average, the people participating in our 14 surveys provided ratings of countries on development that are ordered very similarly to the HDI ratings of the United Nations.

As documented by Melegh, Thornton, and Philipov (2010), the correlations are low in Bulgaria because there are several Eastern European and Central Asian countries rated in the Bulgarian survey, and Bulgarians tend to rate such countries substantially lower than does the United Nations. Similarly, Lebanese respondents were asked to rate several Middle Eastern countries, and they consistently rated these countries lower than did the United Nations. Thus, in these two very different countries, the tendency to rate countries in their own regions low, as compared to the United Nations, results in the overall correlations being lower. It is likely that if Bulgarians and Lebanese had been asked to rate a more internationally representative set of countries, such as people in other countries did, their correlations with the UN HDI would have been higher. Of course, a correlation of .75 between UN HDI scores and the average scores of ordinary people still is very high.

Further evidence that the correlations of respondent average scores with the UN depend on the countries being rated comes from the United States where we did two surveys, with somewhat different countries rated in the two surveys. In the US, the correlation for the US 2006 survey is .95, while the correlation for the 2007 US survey is .84. However, if we calculate the correlations for the two surveys using only a common set of countries, the two correlations

are very similar. This is true because the US average survey ratings for Egypt, Russia, and Saudi Arabia are substantially below the UN scores for these three countries, thus lowering the overall correlation in the 2007 US survey that included ratings for these countries.

We now shift from the average ratings of countries on development and the correlations of these average scores with the UN HDI to the correlations of individual scores with the HDI. The procedure at the individual level is identical with the procedure at the aggregate or average level, with the only difference being that  $n$  correlations are calculated for each  $n$  individuals in a survey. These correlations provide an overall summary of the extent to which individual respondent scores match those of the HDI. The results are summarized by decile in Table 5, where we also list the percentage of respondents with correlations above .50 and above .70.

As shown in Table 5, the great bulk of the individual correlations are positive and substantially so. This can be seen by looking at the correlation that divides the various samples in half—the fiftieth percentile. We see from Table 5, that the fiftieth percentile scores ranged from a low of .58 to a high of .92. This means that for these fourteen distributions, at least half of the sample had correlations of .58 or higher and for many of the distributions the median correlation was much higher—reaching .92 among the college students in Taiwan. Among surveys with more general sampling universes, the 2006 US survey had the highest median correlation, which was .84.

Another way of describing the distributions of individual correlations is the percentage of respondents producing correlations at .50 or higher. Table 5 indicates that the percentages having correlations of this magnitude across the fourteen distributions is quite high. It reaches from a low of 59 percent to a high of 98 percent. Using an even higher standard, we see that between 30 and 96 percent had correlations of .70 or higher. It should be noted, again, that the

highest scores come from the college students of Taiwan, but over 80 percent of the general population of young adults in Saudi Arabia had correlations of .70 or greater.

Furthermore, a substantial fraction of the people in our fourteen surveys has very high correlations. For example, twenty percent or more (the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile and above) have correlations that range from .74 in Bulgaria to .93 in the US to .95 among the college students in Taiwan.

This pattern of results suggests that a very substantial proportion of individual respondents view developmental hierarchies very similarly to the United Nations. At the same time, it is important to note that there is a significant number of individuals with low correlations of their scores with the UN HDI. This can be seen in the fact that ten percent or more had correlations below .30 in the five following surveys: China, Egypt (both surveys), Lebanon, and Nepal. However, there was no data collection in which ten percent or more had correlations that were below .10.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We began this paper by noting that developmental hierarchies have been important for centuries in the writings and actions of scholars and other elites. We hypothesized that these ideas of developmental hierarchies have been disseminated widely around the world and have permeated the worldviews of ordinary people in everyday life. We also hypothesized that the views of ordinary people about developmental hierarchies would generally be consistent with those of international elites, such as the United Nations. The empirical data summarized in this paper were collected to investigate these hypotheses.

The data are generally consistent with our hypotheses. At the aggregate or average level, different countries of the world receive differential development ratings, and the distribution of

the development ratings of various countries closely follows the ratings of the UN HDI. Japan and the United States are consistently rated as very high on development, clearly dominating the ratings. Also rated high are China and the countries of Western Europe. Each of these countries is also rated highly by the UN HDI, although the UN rates China lower and Western European countries higher than most of our average ratings for these countries. At the other end of the distribution, the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, as well as Cambodia and Yemen, are, on average, rated very low by the respondents in our surveys—as they are on the UN HDI. This correspondence of UN HDI scores with the average scores of our respondents is also reflected in the Pearsonian correlations summarizing this correspondence.

As one would expect, at the individual level, the correlations between country ratings and the HDI tend to be lower than the average or aggregate correlations. At the same time, there are also numerous individuals who provided ratings with very high correspondence with the UN HDI scores. These data are, thus, generally consistent with the two hypotheses motivating our data collections. The ideas of developmental hierarchies have been widely disseminated around the world as large fractions of the people we interviewed have understandings of development that are quite similar across settings. In addition, the developmental hierarchies held by people rather closely match the frameworks used in the UN HDI. And, at the average or aggregate level, the correspondence of respondent views of development hierarchies with the views of the experts at the United Nations is remarkable.

Of course, there are nontrivial fractions of people in each of the surveys who gave ratings of countries that do not seem to correspond with the UN HDI. There are multiple possible explanations for such low correlations. Individuals with low scores may not have a concept of development in their minds or the development concepts the persons have may not match that of

the United Nations. Other possibilities are that these individuals reject the idea of developmental hierarchies, did not know the countries, did not understand the questions, or could not properly use the 10 or 11 point scales used in rating countries. However, the fact that so many people had rating scores that fairly closely match those of the United Nations indicates that most people not only understand and accept the ideas of developmental hierarchies but do so similarly to the experts at the United Nations, have some knowledge of the countries that we asked them to rate, and can handle our rating scales.

Although our fourteen surveys in twelve countries are not meant to be a random sample of countries or a representative sample of the world's population, the settings we have surveyed are both diverse and widely distributed around the world. The wide dissemination of the ideas of developmental hierarchies in these settings suggests that the ideas have indeed been widely disseminated. Of course, with our data we cannot know if this widespread knowledge of developmental hierarchies is widely understood in other settings. However, we expect that it is and advocate for additional research in other settings along the lines reported here to evaluate this expectation.

Our data also do not indicate how individuals and communities have gained their knowledge of development and developmental hierarchies. As we posited earlier, there are many ways in which such ideas can be disseminated. In addition, these ideas have a foundation in the real world, as the perceived developmental hierarchies are, at least to some extent, supported by actual hierarchies of wealth and influence around the world. More research is needed to establish those dissemination mechanisms and the factors supporting beliefs in the hierarchy. We also argue that it is important to begin to understand the consequences of such

ideas for family, demographic, political, religious, economic, education, and health beliefs and outcomes.

Although there is substantial evidence for widespread understanding and endorsement of a general developmental hierarchy as promulgated by the United Nations, ideas of this hierarchy are also affected by local circumstances. This is, for example, apparent in the low ratings of Japan given by Chinese respondents. It is also reflected in the low ratings of China given by Taiwanese respondents. We believe that each of these anomalies can be explained by the history of tensions and threats in the East Asian context. We also believe that such local variations exist in other places not yet studied. We advocate for further research into how such anomalies arise and are perpetuated.

There are also several more general deviations of respondent ratings from the development ratings of the United Nations. Among these deviations is the tendency of respondents to report the countries of Europe and the Middle East lower than does the United Nations. Also of relevance is the tendency for ordinary people to over-rate China relative to the ratings of the United Nations. More research is needed to understand the reasons underlying the departure of UN ratings and the ratings of ordinary people in these instances.

We close with the observation that our research has been successful in two general respects. The first is that we have documented that many ordinary people in twelve countries understand developmental hierarchies and do so in ways that are consistent with the conceptualizations of the United Nations. The second is that our research has identified several additional fruitful paths of inquiry about people's views of development, as well as about the causes and consequences of those views.

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Table 1. Basic Characteristics of Countries surveyed

Countries surveyed	Region	Total population (millions)	GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	Total fertility rate (births per woman)	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above)	Combined gross enrolment ratio in education (%)
Albania	Southern Europe	3	7,041	1.9	76.5	99.0	67.8
Argentina	South America	40	13,238	2.3	75.2	97.6	88.6
Bulgaria	Eastern Europe	8	11,222	1.4	73.1	98.3	82.4
China	Eastern Asia	1,329	5,383	1.8	72.9	93.3	68.7
Egypt	Northern Africa	80	5,349	2.9	69.9	66.4	76.4
Iran	South-Central Asia	72	10,955	1.8	71.2	82.3	73.2
Iraq	Western Asia	30	n.a.	4.1	67.8	74.1	60.5
Lebanon	Western Asia	4	10,109	1.9	71.9	89.6	78.0
Nepal	South-central Asia	28	1,049	2.9	66.3	56.5	60.8
Saudi Arabia	Western Asia	25	22,935	3.2	72.7	85.0	78.5
Taiwan	East Asia	23	30,352	1.1	77.9	97.8	95.0
United States	Northern America	309	45,592	2.1	79.1	99.0	92.4

Sources:

Human Development Reports. United Nations Development Programme, 2009. Web. 3 Feb 2010, data from 2007.

Data source for Taiwan: 2008 Social Indicators (2007 statistics), published by Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics Executive Yuan, Republic of China

Table 2. Characteristics of Sample Surveys

Countries surveyed	Study Location	Respondent Ages	Respondent Sex	Interview Mode	Study Dates	Sample Size
Albania	National	15 and older	Both	Face-to-face	2005	3,384
Argentina	Urban Agglomerates $\geq 500,000$	Adults	Both	Face-to-face	2008	1,003
Bulgaria	National	Adults	Both	Face-to-face	2009	1,008
China	Gansu Province	Adults	Both	Face-to-face	2007	633
Egypt	One District each in Fayoum and Qaliubia Provinces	Women 18-54 and their husbands	Both	Face-to-face	2007-2008	1,500
Egypt Youth	Cities and rural surroundings of Alexandria, Cairo, and El-Minya	18-25	Both	Face-to-face	2005	928
Iran	Yazd City	Married: 15-54 Unmarried: 15-29	Women	Face-to-face	2007	703
Iraq	National	Adults	Both	Face-to-face	2006	2,701
KSA	Cities and rural surroundings of Jeddah, Riyadh, and Damman-Khobar	18-25	Both	Face-to-face	2005	954
Lebanon	National	Adults	Both	Face-to-face	2008	3,039
Nepal	Chitwan Valley	15 and older	Both	Face-to-face	2008-2009	7,640
Taiwan	National Cheng-chi University.	17-29	Both	Self-administered with interviewer present	2004	1,369
USA	National	Adults	Both	Telephone	2006	486
					2007	494

Table 3. Respondents' demographic characteristics

Respondents' characteristics	Albania	Argentina	Bulgaria	China	Egypt	Egypt Youth	Iran	Iraq	KSA	Lebanon	Nepal	Taiwan	US
Sex (% Female)	51.9	52.6	48.8	51.3	58.3	46.4	100.0	51.6	40.6	44.2	57.0	63.6	55.5
Age													
Mean	38.8	41.6		41.5	36.0	21.1	34.9	37.1	21.5	32.8	36.6	18.5	52.3
(Std. Dev.)	(15.6)	(16.7)		(14.1)	(11.6)	(2.6)	(12.4)	(13.8)	(2.4)	(13.0)	(14.5)	(0.8)	(17.2)
Marital status													
Single	21.0	31.5		8.7	11.3		22.0	21.2		53.5	17.7	100.0	14.2
Married or cohabiting	73.2	51.9		86.3	85.7		74.8	72.1		41.7	76.8		59.6
Separated/Divorced	0.6	10.4		0.9	1.1		0.1	1.3		3.2	1.6		14.3
Widowed	5.2	6.1		4.1	1.8		3.0	5.4		1.7	3.9		11.8
Education *													
Never attended to school	1.9				26.4	2.3	3.1	16.7	0.2	2.6	31.2		
Below elementary	8.3	6.2	2.1	21.4	13.5	1.7	17.8	12.7	0.2	4.4	10.4		
Complete elementary	36.2	16.0	22.6	23.0	3.5	6.2	8.8	21.2	2.5	8.4	6.3		1.1
Incomplete high school	7.4	17.8		32.7	11.3	14.9	21.1	16.8	24.0	8.9	25.5		4.1
Complete high school	35.5	27.3	51.8	12.0	29.1	39.4	31.6	16.4	45.5	16.7	5.8		23.9
Superior	10.7	32.7		10.6	16.2		17.6						
Some College - No degree						16.2		5.3	19.5	25.6	17.4	100.0	22.8
College/Post Graduate Degree			23.5			19.3		10.9	8.0	33.3	3.5		48.0
Religion Affiliation													
Buddhism		0.1		9.1							11.5		1.0
Catholic	6.8	74.9						0.1		4.9			24.4
Christian - Not further specified		0.3		1.4	1.5			0.7		30.9	1.6		4.8
Muslim	81.1			9.3	98.5			99.1		62.7	0.6		0.6
Protestant		8.4											54.6
Hinduism											83.0		
Other	11.9	0.4		0.8						1.6	1.5		3.8
None/Atheist/Agnostic	0.2	15.2		79.5							1.9		10.7
Importance of Religion													
Very important		33.0		12.7	99.1			96.1			56.1		63.2
Somewhat important		47.5		13.1	0.8			3.7			40.6		23.0
Not important at all		19.6		74.2	0.1			0.2			3.4		13.8
Importance of God in your life (1-10 scale)													
Mean						9.9			9.7	5.5	7.9		
(Std. Dev.)						(0.6)			(1.4)	(2.8)	2.5		
Unweighted N	3,390	1,003	336	633	1,500	928	703	2,701	954	3,039	7,456	1,369	980

\* In Bulgaria and in China, education was registered as the highest level completed, therefore it may be underestimating the actual highest level achieved (e.g., those attending Junior High School has been registered as Complete Elementary, College dropouts have been counted as Complete High School).

Table 4. Respondents' Mean Country Scores on Development and United Nations HDI

Countries rated	Countries Surveyed														UN HDI 2005
	Albania	Argentina	Bulgaria	China	Egypt	Egypt Youth	Iran	Iraq	KSA	Lebanon	Nepal	Taiwan	US '06	US '07	
Albania	3.1		3.1												8.0
Argentina		5.6													8.7
Austria			8.0												9.5
Brazil		6.5		5.6	5.9		6.5				6.6		6.1	5.6	8.0
Bulgaria			3.6											4.5	8.2
Cambodia												2.8			6.0
Central African Rep.	3.1	3.4	3.3	4.7	4.4		3.1				5.6		3.4	3.5	3.8
China	7.1	7.7		6.9	8.1	8.6	7.8	8.9	8.6	8.1	7.4	5.1	7.5	6.9	7.8
Croatia			5.0												8.5
Egypt					6.6	5.3		6.5	7.1					5.5	7.1
France		7.7		6.7	7.6	8.6	7.9	9.2	9.4	8.4				7.3	9.5
Georgia			3.9												7.5
India	3.4	3.6	4.4	5.1	5.8		4.6				5.8	4.4	5.3	5.0	6.2
Iran						5.4	7.0	6.9	6.8	6.6					7.6
Italy	7.7		7.5												9.4
Japan		8.8		7.2	8.2		8.7				8.2	8.8	8.8	8.6	9.5
Kuwait								7.1							8.9
Kyrgyzstan			3.1												7.0
Lebanon										4.9					7.7
Nepal											3.3	3.4			5.3
Nigeria	2.6	3.5	3.0	4.4	5.2		3.4				5.6	2.8	3.3		4.7
Pakistan	2.9	3.8		5.0	5.6		4.4				5.1		4.1	4.0	5.5
Poland			6.0												8.7
Russia			6.9											5.9	8.0
Saudi Arabia						6.4		7.3	7.3	5.0				5.6	8.1
Sweden			8.4										7.4		9.6
Syria										4.5					7.2
Taiwan												7.0			9.3
United Arab Emirates						7.2		8.2	8.1						8.7
United Kingdom			8.5								7.5				9.5
United States	9.5	8.4		8.4	8.6	9.2	8.6	9.3	9.5	8.9	9.1	9.2	8.8	8.7	9.5
Yemen						4.8		4.1	4.2						5.1
Zimbabwe													2.9		5.1
Corr. between each country respondents' score and UN HDI	0.82	0.91	0.75	0.89	0.91	0.81	0.97	0.88	0.95	0.75	0.83	0.95	0.95	0.84	--

Note: all correlations are significant at least at the .05 level, except for Lebanon which is significant at .06 level assuming that the countries represent a simple random sample.

Table 5. Bivariate correlations between Individual respondents' ratings of Development and the United Nation's Human Development Index

	Albania	Argentina	Bulgaria	China	Egypt	Egypt Youth	Iran	Iraq	KSA	Lebanon	Nepal	Taiwan	US '06	US '07
Deciles														
10th	0.48	0.53	0.30	0.15	0.21	0.17	0.43	0.33	0.57	0.23	0.13	0.79	0.56	0.36
20th	0.59	0.65	0.44	0.33	0.42	0.37	0.62	0.54	0.70	0.42	0.29	0.85	0.70	0.49
30th	0.66	0.72	0.51	0.48	0.54	0.50	0.71	0.62	0.76	0.50	0.40	0.88	0.76	0.56
40th	0.71	0.78	0.57	0.58	0.63	0.58	0.77	0.68	0.79	0.55	0.49	0.90	0.81	0.62
50th	0.75	0.81	0.62	0.68	0.69	0.65	0.80	0.73	0.81	0.60	0.58	0.92	0.84	0.67
60th	0.79	0.84	0.66	0.74	0.74	0.70	0.84	0.78	0.84	0.66	0.65	0.93	0.87	0.71
70th	0.82	0.86	0.70	0.79	0.79	0.75	0.87	0.80	0.86	0.71	0.72	0.94	0.90	0.75
80th	0.86	0.89	0.74	0.85	0.84	0.79	0.90	0.84	0.88	0.75	0.79	0.95	0.93	0.79
90th	0.89	0.92	0.79	0.90	0.88	0.85	0.92	0.88	0.91	0.83	0.86	0.96	0.94	0.85
% with corr .5 or higher	88.7	92.3	73.0	68.7	74.1	70.7	88.3	82.6	92.1	70.6	58.7	98.4	92.7	79.3
% with corr .7 or higher	63.4	73.1	30.3	46.6	48.5	40.5	71.1	57.9	81.2	32.1	32.8	95.9	80.2	42.4
N	2,884	933	204	627	1,335	767	660	1,617	856	2,801	7,380	1,355	468	476