

ATTITUDES OF CHINESE POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS ABOUT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN CHINA, MAY 1995

In May 1995 I developed a questionnaire designed to assess the attitudes of Chinese university students studying English at Beijing Foreign Studies University. The survey was written in English, a fact which may have a significant impact on the results because of uncertainty about the degree to which the respondents were able to understand the questions. The forms were dutifully filled out, and I present the results out of their intrinsic interest while not being prepared to defend their validity in light of the question of comprehension.

The survey, called "Attitudes on National and Personal Future", was completed by 230 students. Of these, 108 (47%) were second-year undergraduates, 103 (44.8%) third-year undergraduates, and 19 (8.3%) were graduate students.

Province of origin

The students came from 19 provinces in China, with the largest number of students (70) coming from Beijing (30.4%); 19% came from Shandong, 17% from Hubei, 16% from Jiangsu, and 15% from Zhejiang.

Gender

The majority of respondents (138) were female (60%); there were 90 males (39%). Two students did not indicate either "gender" choice.

Age

Fourteen students were under 20. About one third (32.3%) were 20 years old; another third (33.5%) were 21, while 17.4% (n=40) were 22. Three were over between 30 and 35.

The four potential primary variables, then, were province of origin, gender, year of study, and age. The last two were difficult to distinguish; there is little reason to think that such a small age difference (for the vast majority) or a difference in being second or third-year, would have much bearing on the results. I looked at the question of province-of-origin for a few variables. In the majority of cases, then, gender was the only primary variable used for analysis.

Education as foundation for employment (#5)

Not surprisingly since the survey was conducted among university students studying English as a second language, the majority agreed with this statement "My education has provided me with a strong foundation for finding a job" (74.8%), while only 8.7% did not agree:

	N	Percent
St Agree	35	15.2
agree	137	59.6
neither	38	16.5
disagree	17	7.4
St disagree	3	1.3
Total	230	100.0

Finding work

The students were asked whether they expected to find a job by themselves after they graduated (#6) or whether they expected University officials find work for them after graduation (#7):

	find job myself		Univ find job	
	N	%	N	%
St agree	18	7.8	4	1.7
agree	93	40.4	34	14.8
neither	96	41.7	117	50.9
disagree	20	8.7	57	24.8
St disagree	3	1.3	18	7.8
Total	230	100.0	230	100.0

The largest number of students on both questions indicated uncertainty about the answer, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Without probing, it is difficult to ascertain what the results might indicate. It is unlikely that students expected that the University was responsible for their work placement (although 16.5% indicated they did expect such assistance). 48.2% expected that they would have to find a job themselves. The question is ambiguous, however, because connections play a large part in daily life in China and “by myself” could mean simply using my own resources or connections.

When they were asked if “The only way to find a good job is to have powerful connections,” (#12), there was more variability (though one third again neither agreed nor disagreed; 40% of the women and 26% of the men). About one third disagreed while the other third agreed:

	N	%
St Agree	16	7.0
agree	61	26.5
neither	78	33.9
disagree	65	28.3
St Disagree	10	4.3
Total	230	100.0

Question 12 correlated with two other questions: believing that good jobs require personal connections was associated with it not being necessary to put your own interest ahead of others (#15). On the other hand, believing that connections were important was associated with agreeing that money is the best measure of success (#40).

Work location

Asked where they expected to work, the respondents were asked first whether they “hoped” to find a permanent job in Beijing after graduation (#8). Again, about one third neither agreed nor disagreed. Of the students who were born in Beijing (n=70), 35.7% hoped to work in the city; among those who were not born in Beijing (n=158), 45.6% hoped to stay in the city after they graduated. Presumably, this was a major attraction drawing them to the Beijing Foreign Studies

University from outside. Beijing-born students were more likely to disagree with the statement (30% vs. 21%) compared with those born outside the capital.

Not surprisingly, 60% of non-Beijing-origin students disagreed with the statement, “If I cannot find a permanent job in Beijing I will stay in Beijing anyway”; only 17.1% claimed they would stay in the city. 26% of Beijing-origin students also disagreed, implying they would find work elsewhere, but almost half (48.6%) said they would stay in Beijing anyway. Women were twice as likely as men (33.1% vs 15.6%) to agree with the statement (stay anyway), although there was only about an 8% difference among those who disagreed.

27.8% expected to find permanent work in a special economic zone (#10) while 31.8 did not (about 40% were neutral on the question). Finally, slightly fewer than one in three wanted to find permanent work in their home town (27.4) while about one third (34.4%) did not, while 35.2% were neutral.

Motherhood and employment

Q13 stated: “It is good for a woman to hold a full-time job and be a wife and mother at the same time.” A large majority, 89.6% agreed with the statement (21.3% strongly). Only 15.2% disagreed (4.8% strongly). The proportion of neutral responses to this question was relatively low, 16.5%. Women were slightly more likely (72.7%) than men (62.3%) to agree with the statement. The proportion disagreeing was quite close (14.4% vs. 16.7%). Considerably more women than men strongly agreed (27.3% vs. 12.2%). The proportion of men and women strongly disagreeing were almost identical.

Gender Equality

Asked whether “Employers treat male and female graduates equally when they make job offers to them” (#14), there was sharp disagreement. Only 17 agreed (7.3%) and only 7 (3%) agreed strongly while 100 disagreed (43.5) and 83 disagreed strongly (36.1%). Only 27 (11.7%) remained neutral on the question. There was a considerable gender difference on this question, nevertheless: 88.5% of women and 65.6% of men disagreed with the statement.

Believing that employers treated women equally to men in job offers correlated with the idea that people who are rich in China deserve to be rich (#44) and that the worship of money is not a big problem in China (#47).

Necessary to put oneself first

Question # 15 asked respondents whether they believed “It is necessary to put your own interests first, ahead of others, just under half agreed (48.3%). More women (51.8%) than men (43.3%) agreed:

	N	%
St Agree	23	10.0
agree	88	38.3
neither	67	29.1
disagree	46	20.0
St Disagree	6	2.6
Total	230	100.0

Self-orientation, which Q15 intended to test, was strongly (negatively) correlated (Chi Square) with Q12, (do not need powerful connections to find employment) Q34 (owning a private car is important), and, more surprisingly, with Q40 (money is not the best measure of success).

Preferred Job

In an open ended question (#16), respondents were asked to indicate the “kind of permanent job or work” they would “most like to have” after graduation (#16). The two most common responses were “teacher” and “business” (each n =23, 10%). Generally, about 30% indicated a job in a private business while 18% wanted a state job (teaching, civil service, etc.) Only three indicate they wanted to be “boss of their own enterprise”. Fourteen just indicated a “good salary (6.1%). Seven (3%) wanted to work for a foreign company. Twelve expressed uncertainty (“don’t know”) or did not want a permanent job (n=3) or simply said they didn’t want a job (n=1). Only 2 wrote in the space, “a job I like”.

Respondents were also asked to indicate (open-ended) the kind of permanent job or work they “realistically expect to have” after they graduate (# 17). Overall, the differences between questions 16 and 17 were small. Slightly fewer (29.6%) wanted to work in the state sector (civil service or teaching) than thought they would end up there (32.6%) and the same was true of the state-owned enterprise sector: 23.9% vs. 28.3%). The percentage wanting to and expecting to work in the joint venture were almost identical (28.3% vs. 28.7%). Eighteen (7.8) would most like to own their own small business (#20); fewer than half (n=8, 3.5%) thought this ownership was likely.

Own business

Question 20 asked respondents whether they “expect to own your own private business in the future?” The results were as follows:

yes	77	33.5
no	50	21.7
possible	102	44.3
Missing	1	.4
Total	230	100.0

More men (46.7%) than women (24.5%) agreed that they expected to own their own private business. Women were more likely to say no (25.9%) than men (15.6%) and more likely to say that ownership in the future was “possible” (49.6% vs. 36.7%). Expecting to own a small business was correlated with #34 (owning a private car is important) and with #40 (money is the best measure of success).

On the further question, “The best way to get rich is to open a small business (#43), almost half said they neither agreed nor disagreed (with almost no gender difference):

	N	%
St Agree	8	3.5
Agree	23	10.0
Neither	109	47.4

Disagree	83	36.1
St Disagree	6	2.6
Missing	1	.4
Total	230	100.0

Conditions in Economic Sectors

Fully 86% (n=98) said they thought they could earn the highest salary in a joint venture business. Only 5% (n=12) thought salaries were higher in the civil service/government sector (#21). Just about exactly the reverse numbers said they thought work in teaching and in the civil service was the most secure (89.6%) compared with a joint venture business (4.8%) (#22). There was more uncertainty whether government or private sector work would be better in terms of promotions. Twenty percent (n=46) were “not sure”. Almost half (47.4%) thought the private sector was better in terms of promotions (#23); 0.4% thought the government sector was better while 18% thought the two sectors were just about the same. Very close to the same percentages believed that each sector was likely to have more interesting work (#24):

	N	%
Teaching/Civil Service	37	16.1
Joint Venture Business	98	42.6
Both the same	41	17.8
Don't Know	45	19.6
Missing	9	3.9
Total	230	100.0

Government work was believed to provide the best housing (50%) with 20.9% indicating they thought better housing came with working in a joint venture business (#25). Ten percent thought they were identical. On medical care, there was a more agreement, 79.1% saying government work provided better medical coverage as opposed to 10.4% who thought the coverage was better in the joint venture sector (#26). The public sector also had the best vacation policy (#28) (68.3 vs. 10.9% in the joint venture sector). On the other hand, there was an equally wide discrepancy on the quality of the management. Only 18 (7.8%) thought management was better in the state sector, while 67.4% said that they would expect to find better management in joint ventures (#27). On the question of opportunities to travel, the results were more evenly split:

	N	%
Teaching/Civil Service	70	30.4
Joint Venture Business	74	32.2
Both the Same	42	18.3
Don't Know	36	15.7
Missing	8	3.5
Total	230	100.0

The largest single category of respondents was uncertain in which sector they would find the most satisfying work (#30) (34.8% n=80). Otherwise there was a preference for the joint venture business sector over the government sector: (25.7% vs. 16.1%).

Expected income

The last question (#61) asked respondents to indicate what they expected their income to be when they were employed. 14 (6%) suggested it would be under 1000 RMB. Four (1.6%) indicated a salary of over 5000 RMB. The most popular figures were the following numbers:

RMB	N	%
1000	22	9.6
1500	49	21.3
2000	60	26.1
3000	24	10.4
3500	3	1.3
4000	7	3.0
5000	13	5.7
Missing	9	3.9
Total	230	100.0

Teaching

When asked whether they hoped “to work as a teacher after I graduate,” 19.6% agreed. Over half disagreed, while 27% were neutral on the question (#31). Males (66.7%) were more likely to disagree with the statement than females (44.6%).

Two-thirds (n=153, 66.5%) strongly agreed that “teaching is a necessary and important job for all of society” (#35), while a further 29.6% agreed (n=68). Only one student disagreed. They were asked whether the salaries paid to teaching are much too low” and again there was strong agreement (#36) with very little gender difference:

	N	%
St Agree	89	38.7
Agree	101	43.9
Neither	29	12.6
Disagree	9	3.9
St Disagree	2	.9
Total	230	100.0

On the other hand, almost half did not commit themselves to agreeing or disagreeing on the question: “The government will soon raise the salaries of teachers” (#37), with males being somewhat more likely to disagree:

St Agree	10	4.3
Agree	59	25.7

Neither	110	47.8
Disagree	38	16.5
St Disagree	12	5.2
Missing	1	.4
Total	230	100.0

37.9% agreed (7% strongly agreed) that “I will have to work at more than one job to be able to make enough money to live comfortably” (Q38). Most neither agreed nor disagreed (42.6%) while only 19.1% disagreed (slightly more males than females).

Social Mobility

Students were asked, “When I am permanently employed, my standard of living will be much higher than my parents” (#32) and the majority agreed (25.2% strongly and 48.7% agreed), while only 7 (3%) said they did not. Again, 23% were neutral.

This expectation of higher mobility compared with their parents correlated with #47 (worship of money not a problem), #34 (owning a private car is important to me), and #40 (money is the measure of success).

Automobile ownership

Students were asked: “I will be able to own a private car in the future” (Q33). There was little gender difference on this question, as well as on the follow-up question, discussed next:

St Agree	1	29	12.6
Agree	2	99	43.0
Neither	3	78	33.9
Disagree	4	16	7.0
St Disagree	5	6	2.6
	9	2	.9
Total		230	100.0

On the other hand, the respondents were split on the question of “Owning a private car in the future is not important to me” (#34), although the majority of the decided agreed:

	N	%
St Agree	17	7.4
Agree	76	33.0
Neither	66	28.7
Disagree	52	22.6
St Disagree	18	7.8
Missing	1	.4
Total	230	100.0

As seen above, the importance of car ownership was correlated with putting your own interests first and with expectations of owning your own business. Not seeing ownership of a private car

as important was also correlated with #45 (better to live a simple life with less money than work two jobs) and with #32 (lower expectations of having a higher social status than parents). Logically, these last two questions were also correlated with the idea that the amount of money one has is not the best measure of success in the world (#40).

Success and riches

There was considerable variation on the question that “The amount of money someone has is the best measure of his or her success in the world” (#40); women were slightly more likely than men to disagree (51.1% vs. 44.4%):

St Agree	9	3.9
Agree	56	24.3
Neither	53	23.0
Disagree	83	36.1
St Disagree	28	12.2
Missing	1	.4
Total	230	100.0

But most of the respondents disagreement with the idea that money is the measure of happiness: “The more money someone has the happier they are” (#41):

	N	%
St Agree	4	1.7
Agree	27	11.7
Neither	52	22.6
Disagree	96	41.7
St Disagree	49	21.3
Missing	2	.9
Total	230	100.0

Women were slightly more likely to disagree than agree compared with men.

Question 42 asked whether respondents that “People with very little education can easily get rich in China now”. More disagreed than agreed, and more women (41.7%) than men (31.1%):

	N	%
St Agree	11	4.8
Agree	51	22.2
Neither	80	34.8
Disagree	68	29.6
St Disagree	19	8.3
Missing	1	.4
Total	230	100.0

On the question “Many people who don’t deserve to get rich are now getting rich” (#44), two-thirds agreed (n=156, 67.8%), while only 8.3% disagreed, with little gender difference.

This question correlated closely with to others: #14 (as noted above); that belief in gender equality in job offers was associated with people who are rich deserving to be, and with #47, that money worship was not a big problem.

Was it best to lead a simpler life? Specifically, “Is it better to live a simple life with less money than to work hard at more than one job?” (#45) More disagreed than agreed, but the results were split (but there was little gender difference):

	N	%
St Agree	7	3.0
Agree	58	25.2
Neither	62	27.0
Disagree	86	37.4
St Disagree	15	6.5
Missing	2	.9
Total	230	100.0

Economic growth and social indicators

The respondents were asked whether they expected China “to continue to have rapid economic growth over the next 25 years (#46). 70.9% agreed (18.3% strongly). Only 13 disagreed with this forecast (5.7%). However, respondents expressed concern with “money worship” in China (“The worship of money is a big problem in China,” #47):

	N	%
St Agree	42	18.3
Agree	122	53.0
Neither	43	18.7
Disagree	21	9.1
Missing	2	.9
Total	230	100.0

This orientation, as noted above, was correlated with several other questions: believing that the worship of money was a big problem was associated with a belief that women and men are not treated equally in job offers (#14), lower expectations of having a higher status than their parents (#32), and with the belief that many rich people in China do not deserve their wealth (#44).

And there was a split on whether the gap between “the Coastal Zones and Western China will grow smaller” (#48), with 41.8% thinking that it would not improve and 35.7% expecting that the gap would decrease:

	N	%
St Agree	5	2.2
Agree	77	33.5
Neither	52	22.6
Disagree	83	36.1

St Disagree	13	5.7
Total	230	100.0

Considering a possible rural/urban difference, however, the results were similar for those students from Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin compared with students from the other provinces: (32.6% vs. 38% agreeing). The “province born” variable, however, is not a reliable indicator of urban or rural origin.

There was a similar split on whether China would be “successful in eliminating poverty in 10 more years” (#49). The largest number were undecided, but more respondents thought that eliminating poverty was unlikely in that time frame (34.8%) than thought it likely (27.8%), with little gender difference:

	N	%
St Agree	3	1.3
Agree	61	26.5
Neither	86	37.4
Disagree	62	27.0
St Disagree	18	7.8
Total	230	100.0

Would China by 2050 become “one of the most developed countries on earth” (#50)? A similar split occurred but with the opposite emphasis, with the largest number (39.6%) undecided, but more believing that China would not progress so rapidly (28.3%) than that China would by that date become one of the most developed countries (32.2%). On the other hand, however, over half (67.4%) agreed that “Economic development always creates large inequalities between people;” only 8.7% (n=20) disagreed.

Finally, question 51 asked respondents to consider about economic development and harm to the environment (“China will be able to develop its economy rapidly and protect the environment at the same time”). 38.7% were neutral, but slightly more disagreed (32.2%) than agreed (28.3%) indicating some concern about the environmental harms caused by development. There was close agreement among men and woman.

Important problems in Chinese society

Respondents were asked to rank a number of social issues according to whether they were a social problem in China, on a scale from not a problem to 6th most important problem. They could give some problems equal rating. Corruption (#54) was ranked first by 55.7% of respondents. Overall, unemployment was seen as the least problematic, while crime was a popular choice for second (31.3%).

	Not Problem	First	Second	Third
#53 Crime	0.4	10.9	31.3	24.3
#54 Corruption	0.4	55.7	27.8	10.4
#55 Inequality	1.7	14.8	26.5	23.9
#56 Inflation	0.9	19.6	25.2	27.4
#57 Morality	2.6	19.6	25.7	21.3
#58 Unemployment	3.5	5.7	12.6	21.3

Marriage and Children

The later 20s (between 25 and 28) were the most popular ages Chinese students considered that it was best to marry (#59). 36 (15.7%) said it was 30. On this question, there was a considerable gender difference: the majority of women (88.6%) thought it best to marry in their 20s; the majority of men (64.1%) thought they should marry in their 30s.

The age of the first child would come about three years following (#60), although about 12% of respondents did not answer the first question and about one quarter did not answer the second. 53.9% of women thought they would have their first child in their 20s; 72.7% of men thought this event would occur in their 30s.

Appendix: Survey Instrument

The intention of this questionnaire is to obtain your opinions about your hopes for your future and China's Development.

1. What year of Study are you in? Circle: 1 2 3 4 Graduate
2. In which Province or Region were you born? _____
3. Are you Male ____ or Female ____? 4. How old are you? _____

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1 = Agree Strongly; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Disagree Strongly

5. My education has provided me with a strong foundation for finding a job.....1 2 3 4 5
6. I will find a job by myself after graduation.....1 2 3 4 5
7. I expect the university officials will find a job for me after I graduate..... 1 2 3 4 5
8. I hope to find a permanent job in Beijing after graduation.....1 2 3 4 5
9. If I cannot find a permanent job in Beijing, I will still stay in Beijing anyway.....1 2 3 4 5
10. I hope to find a permanent job in a Special Economic Zone.....1 2 3 4 5
11. I hope to find a permanent job in my home town.....1 2 3 4 5
12. The only way to find a good job is to have powerful connections.....1 2 3 4 5
13. It is good for a woman to hold a full-time job and be a wife and mother at the same time.....1 2 3 4 5
14. Employers treat male and female graduates equally when they make job offers to them.....1 2 3 4 5
15. It is necessary to put your own interests first, ahead of others.....1 2 3 4 5

16. What kind of permanent job or work would you most like to have after you graduate?

17. What kind of permanent job or work do you realistically expect to have after you graduate?

18. After you graduate, in which Sector would you most like to be working?

- 1. Teaching or Civil Service _____
- 2. State Enterprise _____ 3. Joint Venture _____
- 4. Small Private Business _____ 5. Other (Please name): _____

19. After you graduate, in which Sector do you realistically expect to be working?

- 1. Teaching or Civil Service _____
- 2. State Enterprise _____ 3. Joint Venture _____
- 4. Small Private Business _____ 5. Other (Please name): _____

20. Do you expect to own your own private business in the future? Yes _____ No _____
Possibly _____

In which sector would you most expect to have the following: Type of Sector:

	Teaching	Joint	Civil	Don't
		Venture	Service	Know
		Business		
21. Highest Salary	_____	_____	_____	_____
22. Most Secure Job	_____	_____	_____	_____
23. Best Chance at Promotion	_____	_____	_____	_____
24. Most Interesting Work	_____	_____	_____	_____
25. Best Housing	_____	_____	_____	_____
26. Best Medical Care	_____	_____	_____	_____
27. Best Management	_____	_____	_____	_____
28. Most Generous Vacations	_____	_____	_____	_____
29. Best Chance to Travel	_____	_____	_____	_____
30. Most Satisfying Work	_____	_____	_____	_____

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1 = Agree Strongly; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Disagree Strongly

31. I hope to work as a teacher when I graduate..... 1 2 3 4 5

32. When I am permanently employed, my standard of living will be much higher than my parents'..... 1 2 3 4 5

33. I will be able to own a private car in the future..... 1 2 3 4 5

34. Owning a private car in the future is not important to me..... 1 2 3 4 5
35. Teaching is a necessary and an important job for all of society..... 1 2 3 4 5
36. The salaries now paid to teachers are much too low.....1 2 3 4 5
37. The government will soon raise the salaries of teachers 1 2 3 4 5
38. I will have to work at more than one job to be able to make enough money to live comfortably.....1 2 3 4 5
39. I want very much to be a success in my job..... 1 2 3 4 5
40. The amount of money someone has is the best measure of his or her success in the world.....1 2 3 4 5
41. The more money someone has the happier they are.. 1 2 3 4 5
42. People with very little education can easily get rich in China now..... 1 2 3 4 5
43. The best way to get rich is to open a small business.....1 2 3 4 5
44. Many people who don't deserve to be rich are now getting rich..... 1 2 3 4 5
45. It is better to live a simple life with less money than to work hard at more than one job..... 1 2 3 4 5
46. China will continue to have rapid economic growth over the next 25 years.....1 2 3 4 5
47. The worship of money is a big problem in China.....1 2 3 4 5
48. As China develops, the gap between the Coastal Zones and Western China will grow smaller 1 2 3 4 5
49. China will be successful in eliminating poverty in 10 more years.....1 2 3 4 5
50. By 2050, China will be one of the most developed countries on earth.....1 2 3 4 5
51. Economic development always creates large inequalities between people..... 1 2 3 4 5
52. China will be able to develop its economy rapidly and protect the environment at the same time..... 1 2 3 4 5

In your opinion, how serious are each of the following problems facing China now?

0 = Not a Problem. 1st = Most Serious Problem; Then 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and finally 6th = Least Serious Problem

	Not a Problem	Most Serious					Least Serious
53. Crime.....0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	
54. Corruption.....0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	
55. Inequality.....0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	
56. Inflation.....0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	

57. Loss of Morality.....0 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th
58. Unemployment.....0 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th

59. At what age do you expect to marry? _____
(I don't plan to marry ___ I am married now ___)

60. At what age do you expect a child? _____
(I don't expect to have a child _____)

61. What would you consider a satisfactory monthly income, after you graduate, for someone like yourself? _____ RMB each month