Chinese Youth Political Activism

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Abstract of Thesis

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The political future of China is in the hands of today's Chinese youth, a cohort that grew up along with the significant social and technological changes which happened in the past 30 years. To better understand the political prospects of China, investigating the political activism of today's youth is imperative. This paper is to provide a descriptive account of the political activities youth engage, mainly nationalistic and contentious activities, and to analyze the traits and impacts of these activities. The paper is also intended to assess the political characteristics, ideas and aspirations of contemporary Chinese youth. Drawing upon findings from surveys, interviews, academic articles and news reports, this paper reveals that the youth cohort today are clearly materialistic but less obviously nationalistic. They are less interested in grand political ideas that have cost hundreds, possibly thousands, of lives for the youth of the last generation in 1989, but equipped with new technology, especially the Internet, the youth today are not shy from demanding and exercising their political rights.

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Introduction

In the past 30 years, political, economic, social and technological changes have impacted China, culturally speaking and otherwise. The group or cohort that grew up along with these significant changes will, in the coming decades, take up positions of greater power and influence in their Chinese communities, and the distinct characteristics, habits and values they hold will have a mounting impact on Chinese society. A cohort is defined as an aggregate of individuals who experience the same event within the same time interval.[1] As Ronald Inglehart argues, significant political, economic, social and technological developments that occurred during a generational cohort's pre-adult period results in a generational identity containing a distinctive set of values, beliefs, expectations, and behaviors, and they remain relatively stable throughout a generational cohort's lifetime.[2] In other words, what people experience in their youth has a significant impact on how they "orient" themselves, in terms of values, beliefs, expectations, and behaviors or what might be best described as "culture," later in life.

The political future of China has always been a hot topic with questions abounding such as will the CCP collapse, democratize, or continue to rule. The "collapse school" (e.g., Gordon Chang), the "muddle-through school" (e.g., Susan Shirk), and the "adaptation school" (e.g., Bruce Dickson) have all contributed to the lively and rich debate involving the politics of China, especially after 30 or so years of post-Mao economic reform. However, these theories may not permit complete assessments of the present and conclusive predictions about what is around the next corner because China's

[1] Norman Ryder, "The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change," *American Sociological Review* 30, no.6 (1965): 843-861.
[2] Ronald Inglehart, "Value Change in Industrial Societies," *The American Political Science Review* 81, no.4 (1987): 1289-1319.

youth cohort who are next in line to take on many of the positions of power, their influence and responsibility in their own Chinese communities, are arguably the least understood yet most critical element to understanding China's current political situation and prospects.

The concept of youth varies from culture to culture and it is subject to reconstruction over time.[3] One of the most common definitions of youth, in quantitative terms, is persons between the ages of 15 and 24. This metric, used by both the United Nations and the World Bank, is applied in many statistical indicators.[4] The equivalent term of "youth" in Chinese is "qing nian" (青年), which literally translates as "green years." Though there is no official definition for the specific age range that constitutes youth in China, there are a few markers of what Chinese gauge as "youth."[5] For example, China has a "Youth Day" (qingnian jie, 青年节) where people between the ages of 14 and 28 can enjoy a day off. People between the ages of 15 and 28 can join the Communist Youth League, and every year the All-China Youth Federation presents the "Ten Outstanding Youth" prizes to youth between the ages of 18 and 39 who make significant contributions in professional, academic or community service-related areas.[6] From these numbers, we can see that the Chinese concept of youth adopts a broader age range, with the cohort stretching beyond the age band of what constitutes youth in the West to include those who are in their late twenties or even thirties. The difference partly

[3] Gill Jones and Claire Wallace, *Youth, Family and Citizenship* (Open University Press, 1992).
[4] "Frequently Asked Questions," United Nations, accessed August 1, 2011, http://social.un.org/index/Youth/FAQ.aspx.
[5] "tuanzhongyang huiying qingnianjie zhenglun: 14-28 bushi qingnian dingyi," [The Communist Youth League respond to Youth Day debate: 14-28 is not the definition of youth], *Xinhua News*, April 23, 2008, accessed August 1, 2011, http://news.qq.com/a/20080423/003729.htm.
[6] "lijie zhongguo shida jiechu qingnian pingxuan jieguo," [the result of top ten outstanding youth awards in the past years], May 2, 2008, *People's Daily*, accessed August 1, 2011, http://view.news.qq.com/a/20080502/000019.htm.

comes from the defining feature and highest virtue in Chinese tradition – filial piety. Young people are supposed to respect and obey their parents and other key figures in the household. Independence is not valued. Even when a person is an adult by law, to the older generation she is still considered, and treated like, a child. Compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese young adults are viewed less as full-grown people. This phenomenon may partially explain why the Chinese concept of youth is broader in age range than it is in the West.

Grouping young people to form a statistical entity makes it possible to compare data across time and countries, but an identical cross-section within and across national boundaries may not well reflect the reality. For example, a person born in 1979 is excluded from the "post-1980s generation" (baling hou, 八零后), but her behavior and values may be very similar to the people born in the early 80s, while the differences between people born in the late 1980s and the early 1980s can actually be much larger. Inglehart proposes that using sociohistorical events may in fact more accurately define a country's generation cohorts. For example, in the west people often hear the term "Baby Boomer Generation" or "9/11 Generation." I adopt this method in this paper. I define youth as the people who did not experience or have no memory of the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989. The Tiananmen Square incident is a turning point in recent Chinese history. The world watched to see whether it would be the beginning of the end of the Communist government of China, as it happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Instead, the Communist Party leaders brutally suppressed the student protest and brought China back from the brink of democratization. For people who were old enough to understand and remember what was happening at that time, it is a hard-to-forget memory.

For people who were too young to remember or people who were born after the incident, because of censorship and the rewriting of the narrative by the government, the incident is somewhat distant. For the majority of the youth, if not completely unaware of the incident, they do not consider it as something particular important. Therefore, I divide the youth cohort by the Tiananmen Square incident. People who fall into this category are approximately 30 years old or younger.

In the 1960s, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba conducted a study on political activism within and across nations, and distinguished modes of political participation.[7] In democracies, voter turnout is the mode of political participation with the largest number of participants. Beyond this, the more demanding forms of conventional participation include campaigning and party work, contacting public officials, and community organizing. Protest politics are a less common form of political participation, but it is accepted as a form of political expression designed to achieve changes in government policies and actions. Types of protest include demonstrations, petitions, political strikes, etc. China is not a democracy, so the first two forms of political participation do not apply to Chinese politics. There are elections at the village level, but the authenticity of these elections has been shown time and again to be highly dubious.[8] In any case, youth are generally not active in village elections. Party (campaigning, etc.) work in China is more of a top-down activity, directed and organized by the Communist Party, than genuine grassroots political participation. Therefore, this paper will only focus on the third mode of political participation – protest.

[7] Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Sage Publication, 1989).
[8] Tangbiao Xiao, Tianjian Shi with Qiu Xiniyou and Yu Wenhua, *Linage and Village Governance in Contemporary China: Multidisciplinary Research* (Xi'an: Xi'an University Press, 2002).

The first part of a discussion of youth political activism will examine nationalism. Nationalistic protest is the type of protest that is largely tolerated by the Chinese government. Oftentimes, it is welcomed by government authorities as a way to shift attentions away from domestic issues. "Students have had a long-standing romance with nationalism," says Philip Altbach, and some of the earliest important student movements were related to nationalism. German student organizations were among the first groups to support Hitler. Students played an important role in nationalist and independence struggles in Africa and Asia against colonial rule. Students who were educated abroad were actively involved in the articulation of nationalist sentiments.[9] China is no exception. In the early 20th century, young nationalists have vigorously sought different ways of defeating foreign aggression and modernizing China. With the rapid rise of China's economy in the past three decades, youth nationalism again becomes a notable political phenomenon in China, though the global context has changed significantly.

Aside from nationalist protest, the Chinese government seldom allows other forms of protest to take place. The discussion in the second part of this paper will examine protest that is contentious in nature and unwelcomed by the government. Charles Tilly defines contentious politics as "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties."[10] Actions of contention often involve the use of disruptive techniques that are relatively infrequent and unconventional activities of society to make a political point or to influence government policies. Examples include strikes, demonstrations, civil disobedience, riots, terrorism, etc. To be sure, much of

[9] Philp Altbach, "Perspectives on Student Political Activism," *Comparative Education* 25, no.1 (1989): 97-110.
[10] Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Tilly's definition of contentious politics is forbidden by Chinese authorities, but precisely what kinds of activities are considered "contentious" by Chinese authorities is still unclear. Many activities that are not commonly seen as contentious in Western societies are often interpreted by the Chinese government as such. Some activities that are neither targeted nor related to the Communist government are often met with suppression. For example, workers' strikes that target private companies can be seen as a threat to social stability, and since social stability is key to the Communist regime's survival, it is unwilling to let these kinds of protest foment. In this paper, I broadly define activities of contention to be any form of collective action that is perceived by authorities as contentious.

In short, this paper narrows down the scope of Chinese youth political activism into these two most important kinds: nationalistic protests and contentious activism. Given the unique Chinese political environment, other forms of activism are either largely non-exist or inconsequential. This paper also gives special attention to the Internet. The power of the Internets is all encompassing in every society that utilizes it. The internet allows those who use it to capitalize on humanity's greatest learning resource – the minds of people all over the world. However, the meaning of the Internet to Chinese youth is special. Information control has been strictly exercised by the ruling Communist Party since it took power in 1949, but the Internet made censorship increasingly difficult. Information dissemination becomes easier and cheaper, and harder to be traced. The emergence of blogs, social media and other interactive communication products in recent years has empowered citizens to key in their own information in a way never before seen. The use of the Internet, combined with information technology products, is crucial to all

political activities carried out by youth, the population that is the most enthusiastic about adopting and using new technology.

Nationalism

On May 1, 2011, after hearing the news that Osama bin Laden was killed in a firefight by American commandos, I wrote "Osama bin Laden is dead" on my Renrenwang page (人人网), the equivalent of Facebook in China. Immediately, my high school classmate commented on my status: "He is a great anti-American imperialism warrior, a freedom fighter, a great national hero, and the pioneer of anti-imperialism." I then asked him why he would consider Bin Laden, a leader of an organization that killed thousands of innocent people, a hero. Zhang replied: "because he dared to challenge America, the biggest evil." Zhang's reaction is not an isolated case. According to a survey conducted by Hong Kong Phoenix Television, about 212 of the 480 surveyed, or 60 percent, agreed with the statement that Bin Laden's death was a sad event because "an anti-U.S. warrior has fallen", while only 18.3 percent selected the choice indicating they were happy that "the head of terrorism is finally dead."[11] Considering the fact that more than half of the Internet users in China are under 25-year-old,[12] it is reasonable to say that most of the respondents were young Chinese. The result of the survey was soon reported by the Wall Street Journal,[13] the Congressional China Caucus[14] and other Western media.

[11] "Ni ruhe kandai meijun jibi ben ladeng?" [How do you view the death of Bin Laden?], *Phoenix TV*, May 3, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://survey.news.ifeng.com/result.php?surveyId=11902.
[12]Tony Jin, "Telecom, Internet & Media," *The China Perspective*, January 19, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://thechinaperspective.com/articles/china039scyberpopulationhits457m8117/index.html.
[13] "Chinese Online Community Reacts to Bin Laden Death," *Wall Street Journal*, May 2, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/05/02/a-hero-lost-chinese-reactions-to-bin-laden-death/.

In 2008, the international media covered extensively the protests that took place across the U.S. and other western countries against the western media's "biased" reports on the Tibetan riots. Students in the protests claimed the western media was "ignorant," "prejudiced," "vicious," "unacceptable," etc. Numerous individual Chinese also vented their anger on the Internet. Hundreds of them even went further to mail, call and fax threatening messages to foreign journalists. When one Chinese student at Duke University tried to mediate between pro-China and pro-Tibet protesters, the Chinese side called her a traitor and threatened to kill her.[15] At the University of Washington, hundreds protested outside during a speech by the Dalai Lama, chanting, "Dalai, your smiles charm, your actions harm."[16] The protests and anti-western nationalistic sentiment was largely perceived, as Edward Friedman squarely put it, as "racist" and "intolerant."[17]

Youth nationalism is not new to China. On May 4, 1919, students of Peking University and other schools took to the street protesting the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, in which the sovereign authority of Shandong peninsula was transferred from Germany to Japan, rather than returning to China. This event marked the emergence of China's youth nationalism. Youth nationalism went into intermission after the Communist Party took power and completely closed the country. The reemergence of youth nationalism began in the early 1980s after the opening up of

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[14]"China's Reaction to Bin Laden's Death," *China Caucus Blog*, May 5, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.forbes.house.gov/ChinaCaucus/Blog/?postid=239906.

[15] Shaila Dewan, "Chinese Student in U.S. Is Caught in Confrontation," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2008, accessed November 24, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/17/us/17student.html?pagewanted=1.

[16] Josh Kurlantzick, "China's next-Generation Nationalists," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 2008, accessed September 11, 2011, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2008/05/06/china-s-next-generation-nationalists/9ly.

[17] Edward Friedman and Bernard Gwertzman, "Friedman: Chinese believe Tibetans, other ethnic groups should be incorporated into one China," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 23, 2008, accessed September 11, 2011, http://www.cfr.org/china/friedman-chinese-believe-tibetans-other-ethnic-groups-should-incorporated-into-one-china/p16052.

the Chinese economy and society, and the re-enstatement of Chinese universities, but the notable resurgence of youth nationalism did not begin until the post-Tiananmen era when the Chinese government started to carry out successive patriotic education campaigns. The most notable incidents that drew outpourings of nationalist sentiment included the 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the 2001 collision between a Chinese fighter plane and U.S. spy plane over Chinese territory, the 2005 controversy over Japanese history textbooks coupled with Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, and the 2008 anti-West protests against Western media's bias on Tibetan unrest, as mentioned above. The latest episode is the 2010 events involving the ongoing dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu Islands.

There is a wealth of existing literature on Chinese nationalism, much of it directed at the young generation of the population. David Shambaugh discusses "aggrieved, defensive nationalism" versus "confident and proud nationalism."[18] Suisheng Zhao distinguishes "state-led nationalism" and "popular nationalism."[19] Pal Nyiri, Juan Zhang and Merriden Varrall talk about "cosmopolitan nationalism."[20] Vanessa Fong argues "filial nationalism."[21] Maria Chang discusses "irredentist nationalism."[22] Barry Sautman introduces the concept of "paleoanthropological nationalism."[23] Orville Schell identifies

[18] David Shambaugh, "China's competing nationalisms," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2008, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/05/opinion/05iht-edshambaugh.1.12573434.html.
[19] Suisheng Zhao, "The Olympics and Chinese Nationalism," *China Security* 4, no.3 (2008): 48-57.
[20] Pal Nyiri, Juan Zhang and Merriden Varrall, "China's Cosmopolitan Nationalists: 'Heroes' and 'Traitors' of the 2008 Olympics," *The China Journal*, no.63 (2010): 25-56.
[21]Vanessa Fong, "Filial Nationalism among Chinese teenagers with Global Identities," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004): 631-648.
[22] Maria Chang, "Chinese Irredentist Nationalism: The Magician's Last Trick," *Comparative Strategy* 17, no. 1 (1998): 83-101.
[23] "The state has adapted a body of complex scholarship toward… archaeology, the study of ancient societies and cultures, and paleoanthropology, the study of the human fossil record, have been instruments for the inculcation of nationalism and a response to it in many national settings." Barry

Chinese nationalism with "inferiority complex."[24] Peter Hayes Gries links nationalism to the "hundred years national humiliation" patriotic education.[25] The discourse of "national humiliation" was analyzed to a great extent in William Callahan's book "China: The Pessoptimist Nation."[26] Scholars like Zhang Xudong[27] and Wang Shaoguang[28] express a positive attitude toward nationalism. Andrew Nathan, Robert Ross,[29] Thomas Metzger, Ramon Myers,[30] Philip Saunders[31] and Suisheng Zhao,[32] among others, hold that Chinese nationalism is rational and manageable, and some others speak in more premonitory tones. Largely due to the high publicity of the protests in recent years, especially the 2008 protests in the West that involved many overseas students, many scholars and reporters, for example Dru Gladney [33] and Qiang Yan,[34] argue that Chinese youth nationalism is increasingly dangerous. Josh Kurlantzick states that "able to truly express their opinions (if China was a free society,) young Chinese would be able to put intense pressure on a freer government to adopt a hard line against the West – even, perhaps, to

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Sautman, "Peking Man and the Politics of Paleoanthropological Nationalism in China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no.1 (2001): 95-124.

[24] "China's Agony of Defeat," *Newsweek*, July 25, 2008, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.newsweek.com/2008/07/25/china-s-agony-of-defeat.html.

[25] Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (University of California Press, 2004).

[26] William Callahan, *The Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

[27] Xudong Zhang, "minzu zhuyi yu dangdai zhongguo," [Nationalism and Contemporary China], *Dushu* 6 (1997): 22-30.

[28] Shaoguang Wang, "Nationalism and Democracy: Second Thoughts," *China Public Administration Review* 1, (2004);

[29] Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

[30] Thomas Metzger and Ramon Myers, "Chinese Nationalism and American Policy," *Orbis* 42(1998): 21-36.

[31] Erica Downs and Phillip Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limites of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Isaland," *International Security* 23, no.3 (Winter 1998/1999):114-146.

[32] Suisheng Zhao, "China's Pragmatic Nationalism: Is it Manageable?" *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no.1 (Winter 2005/2006): 131-144.

[33] Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China: reflections on Muslims, minorities and other subaltern Subjects* (London: C.Hurst & Co, 2004).

[34] Qiang Yan, "Realism, Nationalism, and China's Foreign Policy Making (since 1979)" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, USA, March 22, 2006).

invade Taiwan," and "one day, Hu [Jintao] may find even he can't defend himself before a mob of angry Chinese students."[35] Jean-Pierre Cabestan writes: "in 1999, there were no foreign casualties. But one cannot exclude such a possibility in the future, so punctuated is the history of Chinese nationalism, in its populist and primitive dimension, with aggression against foreigners."[36] Authors take different angles in analyzing the origins and characteristics of Chinese nationalism and differ in opinions on the prospects of Chinese nationalism, but they all agree that it is state-led as well as populous.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) needs nationalism as its new source of legitimacy in the face of an "ideological vacuum" left by the waning of socialism. Much research and writings have been done on Chinese nationalism, but attentions are predominantly focused on either the "high politics" - state polices and international relations - or the cultural and historical perspectives. This section is intended to focus on the young people themselves - what they think and how they act, and whether their thoughts and actions will render Chinese nationalism, in the future, dangerous, as many authors predict.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to quantitatively measure the intensity of nationalistic sentiment, but this does not necessarily mean that one cannot get a rough idea about it. I argue that youth nationalism in the post-Tiananmen era is not as dangerous as some scholars think. First, the majority of the students are not rabidly nationalistic. They believe in international cooperation and communication for advancing China's interests and resolving conflicts. Secondly, I will show that the angry youth are

[35] Josh Kurlantzick, "China's next-Generation Nationalists."
[36] Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism," *China Perspectives [Online]* 59 (2005), accessed November 8, 2010, http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/2793.

not people of deep conviction in their nationalistic agenda. When nationalism is in conflict with the young nationalists' own interests, pragmatism triumphs over students' nationalistic sentiments, and at moments when they face suppression from the state, they are not able to stay committed, uncompromised and unified.

The Cool-headed Majority

Journalists as well as scholars lamented over Hong Kong Phoenix TV's survey result. Evan Osnos of New Yorker described the praise on Bin Laden "chilly."[37] Professor Liu Jing said she is "alarmed" by Chinese youths' "stubborn either-or mentality." However, it is unclear how well the Phoenix TVsurvey reflects reality. The validity of online surveys is always questionable. First, different websites have their own self-selected viewers. Experiments have repeatedly found that people tend to pay attention only to information that confirms their existing views. Secondly, people who have a strong view are more inclined to participate in a survey or leave a comment. This phenomenon can often be seen on restaurant or hotel review sites. One often sees a review page full of either lavishing praise or harsh criticism, but oftentimes in reality, the majority of the customers do not belong to either end of the spectrum. Furthermore, since before taking the survey website viewers can view previous participants' choices and comments, their decisions can be easily influenced by existing survey results. People want to conform to ideas they perceive as mainstream, normal or correct. As Siji Wang pointed out, in this case, some people may feel: "if I condemn Bin Laden, I am on the

[37]Evan Osnos, "Osama, China, and America," *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/evanosnos/2011/05/osama-china-america.html.

opposite side of others, thus I am unpatriotic."[38] In fact, according to a reporter at Public Radio International, the prevailing view on the death of Bin Laden in his Beijing neighborhood is rather indifferent.[39]

To avoid the disadvantages of online surveys, I conducted a survey of more than one hundred Chinese nationals now studying at the George Washington University (GWU) and Georgetown University (GU) located in Washington D.C. Survey samples were distributed during the National Day celebration lunch hosted by GWU's Chinese Students and Scholars' Association on October 3, 2010. I also solicited survey responses by contacting people on the GW and GU Chinese students' mailing lists. There are 100 valid responses. I also interviewed 20 people through email, instant messaging software (g-chat, qq-chat) and face-to-face meetings. In addition, I randomly selected 35 GWU and GU students from the mailing lists and added them as my "friends" on Renrenwang, a major social networking site in China. I looked at their comments, posts and shared items on politics and U.S. - China relations-related topics on their Renrenwang pages. One note about surveying Washington D.C. students is that Washington, the capital of the United States (U.S.), is a place where many events concerning international politics are carried out. Students have more opportunities to be exposed to a diverse menu of political activities and different opinions than other places in the U.S. In order to avoid the problem that a volunteer sample (e.g., soliciting commentary on the Internet) would only represent the opinions of people who have stronger opinions or are more willing to speak out, the people I surveyed and interviewed were randomly chosen from the Chinese

[38] Siji Wang, "ladan sihou, meiguo hui ezhi zhongguo ma?"[after the death of Bin Laden, is America going to deter China?], *Southern Metropolis*, May 8, 2911, accessed Agusut 1, 2011, http://gcontent.oeeee.com/7/73/7736debbc2c6bca5/Blog/143/f596dd.html.

[39] "China's mixed reaction to Osama Bin Laden's death," *Public Radio International*, May 5, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.pri.org/world/asia/china-s-mixed-reaction-to-osama-bin-laden-s-death.html.

students on GW's and GU's lists. The questions I asked in my survey and interviews are merely about the students' opinions. I did not try to test whether or not they are well versed on the issues, nor did I try to judge whether their views were founded.

My research shows that the students in general are less confrontational and more moderate than the students we saw on the Internet and TV in 2008 who took to the streets in protest. Though angry youth are the loudest and most conspicuous, they do not represent the majority. One question I asked in my survey was, "If you are in China and your friends and relatives asked you how America is, how would you respond?" The least popular choice is "hegemonic, intervenes in other countries' internal affairs," with only 9 percent of all respondents choosing this option. The most popular choice was "free, democratic and with rule of law" with 59 percent of respondents choosing this response (see appendix: Question 10). This result does not necessarily mean that students do not think that the U.S. is hegemonic and likes to intervene other countries' internal affairs, but it means that most of the students do not think this is the most representative characteristic of the U.S. My interviews also show that most students do not believe that the U.S. has treated China as an enemy and they all believe the U.S. and China should enhance their cooperation in various aspects. During my interview with one GW student in the biology department who shows strong disapproval of United State's hegemonism, while asking his opinion on the September 11 attacks he said, "I wish…no people died and every country's interests would be balanced." When asked about the protests against Japan's policy over the Diaoyu Island which happened in several Chinese cities on October 16, 2010, none of the interviewees expressed sympathy over the college students' behavior of breaking and smashing products of Japanese brands that belong to individuals

or stores. Five students out of the 35 whose Renrenwang pages I followed expressed their views on the incident. All of them opposed the students' behavior. When asked in my survey "with regard to the Taiwan issue, which one of these steps do you consider China taking to be the most suitable?", only 5 percent chose "military action." No matter what their opinions on issues concerning territorial disputes are, they do not appear to be the "mob" that wants to resort to violence.

A study on the anti-U.S. protests against the Belgrade embassy bombing in 1999 by Zhiyuan Yu and Dingxin Zhao shows that approximately 76 percent of the protest participants in the demonstrations were in fact uncommitted participants and opportunists, those who have little interest in the movement goal but nevertheless participated.[40] Yu and Zhao find that the high portion of uncommitted participants in the protests was due to the "roommate effect" and the campus environment. Another survey by Dingxin Zhao on the attitudes among students of Peking University, Tsinghua University and the People's University of China after the embassy bombing event concludes that the anger expressed during the anti-U.S. demonstrations were more a momentary outrage triggered by the embassy bombing than a reflection of a long-term development of popular anti-U.S. nationalism as portrayed in the media as well as in the political science and international relations literature.[41] Shengluo Chen's 28 personal interviews with students from eight universities in Beijing concerning the September 11 attacks conclude with the same observation. Students' initial reactions – cheering for the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center – changed soon after second thoughts: "they gradually realized... that the

[40] Dingxin Zhao and Zhiyuan Yu, "Differential Participation and the Nature of a Movement: A Study of the 1999 Anti-U.S. Beijing Student Demonstrations," *Social Forces* 84, no.3 (2006):1755-1777.
[41] Dingxin Zhao, "An Angel on Nationalism in China Today: Attitudes among Beijing Students after Belgrade 1999," *The China Quarterly*, no.172 (2002):885-905.

events of September 11 did not damage only the interests of the United States; they also damaged the interests of China and global security." [42] These observations apply to the overseas students I surveyed.

Comparing my survey and interviews with research done by Chen on students from nine universities in three different locations, Beijing, Luoyang and Fuzhou, students studying in the U.S.'s views on America and China are consistent with those in China.[43] Students in or out of China both have positive views toward the U.S. political system, education system and economic system. David Zweig and Han Donglin conducted two surveys on Chinese returnees from Canada and Japan. Instead of comparing the returnees with the students from universities, Zweig and Han used the Chinese middle class as the comparative group because "the vast majority of returnees will move into the middle class when they return to China."[44] Their survey shows that returnees believe more strongly in international cooperation and are less supportive of assertive nationalism than China's middle class are. However, the difference was very small with only about 0.5 in the scale of 10. Also, the possibility that people who go abroad may be more "internationalist" (e.g., more open to difference places, viewpoints and cultures) to begin with should not be ruled out.

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[42] Shengluo Chen, "Chinese College Students' Views of America After September 11, 2001," in *Chinese Images of the United States*, ed. Carola McGiffert (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 106-114.

[43] Shengluo Chen, "Liangge meiguo: zhongguo daxuesheng de meiguo guan," [Two Americans: Chinese university students' views of America], *Ai sixiang*, October 21, 2008, accessed November 29, 2010, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/21559.html.

[44] Middle class in their report was defined as total household income above RMB 50,000 before taxes, so the "upper class" was in fact included. Donglin Han and David Zweig, "Images of the Outside World: Chinese Overseas Returnees' Attitudes towards International Affairs," *Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*, December 2008, accessed November 24, 2010, http://www.cctr.ust.hk/materials/working_papers/Image.Outside.World-20090123.pdf.

To sum up, contrary to what we see in the west on TV about the chaotic and disturbing Chinese youth nationalism, my survey shows that most of the surveyed overseas students are not "angry youth." Comparing my survey with the surveys done involving the students studying inside China and the Chinese returnees, it is shown that there is no persistent dominant radical anti-U.S. nationalism. In or out of China, the majority of Chinese youth are not rabidly nationalistic. They are in general cool-headed and rational in their thinking.

The Superficial and Uncommitted Nature of Youth Nationalism

Many scholars have pointed out the apparent contradiction between Chinese students' anti-West stance and their embracement of Western life. This contradiction is particularly evident among elite students who strive to go to study in the West, and among them, many later become naturalized citizens of the host countries. The existing literature on Chinese nationalism, either primordialist analyses that focus on historical grievances or constructivist analyses that focus on the relationship between the state and citizens, do not quite answer the simple question: if you dislike a nation and are angry about its arrogance, ignorance and prejudice, then why would you try hard to go to the country to study, live and even become a citizen of it? The other side of the question would be: if you love your country so much, why would you leave her? According to Dickson, "it is possible that people with more moderate views were more likely to want to go overseas. If they have strongly nationalistic views, or very critical views of the West, they might prefer not to live in a Western country."[45] This apparently does not seem to apply to the loud and enraged nationalists on the streets who claim the West is

[45] Email correspondence.

"ignorant," "prejudiced," "vicious," and "unacceptable." It should be further pointed out, there is no way to determine whether Chinese students who come to the U.S. were already more moderate in their views unless there is survey data from before they left China. And then it would be imperative to compare that data to Chinese youth who did not go overseas.[46] Nevertheless, I will discuss the basic characteristics of Chinese youth nationalism in an attempt to explain, and partially reconcile, this apparent discrepancy.

Lucian Pye argues that nationalism should only involve those sentiments that are oriented towards the "nation-state," a concept that only began to exist at the end of the 19th century. Therefore, nationalism should not be confused with tribalism, ethnicity, or shared cultural, religious and linguistic identities, the concepts that preceded the emergence of nation-state. He argues to create a substantive modern nationalism, "there must be a distinct set of ideals, aspirations, heroes, and symbols that are associated with the political system as a part of the larger nation-state system."[47] Writing in 1992, he stated that China had failed to create such a nationalism. "Forty years of sustained attacks on traditional Chinese culture and the equally vigorous efforts to limit the spread of unacceptable modern ideas, all in the name of Chinese nationalism, has left Chinese nationalism without a substantive core which can be readily articulated."[48] Unlike in America, where the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Pledge of Allegiance and other founding documents construct American nationalism, the content of contemporary Chinese nationalism in comparison is "exceedingly thin."[49]

[46] Email correspondence.
[47] Lucian Pye, "How China's Nationalism was Shanghaied," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.29 (1993):107-133.
[48] Pye, "How china's Nationalism was Shanghaied,"126.
[49] Ibid.

During his address of the 2010 midterm election result, John Boehner, the then newly elected Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, was seen very emotional while saying "economic freedom, individual liberty and personal property" are the values that "made America America."[50] No Chinese political elites are able to elaborate equivalent national values that made China, as a nation-sate, China. Comparing the nationalistic sentiment surges after the September 11 attack in the U.S. and the Belgrade embassy bombing in China, we can see how Chinese nationalism, relative to the U.S. lacks content beyond its ethnic and culture identity. On September 11, 2001, Islamic terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon building in Washington D.C. The attacks dramatically increased nationalistic sentiment in America. In his address to the Congress on September 20, nine days after the attacks, then President George Bush said: "…Americans are asking, why do they hate us?...They hate what they see right here…: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other…. These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life."[51] It is clear from the speech that the reason the enemy attacked the U.S., according to President Bush, was that they were against Americans' "way of life." It is safe to say that this message had strong appeal to the American public at that time.

[50] Nicke Wing, "John Boehner Tries Not To Cry During First Address White House Majority," *The Huffington Post*, November 3, 2010, accessed November 24, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/02/john-boehner-cries-speech_n_778042.html.
[51] George Bush, "Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2001, accessed November 24, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html.

On May 7, 1999, during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Bombing of Yugoslavia, five U.S. bombs hit the People's Republic of China Embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese citizens. On May 13, six days after the bombing, then President Jiang Zemin delivered a speech at the Meeting Welcoming Staff Working at Yugoslavia. He stated: "These activities [protests, condemnation] sufficiently proved the great patriotic spirit and tremendous solidarity of the Chinese nation (zhonghua minzu, 中华民族) …The great People's Republic of China cannot be bullied…The U.S., relying on its economic, technology and military power, continues to promote hegemonism and power politics, and recklessly intervene in other nations' internal affairs…"[52] In the speech, the "attack" was interpreted simply and entirely as the weak falling victim to the strong. Like Bush's speech, Jiang's was also very well received by his domestic audience. But unlike Bush, Jiang did not claim that the attack was aimed at China's "way of life" or Chinese values. In other nationalistic sentiment outbursts, no claim of this kind was ever made. This is probably because it is difficult to construct and articulate a package of "Chinese values" that can strongly appeal to the Chinese public and therefore effectively bring about nationalistic sentiment. China, in the past 30 years, was able to transform from an isolated Leninist-Communist state to a quasi-open mishmash authoritarian state. It has proved to the world its extraordinary flexibility and adaptability, but at the same time, it fails to construct a modern nationalism that is distinct to China as a nation-state, rather than a civilization.

After Deng Xiaoping began to open up the country in the late 1970s by adopting capitalist ideas, the Communist Party has been attempting to make their partisan political

[52] Jiang Zemin, "Zai huanying woguo zhu nansilafu lianmeng gongheguo gongzuo renyuan dahui shang de jianghua," [Speech at the Meeting Welcoming Staff Working at Yugoslavia Federation], May 13, 1999, accessed November 24, 2010, http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/docsn/xqh/kangmei/kangm57.htm.

ideology, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "the Four Cardinal Principles,"[53] the basis of the new Chinese nationalism. Enormous resources have been spent by the Party for the production and propagation of official discourse and ideology. Heike Holbig argues that the Communist Party's ideological reforms have been a crucial factor in sustaining the legitimacy of Communist party rule. For example, the "Three Represents" introduced by Jiang Zemin was an attempt to include the capitalists and other elites into the Party.[54] However ideological reform may provide a theoretical basis for the Party's legitimacy, it is more a source of cynicism for young people. As Stanley Rosen points out, there are ample evidences showing that the regime has made little headway in penetrating the belief systems of young people.[55] Shengluo Chen's survey also shows that political ideology classes have very limited impact on university students.[56]

Failing to derive nationalism from China's official political ideology, nationalists have to resort to the primordialist line of cultural identity. A surge of popular interest in contemporary interpretations of classical texts, "national studies fever" (guoxue re, 国学热) has appeared in recent years. Guoxue classes have opened around the country from the elementary school level to the university level. Renmin University Guoxue College was established in 2005 and Qinghua University Guoxue College re-opened in 2009 (it

[53] The Four Cardinal Principles are: the principle of upholding the socialist path, the principle of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, the principle of upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and the principle of upholding Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought.
[54] Heike Holbig, "Ideological Reform and Political Legitimacy in China: Challenges in the Post-Jiang Era," *Institute of Global and Area Studies*, March 2006, accessed November 27, 2010, http://www.giga-hamburg.de/dl/download.php?d=/content/publikationen/pdf/wp18_holbig.pdf.
[55] Stanly Rosen, "The Effect of Post-4 Jun Re-Education Campaigns on Chinese Students," *The China Quarterly*, no.134 (1993):310-334.
[56] "Meiguo zhengzhi zhidu huode zhongguo daxuesheng gengduo huanying," [American political system wins favorable views from Chinese university students], *Tiexue International Forum*, April 11, 2010, accessed November 11, 2010, http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_4188412_1.html.

existed temporarily from 1925-1929). Young people have organized to wear Han Dynasty style robes and perform old rituals. It also has been a multi-media phenomenon, taking shape in books, DVDs, televised lectures and historical miniseries, on the Internet and even in the form of computer games.[57] The fever, apparently driven by the market and commercialization of history, was also strongly backed by the government. President Hu Jintao has made the Confucian concept of "harmonious society" (hexie shehui, 和谐社会) a cornerstone of his ruling ideology. Former president Jiang Zemin's focus on "a moderately prosperous society" (xiaokang shehui, 小康社会) was also derived from Confucianism. Both central and local governments have supported various Confucian projects – Confucian colleges, Confucian fellowships, Confucian Festivals, movies about Confucius, etc. Confucian classes have opened around the country from the elementary school level to the university level.

For many ordinary citizens, as China's economy has grown so has Chinese people's national pride, and a desire to attribute China's rise to something uniquely Chinese, namely Confucianism.[58] However, on close look one will find the connection tenuous. Studies consistently find that economic liberalization (e.g., greater participation of private entities, greater labor-market flexibility, fewer government regulations and restrictions) is the driving force behind China's economic miracle. Contrary to economic liberalism that focuses on productivity, Confucianism stresses equality, professing that a leader should "concern himself with unequal distribution and not scarcity (不患寡而患不

[57] Michael Szonyi, "Ming Fever: The Present's Past as the People's Republic Turns Sixty," *China Heritage Quarterly* 21(2010).

[58] "Jiekai dangqian 'guoxue re' xingqi de zhuyao yuanyin," [reveal the main reasons of the rise of the current "national studies fever"], *Beijing Daily*, June 21, 2007, accessed November 29, 2010, http://book.qq.com/a/20070621/000009.htm.

均)." In another well-known example, when a student asked to learn how to plow, Confucius averred that he was a "little-minded man." Confucianism's aversion to manual labor does not agree with the widespread understanding that an abundance of manual laborers has been a tremendous boon to the economy over the last three decades. The belief that China's current economic achievements are owed to traditional Chinese values is ill grounded.

The revival of Confucianism and traditional values stems from people's desire to find a cultural identity when their economic needs are satisfied and their confidence is on the rise, rather than from their true understanding and belief in some traditional values.[59] As professor of Chinese at Fudan University Luo Yuming pointed out "national studies fever" is like an infectious disease, and people are more interested in the phenomenon than national studies itself.[60] It is more a fashion that should not be missed than a serious subject to study. Students care less about better understanding the content of the Classics. Their interests are more in "forms" and "appearances" – wearing Han dynasty robes, reciting Tang dynasty poems and worshiping ancestors. Confucianism's fundamental values Ren (Humanity, 仁), Yi (Righteousness, 义), He (peace, harmonious, 和), Wen (kind, gentle, 温) and others are in fact poorly carried out among the angry youth. The pernicious and belligerent words they chanted and wrote on their banners during anti-Japanese protests were in stark contrast to Confucian idea of Ren and He. It is also the opposite of Yi when angry youth choose to keep silence on domestic issue of inequality

[59] A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-396.

[60] Shengyu, Fu, "Guoxue jiaoyu yu nanti 'leng bandeng' nan zuowen 'guoxue re' yi fuza," [the difficult question for national studies education, hard to sit stable on a cold chair, easy to be impetuous no national studies studying], May 16, 2008, accessed November 29, 2010, http://news.163.com/08/0516/10/4C2E3BHQ000120GU.html.

and injustice while shouting loud about foreigners' bullying and bias. During the protest against Japan over the Diaoyu Island in 2010, a girl in Chengdu who was wearing Han Dynasty robe was mistaken by the angry youth as wearing a Kimono. The angry youth shouted at her, forcefully demanded her to take off her clothes and threatened to burn the clothes.[61] The difference between Han Dynasty robe and Kimono is apparent. This vignette only shows the angry youth's lack of even basic understanding of the culture they are so proud of. It is fair to say that the "national studies fever" is rather a superficial event. The pride the angry youth hold towards their culture heritage does not come from their understanding and firm belief in the culture itself, but the mere enchantment by the concept of the "traditional culture." The nationalism that is based on this kind of culturalist pride is shallow at the very least, if not devoid of content.

One major theme of Chinese nationalism is the discourse of the "Century of Humiliation" (bainian guochi, 百年国耻), a period from mid-1800s to mid-1900s when China was subjugated by Japan and the Western powers. References to "the 'Century of Humiliation'…both reflect and powerfully shape China's relations with the West today," writes Peter Gries. "Neither Communism's victory over the Nationalist Party in the Civil War, nor the declaration of 'liberation' in 1949 appears to have exorcised the past."[62] China's stunning economic growth in the past thirty years and the status as the world's second largest economic body also fail to alter Chinese sense of victimization. "Feelings of humiliation live on." "The great People's Republic of China cannot be bullied," as

[61] "Nvhai chuan hanfu bei wudang hefu, beibi dangzhong tuoyi," [a girl wearing Han Dynasty robe mistaken for wearing Kimono, forced to take off her clothes in public], *Wangyi Luntan*, October 18, 2010, accessed November 29, 2010,http://bbs.news.163.com/bbs/photo/189705131.html.

[62] Orville Schell, "China: Humiliation & the Olympics," *The New York Review of Books*, June 15, 2008, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/aug/14/china-humiliation-the-olympics/?page=2.

appeared in Jiang's aforementioned speech, and "the Chinese people cannot be humiliated" are typical slogans chanted repeatedly in reaction to perceived unfair treatment or injustices from foreigners. Playing "the victim" and "Century of Humiliation" have been very successful in fostering youth nationalism, thanks to the highly successful "patriotic education" campaign introduced by the CCP after 1989. "The national-humiliation narrative is painstakingly reproduced in textbooks, museums, popular history books, virtual exhibits, feature films, dictionaries, journals, atlases, pictorials, and commemorative stamps."[63]

However, the question is: to what extend this emotional nationalism, without any real interest at stake and without any real belief in it, drive the youth to act "out of control"? As Dingxin Zhao argues, because the nationalist demonstrations are triggered by a short incident and centered on a single issue, it is hard for the participants to sustain prolonged protesting activities.[64] Students' nationalistic behavior is usually not an aggressive act initiated by them. It is more of a defensive reaction to a specific issue that youth perceive is treated unfairly or unjustly by foreigners. The students' behavior is not backed up by strong convictions in elaborate ideas. The strong nationalistic sentiments demonstrated in protests are much like a momentary emotional outburst that, inherently, cannot last long.

The discourse of national humiliation is not unique to China. "Ireland, rather than having merely one century of national humiliation is in its ninth century of shame, and the issue is still unresolved; Serbians tell us that they have been suffering for more than

[63] William Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives* no. 29 (2004):199-218.
[64] Dingxin Zhao, "Nationalism and Authoritarianism: Student-Government Conflicts During the 1999 Beijing Student Protests," *Asian Perspective* 27, no.1 (2003): 5-34.

six hundred years, and in Korea national humiliation is used not to describe ancient history but the current economic crisis: [the] agreement [with the IMF] will open up a new door for the South Korean economy to enter into a new era. To many South Koreans, the agreement was 'National Humiliation Day.'" In France, the invasion by Nazi Germany in 1940 is "the most stringent humiliation in contemporary memory," and the defeat by and collaboration with Nazis still "plague French mentality."[65] Even the arrest of the chief of the International Monetary Foundation, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a French national and presidential hopeful, for an alleged sexual attack of a maid at a New York hotel in 2011 stirred expressions of national humiliation across France.[66] In the East or the West, in democracies or non-democratic states, national humiliation is a common and recurring theme in domesticand international politics.

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, some argue if China were a democracy, popular nationalism would have more influence on the making of Chinese foreign policy. However, South Korea, to take one example, has an equally troubled relationship with Japan because of issues related to colonial rule, comfort women, Japanese prime ministers' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, inaccuracies of history textbooks, geographic disputes, etc., all of which are similar to the issues China has with Japan. "Nationalism directed against Japan is an essential part of Korean national identity," says Charles Armstrong.[67] As a democracy, South Korean leaders have to respond to a bloc of young nationalistic voters, but both the liberal-minded Roh Moo-hyun administration and

[65] Caroline Varin, "Humiliation, National Identity and Foreign Policy: A Study of France and China" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2009).
[66] Dan Bilefsky, "The French Reaction to I.M.F. Chief's Arrest," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/the-french-reaction-to-i-m-f-chiefs-arrest/.
[67] Esther Pan, "Japan's Relationship with South Korea," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 27, 2005, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.cfr.org/japan/japans-relationship-south-korea/p9108.

the more conservative Lee Myung-bak administration came out pragmatic on dealing with Japan. They surpass ideological differences for tangible economic and diplomatic benefits. “Relations are not as bad as they appear from the outside,” Armstrong says. “Much of the protest is for domestic consumption.” In this highly integrated and deeply connected global community, few countries can afford to let emotion override rational calculation and, after all, most citizens are not willing to. To say China would be an exception, more evidence is needed.

Without the modern values and identities that can hold them together, lack of real interest in the cultural identity, uniting under waves of momentary emotion that inherently cannot last long, youth are not truly committed to their nationalistic agenda. They are usually not able to stay uncompromised and unified and carry out nationalistic action at the time when it is against the will of the government. During the 1999 anti-U.S. protests, the 2005 anti-Japan protests, the 2008 anti-West protests and the 2010 anti-Japan protests, each time, when the government decided to curb fervent nationalist sentiment, they managed to do so with little effort. The crackdowns involved much less force than the government usually has to use to crack down on protests that participants have unyielding interests in (e.g., class actions by peasants whose lands are taken over by the local government) or protests whose people have strong religious beliefs (e.g., the Falun Gong movement). During the late period of the Diaoyu Island episode, the government prohibited the group “Civil Diaoyu Island Protection” (minjian baodiao, 民间保钓) from going to the island. The members of the organization expressed their

disappointment of the government to a Voice of America reporter, but no further actions were taken.[68]

The reason that the nationalistic university students are still very keen on coming to study and live in the West has to do with the same "superficial" nationalism. Because of the lack of depth in the nationalistic sentiment the students hold, they are not at odds with their host countries' nationalism. For example, among the Chinese students in the U.S., many are able to cheerfully live in America and willingly embrace, to use Huntington's words, the "America Creed", those aspirational political values which "Americans hold dear" including democracy, individualism, the rule of law, private property, etc.[69] Michael Finn researched stay-rates of non-U.S. citizen doctorate recipients from U.S. Universities. Compared to students from other countries, Chinese students have exceptionally high stay-rates. Among students from all over the world he surveyed, Chinese students who received their Ph.D. in 1996 and 2002, in the following five years after completing their programs, 92 percent to 95 percent remained in the U.S. (See Table 1 & 2)

[68] "Xubao, Zhongguo zhengfu daya minjian baodiao," [Chinese government suppress civil Diaoyu Island protection group*], Voice of America*, September 15, 2010, accessed November 25, 2010, http://www.voanews.com/chinese/news/20100915-China-Diaoyu-Island-102942594.html.
[69] Alan Wolfe, "Defend the Homeland," *Foreign Affairs*, June 2004, accessed November 29, 2010, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59908/alan-wolfe/native-son-samuel-huntington-defends-the-homeland.

Table 1[70]

Percentages of Temporary Chinese Residents Receiving Ph.D.s in 1996 Who were in the United States, 1997-2000

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
93 percent	94 percent	94 percent	95 percent	95 percent

Table 2[71]

Percentage of Temporary Chinese Residents Receiving Ph.Ds[72] in 2002 Who Were in the United States, 2003-2007

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
93percent	92percent	92percent	92percent	92percent

Students choose to study and stay in America for various reasons. The most obvious reason is the quality of America's higher education. Xiaoqiu Xu did a questionnaire on Chinese students in America's intention to stay or return after graduation.[73] The survey found out the reasons to stay in America after graduation are highly practical: "love the blue sky in America," "love the relative liberty of life in the

[70] Michael Finn, "Stay Rates of Foreign Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities, 2001," *Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education*, November 2003, accessed November 29, 2010, http://www.abtassociates.com/reports/stayrate03.pdf.
[71] Michael Finn, "Stay Rates of Foreign Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities, 2007," *Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education*, January 2010, accessed November 29, 2010, http://orise.orau.gov/files/sep/stay-rates-foreign-doctorate-recipients-2007.pdf.
[72] The PhD recipients are in science and engineer.
[73] Xiaoqiu Xu, "The dilemma of Chinese students in America: To return or stay?" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2007).

U.S. in comparison with more conservative and complicated human relations in China," "made new friends, or found a wife or husband," "worry that once returned, they will never be able to return to America," etc. Certainly, as I said, not all students who choose to study or stay in America are nationalistic. Among those who are nationalistic, because their nationalistic sentiments lacks real substance and their conviction to their nationalist course are superficial, they would not be "angry" at their host countries enough to resist the chance to live a life that is better "in practice." They are able to pragmatically judge and pick up ways of living their lives that they think best fit themselves.

After the embassy bombing in Belgrade in 1999, students at Peking University hung a banner on campus saying "don't take TOEFL, don't take GRE, focus our attention solely on attacking the imperialist America."[74] Ironically, it turned out that in the following year 2000, 78 percent of Peking University graduates who went abroad chose America as their destination.[75] I did not find numbers of Peking University students who went abroad in 1999, but at Tsinghua University, an equally prestigious university, the number of students who went abroad actually increased from 960 in 1999 to 1,120 in 2000, which was a 17 percent increase. The anger many students had towards the U.S. did not stop them from taking the tests and applying to U.S. universities. (The GRE test was carried out in June, the month following the embassy bombing.)[76]

[74] Lu Hui, "1999 : fanmei youxing, minzu zhuyi xin langchao," [1999: anti-U.S. protests, new wave of nationalism], *Southern Metropolitan Weekly*, December 11, 2008, accessed November 20, 2010, http://news.ifeng.com/opinion/specials/thinking/200812/1211_4817_917898.shtml.
[75] "Shehui diaocha: qinghua beida biyesheng dou qule nail?" [Social survey: where did Tsinghua, Peking graduates go], *Zhejiang News Online*, July 14, 2005, accessed November 2010, http://www.zjol.com.cn/05edu/system/2005/07/14/006191766.shtml.
[76] GRE tests are carried out every year in June and October, but taking the test in October would be too late for Universities whose deadlines are in the beginning of December.

During the anti-West protests in 2008, the French supermarket chain Carrefour was accused of supporting the Dalai Lama. Young nationalists thus called for a boycott of Carrefour supermarkets in China, especially on May Day, a national holiday. The frenzies of youth protesting outside of Carrefour were widely reported, giving an impression that the situation was out of control. However, according to Carrefour's executive in China, only between 10 and 15 stores out of 112 were impacted by demonstrations. On the planned May Day protests, New York Times correspondent Andrew Jacobs observed: "They came. They expressed their patriotic fervor. Then they shopped." Li Chen, a 22-year-old biology student shopping in the store, claimed: "we should oppose Westerners who try to bring down China," but when asked about the bottles of Pepsi he purchased, he explained, "these days, everything is made in China." [77] According to Carrefour's 2008 Annual Report, sales in China increased 14.5 percent, and China was repeatedly highlighted as an example of Carrefour's success in the global market.[78] Two months after the height of 2005 anti-Japanese demonstrations, the Japan External Trade Organization did a survey on the impact of the demonstrations on production and sales of 414 Japanese companies in China. Survey results show that only 9.7 percent of companies indicated that their business activities were affected by the anti-Japanese movement. Most of the companies stated that they were "not affected at present and do not foresee any negative impacts."[79] Sony, Panasonic and NEC, companies that

[77] Andrew Jacobs, "Carrefour shoppers choose bargains over boycotts in China," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2008, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/world/asia/01iht-china.1.12486010.html.

[78]" Carrefour 2008 Annual Report," accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.carrefour.com/docroot/groupe/C4com/Finance/Publications_et_presentations/Lespercent20rapportspercent20annuels/CARREFOUR_RA_2009_UK_01-56_V2.pdf.

[79] "Special survey of Japanese business in China – Impact of the April anti-Japan demonstrations," accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/reports/survey/pdf/2005_04_biz.pdf.

produce electronic products that are most purchased by young people, claimed that they did not see any major impact on their sales. The violent scenes people see on TV- angry youth smashing Japanese brand goods and damaging Japanese owned stores - do not represent the general situation of Japanese businesses in China at that time at all.

Nationalism is a key component of youth activism in China. The phenomenon has attracted wide international attention. Despite the many warnings of the danger of Chinese youth nationalism, I found that the young people in China, among which some will be future political elites, nationalistic sentiments and practical interests are well balanced. At times, the students will show disagreement, frustration, anger or contempt with regard to the West and Japan; at the same time, the same students will go on about their everyday lives no matter their nationalistic pursuits.

Activism of Political Contention

Though the economic liberalization set in motion by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 has improved the lives of hundreds of millions and made China the second largest economy in the world, the cost of the achievement is no less significant. The widening gap between rich and poor, and urban and rural Chinese, the deteriorating land, air and water pollution, endemic official corruption, widespread police abuses, unlawful seizure of land, inflation and other social issues have caused unprecedented protests and conflicts. A growing number of people have taken actions to address the problems, and to defend their interests that are harmed and their rights that are infringed. Young people are an indispensable part of this phenomenon. This section focuses on youth led contentious

activities. I divide the youth into two groups: the young migrant workers and the college educated youth. I will discuss their activities respectively.

The New Generation of Migrant Workers

On January 31, 2010, a document known as Document Number 1 (一号文件, yihao wenjian) titled "Several Opinions Regarding Strengthening the Coordination between Urban and Rural Development, and Furthering the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas" (guanyu jiada tongchou chengxiang fazhan lidu, jinyibu wushi nongye nongcun fazhan jichu de ruogan yijian, 关于加大统筹城乡发展力度 进一步务实农业农村发展基础的若干意见) was issued by the State Council, addressing issues related to agriculture and migrant workers.[80] It was the first time the term New Generation Migrant Workers (xinshengdai mingong, 新生代民工), or NGMW, was mentioned in an official document. The NGMW generally refer to the migrant workers who were born after 1980. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of NGMW in 2009 is about 100 million. It is the majority of the migrant worker population. The average age is 23. Most of them join the workforce after graduating from middle school.[81]

The NGMW were either born in cities or came to cities at a very young age. They identify more with the city they live than the village they come from. The lifestyles and ways of thinking of the NGMW are heavily influenced by the cities they grew up in, greatly different form their parents' generation. The first generation worked long hours in poor conditions but were able to send money back to their families, helping them build

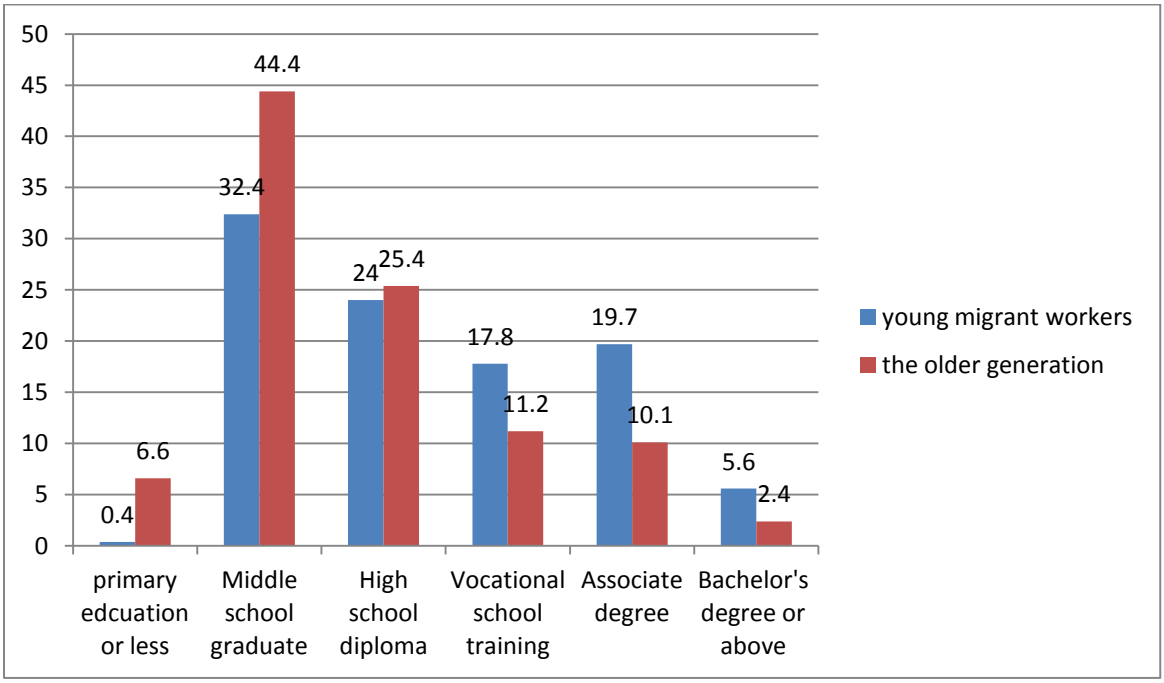
[80]Chinese authorities issue Number One documents in the beginning of every year as a means to highlight policies for the coming year.

[81] *"Nian qiye xinshengdai nongmingong zhuangkuang diaocha ji duice jianyi*," [2010 survey and policy recommendation on the new generation migrant workers], All-*China Federation of Trade Union*, accessed August 1, 2011, http://wenku.baidu.com/view/b3adfa4ce518964bcf847c54.html.

new homes and raise living standards in their rural villages. Raised in those boom times, the workers of the new generation are less willing to accept difficult conditions for low pay and are increasingly assertive about exercising their influence as laborers. They are better educated than their parents' generation (See chart 1). They are aware of their rights, and are increasingly frustrated with the treatment they receive in cities. The Hukou system, widely recognized as a patently unfair household registration system that identifies the city, town or village to which a person belongs, has divided people who are permanent residents of cities from peasants. It has also prevented migrant workers from accessing a range of public services in the cities they live, including housing, education, medical care and employment. "There is a sense of social injustice that young migrant workers see every day," says Geoffrey Crothall of the Hong Kong-based China labor Bulletin, a workers' rights organization.[82]

[82] Allison Jackson, "China's frustrated migrant workers rise up," *AFP*, July 3, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.mysinchew.com/node/59878.

Figure 1: Education attainment of NGMW[83]



Labor disputes have been on the rise in recent years. Chart 2 shows the trends of newspaper reported labor disputes from 2005 to 2010. As one can see, there is a dramatic increase in 2008, mainly due to the global economic crisis that sparked a series of bankruptcies and factory closures in 2008. Chart 3 shows the number of labor disputes that were brought to and accepted by different levels of courts. Similar to the reported labor unrests, there is a dramatic increase since 2008.[84]

[83] All-China Federation of Trade Union, *jianyi*.

[84] New York Times's reports on the number of labor disputes brought to the courts are incorrect. The numbers are in fact the cases of which the courts issued a verdict. I am not able to find the statistics for 2010. To see New York Time's reports, visit at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/16/world/asia/16china.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1311275116-DW1rUttR5Pz8N1ZCEaImiQ.

Figure 2: Reported Labor Unrest[85]

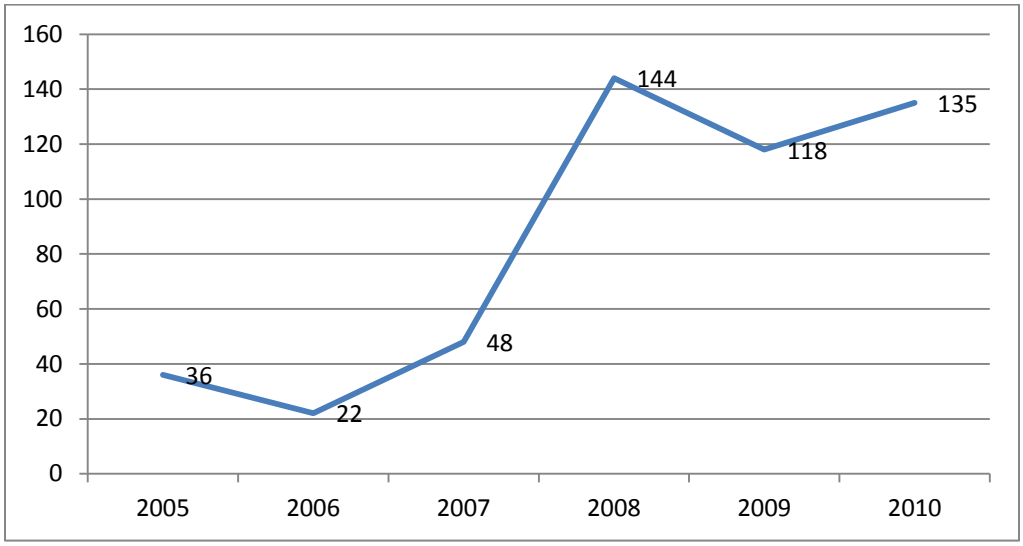
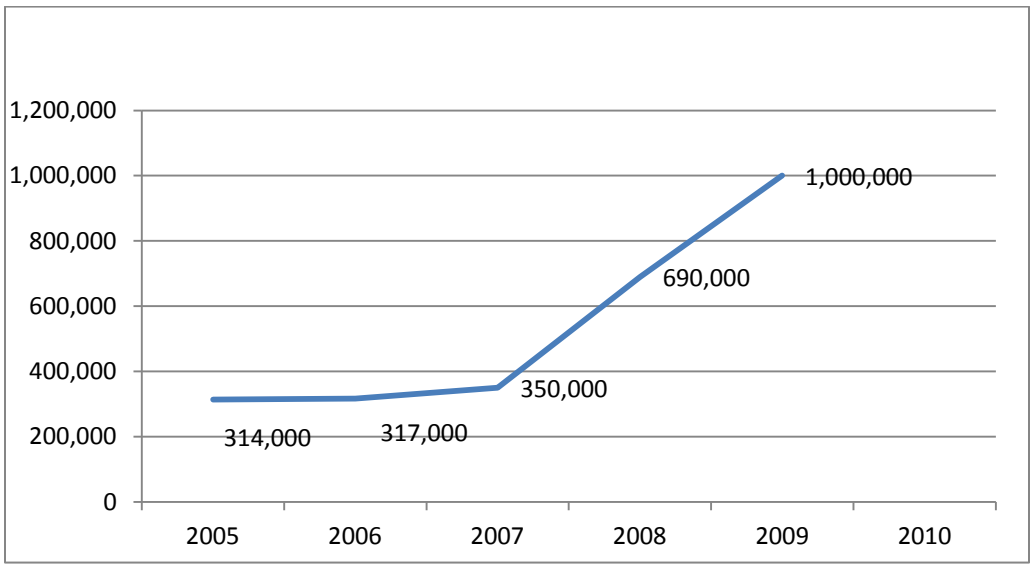


Figure 3: Labor Disputes Lawsuits[86]



[85] Jianrong Yu, "*dangqian woguo quntixing shijian de leixing yu tezheng,"* [the types and characteristics China's current mass unrest incidents], accessed December 6, 2010, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/32027.html.

[86] "*Quanzong: 2010 nian defang laodong zhengyi anjian shuliang chen shangshen qushi," [All China Federations of Trade Unions: the number of labor dispute cases in 2010 demonstrated a increasing trend], People.com*, September 2, 2010, accessed August 24, 2011, http://news.163.com/10/0902/17/6FJGCIVS000146BC.html; "Laodong zhengyi an shuliang reng jugaobuxia," [the number of labor dispute cases is still very high], *China Youth Online*, January 9, 2010, accessed August 24, 2011, http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2010 01/19/content_3045611.htm.

To assess the outlook of the NGMW, I conducted a series of interviews. Through Beijing Legal Aid Office for Migrant Workers and Beijing Youth Research Center, I was able to reach out to young migrant workers who were once involved in labor disputes. Through the Internet, especially social network sites Renrenwang and Weibo, I interviewed 12 people who claimed they were once a participant or a leader of a strike. I also draw references from existing news reports on young migrant workers. To express their discontent, migrant workers have tried different ways. Many went to petition (上访, shangfang).[87] Some were so desperate that they set themselves on fire or physically harmed other people to attract attention. The type of contentious activity I will discuss is the strike, for two reasons. First, it is a type of collective action while petitioning and any form of self-mutilation can be either individual based or collective behavior. Second, strikes are more often used by the young generation and they signify that the young generation is less afraid of confrontation and more aware of their rights.

Twenty five year old Tan Zhiqing was one of the two primary leaders of strikes demanding wage increases at a Honda parts supply plant in Guangdong in May 2010. Raised in a relative affluent environment in rural Hunan Province, Tan was able to obtain a high school diploma before he came to Guangdong, but he was earning merely 1300 yuan ($200) a month after a third pay raise at the Honda plant. He decided to leave. In an interview with *Chinese News Weekly*, he said before he left, he was convinced that he needed to "make a few things right" for his fellow workers.[88] On May 17, 2010, Tan

[87] Petitioning is the administrative system for hearing complaints from individuals.
[88] "Shudu maozedong shici de 80 hou qingnian lingdao bentian gongren bagong," [a young person who read poems by Mao Zedong led Hunda workers to go strike], *Chinese News Weekly,* June 2, 2010, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.sdenews.com/html/69355.htm.

went to the workshop as usual, but instead of turning the machine on, he pressed the emergency button. All the machines suddenly stopped. Tan and anther young man Xiao yelled at other workers, saying "the salary is so low. Let's stop working!" A large-scale strike, the first of a series, thus started. "This generation of students is different from their parents. For the old generation, if they feel their salary is too low, they will just leave and work for another work unit (danwei, 单位), but this generation's young workers have many more ideas."[89] Mr. Du, the vice-principle of Yuexi Vocational School in Zhanjiang from which Honda recruits its new workers, told the reporter. By having "more ideas" the vice-principle was referring to the fact that the young workers will not just "walk away" if their wages are unacceptably low, instead, they are willing to fight the reality they perceive as unjust.

Informant Li Qiang (pseudonym), a 22-year-old man in Shenzhen, described to me the strike he experienced in the factory he is currently working at. He refused to reveal the name of the company, but said it is an "internationally known" company. This company purchased a local lighting company, and in May 2011, the company announced that workers' years of service for the previous company would not be counted in the new company's length of service. Workers, approximately 2000 people, were fiercely upset with the decision. At one o'clock in the afternoon, all workers stopped working and sat quietly in the workshop. Strike continued into the next day. Under the government's instruction, representatives of the workers and the company started to negotiate. The company did not give an immediate response to the workers' demands. After hearing this news, Li, who was sitting on the playground earlier, stepped onto the podium. He used a

[89] "Shudu maozedong shici," *Chinese News Weekly.*

loudspeaker to detail the poor welfare and salary the company has offered. His speech was warmly received. All the workers began to chant slogans. The incident was resolved with the interference of the armed police (Wujin, 武警).[90] Two days later the company agreed to the demands the workers had made. Asked why he chose to step up, Li said because he felt very angry and wronged, and there had to be someone doing "the right thing." Asked whether he was afraid of the armed police, Li replied: "I didn't think too much. I felt I was doing the right thing."

Before Lunar New Year in February 2011, Wang Mingliang, an 18-year-old man from Sichuan Province working in a clothing factory in Guangdong, and his fellow workers, about 100 people, sat outside of the factory owner's house to demand unpaid wages. I asked Wang why he did not file a case to the Office of Labor Arbitration for free. "It took too long and I could not wait that long. Even if the court ordered the boss to pay us the money, he might just run away. The way we chose is more effective," he said.

According to a survey by Shenzhen General Labor Union on 5,000 NGMW, 7 percent of the respondents said they have participated in a "mass unrest." When asked which method they would choose if they encounter labor disputes, 7 percent chose petition, 4 percent chose taking to the street, and 6 percent chose to use violence to retaliate against the company. The study concludes that NGMW are more prone to use "extreme" methods than the workers of the older generation are.[91]

Surveys, interviews, statistics from various sources demonstrate that there is a rising "rights consciousness" among young workers. Some scholars are very positive of

[90] The People's Armed Police is primarily responsible for internal security.
[91] *"Shehui maodun riyi tuchu burong hushi,"* [the increase of social conflicts should not be neglected], *Chinese Communist Party Shandong School Library*, accessed August 1, 2011, http://library.sddx.gov.cn/Manage/ArticleInfo/detail.aspx?id=552A0DB6B1B1EB70.

its impact. Minxi Pei predicts that "China's incipient opposition is likely to become more resilient, sophisticated and adept in challenging the regime." Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu argue that the "impetus for democratization" will begin with "rising rights consciousness" and "such rising consciousness [will] lead to fundamental changes."[92] Merle Goldman writes that "the sense of rights consciousness…had spread…beyond intellectual and elite circles…to the population at large… [T]he transition from comrade to citizen in the People's Republic of China has begun."[93]

I am skeptical of these grand statements. The numbers of protests, strikes, lawsuits are high and ever increasing, but one should keep in mind the advancement of information technology, especially the invention of blogs, social media, video-sharing websites, which has enabled journalists and citizens to expose incidents to the public much easier, cheaper and faster than they could 10 years ago. To see the big picture of workers' contentious activities, in fact, characters like Tan and Li who dare to stand out under tremendous risk are still rare. The percentage of people who are willing to take their time and risk their jobs, according to the Shenzhen General Labor Union's survey, is very small. "These workers are constantly calculating what is in their own best interest. Usually they decide that talking a boss into giving them a raise or jumping to a different job is a better option than challenging the factory directly,"[94] wrote Leslie Chang, author of "Factory Girls." In an interview with Zhang Longfa, a 25-year-old migrant work from Anhui working in Shanghai, Zhang complained about the union, saying "the

[92] Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, *Taxation without Representation in Contemporary Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[93] Elizabeth Perry, "Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution?" *The China Journal*, no.57 (2007):1-22.
[94] Leslie Chang, "A Conversation with Leslie T. Chang," accessed August 1, 2011, http://leslietchang.com/book4.html. "Factory Girls" covers the stories of young female migrant workers in the city of Dongguan in Guangzhou Province.

governmental union, I am not sure whether it protects workers or persecute workers. We, all the migrant workers in China, must have our independent unions." When asked whether he would be willing to organize an independent union, he said: "I don't think so. If I do that, I could lose my job and get beaten by the factory owner. I admire people who do that, but I am too scared to do so." Zhang said his biggest dream is to earn enough money and buy whatever he wants. In my interviews with other workers, these are very typical answers.

Secondly, for the young migrant workers, though working conditions are very tough and discrimination is common, life in the city is still the best they have ever experienced. Twenty two-year-old Liu Qing came to Beijing when he was 16. After working several low-pay jobs, in 2006 he got into the security door business, learning everything from scratch. Now he is in a manager position, earning 3000 yuan ($460) a month. On his QQ profile, he wrote: "I believe if you can maintain a positive attitude in difficult times, everything will be fine." A. Guang, 28, came to Beijing from a village in Hunan 10 years ago after graduating from vocational school. His first job was working at a toy factory, earning 250 yuan ($38) a month. He changed many jobs and lived in many places afterwards. Now he is earning 5000 yuan ($770) a month. "The key to success is the willingness to 'eat bitterness' (chiku, 吃苦)," said Guang. "Eat bitterness" is a Chinese saying, meaning endure hardship, or as in English, "hang in there," or "suck it up." It is one of the most valued Chinese virtues. Unlike American culture that puts a great emphasis on personal freedom and individual rights, Chinese culture denounces disobedience and complaints, deeming it as an excuse for a person's laziness. "Silently working hard" (momo de nuli，默默地努力), on the contrary, is viewed as a moral

strength. Though young workers have to endure miserable living conditions, working in the cities enable them to buy technical gadgets they could not afford if worked in their family farm, and wear fashionable clothes they never would if they remained in the village. Liu Gang is a 23-year-old man from Xianyang, Shanxi Province. He works in a hotel in Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. He told the reporter at *Qinghai News* that during his two years in Xining, he visited all the malls and parks in the city. "I love the city. I love skyscrapers. I love the busy traffic and the magnificence of the malls," he said.[95] Workers are happy with the changes which happen to them and look for any slight opportunity that would lead to further improvement of their situations.

Thirdly, as Peter Lorentzen and Suzanne Scoggins acutely point out, despite the wide use of the term "rights consciousness," it suffers from "a severe lack of conceptual clarity": "What distinguishes a person or a populace with rights consciousness from one without it? In what sense can we attribute causal power to an increase in rights consciousness, or does what is commonly described as increasing rights consciousness actually reflect a change in some other underlying factor?"[96] Elizabeth Perry argues protests and strikes reflect the continuation of Chinese people's "rules consciousness," rather than "rights consciousness": "Post-Mao state proclamations heralding 'reform' and 'legal rights' bear a certain parallelism to Maoist state propaganda harping on 'revolution' and 'class struggle.' Just as protesters during the Maoist era borrowed the then hegemonic language of class in pressing their demands, so protesters today adopt the

[95] Faen Lei, "Special report: focus on migrant workers' life after work," *Qinghai News Net*, September 1, 2010, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.dzwww.com/rollnews/news/201009/t20100901_6643470_1.htm.
[96] Peter Lorentzen and Suzanne Scoggins, *Rising Rights Consciousness: Undermining or Undergirding China's Stability?* December 8, 2010.

currently hegemonic language of rights in framing their grievances." [97] Carl Minzer also argues that the large amount of cases of petitioning – a dysfunctional proxy of formal legal channels - reflects that Chinese citizens' historically rooted practice of seeking justice is still popular, and that does not necessarily indicate a development towards rule of law norms.[98]

Various sources indicate young workers' increasing willingness to challenge the status quo, but the question of how far this could go is still debatable. David Zweig argued back in 1987 that "rights consciousness" might result in reversing individual's subservient role to the state.[99] This argument can still be made today, which means changes in the past 23 years have not been transformative. Further research is needed to assess the impact of the phenomenon of the new generation of migrant workers.

The College Educated Youth

By "college educated youth", I am referring to the youth who have gone to or currently in college. According to *Xinhua News*, among the students who were in college in 2009, 82.3 percent were from urban areas. The better known a university is, the fewer students from rural areas there are.[100] As Rosen pointed out, China's urban youth, beneficiaries of the economic reform, have "primarily pursued a pragmatic, success-oriented approach, placing their public lives in the service of their private ambitions."[101]

[97] Perry, "Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution?"
[98] Carl Minzner, "Xinfang, An Alternative to Formal Chinese Legal Institutions," *Stanford Journal of International Law* 42(2006): 103.
[99] Lorentzen and Scoggins, *Rising Rights*.
[100] "Nongcun daxuesheng bizhong weihe shaole yiban," [why did the ratio of college students from rural area reduce 50 percent], *Guangzhou Daily*, January 24, 2009, accessed August 1, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2009-01/24/content_10712908.htm.
[101] Stanley Rosen, "Chinese youth and state-society relations," in *Chinese politics: State, Society and the Market*, ed. Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen. (Routledge, 2010), 162.

Minxin Pei says in a more pessimistic tone: "this generation has no political ideals or aspirations" and most of China's youth are "totally materialistic."[102] The scholars' views are congruent with studies done on China's youth. Flora Gu and Kineta Hung's survey on both youth and their parents' generation shows that the young generation are more materialistic than the parent generation in terms of acquisition centrality, novelty-seeking, and susceptibility to social influence.[103] A survey in 2007 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) shows 72.7 percent of the university students chose "strive for individual success" on the issue of belief system, compared to 17.2 percent for "strive for realize Communism" and 10 percent for "don't know."[104]

Materialistic maybe, with better quality of education, greater access to information, increasing international exchange opportunities and other various reasons, the educated youth's rights consciousness has also been growing. According to a survey conducted by China Youth Daily, 52 percent of the surveyed 3,100 "post-1980s generation" view the ballot as their basic rights.[105] CASS's study shows one-third of the surveyed 629 students support the concept of universal human rights.[106] Beijing Normal University's survey shows that 90 percent of students in Beijing believe in the freedom of speech. Though the event of 1989 elicited "a brutal and unimaginative set of policies" to suppress the demand for political rights, as Thomas Gold says, today's educated youth still feel empowered to challenge state authority.[107]

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[102] Meredith Robyn, "China's Youth: Labor Activists?" *Forbes,* June 10, 2010, accessed August 1, 2011, http://blogs.forbes.com/china/2010/06/10/chinas-youth-labor-activists/.
[103] Flora Gu and Kineta Hung, "Materialism among adolescents in China: a historical generation perspective," *Journal of Asia Business Studies* 3(2009): 836-853.
[104] Rosen, "Chinese youth and state-society relations", 167.
[105] Zuo Likun, "Poll: Post-80s youth most conscious on rights," *China Daily*, April 6, 2010, accessed August1, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-04/06/content_9691991.htm.
[106] Rosen, "Chinese youth and state-society relations,"167.
[107] Thomas Gold, "Youth and the State," *The China Quarterly* 127 (1991): 611.

Information technology, especially the Internet, plays a vital role in the college educated youth's political activism. Most of their contentious activities, different from those of the young migrant workers, take place in cyberspace. There are also many which spill offline. For those end up on the street, the Internet is still the center of action. Scholars are divided on whether the Internet leads to democratization. There are two basic arguments. The optimistic view is that "the Internet will facilitate the increased participation and deeper engagement of citizens in the political sphere," and "deliver low-cost participation that is nevertheless direct, immediate and interactive." The skeptical view suggests that "the Internet remains beholden to the same commercial and public interests that have dominated and continue to dominate other technological media," and it can only "reinforce the position of already dominant social groups and political interests."[108] Supporters of the first argument include Michael Best and Keegan Wade whose study on the global effect of the Internet on democracy shows that there is a significant correlation between Internet penetration and a nation's level of democratization.[109] Patience Akpan-Obong, Nicholas Alozie and William Foster's study on Sub-Saharan Africa also shows that there is a close alignment between the Internet and democratization.[110] David Hill and Krishna Sen argue that the Internet played a vital role in overthrowing Indonesian President Suharto in 1998, "the first revolution" in the Internet era. On the other side of the debate, Malcolm Galdwell contends that the Internet, especially social media, cannot provide what social change has always required.

[108] Adam Jones, "Review: The Internet, Democracy and Democratization," *Democratization*, accessed September 11, 2011, http://adamjones.freeservers.com/ferdinand.htm.
[109]Michael Best and Wade Keegan, "The Internet and Democracy: Global Catalyst or Democratic Dud?" *The Berkman Center for internet and Society* 2005, (2005).
[110] Patience Akpan-Obong, Nicholas Alozie and William Foster, "Cell vs. Internet: The Impact on Democratizaiton in Africa," accessed August 1, 2010, http://www.fosterandbrahm.com/docs/Akpan_Alozie_Foster_TPRC_2010-2.pdf.

He argues that contentious political activism are high-risk activism that require participants to have strong-ties among each other, however, the platforms of social media are built around weak ties.[111] James Mulvenon points out that for those who want to use the Internet to promote democracy in China, they have to break up not only the information censorship but also the technical barrier that the Great Fire Wall has set up.[112] Nina Hachigian is also pessimistic about the effect of the Internet on democratization in China. She demonstrates that the Chinese government is not only weaving a web of regulation to limit network content and use, but also actively participating in making and disseminating of its own propaganda on the Internet. [113] Ian Bremmer points out the neutral nature of the Internet, noting that the Internet can help to spread democracy and freedom, but can also instigate resentment, racism, nationalism, etc.[114] In a meeting with Dickson, he made the argument that the Internet can in fact make actual public protests less likely. The Internet gives citizens the ability to voice opinions online. Once they get their frustration out, they may be less inclined to protest. In other words, the Internet acts as a safety valve to prevent a larger explosion.

These analyses share a common theoretical basis: the citizen versus the government dichotomy. The Internet is a tool for citizens to go against the government. It is also a tool for the government to control citizens. The question therefore centers at who overpowers whom. However, in reality, the relation between the government and citizens

[111] Malcolm Gladwell, "Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted," *New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell?currentPage=all.
[112] James Mulvenon, "Breaching the Great Firewall," Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, April, 2005, accessed August1, 2011, http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2005hearings/written_testimonies/05_04_14wrts/mulvenon_james_wrts.pdf.
[113] Nina Hachigian, "China's Cyber-Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no.2 (Mar/Apr 2001):118-133.
[114] Ian Bremmer, "Democracy in Cyberspace," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November 2010): 86-92.

is more complex. For an individual, he can be at one time upset with the government's rampant corruption and use the Internet to express his dissatisfaction, but at another occasion, he can praise the government's nationalistic agenda. Secondly, oftentimes the government does not have a unified voice. There is competition and animosity between different agencies at different levels within the government. Take the high-speed train crash in Wenzhou for an example. After only 20- hours of rescue, the Ministry of Railway ordered to bury the front part of the damaged train. This stirred furious reaction on China's social network sites with millions of users criticizing the government. Meanwhile, the local Wenzhou government made it clear that it was the decision from the Ministry of Railway, not them, and in fact they wanted to do whatever they could to continue the rescue.

Guobing Yang also keenly points out one common flaw of the arguments in the Internet and democracy debate: the statements "draw a simple line between technology and society, omitting all the rich human experiences and institutions in between." He says the skeptical view is even more problematic because "it both fails to see the real changes that are taking place at the grassroots level and dismisses too easily the daily experiences of millions of people in their actual engagement and encounters with the Internet."[115] This is true. Scholars who study the effect of the Internet on democracy in a country often lack real experience in using the Internet in that country, thus they often fail to see the dynamics of the Internet and its interactions with other actors in society. Gladwell claimed that "the platforms of social media are built around weak tie. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not

[115] Guobing Yang, *The Power of The Internet in China,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 10.

otherwise be able to stay in touch with."[116] This might be true for people live in democratic societies, because social media is not essential to their activities since they can communicate freely through other channels. However, for the youth in China, the Internet is the safest and most free way they can use to connect to people who share the same ideas and to communicate and coordinate contentious activities. People can be very familiar with each other before physically meet. The beliefs they share and the risks they are aware of hold them together. There is a strong sense of trust existing among them. This is not necessarily a weak tie.

Surveys show how the Internet is used in the West and in China are quite different. Internet company IAC and advertising agency JWT's survey on 1,104 Chinese young elites and 1,079 American youth shows that Chinese respondents were four times as likely as Americans to agree that things online often feel more intense than things offline (61 percent versus 13 percent). Seventy three percent of Chinese youth agreed with the statement "online, I feel free to say and do things I wouldn't do or say offline," compared to only 32 percent of U.S. youth. Fewer than half of American youth agreed that "I often use the Internet to find the opinions of others or share my opinion."[117] By contrast, three quarters of Chinese young elites said they go online to share opinions. Another survey by social business intelligence provider company CIC shows that urban Chinese youth are twice more active in contributing to online content (rather than simply consuming it) than American youth.[118]

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[116]Gladwell, "Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted?"

[117] "China Leads the US in Digital Self-Expression," *IAC*, November 23, 2009, accessed August 1, 2011, http://iac.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=1455.

[118] Daniele Fiandaca, "The Uniqueness of Social Media in China," *The Hive*, September 20, 2009, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.thehiveblog.com/social/media/the-uniqueness-of-social-media-in-china.

Cultural difference is one explanation for the big difference between the Chinese youth and American youth. America's individual-oriented culture encourages young people to speak their minds, so there is less pressure for youth to express their opinion offline. Chinese culture on the contrary places less emphasis on personal views and is less tolerant of dissenting opinions. This deters people from speaking up in daily life, so they prefer to express themselves in the cyberspace. A much more important explanation for the difference is the distinct political environments of the two countries. Free speech is guaranteed in the U.S. Youth will have no trouble to merely speak against the government or political parties. To the Chinese, this is not the case at all. The anonymity the Internet offers protects them from political persecution.

In all, the Internet in China is very rich in content, touching on all imaginable subjects. As the state attempts to control and censor the Internet, netizens respond creatively. Youth in China use the Internet more intensely and extensively than youth in the West. The Internet serves a much more important function for young elites in China than it does in liberal democracy societies, especially with regard to political contention, due to its risky nature.

Ching Kwan Lee divides rural protests, certainly offline, into two categories: "protests against discrimination" and "protests of desperation.". Yang separates online activism into two types: "struggles for recognition and against discrimination" and "struggle against oppression and exploitation." For Lee, both types of protests are rooted in material grievances. For Yang, online activism focuses primarily on nonmaterial concerns. The young elites' contentious political activities include both material and nonmaterial types. Often times, it is a mixed of both. I divide them to two types: ones

that center at pursuing an idea (e.g., freedom, democracy, anti-censorship), and ones that focus on a specific issue (e.g., pollution, inflation). I conducted 14 personal interviews with youth and public intellectuals that are actively involved in contentious politics. In the following pages, I will discuss the activities they engage and assess their impact. The role of the Internet in these activities will be described in detail.

The Pursuit of Ideas

The Grass Mud Horse (Cao Ni Ma, 草泥马) is an Internet term used as symbolic defiance of Internet censorship. The name is derived from a very common obscenity. It started with a children's song on YouTube telling a story about a mythical alpaca-like creature's struggle against an evil river crab. In Chinese, the word "river crab" (hexie, 河蟹) sounds very much like "harmony" (hexie, 和谐), which in cyberspace has become a synonym for censorship. Netizens often say their censored posts have been "harmonized," pointing, and indirectly deriding, President Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" ideology. Since the song was posted on YouTube, it has become a cult phenomenon among the educated youth through chat forums and social network sites. Xiao Qiang, professor of journalism at the University of California Berkeley, said in an interview with the New York Times that the Grass Mud Horse "has become an icon of resistance to censorship."[119] The phenomenon has also received wide-ranging international press coverage. The New York Times first brought it to international audiences, followed by

[119] Michael Wines, "A Dirty Pun Tweaks China's Online Censors," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2009, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/12/world/asia/12beast.html?em.

other newspapers and TV networks in the West. However, not many have noted that the phenomenon has been moving offline.

On May 7th 2010, Dong Li, a 23-year-old free lance photographer in Hangzhou was visited by the secret police at his apartment. It was the day before his scheduled Grass Mud Horses lunch get-together. Through the Internet, Dong got to know many young people who share the same distaste towards censorship and who have the same yearning for freedom of information. They have built online groups and mailing lists to share articles and discuss political issues. The youth got to know each other well online, and people living in the same region often times decided to meet one another in real life. They all identify themselves as "Grass Mud Horses." They call their group "grass circle" (caoquan, 草圈). They name their lunch or dinner party "rice-drunk" (fanzui, 饭醉). In Chinese, "rice-drunk" sounds the same as "to commit crime" (fanzui, 犯罪). The pun points to the fact that their gatherings are not allowed by the government. Dong was the organizer for the "rice drunk" event in Hangzhou. He and other participants used emails to coordinate. His computer's IP address was located by the police. Consequently, he was invited to "drink tea" (hecha, 喝茶) with the police. "Drink tea" refers to the widespread practice by Domestic Security Department police or other authorities to interrogate citizens who are perceived as engaged in subversive behaviors. The police officers threatened Dong that if he still planned to go to the event, he would suffer "severe consequences." In an interview with him, I asked him what his impression of the secret police was. "Weak. They had no idea why we were doing that and why this kind peaceful activity could get the state so nervous. However, I somehow understand them. It is just a job. After taking off their uniforms, they are just the normal people who would complain

about the high price of the real estate and the rampancy of corruption," Dong said. Zhang Yi, a 23-year-old engineer in Shanghai, was taken to the police after a Grass Mud Horse event to demand the release of Ai Weiwei. He commented similarly, "I felt sorry for the secret police. They didn't really know what we were doing. They didn't know what they were doing either." When asked whether he felt afraid when the secret police threatened him, Dong Li responded, "No, if you are certain that you are with justice, you feel empowered. History will be the final judge of our deeds, and I know I was right." The next day, Dong went to the event and met with 200 other "Grass Mud Horses." As a free lance photographer, Dong did not belong to any danwei, so the police's usual threat to activists – compelling activists' danwei to fire the activists – does not apply to him. Dong said if he was employed by a danwei, he might choose not to go.

Gu Xi is a 22-year-old man from Tianjing who recently graduated from Zhejiang University. While in college, he was the administrator of the university's Bulletin Board System and founder of a weekly reading party. People got to know the event through the Internet. During the party, the participants held discussion about a certain book. The chosen books are usually on topics of politics and society. The party is open to everyone, but attended mostly by university students. Gu said the reading party is not supposed to be a traditional meeting where people only have an academic or a casual talk. "I want the party to be one that can unify people for a common cause and one that can transform 'talk' to 'action'. Through the weekly party, we not only learn new knowledge, but built friendship and trust. If in the future there are moments that we need to go to the street to protest, trust and allegiance are vital. It is better to nurture this kind of connection earlier." When asked whether he would identify himself with the Grass Mud Horse group, he said,

"I share similar values with them, but I think the things we need to do are not only serious but also risky, so using profanity might not be a good idea."

Kong Lingxi, a 26-year-old graduate of Columbia University, is one of the most active youth engaging in contentious political activities. He is the founder of the Chinese Youth Foundation and the organizer of a series protests called "Jasmine Revolution" in China. The so-called Chinese Jasmine Revolution, inspired by the revolutions which took place in Middle Eastern countries, was a series of weekly street actions which unfolded in dozens of Chinese cities starting early in 2011, aimed at ending China's one-party system, and promoting democracy, freedom and social justice. There are several sources claiming they are the initiators of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution. Among them, the most influential one is the blog "Chinese Jasmine Revolution Initiator," created by Kong who said his website has 25,000 visits daily. While the calls for weekly demonstrations every Sunday in dozens of cities attracted few protesters, the government sent hundreds of police to the streets and detained hundreds of people, including renowned artist Ai Weiwei who was released in July. Despite the fact that few have showed up on the designated protest sites, Kong and his partners have persisted. Kong told me that he and other volunteers will launch their own website, logo and anthem soon. The organization has also applied for financial support for their movement. "Some people say this movement is going to die and this movement is not going to be successful like that in Tunisia or Egypt, but in those countries, it took three or four years for the people to make preparations and finally, there was a peaceful transition," Kong said. "It may take a

period of time for the people to wake up, so the longer we continue our efforts the more people will know about the situation and join us."[120]

The persons I interviewed represent a group of educated youth who are very politically active and dare to confront the authorities, but they are certainly not the majority. As surveys consistently show, the vast majority of the youth of this generation are primary concerned with their personal development. Struggling for a political cause simply has no attraction to most of these young Chinese. Very few incidents of contention in recent years were caused by the pursuit of ideas. One notable exception is the incident of *Charter 08 for Reform and Democracy in China*, a manifesto signed by over 300 Chinese intellectuals calling for legal reforms, democracy and protection of human rights in China. The movement ended with the imprisonment of its initiator Liu Xiaobo. Liu subsequently received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2010 and *Charter 08* became internationally known. However, the impact of this event was limited inside China. After all, only hundreds had signed and the general population was not even aware of the issue. Though surveys show that the majority of college educated students support the concepts of democracy and human rights, not many are willing to fight for it.

Issue Based Contention

Though the young elites, or college educated, in general are unwilling to struggle for any political ideas, this does not necessarily mean that they want to evade any activity of contention. When their own interests are harmed, they are no longer reluctant to fight

[120] "AP Exclusive: Voices behind China's protest calls," *CBSNEWs,* April 6 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/04/06/ap/asia/main20051260.shtml.

for them. The nine incidents of campus riots I found online in 2010 are all material-related.[121] For example, in November and December thousands of students protested cafeteria price hikes in Guizhou and Sichuan. In other cases, students protested over food quality, school fees, and diplomas. In the summer of 2009, university students rioted in Beijing after refusing to participate in a National Day training drill. In 2008, 4,000 students at Guangxi University of Technology protested over the suspension of hot water supplies. In the following pages, I will explain two youth-led protests in detail to show how the usage of the Internet is key to the success of the protests, and to demonstrate that a new kind of youth activism has emerged.

In June 2007, Xiamen residents went on a "group stroll" (jiti sanbu, 集体散步) after learning about plans for a chemical plant to be built just 16 kilometers from the center of town. In January 2008, Shanghai citizens took to the streets in a similar fashion after they learned that the local government was to extend the high-speed maglev train another 30 kilometers in close proximity to residential areas. Both of these protests, led by young professionals, preceded desired outcomes.

On June 1st and 2nd 2007, approximately 10,000 to 20,000 people, comprised mainly of young home-owners, took to the streets of Xiamen to protest plans to build a paraxylene (PX) chemical factory in their city. The protesters did not obtain a permit from the Public Security Bureau, a prerequisite for "lawful demonstration" as required by China's ""Law of People's Republic of China on Assembly, Procession and Demonstration." According to the Shanghai Daily, PX is "a highly polluting and

[121] Clearly state sanctioned nationalistic protests are not counted.

carcinogenic petrochemical, which will also increase the chance of fetal abnormality."[122] The project was determined by the government as having "completed all procedures in accordance with the law and regulations," but citizens still suspected it would have detrimental impact on the environment and people's health.

On May 27, 2007, text messages about PX began to fly, and Xiamen residents greeted each other with, "did you receive the text message?" A widely circulated message read the proposed PX plant could "cover Xiamen in a nuclear bomb, causing the people of Xiamen afterward to live with leukemia and deformities. We want life, we want health!"[123] On the same day, then 20-year-old Wu Xian summoned Xiamen residents via QQ, an online chat service, to gather together on the 29th. Soon after sending the message, he was visited by plain-clothes police in his home and subsequently detained the next day in an Internet cafe.[124]

Lian Yue, already a well-known relationship advice columnist for the *Shanghai Weekly*, had a blog which functioned as a guide for anti-PX activists. He outlined 12 points which activists could follow before and during the "group stroll." Lianyue's blog also posted facts about the side effects of PX from various credible sources such as the U.S. Center for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health. His blog became the major outlet of online discussion for the PX activists, and provided real-time insight

[122] Dagong Zhao, "The Xiamen Demonstrations and Growing Civil Consciousness," *China Rights Forum*, November 3, 2007, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.hrichina.org/public/PDFs/CRF.3.2007/CRF-2007-3_Xiamen.pdf.
[123] Shai Oster, "Green Protests Suspend Chinese Chemical Plan," *The Wall Street Journal*, accessed August 1, 2011, http://www.pacificenvironment.org/article.php?id=2405.
[124] "Xiamen PX shijian: minben daoxiang cu duofang liyi boyi dadao gongyin," [Xiamen PX Incident: citizen-based helped interests from all actors to comprise and create a win-win situation], *China News Net*, December 2007, accessed August 1, 2011, http://news.xhby.net/system/2007/12/30/010176807.shtml.

into the progress of the "group stroll."[125] Shortly after the protest, the government announced that the project would be permanently halted.

In early June 2008, six months after the Xiamen protests, residents of the Gumei neighborhood in Shanghai's Minghang District took to the streets, protesting the proposed extension of the maglev high speed train. Bing Jinger, an administrator of one of the affected communities' BBS was one of the first to post articles which explained the dangers surrounding the proposed maglev train extension. She was pregnant with her first child, so she was overwhelmed by the concern for the soon-to-be-born baby. Soon, more people on BBS began to participate in the discussion. The conversation, which took place on the Internet, compelled citizen activists to go outside. On January 5, 2008, more than one hundred members of the Gumei apartment community "went for a stroll." During the stroll, a journalist for the *Southern Metropolis Weekly* reported that "Xiamen experience" became a catchphrase for these citizen activists, and even a pamphlet called the "Xiamen experience" was circulated. On January 7, the third day of the stroll, chosen representatives from the Gumei neighborhood talked with local officials. The head government official of the Minhang District promised "no violence towards residents."[126] The official also asked some maglev train specialists to talk with homeowners. One of the homeowners' chosen representatives at this meeting was Zhang Yuying.

Zhang Yuying, a 30-year-old environmental specialist, debated the safety and security of the extension with the maglev train specialists, citing problems with a National Environmental Protection Agency report. Zhang also brought an expert with her, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and representative to the

[125]Hongjun Zhu, "Xiamen Calls an Abrupt Halt to the PC Project to Deal with the Public Crisis," *Southern Weekend*, May 28, 2007, accessed September 11, 2011, http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20070601_1.htm.
[126] Ibid.

National People's Congress, Wang Mengshu. Like Xiamen's Zhao and Yuan, Zhang and Wang acted to present and uphold citizen activists' concerns about the proposed project. However, initial negotiations had limited effect. The stroll continued. On Jan 12th and 13th, more than 1,000 people from different potentially affected communities went for another walk in the larger People's Square. One participant of the stroll, Wang Ruowen, a 28-year-old graduate of Fudan University, was taken to the police station to be "registered." He was also asked to write a "statement of repentance," admitting he participated in an illegal activity. After his release, Wang said, "Xiamen people won the PX case and that means those ways of protest were not illegal. Since they can do that, others elsewhere can do that too. This kind of walking will be seen more and more around the whole country."[127] In the morning of June 13, the Shanghai municipal government issued a statement saying that the government was paying close attention to the maglev issue and would listen to public opinion. The organizers mentioned above are all young professionals in their late 20s and early 30s living a middle-class life. Wang described themselves as "educated, caring about public interests, loving life and thinking independently."[128]

Xi Chen discusses how Chinese activists "do not take a principled or consistent position toward being either obedient or defiant but are ready to employ any tactics they think useful."[129] Chen defines this as "protest opportunism." However, the techniques and strategies of the Xiamen and Shanghai protests comprise a style of contention that is

[127] Zhu, "Xiamen Calls an Abrupt Halt to the PC Project to Deal with the Public Crisis."
[128] "Danyou cixuanfu, shanghai shimin wenhe sanbu," [worried about the maglev train, Shanghai residents went to the street], *Southern News Net*, January 21, 2008, accessed August 1, 2011, http://news.qq.com/a/20080121/001523.htm.
[129] Xi Chen, "Between Defiance and Obedience," in *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China*, ed. Elizabeth Perry and Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 253-281.

principled -- facts-based, deliberately unorganized, and non-violent. In the case of Xiamen, blogger Lianyue provided scientific evidence from credible sources. Zhao Yufen, an environmental specialist, and Yuan Dongxing, a professor at Xiamen's Environmental College, provided further evidence and leadership support to the Xiamen protest. In the case of Shanghai, the work of Zhang Yuying, an environmental specialist, and the support of Wang Mengshu, a Chinese Academy of Engineers railway engineer, gave the same type of support. With scientific evidence backed by experts and leaders, it is more difficult for the government to quibble or procrastinate.

Organized protest is a crime still harshly punished in China. Oftentimes, organized protests are seen as "inciting subversion of state power" (颠覆国家政权,dianfu guojia zhengchuan). Thus, the style of the Xiamen and Shanghai protests was to appear unorganized. Citizen activists acted as though they had made individual choices to go for a walk. Appearing disorganized diminished the government's perception of the activists as a threat. These walks also lacked an overt presence of leadership, making it difficult for the authorities to single-out and severely punish any individual protester. In an interview with Lianyue, the strategy of the Xiamen protest was described as "appearing to be unorganized, but orderly" (无组织，有纪律, wuzuzhi, you jilü.) By contrast, during the November 2009 Guangzhou Province Hailunbao home owners' protest, after failed negotiations with government officials, thousands of people went spontaneously into the street to "ask for a reason" (讨个说法, tao ge shuofa).[130] Activists were dispersed. Some were beaten, two were detained. Contentious actions out of strong emotion are

[130] "Guangzhou dianshitai(chengshi huati): shenru baodao guangzhou hailunbao shou wuran," [Guangzhou TV (city topic): Investigational Report: Guangzhou Hailunbao under pollution], March 4, 2009, accessed August 1, 2011, http://club.dayoo.com/read-wsbl-18330.htm.

always faced with serious repression, usually due to the government's fear of things getting out of its control. The Hailunbao protest exhibited an impulsive, reactive, and coarse style whereas the Xiamen and Shanghai protest exuded a cautious, deliberately unorganized, and casual style.

Contributors to Lianyue's blog provided eye-witness accounts of the walkers, saying they acted rationally and prudently, even quieting down when they passed a hospital. During the Shanghai protests, one protester shouted to push over a metro bus, others quieted him, exemplifying protesters showing restraint.[131] Violent protests are often met with harsh responses from the Chinese government who see a justification to respond violently, while the repression of nonviolent protests risks backfiring. Drawing evidences from data on past instances of civil resistance, Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth argue that nonviolent resistance has a strategic advantage over violent resistance.[132] The Xiamen and Shanghai protesters understood that the more peaceful they behaved, the worse the government would look if it chose to suppress them. The Xiamen and Shanghai cases are the first two well known "citizen strolls" (gongmin sanbu, 公民散步), a new type of protest that plays with the official definition of and prohibition against demonstrating. Following these two strolls, in the past three years, people in Chengdu, Guangdong, Nanjing, Suzhou, Dalian and other places have taken to the streets in the name of "strolling." Through these "strolls", activists have found a way they can participate in political activities which take on the characteristics of the generational cohort.

[131] "Danyou cixuanfu, shanghai shimin wenhe sanbu."
[132] Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Assessment

In 1989, hundreds of thousands of students from numerous universities in Beijing marched to demand freedom and democracy. They sat on Tiananmen Square for seven weeks, refusing to move despite threats of violence. They chanted slogans and sang patriotic songs with great emotion. One printed manifesto read: "The nation is in crisis – beset by rampant inflation, illegal dealing by profiteering officials, abuses of power, corrupt bureaucrats, the flight of good people to other countries and deterioration of law and order. Compatriots, fellow countrymen who cherish morality, please hear our voices!"[133] To avoid losing momentum, the students proceeded to hold hunger strikes. During that time more than 2,000 students fainted due to starvation. On May 28th, 1989, student leader Chai Ling went so far as to say to American journalist Philip Cunningham that she was hoping for bloodshed because "only when the Square is awash with blood will the people of China open their eyes." The ending of the protest was tremendously tragic. "The gigantic scale of the movement… the lives it claimed, the soaring ideals it expressed, and the unprecedented international reverberations it created combined to turn it into the grandest narrative of China's enlightenment project in recent history," Yang writes. Given the same degree of political tolerance from the central government today, it is very unlikely the youth of this generation would carry out this kind of epic-style death-defying contention.[134] The courage and the resoluteness are gone. The One-Child Policy has made any kind of risk-taking activity and sacrifice even more difficult to execute. In many urban families, as the only child, the youth are often burdened with

[133] Andrew Nathan and Perry Link, "The Tank Man", 2001.
[134] Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*. (New York: Columbia University Press 2009), 85-102.

great expectations from parents and grandparents to succeed in the job market and marital market. Filial piety is considered the first virtue in Chinese culture. Children are obligated to take care of their parents when they get old. To take the risk for a political cause is almost immoral in this sense. Continuing commercialization has made today's youth materialistic and self-centered. Certainly, there are still youth of this generation who retain their visions for the future of China. Knowing the tragic past, activists I interviewed showed their caution. None of them showed any approval of student leader Chai's remarks. One said it is "the height of irresponsibleness and selfishness." Kong said no person should have any obligation to risk anything. One respondent even said he would be the first to run if there was a possibility of being physically assaulted.

Mark Bauerlein has named the generation of the digital age "the dumbest generation."[135] Zhang Shihe, 56, a political activist and blogger in describing China's youth today says, "this is the stupid generation. They were raised on Coca-Cola and Western movies and they're very isolated from their country's history."[136] However, this research has shown that this generation may not revere the concepts of "freedom" and "democracy" as the generation of 1989 did, and perhaps the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Alex Huxley and John Locke are no longer as widely read as they once were on college campuses 20 years ago, but today's youth have their own characteristics and styles, which are a result of their unique generational cohort experience. The Grass Mud Horse is the product of creativity, playfulness and sarcasm that only belong to this generation. Its humorous and profane nature is exactly the reason it went viral. Political satire is

[135] Mark Bauerlein, *The dumbest generation: how the digital age stupefies young Americans and jeopardizes our future, (Tarcher: 2008).*

[136] Barbara Demick, "Tiananmen anniversary unimportant to Chinese youth," May 22, 2009, accessed August 1, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2009/may/22/world/fg-china-youth22.

forbidden on traditional media and direct criticism of political leaders is censored on the Internet, so young Chinese netizens have created all kinds of nicknames and code names for political entities and leaders. For example, China is called the "celestial empire" or "West Korea"; the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party is the "Ministry of Truth" (referring to the ministry in the government of Oceania in George Orwell's novel Nineteen Eighty-Four); Premier Wen Jiabao is dubbed "the best actor" (影帝, yingdi) due to his emotional appearances at scenes of disasters; and Hu Jintao who is often seen stone-faced has been nicknamed "Paralyzed Face" (面瘫，miantan). Countless cartoons, Flash movies, and songs have been made to show the youth's dissent towards the regime. As Yang points out, the style of political contention has changed from grand to casual, from solemn to "playful."[137]

In an interview with columnist Mo Zhixu, a participant of the Tiananmen protest in 1989, I asked him what mistakes the students at Tiananmen Square made. He said: "the students' main problem was that they really didn't know much. They had no idea of what democracy and freedom were. Though they didn't know much, they were overly confident. They refused to hear advice and did not understand the value of comprise." On May 18, 1989, students were offered a chance to meet with then Premier Li Peng, but the meeting ended without any agreement or progress. The problem was that the protests contained many people with varying agendas, and the students themselves were not clear as to what exactly they were asking for. On the contrary, facing today's tightly sealed political environment, students are less idealistic but more realistic. They are issue-focused and interest-oriented. In the Xiamen and Shanghai protests, the goals of the

[137] Guobing Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*, (Columbia University Press, 2009).

protesters are simple—they wanted the PX factory and maglev train out. There was no mention of ideology, rhetoric or prescriptive ideas.

All the political, economic, social and technological changes of the past 20 years have made the well educated youth of this generation different from those who protested in Tiananmen Square. The passion, courage and grandiose idealism of the generation of 1989 no longer exists among the general elite youth population. The new generation is certainly more realistic. On the one hand, they are concerned more about their own lives and future, not necessarily "the future of the country." They do not aspire to have transformative changes of their political environment. On the other hand, today's Chinese youth are down-to-earth and cautious. While engaging in risky actions of contention, they know their goals and know to protect themselves. The Internet is essential to all of their contentious activities, online or offline, from finding and spreading information to seeking and providing social support to coordinating and organizing activities.

Conclusion

Charles Dickens began his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* with "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..." Through my researching and talking with young people from all social backgrounds and professions, and in finding all matter of opinions, from the very left to the very right, the very next two words of Dickens's famous opening might well have been "in China." Indeed, countless youth believed China is in its heyday while others saw it on the verge

of collapse. When I logged onto websites like Utopian Home,[138] I saw numerous youth who aspire to go back to the Mao era; when I logged onto websites like Bullogger,[139] I detected numerous youth who would resonate with the Tea Partiers in America. There are thousands of people who claim they will risk their life to defeat American imperialism, and there are also thousands of youth who wish for a U.S. invasion. Some scholars say the Internet has a major impact on changing the political culture of China, and some scholars say the Internet just reinforces the opinions people already have. One thing we can clearly see is the diversification of ideas of the youth of this generation. This in itself is a positive thing. Youth are looking at, shopping for, talking about and trying to figure out a wealth of ideas. They are staring and searching into the abyss of a constant stream of information. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Mao was able to mobilize millions of youth to eradicate traditional culture and bourgeois elements. This kind of mass mobilization is no longer possible. Not only because that today's top leader does not have the same degree of authority as Mao had, but also because today's youth have more divergent opinions on political and social issues. There are far more "competing and often contradictory influences" shaping the attitudes and values of the youth today.[140]

One popular post that has been circulated on the Chinese Internet community reads: "if you read Weibo, you feel there will be a revolution tomorrow; but if you walk around the grocery market, you feel there will not be a revolution in 100 years." The Internet is full of inflammatory articles and comments, from the far left to the far right,

[138] See www.wyzx.com
[139] See www.bullogger.com
[140] Stanley Rosen, "Contemporary Chinese Youth and State," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68(2009), no.2:359-369.

but polls and surveys consistently show the majority belong to neither. Most people are neither overtly nationalistic, nor do they thirst for Western democracy and freedom. They are materialistic and self-centered. Many inside China have interpreted this phenomenon negatively, naming the young generation the “beat generation”, the “me generation”, or the “irresponsible generation.” However, on the other side of the coin, this less idealistic generation is rights-conscious and pragmatic. If they are not satisfied with their material conditions, they are more willing to speak out than their parents’ generation. They dare to take actions when the price of their cafeteria food is increased, when their pay is not good, and their environment is polluted. China's youth, success-oriented and confident, have high expectations. They are expecting a better life for themselves and a world-power status for their country. They are not shy of acting out what they believe.

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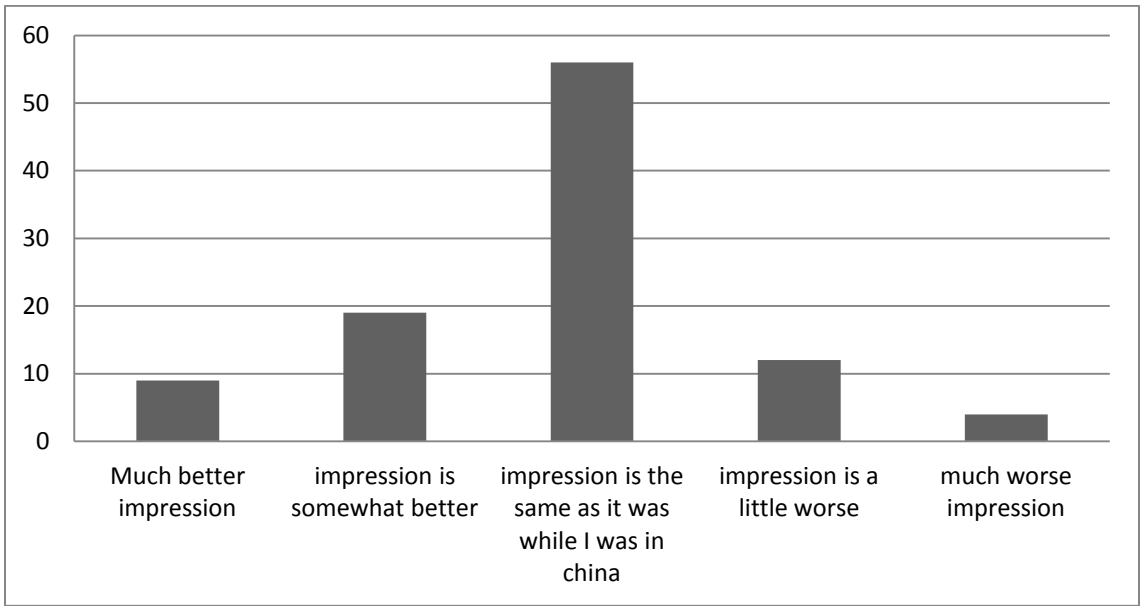
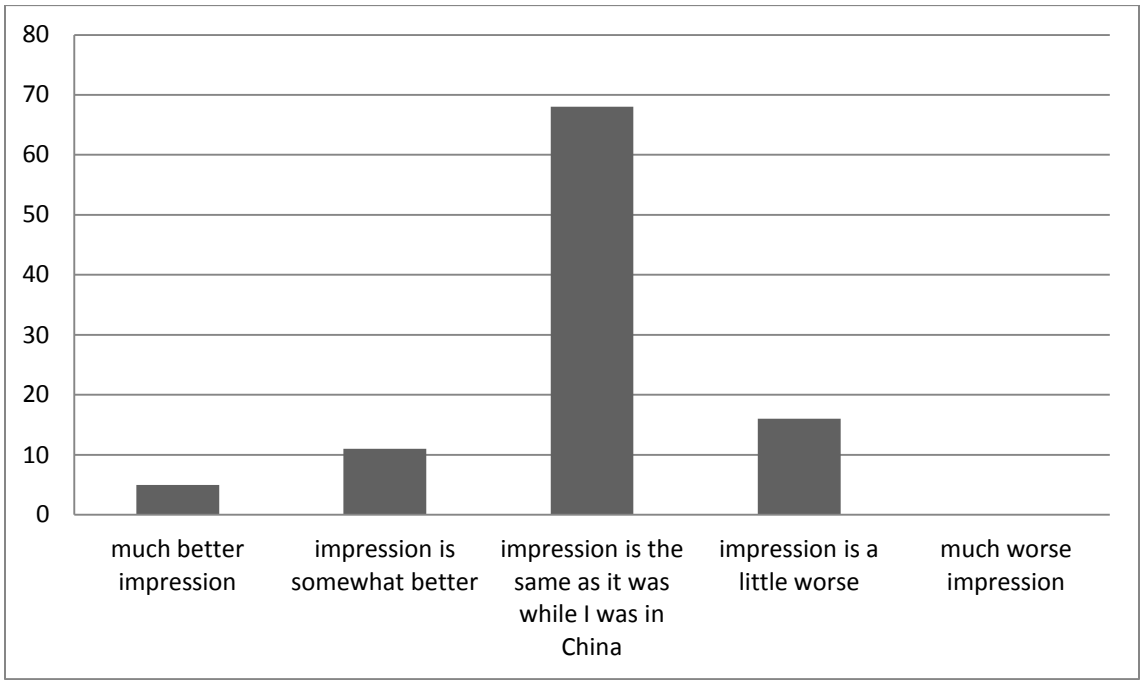
Appendix

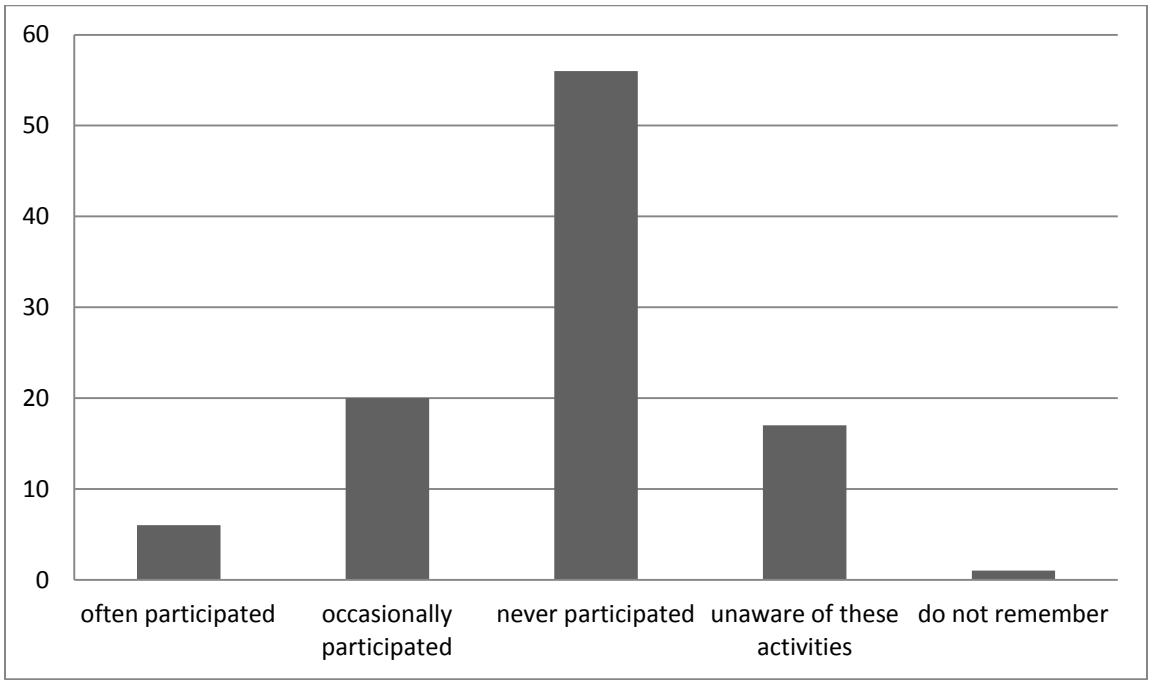
Question 1: Since coming to the United States how has your overall impression of this country changed?



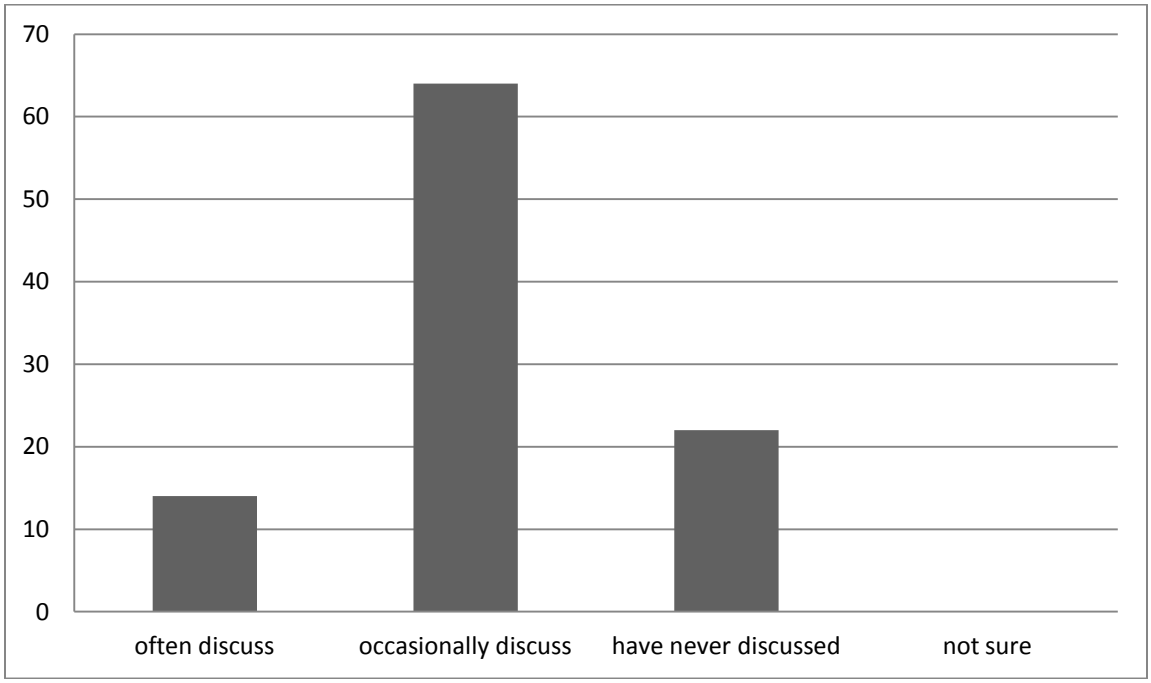
Question 2: After coming to the U.S. how has your overall impression of China changed?



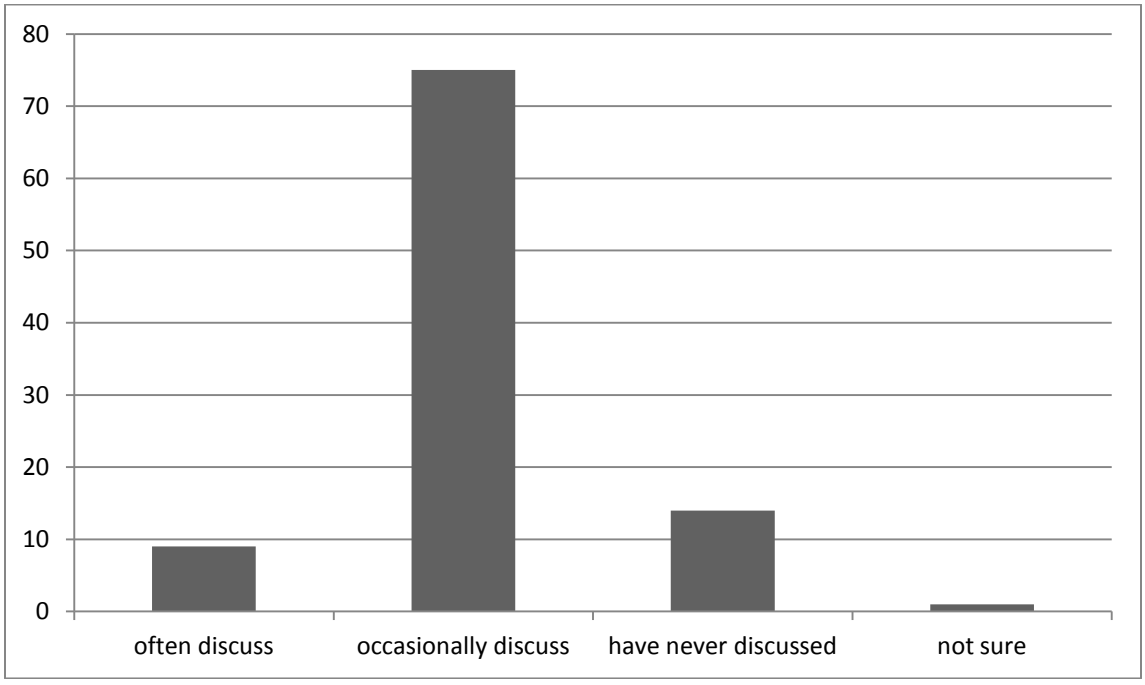
Questions 3: Have you participated to school or think tank hosted discussions about China or China-US relations?



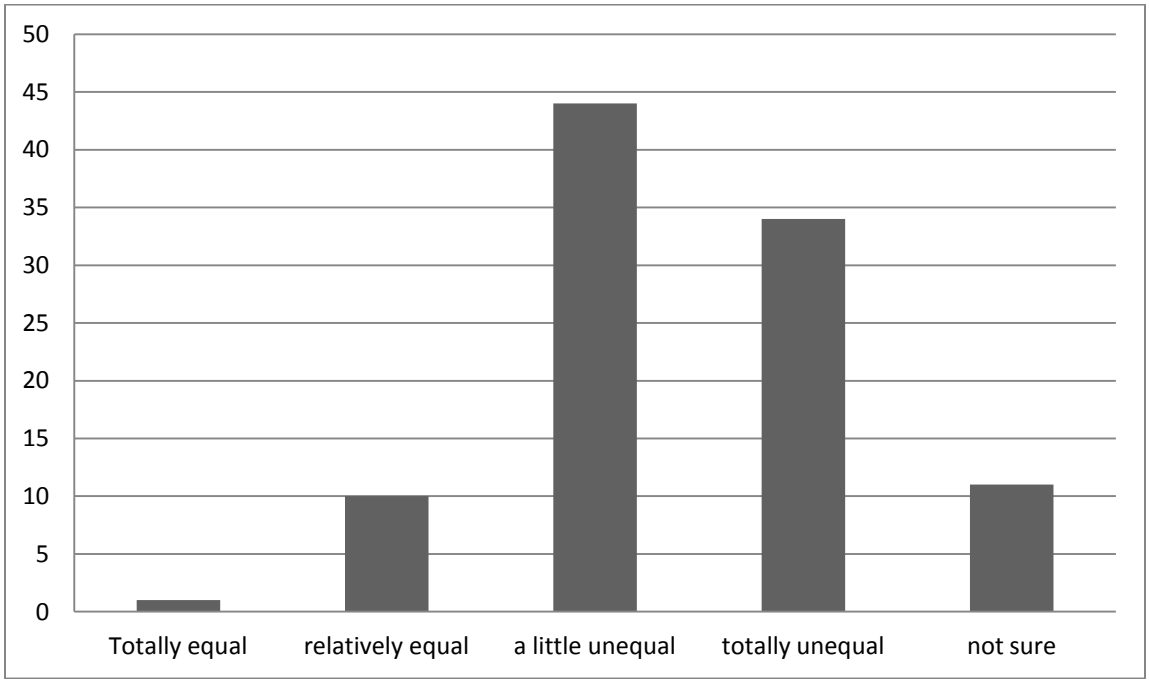
Question 4: Do you discuss political issues with your American friends and classmates?



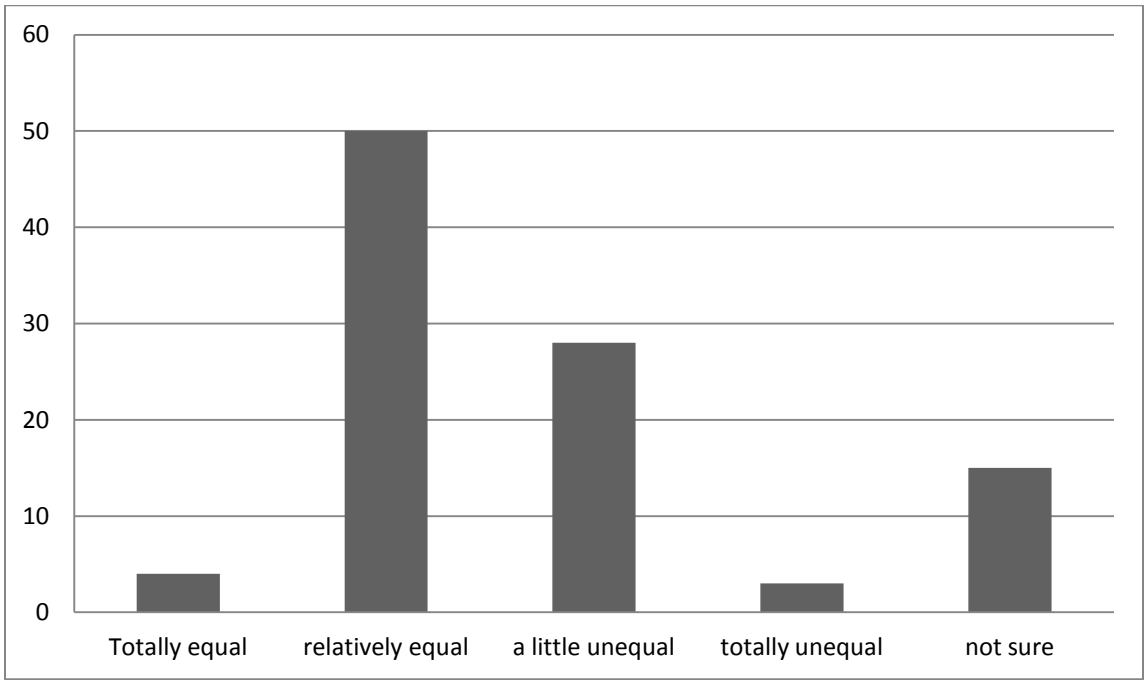
Question 5: Do you discuss political issues with your American friends and classmates?



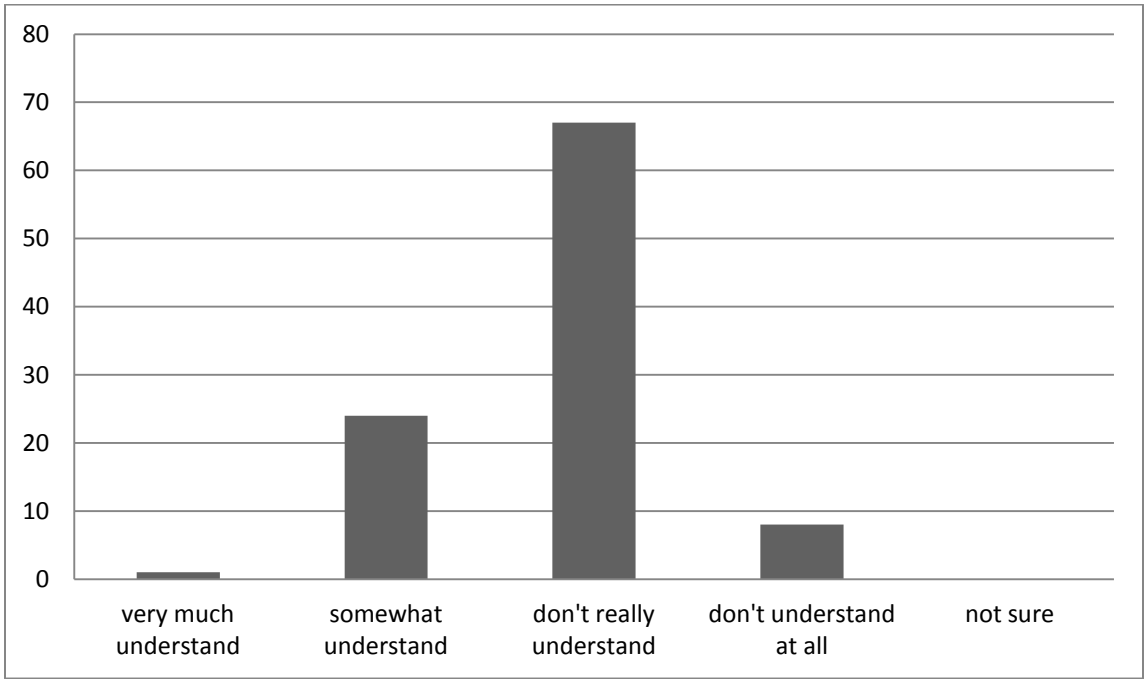
Question 6: In your opinion, do Chinese living in America (Chinese nationals) enjoy the same opportunities in work and life that Americans do?



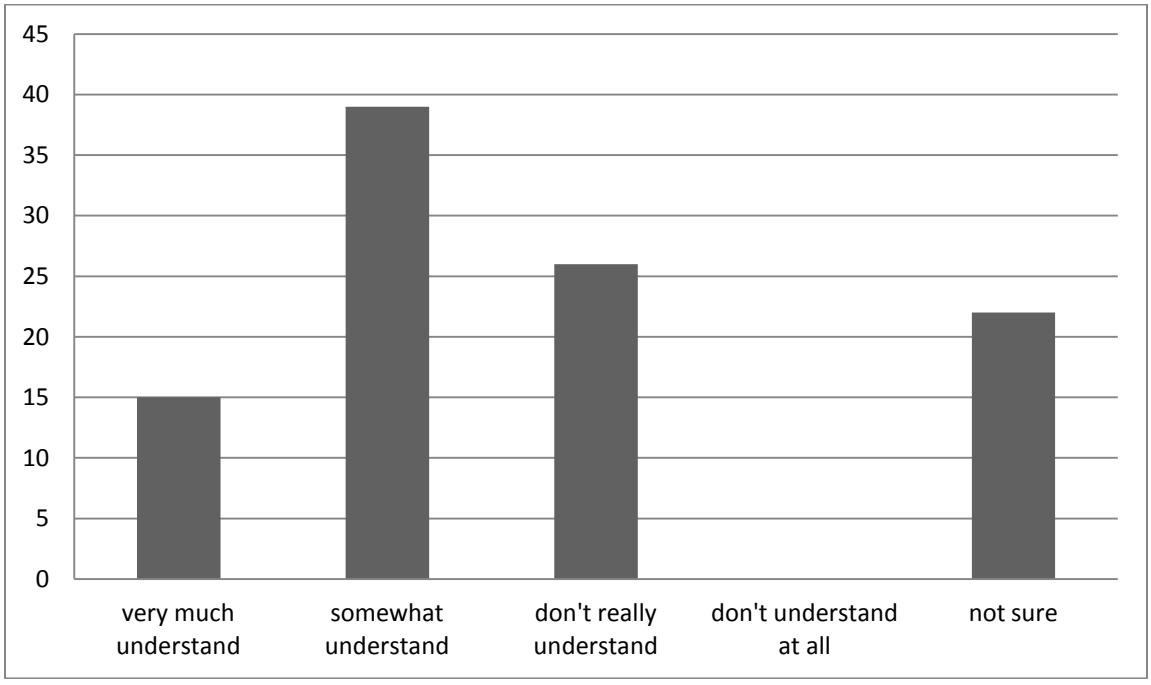
Question 7: In your opinion, do Chinese-Americans (U.S. citizens) enjoy the same opportunities in work and life that Americans do?



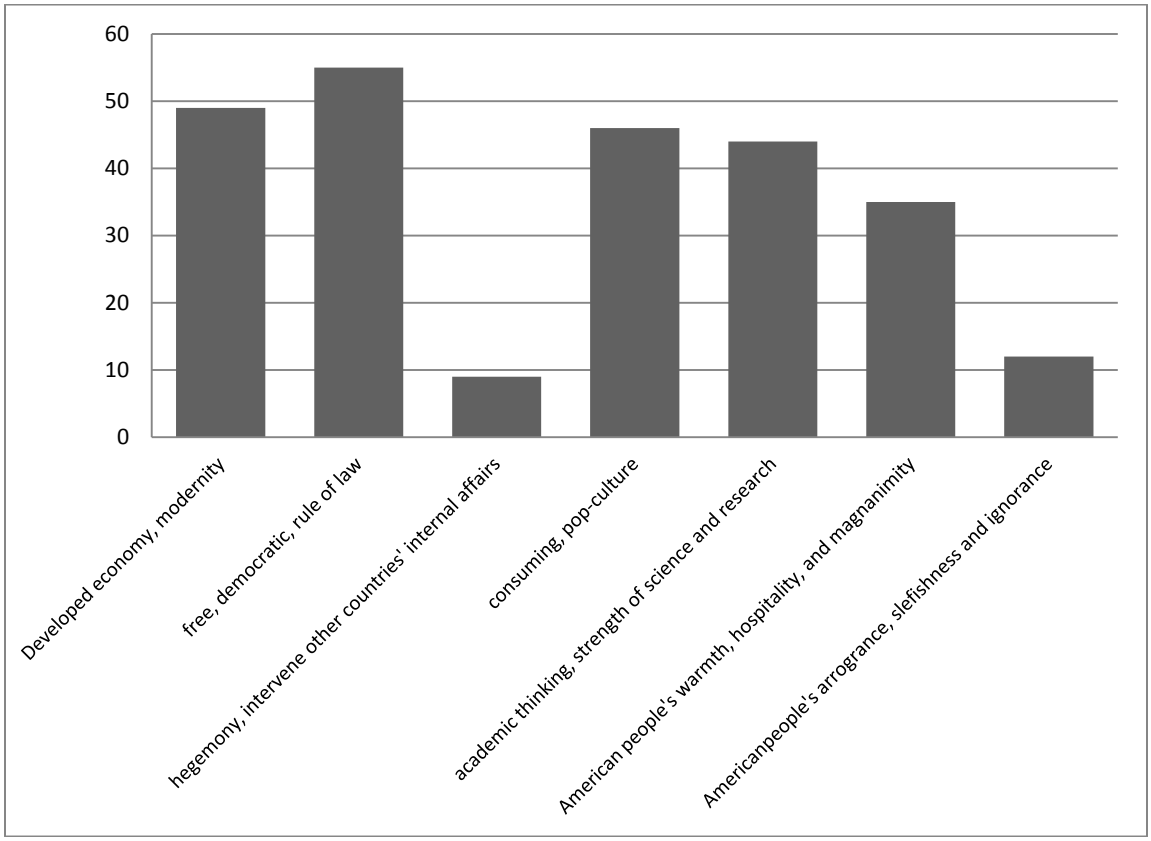
Question 8: Do you feel that everyday Americans understand China?



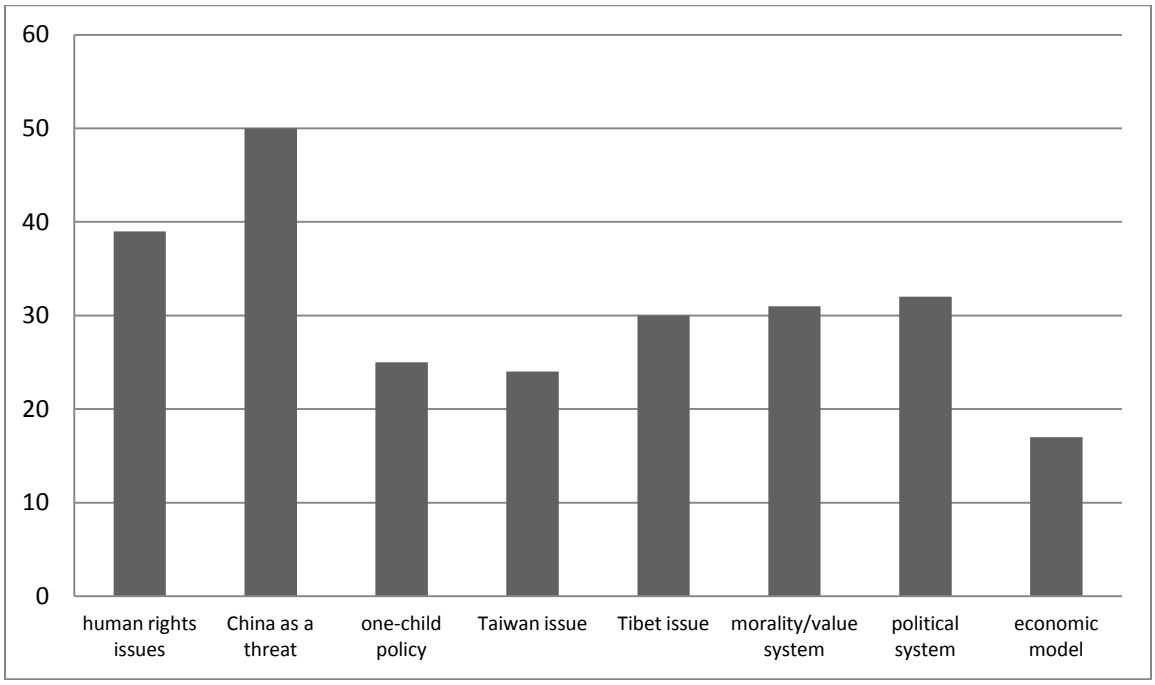
Question 9: Do you feel that America's China experts understand China?



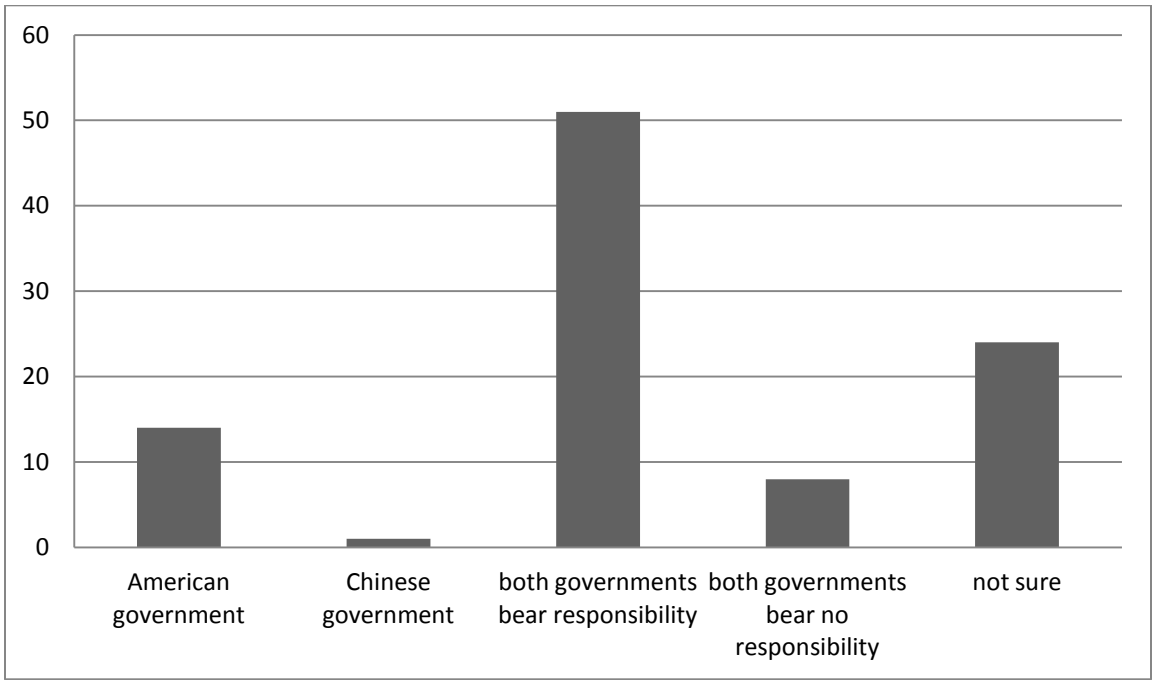
Question 10: If you are in China and your friends and relatives asked you how America was, how would you respond? Please choose 3 or less than 3 from below.



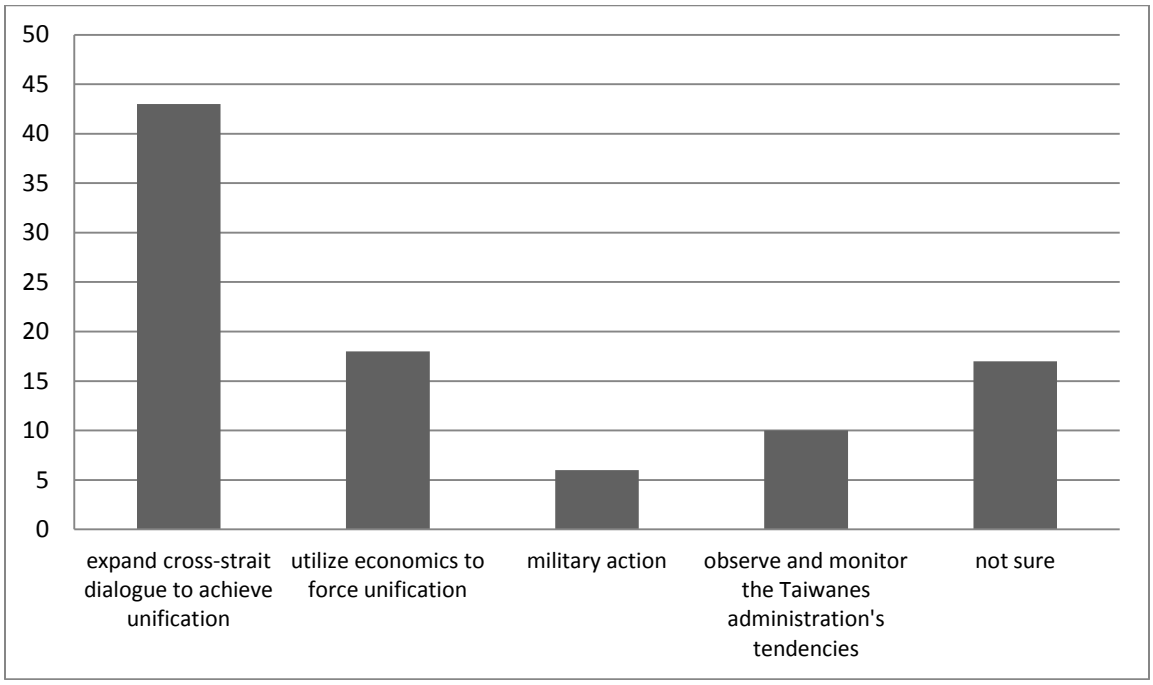
Question 11: In which aspects do you feel Americans misunderstand China? Please choose 3 or less than three from below.



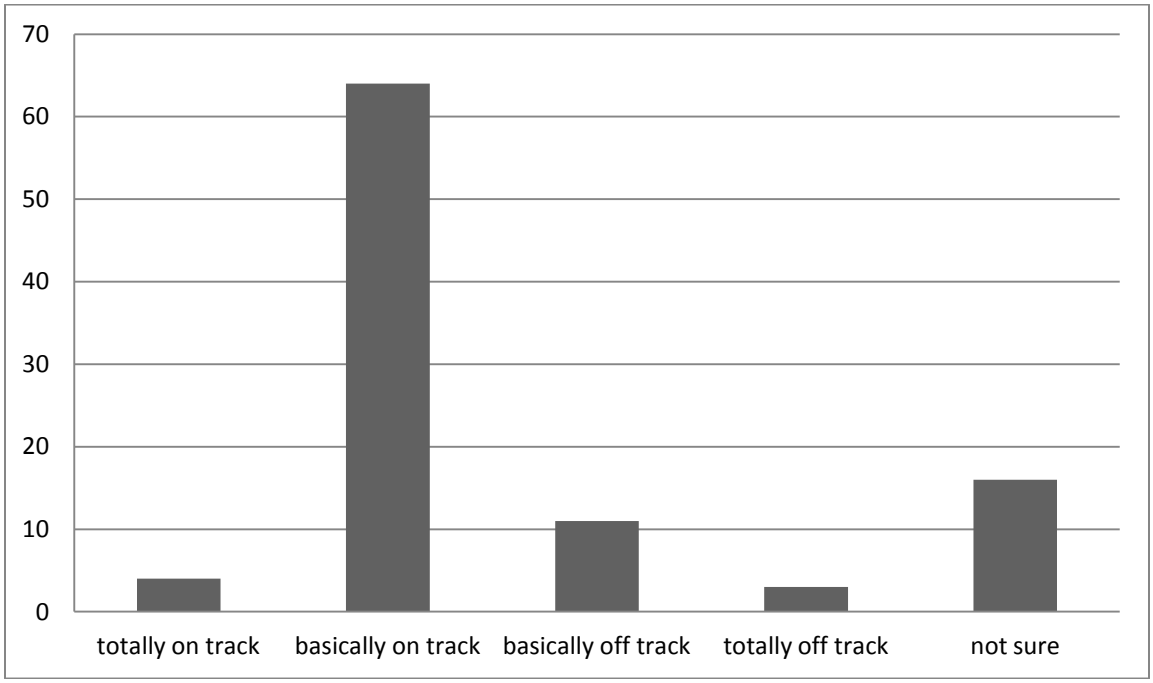
Question 12: Who do you attribute the differences between America and China (in trade, military, the Taiwan issue and Tibet issue, etc) to?



Question 13: With regard to the Taiwan issue, which one of these steps do you consider China taking to be the most suitable?



Question 14: Do you think China's development is on the right track?



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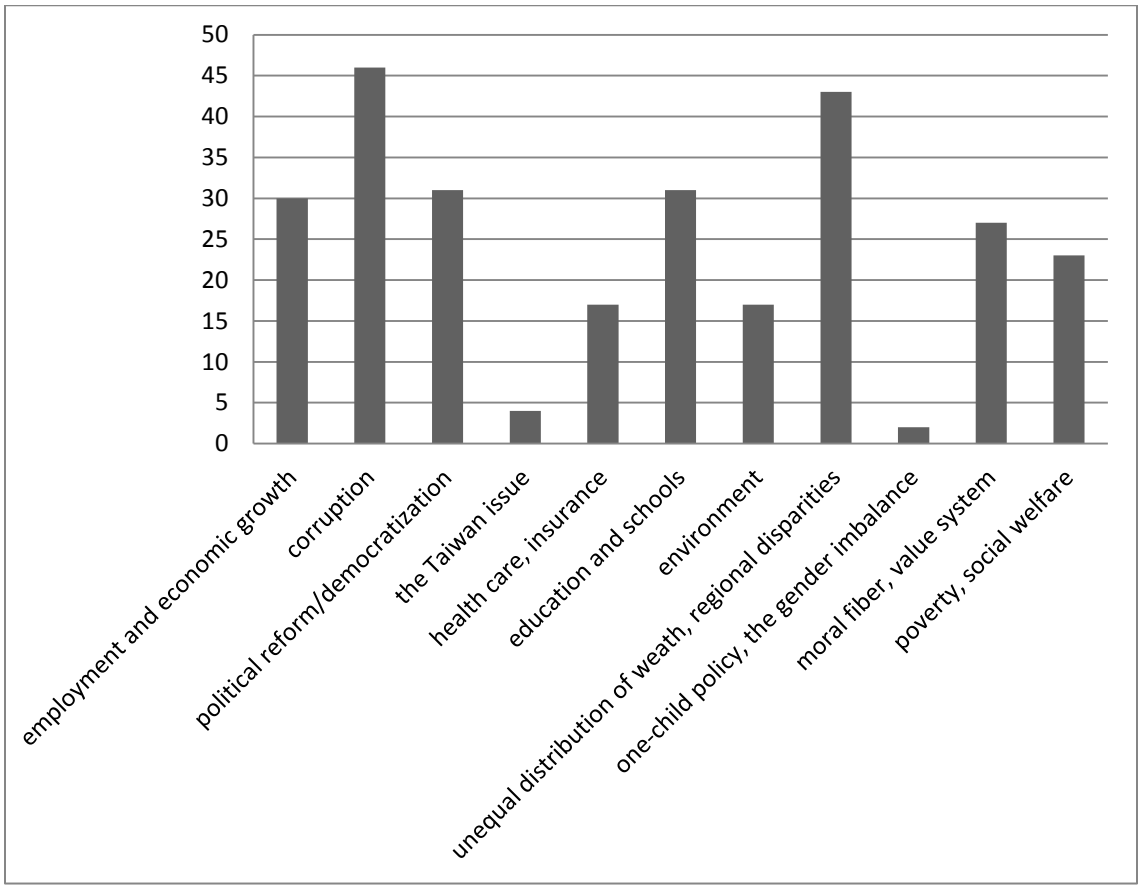
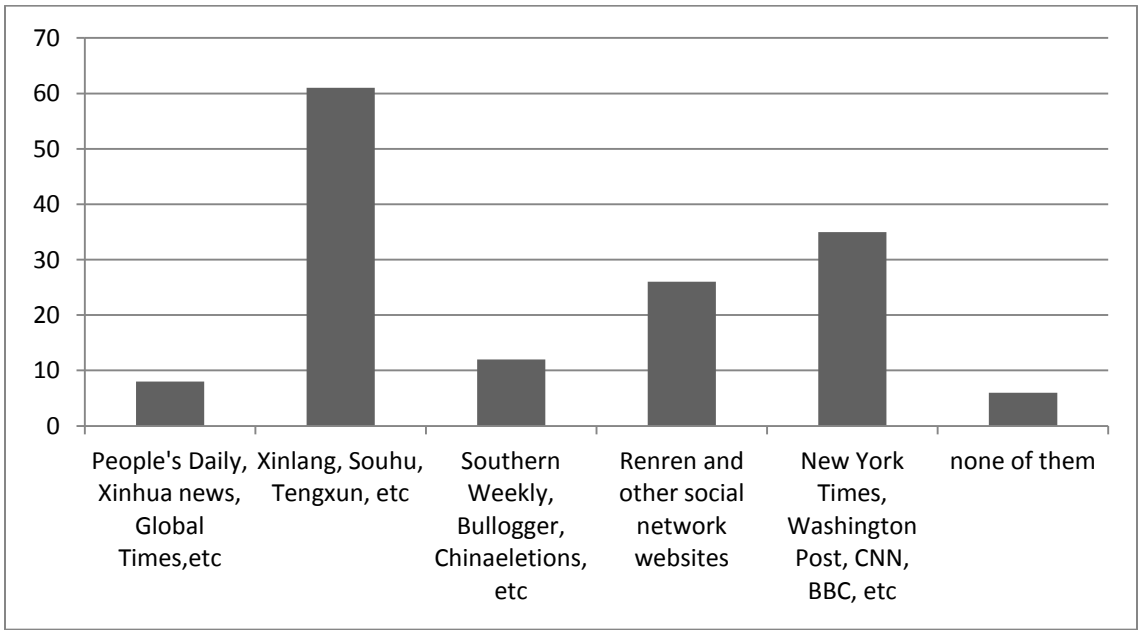
Question 15: In your opinion, which of China's problems most urgently need to be addressed? Please choose 3 or less than 3 from below.



Question 16: Through which of the following news media do you get information about China?