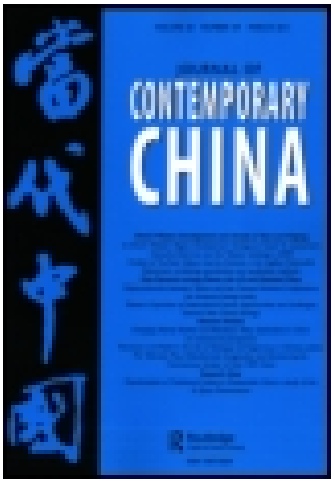

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How Do Americans View the Rising China?

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The dramatic increase in China's economic and hence political power and influence is a common story around the world. Just how clearly and well does this story get across to citizens of some nations other than China, itself? In particular, we ask what Americans know about China. Do they observe its rise? Are their views simple or rich and nuanced? How do they vary across the public? What leads to more positive and what leads to more negative views of China? We report the results of a survey of the American population designed to address these questions. We find that they are reasonably knowledgeable of China's rise and that they have rich and nuanced perceptions of a variety of dimensions of China, its society, economy and polity. These views are, on balance, not especially positive, but the more cosmopolitan the citizen, the more likely they are to hold positive views. Those who are Democrats, who are liberals, and who have had the opportunity to travel in China are especially likely to have positive impressions.

Conventional wisdom holds that the American public is primarily concerned about domestic issues rather than international affairs, or in the common saying, 'American politics stops at water's edge'.[1] Still, the People's Republic of China does have the world's second largest economy and its growth as a nation is a remarkable story that is widely discussed in the US and around much of the rest of the world. And for the US in particular, China holds more American debt than any other country, is America's second largest trade partner, and is commonly decried (whether correctly or

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1. From a passage due to Senator Arthur Vandenberg in a Senate speech in 1945, when he converted from the Senate's leading isolationist to become a (bipartisan) supporter of President Truman, and in particular the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and NATO. For related information, see http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured=Bio=Vandenberg.htm.

not) by political elites in public as the leading exemplar of a nation 'taking' American jobs. It should be no surprise, therefore, that China is the subject of many features in American media—a multi-episode series on *Wild China* on the National Geographic cable channel, recurring sequences on CBS TV's *60 Minutes*, and so on. Nor should it be a surprise to anyone that, politically, both parties and their candidates frequently 'play the China card' on the campaign trail. Both Obama and Romney did so in their 2012 presidential campaigns, although with varying emphasis. In addition to what he claimed was China's insufficient protection of human rights (e.g. its one-child policy and the issue of Falun Gong), discrimination against minorities (e.g. the Tibetans and Uighurs) and lack of democracy, Romney also vehemently criticized China as a currency manipulator and for theft of intellectual property and American jobs. For his part, Obama focused on his administration's confrontation with China on trade and tariff issues and proposed a 'pivot' in American security policy from Europe and the Mideast to the Pacific. As Trey Hardin, a Republican political strategist, argued, the China card played by Obama and Romney brought about the most influential emotion motivating voters in the fall of 2012—fear. Hardin emphasized that: 'It is not clear that most voters truly understand the economic significance of China but playing the fear card does not necessarily require that tutorial by either campaign'.[2]

Of course, China has also worked hard to seek to increase its 'soft power' through trying to develop a more positive image around the world, perhaps most especially in the US. Since the early 2000s, the Chinese government has been working industriously to present its economic growth as a peaceful rise that should enhance world stability and development, rather than threatening other countries' security, in general, or challenging American hegemony, in particular.[3] Nevertheless, many countries still are anxious about or even suspicious of an increasingly powerful China with its authoritarian government and opaque decision-making processes. Such anxiety and suspicions have generated waves of theories about the threat China poses around the world.[4] Seeking to counteract such speculation, the Chinese government has updated its strategies to improve its image. More specifically, it has moved past the use of conventional diplomatic and academic channels to direct attention toward cultivating soft power via promoting public diplomacy.[5] Given the significance of Sino–US relations, it is understandable that the Chinese government has invested millions of dollars to improve its image in the US. For instance, 68 Confucius Institutes have been established in the US, accounting for more than 20% of all such programs sponsored by the Chinese government around the world. In early 2011, one of China's promotional advertisements debuted in Times Square. And later, a number of other promotional advertisements, sponsored by Chinese cities like Chengdu, Suzhou and Shanghai, were shown in the US.

2. See http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544=162-57518776-503544.html.

3. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/business/2012-12/05/c=132019684.htm. For related academic and policy analysis, see, among others, Bijian Zheng, 'China's "peaceful rise" to great-power status', *Foreign Affairs* 84 (5), (2005), pp. 18–24.

4. See, among others, John J. Mearsheimer, 'China's unpeaceful rise', *Current History* 105(690), (2006), pp. 160–162; Amitai Etzioni, 'Is China a responsible stakeholder?', *International Affairs* 87(3), (2011), pp. 539–553; Elizabeth C. Economy, 'The game changer: coping with China's foreign policy revolution', *Foreign Affairs* 89(6), (2010), pp. 142–145; Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small, 'China's new dictatorship diplomay: is Beijing parting with pariahs?', *Foreign Affairs* 87(1), (2008), pp. 38–56.

5. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-09/01/c=12505564.htm.

Here we ask how successful has the 'tutorial', as Hardin called it, been that Americans have received? That is, what do they know about the emergence of China, how do they feel, and what source of information 'teaches' them about China most effectively? In this article, we use an original national survey of Americans, conducted in the summer of 2010, to address these questions.[6] More specifically, we assess: (1) how well Americans understand the significance of China and its rise; (2) their perceptions of China's socioeconomic, political and cultural dimensions; (3) their general feeling about China, compared to some other prominent foreign countries; and (4) how this general feeling might have been shaped by various factors, such as by their perceptions of China's socioeconomic, political and cultural aspects, their exposure to China-related information from various sources, and their partisan and ideological predispositions.

The contribution of this article is threefold. Firstly, moving beyond the conventional thermometer measures, we enrich existing research by more comprehensively examining the American people's views of China, which are multidimensional and contain embedded tensions. Secondly, we explore the relative salience of the American public's evaluations of China's various aspects in shaping their general feeling toward China. Thirdly, we adopt new instruments to measure Americans' exposure to China-related information, including different media channels and personal contacts with China; and we examine how such information affects the American public's general dispositions toward China.

A more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of American views of China

Given the salience of China issues in American politics, especially during electoral campaigns, there is no lack of empirical work on how Americans view China using survey data.[7] To extend this line of research, we report the results of a survey conducted as a random sample of the American public (via an RDD telephone survey)—the Americans' Attitudes toward China Survey (AACS), conducted by the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Indiana University.[8] This survey was specifically designed to provide a richer basis for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how Americans view China, aiming to address some deficiencies of existing relevant research.

6. The survey was organized and sponsored by the Institute of Arts and Humanities, Shanghai Jiao-Tong University and the China Research Center, Duke University, and conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Indiana University.

7. See, among others, Tao Xie and Benjamin I. Page, 'Americans and the rise of China as a world power', *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(65), (2010), pp. 479–501; Peter Hays Gries, H. Michael Crowson and Todd L. Sandel, 'The Olympic effect on American attitudes towards China: beyond personality, ideology, and media exposure', *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(64), (2010), pp. 213–231; Benjamin I. Page and Tao Xie, *Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the Rise of China* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010); Charles Tien and James A. Nathan, 'Trends: American ambivalence toward China', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65(1), (2001), pp. 124–138. There is another line of research that focuses on longitudinal changes in the aggregated views of China in the US. See, Xiuli Wang and Pamela J. Shoemaker, 'What shapes Americans' opinion of China? Country characteristics, public relations and mass media', *Chinese Journal of Communication* 4(1), (2011), pp. 1–20. Due to the possible issue of ecological fallacy, the research focusing on aggregated views of China in the US cannot provide reliable information on how the American people's views of China may change for various reasons.

8. See Appendix for details on the survey. Professor Liu Kang of Shanghai Jiao-Tong University and Professor Tianjian Shi and Professor John Aldrich of Duke University served as Co-PIs of this survey project.

Even serious scholars are often reduced to being able only simply to assume that the rising of China is significant to the American public, in the common absence of pertinent measurement.[9] Even when there are data for them to assess, most public opinion surveys use one or two general measures of evaluation, such as the 100-point feeling thermometer, a choice of favorable–unfavorable feelings, or ally–enemy recognition measures to tap China's image in the US. And most of them focus on foreign policy alone. While these data are indeed valuable for some purposes, and we also do a significant amount of analysis of a thermometer evaluation measure ourselves, these measures alone cannot effectively capture the multidimensional nature of China, or any other nation, and thereby are unable to be used to investigate whether any of that richness and complexity is in fact perceived by the American public. They also cannot provide sufficient information to examine how the multidimensional nature of China and its rise might generate tensions in the American people's related views, on the possibility that Americans might see both positive and negative aspects of China (as with the study of views about any other nation). As Tien and Nathan document in their analysis of waves of American public opinion surveys in the 1990s, Americans actually are quite ambivalent toward China, particularly when we move away from the general measures and most research's focus on foreign policies.[10] Moreover, existing research also tends to be concerned primarily with how the American people think their government should deal with China, rather than the American public's perceptions and evaluations of China's behavior and performance, per se.

To address these concerns, the AACS, in addition to a general thermometer measure, added a variety of original questions designed to tap how Americans assess China on various dimensions, such as its economy, political system, culture and international behavior. These new measures provide a richer information basis for more comprehensive and nuanced understandings on how China's performance and its behavior are perceived by the American people. These data also make it possible to understand the relative salience of such perceptions (regarding various aspects of China) in shaping the American public's general dispositions toward China that have been widely examined in related public opinion surveys.

In addition to documenting how Americans view China, in this article we are also interested in understanding how such views are formed and shaped. In other words, we are particularly interested in the factors and their respective roles in shaping the American public's perceptions of China. Contemporary research suggests that American public opinion is shaped by two factors, the public's predispositions and the information to which they are exposed.[11] Thus, we also focus on these two groups of factors in our survey design and subsequent analysis.

9. Exceptions are Page and Xie, *Living with the Dragon*; Xie and Page, 'Americans and the rise of China as a world power'.

10. Tien and Nathan, 'Trends'.

11. See, among others, R. Michael Alvarez and John Brehm, *Hard Choices, Easy Answers: Values, Information, and American Public Opinion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); D. R. Kinder and Cindy D. Kam, *Us against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Markus Prior, *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Election* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992); J. Aldrich and Kathleen M. McGraw, eds, *Improving Public Opinion Surveys: Interdisciplinary Innovation and the American National Election Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

In most existing research, predispositions are usually captured by a conservative–liberal scale or self-reported party affiliation, which we do here as well.[12] The AACS included the widely used batteries for political ideology and self-reported partisanship. Unfortunately, the sources of China-related information are either completely ignored or only very roughly approximated by some index of general media exposure in existing research. For instance, Page and Xie neither theorize about nor measure how Americans get their information about China in their recent comprehensive assessment of China's image in the US.[13] In Gries *et al.*'s examination of how the 2008 Beijing Olympics affected the American public's views of China, they use only a single general question asking whether respondents accessed any coverage about China through American media during the two weeks of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.[14] We believe it is crucial to give serious and sufficient attention to a broad range of the American public's sources of China-related information so that we can study their possible effects on Americans' views of China, given the American public's increasing autonomy in media consumption and information acquisition in the post-broadcast era. Therefore, besides general media exposure measures, the AACS included specific indicators measuring whether Americans access any information about China from a wide array of media outlets (newspapers, radio stations, TV programs and news websites). Moreover, we believe that some Americans' life experiences in China (such as visiting for vacation or business) should provide critical information that might be essentially different from what they acquire from American media. Thus, the AACS adopted a question specifically asking for the American people's previous experience of visiting China.

Do Americans recognize the significance of China and its rising?

Before we turn to the main set of questions about what Americans think about China, we need to show whether Americans actually do recognize the significance of China and of its rising. If not, perhaps it is the case that the public's attitudes toward China are simply led by emotions or illusions mobilized by strategic politicians. This exercise provides the critical cognitive foundation for our later examination of China's image in the US.

The AACS included two questions focusing on the economic significance of China to the US: 'To the best of your knowledge, do you think the US loans more money to China or that China loans more money to the US?' and 'Whose economy do you think would be harmed more if the US completely broke off trade relations with China?'. To measure whether the American public does recognize the rising influence of China, the AACS asked two questions focusing on the influence of China in the world. The first question reads: 'On a 5-point scale, where 1 means not at all and 5 means extremely well, how well do you think the following statement describes

12. Personality measures and right-wing authoritarianism are also used to capture relevant predispositions. See Gries *et al.*, 'The Olympic effect on American attitudes towards China'.

13. Page and Xie, *Living with the Dragon*.

14. Gries *et al.*, 'The Olympic effect on American attitudes towards China'.

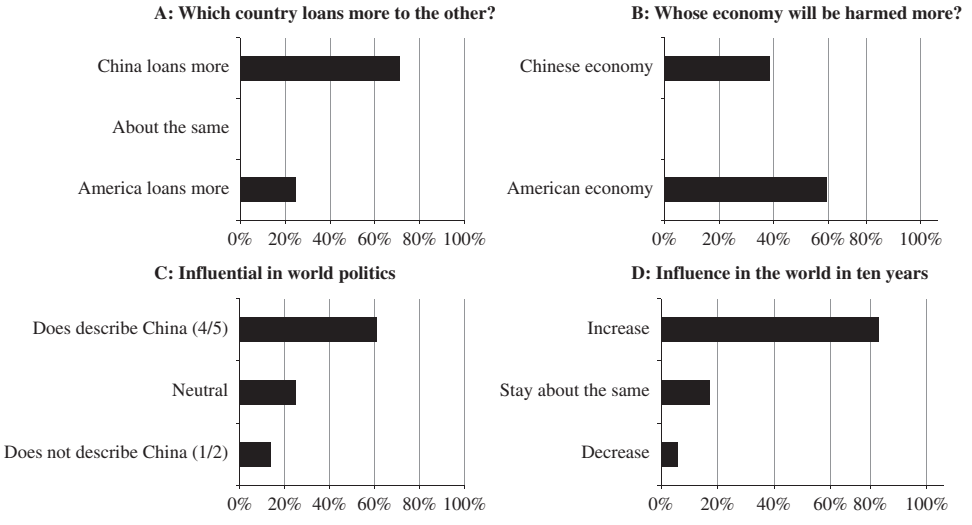

Figure 1. Significance of China and its rising.

China? China has been influential in world politics'. The second question reads: 'Thinking about the next ten years, do you think that China's influence in the world will increase, decrease, or stay about the same?'. The respondents' answers are presented in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1A, over 70% of the American people correctly recognize that China lends more money to the US.[15] Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 1B, nearly 60% of Americans believe that the American economy might be harmed more than China's if the bilateral trade relations were disrupted. Thus, a large majority of the American people do understand the significance of China for the US, at least in terms of the economy. In addition, most Americans clearly perceive the growing influence of China, as displayed in Figures 1C and 1D. More than 60% of the American people agree that China has been influential in world politics, and over three-quarters believe that China's influence in the world will increase in ten years.

Contrary to some American politicians' beliefs, then, not only is there a broadly held understanding of the significance of China for the US, but Americans also clearly perceive the rising of China and its significant and increasing influence in the world.[16] Such findings should not be too surprising, given the close Sino–US economic connections and the American media's extensive coverage of related

15. Our finding is compatible with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' 2010 public opinion survey. The Chicago Council's 2010 survey showed that two-thirds of Americans understood that China loaned more money to the US than the US loaned to China. This, at least to some extent, confirms the validity of our survey, which was administered around the same time but by a different institute with a different probability sample. See http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/files/About=Us/Press=Releases/FY11=Releases/110118.aspx.

16. This confirms Page and Xie's findings based on American public opinion surveys collected in the early 2000s. See, Page and Xie, *Living with the Dragon*.

issues. Will this lack of ignorance also be found when it comes to China's other aspects?

Americans' multidimensional views of the rising China

As noted earlier, the AACS included a general 'affective evaluation' or 'feeling' thermometer to measure overall assessment of the respondents' feelings about China. But as we have also noted, we differ from most studies in that our interest is measuring the American people's attitudes toward China regarding its performance in other domains in addition to (but along with) beliefs about China's rising performance and about America's possible foreign policy toward it. As China increasingly places emphasis on cultivating its soft power and promoting public diplomacy in the world to improve its image and secure a friendlier international environment, it is critical to understand how Americans assess China on various aspects other than the Sino–US relations.

To do so, the AACS administered a new battery of survey questions designed to gauge how the American public views China's economic performance, political system, cultural attractiveness and international behavior. All respondents were asked: 'On a 5-point scale, where 1 means not at all and 5 means extremely well, how well do you think each of the following statements describes China?' (1) 'China has an internationally competitive economy'; (2) 'China has a political system that serves the needs of its people'; (3) 'China has an appealing popular culture'; (4) 'China has a rich cultural heritage'; (5) 'China has been influential in world politics'; and (6) 'China has been dodging responsibility in the world'. In addition, all respondents were also asked to provide their prospective evaluations of China's influence in the world and democracy in ten years: (7) 'Thinking about the next ten years, do you think that China's influence in the world will increase, decrease, or stay about the same?' and (8) 'Thinking about the next ten years, do you think that China will become more democratic and responsive to its people, less democratic and responsive to its people, or stay about the same?'. The respondents' answers to the eight questions are presented in Figure 2.

As illustrated in Figures 2A and 2B, nearly two in three Americans recognize the international competitiveness of the Chinese economy; and about 55% of the American public believes that China's political system is effective in serving its people's needs. It seems that, although China has been vehemently criticized in America for its practice of unfair trade, inferior product quality, merciless political oppression and lack of respect for basic human rights, Americans are not blind to what the Chinese government has achieved over the past decades in enhancing the competitiveness of its economy and improving the living standard and welfare of the Chinese people.

The American public's assessment of Chinese culture, however, is much less positive than what the Chinese government has hoped for. As shown in Figures 2C and 2D, under 30% of the American people think China's popular culture is appealing; and only a little more than 40% recognize the rich cultural heritage of China. It is worth noting that these data were collected only two years after the highly popular Beijing Olympics. They speak directly to certain aspects that have always

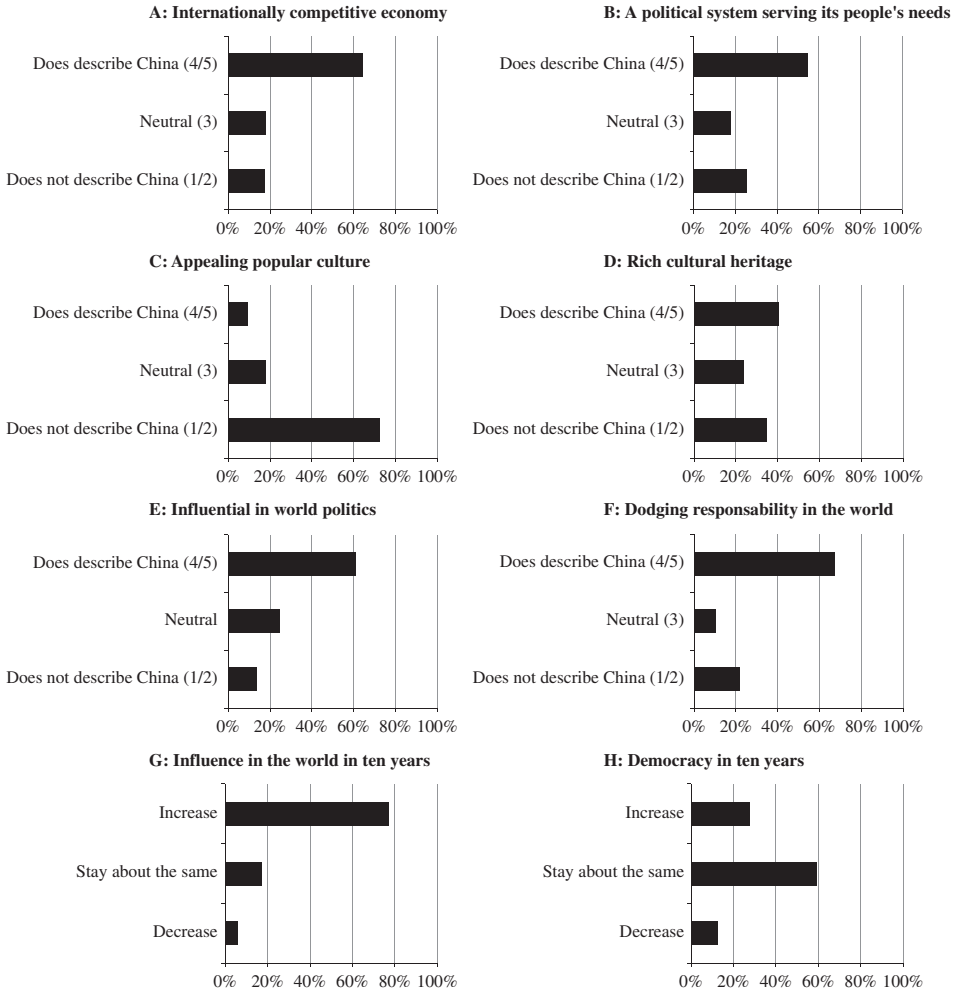

Figure 2. American people's multidimensional views of China. *Source*: AACS 2010 ($N = 810$).

been a major selling point for China's public diplomacy, suggesting that the Chinese government has a great deal of work to do if they are to achieve their goals in this area.[17]

Americans hold quite nuanced views of China's international behavior and influence, as shown in Figures 2E and 2F. About three in five Americans regard China as a world power with significant influence, but two in three believe that China has been dodging its international responsibility. Of course, the data do not allow us to

17. To what extent the Confucius Institutes established in the US may contribute to a better recognition of China's rich cultural heritage is an interesting question that merits further research. For some findings on the insignificance of the Chinese government's efforts in improving its image and soft power via sponsoring the establishment of Confucius Institutes, see Tao Xie and Benjamin I. Page, 'What affects China's national image? A cross-national study of public opinion', *Journal of Contemporary China* 22(83), (2013), pp. 850–867.

examine which policies adopted by China in the world might have driven this perception of China dodging its international responsibility, whether these emanate from perceptions of China's policy with respect to global climate change, the Korean Peninsula, civil wars in Africa and the Middle East, or wholly other sources. These findings, nonetheless, clearly contradict what the Chinese government tries to present to its audience in the world—that China is a growing and responsible power in the international community.

The American public's prospective evaluations of China are also conditional upon just which aspects are under examination. As shown in Figure 2G, more than three in four Americans expect China's influence in the world to increase in ten years. Comparatively speaking, their views of the prospects of democracy in China are much less encouraging, as illustrated in Figure 2H. Although around 28% of the American people expect some democratic progress in China in ten years, close to 60% of them do not anticipate any democratic change in this, the largest authoritarian society, at least not in the foreseeable future.

How do these particular dimensions of evaluation add up? That is, how do Americans evaluate China generally? To gauge the American public's general feeling toward China as a nation, the AACS adopted the widely used feeling thermometer (i.e. a continuous scale ranging from 0 to 100), as compared to three other foreign countries that most Americans are familiar with, i.e. Japan (America's long-term ally in Asia), Russia (America's long-term rival) and India (China's potential competitor as another rising power in Asia). To minimize any effect the presentation order of the four countries might have, the four were rotated randomly across respondents. The American people's general feelings toward the four countries are presented in Figure 3.

On average, as illustrated in Figure 3, the American people's general feeling toward China falls on the cool-side of the feeling thermometer (48.0/100) which leaves it the lowest ranked, on average, among the four countries. It is understandable that Americans hold a much warmer feeling toward Japan (66.6/100), which has been a liberal democracy and has by now become a long-term ally of the US. It is quite interesting to see that their feeling toward China is even significantly lower than that toward Russia (50.2/100), despite the Cold War and continuing disagreements between Russia and the US.

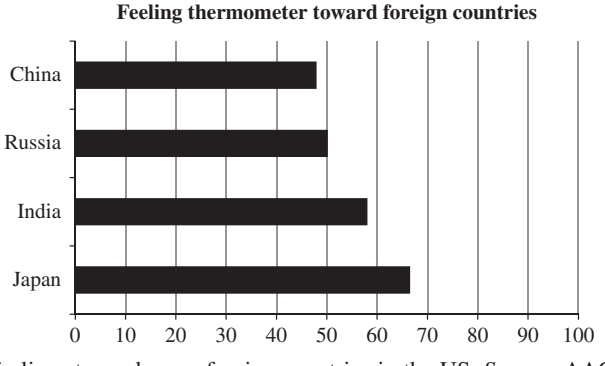

Figure 3. General feelings toward some foreign countries in the US. *Source*: AACS 2010 ($N = 810$).

Overall, then, the American public holds a cautious attitude toward China. Consistent with our findings on the American people's recognition of the significance of China and its rising, Americans are also able to evaluate China on a variety of characteristics, covering a number of dimensions of this nation and its standing and image. These views are not only multidimensional but also accompanied by embedded tensions, that is, with a mixture of positive and negative evaluations. On the one hand, they effectively recognize China's superior performance in building its economy, effectiveness in serving its people's needs, and success in enhancing its influence in the world. On the other hand, they are not particularly attracted to China's popular culture, do not evaluate China's cultural heritage particularly positively, denounce its dodging of necessary international responsibilities, and are not impressed by the prospects for democracy, as citizens of the US would recognize it, coming to China. It is not surprising therefore that, on average, the US public expresses ambivalence when asked how they feel toward China. Overall, these findings raise some interesting questions: with this kind of substantial variation in evaluations, who are more positively and who are less positively inclined toward China? How do the American people's multidimensional views of China (with their embedded tensions and tradeoffs) shape their general dispositions toward China? And, what is the varying influence of these multidimensional views and prospective evaluations in shaping the American public's general feeling toward China?

Who holds more positive or more negative views of China?

In Table 1 we report a series of regression models that seek to explain the variation we observe in the general evaluations of China, from the 100-point feeling thermometer. Recall that the sample average is a bit less than 50 degrees, that is, just a bit more negative than positive. We begin by examining the role of the respondent's background characteristics. We then add to that the two most important long-term political attitudes, partisanship and ideology. Furthermore, we explore the role played by the media. Finally, we include an assessment of how each of the several particular dimensions of evaluation of China's socioeconomics, politics and culture shape this overall assessment.

Individual differences

As shown in Table 1, the first model (M1) is purely demographic and includes age (with both age and its quadratic form in case age is non-linearly related to evaluation), gender (male scored 1, female 0), education and income (both ordinal and increasing positively). Age is consistently and rather strongly related to thermometer evaluations. Younger American respondents assess China more positively than older cohorts.[18] Education is consistently and also rather strongly

18. The marginal influence of age decreases, as captured by its significant but negative quadratic form. According to our estimations, *ceteris paribus*, the lowest general feeling toward China is revealed by the Americans in their late 60s and early 70s (depending on model specification).

Table 1. OLS regressions on the American public's general feeling toward China (demographics, partisanship, political ideology and information sources)

	M1	M2	M3
Demographic features			
Age	−0.716 (0.293)**	−0.661 (0.289)**	−0.661 (0.291)**
Age square	0.005 (0.003)**	0.005 (0.003)**	0.005 (0.003)*
Male	−0.841 (1.691)	0.220 (1.694)	0.061 (1.728)
Education	5.055 (1.112)***	4.079 (1.141)***	3.485 (1.149)***
Income	−0.839 (0.614)	−0.550 (0.634)	−0.885 (0.649)
Information access			
Newspapers			1.752 (2.296)
Radio stations			−4.851 (2.451)**
TV news			−3.619 (2.062)*
Internet news websites			2.862 (2.524)
Visiting mainland China			13.58 (2.939)***
Ideology			
Conservative		−5.141 (2.063)**	−5.059 (2.041)**
Liberal		6.528 (2.542)***	6.715 (2.567)***
Party ID			
Republican		2.356 (2.270)	2.926 (2.255)
Democrat		5.333 (2.087)**	5.603 (2.096)***
Intercept	58.11 (8.360)***	55.95 (8.181)***	59.25 (8.193)***
Model information			
F	(5, 734) = 5.81***	(9, 714) = 8.53***	(14, 697) = 8.35***
R-squared	0.039	0.086	0.126
Number of observations	740	724	712

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.
Source: AACS, 2010 ($N = 810$).

related, such that the more highly educated, the more positively Americans feel toward China. Income, like gender, is not independently related to evaluations, except in so far as they may be related to age and education. Collectively, these demographic variables explain a modest amount of variance in feelings about China, although they are related to general evaluations as one might expect. The more 'cosmopolitan' the respondents are likely to be (that is, the younger and more highly educated they are), the more positively they feel about China.

Partisanship and political ideology

The AACS employed two standard measures to capture the American people's political ideology. One was a trichotomous scale asking whether the respondent was a conservative, moderate or liberal. The other is the standard measure of partisan affiliation (i.e. the Republican–Independent–Democrat trichotomous scale). We begin by cross-tabulating the American public's general feelings toward China with their partisanship and with their ideological orientations to explore their respective influence, and present the results in Figure 4.

As is generally found, those who identify with the Democrat Party hold warmer general dispositions toward China than Republicans and Independents (see Figure 4A). Meanwhile, self-professed liberals in America, as illustrated in Figure 4B, also hold more favorable general attitudes toward China than moderates, who in turn hold warmer feelings toward China than do conservatives. Do these basic orientations toward politics continue to exert influence over the American public's attitudes toward China in our regression models that control for demographics? The second model in Table 1 (M2) indicates that partisanship and political ideology add considerably to our understanding of who assesses China more positively and who less so. They do so without affecting greatly the performance of the demographic variables, so our basic assessments of M1 continue to apply here. In addition, as just shown in Figure 4, conservatives are negatively disposed while liberals are more positively disposed toward China (relative to moderates, the excluded base category). Thus, *ceteris paribus*, conservatives give the most negative, liberals the most positive assessments, with moderates falling in between. And, those effects are rather strong. While Republicans are somewhat more positive than independents toward China, that effect is rather slight and not statistically significant. Instead, it is the Democrats who stand out as those with significantly more positive views. Of course, because Democrats are more likely than others to be liberals and vice versa, these two variables have a cumulative effect, such that a liberal Democrat is about a dozen points more positive, on average, than a moderate independent.

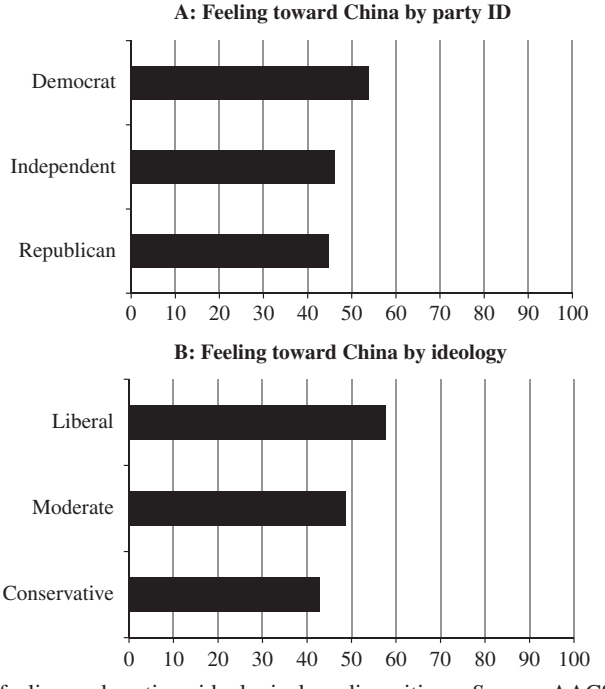

Figure 4. General feeling and partisan-ideological predispositions. *Source*: AACS 2010 ($N = 810$).

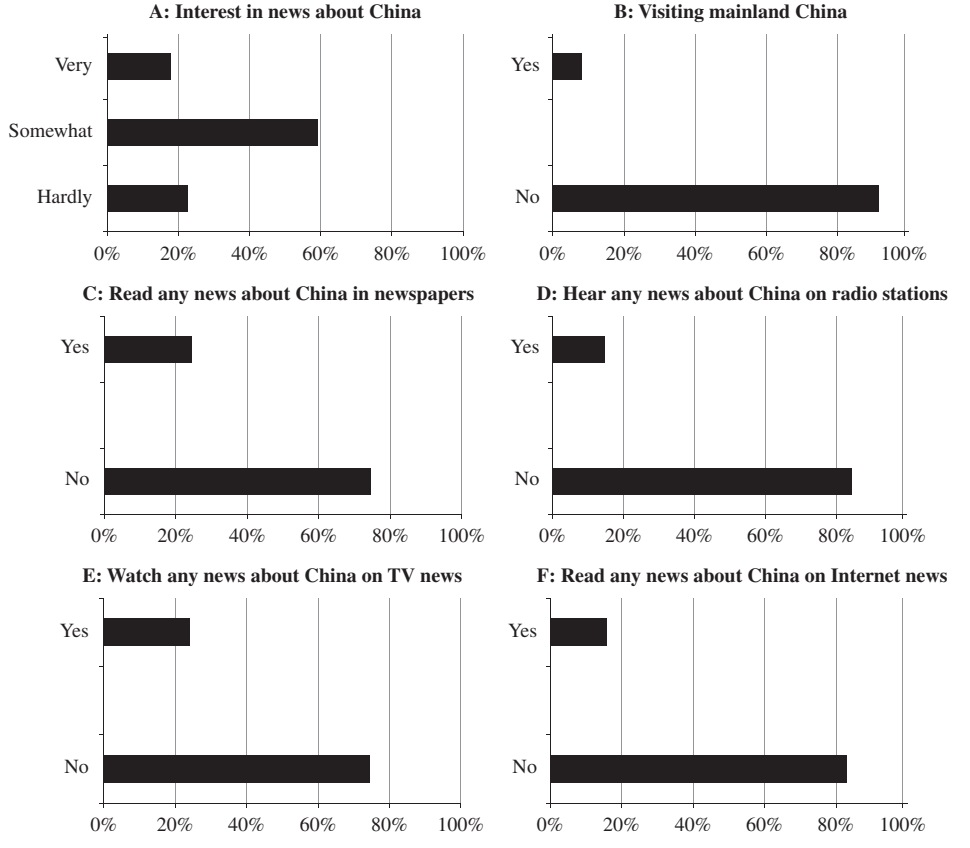

Figure 5. Interest in and sources of information about China. *Source*: AACS 2010 ($N = 810$).

Sources of information

Before turning to the role of the media in influencing evaluations of China, we report in Figure 5 the distribution of responses to our media questions regarding the American public's acquisition of China-related information from different media outlets.

Generally speaking, as shown in Figure 5A, the American public shows significant interest in news about China: about 18% are highly interested; and a little more than 59% are somewhat interested. Moreover, despite the high costs of transpacific journeys, as illustrated in Figure 5B, about 8% of the American people reported having visited mainland China.[19] The American people's interest in China is also reflected in their consumption of China-specific news from various media channels.

19. This is likely to be a high estimate. We are confident, however, that virtually no one who did travel to China said they did not, and so, while that 8% might include some who did not actually travel there, those who did travel there are concentrated within that response set, and make up a large fraction of them. Hence, while there may be some measurement error (and thus we might underestimate the effect of this variable), it seems likely to be a relatively small level of error and concentrated, thus minimizing its consequences.

Around 25% of the American people reported reading news about China from newspapers (Figure 5C) or watching such news on TV news broadcasts (Figure 5E) in the week before the survey. Meanwhile, about 15% claimed to have listened to China-specific news from radio stations (Figure 5D) or read such news from news websites (Figure 5F). In summary, the majority of Americans are interested in learning about China, and a significant number of them acquire China-related news from various media channels (more likely from newspapers or TV news broadcasts). Though personal contacts with China are still limited among Americans, a noticeable number of them have visited China.

How does such China-related information affect the American public's affective evaluations of China? For exploratory purpose, we cross-tabulate the American people's general feeling toward China against their interests in and acquisition of China-related information from various media channels, and present the results in Figure 6.

As expected, China-related information from these different sources shapes the American public's general feeling toward China in distinct ways. Comparatively

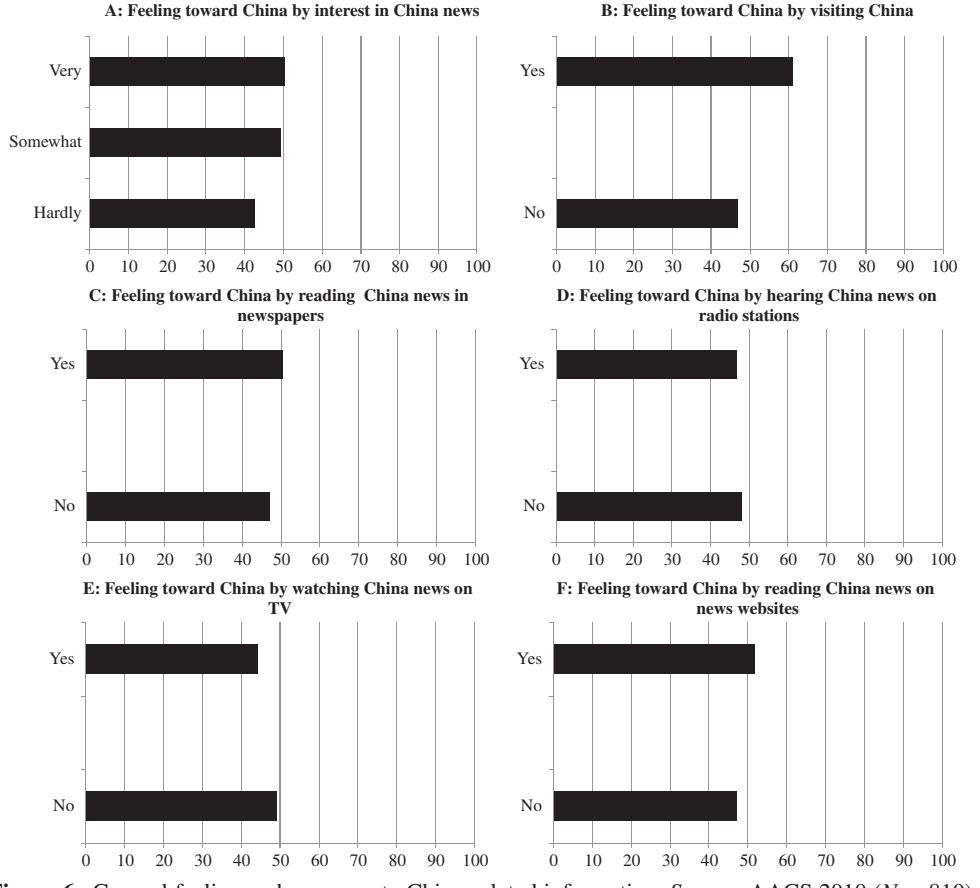

Figure 6. General feeling and exposure to China-related information. *Source*: AACS 2010 ($N = 810$).

speaking, the most salient influence lies in the American people's life experience in China (Figure 6B), which is associated with a much warmer attitude toward China. China-related information from different media channels also shifts the American public's general dispositions toward China in distinct ways. Accessing such information via newspapers (Figure 6C) and Internet news websites (Figure 6F) is associated with more positive general feeling toward China, while acquisition of such information from TV news broadcasts (Figure 6E) and radio stations (Figure 6D) is associated with more negative general feeling toward China.

The third model (M3) in Table 1 adds these media variables to our models of demographics and core political orientations. The effects of already considered variables continue in largely the same fashion even adding in consideration of media sources and hence level and type of China-related information that the respondents are exposed to. In addition, the sources of information add to our ability to understand who values China more positively, who less so. In particular, those following broadcast media—either radio or television (or both)—are significantly more negatively inclined toward China, at least in terms of their overall assessment. Following either newspapers or news via the Internet has only a small and non-significant effect, in spite of the bivariate correlations just reported in Figure 6. Those who visit China, however, are far more positively inclined to the nation.[20]

Varying dimensions of evaluating China: sources and consequences

The most interesting questions about our data pertain to how American evaluations of the particular dimensions of Chinese economy, society, polity and culture shape their overall assessments. In Table 2, we report an extension of the models estimated in Table 1 to assess how these measures contribute to understanding who, overall, evaluates China positively. We report four models there, including the original demographic model from Table 1 for ease of comparison. The second model (M4) in Table 2 is the direct inclusion of the six measures of evaluations of the various dimensions of China and the two prospective assessments of China in ten years, along with the demographic variables from M1. The third (M5) and fourth (M6) models in Table 2 add in the sources of media and, respectively, political ideology and self-reported partisanship. Statistically, the level of multicollinearity arising from including all 22 variables at once is unacceptably high, leading us to compare political ideology and partisanship separately.

First note in Table 2 that the inclusion of these new variables does not affect the influence of the demographic variables. Indeed, if anything, it strengthens them. Secondly, note that, moving from M1 to M4 in Table 2 dramatically increases the

20. Some may argue that the effect of traveling in China would be largely due to selection effects. Basically, those who are interested in and already appreciate China and its culture would be more likely to travel to China. We examine this possibility with a treatment-effect model. Basically, we simultaneously estimate M3 and another equation that models who is more likely to visit China. We also allow the error terms of the two equations to be correlated (thus accounting for unobserved factors). Contrary to this argument, we find an even stronger positive effect of visiting China after controlling for this selection effect. In other words, Americans' experiences of visiting China do significantly improve their generous feeling toward China. Related results can be obtained on request from the authors.

Table 2. OLS regressions on the American public's general feeling toward China (assessments of various aspects and beliefs)

	M1	M4	M5	M6
Demographic features				
Age	−0.716 (0.293)**	−0.598 (0.267)**	−0.494 (0.267)*	−0.519 (0.268)*
Age square	0.005 (0.003)**	0.004 (0.002)*	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)*
Male	−0.841 (1.691)	−0.624 (1.590)	−0.127 (1.597)	−0.021 (1.603)
Education	5.055 (1.112)***	4.091 (1.107)***	3.085 (1.136)***	3.674 (1.081)***
Income	−0.839 (0.614)	−0.877 (0.567)	−0.712 (0.586)	−0.964 (0.581)*
Assessment of China's varying aspects				
Competitive economy		4.001 (1.165)***	3.669 (1.162)***	3.947 (1.166)***
Effective political system		−1.131 (1.068)	−1.213 (1.065)	−1.496 (1.082)
Appealing popular culture		8.305 (1.68)***	7.449 (1.261)***	7.360 (1.242)***
Rich cultural heritage		−3.119 (1.041)***	−3.134 (1.043)***	−3.675 (1.050)***
Influential in world politics		1.534 (1.206)	0.944 (1.174)	1.042 (1.211)
Dodging responsibility in the world		0.039 (1.178)	0.264 (1.196)	0.006 (1.158)
Prospective evaluation				
Democracy in ten years		8.781 (1.383)***	7.692 (1.439)***	8.307 (1.385)***
Influence in the word in ten years		1.269 (1.484)	0.851 (1.494)	1.125 (1.495)
Information access				
Newspapers			2.681 (2.161)	2.963 (1.129)
Radio stations			−4.306 (2.385)*	−4.084 (2.384)*
TV news			−3.559 (2.011)*	−3.718 (2.002)*
Internet news websites			−0.109 (2.533)	0.180 (2.457)
Visiting mainland China			9.693 (2.818)***	10.03 (2.875)***
Ideology				
Conservative			3.814 (1.767)**	
Liberal			4.765 (2.327)**	
Party ID				
Republican				1.902 (2.013)
Democrat				7.671 (1.921)***
Intercept	58.11 (8.360)***	59.18 (7.570)***	60.25 (7.544)***	56.36 (7.612)***
Model information				
F	(5, 734) = 5.81***	(13, 702) = 14.89***	(20, 672) = 12.57***	(20, 680) = 12.92***
R-squared	0.039	0.203	0.243	0.252
Number of observations	740	716	693	701

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.
Source: AACS, 2010 ($N = 810$).

associated *R*-squared, from about 0.04 to 0.20. While this is only a crude performance measure of the specified model, it nonetheless indicates how strongly overall evaluations of China are related to the various components and forecasts of future directions of China included here—and how much variation remains to be explained. Thirdly, note that inclusion of the new variables also does not substantially change the effects of partisanship, political ideology or media effects, as reported in Table 1. And, of course, these variables add to the overall power of our explanation of who values China positively and who does not.

Most interesting, of course, is what is newly added. Those (and, of course, that is many) respondents who see the increased competiveness of China's economy are more positively predisposed to China. These are balanced by the unusual finding (for which further corroboration and research are needed) that those who believe China has a rich cultural heritage are more negatively disposed toward China, to almost the same extent. The bigger effects come, however, from those who find China's popular culture appealing and those who believe that China will be more democratic in ten years, both of which add positively to their overall evaluations of China.

Moreover, because the same three-point ordinal scales are used for the varying assessments, we can directly compare respective coefficients to assess such assessments' respective influence on the American people's general dispositions toward China. Generally, the influence of the American people's evaluations of China's popular culture and prospects of democracy doubles that of their assessments of China's cultural heritage and economic performance. As noted above, these variables add a great deal toward the explanation of who feels warmly toward China. These variables essentially double the explanatory power of all the other variables put together (see M3 in Table 1). And collectively, we have made considerable progress in understanding Americans' affective evaluations of China, at least in a statistical sense.

Conclusions and suggestions

In this article, we use a national survey of the American public, conducted through the joint efforts of Shanghai Jiao-Tong University and Duke University in 2010 to examine systematically how Americans view the rising China. We begin by showing that most Americans understand the economic growth of China and its implications for the US, and they also recognize China's emergence as a growing international power and anticipate that it will continue to do so in coming years. We then examine the nature of their views about China. We have found that the overall assessment of China is at best tepid and, on average, trails the assessments of other foreign nations, including Japan, India and Russia. Moreover, beneath this overall assessment is a rich and varied set of evaluations of particular dimensions of this complex nation, with embedded tensions, as the American public views some aspects positively, others negatively.

There is considerable variation in these assessments, and we have done a series of analyses of just who is more likely to evaluate China more positively overall, and who more negatively. We find that the younger, the more educated, those who have

traveled to China already, Democrats and liberals are all more likely to hold a more positive general feeling toward China. Conversely, those who follow China on television or on the radio news are less likely to do so. Further analysis reveals that the Americans' assessments of China's economic performance, popular culture, cultural heritage and the prospects of democracy have significant influence over their overall feelings toward China. Forecasts about the prospects for democracy in China and evaluations of its popular culture seem to have the most substantial effects on the American public's general feeling toward China.

Our findings have significant implications for understanding how American public opinion toward China might evolve. First, given the importance and substantive influence of ideology and partisanship in shaping the American people's general attitudes toward China, as well as these two factors' widely documented stability in American politics, American public opinion toward China seems unlikely to change dramatically in the near future. Second, the influence of party identification especially, but also ideology and related values, provide sufficient leeway for American politicians to mobilize public opinion about China for their particular ambitions, whether that is for shaping the US foreign policy or merely seeking election to office. Finally, our findings provide a cognitive foundation for examining the underlying dynamics of China's image in the US. The next round of data collection and future research should turn to the difficult problem of how best to bring these cognitive dynamics and Americans' behavioral responses (e.g. policy preferences, candidate evaluations and vote choices) together, thus providing a more comprehensive and effective understanding on the role of Americans' views of China in Sino–US relations. It will also be interesting to consider the stability of these opinions and assessments over time, so that we may have a better sense of just how firmly grounded Americans' views of China are and how much others, whether the Chinese government, American politicians or whomever else, can meaningfully shape such public opinion and exert pressure on America's policies toward China.

Appendix: Survey sampling and implementation

In 2010, the Institute of Arts and Humanities at Shanghai Jiao-Tong University collaborated with the Program for Research on China at Duke University and conducted the Americans' Attitudes toward China Survey (AACS). This is one of a few nationally representative sampling surveys initiated by a Chinese academic institute in the US. Several Chinese and American political scientists, communication scholars and public opinion experts were involved in the questionnaire design. The AACS was administered by the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Indiana University, with interviews conducted between 23 June 2010 and 29 August 2010. The survey was conducted with an RDD sample of landline phone numbers in the lower 48 states. Telephone numbers were randomly generated using the Genesys list-assisted method. This method allows for unpublished numbers and new listings to be included in the sample. After selecting a random sample of telephone numbers, the numbers were matched to a database of business and non-working numbers. All matches were subsequently purged from the original sample. All cases confirmed to be eligible were called up to 24 times, except in cases of respondent refusal or

insufficient time before the end of the study. Cases with unknown eligibility (persistent no answers or answering devices unknown to belong to residences) were called a minimum of eight times, with calls made during the morning, afternoon, evening and weekend. Interviewers attempted to convert each refusal at least twice, once at the first instance of refusal and again a few days later. For each residential telephone number, one respondent was randomly selected from all eligible household members (18 +). The average interview length was 24.2 minutes. Data were collected by telephone using the CASES software (5.4) on-site at the CSR telephone interviewing facilities. The final sample includes 810 cases.