

# Comparing Job Expectations of Chinese and American College Students

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## Abstract

China is one of the fastest growing economies in world. Most of its growth has come as a result of an explosion of business activity, both internally and as a result of multinational investment. As such, the competition for the best and brightest talent being graduated from universities in China has become intense. Organizations need to understand those factors which will attract and retain competent employees. Are Chinese students different from those graduating from U.S. universities? How might such differences, if they exist, affect the HRM function of Chinese organizations? The present study shows that several significant differences exist between Chinese and U.S. college students.

## Introduction

The phenomenon known as “globalization” refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world. Competition and specialization promote market efficiency that allows people and economies to concentrate on what they do best. Markets alone do not guarantee that benefits derived from improved efficiency are common to all. The effectiveness of multinational corporations in such an environment requires new strategies be implemented and policies established that can procure, integrate and maintain an appropriate workforce. Success in this area depends in large part on the congruence between their employees’ job expectations and organizational realities.

Extensive research examining gender differences on job orientation or work values has been conducted during the last half-century (Herzberg, et.al. [1957]; Centers and Bugental [1966]; Brief, et.al. [1977]; Neil and Snizek [1987]; Loscocco [1989]).

Studying job orientations at the international level has also garnered its share of interest (deVaus and McAllister [1991]; Mahmoud [1996]; Elizur [2001]; Frankel, et.al. [2006]).

Since 1972, a number of studies have utilized a job orientation survey instrument developed by Manhardt (1972). Studying recent college graduates who had just joined a major insurance company, Manhardt found significant differences between males and females out of a total of twenty-five job characteristics. Several additional studies have used the Manhardt instrument (Bartol [1976]; Brenner and Tomkiewicz [1979]; Bartol and Manhardt [1979]; Brenner and Tomkiewicz [1982]; Beutell and Brenner [1986]; Tomkiewicz et.al. [1994]; Tomkiewicz et.al. [1997]).

The focus of the present study is China, which many observers believe is a highly attractive country, for

several reasons. The goal of this paper is to initiate the studying of job expectations possessed by China's newly emerging college educated knowledge workers. These expectations will then be compared to a comparable sample of American students in order to ascertain what differences, if any, American business organizations might expect to find as they recruit and try to retain employees in business undertakings in China. Eventually, our hope is to compare job expectations from newly emerging countries in different parts of the world. In a previous (published) paper, Poland was the subject of a study investigating job expectations. (Tomkiewicz, et.al.,2006). In addition, a paper, in press, looked at the job expectations of Russian students.

## **Why China?**

China's dynamic economy has one of the highest sustained growth rates in the 20th century. It has also gone through profound institutional and structural changes. (United States Department of Agriculture, 2004)

For example, according to the (Chinese) Ministry of Education, "China will see 2.8 million college graduates hit the job market in the summer of 2004, an increase of 680,000 over the same time last year, and by 2005, the number is expected to reach a record 3.4 million." (China Daily, 2004) Even with such large numbers of college graduates "the war for talent never ends. Middle managers in China? Good luck finding them, let alone keeping them. They're well-educated and hard-working: Trouble is, every company wants them." (McGregor and Hamm, 2008, p.34) However, even with an expanding economy, the increase in college graduates has led some experts to warn that "university graduates need to reduce their expectations and design reasonable career development plans to meet the tight new employment situation." (China Daily, 2003) Thus, while it may seem on the one hand that a plethora of knowledge workers exists, hiring the brightest and best and, perhaps more importantly, keeping them for an extended period of time, appears to be the greatest challenge faced by multinationals. For example, Ketter (2008, p. 16), in a survey of employees in China found that 25% of the respondents had already had 3 or more jobs and 20% of them planned to leave their present positions in the coming year. Shao (2007, p.17) points out that as a result of China's continued growth, there is an "ongoing war" to attract and keep key talent and organizations need to understand what motivates employees to stay for any extended period of time with one employer. Prieur (2007, p. 20) believes that the most pressing challenges facing HR professionals is to provide the necessary expertise and strategic insights to meet the needs of businesses in China's cultural environment.

## **Methodology**

Chinese university students were asked to rate 25 job characteristics according to their importance to the rater on a 5-point scale (5 = Very Important, 1 = Not Important) in the same manner as had previously been done by Manhardt (1972). There were 101 Chinese university business students surveyed. Of this number, 94 usable forms were obtained. Also surveyed was a sample of American business students from an eastern university. A total of 209 students were surveyed which resulted in 182 usable forms. While sex is not one of the variables examined in this study, in the Chinese sample there were 47 males and 47 females. The average age of the entire Chinese sample was 22.4 years. The American sample consisted of 64 females and 118 males. The average age of the entire American sample was, coincidentally, 22.4 years.

## Results

Mean scores were calculated for each of the twenty-five items on the questionnaire and these were rank ordered separately for Chinese students and American students. [See Table 1.] The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient between the rank orders of Chinese students and American students was 0.62 ( $p \leq 0.01$ ), indicating that the order of importance which Chinese students and American students placed on job characteristics was similar.

Significant differences for nationality were tested using the statistical procedure MANOVA. [See Table 2.] The model was significant (Wilks lambda = 0.58;  $p \leq 0.0001$ ). Univariate analysis showed significant differences ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) on 10 of 25 items (Items: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 17, 18, 25). American students were higher on 8 of the 10 items. Chinese students were higher only on items 3 and 10. Standard deviations of the 25 items were compared. Examining standard deviations of the entire sample over the 25 items showed an average standard deviation for American students of 0.91 while Chinese students had an average standard deviation of 1.01. Using a paired t-test showed significant difference between American and Chinese students ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the American sample was significantly more homogenous than the Chinese sample.

### **Intrinsic and Extrinsic perspectives of the survey items.**

Dichotomizing the 25 items into intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics yielded 13 intrinsic factors (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 21, 24, 25) and 12 extrinsic factors (items 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23). Differences in job orientation, whether intrinsic and/or extrinsic are an important component in determining organizational strategies in attracting and retaining employees (Herzberg et al. 1957; Loscocco 1989; Brief, Rose, and Aldag 1977; Neil and Snizek 1987; Centers and Bugental 1966; deVaus and McAllister 1991; Mahmoud 1996; Elizur 2001). The cause of intrinsic motivation is a need or incentive that takes place within the individual and is directly related to the task (e.g., sense of achievement). Extrinsic motivation is caused by an event or stimulus that happens outside the individual and are related to external circumstances (e.g., salary).

Multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on both subsets (intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics). The intrinsic model was significant (Wilks lambda = 0.68;  $p \leq 0.0001$ ). Univariate analysis showed significant differences on 6 of the 13 items. Of these, American students had the higher score on 4 of the 6 items. Chinese students had the higher score on items 3 and 24.

The extrinsic model was also significant (Wilks lambda = 0.82;  $p \leq 0.0001$ ). Univariate analysis showed significant differences on 5 of the 12 items. Of these, American students had the higher score on 4 of the 5 items. Chinese students had the higher score on item 10.

## Conclusions and Discussions

The Chinese students in this study indicated that three job characteristics were significantly more important to them than to American students. These Chinese students wanted a job that allowed for the continued development of their skills and knowledge, they desired to work with congenial associates, and they wanted a job that permitted them to develop their own methods. While job security and high income were not unimportant, they counted for significantly less importance for the Chinese students than for the American sample. In fact, it might be said of these respondents that the American sample expected more of most items than their Chinese peers. American students were higher on 16 of the 25 items (with significant differences on 8 of 10 statistically different items).

One way to look at Chinese versus American student job expectations might be to examine what both groups think are most important and what they think are least important. American students ranked as their top 3 items, respectively, a job that provides a sense of accomplishment, a job that provides security and the ability to earn a high income. Two of their top three items are extrinsic factors. Chinese students,

on the other hand, had as their top 3 items, respectively, continued development of skills and knowledge, permits the development of your own methods and a provides a sense of accomplishment (tied). All three items are intrinsic factors.

When examining the least important items listed by the respondents, the American sample ranked, starting at the least important, a regular work routine, responsibility for taking risks, requires originality and permits working with congenial associates (tied). Two items are considered intrinsic and two are extrinsic. The Chinese sample ranked, starting at the least important, requires supervising others, requires meeting and speaking with many other people, and makes use of specific educational background. The two least desired expectations are both extrinsic factors.

While the present paper does not have as its goal the correlation of the measured job expectations with Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions, the results do parallel to a certain extent his categories of Individualism (IDV) and long-term orientation (LTO). The former dimension indicates a preference for taking care of one's self. The United States is classified in this dimension and the American sample appears to reflect this tendency by the importance placed on high income and job security. On the other hand, the dimension of long-term orientations deals with thrift and perseverance and seems to be indicated by the Chinese sample's importance placed on continued development of skills and development their own methods of doing work.

As greater numbers of organizations continue their globalizing efforts, with China representing one of the most important development targets, understanding the needs and expectations of prospective employees must rank at the highest levels of importance. Such knowledge can provide organizations who use it a competitive advantage not bound only to monetary expenditures. Awareness of job characteristics valued by workers might enable organizations to avoid mistakes of underestimating and under-developing the full extent of human resource management tools that can be used in creating a working climate that encourages both performance and retention.

**Table 1: Job Expectation Questionnaire**

	China			USA		
	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
Q1	3.74	0.98	13	3.49	0.79	22
Q2	3.40	1.24	23	3.90*	0.82	10
Q3	4.56	0.77	1	4.04*	0.88	8
Q4	3.79	1.07	9	4.24*	0.93	5
Q5	3.94	0.92	7	4.40*	0.92	2
Q6	4.00	0.83	6	4.27*	0.98	3
Q7	3.79	0.93	9	3.64	0.92	16
Q8	3.42	0.97	22	3.47	0.77	24
Q9	3.74	0.92	13	3.53	0.80	20
Q10	3.86	1.01	8	3.49*	0.85	22
Q11	3.63	1.15	17	3.76	0.93	12
Q12	3.58	1.04	18	3.71	0.83	14
Q13	3.78	0.87	12	4.27*	0.89	3
Q14	4.06	0.90	4	4.19	0.88	6
Q15	3.79	1.06	9	3.72	0.97	13
Q16	4.04	0.94	5	4.10	0.88	7
Q17	3.19	1.18	25	3.57*	0.96	18
Q18	3.68	1.04	15	4.00*	0.88	9
Q19	3.58	1.07	18	3.63	0.98	17
Q20	3.53	1.07	20	3.54	0.99	19
Q21	3.68	1.09	15	3.69	0.97	15
Q22	3.50	1.05	21	3.35	1.11	25
Q23	3.31	1.13	24	3.51	0.91	21
Q24	4.13	0.90	2	3.80	0.89	11

Q25 4.13 1.12 2 4.49\* 0.96 1

\* $p \leq 0.01$  (or better)

## JOB EXPECTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate how important each of the following items are to you in a job, with '1' being unimportant and '5' being important.

How important is it to you to have a job which:

Q1-requires originality

Q2-makes use of your specific educational background

Q3-encourages continued development of knowledge and skills

Q4-is respected by other people

Q5-provides job security

Q6-provides the opportunity to earn a high income

Q7-makes a social contribution by work you do

Q8-gives you the responsibility for taking risks

Q9-requires working on problems of central importance to the organization

Q10-involves working with congenial associates

Q11-provides ample leisure time off the job

Q12-provides change and variety in duties and activities

Q13-provides comfortable working conditions

Q14-permits advancement to high administrative responsibility

Q15-permits working independently

Q16-rewards good performance with recognition

Q17-requires supervising others

Q18-is intellectually stimulating

Q19-satisfies your cultural and aesthetic interests

Q20-has clear-cut rules and procedures to follow

Q21-permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect

Q22-permits a regular routine in time and place of work

Q23-requires meeting and speaking with many other people

Q24-permits you to develop your own methods of doing work

Q25-provides a feeling of accomplishment

## **References**

References will be provided upon request.