

# Chinese Middle Class Attitudes Towards International Affairs: Nascent Liberalization?\*

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**ABSTRACT** There is a growing interest in the preferences of an emerging middle class in China towards domestic reform. But little attention has been paid to middle class views on world affairs and foreign policy. Given the murky trajectory of political reform in China it is uncertain how middle class preferences may affect government policy. But with the growing role of entrepreneurs in policy-making, one could plausibly expect that middle class voices will increasingly be heard at the top. We need to know what these voices are saying. Using longitudinal data from the Beijing Area Study this article examines the attitudes of Beijing's middle class towards free trade, international institutions, military spending, the United States and nationalism. It finds that generally the middle class exhibits a greater level of nascent liberalism than poorer income groups. This is consistent with what various international relations theories would expect.

Is there a Chinese middle class and what does it think? There is a growing scholarly, political and commercial interest in the economic, cultural and political preferences of an emerging middle class in China.<sup>1</sup> The central line of inquiry has been whether a growing middle class will be a force for political reform and democratization, as it has been in some countries.<sup>2</sup>

But there is another aspect of the Chinese middle class that has not been studied much, namely its attitudes towards world affairs. The general question of class or social group and such attitudes is also an understudied topic in the international relations literature.<sup>3</sup> Yet why does

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1. For early surveys of evolving attitudes towards democratization and political participation that take social and economic status into some account, see Min Qi, *Zhongguo zhengzhi wenhua: minzhu zhengzhi nanchan de shehui xinli yinsu* (*China's Political Culture: Social Psychological Elements that are Slow in Coming From Democratic Politics*) (Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1989) and Zhang Mingshu, *Zhongguo "zhengzhi ren"* (*China's "Political Man"*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1994), Yin Yiping, *Gaoji hui: Zhongguo chengshi zhong chan jieceng xiezhen* (*Superior Grey: Portrait of China's Urban Middle Class*) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1999).

2. For a summary of arguments about Chinese middle-class attitudes towards domestic political change see Thomas Lum, "The marginalization of political activism in China," paper prepared for the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

3. For example, the most recent of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations' quadrennial studies of foreign policy opinion, *American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy 1999*, does not use social or economic class but divides its samples into "leaders" and "mass."

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this question matter? China, after all, is not a country where middle class voters can recall poorly performing political leaders. None the less, there are claims that the Chinese leadership is increasingly sensitive to and/or constrained by the opinion of attentive publics (primarily urban political, economic and military elites) on issues ranging from Taiwan to Japanese reparations to the treatment of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. This will even be more likely in the event that political reform leads to limited democratization. As it is, with Jiang Zemin's controversial decision to sanction the induction of capitalists and entrepreneurs into the Communist Party, one could plausibly expect that some middle class voices will be heard increasingly within the ruling party itself.<sup>4</sup>

Some have argued that the emerging middle class may be even more nationalistic than other socio-economic groups in China. The main argument is that with the bankruptcy of Marxist-Leninist ideology the CCP has turned to nationalism to shore up its legitimacy. Moreover, this nationalism, many contend, is a particularly emotional and xenophobic kind, the type of nationalism that Allen Whiting has called "aggressive,"<sup>5</sup> and it resonates in particular among the urban socio-economic elites. Thus even if China democratizes, there is every likelihood that this urban elite will be highly nationalistic, even anti-American.<sup>6</sup>

This may well be the case. There are, however, at least two problems with jumping to this conclusion too quickly. The first has to do with its theoretical basis. In the scholarly literature on China this kind of argument often draws, implicitly or explicitly, on Mansfield and Snyder's argument that democratizing states may be more aggressive and conflict-prone than either democracies or authoritarian states because, in many cases, they rely on extreme nationalism for legitimization.<sup>7</sup> The China literature, however, misses the substantial methodological and empirical

4. Jiang Zemin, "Speech at the meeting celebrating the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China" (1 July 2001), <http://www.china-un.ch/eng/14905.html>. On the political preferences of the "entrepreneurial class" see David Yang Da-hua, "Civil society as an analytical lens for contemporary China," *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 2004), pp. 14–20. For an explanation of why China's integration into global politics and economics has created space for attentive public, expert and sub-elite opinion see Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen, "The domestic context of Chinese foreign policy: does 'public opinion' matter?" in David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978–2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 151–187.

5. Allen S. Whiting, "Chinese nationalism and foreign policy after Deng," *The China Quarterly*, No. 142 (June 1995).

6. For references to this and similar arguments see the summary of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies Annual Conference, Manila, 14–17 September 2000 at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/css/docs/reports/IISS.html>; June Dreyer's testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, 19 July 2000 at <http://www.house.gov/hasc/testimony/106thcongress/00-07-19dreyer.html>; Barrett McCormick, "Introduction," in Edward Friedman and Barrett L. McCormick (eds.), *What if China Doesn't Democratize: Implications for War and Peace* (Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000) p. 11; David Bachman, "China's democratization and US–China relations," in *ibid.* p. 196; Harvey Nelsen, "Caution: rough road ahead," in *ibid.* p. 279; Ying Ma, "China's America Problem," *Policy Review*, No. 111 (February/March 2002), <http://www.policyreview.org/FEB02/ma.html>.

7. See Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the danger of war," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 5–38.

critiques of the Mansfield–Snyder thesis.<sup>8</sup> Some of the latest research suggests that democratization processes which have entailed a lot of authoritarian backsliding and/or which occur in highly conflictual areas are the ones more prone to conflict than relatively smooth democratization processes within relatively peaceful areas. In other words, democratization *per se* is not obviously related to more conflictual behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, in contrast to the democratization–nationalism–conflict hypothesis, certain theories of foreign policy preferences derived from the democratic peace and economic interdependence literatures suggest that the middle class may be more liberal and internationalist in its worldview than other socio-economic groups. These literatures suggest, variously, that middle classes are more likely to value economic well-being and be sensitive to the costs in blood and treasure from military adventures abroad. To the extent they represent the preferences of a “median” voter in a democracy, political leaders will be more cautious externally. Those in the middle class whose economic interests are dependent on external markets will be more supportive of free trade and international integration. Educational opportunities, foreign travel and more access to information about the outside world – advantages for middle classes over poorer groups – may lead to less xenophobic or dichotomized understandings of the external world. The middle class’s interest in domestic legal transparency and institutionalization may transfer to support for international legalization.

These two alternative sets of arguments raise critical questions about the possible future directions of Chinese foreign policy and how other states should react as or if the middle class increases in size and political/economic clout. It would make sense, then, to learn a bit more about what the middle class foreign policy preferences are or may be as a first step in testing which might prevail over time.

Yet we know very little about these preferences. This is the second problem. In both the scholarly and political punditry worlds, the conclusions about “rising” Chinese nationalism and anti-Americanism come mostly from anecdotal evidence or relatively unsystematic reliance on high profile, popular publications in China. Books such as the nationalist screed, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu (China Can Say No)*, are often held up as evidence. The famous 1995 survey of Chinese youth opinions published in the *Zhongguo qingnian bao (China Youth Daily)* is sometimes invoked as evidence, even though it did not meet any social scientific sampling criteria.<sup>10</sup> Often the conclusion about rising nationalism and anti-

8. For critiques see Michael D. Ward and Kristian S. Gleditsch, “Democratizing for peace,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (March 1998), pp. 51–61; William R. Thompson and Richard Tucker, “A tale of two democratic peace critiques,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (June 1997), pp. 428–454; and Bear Braumoeller, “Hypothesis testing and multiplicative interaction terms,” *International Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (forthcoming).

9. See Kristian S. Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward, “War and peace in space and time: the role of democratization,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 2001) pp. 1–30.

10. In fact the survey was a readers’ voluntary response survey, not a random sample of Chinese youth.

Americanism among urban educated and/or wealthy elites inheres in Western journalists reporting from China. Yet, it is not uncommon for journalists to offer anecdotal evidence that confirms a particular line of argument, while under-reporting or ignoring disconfirming evidence. Often the sources cited in US journalism are biased (in a statistical sense) or the quotations are unsystematically collected. For instance, of the articles in US newspapers found on Lexis-Nexis from October 2000 to July 2001 that mentioned Chinese nationalism, almost 30 per cent of the 57 references were to interviews with non-randomly selected Chinese students, while another 22 per cent were to younger Chinese professionals. Some 12 per cent were to American (non-PRC) China specialists. If this were the sample used for an analysis of US popular attitudes towards China we would rightly be cautious about how much we could infer from such interviews.<sup>11</sup> Where the evidence seems strong that nationalism is at least meant to be one of the new ideological bases of CCP legitimacy<sup>12</sup> the research has generally not tried to control for class or socio-economic status.

There is therefore very little systematic data on Chinese middle class attitudes towards foreign relations compared, say, to data on attitudes towards domestic economic and social issues.<sup>13</sup> Recent data from yearly, randomly sampled surveys of Beijing residents, however, finally allows us to control for class and economic status and isolate and compare the attitudes of the middle class on a select range of foreign relations questions – free trade, interdependence, military spending, amity towards

11. This is not to say that levels of nationalism in the Chinese population are low. Indeed, arguably the CCP's legitimacy has always rested to a large degree on nationalism. The victimization themes in modern Chinese nationalism, in particular, have inhered in educational and propaganda systems since 1949 and certainly pre-date the post 1989 legitimacy crisis.

12. See, for instance the perceptive analysis of popular cultural commentary, Geremie R. Barme, "To screw foreigners is patriotic: China's avant-garde nationalists," *The China Journal*, No. 34 (July 1995), pp. 209–234.

13. For one of the few detailed efforts to examine how public opinion constrains Chinese foreign policy see Fewsmith and Rosen, "The domestic context of Chinese foreign policy." Their study does not use surveys and relies mostly at the writings of intellectual elites on economic integration, relations with the US and nationalism. There is a small but growing number of scholarly studies that do use survey-type methods: Sheldon Levy, "International law governing restraint in conflict: cross cultural views," paper presented to ISPP, Montreal, 12–15 July 1998; Jianwei Wang, "The United States–China mutual images in the post-Tiananmen era: a regression or sophistication," PhD dissertation, University of Michigan Department of Political Science, 1994; Lingdian Survey Company, *Guancha Zhongguo (Observing China)* (Gongshang Press, 1997) pp. 31–52; Yu Sunda *et al.*, "Zhong Mei guanxi: laizi minzhong de kanfa" ("Sino-US relations: views from the masses"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No.6 (2001), pp. 33–38; Chen Jie, "Urban Chinese perceptions of threats from the United States and Japan," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, No. 65 (2001), pp. 254–266; Yu Gouming, "Zhongguo ren yanzhong de Riben he Riben ren" ("Chinese views of Japan and Japanese people"), *Guoji xinwen jie (International News World)*, No. 6 (1997) pp. 58–65; Lucy M. Cummings, "PRC foreign policy responsiveness to domestic ethical sentiment: understanding the link between ethics and regime legitimacy," PhD dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, Department of Political Science, 2000). None of these studies controls for income category, most do not ask about international relations questions beyond bilateral relations with great powers (the Lingdian survey has more to do with global cultural affairs), and most only report raw percentages rather than tests of association, difference or correlations.

the US and other democracies, and nationalism. These data were collected by the Research Centre on Contemporary China at Beijing University as part of its Beijing Area Study in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. This article does not try to explain or account for the specific views held by the middle class respondents. Nor does it address the question of how China's middle class may constrain China's foreign policy options. That is, these views are neither independent nor dependent variables in some model of the origins and impact of public opinion on Chinese foreign policy. Rather as a first step in any such model building I present a preliminary descriptive analysis of attitudes that looks for any clusters of views which, first, are coherent in some thematically logical fashion, and, secondly, are consistently held by those in the growing Chinese middle class in proportion or degree that is different from the non-middle class. To telegraph these preliminary findings, there is evidence that middle class respondents, *relative to less well-off respondents*, are more likely to hold what might be called proto-liberal attitudes.

### *What is the Middle Class?*

Unfortunately, whether in China or in the West, there is little scholarly or official agreement on what constitutes the middle class.<sup>14</sup> The debate is usually over what criteria should be used to define the members of a class. For example, if class determines who has access to what resources in society, then income-derived categories can be appropriate in highly unequal societies, but less useful for welfare-based societies or countries with relatively equitable distributions of power and resources.

In the United States income tends to be the dominant criterion for determining class. Even so, there is no consensus over where the income cut points are to divide the population.<sup>15</sup> Economists have suggested a range of estimates: the third quintile of income distribution; the second to fourth quintiles; 25 to 75 per cent of income distribution; 33 to 66 per cent of income distribution; two to three times the poverty line; 80 to 120 per cent of median income; 75 to 125 per cent of median income; and 50 to 200 per cent of median income. Since the absolute value of these ranges cannot be applied to all other states, however, these income figures ought to be considered proxies or indirect indicators for standards of living and patterns of consumption that roughly correspond to what an American or West European middle class might enjoy.

Outside the United States, countries have used different measures of class to distribute the benefits and determine the effects of public spending. Great Britain has traditionally used occupational categories. Some West European states have used educational levels, or some composite index that combines education, occupational category and

14. According to an unscientific e-mail poll of over 20 university-based economists about an "industry standard" in defining the middle class, the overwhelming answer was that there was none. My thanks to Michael Griesdorf for providing this information.

15. For instance, the US Census does not use middle class as a category of analysis (<http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/incfaq.html>).

income.<sup>16</sup> In general, research on different indices suggests that there is no good way of determining class, hence what constitutes a middle class. There will always be some arbitrariness that highlights the “liminality” of some socio-economic category.

Given the ambiguity of the term as it is used in the West, it is not surprising that there is some debate as to whether or not there is truly a middle class in China. Some scholars denied that one existed in the 1990s. The term is, however, used increasingly as a typology both in popular journalism and in some scholarship.<sup>17</sup> One of the few efforts to define a Chinese middle class uses an income criterion. According to a 1997 study, the middle class in 1995 was that socio-economic group with annual household earnings of at least 30,000 RMB (US\$3,600 at 1996 exchange rates).<sup>18</sup> At the time of the study this constituted 9 per cent of urban families. More recently, it has been reported that some journalists and scholars in China believe that the middle class is constituted by household incomes which come close to levels one might use in developed economies (100,000–400,000 RMB or about \$12,100–48,400 in current US dollars). It also notes, however, that occupation, education and consumption patterns can be used as criteria for middle class membership as well.<sup>19</sup> Yet another analyst defines the middle class as the “professional and entrepreneurial stratum in cities earning between \$2,500 and \$25,000 per year,” about 20 per cent of the urban population.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless which measure one uses, in China the “middle class” appears to be a misnomer because this group, in fact, is an economic elite. However, one can view the term as essentially a proxy for those whose standards of living and consumption patterns (in travel, entertainment, clothing, education, housing and so on) are increasingly similar to those of the middle class in developed states.<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this article,

16. For a detailed discussion of the problems of different class indices see L.F. Berkman and S. Macintyre, “The measurement of social class in health studies: old measures and new formulations,” in M. Kogevinas *et al.* (eds.), *Social Inequalities and Cancer* (Lyon: International Agency for Research on Cancer, No. 138, 1997) pp. 51–64. I thank Sid Verba for bringing this article to my attention.

17. See Li Jian and Niu Xiaohan, “The new middle class in Beijing: a case study,” unpublished paper, Lund University, Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies, 2001.

18. Ming Rui Feng and Yang Yiyong, “Yi ye chun feng: chengli ren de shouru chu tu xiang se” (“An evening of spring breezes: urban population income”). in Yang Yiyong (ed.), *Gongping yu xiaoli: dangdai Zhongguo de shouru fenpei wenti (Equality and Efficiency: The Issue of Distribution of Income in Contemporary China)* (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo chubanshe, 1997), p. 133. I thank Zhang Ming for pointing out this source. Interestingly, this is close to how the Agricultural Trade Office at the US Consulate in Shanghai defines the middle class (household annual income of over 24,000 RMB). See <http://www.atoshanghai.org/shanghai.html>. David S.G. Goodman developed a slightly higher threshold for defining the middle class based on what was needed to be “well-off” in the developed coastal areas in 1997 (above 5,000–6,000 RMB/month). See “The new middle class” in Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar (eds.), *The Paradox of Post-Mao Reforms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 243.

19. Li and Niu “The new middle class.”

20. Lum, “The marginalization of political activism in China,” p. 4.

21. Robison and Goodman argue that the “middle class” is a group with shared social interests that converge around consumption of leisure, material good, education and information, and a desire for legal predictability. See Richard Robison and David S.G.

I will use a consumption proxy, an income-based definition of a Chinese middle class. In particular I use the income categories suggested by Chinese analysts Ming Ruifeng and Yang Yiyong. The middle class is constituted by respondents whose monthly household income is 3,000 RMB or more. The potential middle class has household incomes from 800 to 2,999 RMB, and the poor respondents have monthly household incomes of less than 800 RMB.<sup>22</sup> I am fully aware of the analytical pitfalls of using only income-based criteria. But since these criteria were developed by Chinese scholars, not American ones, and since they can be consistently applied across the survey data at hand, it is a useful starting point to establish some tentative baseline conclusions about income and attitude in China.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Middle Class and Foreign Policy*

There are virtually no systematic studies of middle class foreign policy preferences in the general international relations literature (which is surprising given the degree of interest in democratic peace, a phenomenon found primarily among developed capitalist countries). There are some plausible hypotheses, however. Basically, a range of international relations literature suggests that middle classes will hold more or less consistent clusters of views on world politics. Most of these expectations derive from different explanations for the democratic peace or from arguments about income, occupation and trade preferences. Some of the democratic peace literature argues, for instance, that median voters in democratic capitalist states are concerned about economic well-being and not the blood and treasure that must be expended for costly external conflicts. Politicians will be responsive to these preferences. Others suggest that liberal ideology – which will predominate in middle classes in democracies – is a major constraint on foreign adventurism in democracies and a major source of restraint in relations with other liberal democracies (a shared identity argument). Still others suggest that the middle classes will tend to be better educated, more aware of the outside world, and thus less likely to hold to black-and-white dichotomizing

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*footnote continued*

Goodman, “The new rich” in Robison and Goodman (eds.), *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile Phones, MacDonalds and Middle Class Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 11. For other consumption-based definitions of the middle class, see, Goodman, “The new middle class,” pp. 248–261. My thanks to Ming Zhang for clarifying this aspect of the definition in Yang’s study, and to Li Jian and Niu Xiaohan for underscoring this point about their criteria.

22. Ming and Yang, “An evening of spring breezes.”

23. It might be plausible to rerun the tests I conduct here using more social indicators of class (e.g. education, occupation, social status). Unfortunately, the data I use here do not contain sufficient information to develop such criteria. In addition, there is as far as I am aware no *a priori* theory about which criteria to include and how to weight them in a composite definition of class. Thus, instead of imposing an arbitrary definition, I start instead with a simple income-based criteria developed by Chinese scholars.

views of international relations.<sup>24</sup> The literature on income, occupation and trade preferences – based on the Heckscher-Ohlin model of domestic labour mobility – derives foreign policy preferences from economic interests, not political or ideological preferences. It suggests that as occupational skill and income increases individuals are less likely to favour trade protection because they can adjust faster and more easily to changes in comparative advantage by moving to sectors that are more competitive.<sup>25</sup>

These two sets of literature suggest the following four hypotheses. Economic interests will generally lead the middle class, first, to support open markets and free trade, and secondly, to offer somewhat less unquestioning support for military expenditures than those with lower incomes. Military expenditures can be unproductive uses of resources and, in the absence of clear external threats, are generally not in the interests of middle classes. Thirdly, to the extent that the middle classes exhibit more liberal tendencies, they will be more likely to hold positive views of international institutions that constitute the global capitalist economy. Compared to less well-off socio-economic groups they are also likely to hold more positive views of other capitalist (and possibly liberal) states. Finally, to the extent that middle classes are more “international” in outlook, and less nativist (partly due to increased opportunities for travel and for acquiring information about the broader world, and partly due to support for global capitalist institutions), they may be less likely to view the world in black-and-white terms. Thus they may be less nationalistic, and less susceptible to raw, exclusivist or uncritical appeals to group loyalty.

If the hypotheses are confirmed by the Chinese case,<sup>26</sup> then it suggests that China’s integration into the global economy – to the extent that integration has helped to produce a middle class – may have an ameliorative effect on the worst excesses of Chinese nationalism.

24. For a sampling of the different hypotheses on the democratic peace see Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); John M. Owen IV, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kenneth Schultz, “Do democratic institutions constrain or inform? Contrasting two perspectives on democracy and war,” *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1999), pp. 223–266.

25. For a discussion and test of the Heckscher-Ohlin hypothesis see Kenneth F. Scheve and Mathew J. Slaughter, “What determines individual trade-policy preferences,” *Journal of International Economics*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (August 2001), pp. 267–292. While the authors do not test for the trade preferences of a middle-class per se, their findings do show that as an individual’s income and skill levels increase in the US, so does opposition to trade barriers. This is not inconsistent with the argument that middle classes ought to be more supportive of free trade. The middle class’s income is a reflection of higher, more marketable skills.

26. Europe data on attitudes towards economic integration also suggests a positive correlation between higher class and support for the European common market. See Mathew J. Gabel, *Interests and Integration: Market Liberalization, Public Opinion and European Union* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1998) p. 52.



*Chinese Middle Class Attitudes Towards World Affairs.*

What, then, are the Chinese middle class's attitudes towards foreign affairs? The analysis below draws from a unique data subset in the 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 Beijing Area Study (BAS), conducted by the Research Centre on Contemporary China at Beijing University.<sup>27</sup> These are, as far as I am aware, among the first systematic, social scientific, non-governmental data on the contemporary Chinese public's attitudes towards a wide range of international issues. Sampling was done according to probability proportional to size, a form of stratified random sampling, to ensure as representative a sample of the Beijing population as possible. The polling involved lengthy face-to-face interviews with respondents conducted by trained graduate students, in the late autumn of each year. Some of the questions were modelled on those used in the 1994 and 1998 Chicago Council of Foreign Relations surveys. Some questions were experimental, designed to test measures of in-group identification and the degree of "othering" of national out-groups. Some were designed to tap into attitudes related to China's growing participation in international institutional life. The questions on foreign affairs were only a small part of a large list of annual questions on a range of socio-economic indicators. Overall, the study was modelled on the University of Michigan's Detroit Area Study.<sup>28</sup>

The data collection periods were also marked by some very important events, or "shocks," in US-China relations. The 1998 and 1999 data collection was separated by the American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999. The 2000 and 2001 data collection was separated by the EP-3 air collision incident. These episodes enable one to test the degree of volatility in overall worldview and in specific attitudes in response to major events in Chinese foreign policy. Moreover, they allow for some insights into the degree to which there is an interactive effect in Sino-US relations. Some analysts in the United States tend to discount the possibility that American actions have negative consequences for Chinese understandings of the United States, except for deliberate PRC government efforts to whip up anti-Americanism.<sup>29</sup> Data from before and after Kosovo and before and after the EP-3 incident tap into responses that are independent of direct government cueing<sup>30</sup> and thus are useful for testing this assumption.

As noted earlier, for the sake of testing the hypotheses above, I divided the BAS sample into three income groups using the categories suggested

27. The sample sizes from 1998 to 2002 were 756, 712, 757, 615 and 662 respectively. On the sampling procedures see Hao Hongsheng, "The sampling design and implementation for the 1995 Beijing Area Study" (The Research Center for Contemporary China, Beijing University, 7 March 1996).

28. See the *BAS Data Report* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, forthcoming)

29. On the spontaneity of anti-Americanism in the aftermath of Kosovo see Peter Gries' analysis of e-mails to the *Guangming ribao* website in "Tears of rage: Chinese nationalism and the Belgrade embassy bombing," *The China Journal*, No. 45 (July 2001).

30. That is, to the extent respondents take positions independent of government on other foreign policy issues, there is less reason to believe that a rise in anti-Americanism in these data is the direct effect of anticipating the state's official position towards the US.

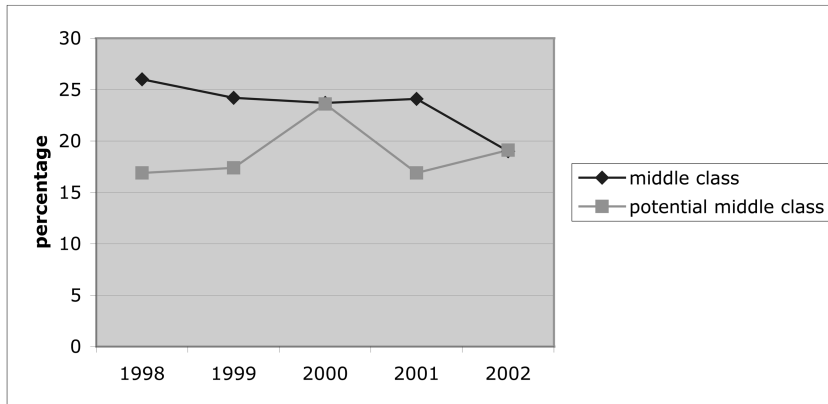


Figure 1: Support for the Elimination of Tariffs

by Chinese analysts Ming Ruifeng and Yang Yiyong. Inflation during the survey period was very low and possibly negative so it is reasonable to use the same income thresholds across the five years.<sup>31</sup> Using these criteria, the middle class comprised about 18 per cent of the sample in 1998, 25 per cent in 1999, 31 per cent in 2000, 40 per cent in 2001 and 42 per cent in 2002.<sup>32</sup> The potential middle class<sup>33</sup> comprised about 71 per cent in 1998, 59 per cent in 1999, 58 per cent in 2000, 49 per cent in 2001 and 41 per cent in 2002. The rest of the samples are classified as the poor.

#### *Attitudes Towards the Global Economy: Latent Liberal Interdependence?*

The first and least surprising point is that the middle class is more supportive of free trade (the elimination of tariffs) than the average citizen (see Figure 1). In the 1998 BAS, 26 per cent of the middle class

31. The CIA estimates China's inflation for 1999 was -1.3%. See the Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*, at [http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/inflation\\_rate\\_\(consumer\\_prices\).html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/inflation_rate_(consumer_prices).html).

32. This rapid growth of the middle class is an important topic in itself. But it is perhaps not surprising as more people and more households, in a growing economy with low inflation, learn to take advantage of market opportunities. Indeed, the increasing size of the middle class as a portion of the total sample probably has to do with the rapid growth of the urban economy. Incomes in Beijing have increased dramatically over the 1998–2002 period. Beijing growth rates average around 10% in this period. In the BAS sample the average reported monthly income increased 45%, slightly higher than the official annual figures. Since inflation was low or non-existent, one assumes that on average people were in fact making more money over time. So it is not surprising that some households move into the “middle class” category by crossing the 3,000 RMB/month income threshold. The curve in income distribution generally shifts up from 1998 to 2002. Everyone moves up the income scale, though some more than others. The big change is in the size of the 3,000–4,999 RMB category of households, the low end of the middle class category. The size of this group increases from around 12% of the sample in 1998 to around 26% in 2001.

33. This is the term used in IHS International, *China Infrastructure 2010: Capability and the National Competency to Employ It* (prepared for the US Department of Defense, Office of Net Assessment, March 2000).

respondents who answered<sup>34</sup> supported the elimination of tariffs, while only 16.9 per cent of the potential middle class supported such an outcome. The sample mean was 18.4 per cent. A chi square measure of association is significant at the 0.02 level. In other words, there was strong evidence of an association between income group and attitude towards free trade in 1998.

In the 1999 BAS, the proportion of the middle class supporting the elimination of tariffs dropped slightly to 24.2 per cent while 17.4 per cent of the potential middle class supported their elimination. The sample mean was 19.5 per cent. The test of association was also significant ( $X^2 = 3.4$ ,  $p = 0.065$ ).

In the 2000 data, however, these differences disappear, a result of increasing potential middle class support for free trade. Of the middle class respondents 23.7 per cent supported the elimination of tariffs, while the figure for the potential middle class climbed to 23.6 per cent. There was, of course, no statistically significant difference across income thresholds.<sup>35</sup>

In the 2001 data, the differences reappear. Of those who had an opinion, 24.1 per cent of the middle class respondents supported the elimination of tariffs, while only 16.9 per cent of the potential middle class did so. This difference was statistically significant ( $X^2 = 4.03$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ). In 2002, however, the differences disappear again, and the overall percentage who support free trade drops.

In general, except for 2002, the middle class has been fairly consistent in its level of support for free trade across time. There is no easy explanation for the 2002 responses, however. They may be the result of some uncertainty generated by the suspected relationship between China's entry into the WTO, free trade and social unrest in China's industrial belts. Or it may simply be that as those from the potential middle class have moved into the middle class over time they bring with them a scepticism of free trade that has not (yet) diminished as a result of higher income.<sup>36</sup>

Another indicator of attitudes was the answers to a question that listed three descriptions of the concept of economic interdependence: one that

34. I did not include the poor or those who responded with "don't know" (DK) or refused to answer. In this question they comprised less than 10% of the total sample. Unless indicated, none of the subsequent tests in this research note includes DKs or poor respondents.

35. It is unclear what explains this jump for the potential middle class in 2000. One hypothesis, suggested by Tom Christensen, is that it reflects the potential middle class's greater susceptibility to pro-WTO messages from the government in 1999 and 2000. This is plausible, though it is still interesting to note how low support for free trade is overall, despite the government's high profile push to enter the WTO. It is possible as well that, since the distribution of income within the potential middle class has skewed slightly "right" over time, a larger portion of the group has moved closer to the level of income and consumption of those in the middle class category, developing some affinity of interests, at least on this question.

36. It is interesting to note that in 2002 among the middle class respondents, supporters of free trade had higher personal incomes than those who opposed free trade (3,059 RMB/month versus 2,278 RMB/month) and this difference was statistically significant ( $F = 4.2$   $p = 0.041$ ). They also appear to have a higher average household income than opponents (5,553 RMB/month versus 5,200 RMB/month), though the difference is not statistically significant.

stressed national competitions for markets and resources; one that simply focused on mutual exchanges of goods and services; and one that underscored the mutual vulnerability of increasingly integrated economies. Respondents were asked to indicate which one of the three best described the concept of interdependence.

In the 1998 BAS, as with the other socio-economic groups, the largest portion of the middle class respondents supported the second definition (49.6 per cent). But relative to other groups, a larger portion of the middle class supported the mutual vulnerability definition: 21.8 per cent, compared to a sample mean of 18.2 per cent and a mean of 17.8 per cent for the potential middle class. Similarly, a smaller portion of the middle class supported the mercantilist definition (18.5 per cent), compared to the potential middle class (28.1 per cent). These findings, again, would be consistent with the argument that the middle class is more likely to hold "liberal" conceptions of the global economy than poorer groups. The chi square test of association was not statistically significant, though it was close ( $X^2 = 5.69$ ,  $p = 0.13$ ); the actual percentage difference across the two classes was consistent with the initial hypotheses.

In the BAS 1999 data, however, there seems to have been some slippage in middle class attitudes. While a larger portion of the middle class was still supportive of the mutual vulnerability definition of interdependence (17.4 per cent versus a mean of 14.7 per cent for the potential middle class), compared to the 1998 data there was a substantial jump in the portion of the middle class supporting the mercantilist definition (27.3 per cent compared to a sample mean of 28.4 per cent). The chi square test of association between class and attitudes was not significant, however ( $X^2 = 3.997$ ,  $p = 0.26$ ).

The 2000 BAS data again show a slightly greater middle class support for the mutual vulnerability definition (20.9 per cent) compared to the potential middle class (19.2 per cent). A larger portion of the middle class supported the mutual exchange definition (45.1 per cent to 40.7 per cent) while a slightly smaller proportion supported the mercantilist description (26 per cent versus 27.5 per cent). Again there is no statistically significant degree of association ( $X^2 = 3.71$   $p = .29$ ).

The 2001 data again show that a significantly smaller portion of the middle class support the mercantilist definition, compared to the non-middle class (21.9 per cent versus 31.6 per cent). However, a slightly smaller portion of the middle class also supports the mutual vulnerability definition (19.5 per cent versus 21.8 per cent). The middle class is more likely to support a mutual exchange definition (58.6 per cent versus 46.7 per cent). These associations, overall, were statistically significant ( $X^2 = 7.1$   $p = 0.03$ ).

The 2002 data indicate that the middle class respondents are again less likely to support the mercantilist definition of interdependence (22.8 per cent to 27.6 per cent), and more likely to support the mutual exchange definition than the non-middle class (59.1 per cent versus 51.9 per cent). Both groups were about equally likely to support the mutual vulnerability

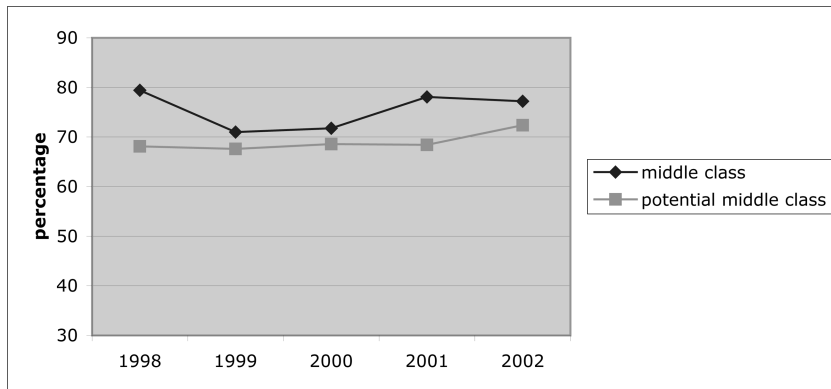


Figure 2: **Support for Non-mercantilist Definitions of Interdependence (% of income thresholds sample)**

definition (18.1 per cent versus 20.6 per cent). These associations, however, were not statistically significant.

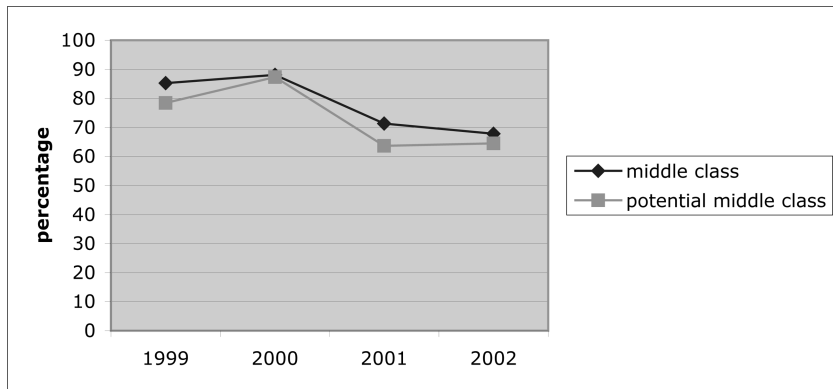
Thus in three of the five years of data a larger portion of the middle class supports the mutual vulnerability description of interdependence when compared to the potential middle class. In all five years, a smaller portion of the middle class respondents supports the mercantilist definition.

Using a mutual vulnerability definition of interdependence to gauge the relative liberality of the middle class respondents, however, is a hard test. If one aggregates the two non-mercantilist definitions of interdependence (the liberal exchange plus the mutual vulnerability definitions), it is clear that the middle class is consistently more likely to support a non-mercantilist definition, and consistently less likely to support a mercantilist definition compared to the potential middle class (see Figure 2).<sup>37</sup>

In 1998 almost 80 per cent of the middle class chose non-mercantilist definitions, while 68 per cent of the potential middle class did so. These differences were statistically significant ( $X^2 = 5.24$   $p = 0.02$ ). In 1999 and 2000, the percentage for the middle class dropped, and statistical significance disappeared ( $X^2 = .55$   $p = 0.46$ ;  $X^2 = .58$   $p = 0.45$ ), though in both years the middle class percentage was still larger than the potential middle class percentage. Then in the BAS 2001 the percentage of middle class respondents who held non-mercantilist definitions was again significantly higher than the potential middle class ( $X^2 = 5.26$   $p = 0.02$ ). In 2002 the raw percentage differences were again in the predicted direction, but were not statistically significant ( $X^2 = 1.32$ ,  $p = 0.25$ ).

As for the final issue, the effects of economic interdependence on world politics, the middle class appears generally to be more likely to

37. These differences were significant in 1998 and 2001 ( $X^2 = 5.54$ ,  $p = 0.02$ , and  $X^2 = 5.26$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ).



**Figure 3: Agreement with the Statement that Economic Interdependence Reduces Conflict**

believe that economic interdependence has some ameliorative effect on the conflict among states. The BAS 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 asks whether respondents agree (strongly or somewhat) or disagree (strongly or somewhat) with the statement that “economic interdependence among countries can reduce the level of conflict in international relations.” Overall, in 1999 85.2 per cent of those in the middle class with an answer agreed to some degree with the statement, while only 78.4 per cent of those in the potential middle class with an opinion agreed (Figure 3). This association across income thresholds and agreement was statistically significant ( $X^2 = 3.177$   $p = 0.075$ ). In 2000 these differences shrank, with 88.1 per cent of the middle class and 87.3 per cent of the potential middle class with opinions agreeing with the statement. While this difference was still in the hypothesized direction, the statistical significance disappeared ( $X^2 = 0.08$   $p = .78$ ). By 2001 the distance had reappeared, though overall levels of agreement with the statement had declined over previous years. Some 71.3 per cent of the middle class respondents agreed with the statement, while only 63.6 per cent of potential middle class respondents did. The differences were not statistically significant. In 2002, the differences persisted with 67.8 of middle class respondents agreeing with the statement, while 64.5 per cent of non-middle class respondents agreed. This difference was significant ( $X^2 = 6.14$   $p = 0.046$ ). However, slightly more middle class respondents than non-middle class respondents disagreed with the statement (a higher portion of non-middle class respondents had no opinion).

In sum, the data on international economic questions present a somewhat mixed picture. Compared to the poorer non-middle class, the middle class was generally more likely to hold liberal interdependentist conceptions of the global economy.<sup>38</sup> However, there has been a slight decline

38. Li and Niu refer to “inside system” and “outside system” middle classes in Beijing, the former dependent on resources in the state-owned sector and the latter more

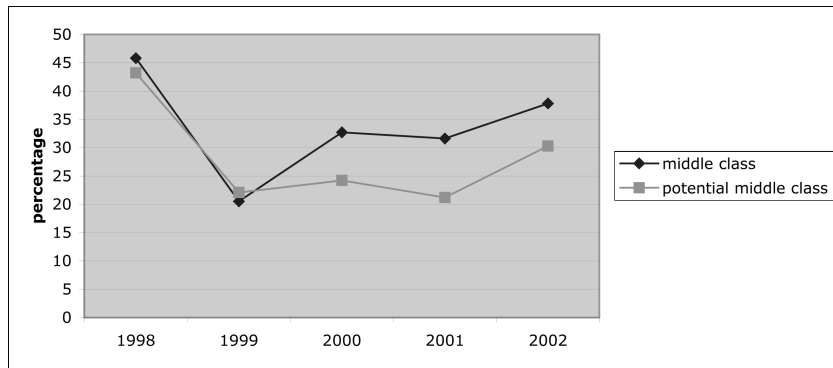


Figure 4: **Opposition to an Increase in Military Expenditures (% of sample)**

in the percentage of middle class respondents who support free trade and who believe that interdependence reduces interstate conflict.

#### *Attitudes Towards Military Expenditures*

The BAS 1998 data suggest that as of late 1998 the middle class was somewhat more supportive of at least some restraints on military expenditures than the average citizen (see Figure 4). Some 54.2 per cent of the middle class supported some increase in military expenditures compared to 56.8 per cent of the potential middle class. But a total of 45.8 per cent of the middle class did not support an increase (with 32.1 per cent supporting no change in current military expenditures and 13.7 per cent supporting a decrease). Among the potential middle class a smaller proportion opposed increases in military expenditures (43.2 per cent, with 32.8 per cent supporting no change and 10.4 per cent supporting a reduction). While consistent with the initial hypotheses, these differences were not statistically significant ( $X^2 = 1.15$   $p = .56$ ).<sup>39</sup>

*footnote continued*

self-sufficiently dependent on the market economy. They hypothesize obvious differences in support for extant political and economic structures (Li and Niu, “The new middle class”). It is quite possible that the two groups differ on attitudes towards the global economy, with the former being less supportive of free trade, for example, than the latter. Unfortunately, the BAS data cannot differentiate between them. However, since the sample probably contains respondents from both, and because there are still some indications that more middle class respondents hold liberal views, then one should expect the “outside” middle class to have even more liberal attitudes than are showing up in the BAS. This would be even more consistent with a hypothesis about those tied to the global economy being more “liberal” leaning.

39. Support for military spending overall remains very high across income groups. However, this is not a case where the respondents want more public spending because there is little economic cost to supporting higher spending. Nor has the regime effectively socialized people unquestioningly to support the strengthening of state power. The BAS asked a similar question for many popular areas of public spending – education, environment, crime, social insurance. Invariably there was stronger and more uniform cross-class support for increases

The BAS 1999 data show a considerable hardening of attitudes in that support for increasing military spending jumps quite dramatically. This is likely to be an effect of the American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the concomitant outburst of anti-American nationalism, accompanied with calls for standing up to foreign bullying. In contrast to 1998, however, members of the middle class were slightly more likely to support increases than those in other socio-economic groups. Fully 79.5 per cent of the middle class supported increases as opposed to 77.9 per cent of the potential middle class. Only 20.5 per cent of the middle class respondents did not support any increase (a drop from 45.8 per cent in 1998), compared to 22.1 per cent of the potential middle class. The measure of association was not significant ( $X^2 = 2.13$   $p = .35$ ). It is clear that there is fair amount of across-the-board support for increasing military expenditures in the wake of the embassy bombing.

By the BAS 2000, however, differences re-emerged: the change occurred mostly among middle class respondents as the percentage of support for increased military expenditures dropped (to 67.3 per cent as opposed to 75.8 per cent for the potential middle class), and the support for either freezing or reducing military spending increased. Among middle class respondents 32.7 per cent supported current or reduced levels, while only 24.2 per cent of the potential middle class held the same views. These differences were statistically significant at the  $p = .1$  level ( $X^2 = 5.5$   $p = .06$ ).

The 2001 data indicate that the middle class is still less supportive of increases in military expenditures than the potential middle class: 67.9 per cent of middle class respondents supported an increase compared to 78.7 per cent of the potential middle class. Some 31.6 per cent of middle class respondents opposed an increase, compared to only 21.2 per cent of the potential middle class. The differences were statistically significant ( $X^2 = 8.52$   $p = 0.014$ ). The bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 seems to have had a larger impact on support for increased military spending than the EP-3 incident in April 2001.

As for 2002, the overall level of opposition to increases in military spending increased over the previous year. The middle class again was less supportive of increases: 37.8 per cent of middle class respondents opposed an increase, compared to 30.3 per cent of the non-middle class. There was a statistically significant association (at the  $p = 0.1$  level) in this year as well ( $X^2 = 3.27$   $p = 0.071$ ).

In sum, there seems to be relatively strong evidence that, with the exception of the post Belgrade bombing period, Beijing's middle class respondents are not as supportive of diverting resources towards the military as non-middle class respondents.

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*footnote continued*

in these areas than in military spending. This suggests that respondents are not blindly supporting any and all increases in state spending.



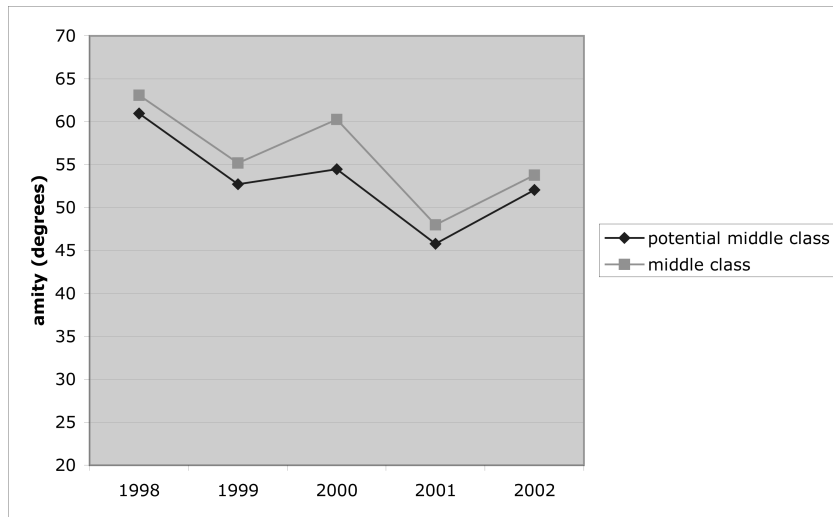


Figure 5: Mean Degrees of “Amity” for the United States

#### *Attitudes Towards the United States: Levels of Amity*

In the BAS studies, attitudes towards other states were measured by a standard feeling thermometer, as used, for example, in the CCFR study of public opinion and US foreign policy. Respondents are given a 100 degree scale and asked to assign a temperature to a named country corresponding to their general degree of amity towards that country, with 50 degrees indicating neutral feelings, below 50 degrees signifying coolness and above 50 degrees signifying warmth.<sup>40</sup> A list of states was provided so that, in effect, people were not just being asked to rate their discrete feelings towards one state but were being encouraged to think comparatively.

Perhaps the most interesting case is the level of amity towards the United States (see Figure 5). Despite the fact that in official Chinese discourse, the United States is the global hegemon, the primary potential challenger to Chinese security and the primary defender of Taiwan, the mean degree of amity towards the US in 1998 was the highest for all countries listed on the BAS questionnaire. In the 1998 BAS, the average for the US was 61.4 degrees across the sample.<sup>41</sup> For the middle class it was 63.1 degrees and for the potential middle class 60.9 degrees. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results indicate, however, that these differences were not statistically significant ( $F = 0.85$   $p = 0.36$ ).

In the BAS 1999 data, one finds similar results overall. The mean temperature towards the US was 53.5 degrees. For middle class respon-

40. Feeling thermometers are standard tools for measuring affect in US social science surveys.

41. The countries listed were Russia, Japan, DPRK, Iran, Iraq, Germany, Pakistan, India, Indonesia.

dents the figure was 55.2 and for the potential middle class it was 52.7 degrees. These differences are not significant statistically ( $F = .95$   $p = .33$ ), though they are, again, substantively consistent with our initial hypotheses, and with the previous year's data.

The BAS 2000 data show much clearer differentiation across income thresholds, again in the predicted direction. The sample mean degree of warmth was 56.7 degrees. But for the middle class respondents this figure rose to 60.7 degrees, a dramatic recovery from the Belgrade embassy bombing year. For the potential middle class the mean temperature was 54.47 degrees. The ANOVA shows these difference in these means to be statistically significant ( $F = 9.18$   $p = .002$ ).

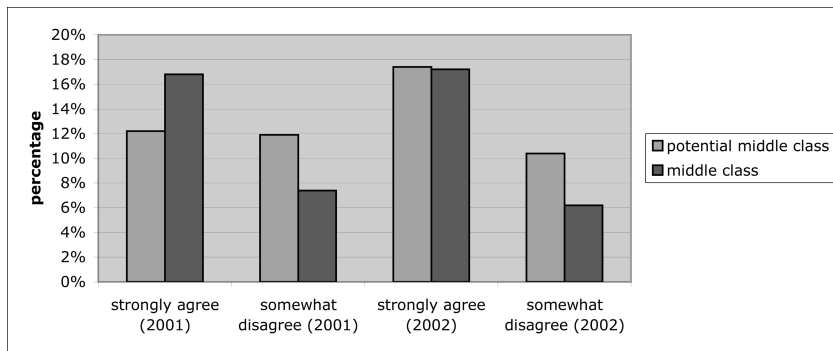
In 2001 there was a dramatic decline in the mean temperature for the US across all income categories. The middle class still had a higher than average level of amity (48 degrees), while the potential middle class had a lower than average level (45.8 degrees). These differences, however, were not statistically significant. By 2002, the mean level of amity had increased somewhat, with the middle class again holding slightly higher levels of amity compared to the non-middle class (53.8 versus 52.1 degrees). The difference was not statistically significant.

The BAS 2001 and 2002 polls also asked respondents whether, overall, they agreed with a statement that US–PRC interaction since 1979 had had a positive effect on China's economic and political development. The default answer in both years appears to be a cautious "somewhat agree" (75 per cent in 2001 and 74 per cent in 2002). Virtually no one chose "strongly disagree." So the interesting question is whether income category is associated with a more positive answer to this question. As it turns out, the middle class was proportionately more likely to chose this answer than the non-middle class (16.8 per cent to 12.2 per cent) and less likely to chose the "somewhat disagree" answer. ( $X^2 = 4.65$ ,  $p = 0.098$ ).<sup>42</sup> In 2002, there is virtually no difference between the middle class and potential middle class in the percentage of respondents who strongly agree, but the middle class is still more likely to somewhat disagree with the statement compared to the non-middle class. The differences are not statistically significant, however. If one aggregates the agrees and disagrees, the middle class respondents are significantly more likely to agree with the statement than the non-middle class (93.8 per cent versus 89.2 per cent,  $X^2 = 3.6$ ,  $p = 0.058$ ).

#### *Attitudes Towards the United States: Identity Differences and "Othering"*

How a social group describes its own traits and those of other groups appears to be a critical indicator of how it will behave towards the others. The differences in these characterizations matter and they are not necessarily epiphenomena of prior conflicts of material interest. Based on some

42. A multinomial logit analysis indicates in particular that compared to the middle class the potential middle class is much less likely to strongly agree than to somewhat disagree with the statement ( $p = 0.032$ ).



**Figure 6: Percent Income Category and Agreement with the Positive Effect of US–PRC Interaction**

very robust empirical findings social identity theory (SIT) argues, for example, that ingroups generally require the construction of different and devalued outgroups in order to build identification with the ingroup and to consolidate the legitimacy of the group's internal order. This process is commonly if awkwardly referred to as "othering." The degree of devaluation will vary depending on the requirements for ingroup identity construction. Less differentiation and thus less devaluation is associated with less competitiveness directed at the outgroup. Conversely, more differentiation, other things being equal, leads to more devaluation, and this is associated with more competitive views of an even more threatening outgroup.<sup>43</sup>

Given the assumptions in international relations theory about the kinds of values the middle class ought to have, one should expect somewhat less "othering" of groups, societies and states that are capitalist. Middle classes – perhaps by dint of education or exposure to external information or economic interests – ought to hold less black-and-white views of other major "outgroups."

This general hypothesis was tested in the BAS 2000 to 2002 samples through questions using what are called semantic differential scales.<sup>44</sup> These are common in social psychology and are used to determine the traits with which different identities are associated, and the degree to

43. On SIT see Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982); Dominic Abrams and Michael Hogg (eds.), *Social Identity Theory* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); John C. Turner, *Rediscovering the Social Group* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). On its application to political science and international relations, see Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and identity," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (1995), pp. 229–252; William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Paul Kowert, "The construction of national identity," in Vendulka Kubalkova et al. (eds.), *International Relations in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 101–122.

44. On the logic behind semantic differential scales see Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci and Percy H. Tannenbaum, *The Measurement of Meaning* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957).

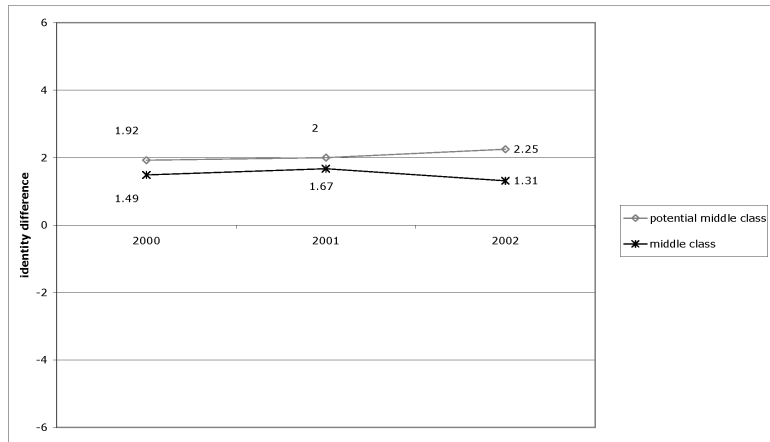


Figure 7: Mean “Othering” Index by Income Category

which groups stereotype self and other. Respondents are asked to assess where on a 5, 7 or 9 point scale anchored by polar opposite adjectives they would classify a subject (e.g. peaceful–warlike). Means and spread/dispersion of responses are used to determine differences between groups and degree of ingroup identification.<sup>45</sup>

The BAS used a 7 point peaceful–warlike scale and a moral–immoral scale. Respondents were asked to determine where they would put “Chinese” as people and “Americans” as people. An “othering” scale was calculated by subtracting the composite mean score attributed to Chinese on both scales from the score attributed to Americans. This mathematical difference is a proxy for the degree of difference in any given respondent’s answer. The lower this figure, the narrower the difference and the more “like us” the Americans are considered by Chinese respondents. If it is higher, Americans are judged to be more “different” and hence more susceptible to being “othered.” If the general hypotheses about the middle class are correct, they ought to perceive less difference between Chinese and Americans. This ought to be consistent, overall, with a less hard realpolitik worldview.

The data support the hypothesis that the middle class believes, relative to other income groups, that there are fewer differences between Chinese and Americans. That is, the middle class engages in a lower degree of othering, relative to other the non-middle class (see Figure 7). In the BAS 2000 data the difference for the middle class (1.71) was smaller than for the potential middle class (2.15) and was statistically significant ( $F = 5.18$   $p = 0.02$ ). In 2001 this difference persists, though it narrows somewhat. The “othering” score for the middle class was 2.09 while for the potential middle class is was 2.4. This difference is very close to statistical

45. For an example of the semantic differential scale in assessing identity see Peter J. Burke and Judy C. Tully, “The measurement of role identity,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (June 1977), pp. 881–897.

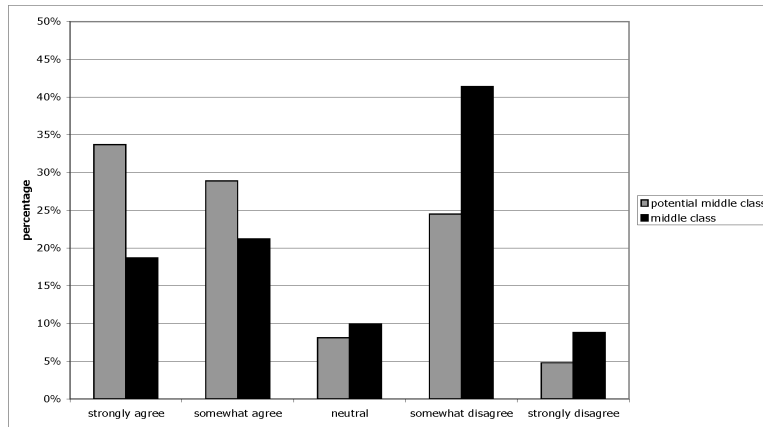


Figure 8: **Income and Nationalism**

significance at the 0.1 level ( $F = 2.55$   $p = 0.11$ ). In 2002 the difference increased and was statistically significant.

#### *Attitudes Towards Uncritical Nationalism*

The BAS 2002 included specific questions about nationalism. One of the questions was designed to tap into levels of xenophobic, nativist or uncritical nationalism. Responses to the statement “people should support their country even if it is in the wrong” were coded using a 5 point likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The results would appear to be consistent with the findings about identity-difference. As Figure 8 shows, the middle class respondents are not as supportive of uncritical nationalism as the non-middle class. These differences are statistically significant (using both a chi square measure of association and multinomial logistic regression procedures). This suggests that middle class respondents maintain a more sceptical attitude towards nativist or exclusionary nationalist sentiments.

#### *Conclusion*

I think it is fair to say that the BAS data reveal intriguing evidence that the emerging middle class, at least in Beijing, holds relatively distinct views on a range of important foreign policy and international political/economic issues. Not all the differences across socio-economic groups are statistically significant. But even where the differences do not meet standard levels of significance they are almost invariably “in the right direction.” In other words, middle class attitudes are consistently on the more “liberal” side of most of the responses (see Table 1). Of the 35 findings across the five years of data the “sign” was in the predicted direction in 30 cases (86 per cent).<sup>46</sup> Of these 35 findings just over half

46. Assuming that the probability that the sign is in the “right” direction is 50% in any one test, one would expect 17 or 18 out of the 35 tests to be in the right direction. A binomial probability distribution shows that the probability of 30 out of 35 tests being in the right direction is  $p = 0.00001$ .

(19, or 54 per cent) were statistically significant at or below the 0.1 level.<sup>47</sup> These data and findings suggest a number of tentative conclusions.

First, there is some evidence that there are coherent worldviews, the distribution of which across society is affected by class or income status. That is, there are clusters of views that we would normally identify as internally consistent packages of beliefs about international relations.<sup>48</sup> There are respondents who are liberal on free trade, believe that disarmament treaties are relatively useful, oppose increases in military expenditures, have a higher than average degree of amity towards the United States, believe that interdependence can reduce interstate conflict, are somewhat less prone to identify “othering,” and tend to be wealthier, better educated and informed about world affairs – in short who hold less hard realpolitik views of international relations. Similarly, there are those who oppose free trade, believe that international conflict is inevitable product of rising power, support increases in military expenditures, have a lower than average degree of amity towards the United States, and engage in relatively sharp identity othering – in short who hold hard realpolitik views of international relations.<sup>49</sup>

47. The small differences in some of the tests between middle class and non-middle class respondents – even those differences that are statistically significant – does raise the question of substantive significance. Does it matter for political and policy outcomes whether the propensity to “other” the US is lower or the support for free trade is a few percentage points higher for the middle class? This is a hard question to answer, since the Chinese political system is not an electoral democracy. It should be noted, however, that over a large voting population, even small differences in the positions of two or more groups can translate into large numbers of votes. There is no way of knowing at this point whether the differences in middle class attitudes will have any political effect. But, to the extent that middle classes tend to be more politically active than poorer groups, and to the extent that the current Chinese leadership realizes that the urban entrepreneur and white collar worker is a social, economic and political force to be incorporated into “the system,” some of these differences may come to matter in internal policy debates. To those used to studying countries with large social, economic and political cleavages manifested in open political systems these differences may appear to be like a glass “half empty.” To those who study closed societies where the intent of the state socialization systems has been to inculcate uniform attitudes towards major public policies – especially foreign policy – these emergent differences in the Chinese data appear to be like a glass “half full.”

48. Some might wonder how such a rapid growth in the middle class in Beijing could consistently create similar inter-class differences in attitudes. If the middle class in 2001 contains people who in were not middle class in 1998, why should their foreign policy attitudes change so quickly? This is hard to answer because the 1998 and 2001 samples do not necessarily include the same people. Ideally one would need to run a panel study, interviewing the same people across time. However, the data suggest there is something about high income (and the process of getting there, and the understanding of how one can consume at that level) that can change attitudes. If income increases rapidly enough to enable consumption of more expensive imports, people may decide that free trade is a good thing because it enables them to improve their consumption.

49. The hints of such structures in the BAS data, however, are consistent with findings about the existence of hierarchically organized, ideologically based, foreign policy attitudes in other publics. See Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley, “How are foreign policy attitudes structured? A hierarchical model,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 1099–1120.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

Issue area	Middle class more liberal and/or "internationalist"?					Differences statistically significant?				
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Free trade	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Concept of interdependence (mutual vulnerability)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes*	No	No	No	No
Concept of interdependence (non-mercantilist)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Interdependence reduces conflict	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Reduction in military expenditures	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Amity towards the US	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
US-PRC interaction positive for China	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes
"Othering" of the US	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes**	Yes
Attitude towards nationalism	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes

Notes:  
 \* p = 0.13  
 \*\* p = 0.11

Secondly, there is some likelihood that the rapid development of a Chinese middle class, particularly one that holds a cluster of foreign policy attitudes associated with support for limited internationalism, will expand the “pool” of more or less liberal views of international relations inside China. Should political reform allow these views to be articulated in the policy process, one can plausibly expect Chinese foreign policy to reflect some of them. These findings also suggest that some neo-containment ideas (such as that growing Chinese economic power is inherently dangerous because it will not be constrained by “liberal” values) need to be stated in more conditional fashion than they have been thus far. There is no evidence that the emerging middle class in Beijing is obviously more nationalistic or more hostile to status quo international institutions, to the global capitalist economy or to major capitalist democracies like the United States than other income groups. Instead China’s open door policy and process of enmeshment in the global economy appears to be having an ameliorative effect – if slight – on some of the harder realpolitik values into which much of the population has been socialized by China’s nationalist and Marxist-Leninist ideologies and by its history of conflict with many of its neighbours. These findings raise some caveats about the commonly held view that a democratic, market-oriented China may be even more nationalistic and/or anti-American than the current regime.

The findings also suggest that the Chinese government may be less constrained on certain nationalist or anti-American issues than it believes, or has led the outside world to believe. There is considerable evidence that the regime focuses on more extremist attitudes (as found on the internet bulletin boards, for instance) presumably because these views are a barometer of the kinds of emotions that would get protesters into the streets. And it is street protests on issues such as Taiwan or the United States – linked to intra-elite competition – that the current leaders appear to worry about. But this attention to extremist opinion may lead the government to ignore pools of more moderate opinion that could be mobilized on these issues if the regime were looking for more domestic space.

Thirdly, and relatedly, despite the fact that the regime hopes to present a united front of views on foreign policy, it is clear from much of the data that there are obvious differences in interests and preferences on major issues, and that these cut across income groups. There is no uniform opinion on increasing Chinese military expenditure or on imposing tariffs to protect Chinese industries or on the degree of amity towards other countries. That is, there are different public opinions about many important issues.

It should be noted, of course, that the more “liberal” views of international relations held by the middle class in Beijing are relative to other socio-economic groups in China. Relative to American public opinion on foreign relations, Chinese middle class attitudes are less “liberal” on some issues. Support for the elimination of tariffs is higher across all socio-economic groups in the United States, for instance, than in the



Beijing middle class.<sup>50</sup> While class is an important determinant of Chinese views on free trade, there is still a very large majority who oppose free trade, regardless of their income category.

Fourthly, public opinion in Beijing is sensitive to the actions of other states. It seems to be a fairly common tendency for foreign policy elites in one state to discount the possibility that their country's own behaviour has helped produce the negative behaviour that they perceive in other states. This phenomenon is consistent with what attribution theory says we should expect to see: when other actors do things we don't like, we tend to attribute the behaviour to their disposition; when they do things we do like, we tend to attribute this to wise actions we have taken to form or mould the situation in which they operate.

In this regard there is no doubt that American support for China's economic development over the past two decades (welcoming China's participation in major international economic institutions, encouraging the development of market reforms, providing markets and foreign direct investment) has contributed to the normalization of interstate relations between the two countries. But the data also suggest that American behaviour has the potential to do a lot of "bad" in the relationship. It is plausible that the decline in opposition to increases in military expenditures between the 1998 and 1999 surveys was a result of the Belgrade bombing and the perception of China's vulnerability and weakness in the face of US power. It is probably the case that the decline in amity towards the United States from 1998 to 1999 was influenced by the Belgrade embassy bombing, and the decline between 2000 and 2001 was affected by the EP-3 incident. The decline in the mean temperature from the 1998 to the 1999 sample and from the 2000 to the 2001 sample reflects a substantial loss in goodwill, even in the middle class that has tended to "like" the United States more than average. This has probably been due to the perception that the United States wants to challenge China's fundamental interests.<sup>51</sup> But it is also important to point out that as late as 1998 the level of amity towards the US was quite high, that it recovered to some degree in 2000 over the level in 1999, and again in 2002 over 2001. In other words, there is some volatility in both directions in levels of amity, and this volatility is to some degree in response to exogenous shocks in the relationship.

Fifthly, the sample is clearly a limited one. While the survey meets the strict standards and practices of American academic surveys, in the end it still reflects the views of Beijing urban residents only. Thus I make no claims about public opinion outside Beijing.

Finally, what may be surprising about most of these findings is that there is little that ought to be surprising. Even in a society where not too

50. According to the CCFR data set, in 1998 31.8% of the US public supported the elimination of tariffs compared to 26% of the Beijing middle class in the same year.

51. Chinese respondents singled out the US, rather than NATO or "Western" countries, for blame. The temperature for another NATO state, Germany, hardly moved at all from 1998 to 1999 or from 2000 to 2001.

long ago political socialization, economic autarky and ideological conformity appeared to hinder the development of more autonomous foreign policy preferences among the population, the Beijing middle class holds some of the attitudes and values that in kind, if not yet in degree, international relations theory expects to find. In a sense, the views of an emerging Chinese middle class could be considered a “hard case” for democratic peace arguments about the foreign policy values of middle class populations. That there is some evidence for more liberal foreign policy attitudes among a nascent middle class in a non-democratic polity suggests that democratic peace scholars should look more closely at class and foreign policy preferences in their efforts to test different theories of the democratic peace (median voter theory or democratic identity theory, for instance).

The data and the analysis presented here obviously constitute only a small first step in understanding Chinese public opinion towards international affairs. Ideally, the BAS needs to be followed up with more extensive cross-China surveys; by surveys specifically targeted on political and foreign policy elites; by surveys that can focus in a more fine-tuned way on the degree to which respondents are connected to different economic and social networks (domestic and international); and by intensive qualitative studies of how precisely these opinions and preferences are incorporated into the policy process. Any such research also needs to focus on the scope conditions under which one might expect the middle class to endorse more liberal foreign policy preferences and the conditions under which one might expect it to be susceptible to more xenophobic nationalist sentiments.