
China, U.S. citizens view each other favorably

BEIJING, Dec. 13 -- The American and Chinese people have more in common than we may think - in fact more than the business and government leadership in their own countries, according to a new poll.

On Monday the Committee of 100, a non-profit, non-partisan organization made up of Chinese American leaders and professionals, unveiled the results of their latest survey - Hope and Fear: American and Chinese Attitudes Toward Each Other. Among the notable findings 62 percent of Chinese surveyed held a favorable view of the United States while 52 percent of Americans held a favorable view of China. Even among US Congressional staffers, the favorability of China has increased from 19 percent in 2005 to 35 percent today.

These views held by each country's citizens was unexpected by the leadership of both countries, as the Congressional and business executives polled anticipated far more negative views from the common man on either side.

The American elite may feel threatened by China's economic rise and mistakenly believe the general public would feel threatened while in China the elite feel the public have great opinions of the US because the nation stands to gain much insight into the business world from American corporations.

John L. Fugh, chairman of the Committee of 100 and former judge advocate general of the US Army, said: "I think we should send a copy of our mirror survey to all of the presidential candidates. Let them take a look because there is some value in there to see how the general public feels visa vie how the elite feels."

As Frank H. Wu, dean of Wayne State University Law School in Michigan and a member of the board of directors for the Committee of 100 pointed out: "There is tremendous good will and positive attitudes and feelings on both sides of the relationship whether it has to do with trade, politics or culture. This poll provides a snapshot of a bilateral relationship that is at a crossroads.

"The reason the general public doesn't feel as threatened is because the elite's feel more acutely the nature of these relationships and the need to maintain their own status. If you work on the assembly line of a plant it doesn't matter much who the owner is - if you're a businessperson who buys and sells plants and wants to expand globally then it very much matters who owns the plant - you or someone else."

As bilateral relations ranked as a top priority to the majority of those surveyed, the Chinese ranked the US as their most important foreign country to partner with while the US respondents ranked China third behind Britain and Japan.

Trade and economic interaction was emphasized as 72 percent of the US public agree that trade with China benefits the US compared with 27 percent that thinks it does not. In China the numbers were more striking - 82 percent believe trade with the US benefits China and a mere 7 percent thinks the opposite.

"That's important because the survey we conducted was done between August and early September, and that was the time the media concentrated on China for food product safety," co-chair of C100's Research Committee, Cheng Li, said.

Indeed product safety has had an impact on consumers' minds in 2007. Sixty-eight percent of American respondents said concerns over products reduced their confidence in buying the "Made in China" label while 44 percent of the Chinese surveyed said they were concerned over domestic products. Cheng also highlighted another glaring negative found from the survey.

"At the same time there are some fears, and the numbers actually increased - 75 percent of Americans believe China is or will be a military threat to the US. Sixty-five percent of Americans believe that China's economic rise can or already is a threat to the US. How to reconcile this paradox is a challenge to all China analysts," Cheng said.

Both countries showed disappointment for their government's handling of environmental issues, although the Chinese were far less critical of either government's overall performance. Eighty-eight percent of the Chinese surveyed said their nation is headed in the right direction while just 34 percent of Americans expressed faith in their country's current track. That factor comes as great hopes for China as the 2008 Olympics year coincides with the forthcoming US presidential election, and concerns over the Iraq war, which Americans listed as the nation's most pressing issue.

The speakers all brought up the role media plays in influencing each people's views of the other and the theory that not enough objective first-hand accounts have been presented to either side. Fugh called for a more positive portrayal of either side.

"The media has a very important responsibility - in the end is it better for China and the US to be at loggerheads, whether it's military threat or economic threat, or is it better to cooperate in all different areas, whether it's the environment, counterterrorism, energy resources," Fugh said.

The poll was conducted by Zogby International through 1,200 telephone interviews within the US and correspondence with members of Congress and top-level business executives (all randomly selected).

In China Horizon Research Consultancy Group met with 4,104 Chinese adults face-to-face in 21 locations country-wide to collect their sampling. Victor Yuan, chairman and president of Horizon, said his firm's participation in the survey was breaking new ground for comparing other countries to China.

"We are trying to develop a consistent mirror study between China and another country. i.e. China and Japan, China and Russia, China and Germany, China and Italy, China and India - 16 countries in total. We want to develop a Chinese global vision and we're not necessarily saying it's right, but when you gather results you encourage people to have some reflection.

"Many times, I would say the reception is not that good, not accurate without enough information on this country (China)," Yuan said.

(Source: China Daily)

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