

How do Americans View Chinese Manufactured Products and Workers?

Attitudes towards Chinese manufacturing workers and the industries they work for varies from pity for poor working and living conditions to outright prejudice and hatred towards a group of people that are perceived as having taken away high paying American factory jobs. This paper addresses the ways that Americans view Chinese workers and the products they manufacture. A final, bonus article, describes China on the virtual plain. It concludes that Americans have a negative attitude towards Chinese and the Chinese manufacturing system. The article quotes extensively in order to provide the reader with a sense of how deeply entrenched these sentiments are, even among resources that are peer reviewed or otherwise responsible sources.

Sources

Wu

In 2008, Jack Cafferty, the then CNN News anchor, expressed what he stated represented the American view of China:

We're in hock to the Chinese up to our eyeballs because of the war in Iraq, for one thing. They're holding hundreds of billions of dollars worth of our paper. We also are running hundred of billions of dollars worth of trade deficits with them, as we continue to import their junk with the lead paint on them and the poisoned pet food and export, you know, jobs to places where you can pay workers a dollar a month to turn out the stuff that we're buying from Wal-Mart. So I think our relationship with China has certainly changed. I think they're basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they've been for the last 50 years (Wu 914).

Cafferty's "assessment" of the American view is very harsh, but other sources reflect that many other people feel the same way, although they are not so vocal or do not have such a wide

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national audience. There are, perhaps, three reasons why stereotypes of China exist: a dislike of Communism, cultural differences related to religious belief, and a tendency to judge China with American standards (Wu). These concepts are reflected to some extent in the other sources.

Gabberty

A second article suggests that even when reports are academic in nature, peer reviewed, and directed towards discussion of world economy, views of the Chinese and their products can color or slant the presentation:

Though the partnership with Microsoft quickly went astray on account of China's massive patent violation with its partner, China nonetheless gained access to incredible amounts of Western technology that cost billions of dollars to develop for little absolutely no money being exchange. Further, its pre-U.S. release and premature sales of Microsoft Windows 95 in 1995 (without Microsoft's permission) to its internal market helped millions of consumers gain access to the software free of charge and aided China's perception around the world as an untrustworthy partner on account of its repeated theft of technology (Gabberty 19).

Gabberty continues his discussion, stating that usage of modern information technology and telecommunications structure in China is merely another way for the government to track Chinese citizens and control them.

Mears

The third source utilized for this analysis is a law journal article written by an American environmental law advocate who visited China in 2010. The problem is not with the Chinese, nor the Americans, per say; instead, it is "lack of shared fluency in language, history, and culture. For Americans, the problem is particularly acute, given our tendency to view our own culture, language, and history as the central narrative of modern history for the entire globe" (Mears 5). Mears provides a very long list of stereotypes which he reports he heard in the US, but which was disproved by being in China, beginning with *China has a communist government*, ending

with *Chinese people do not like conflict*, and encompassing everything in between. Mears also states that the Chinese government's emphasis on economic development certainly does not resemble what he was taught in civic class (Mears 21).

Atkinson

Atkinson's 2012 report on Chinese innovation mercantilism provides a list of 402 technologies (88-97) which the Chinese have targeted for expansion. The Chinese goal, it seems, is not to develop these technologies for their own usage or for the benefit of their people, but to *win* (Atkinson 5) in all industries. Atkinson also suggests that official Chinese policies:

...take numerous forms including discriminatory government procurement; controls on foreign purchases designed to force technology transfer to China; land grants and rent subsidies to Chinese-owned firms; preferential loans from banks; tax incentives for Chinese-owned firms; cash subsidies; benefits to state-owned enterprises; generous export financing; government-sanctioned monopolies; a weak and discriminatory patent system; joint-venture requirements; forced technology transfer; intellectual property theft; cyber-espionage to steal intellectual property (IP); domestic technology standards; direct discrimination against foreign firms; limits on imports and sales by foreign firms; onerous regulatory certification requirements; and limiting exports of critical materials in order to deny foreign firms key inputs (Atkinson 7).

Although Atkinson's report does not speak to opinions of Chinese workers per se, his clear pronouncements regarding the morality of the Chinese people (via official government stance) are daunting.

Gao

Gao produced a report on the recent pet food crisis in China. Although the report contains a great deal of empirical evidence of pet food production problems in China, like the other authors Gao utilizes information that is not related to the pet food crisis in order to emphasize the seriousness of failure to provide safe products from China. In fact, the Gao concluded that "It

seems that not only pet health, but also human health is in danger if one consumes directly or indirectly products made in China” (Gao 415). Gao quotes the manager of one company as saying:

Many companies buy melamine scrap to make animal feed, such as fish feed. I don’t know if there’s a regulation on it. Probably not. No law or regulation says ‘don’t do it,’ so everyone’s doing it. The laws in China are like that, aren’t they? If there’s no accident, there won’t be any regulation (Gao 416).

Gao’s analysis is particularly interesting given that she conducted a textual analysis of over 2,000 pages of US media reports from May 6 to May 26, 2007, and conducted a survey of 137 college students to investigate the knowledge and attitude of U.S. consumers and pet-owners’ toward pet food and pet ownership. A full 36% of the respondents to Gao’s survey reported that about 36% respondents “think that it could be a terrorist plot from China of attacking pet and human health by using contaminated food” (Gao 421).

Discussion

Despite the vast difference in the sources, the information gleaned from these articles is consistently anti-Chinese and anti-Chinese manufacturing. The chart below is indicative of some of the threads from the articles.

Table 1. Threads from Articles

Text	Wu	Gabberty	Mears	Atkinson	Gao
Victimizing other nations	x	x	x	x	x
Lead paint	X				
Poisoned pet food	x				x
Goons, thugs	x				
Don’t pay employees	x	x	x	x	
Riots and killings					
Americans don’t understand Chinese, who are honorable and peace-loving	x				
Americans don’t understand Chinese,		x	**		*

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who are dishonorable and non-peace-loving					
Source of cheap manufacturing	X	X	x	x	x
Broke piracy and copyrights	x	x		x	
US needs to demand balanced trade	X	x		x	

*Although Gao’s article did not explicitly make this statement, it stated that a significant percentage of American college students believe that the pet food incident was terrorism.

**Mears reports that Chinese students are definitively capable of getting into spats and having loud disagreements

In the table above, all of the articles referred to as China as a source of cheap manufacturing, and prone to victimizing other nations in one way or another. Four of the articles referred to China’s lack of adequate pay for employees. Three of the articles insisted that the US needs to demand balance trade; that China is known for breaking copyrights and supporting piracy, even in the heights of the government; and that the Chinese are not particularly peaceful and peace loving.

However, reducing the articles to textual threads does not tell the whole story. Consider the direct extractions of text threads from the articles, shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Direct Text Extractions

Text	Author
in hock, up to our eyeballs, hundred of billions of dollars worth of trade deficits, import their junk, lead paint, poisoned pet food, export jobs to places, pay workers a dollar a month, goons and thugs	Wu
Microsoft, massive patent violation, access to incredible amounts of Western technology, absolutely no money being exchange, gain access to the software free of charge, untrustworthy partner, repeated theft of technology	Gabberty
failure to enforce, millions of women who spend most of their days hauling water and washing clothes by hand, deep poverty of rural and undeveloped communities, American students of China’s legal system should maintain a healthy skepticism of any	Mears

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one person's opinions	
discriminatory government procurement; controls on foreign purchases designed to force technology transfer to China; preferential loans; benefits to state-owned enterprises; government-sanctioned monopolies; discriminatory patent system; forced technology transfer; intellectual property theft; cyber-espionage; direct discrimination against foreign firms; onerous regulatory certification requirements; and limiting exports of critical materials	Atkinson
Human health is in danger, melamine scrap to make animal feed, No law or regulation says 'don't do it,' so everyone's doing it. If there's no accident, there won't be any regulation, terrorist plot from China of attacking pet and human health by using contaminated food	Gao

Even the authors of the articles that were relatively supportive of the Chinese system (Mears, Gao) pointed out that perceptions of the Chinese and their policies were quite pointed. Gao went so far as to provide the information that American students they polled responded that the pet food incidents in China might be terrorism. While my research is certainly not a representative sample (it is a convenience sample), the language regarding China and description of its policies is almost uniformly negative, with Mears concluding that the rest of the world just cannot predict what China may, or may not, do.

A Bonus Article

Perhaps the most pointed commentary on Chinese economy, production, and workers comes from Raut and Schrader, who assert that the online Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (WOW) has recorded events in which virtual American players surround virtual Chinese players and attack and kill them in the virtual world because they were “gold farmers” or players who play the game professionally and earn money for increasing the levels of other players (in the real world) (Raut 20). As Raut and Schrader

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pointed out, “their real sin was not that they were taking their gold, but that they were taking it out of the US economy – and sending it back to China” (Raut 20). Racist language in the game boards, combined with “product failures, including poisonous pet food and children’s toys coated with chemical” (Raut 20) have resulted in calls for “trade protection against China that are already tinged with broader, anti-Chinese sentiment (Raut 20).

Anti-Chinese sentiment has entered the “real” world when it enters the world of the teenaged geek game player. The negative comments of each of the authors shown in this article suggest that while there are reasons to resent the Chinese, there are many more cases of sheer alarmism. This paper has shown that Americans have a negative attitude towards Chinese and the Chinese manufacturing system, and this attitude extends to the very depths of the American existence.

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