

Research Guide

An Introduction to Survey Research in Urban China

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As more researchers are using public opinion surveys to study China, Western readers constantly question the credibility of survey data coming out of China. This research guide introduces the survey process in urban China, noting potential problems and offering useful solutions. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive discussion of all the steps necessary for undertaking survey research in China, but rather to offer an introductory overview for the non-specialist. The five main sections of this research guide deal, respectively, with the development of survey research in post-Mao urban China, the political difficulties—and their solutions—in conducting an urban survey, a step-by-step guide to drawing an urban sample, the ways in which the survey quality can be improved in terms of quality control and survey data, and how to increase the cross-country comparability of the survey and use existing Chinese survey data in data comparability

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and analysis. Not emphasized in this guide are common concerns in survey research, such as the possible biases in designing survey questions and conducting face-to-face interviews, which can be found in standard survey handbooks.

KEYWORDS: state of the field; China; survey research; urban China; survey strategies.

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Development of Survey Research

Pioneer efforts by American scholars to conduct survey research on China were based on Chinese immigrant interviews in the 1970s and the early 1980s, such as William Parish and Martin Whyte's studies on rural and urban life in China¹ and Andrew Walder's study of Chinese factory life.² With the loosening of prohibitions on conducting surveys in China, an increasing number of American-based researchers have published articles and book chapters based on survey data. A few examples related to urban China include Andrew Walder, Martin King Whyte, John Logan and Yanjie Bian, Andrew Nathan and Tianjian Shi, Jie Chen, and Wenfang Tang.³ Book-length studies using survey data include the study by Keith

¹William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³Andrew G. Walder, "Economic Reform and Income Distribution in Tianjin, 1976-1986," in *Chinese Society on the Eve of Tiananmen*, ed. Deborah Davis and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 135-56; Martin King Whyte, "Changes in Mate Choice in Chengdu," *ibid.*, 181-214; Martin King Whyte, "Wedding Behavior and Family Strategies in Chengdu," in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, ed. Deborah Davis and Steven Harrell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 189-216; John R. Logan and Yanjie Bian, "Inequalities in Access to Community Resources in a Chinese City," *Social Forces* 72, no. 2 (1993): 555-76; Andrew J. Nathan and Tianjian Shi, "Cultural Requisites for Democracy in China: Some Findings from Nationwide Survey," *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (1993): 95-123; Jie Chen, "Comparing Mass and Elite Subjective Orientations in Urban China," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 193-219; and Wenfang Tang, "Political and Social Trends in Post-Deng Urban China: Crisis or Stability?" *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (December 2001): 890-909.

Griffin and Renwei Zhao on income distribution,⁴ Yanjie Bian's analysis of work and inequality in urban China,⁵ Deborah Davis et al.'s edited volume on various aspects of urban life,⁶ Tianjian Shi's study on political participation in Beijing,⁷ Wenfang Tang and William Parish's examination of urban reform,⁸ and Jie Chen's study on political support in Beijing.⁹

Throughout PRC history, the government has utilized systematic mechanisms to collect public opinion. Public opinion surveys, however, were rarely utilized to facilitate research and decision-making until the mid-1980s when survey research was introduced by such American sociologists as C. K. Yang, Nan Lin, Martin Whyte, and William Parish. Since then, survey research has experienced a minor explosion in China. Chinese sociologists began to conduct surveys for their research projects, and in the late 1980s convinced then Premier Zhao Ziyang (趙紫陽) that urban reform policymaking could be made more effective via the monitoring of public opinion. A national urban survey network (the Center for China Social Survey, 中國社會調查系統), led by Yang Guansan (楊冠三), was set up under the Economic System Reform Institute of China (ESRIC, 中國經濟體制改革研究所). Beginning in 1987, ESRIC conducted a series of urban public opinion surveys based on stratified random samples.¹⁰ Today, Chinese government agencies as well as academic and commercial organizations conduct routine surveys both for policymaking as well as for academic and market research.

⁴Keith Griffin and Renwei Zhao, eds., *The Distribution of Income in China* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

⁵Yanjie Bian, *Work and Inequality in Urban China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁶Deborah Davis et al., eds., *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995).

⁷Tianjian Shi, *Political Participation in Beijing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁸Wenfang Tang and William Parish, *Chinese Urban Life Under Reform: The Changing Social Contract* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹Jie Chen, *Political Support in Beijing* (Book manuscript, 2002).

¹⁰Stanley Rosen, "The Rise (and Fall) of Public Opinion in Post-Mao China," in *Reform and Reaction in Post-Mao China: The Road to Tiananmen*, ed. Richard Baum (New York: Routledge, 1991), 60-83.

Currently, three types of organizations conduct surveys in China: government and quasi-government units, academic institutions, and commercial companies. Examples of such government and quasi-government units include the State Statistical Bureau (SSB, 國家統計局), ESRIC, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (民政部), labor unions, and women and youth groups. The advantage of these organizations is that they can carry out surveys most effectively because of their vertical organizational structures and bureaucratic authority. Both SSB and ESRIC have their own survey networks of local offices staffed by full-time government employees. The State Administration of Environmental Protection (國家環境保護總局), the All-China Federations of Trade Unions (中華全國總工會), the All-China Women's Federation (中華全國婦女聯合會), and the All-China Youth Federation (中華全國青年聯合會) all have their own local offices. Once the central office of any of these organizations decides to conduct a survey, this decision can be carried out as an administrative order and a budget then provided. While these organizations are concerned about political sensitivity, they do have a certain degree of legitimacy (lacking among other types of organizations) to ask sensitive questions. The disadvantage, however, is that employees of government survey organizations, being low-paid, are less motivated. This lack of motivation by interviewers can often lead to reduced survey quality.

Academic organizations include the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS, 中國社會科學院) and its provincial affiliates, universities, and other research institutes. These organizations also have legitimate claim to conduct surveys, yet have neither the authority to compel people to cooperate nor adequate financial resources to carry out involved surveys. Similar to government units, their hands are tied by government regulations. They are eager, however, to cooperate with outside researchers. Another advantage of academic organizations is that, as a collaborating partner, they are more likely to be both familiar with Western social science research and more flexible in dealing with research topics and survey questions.

Finally, an increasing number of government officials and academics in the field of survey research are "jumping into the sea" (下海, *xiahai*) of

the market economy and forming private or joint-venture survey companies.¹¹ One successful example of a commercial survey firm is Herizon (零點調查公司), a private public opinion and market research firm. Its survey results are frequently quoted by the Chinese media in public policy discussions. Note that government and academic survey organizations sometimes form a "commercial wing" to carry out politically sensitive projects. These private survey firms are taking advantage of the freedom granted to the growing private sector. Since they do not—at least on paper—receive a budget from the government, commercial survey companies enjoy greater freedom to accept foreign contracts. Although having the least administrative power, they are the most flexible and can often rely more heavily on market mechanisms to implement a survey. For example, a government organization taking an urban household sample would order the resident committee (居民委員會, *jumin weiyuanhui*) to prepare a list of all households, but a commercial firm would pay the resident committee to do so. Once gaining the cooperation of the resident committee, the quality of the sample and the response rate of a commercial survey would not be that different from a government survey.

The above discussion has attempted to show the advantages and disadvantage of collaborating with each type of organization. Researchers have reported both successful and frustrating experiences with different types of organizations.¹² It is important to note that the actual success of

¹¹ *Beijing qingnian bao* (Beijing Youth Daily) lists more than a dozen such companies in its April 29, 1998 edition (p. 8): China Youth Daily Social Survey Center (中國青年報社會調查中心); Gallup Ltd. China (蓋洛普有限公司); Beijing Xin Xin Market Research Co. (北京欣欣市場調查公司); Beijing Shao Hai Market Research Co., Ltd. (北京勺海市場調查有限公司); Guangdong Kang Sai Market Service Co., Ltd. (廣東康賽市場服務有限公司); Social Survey and Research Center at Beijing University (北京大學社會調查研究中心); Social Survey Center of the Economic System Reform Institute of China (國家體改委社會調查系統); Research Center for Contemporary China at Beijing University (北京大學中國國情研究中心); Da Men Market Research Co. (達門市場研究公司); Beijing Fu Bang Consulting Co., Ltd. (北京福邦諮詢有限公司); Herizon (零點調查公司); Beijing Wei Lai Zhi Lu Market Research Co., Ltd. (北京未來之路市場研究有限公司); and Beijing Youth Daily "Jing Que Xin Wen" (北京青年報"精確新聞"版).

¹² For example, one reviewer of this paper disagreed with the characterization that private firms had more freedom, arguing that academic institutions were the best choice due to low "transaction costs."

a survey project depends on the compatibility of interest between the collaborators. One potential problem in a joint project between Chinese and Western researchers is that "competing interests" may compromise the quality of the survey. For example, Rosen and Zweig reported that in a collaborative project on the topic of returning overseas Chinese scholars, the Chinese government officials specializing in education—having an agenda to confirm government policies—did not work well with Western political economists who wanted to challenge/test government policies.¹³

Furthermore, the success of a project may depend less on the type of collaborating organization, and more on the timing and political sensitivity of the survey, an important issue to which we now turn.

Political Difficulties and Solutions

The Chinese leadership has viewed the 1989 Tiananmen protests as a result of premature liberal political reform. Consequently, the current development-oriented leadership in China considers political stability as the precondition for economic development—and thus the party's top priority in governing. Surveys with foreign involvement and sponsorship, especially if designed to identify different opinions in the population, are often seen as a threat to stability.¹⁴ There have been incidents where the Chinese authorities have interfered with surveys conducted with the involvement of Western scholars.¹⁵ In 1999, the State Statistical Bureau issued a regulation not only ordering all "overseas-funded survey institutions or domestic sur-

¹³See Stanley Rosen and David Zweig, "Managing 'Competing Interests': Problems in Collaborative Survey Research Projects in China" (Paper presented at the conference on "Surveying China," George Washington University, Washington, D.C., June 2000).

¹⁴In contrast, Taiwan in recent years has become much more open to outside researchers who wish to conduct surveys and use existing survey data. The Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica (中央研究院社會學研究所), for example, grants access to its survey data free of charge.

¹⁵As noted in Martin King Whyte, "My Joys and Frustrations Doing China Survey Work" (Paper presented at the conference on "Surveying China," George Washington University, Washington, D.C., June 2000).

vey agencies employed by foreigners" to receive approval from national or provincial statistical bureaus, but also mandating that such survey results be checked by statistical authorities before being released.¹⁶ These examples seem to suggest that great barriers exist for Western researchers seeking to undertake surveys in China.

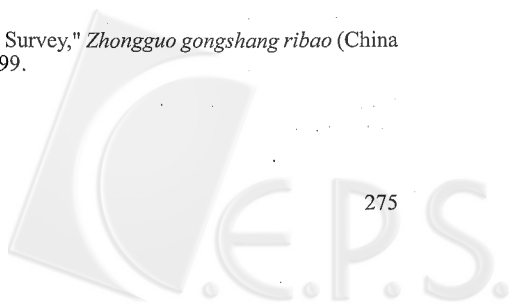
Fortunately, this is not the end of the story. While the 1999 State Statistical Bureau regulation could be seen as a concrete step in carrying out a series of earlier efforts to curb foreign involvement in survey research, the document did not explicitly outlaw joint surveys between Chinese and foreign organizations. The approval procedure by "provincial-level statistical bureaus" and the emphasis on banning "substandard survey companies" both seem to reflect a primary concern with other surveys overlapping with those of the Bureau.¹⁷ The emphasis on substandard and overlapping surveys in the 1999 regulation makes one suspicious that economic motivations were as equally strong as political concerns. If all such survey organizations conducted surveys with foreign researchers, the State Statistical Bureau would not be able to sell their own survey data to foreigners at a high price. In 2000, the State Statistical Bureau issued licenses to twenty-nine Chinese and foreign-funded companies to carry out research for overseas organizations and individuals.¹⁸ This measure has proven to be a double bonus for the Bureau. This move has not only strengthened the position of the State Statistical Bureau by giving it further administrative authority, but has also provided further reassurance for the Bureau's domination and profitability in a growing market of survey research by limiting the number of licensed survey firms.

The difficulties of collecting one's own survey data in China can be circumvented by seeking out existing survey data collected by Chinese organizations. Examples of national surveys include the State Statistical Bureau's ongoing population censuses and surveys on civil servants, indus-

¹⁶State Statistical Bureau, "New Regulations on Survey," *Zhongguo gongshang ribao* (China Industry and Commerce Daily), August 2, 1999.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸*China Daily*, July 28, 2000.



trial managers, rural and urban consumption, and many other subjects. The Center for China Social Survey under the Economic System Reform Institute of China has been conducting annual public opinion surveys since 1987 in fifty cities on such topics as reform satisfaction, housing reform, price reform, crime and safety, work and unemployment, and income.¹⁹ The All-China Federation of Trade Unions has carried out several national surveys on such topics as worker satisfaction, labor relations, unemployment, female workers, and rural migrant workers.²⁰ The All-China Women's Federation has conducted several national surveys on women.²¹ There are also numerous single-site surveys, such as the annual Beijing Area Study by the Research Center for Contemporary China (RCCC) at Beijing University and the Beijing City Survey on Migrant Population.²² Chinese researchers are, moreover, often willing to share their data; in exchange, the foreign collaborator can offer to organize joint research conferences, host short-term visits for Chinese researchers in a foreign country, propose joint authorship, or offer payment of research costs. According to this author's knowledge and experience, the sensitivity and political risks in data sharing are much lower for a Chinese survey organization than in conducting the survey itself. There are no specific regulations against data sharing between Chinese and outside researchers.

There are, however, obvious limitations to using existing survey data. One has, for instance, no control over the design of the questionnaire or the quality of interviews and data entry. I personally have spent an entire year

¹⁹Center for China Social Survey, *Zhongguo shehui diaocha xitong jianjie 1987-1996* (A brief introduction to the Center for China Social Survey, 1987-1996) (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1996); and Li Sun, ed., *Zhuanxing qi de Zhongguo shehui* (Chinese society in transition) (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1997).

²⁰All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), *Zhongguo zhigong duiwu zhuangkuang diaocha* (A survey of Chinese workers) (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1986); ACFTU, *Zouxiang shehui zhuyi shichang jingji de Zhongguo gongren jieji* (The Chinese working class marching toward the socialist market economy) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993); and ACFTU, *Zhongguo zhigong zhuangkuang diaocha* (A survey of Chinese workers) (Beijing: Xiyuan chubanshe, 1997 and 2002).

²¹See note 8 above.

²²*Beijingshi wailai renkou diaocha* (Beijing city migrant population survey) (Beijing City Government: 1995).

trying to clean up one survey data set which was plagued with errors due to sloppy data entry. I am, nevertheless, always pleasantly surprised and impressed with the amount of information in an existing survey that can be further analyzed.²³

One alternative method is to "latch a ride" on a forthcoming or ongoing survey by adding a module of the researcher's own questions. This method has several advantages: it directly satisfies the researcher's interest, does not usually require a separate approval, and—more importantly—can effectively cut costs.

The third solution is to go through non-government channels. There is an increasing number of commercial firms in China that accept contracts to perform surveys. These firms are politically less visible—and are willing to take greater risk. Such companies do not have to jump through as many bureaucratic hoops to get a project approved, and thus can often act quickly to complete a project before the authorities even notice. Due to these advantages, some government and academic organizations are forming commercial market research firms as a source of additional revenue (see the above discussion on survey organizations).

Finally, the nature and design of survey questions can also determine the feasibility and outcome of the project. Social and economic questions are generally perceived as less threatening than are political issues. Among political issues, more general questions related to rule of law, voting and other forms of political participation, expressing dissatisfaction, attitudes toward market and socialism, and foreign policy issues are seen as less threatening than are questions directly related to the evaluation of the current regime and leadership.

For example, a survey will draw much less attention if it does not include politically sensitive questions such as "Is the party corrupt?" or "Should China have multiparty elections?" Helpful is also to state a politically sensitive question in a positive way. In a 1999 survey of six cities, for

²³Examples of how to make the best use of imperfect survey data can be found in Tang and Parish, *Chinese Urban Life Under Reform*.

example, I originally sought to uncover people's attitudes toward single-party rule in China by asking: "What do you think about China's single-party system?" (1 = change; 2 = don't care, if life is good; and 3 = no change.) During the pretest of the survey, most respondents chose 1, some chose 2, and few chose 3. I realized then that this question was probably too risky for the respondents to answer and therefore changed the wording to: "What do you think of 'multiparty cooperation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party'?"—a phrase in the Chinese Constitution which was more familiar and less threatening than the concept of single-party system. As a result, 24 percent chose change; 31 percent answered "don't care, if life is good"; and 44 percent selected no change. These results seem to be more realistic than what would have likely been obtained by asking the single-party question.

Drawing an Urban Sample

Drawing a representative sample is a crucial first step in any successful urban survey. A sample of urban population in China can be drawn via various standard sampling techniques, including simple random, stratified random, random cluster, and systematic sampling.²⁴ The challenge in China is in gaining access to urban household registration (戶口, *hukou*) information. The best way to illustrate these techniques is to describe how a 40-city sample of 2,580 urban residents was drawn in the 1990s by the ESRIC. Cities were stratified into large, medium, and small according to population size. In addition to the provincial-level cities like Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing, 36 cities were randomly selected from the three categories, ranging down to the smallest municipal population of 93,800 (樟樹, Zhangshu). This selection process resulted in 40 cities that

²⁴Arlene Fink and Jacqueline Kosecoff, *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide*, second edition (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1998); and Floyd J. Fowler, Jr., *Survey Research Methods*, second edition (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993).

were scattered across 23 provinces.²⁵ The mechanics of the survey mirrored the following format.

1. Within each city, ESRIC would first collect information on neighborhood and population, including the names of all neighborhoods (街道辦事處, *jiedao banshichu*) and the number of residents in each neighborhood. These materials can usually be found at the municipal bureau of civil affairs (市民政局, *shi minzhengju*) or the administrative office (市辦公廳, *shi bangongting*).

2. Materials are then tabulated. A 14-neighborhood city, for example, would have its districts arranged by the number of strokes in the characters of their names (from least to most). Each neighborhood would then be given an I.D. number, ranging from 1 to 14. The number of residents in each neighborhood would be listed in the second column. The cumulative number of population would be listed in the third column:

Neighborhood I.D.	No. of Residents	Cumulative No. of Residents
1	12,000	12,000
2	40,000	52,000
3	8,000	60,000
4	21,000	81,000
5	10,000	91,000
6	60,000	151,000
7	60,000	211,000
8	7,000	218,000
9	62,000	280,000
10	13,000	293,000
11	8,000	301,000
12	21,000	322,000
13	31,000	353,000
14	17,000	370,000

3. Neighborhood sampling distance is then calculated, using total cumulative population divided by 3 (divided by 6 in Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai): for example, $370,000/3=123,333$, for neighborhood #14.

²⁵Some ESRIC surveys also use eight large cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Chongqing, Harbin, Tianjin, and Shenyang) in the first stage of sampling.

4. The sampling starting point is then calculated. The starting point is different in each survey. It is $1/2 \times$ sampling distance in the first survey, $1/3 \times$ sampling distance in the second, and $1/4 \times$ sampling distance in the third. For example, the sampling starting point for the first survey = $1/2 \times 123,333 = 61,667$.

5. The next step is the calculation of the second and third starting points. The second starting point = first starting point + sampling distance: $61,667 + 123,333 = 185,000$. The third starting point = second starting point + sampling distance or first starting point + $2 \times$ sampling distance: $61,667 + 2 \times 123,333 = 308,333$.

6. The I.D. numbers of the three sampling neighborhoods where the three starting points fall are then identified. For the above example, they are 4, 7, and 12.

7. One residential committee in each neighborhood is then randomly selected. In Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai, six residential committees in six neighborhoods are selected. If there are eleven residential committees in the seventh neighborhood, for example, one is selected by a random drawing among eleven numbers.

8. The next step is the selection of 20 households in each residential committee. Household registration materials are collected from the residential public security office or the residential committee office. The total number of households is divided by 20 to obtain sampling distance. Beginning from the tenth household from the list of household registration I.D.'s (i.e., address numbers), one household at each sampling distance is selected, until 20 households are chosen. A total of 60 households are selected from the 3 neighborhoods (or 120 households from 6 neighborhoods in Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai).

9. Next, one person in each household is selected. A total of 60 people are chosen from each city (or 120 people in Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai). The order of selection is: oldest male, youngest female, oldest female, youngest male—for example, the oldest male of the first household, the youngest female of the second household, the oldest female of the third household, and the youngest male of the fourth household, with the process repeating itself with the oldest male of the fifth household. If

there are only males in a household where a female should be selected, the females are skipped, and the circle is continued by selecting the next youngest male. The lower age limit is 16 and the upper limit depends on the ability of the respondent to answer the questions in the questionnaire. Alternatively, the respondent in a household can be selected randomly, or by the birth date closest to the survey date.

10. In cases where no one is at home, the I.D. number before the selected one is identified and interviewed. If no one is still found to be at home, the first I.D. number after the original one is chosen, followed by the second I.D. before the original, the second I.D. after the original, and so on, until someone is found to be at home.

Quality Control and Survey Data

The first issue of quality control determines how representative the sample is. The advantage of going through China's urban household registration system is obvious. This system provides an authoritative list of residents from which a reliable sample can be drawn. The problem of using the household registration system is that this registry does not keep on file the growing number of rural migrants.²⁶ One solution is to draw a subsample of registered migrant workers. This information is usually kept by each neighborhood committee. A second problem associated with using the household registration system is that the bookkeeping at the residential committee cannot keep up with the frequent changes in address due to massive urban construction; sometimes the addresses obtained at the residential committee cannot be found, for instance, because the entire apartment building has been torn down. The third problem related to household registration-based samples is fake registration (空挂户, *kong gua hu*): some people never live where their names are registered. The last two problems

²⁶It is estimated that 120 million people have left the countryside since the late 1970s. See Nicolas Becquelin, "Without Residency Rights, Millions Wait in Limbo," *South China Morning Post*, February 27, 2003.

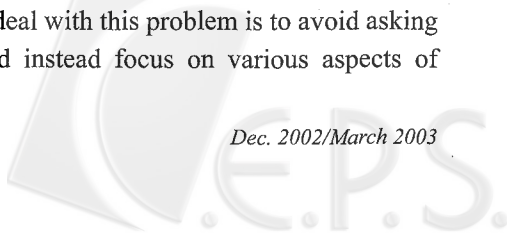
together can result in as much as 50 percent of the names in a selected sample being incorrect or otherwise missing. This was particularly a problem in Guangzhou (廣州) during the 1990s. Alternative sampling techniques, such as utilizing the Global Positioning System, are presently under experimentation; these techniques must overcome their own technical problems, however, before they begin to generate reliable samples.

The second quality control issue is response rate. Once the names in the sample are chosen, not all subjects will actually both let you in and then sit through an entire 30-60-minute interview. According to this author's own experience, about 50-90 percent of the interviewees are likely to be cooperative, depending on the city. It is more difficult to convince the money-driven Guangzhou residents or the politically alert Shanghainese that the interview is worth their time; Beijing residents, in contrast, are eager to tell you what the government should or should not do.

In urban China, the response rate is also directly related to the involvement of the residential committee. In some cases, employees of the residential committees will take the interviewers to each household, introduce them to the family, and explain the purpose of the survey. Without such committee involvement, it is much more difficult to attain interviewee cooperation. This is particularly the case in Shanghai where the urban residential committee structure is highly effective.

In the future, conducting household interviews will be more and more difficult. In some cities, the residential committee will have less information and authority given greater resident mobility and the fact that more and more people tend to live in high security buildings. Urban residents, who are becoming more aware of their privacy rights, will be more likely to decline an interview. Survey workers have also reported increased difficulties working with newly recruited younger members of some residential committees who tend to be politically more wary than their predecessors (who were mostly retired older ladies).

The third quality control issue is whether the respondent is telling the truth. In China, people are often afraid of the political consequence of speaking their mind. One way to deal with this problem is to avoid asking politically sensitive questions and instead focus on various aspects of



people's daily lives—such as issues related to housing, income, work, family, and so on—and then use the information to imply political and social attitudes. One example is to use reported income change to measure popular satisfaction with reform.

The second way to tell whether people are telling the truth is to deliberately ask politically sensitive questions—such as whether "the CCP is corrupt," "the government is inefficient," or "market reform is going too fast." If the majority of the respondents say yes, we as social scientists can be more confident that people are telling the truth and not afraid of political retribution. For example, one may be suspicious of the reliability of a May 1989 ESRIC survey due to the low percentage (about a quarter) of urban residents expressing desire for freedom of speech and political rights during the peak of the 1989 urban demonstrations. In the same survey, however, over three quarters of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the party and the government.²⁷ The outspokenness of the respondents suggests that the weak desire for democracy was perhaps a truthful answer, rather than a result of fear of political retribution.

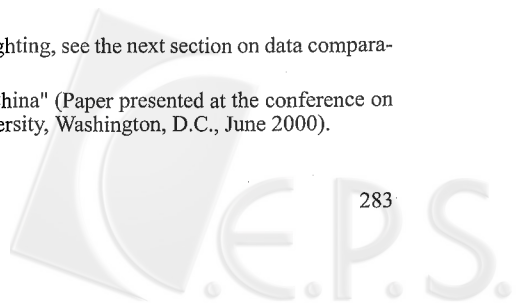
Yet another way to test for such fear is to ask people directly in the survey whether they are afraid of being reported on by others if they criticize the government, a question posed in both the 1992 ESRIC Urban Social Survey and my own 1999 urban survey. Note that 45 percent in 1992 and 56 percent in 1999 agreed that criticism of the government would not be reported on by others.²⁸

The fear factor is reflected less in lying about one's opinion and more often expressed in nonresponse.²⁹ For example, after the 1989 crackdown on urban protests, the percentage of "don't knows" increased 10-20 percent for questions related to satisfaction with the party, the government, and market reform; the percentage of satisfaction remained more or less the

²⁷Raw data, ESRIC 40-City Survey, May 1989.

²⁸Figure is weighted. For an explanation of weighting, see the next section on data comparability and analysis.

²⁹Tianjian Shi, "Response Error in Surveys in China" (Paper presented at the conference on "Surveying China," George Washington University, Washington, D.C., June 2000).



same.³⁰

The above example also indicates the importance of timing. Depending on the direction and strength of the political wind at the time survey is conducted, people may be more or less likely to respond. People exhibit heightened caution in answering questions during a major national party congress than, for example, during Chinese New Year.³¹

The fourth quality control issue is created by the sampling technique used in urban China. The household registration system provides the address and name of the potential interviewee; the interviewer is required to interview that exact person. This can be very difficult to accomplish: the person may not be at home, the address may be difficult to find, or the person may refuse to cooperate (a minimum of three visits should be undertaken). One time during my 1999 survey in Guangzhou, an interviewer took a bus for two hours each way to a remote neighborhood, spent six hours there, yet failed to even complete one questionnaire. This situation creates an incentive to cheat: an interviewer can, for instance, find friends to fill out questionnaires. One way to solve this problem is to require interviewers to ask for the phone numbers of their respondents. Knowing that double checking is a possibility, interviewees thus have a disincentive to cheat.

Data Comparability and Analysis

Survey designers in China often face the dilemma of whether to ask questions that are less comparable with other surveys but more suitable for China's conditions on the one hand, or to ask questions that can easily be used in cross-national comparisons yet are unable to reflect specifics about China on the other. For example, Jiang Zemin's (江泽民) new party doc-

³⁰See the ESRIC surveys, 1987-92.

³¹Neither is China immune to other common problems in survey research, such as the higher nonresponse rate among less educated older females, and inconsistencies related to variations in the chemistry between the interviewer and the respondent.

trine of the "three represents"³² is highly relevant in the Chinese context but perhaps has little comparative value unless translated into comparable social science terms. Other questions—such as "Would you drive to work if you could take the bus" and "Would you pay taxes to support arms development or the environment," while commonly used in Western public opinion surveys, do not fit with China's current conditions since many people do not drive or pay taxes.

Having described the danger of finding a question that cannot travel, asking comparative questions will obviously increase the readability of China-related research among non-China specialists. To that end, one can consult the many multipurpose social surveys conducted in other societies which can be used to develop parallel questions. Examples include the biannual General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago; the Social Change Surveys conducted by the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan; and the World Value Surveys.³³ These surveys have modules of questions on such topics as political participation, the environment, family and marriage, work, and so on. Many of these questions can be adapted for use in China.

Sometimes a survey sample is biased. For example, the less educated may be underrepresented in the sample. One way to avoid drawing incorrect conclusions due to sample bias is to exercise caution in interpreting the results. For example, if the sample error is ± 5 percent, one should be very cautious in comparing two groups with less than 10 percent difference (e.g., a 50 percent popular approval rate for Jiang Zemin vs. a 55 percent approval rate for Hu Jintao 胡錦濤). Another way to deal with sample

³²The "three represents" (三個代表, *sange daibiao*) include representing: the forces of advanced material and technological production, the forward advancement of Chinese culture, and the basic interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. See the report on Jiang Zemin's inspection of work in Guangdong (廣東) in *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), February 26, 2000, 1.

³³National Opinion Research Center (NORC), *General Social Survey Codebook* (The University of Chicago, various years); Academia Sinica, *Taiwan Social Change Survey* (Taipei: 1990, 1996); and Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

biases is to use statistical methods. Computer statistical packages include an increasing number of commands developed by researchers to deal with problems in a survey. One commonly used method is weighting. If the sample's education level is higher than the average urban education level obtained from the population census, the sample education is then upwardly biased. One can weigh the sample by the actual lower levels of population education. This technique will display a lower percentage of voting participation than the biased sample due to the reduced (or weighted) level of education. Another improvement is statistical methods designed to deal with missing items. For example, missing values in income can be estimated by age, education, and occupation in the sample.³⁴ Finally, as Melanie Manion correctly argues, it is often safer to study the relationship between variables than descriptive statistics about single variables.³⁵ For example, if the sample is biased with too many high income earners, the average income level in the sample will be too high and should not be used to represent the average income of the population. However, so long as the income variable in the sample has a variation from low to high, it can still be used to examine the impact of income on, say, political participation or the divorce rate.

Budgeting

Budgetary issues also need to be considered in preparing for a survey. In general, a survey budget should include at least the costs of the following items: (1) sampling design (select residential committees and sampling distance); (2) payment for the interviewer; (3) gifts to the respondents (calendar, calculator, table cloth, soap, etc.); (4) sampling implementation

³⁴StataCorp, *Stata Statistical Software* (College Station, Tex.: Stata Corporation, 1995); and Kent Jennings, "Missing Data and Survey Research in China: Problems and Solutions" (Paper presented at the conference on "Surveying China," George Washington University, Washington, D.C., June 2000).

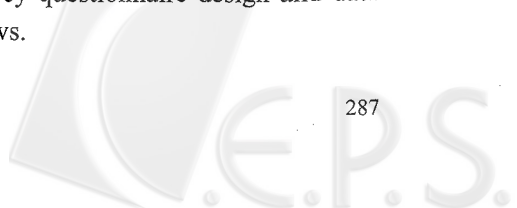
³⁵Melanie Manion, "Survey Research in the Study of Contemporary China: Learning from Local Samples," *The China Quarterly*, no. 139 (September 1994): 741-65.

(select households and names of respondents in each residential committee); (5) payment to residential committee for sampling; (6) travel by the project supervisor to site (airfare, lodging, food, and local transportation); (7) salaries for local project manager and coordinators; (8) emergency costs (such as bailing out detained interviewers from the police station); (9) questionnaire design and printing; (10) data entry; and (11) administrative cost and overhead charges.

The cost can vary greatly depending on the difficulty of sampling, size of the sample, the length of the questionnaire, and whether it is a single-location or multi-site survey. As a rule, urban surveys cost more than rural surveys. For example, if a sample of 1,000 respondents in 10 residential committees in one city costs US\$15,000 (or about US\$15 per person for a 45-minute interview), this amount will at least double if the 1,000 respondents are chosen from 5 cities (200 from 10 residential committees in each city). In that case, the cost is US\$30,000 for all 5 cities, or US\$30 per person.

Conclusion

The future challenge for survey researchers in urban China is how to maximize the benefits in a constrained environment. Specifically, several things can be done. First, finding a Chinese collaborator will greatly facilitate the survey process. Second, urban surveys will continue to take advantage of China's household registration system in order to draw high quality probability samples, although the problem of how to include the floating population remains to be addressed. Third, it is important to gain access to—and the cooperation of—urban residential committees, both of which are vital to a successful urban survey. Fourth, the timing of the survey needs to be carefully calculated, so one asks questions when feelings of political threat and instability are at a minimum. Fifth, more effort should be made to explore the large amount of existing survey data in China, most of which are underutilized. Finally, careful survey questionnaire design and data analysis can avoid or correct survey flaws.



In the long run, conducting survey research will likely be both easier and more difficult in China. Such research will be easier as the political atmosphere becomes freer and surveys seem less a threat to the regime. Surveys will be more difficult, however, as social mobility and awareness of privacy and other rights further increase. By that point, survey-related problems in China will be much more similar to those in advanced market societies.