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Corruption, Pollution, Inequality Are Top Concerns in China

*Many Worry about Threats to
Traditions and Culture*

BY *Richard Wike and Bridget Parker*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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About This Report

This report examines public opinion in China, including views of issues affecting the country, economic conditions and modern life. It is based on 3,649 face-to-face interviews with adults 18 and older conducted from April 15 to May 27, 2015. For more details, see survey methodology and topline results.

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Corruption, Pollution, Inequality Are Top Concerns in China

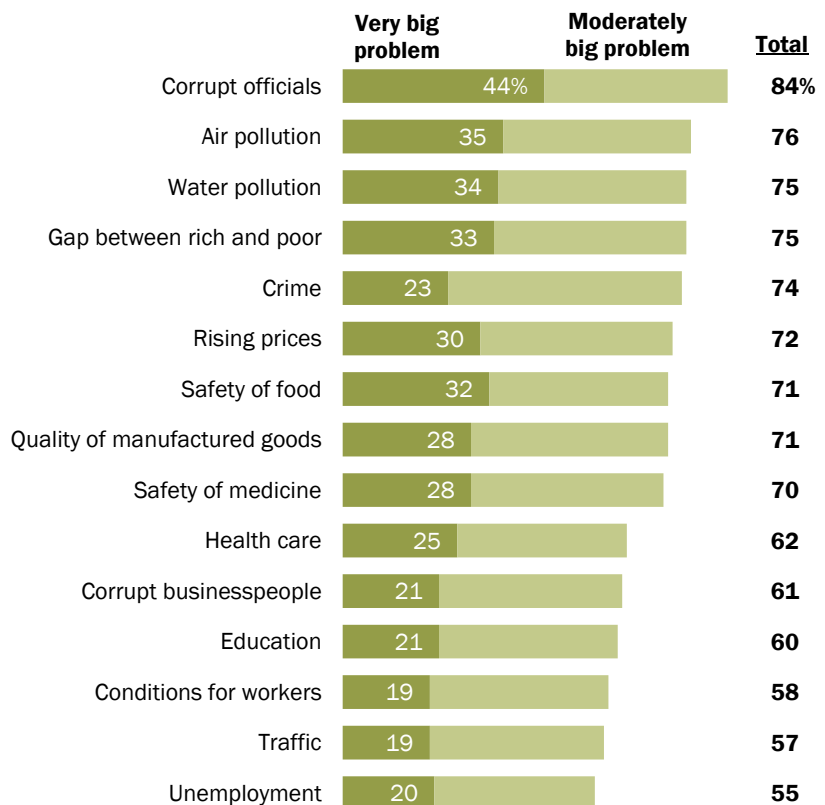
Many Worry about Threats to Traditions and Culture

China's economic growth rate may be slowing, but the Chinese public overwhelmingly recognizes the economic progress their country has made over time. Most say they are better off financially than they were five years ago, and with near unanimity they believe they enjoy a higher standard of living than their parents did.

However, they also believe their country is facing a variety of challenges. In particular, corruption – which has been a major focus of President Xi Jinping – remains a serious concern. Fully 84% say corrupt officials are a big problem, and 44% think they are a *very big* problem. But people are optimistic that this problem can be dealt with – 63% say the corruption problem will get better in five years.

Corrupt Officials, Pollution Are Top Concerns

How big of a problem is/are ...



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q60a, bCHI, d-f, h-q.

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Meanwhile, there are signs that China's remarkable economic expansion has had some negative side effects. For instance, many Chinese are concerned about air and water pollution, as well as widening inequality. And serious concerns about food safety have nearly tripled since 2008.

People express mixed reactions to the rapid changes China has experienced. Most say they like the pace of modern life, but they also believe that their traditional way of life is getting lost and that it needs to be protected against foreign influence. And a growing number see consumerism and commercialism as a threat to their culture.

These are among the key findings from a Pew Research Center survey in China, which is based on face-to-face interviews conducted from April 15 to May 27, 2015, among a nationally representative sample of 3,649 randomly selected adults.¹

Corrupt Officials Seen as Top Problem

Among the 15 issues included in this survey, nine are considered either a very big or moderately big problem by at least 70% of the Chinese public. However, no issue tested is rated as a *very big* problem by half or more of the population. Concerns over corrupt officials top the list, with 44% of Chinese saying this is a very big problem. Still, this is down 10 percentage points from 2014, when 54% cited corrupt officials as a top concern.

About a third of Chinese are worried about environmental damage, with 35% saying air pollution is a very big problem and 34% saying the same about water pollution. Three-in-ten or more cite the gap between the rich and poor, safety of food and rising prices as top concerns.

Only about two-in-ten cite corrupt businesspeople, education, unemployment, traffic and working conditions as very big problems for China.

Concerns about food safety have risen over the past seven years amid several high-profile scares. In 2008, [baby formula tainted with melamine](#) was linked to the deaths of six infants and affected almost 300,000 babies. More recently, nearly [a half-billion dollars' worth of meat](#) was seized by authorities in June 2015, some of it having been frozen in the 1970s. Roughly a third (32%) now say food safety is a very big problem, up 20 percentage points from 12% in 2008.

While the safety of medicine and the quality of manufactured goods are cited as a top worry by fewer than three-in-ten Chinese, concerns have risen by 19 points and 15 points, respectively, since 2008.

On the other hand, concerns about inflation have eased substantially. In 2008, when inflation stood at [5.9%](#), about seven-in-ten Chinese (72%) were very concerned about rising prices. With a more manageable [1.4%](#) inflation rate projected for 2015, only 30% cite rising prices as a top concern, a decline of a staggering 42 percentage points over seven years.

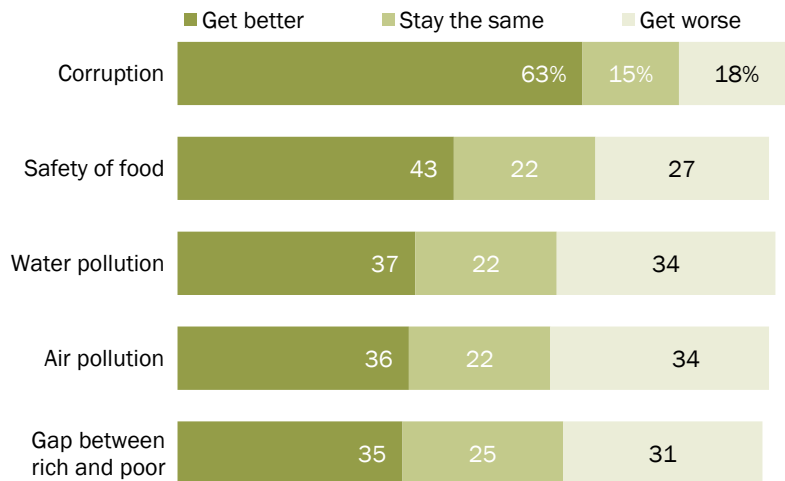
¹ The survey was conducted prior to the August downturn in Chinese stock markets and the devaluation of the yuan.

Chinese Divided on Whether Many Problems Will Get Better or Worse

When asked whether a series of top problems will get better, get worse or stay the same in the next five years, the Chinese public offers mixed views. More than six-in-ten (63%) believe corruption problems will improve in the next five years. A plurality (43%) is also optimistic that progress will be made in food safety. However, the public is split on water pollution: 37% believe it will get better over the next five years, while 34% believe it will get worse. Similar divides are found on air pollution (36% better, 34% worse) and the gap between the rich and poor (35% better, 31% worse).

Chinese Expect Corruption to Improve in Next 5 Years

In the next five years, do you expect ___ to ...



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, Q62a-e.

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In China's two largest cities, pessimism about air quality is widespread. More than half of those living in Beijing and Shanghai (53%) say air pollution will get worse in the next five years, compared with roughly a third (34%) of those living elsewhere in China. A [recent study](#) linked air pollution to 1.6 million deaths a year in China, with some of the most concentrated sources of pollution found in the northeast corridor that extends from Shanghai to Beijing.

On the issue of corruption, optimism about improvement varies considerably by education and income. For example, 71% of higher-income Chinese believe corruption will improve in the next five years, compared with 58% of those with lower incomes.² Roughly two-thirds of Chinese with a secondary education or higher (68%) expect corruption to get better, compared with about six-in-ten among people with less than a secondary education (59%).

² Income categorization based on income levels that are higher and lower than the median household income within China.

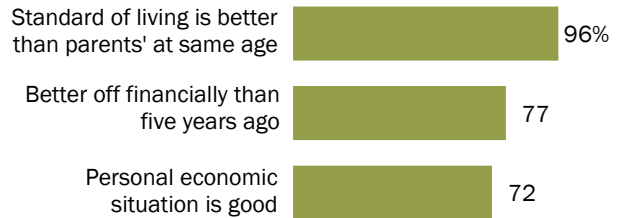
Widespread Belief that Standard of Living Has Improved

Despite concern about a wide range of issues, many are satisfied with their economic situation. Majorities in China have consistently rated their personal economic situation positively. In 2008, 66% of Chinese said their personal finances were good. In 2015, 72% hold this view.

Roughly three-quarters of Chinese (77%) believe their family is better off today than they were five years ago. Only 4% say they are worse off financially than they were five years ago and 17% say they are about the same.

Not only do many Chinese rate the current state of their finances positively, but an overwhelming majority sees the effects of China's economic advancement over the past generation. Nearly all Chinese (96%) say their current standard of living is better than their parents' standard of living at the same age. This is relatively unchanged from 2012, when 92% of Chinese said their standard of living was superior to that of their parents' generation.

Chinese Happy with Economic Situation



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q5, Q7 & Q8.

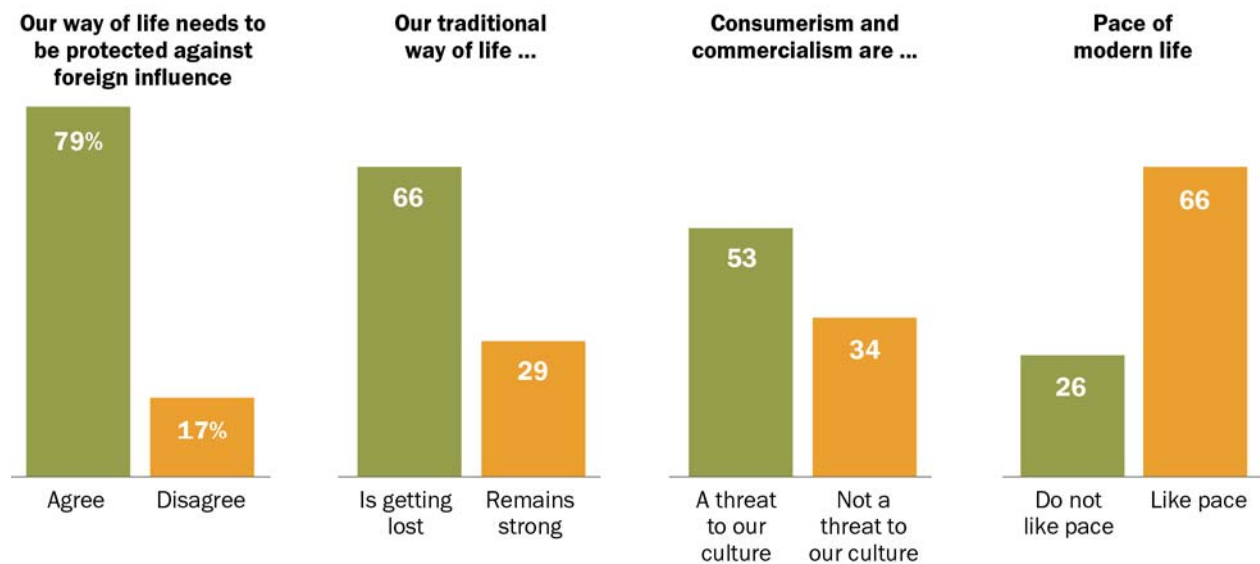
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Chinese See Traditions and Culture under Threat

China's economic transformation has led to many changes in the everyday lives of its citizens. Most Chinese embrace a modern lifestyle, with 66% saying they like the pace of modern life. However, the same percentage says their traditional way of life is getting lost. And 79% believe their way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence (though only 30% *completely* agree with this view).

In a society with a rapidly growing middle class, slightly more than half (53%) think that consumerism and commercialism are a threat to their culture, up from 43% in 2012. Just 34% say consumerism and commercialism do not pose a threat.

Chinese Concerned about Impact of Foreign Influence on Way of Life



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q141, Q142, Q143 & Q144a.

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Methodology

About the Pew Research Center's Spring 2015 Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on face-to-face interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The results are based on national samples, unless otherwise noted. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are available on our [website](#).

For more detailed information on survey methods for this report, see here:

http://www.pewglobal.org/international-survey-methodology/?country_select=China

For more general information on international survey research, see here:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/international-survey-research/>

Topline Results

Pew Research Center
Spring 2015 survey
September 24, 2015 Release

Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see Methodology section and our [international survey methods database](#).
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Since 2007, the Pew Research Center has used an automated process to generate topline for its Global Attitudes surveys. As a result, numbers may differ slightly from those published prior to 2007.
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2015 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q5. Now thinking about your personal economic situation, how would you describe it — is it very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?					
		Very good	Somewhat good	Somewhat bad	Very bad	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	6	66	18	2	8	100
	Spring, 2013	5	62	25	4	3	100
	Spring, 2012	6	63	20	4	7	100
	Spring, 2009	17	60	19	3	1	100
	Spring, 2008	3	63	28	4	2	100
	Spring, 2007	3	53	36	6	2	100

		Q7. Compared to your parents when they were the same age as you are now, do you think your own standard of living now is much better, somewhat better, about the same, somewhat worse or much worse than theirs was?							
		Much better	Somewhat better	About the same	Somewhat worse	Much worse	Parents did not live to the age of respondent (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	51	45	3	1	0	0	0	100
	Spring, 2012	39	53	5	1	1	0	1	100

		Q8. Thinking about how you and your family were doing financially: Would you say you are better off today than you were five years ago, worse off today than you were five years ago or are you doing about the same today as you were five years ago?				
		Better off	Worse off	About the same	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	77	4	17	1	100
	Spring, 2012	70	5	21	3	100

		Q60a. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. a. crime					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	23	51	22	2	2	100
	Spring, 2014	27	46	23	2	2	100
	Spring, 2013	24	38	26	9	4	100
	Spring, 2012	25	40	26	6	4	100
	Spring, 2008	17	44	30	5	4	100
	Spring, 2007	22	58	18	1	1	100
	Summer, 2002	40	49	8	2	1	100

		Q60bCHI. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. bCHI. corrupt officials					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	44	40	12	2	2	100
	Spring, 2014	54	36	8	1	1	100
	Spring, 2013	53	31	10	2	4	100
	Spring, 2012	50	35	9	1	4	100
	Spring, 2008	39	39	14	1	6	100

		Q60d. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. d. health care					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	25	37	29	6	2	100
	Spring, 2014	17	48	29	4	2	100
	Spring, 2013	23	40	25	9	3	100
	Spring, 2012	26	38	27	7	3	100
	Spring, 2008	12	39	40	6	2	100

		Q60e. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. e. traffic					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	19	38	34	7	2	100
	Spring, 2014	13	39	37	10	2	100
	Spring, 2013	19	34	30	16	2	100
	Spring, 2012	18	37	28	13	3	100
	Spring, 2008	9	30	40	21	1	100

		Q60f. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. f. the gap between rich and poor					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	33	42	18	4	3	100
	Spring, 2014	42	42	13	2	2	100
	Spring, 2013	52	35	9	2	2	100
	Spring, 2012	48	39	10	1	2	100
	Spring, 2008	41	48	9	0	1	100

		Q60h. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. h. air pollution					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	35	41	18	4	2	100
	Spring, 2014	38	42	14	4	2	100
	Spring, 2013	47	36	12	4	2	100
	Spring, 2012	36	39	18	4	3	100
	Spring, 2008	31	43	21	3	1	100

		Q60i. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. i. corrupt business people					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	21	40	24	6	8	100
	Spring, 2013	27	44	16	6	7	100
	Spring, 2012	32	41	19	3	6	100
	Spring, 2008	21	40	22	3	14	100

		Q60j. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. j. conditions for workers					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	19	39	29	7	6	100
	Spring, 2013	23	38	23	8	7	100
	Spring, 2012	23	40	27	5	5	100
	Spring, 2008	13	43	31	4	9	100

		Q60k. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. k. unemployment					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	20	35	32	8	4	100
	Spring, 2013	27	38	23	8	4	100
	Spring, 2012	24	40	27	6	3	100
	Spring, 2008	22	46	24	3	5	100

		Q60l. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. l. safety of food					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	32	39	22	4	3	100
	Spring, 2014	40	40	16	3	1	100
	Spring, 2013	38	38	15	6	3	100
	Spring, 2012	41	39	15	2	3	100
	Spring, 2008	12	37	42	7	2	100

		Q60m. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. m. water pollution					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	34	41	18	4	2	100
	Spring, 2014	32	44	18	5	1	100
	Spring, 2013	40	36	17	6	2	100
	Spring, 2012	33	37	20	7	3	100
	Spring, 2008	28	38	26	7	1	100

		Q60n. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. n. rising prices					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	30	42	21	4	3	100
	Spring, 2014	38	50	11	1	1	100
	Spring, 2013	59	35	5	1	1	100
	Spring, 2012	60	32	6	1	1	100
	Spring, 2008	72	24	4	1	0	100

		Q60o. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. o. quality of manufactured goods					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	28	43	22	5	2	100
	Spring, 2013	31	40	20	6	3	100
	Spring, 2012	33	45	17	2	2	100
	Spring, 2008	13	42	38	5	2	100

		Q60p. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. p. education					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	21	39	30	6	3	100
	Spring, 2013	24	34	30	10	2	100
	Spring, 2012	23	36	29	9	3	100
	Spring, 2008	11	31	42	13	4	100

		Q60q. Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all. q. safety of medicine					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	28	42	22	4	3	100
	Spring, 2013	27	43	20	7	3	100
	Spring, 2012	28	43	22	3	4	100
	Spring, 2008	9	37	42	9	3	100

		Q62a. For each of the following problems, please tell me if you think it will get better, get worse or stay the same in the next five years. a. corruption				
		Better	Worse	Stay the same	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	63	18	15	4	100

		Q62b. For each of the following problems, please tell me if you think it will get better, get worse or stay the same in the next five years. b. the gap between rich and poor				
		Better	Worse	Stay the same	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	35	31	25	8	100

		Q62c. For each of the following problems, please tell me if you think it will get better, get worse or stay the same in the next five years. c. air pollution				
		Better	Worse	Stay the same	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	36	34	22	8	100

		Q62d. For each of the following problems, please tell me if you think it will get better, get worse or stay the same in the next five years. d. water pollution				
		Better	Worse	Stay the same	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	37	34	22	7	100

		Q62e. For each of the following problems, please tell me if you think it will get better, get worse or stay the same in the next five years. e. safety of food				
		Better	Worse	Stay the same	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	43	27	22	8	100

		Q141. Which of the following comes closer to your view? I like the pace of modern life OR I do not like the pace of modern life.			
		Like pace of modern life	Do not like pace of modern life	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	66	26	8	100
	Spring, 2012	59	31	10	100
	Spring, 2008	71	25	5	100
	Summer, 2002	65	28	7	100

		Q142. Which of these comes closer to your view? Our traditional way of life is getting lost OR our traditional way of life remains strong.			
		Our traditional way of life is getting lost	Our traditional way of life remains strong	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	66	29	5	100
	Spring, 2012	57	29	14	100
	Spring, 2008	59	37	4	100
	Spring, 2007	60	35	5	100
	Summer, 2002	68	27	5	100

		Q143. And finally, which comes closer to your view? Consumerism and commercialism are a threat to our culture OR consumerism and commercialism are not a threat to our culture.			
		Consumerism and commercialism are a threat to our culture	Consumerism and commercialism are not a threat to our culture	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	53	34	14	100
	Spring, 2012	43	32	25	100

		Q144a. Please tell me whether you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statements. a. our way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence					
		Completely agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2015	30	49	15	2	5	100
	Spring, 2012	25	46	17	4	8	100
	Spring, 2009	30	51	16	2	2	100
	Spring, 2007	19	51	23	3	4	100
	Spring, 2006	22	47	21	3	6	100
	Summer, 2002	27	37	23	8	5	100