

A Survey-Based Discussion on Perception and Attitude towards CSR in China

Yiming Wu

School of English for International Business, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China
Email: wuyiming@gdufs.edu.cn

Received February 5th, 2013; revised March 7th, 2013; accepted March 20th, 2013

Copyright © 2013 Yiming Wu. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The rapid growth of China's economy is changing the current pattern of the international market. Nevertheless, scholars have concluded that there is a serious misconduct of CSR among Chinese enterprises. This research is conducted based on a survey to some companies in Guangdong Province to investigate the perception and attitudes of employees from enterprises towards CSR and sustainable development with focuses on three aspects which includes enterprises' understanding of CSR, the influence of enterprises' stakeholders on their CSR and what enterprises should do to assume CSR. It can be concluded that some enterprises have had some extent of CSR awareness and do assume CSR in their practices, however enterprises' attention to CSR is still not sufficient enough and only confines to solving social responsibility problems that closely related to their economic interests.

Keywords: Perception; Attitude; CSR; China

Research Background

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was first defined in a normative way by Bowen (1953) as "Corporate Social Responsibility refers to the obligation of businessmen to pursue those politics, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of society".

Ever since its emergence in the US in the 20th century, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has provoked in depth research by scholars from Western developed countries, and they put forwards their respective theoretical viewpoints from different disciplines and domains on relevant issues on CSR. By introducing the Western CSR theories, most domestic scholars have integrated the theories with the practical situation in China and have studied it from different perspectives.

The rapid growth of China's economy is changing the current pattern of the international market. "Made in China" is transcending its traditional endowment advantage of low labor cost into scale and scope economy level, however, the dependence of China's economic development on natural endowments such as labor, minerals, environment etc., not only brings a series of side effects to its economy and society but also exerts a certain extent of impact on the normal pattern of international economic operation through free trade under economic globalization.

After the research of the status quo of CSR shouldered by Chinese enterprises, a vast majority of the scholars have concluded that there is a serious lack of CSR among Chinese enterprises. Through the investigation of 1500 enterprises, Yin Gefei, Yu Zhihong and Wu Fushun (2005) think that the lack of CSR among Chinese enterprises is so serious that China needs

to put more efforts on establishing a set of enterprise theory system and appraisal mechanism appropriate to China's practical situation, strengthening legislative oversight, enhancing public participation and the management level of CSR of enterprises. By analyzing the disharmony between the "strong" capital and "weak" labor, the disharmony brought by the lack of credit, the disharmony caused by epitaxial extensive economic growth mode, and the lack of responsibility in programs of public good and by analyzing the roots of the lack of CSR, Li Bizhen (2006) proposes to improve the lack of CSR from idea, behavior and insurance. Duan Xiangyun (2006) studies the problems in the current shouldering of CSR among Chinese enterprises and these problems mainly include the lack of "People First" idea, the lack of environmental protection awareness and the serious short-term behaviors, and he also analyzes the causes of these problems and put up with countermeasures. In their sample survey on enterprises in Zhejiang Province, China, Chen Xudong, Yu Xunda (2007) find that though the CSR awareness of private enterprises is no weaker than that of state-owned enterprises and foreign enterprises in China, their CSR awareness is still at the primary stage and their perception of legal responsibilities is higher than that of enterprise ethical and charitable responsibility. Meanwhile a certain extent of strategic consciousness is already shown in the social responsibility behaviors of private enterprises. Though the implementation of CSR has made some progress in China, Li Youhuan & Guo Wenmei (2009) insist that generally enterprises' perception of CSR is still not completely right; and some hold that the performance of CSR is to force enterprises to carry out social construction responsibilities and is still the integration of government with enterprises.

Research Process

This questionnaire with 25 questions is designed with the help of Dr. Lez Michael to investigate the perception and attitudes of employees from enterprises towards CSR and sustainable development in China with its focuses on three aspects which include enterprises' understanding of CSR, the influence of enterprises' stakeholders on their CSR and what enterprises should do to assume CSR.

In all, 127 questionnaires are collected, among which, 65 are in paper versions and 62 are electronic ones. The age of the respondents ranges from 22 to 50, mainly male; 58% of them are master students, among which, 55% are MBA students and 37% have gained bachelor degree with an average working age of 6.5 years in their current enterprises, and 54% of them are managers or above, indicating that they are very familiar with the enterprises they are working in; 32% of the respondents are from state-owned enterprises, 28% are from foreign enterprises in China, and 16% are from private enterprises; as to the organizations the respondents are working for, 32% are manufacturers, 21% are government agencies, covering a large range of social sectors; 56% of the enterprises are small enterprises with less than 200 employees, 26% are large enterprises with over 2000 employees, 18% are medium enterprises; of the enterprises, 58% are local enterprises in Guangzhou, 16% are in Shenzhen, 8% are in Dongguan, the rest are in Foshan, Zhongshan, Qingyuan, Zhuhai, Taishan, Zhaoqing, Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, Hongkong, Macao etc.

Analysis and Discussion on Some Key Issues from Respondents' Perspectives

Understanding the Implication of CSR

Among the respondents, 31.5% regard companies' caring about people and planet and profit as companies' corporate responsibilities, then comes companies' behaving ethically (not cheating) followed by companies' obeying regulation. In considering CSR, the majority of the respondents paid attention to social benefits, thinking that environment, people, sustainable development etc. are important components of CSR. Among them, some people think that sustainable development can be

realized through changing consumption behaviors by business or by searching competition opportunities to influence government decision-making. Only 3.15% respondents insist that sustainable development can be realized by simply following government's decisions. It is safe to conclude that those who insist to take the initiative to realize sustainable development are dominating. The survey result can be found in **Figure 1**.

Collected data in **Figure 2** shows 99.21% respondents think that sustainability is an important socio-economic issue while 69.29% of the respondents insist that social responsibilities should be shared by enterprises and the government, instead of being shouldered by the government alone; meanwhile, 27.56% think that social responsibilities is of help to enterprises to enhance competition opportunities (see **Figure 3**). The results from collected questionnaires also indicate that 72.44% (among which 44.88% chose "strongly disagree" while 27.56% chose "partly disagree") do not regard CSR as a luxury, and on the contrary, they regard it as a necessity for enterprises to assume. Viewing from the perspective of enterprises, they found through their point-of-scale terminal that customers (75.6%) are willing to spend more on the public tested products, for example products of fair trade; while others (64.56%) are willing to spend more on sustainable products.

When it comes to the deep understanding of CSR, over half of the respondents (56.7%) do not regard that CSR is more about public relations, which means that people do not think CSR as the tool for enterprises to establish relations with outsiders (such as consumers, governments etc.) and for show. As many as 72.45% of the respondents insist that sustainable policies are vital for any enterprise to gain profit; 67.71% of the subjects think that CSR is vital for any enterprise to gain profit; 65.36% of the respondents hold that under the current economic environment, CSR cannot be prioritized; 75.59% insist that when it is necessary to implement social projects, they would like to sacrifice short-term gains for long-term returns.

On the whole, the investigation shows that a large majority of the respondents have a comparatively clear perception of CSR, recognizing that CSR is a must for enterprises to shoulder and perform in order to survive, meanwhile, they also insist that environmental protection, caring about people, sustainability are important elements of CSR. At the same time, more than

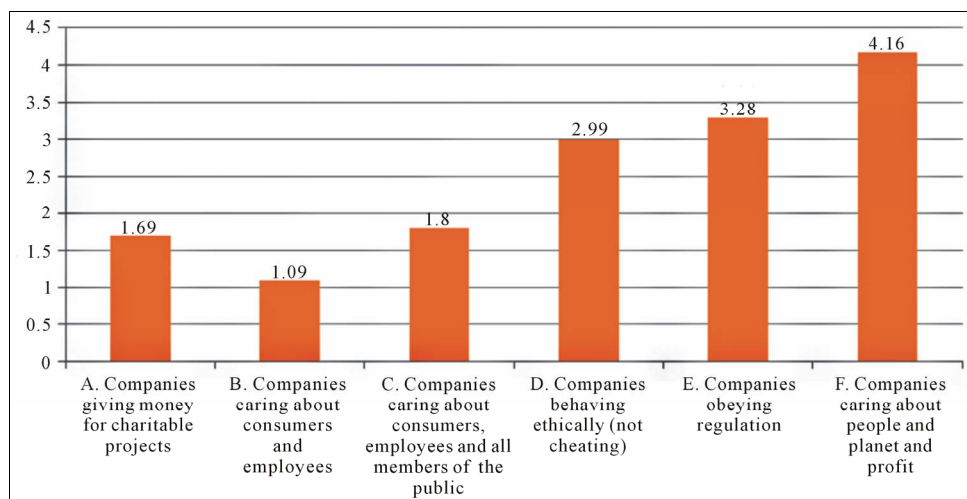


Figure 1.
How do you understand the implication of corporate responsibility?

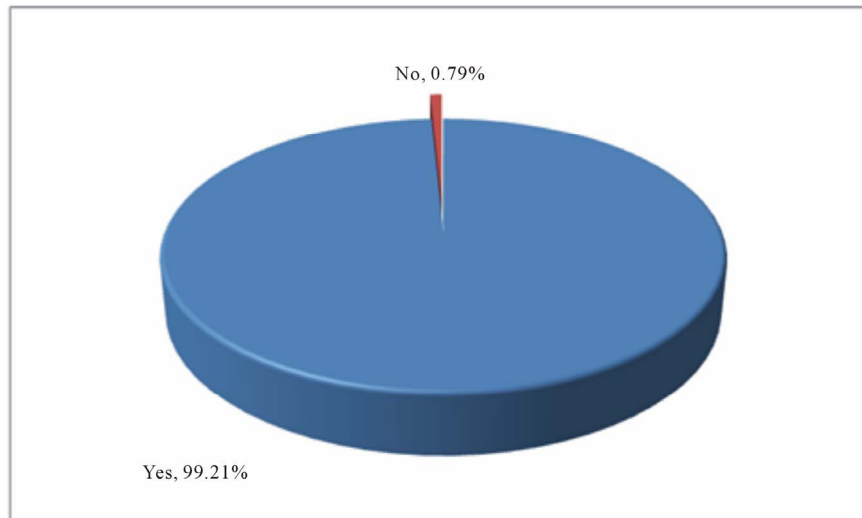


Figure 2.
Is sustainability an important socio-economic issue?

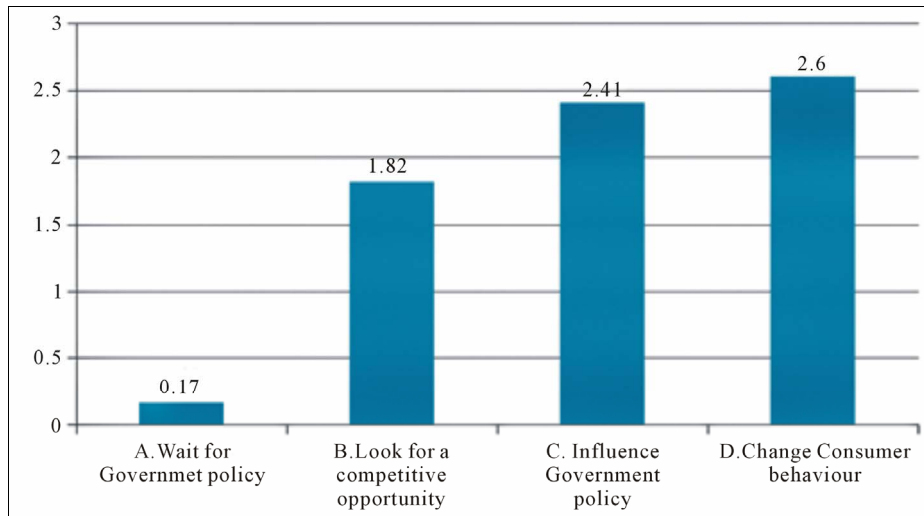


Figure 3.
If choose “Yes”, what is the role of business?

half of the respondents (67.71%) think that CSR is vital for any enterprise to gain profit, while 65.36% think that under the current economic environment, CSR cannot be prioritized, which indicates that though enterprises have strong CSR awareness, it cannot be performed well enough due to external environment constraints (social, economic, technological elements etc.).

Stakeholders’ Influence on CSR Enterprises Ought to Assume

What kinds of core elements do enterprises consider when they make the decision on whether or how to assume CSR? Who makes the final decision in enterprises? What kinds of stakeholders’ suggestions will enterprises consider? These questions are answered clearly from multiple perspectives in the second part of the questionnaire.

The first question in the second part of the questionnaire is: What do you see as the top drivers for a responsible business? The designer of the questionnaire intends to find the benefi-

aries of CSR by analyzing the answers of the respondents. There are eight choices for this question and they are A: Responsibility toward customer expectations; B: Responsibility toward local community; C: Responsibility toward employees; D: Responsibility toward employees; E: Responsibility toward shareholders; F: Act ethically; G: Being profitable; H: Other ____ (Please specify). In the eight choices, the top three are A: Responsibility toward customer expectations; D: Responsibility toward employees; and G: Being profitable, and their proportions are 42.52%, 28.35%, and 25.2% respectively, which indicates that the common recognition among the respondents are that enterprises should be firstly responsible for customers, shareholders and environment. The result can be found in **Figure 4**.

The second question in this part is: What are the main factors you take into account as an employee when thinking about your organization’s reputation. Viewing from the answers, the top three include product/brand quality, social responsibility, and environmental responsibility. Based on the significance of the



Figure 4.
What are the top drivers for a responsible business?

answers, the first one is product/quality with a proportion of 45.67%, the second one is social responsibility, 33.86% and the third one is environmental responsibility. It can be concluded that from the employees' point of view, enterprises should prioritize responsibilities for product, society and environment in forging enterprise reputation.

The third question involves how much impact would you say that (a ... m) has on your company's approach to social and environmental performance? The questionnaire has four choices "No impact", "Very little impact", "Some impact", and "Significant impact", which increase in degree for this question. The 127 respondents focus mainly on broad influence, senior management influence, shareholder influence and cost reduction, and their proportions are 74.8%, 66.93%, 57.48%, 48.82% respectively. It can be concluded from the data that more than half of the respondents regard the power from the enterprises within and internal shareholders are the determinant factors to CSR. Result is shown on **Table 1**.

It can be concluded from the above analysis and data that the "Responsibility" in Corporate Social Responsibility is the responsibility to consumers, shareholders and the environment, while the cultivation of the reputation of an enterprise is dependent on the enterprise's ability to produce the product that satisfy customer needs and the contributions the enterprise make to environmental-protection. The assumption of CSR by enterprises is mainly influenced by internal stakeholders, such as shareholders, broad and senior management, who are considered to be the determinant elements on whether CSR can be implemented.

Practices of Enterprises' Assumption of CSR

Investigation shows that 39% of the enterprises surveyed participated in activities relevant to CSR, and most of the activities are donation, financial aid for impoverished students, tree-planting, charitable activities etc. Some enterprises also established employee mutual aid mechanism or fund for impoverished employees. Subjects indicate that they learn about

their enterprises' participation in the above activities from internal sources such as internal internet, emails, notice, propaganda materials, conferences, and colleagues or from external sources such as newspapers, TV and internet, and some even experienced the activities; however what is worthy of noticing is that enterprises that did not participate in such activities and have no such rules and regulation still occupy a large proportion of the total enterprises surveyed.

As per results shown on **Table 2**, about 60% of the subjects say that their enterprises are working on solving resource consumption problems (power, natural gas, water etc.), recyclable problems (packaging, paper, food, water etc.) and the balance between work and life of the employees; however 50% of the enterprises surveyed indicate that all have no definite plan to resolve the other six issues closely related to CSR in the questionnaire. Among these issues emissions from transportation of goods, values and ethics, emissions from the employees transport and social performance of suppliers attract more attention comparatively, and 10% - 20% of the enterprises surveyed indicate that they would resolve the above issues in the next three years. In a word, the reason why enterprises care most about resource consumption and environment pollution is probably because these problems are closely related to their economic interest; however, whatever the reasons are, enterprises' caring about these issues is beneficial for the sustainable development of both enterprises and the society.

From **Table 3**, we can find that majority of enterprises (over 50%) pay attention to some international standards such as ISO14001, ISO26000, CSC9000, UN Millennium Development Goals, UN Global Compact Initiative and International Labor Organization related to CSR; however, only ISO14001, ISO26000 and CSC9000 are employed. ISO14001 grabs the most attention, 65% of the enterprises surveyed indicate that they know something about it and 20% are employing the standard in their operations. However, most of the respondents show that they have never heard of most of the international standards, let alone adhering to or employing them. The three stands, i.e., AA1000, Triple Bottom Line and Principles of Responsible Management have got the lowest awareness rate.

Over 70% of the respondents expressed they had never heard of

Table 1.

How much impact would you say that (choose one or more) has on your company's approach to social and environmental performance?

Subject/Option	No Impact	Very Little Impact	Some Impact	Significant Impact
A. Board Influence (e.g. policies, statements)	5 (3.94%)	10 (7.87%)	17 (13.39%)	95 (74.8%)
B. Senior Management Influence (e.g. statements, actions)	2 (1.57%)	11 (8.66%)	29 (22.83%)	85 (66.93%)
C. Middle Management Influence (e.g. statements, actions)	5 (3.94%)	34 (26.77%)	77 (60.63%)	11 (8.66%)
D. Shareholder Influence (e.g. statements, action)	3 (2.36%)	15 (11.81%)	36 (28.35%)	73 (57.48%)
E. Potential Investor Pressure (e.g. statement, actions)	13 (10.24%)	39 (30.71%)	53 (41.73%)	22 (17.32%)
F. Employee Influence (e.g. actions)	13 (10.24%)	61 (48.03%)	36 (28.35%)	17 (13.39%)
G. Government Regulations	5 (3.94%)	11 (8.66%)	54 (42.52%)	57 (44.88%)
H. Cost Reduction	4 (3.15%)	7 (5.51%)	54 (42.52%)	62 (48.82%)
I. Risk Management (legal risk, financial risk, reputation risk)	3 (2.36%)	14 (11.02%)	69 (54.33%)	41 (32.28%)
J. Competitor Action (e.g. strategy, action)	7 (5.51%)	26 (20.47%)	70 (55.12%)	24 (18.9%)
K. Supply Chain Pressure	4 (3.15%)	40 (31.5%)	58 (45.67%)	25 (19.69%)
L. Consumer Pressure	6 (4.72%)	35 (27.56%)	54 (42.52%)	32 (25.2%)
M. External Pressure Groups (e.g. statement, actions)	7 (5.51%)	42 (33.07%)	58 (45.67%)	20 (15.75%)

Table 2.

Please indicate whether your organization is managing each issue below (choose one or more), or plan to manage them within the next 3 years.

Subject/Option	Currently Manage	Will Manage in the Next 3 Years	No Plan to Manage in the Next 3 Years
A. Resource Consumption (electricity, gas, water)	75 (59.06%)	12 (9.45%)	40 (31.5%)
B. Recycling (packaging, paper, food, water)	85 (66.93%)	10 (7.87%)	32 (25.2%)
C. Employee Transport Emissions (air, cars)	25 (19.69%)	16 (12.6%)	86 (67.72%)
D. Goods Transport Emissions	31 (24.41%)	25 (19.69%)	71 (55.91%)
E. Human Rights, Including Child Labor	43 (33.86%)	9 (7.09%)	75 (59.06%)
F. Employment Equality and Diversity	49 (38.58%)	12 (9.45%)	66 (51.97%)
G. Value, Ethics	49 (38.58%)	22 (17.32%)	56 (44.09%)
H. Employee Work/Life Balance	77 (60.63%)	15 (11.81%)	35 (27.56%)
I. Social Performance of Supply Chain	39 (30.71%)	13 (10.24%)	75 (59.06%)

Table 3.

How familiar are you with these standards.

Subject/Option	Never Heard of It	Heard of It	Know about It	Using It
A. AA1000	106 (83.46%)	20 (15.75%)	1 (0.79%)	0 (0%)
B. ISO14001	45 (35.43%)	45 (35.43%)	12 (9.45%)	25 (19.69%)
C. ISO26000	67 (52.76%)	45 (35.43%)	11 (8.66%)	4 (3.15%)
D. CSC9000	53 (41.73%)	56 (44.09%)	15 (11.81%)	3 (2.36%)
E. UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)	59 (46.46%)	55 (43.31%)	13 (10.24%)	0 (0%)
F. UN Global Compact Initiative	65 (51.18%)	49 (38.58%)	13 (10.24%)	0 (0%)
G. Triple Bottom Line	98 (77.17%)	24 (18.9%)	5 (3.94%)	0 (0%)
H. Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)	92 (72.44%)	30 (23.62%)	5 (3.94%)	0 (0%)
I. Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI)	73 (57.48%)	46 (36.22%)	8 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
J. International Labor Organization (ILO)	48 (37.8%)	62 (48.82%)	17 (13.39%)	0 (0%)

K. Other _____ (Please specify)	117 (92.13%)	8 (6.3%)	2 (1.57%)	0 (0%)
---------------------------------	--------------	----------	-----------	--------

the three standards before. Enterprises' insufficient attention on these international standards indicates that they still lack CSR awareness and executive force.

Based on the above data and analysis, it can be concluded that some enterprises have had some extent of CSR awareness and do assume CSR in their practices, however enterprises' attention to CSR is still not sufficient enough and only confines to solving social responsibility problems that closely related to their economic interests.

York: Harper & Row.
 Chen, X. D., & Yu, X. D. (2007). Status quo of awareness of private enterprises on CSR and comments. *Journal of Zhejiang University*, 3.
 Duan, X. Y. (2006). *CSR in China: Status and countermeasures*. Tianjin: Tianjin Business College.
 Li, B. Z. (2006). Misconduct of CSR: Status, reasons and countermeasures. *Enterprise Economy*, 6.
 Li, Y. H., & Guo, W. M. (2009). How can China speed up the process of CSR implementation. *World Environment*, 3.
 Yin, G. F., Yu, Z. H., & Wu, F. S. (2005). A survey report on CSR in China. *WTO Tribune*, 9.

REFERENCES

Bowen, H. R. (1953). *Social responsibility of the businessman*. New