

The Effects of Social Networks on Wellbeing in China

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論 文 内 容 の 要 旨

In this dissertation, using data from the 2009 Job-Search Net Survey in Urban China and the 2008 Chinese General Social Survey, I empirically examine the potential effects of social networks on subjective wellbeing (SWB, hereafter) and material wellbeing (MWB, hereafter) in China. The findings reported in this study extend the research line focusing on the effects of social networks on wellbeing theoretically and methodologically in three important ways.

First, this dissertation makes original contribution by simultaneously assessing the impact of social networks on both MWB (i.e., income attainment) and SWB (job and overall life satisfaction). Since SWB and MWB are highly correlated with each other, not accounting for such dependencies may lead to biased estimations, yet most studies have only investigated one of them.

Second, I made a new measurement of strong and weak ties: the proportion of strong and weak tie used. Instead of the usual practice of treating strong or weak ties as dichotomous variables, I coded them as continuous variables. This is a brand-new measurement of social ties, since I believe the differences are not only qualitative, distinguishing between strong or weak ties, but also quantitative, the actual number of categories of weak or strong ties used.

Third, by making a clear distinction between strong and weak social ties, I have shown the comparative effects of strong versus weak ties in affecting various outcomes. Their similarities are four-folded. First, neither strong nor weak ties have any significant effects on one form of formal screening methods in the hiring process: paper-based tests. Selection based on paper tests is a typical form of meritocratic selection. The result suggests that social ties can hardly exert any influence on rigid meritocratic selection criteria. Second, when predicting the probability of having alternative jobs, both weak and strong ties increase the probability of having alternative jobs, though the effects of weak ties are much stronger than that of strong ties. This implies that social ties are effective channels to secure more job offers. Third, both social and weak ties positively contribute to increase network resources measured by the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) of contacts within their networks. Previous studies have shown the advantageous of weak ties in linking people of lower socioeconomic standings to people of higher ones in Western societies. Contributing to this research line, my study also shows the usefulness of strong ties in doing so in Chinese society. Fourth, both strong ties and weak ties have positive and significant effects on MWB, suggesting that both two types of ties are useful in achieving instrumental goals. Their differences are also noteworthy. First, when predicting the probability of being interviewed in the hiring process, strong ties are negatively associated with the probability of having to do an interview, yet weak ties positively contribute to the probability of having to doing so. This implies that strong ties could guarantee more trust to employers, which in turn

decreases the necessity of conducting an interview with job seekers. In contrast, weak ties are incapable of doing so. Second, in terms of their effects on short-term MWB, the effects of strong ties on income attainment declined after economic reforms in 1980, whereas the effects of weak ties on income attainment increased since the post-reform era. Third, regarding their effects on long-term job dissatisfaction, the effects of strong ties are statistically insignificant, while the effects of weak ties are significant and positive, suggesting weak ties provide less valuable information, which in turn, lead to poor person-job match and consequently have negative effects on job satisfaction over time. It reveals that the beneficial effects of weak ties do not persist over time. Fourth, in terms of their effects on SWB, strong ties are positively related to SWB, while the effects of weak ties on SWB are insignificant. Strong ties have direct effects on SWB by providing larger amounts and a greater variety of social support such as emotional aid, babysitting, elderly care, emergency care, and companionship, which in turn impact individuals' overall life satisfaction. Strong ties also have indirect effects on SWB via reaching higher network resources, that is, connecting with the upper class. To put it simply, having some powerful contacts in one's networks could enhance one's own sense of dignity or prestige in social contexts, which in turn, improves SWB. In contrast, weak ties only have indirect effects on SWB via network resources. In other words, the association between weak ties and SWB is fully mediated by network resources.

The beneficial effects of strong ties may be explained by a relational Chinese culture of *guanxi* that values strong connections much more than weak ones. The idea that being connected with powerful contacts could improve one's prestige is also a common phenomenon within Chinese face (*mianzi*) culture.

I believe *guanxi* is a key to understanding the social and economic behaviours and the unique network effects on social stratification and wellbeing in the Chinese cultural context. The frequency of using social networks in finding a job increased over time, even after China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2002. In line with the great social changes in the past five decades, market channels became the dominant mechanism of matching jobs with job seekers since 1993, and the importance of hierarchy channels declined over time. This suggests that 1) the market and formal institutions are still imperfect in replacing informal job search channels; 2) *guanxi* is deeply rooted in Chinese society and is a kind of social norm guiding individuals' actions. It has been shown that those who only rely on *guanxi* to find jobs are from the lower class, suggesting that *guanxi* works as a safety net for the disadvantaged. After controlling for social status (measured by years of schooling), the results show that both strong and weak ties have positive effects on improving both subjective and material wellbeing. This suggests the beneficial effects of social networks on wellbeing not only for the lower class, but also for the upper and middle class. Chinese labour market is a formal-informal dual-structured one where social networks i.e., *guanxi* work as a lubricant to the functioning of formal market-oriented and legal systems.