

# 'Young Chinese people disappointed with German companies'

September 9 2013

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According to a study, young Chinese managers are unsatisfied with the career opportunities in international companies in their home country. "The promotion expectations of highly qualified Chinese employees are restricted by flat hierarchies and poor chances of permanent employment with which Western companies flexibly react to the needs of the globalised market", the sociologist Junchen Yan from Bielefeld explains. He will present the results of the study at the 32nd German Oriental Studies Conference (Deutscher Orientalistentag, DOT) in Münster in September. Owing to decreased hierarchy levels and career opportunities companies have to deal with employees who resign suddenly. "This explains why multinational companies increasingly complain about unmotivated employees and the loss of image which companies recently suffered in China according to surveys."

Talented Chinese employees expect a career in Western companies to continuously advance and that there is always a higher position as a promotion opportunity becomes available, the researcher says. He conducted 30 qualitative interviews with young Chinese employees and managers from German companies in China. "After their [university degree](#) they would like to advance in the hierarchy every two to three years. The reason for this is that social standing grows with the professional advancement – an operational hierarchy spreads to the society."

Recent surveys have shown that international companies have lost their image as the best employers in China and young employees prefer a

Chinese [company](#) to Western multinational companies as employer. At the same time the media regularly report on complaints of Western companies about Chinese employees being poorly committed at work.

## **"Qualified careers do not render enough social standing"**

According to the expert, managers with international experience form a milieu of their own with a lot of prestige which, from their point of view, must be increased even further. The members consider themselves to be special: "We all come from academic families and have studied abroad. We have seen the world and for sure develop good ideas," this is what was often heard in the interviews that Yan conducted for the "Bielefeld Graduate School for History and Sociology".

However, career expectations collide with personnel policies of multinational companies which are imported from the Western world to China, as the sociologist proves. "Today companies undermine the career awareness of an aspiring middle class in urban China if they promote employees to managerial positions only in a limited way and offer instead a 'new career' for qualified employees and project managers in the lower and middle management. Employees are to find satisfaction from their position based on their expert and project competence. But this does not correspond with the ideas of Chinese young employees."

## **Scarce research on Chinese employees**

According to Yan, until now, in contrast to migratory labourers, research has not taken enough account of Chinese employees. Books on management usually assume the mentality of Chinese employees to be the same as the home culture, lacking any empirical basis. "The

subjective patterns of interpretation of the employees, however, which are based on a professional biography and the context of life, as the interviews show, are ignored."

The career young Chinese people desire was feasible in most Western countries until the 1970s, Yan explains. At that time such a professional advancement was possible owing to permanent employment and mass production. "Many young Chinese people fail to see that a career in Western companies is no longer guaranteed or is slower and not linear, as the interviews demonstrate. They also do not appreciate success that is based on growing expert qualifications and the accomplishment of more and more complex tasks. According to their perception this does not render enough social standing."

Some Japanese companies react to these findings by introducing intermediate positions such as a "semi manager" between the middle level and the management in order to promote employees, the expert explains. "Other foreign companies recruit only a small number of graduates from elite universities and purposefully go to second-rate universities so that the career expectations of future employees are not disappointed within the first years on the job."

## **Change in future personnel policy**

According to Yan, for the future personnel policy of multinational companies, the result of these findings is that there should be an open communication with Chinese employees regarding their career objectives. Furthermore, companies should explain their principles of career promotion in a better way and purposefully work on an improved image in China. "This is the only way to contradict Chinese media reports which explain the disappointed career expectations of Chinese employees on a regular basis by the fact that the aspired positions are taken by expatriates, by managers delegated from Western countries.

This interpretation does not recognise the more complex reasons for the disappointed expectations. Thus Chinese employees remain in the company, resigned and unmotivated."

The question whether Chinese companies today offer more [career opportunities](#) than Western companies – as Chinese media often report according to the researcher – has not been analysed empirically. In any case, in Yan's judgement, it should be observed that national companies do not only promote in line with professional achievements but also take social ties and political commitment into account. "The future will show to what extent Chinese [employees](#) will establish their ideals of professional and social success as a standard for the entire Chinese society. This is a controversial issue in science."

The [sociologist](#) Junchen Yan will present first results from his dissertation project at the largest German Oriental Studies Conference (Deutscher Orientalistentag, DOT), where more than 1,000 scholars from all over the world are expected at the University of Münster in September. He introduces the project titled "The [career](#) of Chinese managers within the transformation and globalisation process" in the section "Sinology". Overall there are about 900 lectures and 80 panels on the DOT agenda. Several hundred scientists from all over the world will address linguistic, historical and current developments in Asia, Africa and Arab regions.

Provided by University of Munster

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