

Economic wealth may be linked with happiness in China, if inequality is low

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A country's economic prosperity is linked with improved well-being in its residents, according to the new study. Credit: kschneider2991, Pixabay, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

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its residents, according to a study published in *PLOS ONE* by Feng Huang from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and colleagues.

Philosophers have long pondered the fraught relationship between money and happiness. Aristotle and Solon argued against the euphoric powers of wealth, while the Easterlin Paradox suggests that a nation's economic fortitude can influence its residents' health and happiness. Little evidence exists to support this claim in China, especially after the country's recent economic expansion and rapid industrialization.

Huang and colleagues investigated the influence of national [economic growth](#) on subjective well-being (someone's self-assessed level of happiness) across 31 provinces in mainland China from 2010–2020. To track economic health, the researchers used two data points from the National Bureau of Statistics of China: [gross domestic product](#) (GDP) per capita and the Gini coefficient, which reflects income inequality.

To gauge the subjective well-being of Chinese residents, the researchers securely analyzed public content from 644,243 users of the microblogging platform Weibo. The researchers used natural language processing to analyze and quantify the tone of each post.

Results suggest that across all provinces from 2010–2020, subjective well-being increased alongside increased GDP per capita (by 0.38 units for every 46.70% increase in GDP per capita). Higher [income inequality](#) was associated with reduced subjective well-being (a reduction of 1.47 units for every 0.09 unit increase in the Gini coefficient), and when it becomes too high (when the Gini coefficient exceeds 0.609), the link between the economy and [mental health](#) no longer exists.

A majority of participants lived in the more affluent Eastern China, and all were literate social media users, which might affect the research's generalizability to other populations.

Further research could also interrogate wealth disparities within specific localities (as opposed to provinces). Nonetheless, the researchers state that their study "advocates for a balanced approach to economic planning" and they encourage adopting policies that combat income disparities and foster sustainable economic growth.

The authors add, "The equilibrium between economic growth and income equality is crucial for improving well-being in China, underscoring the nuanced interplay between prosperity and equitable wealth distribution for true happiness."

More information: Does wealth equate to happiness? an 11-year panel data analysis exploring socio-economic indicators and social media metrics, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0301206](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301206)

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