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**Working Paper**

## Comparing Agentic Meritocratic Citizenship in Europe and China: A Research Note

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# WZB

Berlin Social Science Center



Yasemin Soysal and Héctor Cebolla Boado

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**Discussion Paper**

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Abstract

**Comparing Agentic Meritocratic Citizenship in Europe and China:  
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by Yasemin Soysal and Héctor Cebolla Boado

Since the 1990s, global cultural shifts driven by neoliberalism have ushered in significant changes in the institutions of citizenship. This has given rise to an increasingly agentic conception of the individual, with strong meritocratic ideological underpinnings, as manifested across a wide range of policy and institutional domains. While the normative foundations and the institutional embodiment of agentic citizenship are widely studied, we know less about the individual enactments of such citizenship. We present comparative evidence on agentic and meritocratic orientations and their relationship with solidaristic inclinations among higher education students in China and Europe.

*Keywords: Agentic Citizenship, Meritocracy, Neoliberalism, Self-Efficacy, Redistributive Solidarity, Survey, Higher Education Students*

Zusammenfassung

## **Vergleich der agentischen meritokratischen Staatsbürgerschaft in Europa und China: Eine Forschungsnotiz**

von Yasemin Soysal und Héctor Cebolla Boado

Seit den 1990er Jahren hat der vom Neoliberalismus vorangetriebene globale kulturelle Wandel die Institutionen der Staatsbürgerschaft tiefgreifend verändert. Dies hat zu einem zunehmend agentischen Verständnis des Individuums auf Grundlage starker meritokratischer Ideologien geführt, was sich in diversen politischen und institutionellen Bereiche manifestiert. Obgleich die normativen Grundlagen und die institutionelle Ausgestaltung agentischer Staatsbürgerschaft weitgehend erforscht sind, bestehen nach wie vor substantielle Wissenslücken hinsichtlich der individuellen Verwirklichung einer derartigen Staatsbürgerschaft. Dieser Artikel präsentiert vergleichende Forschungsergebnisse zu agentischen und meritokratischen Orientierungen unter Studierenden in China und Europa sowie dessen Beziehung zu solidarischen Neigungen.

*Stichworte: Agentische Staatsbürgerschaft, Meritokratie, Neoliberalismus, Selbstwirksamkeit, Umverteilungssolidarität, Umfrageforschung, Studierende*

## **1. Introduction**

Since the 1990s, the global neoliberal cultural turn has transformed citizenship whereby an increasingly agentic individual, with strong meritocratic ideological underpinnings, gained prominence across a wide range of policy and institutional domains (Jepperson and Meyer 2021, Soysal 2012). The normative foundations and frailty of agentic citizenship have been subject to much academic debate, and the institutional and policy embodiment of this citizenship model has been widely studied. However, we know less about the individual enactments of such citizenship empirically.

In this research note, reporting from an ongoing study, we present comparative evidence on agentic and meritocratic orientations and their relationship with solidaristic tendencies among higher education students in China and Europe. Drawing from data collected through a unique, representative survey, we reveal a striking prevalence of standardized agentic and meritocratic orientations among students from different socio-economic backgrounds and national origins. European students combine these orientations with globalist inclinations. However, their commitment to meritocratic beliefs tends to undermine their support for redistributive policies. In contrast, Chinese students, who exhibit strong national affiliations, maintain their support for social redistribution despite their meritocratic convictions. Contrary to prevailing arguments in the literature, our findings do not indicate any adverse effects of agentic and meritocratic orientations on subjective well-being, particularly concerning mental distress, for either student group.

## **2. Agency of the citizen and its transformation**

Fundamental to the concept of liberal citizenship is the agency of the individual, as embodied in the principle of individual self-determination. Normative theories distinguish between conceptions of citizenship based on their specific emphasis on the individual or collective side of self-determination.<sup>1</sup> While they consider the relationship between the two as an intrinsic tension, empirically, citizens' equal status as

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction is reflected in liberal vs. republican/ communitarian conceptions of citizenship, which interpret and prioritize values associated with the question of politics differently (Shafir 1998).

agents, its specific interpretation and concretization, has varied across time and space, and so did the relationship between the individual and collective.

In the immediate postwar shaping of the liberal world order, citizens' agency was firmly linked with the national collective. The script of national liberal citizenship, as elaborated by the treaties and specialized agencies of the UN in the aftermath of WWII, embedded individual agency within collective structures (e.g., the familial group, national economy, and national welfare and community), and saw it as a means toward national development. In practice, the script involved, with contextual variation, citizens contributing to national efforts as taxpaying employees and often conscripted soldiers, who were rewarded by relatively stable jobs and predictable career paths, increasing levels of prosperity, social security, and secure pension arrangements. Mass decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s further reinforced the script and the relationship —individual agency, emancipation, and freedom could only be ensured by the collective agency and self-determination of the nation.

From the 1960s on, several developments led to the recalibration of agency in liberal citizenship, shifting the focus gradually to the individual. The social movements of the 1960s, with their critical focus on selfhood, self-realization, and freedom (as emancipation from legally and culturally reinforced social practices and state bureaucracies) laid the cultural ground for expanded notions of the individual and their rights. The intervention of elites from the decolonizing nations put the ideas of the universality of human rights into motion at the international level beyond the steer of the US and the Soviet Union (Jensen 2016). The worldwide intensification of human rights instruments in the next couple of decades, codified in the UN Human Rights Conventions and regional human rights systems, consequently advanced the universalistic conceptualizations of individual agency and its decoupling from national constellations.

The neoliberal cultural turn since the 1990s marked even more radical change, disembedding individual agency from the national collective and even from a particular societal structure (Cole et al. 2023, Lerch 2022). In the emergent neoliberal script of

citizenship, individuals are attributed not only with rights but also expanded autonomy, capabilities, and choices. On the one hand, the period saw the extension of universalistic rights based on ever broader and diverse belongings of individuals. On the other, neoliberal reforms and policies re-envisioned the social, in which individuals are now expected to perform their agency and act on their choices (including diverse identities) in ever-expanding domains both locally and globally (Fourcade 2021, Soysal 2012). While national self-determination remains a robust international norm, collective agency is no longer delimited by the nation but by individuals' expanded choice of identity collectives. Relatedly, citizenship implicates the relationship of the individual not only with the state and nation but also with corporations, bioscience, medicine, religion, the ecosystem, and even the cosmos.

The agentic script of citizenship has been endorsed and legitimated widely with the backing of professional expertise and international organizations such as UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, and the EU. Standardized models and recipes for the agentic citizen are widespread in (social) sciences and adopted in several institutional and policy domains, as scholars widely documented. In education, linked with human capital and human rights ideas, school curricula and textbooks the world over emphasize the right-bearing, aspirational, and active child (Bromley 2016, Frye 2012, Lerch et al. 2017, Soysal 2015, Soysal and Wong 2007). Healthcare and well-being increasingly rely on citizen science, individual accountability, and a continuous process of learning (Rose and Novas 2007). Citizenship tests, as part of immigrant naturalization procedures, assess potential citizens' capacities and efforts to participate actively in society's values and institutions (Joppke 2021, Michalowski 2009). The increasingly popular point-based immigration programs are devised to select capable, talented, and productive individuals. The proliferation of digital evaluation technologies in private and public sectors, which enable "measuring" the performance and merit of the agentic individual, brought this citizenship model to the daily life of the citizen (Fourcade 2021). As a model and policy practice, agentic citizenship has widespread currency both in national and transnational spheres.



### **3. Agentic citizenship, meritocracy, and its critiques**

Agentic citizenship projects a “thick” version of the individual, empowered with rights and capabilities, abstracted from national and societal membership. Several qualities are associated with the agentic individual: achievement-oriented, autonomous, belief in self-capabilities, and belief in control over success and life course. This view of the individual is culturally charged and naturalized by ideologies of meritocracy. Meritocracy, the notion that social and economic rewards should reflect talent and effort, has been closely linked with the universalistic aspirations of liberal citizenship. In the unfolding politics of liberal citizenship, it was articulated as the right to equal opportunity to counterbalance the inequalities produced by inherited privilege (the lottery of birth) and ascriptive categories such as gender and race. As famously formulated by T. H. Marshall, social rights were developed to mitigate the entrenched social disparities that interfere with the equal distribution of opportunities. With the neoliberal political and cultural turn, meritocracy talk shifted from the equality of opportunity and its social provision to individual agency, performance, and desert (Fourcade 2021).

There is ample scholarly commentary on the promises and failures of agentic, meritocratic citizenship, particularly in the context of neoliberal transformations. Scholars pointed to its paradoxical relationship with liberal ideals (Joppke 2021, Soysal 2012). The agentic and meritocratic emphasis in citizenship disembods individuals from ascriptive categories and renders them as universally equal and virtuous subjects, broadening the boundaries of membership (inclusionary impetus) while forging new moral boundaries and divisions (exclusionary impetus): those who are capable of exercising their agency are deemed worthy individuals and citizens. Others emphasized its corrosive effect on solidarity by weakening social bonds that constitute common life with mutual obligations to each other (e.g., Sandel 2020). The meritocratic narrative in policy and public discourses legitimizes inequalities; attributing success to individual agency and effort makes inequality more acceptable and restrains redistributive preferences (Mijs 2021). This is further argued to be at the root of increased cleavages between the “cosmopolitan-oriented haves” and “nation-oriented have-nots.” Yet others asserted that the agentic, meritocratic ideals propel individuals in a

race of performance and demonstration of worth, inviting moral desert and self-blame and inevitably leading to stress, anxiety, and mental challenges, particularly among the youth (Lamont 2019, Fourcade 2021).

These critiques are compelling. However, empirical research addressing these points is still in development. Existing research is not always in agreement regarding their findings, and much of it is exclusive to the Western part of the world. The widespread circulation of the cultural and institutional narratives of agency and meritocracy in national and transnational contexts invites us to reflect on its implications comparatively.

#### **4. Individual enactments of agentic, meritocratic citizenship: empirical study**

To what degree are agentic and meritocratic ideals commonly present in individual repertoires of self? What are the implications of agentic, meritocratic orientations for global and national solidarity and subjective well-being?

To address these questions, we draw data from the Bright Future survey, a unique, representative survey conducted among higher education students in China, Germany, and the UK. The data were collected in 2017 and 2018 in all countries using equivalent questionnaires cross-translated from English into German and Mandarin Chinese. With a sample size of about 8000, the survey implemented a structured sampling approach based on university ranking and size. In China, it was additionally stratified by provinces, considering the geographic inequalities in access to education. Students were then randomly selected to participate in the survey. A full description of the technical details is provided in Soysal and Cebolla-Boado (2021).

The survey dataset is highly pertinent. Firstly, Higher Education is a primary site for constructing a self-conscious liberal (national and global) society and its citizens (Frank and Meyer 2020). Universities play a key role in the diffusion of templates and narratives of agentic, capable, and globally oriented individuals. Higher Education is also increasingly massified. Between 1970 and 2015, gross enrolment rates more than

tripled globally, with most growth occurring in developing countries (UNESCO 2019). The current proportion of the age cohort enrolled in tertiary education globally is more than a third. University student is increasingly a standardized category, not as elite as they used to be. Thus, if we want to know the reach but also the limits of agentic citizenship, Higher Education is an excellent site to focus on.

Secondly, our survey enables a double comparative strategy. The case countries (UK and Germany in Europe and China in East Asia) span the liberal/non-liberal political spectrum on the one hand and the individualist/collectivist cultural spectrum on the other. Furthermore, the sample simultaneously includes internationally mobile and immobile student sub-groups, which allows us comparisons between “mobile cosmopolitans” (who are posited to be positively selected on cultural and social capital) and “sedentary nationals” (Findlay et al. 2012).

The case of China is core to our analyses. China has experienced a significant middle-class expansion and a rapid increase in tertiary enrollments since the 1990s. The gross enrollment rate reached 54.4 percent of the respective age cohort in 2020 (only 3.4 percent in 1990), and globally, it is the single largest source country of international students. Furthermore, China politically situates itself as a self-declared alternative to the liberal order, thus, it constitutes a good contrast to the much-studied liberal Western context.

Table 1 describes the sample size for analytic groups in the survey: Chinese higher education students in China and abroad (enrolled in British and German universities) and British and German higher education students.

**Table 1: Survey sample sizes**

| <b>Student group</b> | <b>N</b>     |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Chinese<br>in China  | 3,419        |
| abroad               | 2,337        |
| German               | 423          |
| British              | 1,666        |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>7,845</b> |

Source: Bright Futures Survey

In the analyses below, we proceed with the following order: First, we establish whether the respondents in our survey display agentic and meritocratic orientations in their self-projections. We then examine their global and national attachments and solidaristic affinities. Finally, we explore how meritocratic orientations relate to redistributive preferences and subjective well-being. Throughout the analyses, our focus is on group comparisons and the identification of patterns.

#### **4.1 Distribution of various dimensions of agentic, meritocratic orientations across student groups**

Using different sets of questions from the Bright Futures questionnaire, we examine three linked dimensions that are embedded in cultural and institutional narratives of agentic citizenship:

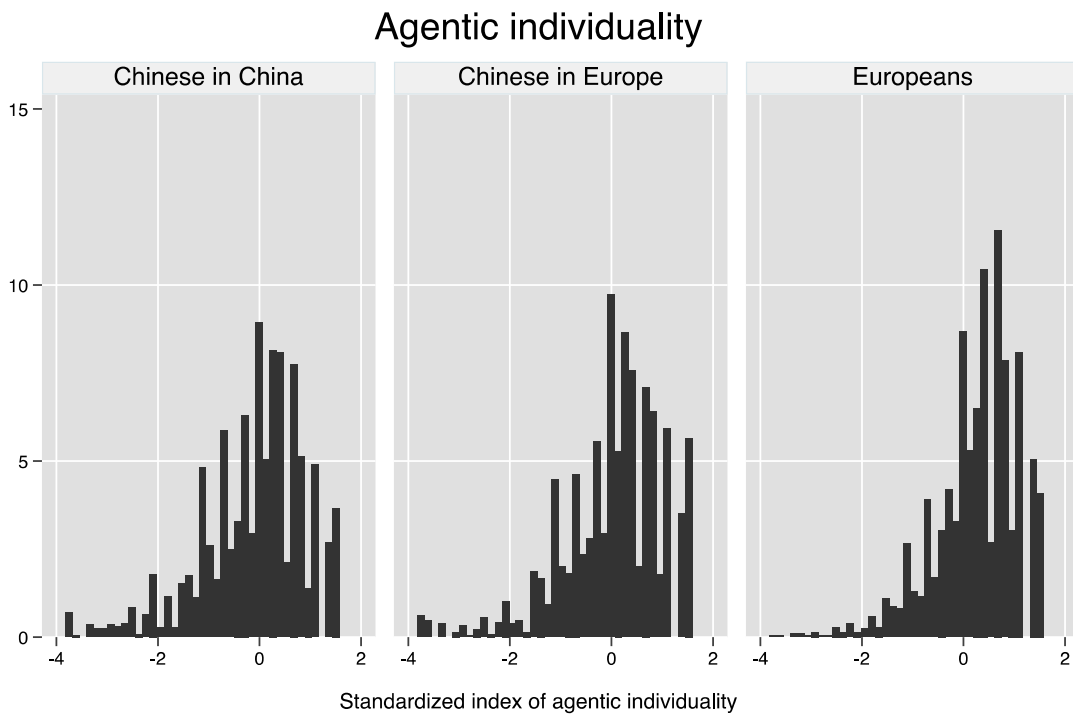
. *Agentic individuality*: whether respondents identify themselves as someone who “thinks up new ideas” (creative); “makes their own decisions” (independent-minded); “values being successful” (achievement oriented) (five-level scale, the response categories ranging from “not at all” to “very much”)

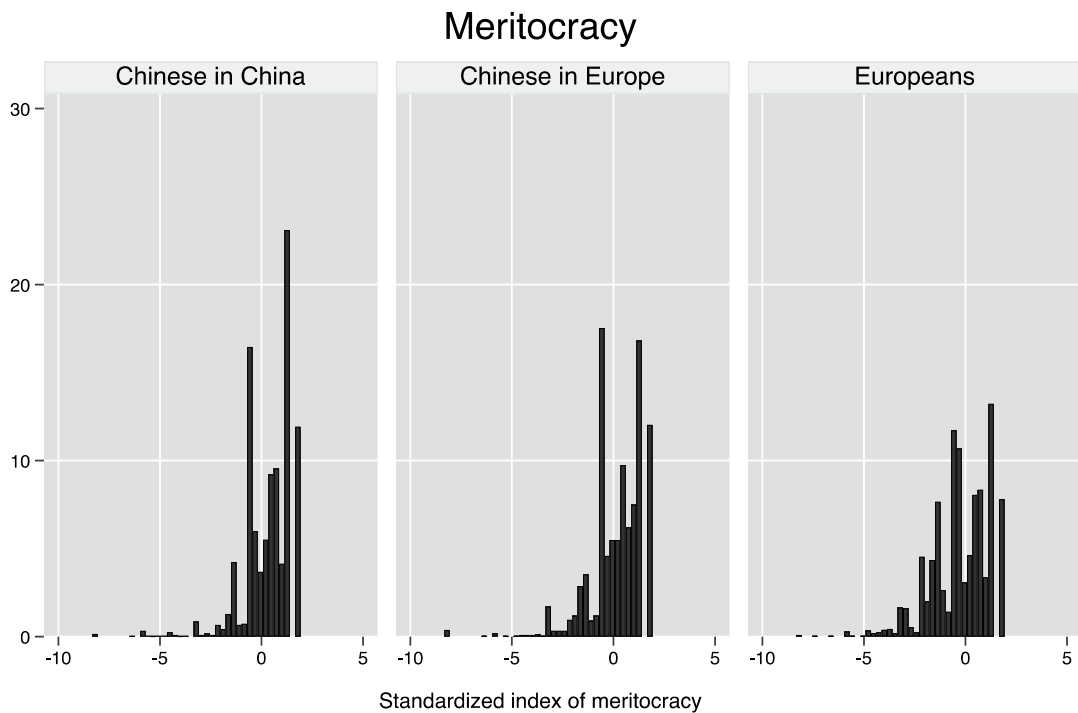
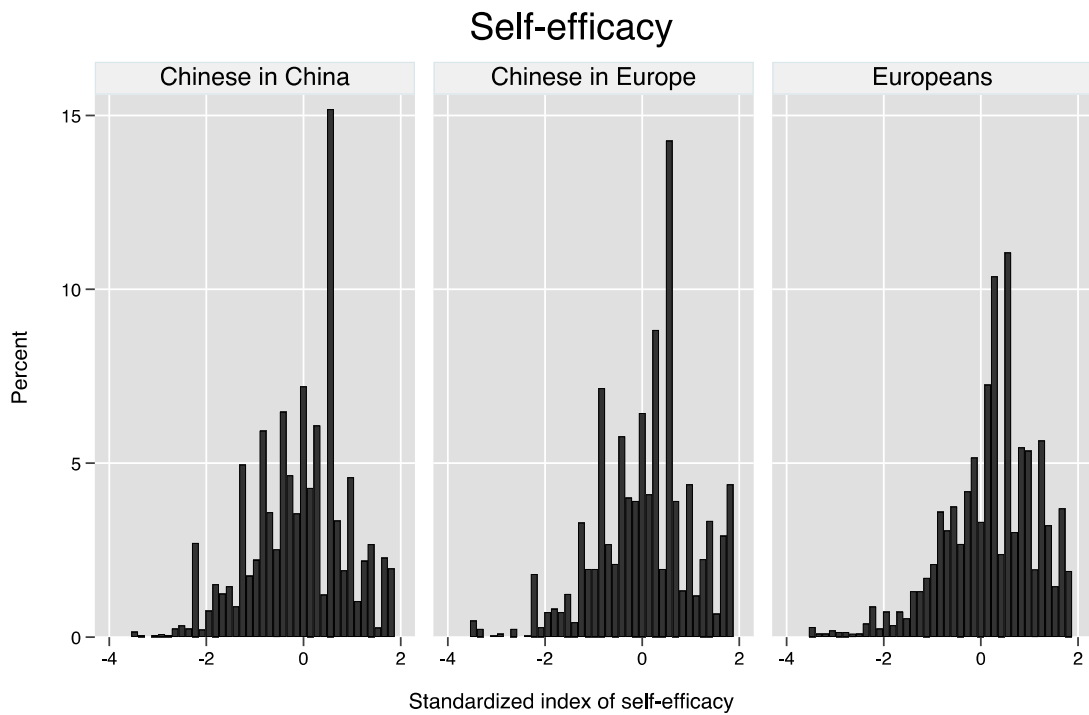
. *Self-efficacy* (one’s belief in their capabilities): whether respondents identify themselves as someone who “finds a way to get what they want”; “sticks to their aims”; “deals efficiently with the unexpected”; “thinks of a solution to problems” (five-level scale, the response categories ranging from “not at all” to “very much”)

. *Meritocratic beliefs*: the extent to which respondents think “hard work” and “talent” matter for success (five-level scale, the response categories ranging from “not at all important” to “extremely important”)

For all three dimensions, we employed factor analyses to collapse the individual components into synthetic indexes and standardized them to ease comparisons and interpretations. These variables are distributed around a mean of 0, and the presentation of results includes y-axes that encompass 90 percent of the observed cases. Figure 1-3 shows the distribution of the synthetic scores by the analytic groups (Chinese students in China and abroad; the UK and German students pooled together).

**Figures 1, 2 & 3. Distribution of synthetic scores of agentic individuality, self-efficacy, and meritocratic beliefs**



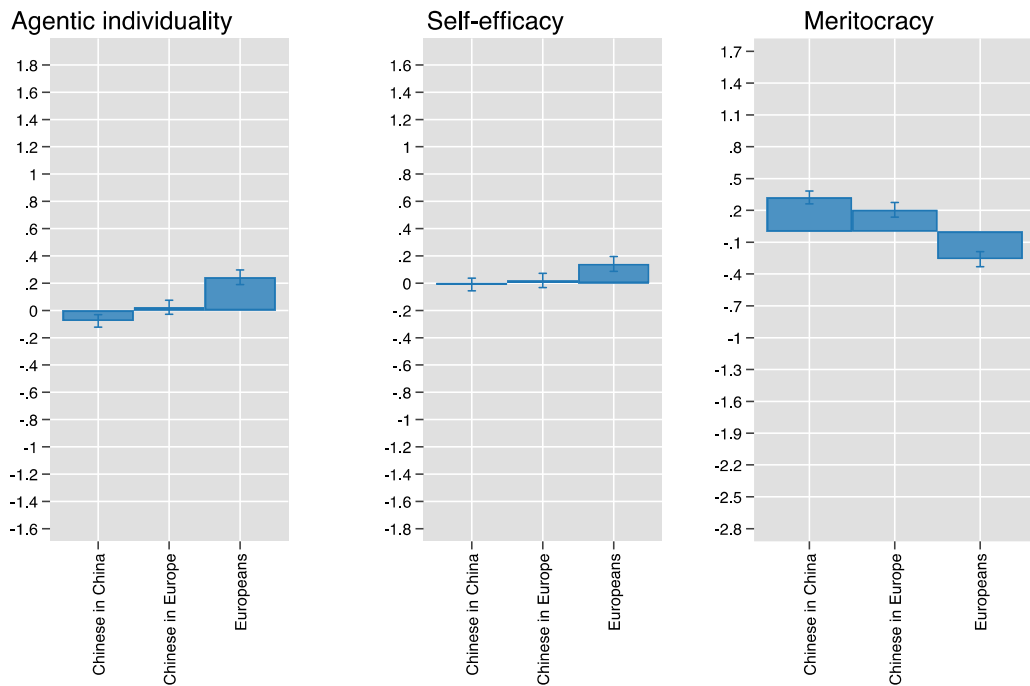


Generally speaking, this visual exercise suggests that all three indexes show very similar distributions across student groups. About 75 to 85 percent of respondents in each student group identify themselves as agentic (creative, independent-minded, and achievement-oriented). Similarly, about 75 to 85 percent of respondents in each

group think of themselves as capable of shaping their situations and experiences. A striking majority of European and Chinese students, 90 to 95 percent, think hard work and talent are important in getting ahead in life. Overall, we find strikingly standardized self-constructions among higher education students across liberal and non-liberal, individual and collective cultural contexts, and, importantly internationally mobile and non-mobile groups.

These descriptive results are robust to adding controls in regression multivariate analyses, as shown in Figure 2. Although some student group differences exist and are significant, these are small in size, with most differences resulting as insignificant.

**Figure 2. OLS estimates; conditional differences in agentic individuality, self-efficacy, and meritocratic beliefs across groups (controls for age, gender, parental education and occupation, and enrolment in a highly ranked university [top 150 in QS ranking])**



Legend: Confidence intervals correspond to 95%.  
 Estimates obtained from Models shown in Table A.1 in the Appendix.

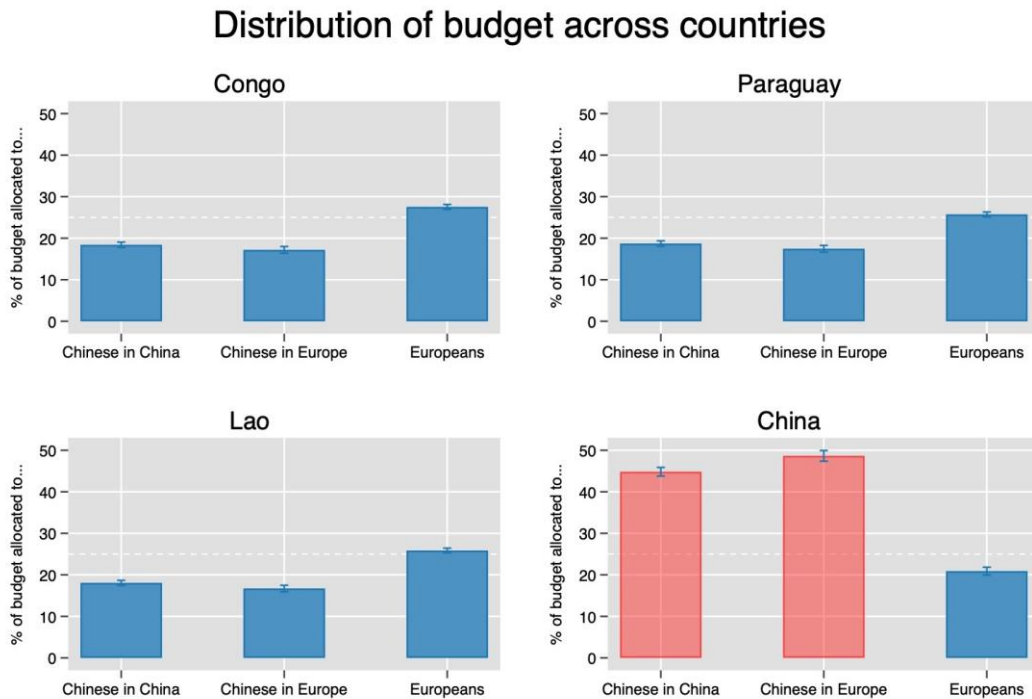
## **4.2 Global attachments and solidarity**

As advocated by various international organizations, and incorporated into educational curricula (Soysal 2015, Soysal and Wong 2007), agentic citizenship assumes a universalistic outlook and awareness that transcends national boundaries. To capture such orientations and their solidaristic implications, in our survey, we devised a question where we asked survey participants to make donations to various social projects located in different countries. The question was formulated as the following: “Imagine you have 100,000 yuan / 12,000 Euros to donate to development projects. How would you allocate this among the following in different places?” Respondents were given the option of deciding in percentages how much they would donate for each option, which specified a project in a specific location in Congo, Paraguay, Laos, and China (the overall sum not to exceed 100%). All the sites listed are the world’s poorest areas, where there are real social projects for providing clean drinking water, building a primary school, facilitating sustainable farming, and building health infrastructure. We randomized the projects and places in the question, thus, not every respondent saw the same combination of locations and projects. This was to neutralize the effect of the social cause itself (it is possible that some people are more concerned about education, others about health, and yet others about the environment). Our main analytical concern was which location the respondents chose to donate to. If the respondents were tuned with a universalistic outlook and solidarity, we expected them to allocate their donation money equally across the locations (25% of their donation budget for each location), given that all these locations are in dire need of social intervention, and universalistic solidarities would require social commitment independent of ties to any specific location.

As shown in Figure 3, on average, European students divide their donation money equally across locations, with some marginal differences. Chinese students, independent of whether they are studying abroad, donate a larger portion (45 to 50 percent) of their budget to the project in China. For the projects in Congo, Paraguay, and Laos, they consistently donate, on average, below 25 percent (between 15 to 20 percent). These notwithstanding, Chinese students’ solidarities are, to a large extent, nation-bound.



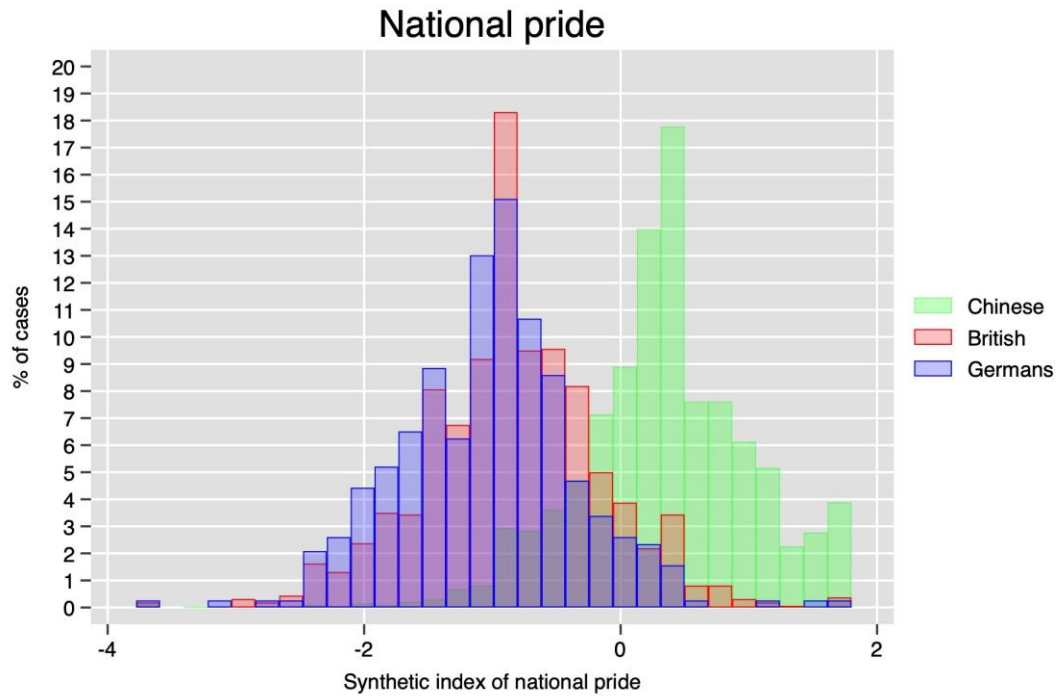
**Figure 3. European and Chinese students' distribution of donation budget**



An important caveat: In our location and project selection, we were constrained with considering the projects addressing the most basic needs in the world's poorest regions, thus, we could not include any social projects from Germany or Britain. Technically, our findings among European students do not tell us about their national attachments. We further examined national attachments among student groups using more direct indicators to rectify this.

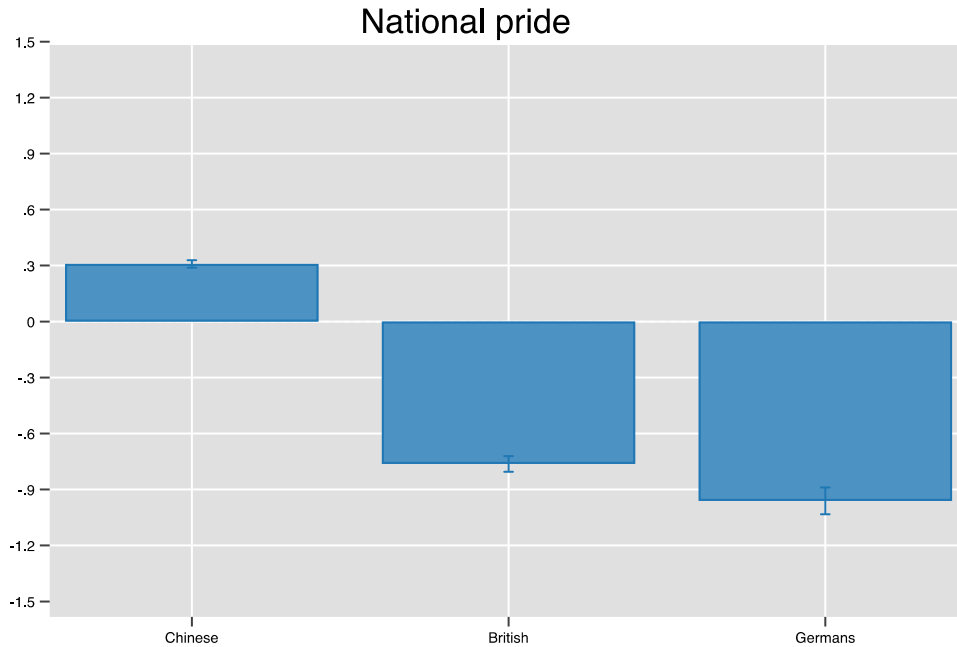
In a battery of questions, respondents in our survey were asked how proud they are of their nation's achievements in different fields: history; democracy; economic, scientific, and technological development; country's political influence in the world and contribution to international aid (the 5-response scale ranging from "not at all proud" to "extremely proud"). Using factor analysis, we collapsed the individual questions in a synthetic index of national pride; the descriptive distribution of the synthetic scores across national groups is shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Distribution of the synthetic scores of national pride**



We again find a stark difference between European students and Chinese students (collapsing those in China and abroad). Chinese students have strong attachments to their co-nationals and are overwhelmingly proud of their nation, while both British and German students decidedly score lower on the national pride index. As before, these results are robust and hold after controls (Figure 5). It is evident from the group differentials that national pride is stronger among Chinese students compared to those in Europe, net of our selected controls.

**Figure 5. OLS estimates; conditional differences in national pride across groups (controls for age, gender, parental education and occupation, and enrolment in a highly ranked university [top 150 in QS ranking])**



Legend: Confidence intervals correspond to 95%.

Estimates obtained from Models shown in Table A.2 in the Appendix.

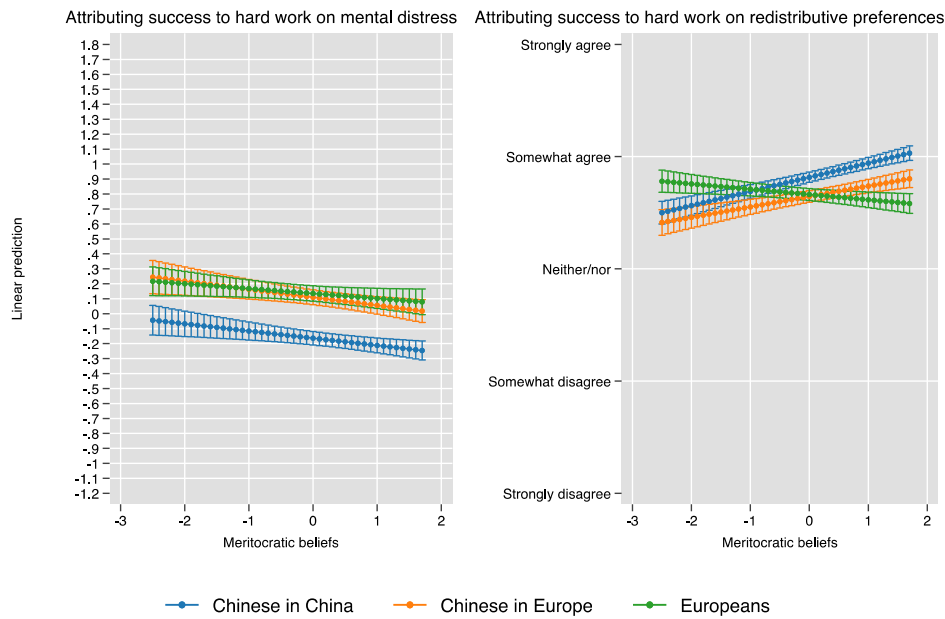
### **4.3 Meritocratic beliefs, redistributive solidarity, and subjective well-being**

While global awareness and solidarity are essential for broader social justice ideals, welfare redistribution and well-being are often linked with bounded social membership and solidarity (Kymlicka 2015). Much of the criticism of agentic, meritocratic citizenship focuses on the latter. We engage with two widely argued positions: a) Meritocratic beliefs (measured as attributing success to hard work) make inequality more acceptable and restrain redistributive preferences; b) They also foster competitiveness, overwork and feelings of failure, and consequently mental distress.

For redistributive solidarity, we used a survey item that asked respondents' views on the statement that "government should reduce income differences" (five-level response scale). For well-being, we used a standardized scale of psychological distress (Kessler), which involved questions about emotional states (five-level response scale).

Contrary to the arguments in the literature, Figure 6 shows that among all student groups, meritocratic beliefs are associated with lower levels of mental distress (more so for the Chinese students in China, but also the other groups). Regarding redistributive preferences, we find a different picture. For European students, in line with the arguments in the literature, the attribution of success to hard work is indeed linked with lower support for social redistribution. However, the opposite is the case for Chinese students (both in China and abroad): the self-attribution of success does not undermine their commitment to social redistribution. They appear to have more egalitarian inclinations than their European counterparts.

**Figure 6. The effect of attributing success to hard work on mental distress and redistributive preferences (controls for age, gender, parental education and occupation, and enrolment in a highly ranked university [top 150 in QS ranking])**

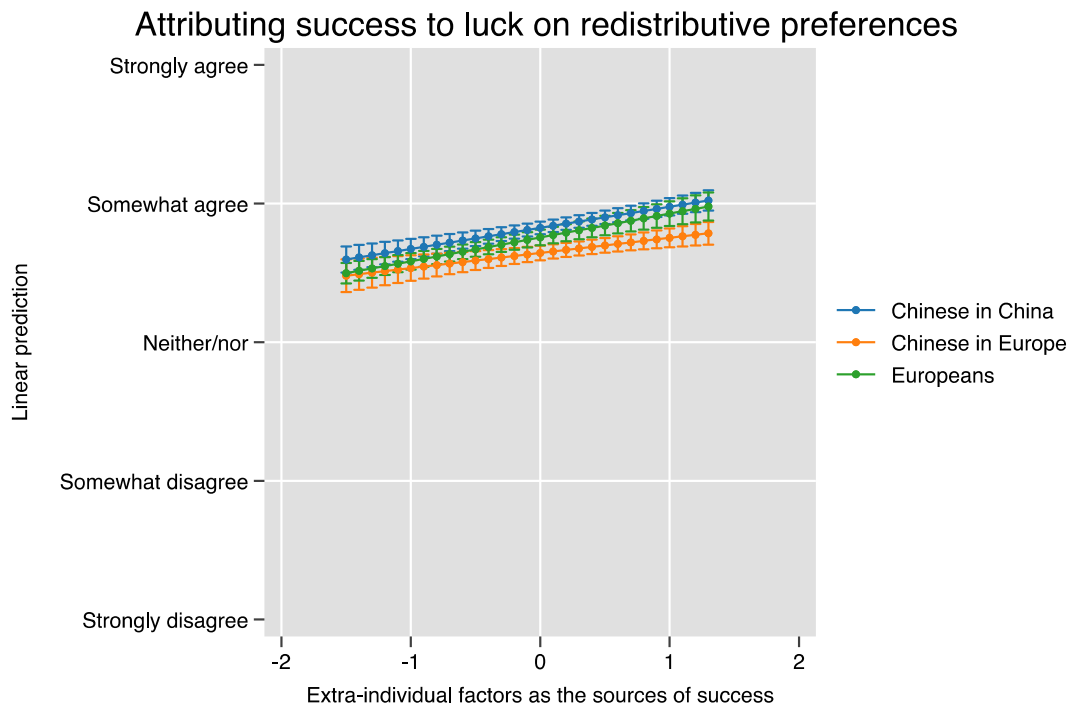


Legend: Confidence intervals correspond to 95%.  
 Estimates from Models 1 and 2 shown in Table A.3 in the Appendix.

We further consider whether recognizing extra-individual factors in one's success changes their view on redistribution. As Sauder (2020) argues, the problem with dominant meritocratic frames is that they hide elements such as luck, social connections, and systemic failures, which sociologists have documented all so well play a signifi-

cant role in getting ahead in life. There is, for example, empirical evidence that people who regard luck as a factor in getting ahead are more supportive of redistributive and preferential policies for the disadvantaged (Fong 2001, Wilkins and Wegner 2014). If people acknowledge factors external to their control and responsibility, they may be more willing to support policies and structures to alleviate the resulting inequalities. We test this possibility, as shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. The effect of attributing success to luck on redistributive preferences (controls for age, gender, parental education and occupation, and enrolment in a highly ranked university [top 150 in QS ranking])**



Legend: Confidence intervals correspond to 95%.  
Estimates from the Model in Table A.4 in the Appendix.

Indeed, our findings indicate that across all student groups, the more they agree on the role of luck in achieving success, the more they are likely to support redistributive policies. Notably, this relationship holds even for European students, among whom we have shown that attributing success to effort tends to reduce their support for redistribution.

## **5. Reflections on findings**

1. In the prevailing neoliberal cultural order, agentic citizenship holds substantial legitimacy, endorsed widely by international organizations of various sorts, expert perspectives, and governmental policies. We offer evidence regarding its enactments by individuals. Expanding our view beyond the liberal Western context, we observe remarkably standardized agentic and meritocratic self-perceptions among higher education students, even within a non-liberal and culturally collectivist setting such as China. Further research is essential to ascertain whether the patterns we have identified within our sample extend across a broader range of countries.

2. As a highly globalized institution, the university is a catalyst in the diffusion of the agentic, meritocratic citizenship model. This study points to robust empirical regularity of agentic and meritocratic orientations, controlling for parental backgrounds, not only across different higher education systems but also across differently ranked universities, which suggests the effect of the university as an institution (independent of national contexts), rather than an effect of the university as an organization and its resources.

3. By design, our study focuses on higher education students, an already selected group of individuals. In additional checks, using World Values Survey data (in all years), we found that among the general population, younger cohorts in both China and Western liberal democracies tend to display more agentic self-perceptions (characterized by traits like aspirations, creativity, and a willingness to take risks). However, the influence of higher education on agentic self-concepts is more pronounced in China than in Western liberal democracies, even among younger cohorts. Further comparative research involving broader segments of the general population and various organizational settings beyond universities (such as transnationally oriented professions) is necessary to validate the role of higher education in the diffusion of agentic and meritocratic models.

4. Our analyses have not identified significant differences between Chinese students studying in China and those studying abroad in Europe regarding their agentic and

meritocratic orientations, or national attachments. This similarity persists even after accounting for factors such as parental educational and occupational backgrounds, posited to select students to international education trajectories (Cebolla Boado and Soysal 2023). International mobility may not play as transformative a role in individual self-constructions as commonly argued in the general literature, particularly among the highly educated.

5. Regarding the connection between agentic and meritocratic orientations and solidaristic attachments, we identify distinct patterns among European and Chinese students. Among European students, adopting an agentic stance aligns with a global outlook, but embracing meritocratic beliefs tends to undermine their commitment to social redistribution. On the other hand, among Chinese students, it appears axiomatic to position themselves as agentic and meritocratic individuals while concurrently maintaining a robust national orientation and sense of redistributive solidarity. These findings suggest significant contextual differences and the need to further unpack the relationship between agentic citizenship, global and national attachments, and their impact on solidaristic commitments.

6. Agentic citizenship, bolstered by the cultural narratives and policies of neoliberalism, places a strong emphasis on individual self-control and responsibility while downplaying the significance of external factors that shape life outcomes. We find that acknowledging luck as a contributing factor to success is associated with increased support for redistributive policies among both Chinese and European student groups. Notably, within our sample, Chinese students not only overwhelmingly believe in the importance of hard work and effort but also agree with the significance of external factors like social backgrounds, networks, and luck (see also Bubak 2019). A substantial percentage of Chinese students, approximately 70% to 80%, regard these external factors as very or extremely important for achieving success. In contrast, only 35% to 40% of European students share this perspective. This discrepancy underscores the nuanced contextual differences and invites further attention to varying interpretations of agentic citizenship cross-nationally.

7. The posited detrimental impact of meritocratic beliefs on individual mental well-being does not manifest within our sample. Determining the psychological effects of meritocratic beliefs requires more comprehensive data and analysis. It remains a plausible hypothesis that the agentic and self-assured self-perceptions we observed in our sample might offset the anticipated adverse effects of meritocratic orientations on mental well-being.



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## Appendix

**Table A.1. OLS regressions on selected synthetic indexes**

|  |                    | Agentic individuality |          | Self efficacy |          | Meritocracy |          |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|----------|---------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Group<br>(Ref. Chinese in China)                 | Chinese in Europe  | 0.100*                | (0.040)  | 0.029         | (0.042)  | -0.12*      | (0.054)  |
|  | Europeans          | 0.32*                 | (0.040)  | 0.15*         | (0.042)  | -0.58*      | (0.054)  |
| Age  |                    | 0.021*                | (0.0037) | 0.021*        | (0.0037) | -0.012*     | (0.0049) |
| Female   |                    | -0.089*               | (0.025)  | -0.12*        | (0.025)  | 0.17*       | (0.033)  |
| Parental occupation<br>(Ref. Professional/techn) | Clerical/service   | 0.041                 | (0.034)  | -0.036        | (0.033)  | -0.035      | (0.045)  |
|  | Worker/farmer      | -0.044                | (0.038)  | -0.074        | (0.038)  | -0.028      | (0.051)  |
| Parental education<br>(Ref. Primary or less)     | Secondary          | 0.046                 | (0.041)  | 0.038         | (0.041)  | -0.0031     | (0.055)  |
|  | Tertiary education | 0.069                 | (0.048)  | 0.033         | (0.048)  | -0.11       | (0.065)  |
| QS ranking<br>(Ref. Top 150)                     | Other QS-ranked    | -0.042                | (0.036)  | -0.038        | (0.036)  | -0.027      | (0.048)  |
|  | Non-ranked         | -0.028                | (0.039)  | -0.070        | (0.039)  | 0.021       | (0.052)  |
| Constant   |                    | -0.050                | (0.063)  | -0.39*        | (0.10)   | 0.28*       | (0.084)  |
| Model info.                                      | N                  | 6331                  |          | 6347          |          | 6343        |          |
|  | F                  | 18.0                  |          | 17.0          |          | 30.9        |          |
|  | R <sup>2</sup>     | 0.025                 |          | 0.026         |          | 0.042       |          |

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05

**Table A.2. OLS regressions on the synthetic index of national pride**

|  |                    | National pride |          |
|--|--------------------|----------------|----------|
| Group<br>( <i>Ref. Chinese in China</i> )                  | British            | -1.07*         | (0.024)  |
|  | Germans            | -1.27*         | (0.038)  |
| Age  |                    | -0.017*        | (0.0025) |
| Female   |                    | -0.096*        | (0.018)  |
| Parental occupation<br>( <i>Ref. Professional /techn</i> ) | Clerical/service   | -0.0018        | (0.024)  |
|  | Worker/farmer      | 0.015          | (0.027)  |
| Parental education<br>( <i>Ref. Primary or less</i> )      | Secondary          | -0.0091        | (0.029)  |
|  | Tertiary education | -0.0075        | (0.035)  |
| QS ranking<br>( <i>Ref. Top 150</i> )                      | Other QS-ranked    | 0.046          | (0.026)  |
|  | Non-ranked         | 0.16*          | (0.024)  |
| Constant   |                    | 0.66*          | (0.074)  |
| Model info.  | N                  | 6223           |          |
|  | F                  | 404.5          |          |
|  | R <sup>2</sup>     | 0.39           |          |

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05

**Table A.3. OLS regressions; attributing success to hard work on mental distress (M1) and redistributive preferences (M2)**

|  |                             | Mental distress (M1) |          | Redistributive preferences (M2) |          |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Hard work as source of success                             |                             | -0.048*              | (0.016)  | 0.13*                           | (0.017)  |
| Group<br>( <i>Ref. Chinese in China</i> )                  | Chinese in Europe           | 0.27*                | (0.040)  | -0.17*                          | (0.041)  |
|  | Europeans                   | 0.30*                | (0.040)  | -0.15*                          | (0.041)  |
| *interactions  | Chinese in Europe*hard work | -0.0058              | (0.025)  | -0.033                          | (0.026)  |
|  | Europeans *hard work        | 0.015                | (0.024)  | -0.17*                          | (0.025)  |
| Age  |                             | -0.021*              | (0.0035) | 0.014*                          | (0.0035) |
| Female   |                             | 0.11*                | (0.023)  | 0.030                           | (0.024)  |
| Parental occupation<br>( <i>Ref. Professional /techn</i> ) | Clerical/service            | -0.0072              | (0.031)  | 0.083*                          | (0.032)  |
|  | Worker/farmer               | 0.050                | (0.036)  | 0.15*                           | (0.037)  |
| Parental education<br>( <i>Ref. Primary or less</i> )      | Secondary                   | -0.068               | (0.039)  | 0.048                           | (0.039)  |
|  | Tertiary education          | -0.068               | (0.046)  | 0.054                           | (0.046)  |
| QS ranking<br>( <i>Ref. Top 150</i> )                      | Other QS-ranked             | 0.021                | (0.033)  | -0.076*                         | (0.034)  |
|  | Non-ranked                  | -0.0065              | (0.036)  | -0.075*                         | (0.037)  |
| Constant   |                             | 0.30*                | (0.097)  | 3.40*                           | (0.099)  |
| Model info.  | N                           | 6248                 |          | 6272                            |          |
|  | F                           | 14.1                 |          | 13.7                            |          |
|  | R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.029                |          | 0.028                           |          |

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05

**Table A.4. OLS regressions; attributing success to luck on redistributive preferences**

|  |                        | Luck   |          |
|--|------------------------|--------|----------|
| Luck as source of success                                  |                        | 0.15*  | (0.026)  |
| Group<br>( <i>Ref. Chinese in China</i> )                  | Chinese in Europe      | -0.18* | (0.041)  |
|  | Europeans              | -0.069 | (0.043)  |
| *Interactions  | luck*Chinese in Europe | -0.043 | (0.040)  |
|  | luck*Europeans         | 0.020  | (0.036)  |
| Age  |                        | 0.014* | (0.0035) |
| Female   |                        | 0.045  | (0.024)  |
| Parental occupation<br>( <i>Ref. Professional /techn</i> ) | Clerical/service       | 0.083* | (0.032)  |
|  | Worker/farmer          | 0.15*  | (0.037)  |
| Parental education<br>( <i>Ref. Primary or less</i> )      | Secondary              | 0.043  | (0.039)  |
|  | Tertiary education     | 0.032  | (0.046)  |
| QS ranking<br>( <i>Ref. Top 150</i> )                      | Other QS-ranked        | -0.065 | (0.034)  |
|  | Non-ranked             | -0.047 | (0.037)  |
| Constant   |                        | 3.41*  | (0.099)  |
| Model information  | N                      | 6258   |          |
|  | F                      | 14.2   |          |
|  | R <sup>2</sup>         | 0.029  |          |

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05

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