

## **BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES OF CHINESE REGARDING HYPNOSIS AND ITS APPLICATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the current study is to broadly consider the beliefs and attitudes of Hong Kong Chinese, regarding the notion of hypnosis and its applications. Particular attention is given to a comparison between the data of the current Chinese sample and those obtained by Western studies. Parameters such as self-perceived hypnotizability and psychology training are also examined. Four hundred and fifty-seven college students in Hong Kong were included in the study, and widely used inventories were adopted to measure their beliefs and attitudes towards hypnosis and its applications. While participants' beliefs in regards to the general nature of hypnosis do not vary significantly according to their cultural background, participants' perceived value of hypnosis and attitudes towards being hypnotized are subject to the effects of psychology training and self-perceived hypnotizability. In addition, a number of significant associations between beliefs and attitudes with regard to hypnosis and its applications were found. This highlights the importance of clearing up the common misunderstanding in hypnotic practice.

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**Key words:** attitudes, beliefs, Chinese, culture, hypnosis, misconceptions

### **Introduction**

Many authors have claimed that people's perceptions of hypnosis are based on myth and misconceptions, and that there is a widespread misunderstanding about hypnosis in the general public (e.g. Kroger, 1963; Marcuse, 1964; Wallace, 1979; Crasilneck, 1985; Pratt, Wood and Alman, 1988; Vingoe, 1995; Page, Handley and Green, 1997; Johnson and Hauk, 1999; Koizumi, 2001). According to Kroger (1963), the public's misperception and the concomitant fears cluster around the loss of control, for example, 'I will reveal secrets'; 'I will be made to do things against my will'; 'the hypnotist will have complete control of my mind'. Most people seem to hold the stereotypical view of hypnosis as a powerful form of mind control, and the most common misconceptions are based on that notion (Udolf, 1981; Wester, 1984; Levitan and Jeven, 1986; Mann, 1986; Yapko, 1995).

Systematic investigations into the misconceptions of hypnosis have hitherto focused on university students and therapists. In two separate studies using the identical set of inventory with 173 American (McConkey, 1986) and 203 Australian psychology student subjects (McConkey and Jupp, 1986) respectively, a considerable number of beliefs and concepts without empirical evidence were revealed. These included the belief that

hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness, wherein subjects experience hypnotic effects without consciously trying to make them happen; that hypnotic suggestions could make subjects recall things that they would not normally remember; and that it could make them tell the truth about things they would normally lie about. In congruence with these aforementioned beliefs and perceptions, the respondents in both studies strongly disagreed that hypnosis is a normal state of consciousness. These opinions, held by the majority of subjects regarding the nature of hypnosis and the impact of hypnotic suggestions, should be, as advised by McConkey, compared with scientific data, inasmuch as these ideas are the subject of much controversy amongst researchers and are by no means verified facts (Scheehan and McConkey, 1982; McConkey and Jupp, 1986). Both studies reported similar findings, and have been further substantiated and supported by Daghish and Wright's study (1991), which found that medical and psychology students ( $N = 184$ ) hold considerable misconceptions about hypnosis in comparison to the general public in Scotland (McIntosh and Hawney, 1983). What is more, there are further studies that implicated that the findings are perhaps of international significance and importance. Indeed, the surveys in Britain, America and Australia have demonstrated that, in many respects, the public conception of the nature of hypnosis (e.g. as an altered state) is different from the traditional and scientific view of hypnosis (see Wagstaff, 1981, 1988; McConkey, 1986; McConkey and Jupp, 1986; Wilson, Greene, and Loftus, 1986; Daghish and Wright, 1991; Vingoe, 1992).

Considering the clinical aspects, Johnson and Hauck's (1999) survey, for instance, indicated that most people have a 'positive' view of the therapeutic benefits, with a vast majority of respondents (total 272 subjects with 97 undergraduate students in introductory psychology) believing that it reduces the time that is usually required to uncover the causes of a subject's problems. They also found that an extremely large portion of the general public views hypnosis as a powerful tool used to recover accurate memories, including memories going back as far as birth or even past lives.

Instead of using McConkey's inventory that was commonly adopted by the studies enumerated above, there is one Asian study (Koizumi, 2001), which investigated 890 Japanese university students' views towards the notion of hypnosis by using a word association test to elicit the images that they would have about the stimulus word 'hypnosis'. The results revealed that a substantial number of subjects deemed hypnosis apprehensive, unreliable and manipulative. Factor analyses were carried out to examine the subjects' attitudes towards the hypnotherapy in relation to counselling, psychological tests, paranormal phenomenon and fortune telling. It was discovered that hypnotherapy was regarded as being placed somewhere between a scientific psychological treatment and a paranormal phenomenon.

Misconceptions and false beliefs on the part of the general public were thought to be at least partly due to stage hypnosis, sensationalistic movies and media stories and superstitions passed from one person to another (Marcuse, 1964; Pratt et al., 1988; Wallace, 1979; Johnson and Hauck, 1999). A surprisingly small number of studies investigated the sources of beliefs and misconceptions about hypnosis. A comparatively comprehensive study comprised of several different population samples (i.e. undergraduates, members of a social club, attendees at a woman's spirituality conference, and members of a retirees association) indicated that although the different sample groups obtained their information about hypnosis from different sources, their beliefs about hypnosis are remarkably consistent (Johnson and Hauck, 1999). This similarity of beliefs may allude to a general consistency in the way that hypnosis is portrayed across different societies and media sources, or that a generic belief about hypnosis exists in American culture and supersedes

the influence of the individual source of information, with reference to Johnson and Hauck (1999).

## Research objectives

The beliefs, misconceptions and attitudes regarding hypnosis of college students, as delineated in preceding sections, have been investigated extensively in Australia, the UK and the USA. In contrast, there have been very few, if any, studies about the misconceptions and attitudes towards hypnosis in Asian countries, in particular, Chinese culture. In filling this gap, the present study strives to provide a preliminary review of the beliefs and attitudes of Hong Kong Chinese, with respect to hypnosis and its applications. Furthermore, the samples in most of the previous studies were composed substantially of psychology students. Note that psychology students are a potentially biased population, and it is reasonable to suppose that relevant information sources are more accessible to them than to the general public. Further investigation is required to clarify this important basic issue.

## Method

### *Design*

In considering the two primary subject matters under enquiry, a total of 457 college students were included in the current study. Participation was completely voluntary. Their consent was obtained and confidentiality was assured prior to the session in which the subjects completed the questionnaire. The instructions of the study were explained to the respondents after distribution of the questionnaires. No discussion about the questionnaires or the research was allowed during the whole session. To ensure a representative of the population, every potential participant was encouraged to participate whether or not they had experience with hypnosis, and regardless of their personal views and thoughts on the topic. Almost all potential subjects participated in the present study, with the dropout rate lower than 2%.

### *Participants*

457 college students in Hong Kong formed the sample, comprised of 153 males (33.5%) and 304 females (66.5%). The number of females far surpassed that of males (binomial test,  $p < 0.001$ ). The average age is 21.32 (SD = 2.27, minimum = 18, maximum = 46). They all came from the same college, but attended different programmes, though the psychology major students constituted a main subgroup in this sample (see Table 1). Both social work and sociology students had taken at least one course in psychology (i.e. introductory psychology), while students from other programmes (e.g. language, economics, etc.) never studied psychology. The number of self-perceived medium hypnotizables outweighed the numbers of high and low cases ( $\chi^2 = 346.86$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 1.** Types of education

| University major          | Frequency | %    |
|---------------------------|-----------|------|
| Psychology                | 198       | 43.3 |
| Social work and sociology | 140       | 30.6 |
| Other subjects            | 119       | 26.1 |
| Total                     | 457       | 100  |

**Table 2.** Self-perceived hypnotizability

| Self-perceived hypnotizability | Frequency | %    |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------|
| Low                            | 61        | 13.3 |
| Medium                         | 342       | 74.8 |
| High                           | 43        | 9.5  |
| Missing                        | 11        | 2.4  |
| Total                          | 457       | 100  |

### *Measures: 55-Item Questionnaire*

The 55-item questionnaire used in this research is primarily composed of three sections, which are intended to measure the general beliefs about hypnosis, the perceived value of hypnosis, and attitudes towards being hypnotized, respectively. The three main sources used for reference are: McConkey (1986), Northcott (1996), and Spanos, Brett, Menary and Cross (1987).

#### Part One: General beliefs about hypnosis

The first part of the protocol is equivalent to McConkey's inventory (1986), which requested that participants indicated their agreement or disagreement on a 4-point scale for each of the 25 statements, concerning the nature, experience, and effects of hypnosis and hypnotic suggestions. In order to standardize the rating methods throughout the whole protocol, the original ratings of McConkey and Jupp were reversed. Thus, the ratings in the present protocol are: 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = agree strongly.

#### Part Two: Beliefs about the 'worth' and 'transcendence' of hypnosis

The original questionnaire containing 48 statements about hypnosis is divided into six dimensions (Northcott, 1996): 'will,' 'worth,' 'transcend,' 'cynical,' 'ASC' and 'weird'. Only two of the six dimensions were adopted in the present study: 'transcend' (describing hypnosis as enabling the enhancement of abilities or achievement of feats not normally achievable) and 'worth' (which concerns the usefulness of hypnosis). In both dimensions, 'worth' and 'transcend,' participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with each of the sixteen statements on a five-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly).

#### Part Three: Attitudes towards hypnosis

The 'Attitudes Towards Hypnosis Scale' developed by Spanos et al. (1987) constitutes the third part of the current questionnaire. The scale is composed of fourteen statements, which the respondents rated using the seven-point scale (from 1 = disagree strongly to 7 = agree strongly). The items assess attraction to hypnosis, perceptions of people who are hypnotizable and fears regarding hypnosis.

## **Results**

### Western students vs Chinese students: general beliefs of hypnosis

The present study results in remarkably similar findings to that of McConkey and Jupp's survey. Resembling mean scores, standard deviations and percentages of agreement are revealed across the twenty-five statements (Table 3). McConkey and Jupp's sample has

higher mean scores in 13 statements out of the 25, while the mean scores of the present study are higher in half the statements. None of the statements show obviously different mean scores (i.e. within 1-point difference). Some differences are even smaller than 0.1 (e.g. statements 13, 15, 17, etc.).

**Table 3.** Western students vs Chinese students: general beliefs

| Statements  | McConkey and Jupp |      | Current study |      |
|---|-------------------|------|---------------|------|
|   | Mean (SD)         | %    | Mean (SD)     | %    |
| <b>Hypnosis</b>   |                   |      |               |      |
| 1. Hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness, it is quite different from normal waking consciousness.   | 3.08 (0.71)       | 82.8 | 2.99 (0.57)   | 86.0 |
| 2. Hypnosis is a normal state of consciousness, it simply involves the focusing of attention.   | 2.25 (0.70)       | 29.6 | 2.44 (0.62)   | 42.8 |
| 3. Hypnosis is a normal state of consciousness, it simply involves being very deeply relaxed.   | 2.46 (0.71)       | 44.8 | 2.66 (0.65)   | 62.4 |
| 4. Hypnosis only involves thinking along with and imagining the suggestions given by the hypnotist.   | 2.26 (0.74)       | 34.5 | 2.77 (0.63)   | 71.1 |
| 5. Hypnosis can be experienced by everyone to a similar degree, under the right circumstances.  | 2.28 (0.80)       | 38.9 | 2.27 (0.63)   | 32.1 |
| 6. Hypnosis can be faked such that an experienced hypnotist could not detect the fake.  | 2.29 (0.78)       | 36.9 | 2.52 (0.67)   | 51.8 |
| <b>The experience</b>   |                   |      |               |      |
| 7. The experience of hypnosis depends on the ability of the subject, not on the ability of the hypnotist.   | 2.40 (0.69)       | 41.9 | 2.28 (0.63)   | 31.5 |
| 8. The experience of hypnosis depends on the ability of the hypnotist, not on the ability of the subject.   | 2.50 (0.66)       | 46.8 | 2.18 (0.61)   | 23.2 |
| <b>During hypnosis</b>  |                   |      |               |      |
| 9. During hypnosis, responsive subjects experience the suggested effects without having to consciously try to make them happen.   | 2.88 (0.64)       | 76.8 | 2.73 (0.53)   | 70.7 |
| 10. During hypnosis, responsive subjects can experience the suggested effects only if they consciously think in a way to help them happen.  | 2.29 (0.65)       | 32.0 | 2.59 (0.56)   | 58.2 |
| 11. During hypnosis, responsive subjects experience the suggested effects as happening involuntarily.   | 2.66 (0.70)       | 63.1 | 2.89 (0.49)   | 83.4 |
| 12. During hypnosis, responsive subjects are aware only of what the hypnotist is suggesting, and are not aware of anything else.  | 2.66 (0.78)       | 60.1 | 2.53 (0.65)   | 51.4 |
| 13. During hypnosis, responsive subjects have a sort of double-awareness where they experience what is suggested but also know things that are in contradiction to the suggestions. | 2.51 (0.71)       | 49.8 | 2.57 (0.61)   | 54.9 |

Contd

**Table 3.** Contd

| Statements   | McConkey and Jupp |      | Current study |      |
|--|-------------------|------|---------------|------|
|  | Mean (SD)         | %    | Mean (SD)     | %    |
| 14. During hypnosis, responsive subjects seem to understand things better.   | 2.52 (0.68)       | 52.7 | 2.35 (0.59)   | 37.0 |
| 15. During hypnosis, responsive subjects feel that everything happens automatically.   | 2.60 (0.58)       | 60.1 | 2.63 (0.63)   | 60.8 |
| 16. During hypnosis, responsive subjects feel that time stands still.  | 2.67 (0.65)       | 63.1 | 2.30 (0.64)   | 35.2 |
| 17. During hypnosis, responsive subjects feel that they are more than one person, with one part experiencing things and the other part observing things. | 2.28 (0.63)       | 32.5 | 2.34 (0.65)   | 37.9 |
| 18. During hypnosis, responsive subjects are not conscious of their surroundings.  | 2.80 (0.73)       | 69.0 | 2.56 (0.66)   | 55.1 |
| Suggestions given  |                   |      |               |      |
| 19. Suggestions given during hypnosis can make responsive subjects insensitive to pain.  | 2.66 (0.76)       | 63.1 | 2.52 (0.68)   | 51.2 |
| 20. Suggestions given during hypnosis can make responsive subjects remember things that they could not normally remember.                                | 3.31 (0.57)       | 94.6 | 3.11 (0.58)   | 90.6 |
| 21. Suggestions given during hypnosis can make responsive subjects tell the truth about things that they would normally lie about.                       | 2.97 (0.69)       | 78.3 | 3.05 (0.54)   | 89.0 |
| 22. Suggestions given during hypnosis can make responsive subjects do things that they would not normally do.  | 2.76 (0.82)       | 67.5 | 2.90 (0.54)   | 82.3 |
| 23. Suggestions given during hypnosis will only work if the subjects want them to work.  | 2.79 (0.78)       | 66.0 | 2.50 (0.66)   | 47.0 |
| 24. Suggestions given during hypnosis cannot be resisted by subjects.  | 2.14 (0.73)       | 31.0 | 2.26 (0.67)   | 33.4 |
| After hypnosis   |                   |      |               |      |
| 25. After hypnosis responsive subjects cannot remember those things that happened during hypnosis.   | 2.57 (0.74)       | 53.7 | 2.39 (0.69)   | 40.4 |

*Note:* For mean ratings, 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = agree strongly; standard deviations appear in parentheses. Percentages reflect those subjects who agree with the statements (i.e. gave a rating of 3 or 4); McConkey used reversed ratings (i.e. 4 = disagree strongly and 1 = agree strongly) and the mean scores of McConkey's study shown in this table were converted accordingly.

In McConkey and Jupp's sample, there are relatively few statements with which respondents either strongly agree or disagree. Most obviously, as mentioned in the introduction, respondents strongly agree with the notions of an altered state (statement 1), automatic hypnotic effects (statement 9), memory recovery (statement 20), and forced truth telling

(statement 21). The student respondents in the current sample show the same strong agreement to precisely the same statements. In addition to these four statements, Chinese students also believe strongly that responsive subjects experience the suggested effects as happening involuntarily (statement 11), and that suggestions given during hypnosis can make responsive subjects do things that they would not normally do (statement 22). Thus, Chinese students agree strongly with six (24%) out of the total 25 statements.

Although the mean scores do not differ obviously in statement 4, a considerable number of Chinese students (71.1%), compared with their Western counterparts (34.5%), deem hypnosis to involve thinking along with and imagining the suggestions given by the hypnotist (statement 4). Moreover, an apparently higher number of respondents in McConkey and Jupp's sample agree that the experience of hypnosis depends on the ability of the hypnotist rather than on the ability of the subject (statement 8). On the whole, however, the cultural background does not appear to be a strong determining factor for the subjects' general beliefs about hypnosis. This seems very clear in view of the conspicuous resemblance between the patterns of beliefs held by individuals from both Western and Eastern cultures.

### Beliefs of worth and transcendence of hypnosis

Direct cultural comparison for the second and third parts of the questionnaire is inappropriate, as no corresponding information has been documented by the relevant Western studies. With regard to the second part of the questionnaire, the respondents exhibit a more apparent recognition of the usefulness of hypnosis, as indicated by statements 27, 28 and 29, whereas in contrast they are less inclined to accept the notion that hypnosis can achieve transcendence (Table 4). The percentages of agreement for the 'transcendence' statements are generally lower than 50. The most obvious exception is statement 38 (age regression), whose mean score and percentage of agreement are relatively high. It is also worth noting that strong agreement with statement 29 is highly consistent with the significant result in statement 20, in the first part of the questionnaire as mentioned above. Both results reflect that a significant number of the respondents believe quite firmly that hypnosis could effectively improve memory.

**Table 4.** Worth and transcendence of hypnosis

| Statements  | Mean (SD)   | %    |
|---|-------------|------|
| Worth   |             |      |
| 26. Hypnosis can help in the treatment of a wide range of problems.                       | 3.56 (0.83) | 63.5 |
| 27. Hypnosis can help in the treatment of psychological problems.                         | 3.97 (0.64) | 88.1 |
| 28. Hypnosis can successfully be used for therapy or counselling.                         | 3.99 (0.59) | 88.6 |
| 29. Hypnosis can make a person remember things that he/she could not remember without it. | 4.03 (0.65) | 90.5 |
| 30. Hypnosis can benefit most people in one way or another.                               | 2.96 (0.74) | 19.0 |
| 31. Hypnosis has a place in modern medicine.  | 3.54 (0.76) | 58.2 |
| 32. Hypnosis can help in the treatment of physical problems.                              | 3.07 (0.87) | 33.4 |
| 33. Hypnosis is a legitimate alternative therapy.   | 3.26 (0.84) | 41.8 |

**Table 4.** Contd

| Statements  | Mean (SD)   | %    |
|---|-------------|------|
| Transcend   |             |      |
| 34. Hypnosis can make the crossover to another plane of existence possible.   | 3.34 (0.87) | 48.6 |
| 35. With hypnosis, previously hidden power in an individual can be tapped.  | 3.64 (0.79) | 69.6 |
| 36. Hypnosis can heighten intellectual ability.   | 2.53 (0.79) | 9.9  |
| 37. Hypnosis can heighten spirituality.   | 2.69 (0.88) | 17.1 |
| 38. Hypnosis can make age regression possible.  | 3.72 (0.77) | 73.7 |
| 39. Hypnosis can produce anaesthesia (total insensitivity to pain).   | 2.75 (0.97) | 24.7 |
| 40. During hypnosis, suggestions can change bodily processes/ responses not ordinarily under voluntary control. (e.g. heart rate, blood pressure, etc.) | 3.09 (0.92) | 38.5 |
| 41. Hypnosis can improve one or more of the human senses.   | 3.12 (0.85) | 35.7 |

*Note:* For mean ratings, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; standard deviations appear in parentheses. Percentages reflect those subjects who agree with the statements (i.e. gave a rating of 4 or 5).

### Attitudes towards hypnosis

Most of the means centre on or around the mid point of 4, apart from statements 42, 48, 49 and 50, all of which seem to illustrate relatively neutral or positive attitudes on the part of the Chinese respondents (Table 5). However, when looking at the percentages of agreement (i.e. score 5 to 7), some potential resistance against the use of hypnosis is revealed. For instance, half of the respondents (49.9%) have some apprehension about hypnosis and being hypnotized, while more than half of the respondents (54.9 %) would attempt to hold themselves back if someone attempted to hypnotize them.

**Table 5.** Means and standard deviations of students: attitudes towards hypnosis

| Attitudes towards hypnosis   | Mean (SD)   | %    |
|--|-------------|------|
| 42. I find the whole idea of becoming hypnotized an attractive prospect.             | 4.92 (1.45) | 66.5 |
| 43. I would like to become deeply hypnotized.  | 4.27 (1.55) | 48.1 |
| 44. I would not mind being known as someone who can be deeply hypnotized.            | 3.82 (1.49) | 31.9 |
| 45. I am totally open to being hypnotized.   | 4.32 (1.47) | 42.9 |
| 46. One's ability to be hypnotized is a sign of their creativity and inner strength. | 4.14 (1.26) | 38.4 |
| 47. I wonder about the mental stability of those who become deeply hypnotized.       | 3.88 (1.35) | 31.3 |
| 48. Those who are easily hypnotized are weak people.                                 | 2.81 (1.50) | 14.9 |

Contd



**Table 5.** Contd

| Attitudes towards hypnosis   | Mean (SD)   | %    |
|--|-------------|------|
| 49. Those who can become deeply hypnotized are as normal and well adjusted as anyone.  | 4.84 (1.26) | 59.7 |
| 50. Intelligent people are the least likely to get hypnotized.   | 3.06 (1.46) | 17.1 |
| 51. I have some apprehensions about hypnosis and being hypnotized.   | 4.53 (1.42) | 49.9 |
| 52. If someone attempted to hypnotize me, I would tend to hold myself back rather than let myself get carried away by the process. | 4.63 (1.41) | 54.9 |
| 53. I'm not afraid of becoming hypnotized.   | 4.09 (1.46) | 40.1 |
| 54. I am wary about becoming hypnotized because it means giving up my free will to the hypnotist.                                  | 3.40 (1.44) | 30.3 |
| 55. A deeply hypnotized person is robot like and goes along automatically with whatever the hypnotist suggests.                    | 3.89 (1.37) | 37.5 |

*Note:* For mean ratings, 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; standard deviations appear in parentheses. Percentages reflect those subjects who agree with the statements (i.e. gave a rating of 5, 6 or 7).

### Psychology major students vs non-psychology major students

In the scales of general beliefs, no significant differences in rating the 25 statements are found between the psychology major students and non-psychology major students, except statement 13 (Mann-Whitney test:  $z = 3.56$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), to the effect that the psychology major students (mean rank: 202.24) believe less than the non-psychology major students (mean rank: 241.14), in the concept of double-awareness. The mean rank differences of most statements are extremely low, with some even lower than 1. Undergraduate training in psychology does not seem to have a significant effect on the general beliefs. Consistently, the diverse academic background of the current sample, as opposed to the circumscribed background of the previous studies accordingly makes no apparent difference in the general beliefs held regarding hypnosis, as outlined at the beginning of the result section.

This picture of similarity between the psychology and non-psychology students, for their general beliefs, is roughly reminiscent in the second part of the questionnaire, which specifically measures beliefs in the value of hypnosis. Only statement 38 (age regression) reaches the significant level of  $p < 0.01$ . Nonetheless, the mean ranks of the psychology major students were higher than those of the non-psychology major students for all 16 but 2 statements (statement 30 and 31).

In contrast, there are clearly significant statistical variations in the 5 out of the 14 attitude statements, which indicate that the psychology major students have both more positive attitudes, (statements 42, 43, 45, 49) and less fear towards the idea of being hypnotized (statement 52; see Table 6). Regardless of the significance levels, the psychology major students' attitudes towards hypnosis tend to be more positive than the non-psychology major students' for all of the 14 statements. Although undergraduate psychology training does not seem to be a strong factor in relation to the general understanding regarding the nature and effects of hypnosis as measured by McConkey's 25 scales and specific beliefs about the usefulness of hypnosis, it is a significant parameter, affecting students' attitudes towards hypnosis.

**Table 6.** Psychology major students vs non-psychology major students: attitudes towards hypnosis

| Attitudes towards hypnosis   | Mann-Whitney Test   |
|--|---|
| 42. I find the whole idea of becoming hypnotized an attractive prospect.   | $z = 3.11; p < 0.01$ (mean rank: psy = 245.36; non-psy = 207.98)  |
| 43. I would like to become deeply hypnotized.  | $z = 2.97; p < 0.01$ (mean rank: psy = 244.50; non-psy = 208.66)  |
| 45. I am totally open to being hypnotized.   | $z = 4.23; p < 0.001$ (mean rank: psy = 252.92; non-psy = 201.99) |
| 49. Those who can become deeply hypnotized are as normal and well adjusted as anyone.  | $z = 3.35; p < 0.001$ (mean rank: psy = 246.24; non-psy = 206.31) |
| 52. If someone attempted to hypnotize me, I would tend to hold myself back rather than let myself get carried away by the process. | $z = 2.66; p < 0.01$ (mean rank: psy = 206.19; non-psy = 238.16)  |

### Self-perceived hypnotizability, and beliefs and attitudes about hypnosis

The stratified low, medium and high self-perceived hypnotizables differ significantly in only one statement (memory recovery) in McConkey and Jupp's scales (statement 20:  $\chi^2 = 15.23$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; mean rank: low = 190.21, medium = 223.39, high = 271.56). In the 'transcendence' and 'worth' scales, significant variations are found between individuals with different levels of self-perceived hypnotizability, for three of the statements (Table 7). There seems to be a tendency, for those that perceive themselves as more susceptible to hypnosis, to concur that hypnosis can facilitate memory recovery and age regression, and can tap previously hidden power. Even more variations are found in the attitude statements, and all 14 statements but 3 reach the significance level (Table 8). Those that believe themselves to be more hypnotizable show a striking propensity to embrace more positive attitudes (e.g. statements 42 and 43) and exhibit less incredulous attitudes (e.g. statements 48 and 50), than those who thought they would be less susceptible to hypnosis. This is displayed by the mean ranks in each significant statement, except for the last one.

**Table 7.** Self-rated hypnotizability vs worth and transcendence of hypnosis

| Worth   | Kruskal-Wallis Test   |
|---|---|
| 29. Hypnosis can make a person remember things that he/she could not remember without it. | $\chi^2 = 18.17$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 190.98;<br>medium = 221.55; high = 274.69) |
| Transcend   |   |
| 35. With hypnosis, previously hidden power in an individual can be tapped.                | $\chi^2 = 22.00$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 164.73;<br>medium = 229.74; high = 257.24) |
| 38. Hypnosis can make age regression possible.  | $\chi^2 = 19.20$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 172.48;<br>medium = 227.20; high = 261.37) |

**Table 8.** Self-rated hypnotizability vs attitudes towards hypnosis

| Attitudes towards hypnosis   | Kruskal-Wallis Test   |
|--|---|
| 42. I find the whole idea of becoming hypnotized an attractive prospect.   | $\chi^2 = 28.30$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 155.35;<br>medium = 228.06; high = 283.90) |
| 43. I would like to become deeply hypnotized.  | $\chi^2 = 16.83$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 177.08;<br>medium = 224.69; high = 279.86) |
| 45. I am totally open to being hypnotized.   | $\chi^2 = 29.40$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 149.58;<br>medium = 230.08; high = 275.99) |
| 46. One's ability to be hypnotized is a sign of their creativity and inner strength.   | $\chi^2 = 13.63$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 176.77;<br>medium = 226.57; high = 265.38) |
| 48. Those who are easily hypnotized are weak people.   | $\chi^2 = 16.49$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 277.43;<br>medium = 218.44; high = 181.95) |
| 49. Those who can become deeply hypnotized are as normal and well adjusted as anyone.  | $\chi^2 = 12.14$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.01$<br>(Mean rank: low = 182.77;<br>medium = 224.45; high = 268.56)  |
| 50. Intelligent people are the least likely to get hypnotized.   | $\chi^2 = 14.71$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 268.84;<br>medium = 220.97; high = 174.06) |
| 52. If someone attempted to hypnotize me, I would tend to hold myself back rather than let myself get carried away by the process. | $\chi^2 = 11.96$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.01$<br>(Mean rank: low = 266.80;<br>medium = 220.22; high = 182.93)  |
| 53. I'm not afraid of becoming hypnotized.   | $\chi^2 = 14.38$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.001$<br>(Mean rank: low = 175.25;<br>medium = 225.90; high = 267.78) |
| 54. I am wary about becoming hypnotized because it means giving up my free will to the hypnotist.                                  | $\chi^2 = 11.49$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.01$<br>(Mean rank: low = 262.43;<br>medium = 221.57; high = 178.43)  |
| 55. A deeply hypnotized person is robot like and goes along automatically with whatever the hypnotist suggests.                    | $\chi^2 = 9.88$ ; $df = 2$ ; $p < 0.01$<br>(Mean rank: low = 246.45;<br>medium = 213.09; high = 268.35)   |

### Associations between beliefs and attitudes

The idea that hypnosis is a normal state of consciousness (statements 2 and 3) is positively associated with credulous attitudes (statements 43, 44, 45, 46, and 53, average  $p < 0.01$ ), and negatively associated with sceptical attitudes and fears (statements 48 and 51, average  $p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, the belief in the power of irresistible hypnotic suggestions (statement 24) has strong associations with negative attitudes and apprehensions [statement 47 ( $r_s = 0.12$ ;  $n = 457$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), statement 54 ( $r_s = 0.141$ ;  $n = 456$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and statement 55 ( $r_s = 0.304$ ;  $n = 456$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )]. The thought that suggestions given

during hypnosis can make responsive subjects do things that they would not normally do (statement 22) is shown to be significantly related to robot like feeling [statement 55 ( $r_s = 0.179$ ;  $n = 456$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )]. Statement 25, the amnesia of events during hypnosis, has the highest frequency of significant correlations with the attitude scales, that is, half of the whole 14 scales. Obviously, these are largely characterized by the direct proportion of negative attitudes (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Correlations with statement 25

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 47. I wonder about the mental stability of those who become deeply hypnotized.                                  | $r_s = 0.148$ ; $n = 455$ ; $p < 0.01$  |
| 48. Those who are easily hypnotized are weak people.  | $r_s = 0.167$ ; $n = 454$ ; $p < 0.001$ |
| 50. Intelligent people are the least likely to get hypnotized.  | $r_s = 0.234$ ; $n = 454$ ; $p < 0.001$ |
| 51. I have some apprehensions about hypnosis and being hypnotized.  | $r_s = 0.191$ ; $n = 454$ ; $p < 0.001$ |
| 53. I'm not afraid of becoming hypnotized.  | $r_s = -0.132$ ; $n = 454$ ; $p < 0.01$ |
| 54. I am wary about becoming hypnotized because it means giving up my free will to the hypnotist.               | $r_s = 0.164$ ; $n = 454$ ; $p < 0.001$ |
| 55. A deeply hypnotized person is robot like and goes along automatically with whatever the hypnotist suggests. | $r_s = 0.365$ ; $n = 454$ ; $p < 0.001$ |

Notwithstanding a number of significant associations, most of the beliefs and attitudes are just mildly associated. Subjects' ratings of agreement for the 55 statements were subjected to a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (i.e. psychology training, gender and self-perceived hypnotizability). No significant two- and three-way interaction effects are found for all the 55 statements.

## Discussion

Interestingly and intriguingly, the present study revealed that Chinese embrace virtually the same set of misconceptions about hypnosis found in many other studies. These include: the medical and psychology students (Daglish and Wright, 1991); the general public in Scotland (McIntosh and Hawney, 1983); and the studies conducted in America (McConkey, 1986) and Australia (Channon, 1984; McConkey and Jupp, 1986). This study constitutes the first important look at cross-cultural international replication of Chinese versus English speaking populations. Johnson and Hauck (1999) postulated that in American culture, general consistencies in the way different sources portray hypnosis, or the existence of a prevalent belief about hypnosis, supersede the influence of an individual source of information. Such a striking resemblance of beliefs across different cultures and people, as shown unequivocally by the current study, seems to tempt one to further conjecture that there are identical processes or mechanisms underlying all these misconceptions.

Besides the extremely widespread altered-state belief that has long been and remains at present the subject of much controversy and debate among researchers, a significant number of Chinese student respondents thought that hypnosis could improve memory,

and quite congruently Chinese respondents believed strongly in the idea of age regression. This mirrors McConkey and Jupp's report that psychology students believed that hypnosis could enhance a witness's recollection of events (McConkey and Jupp 1985). The same result was also documented by Daglish and Wright (1991), McConkey (1986), as well as Wilson et al. (1986). This obviously pervasive opinion exists despite long-standing evidence that hypnosis does not improve memory (see Orne, Soskis, Dinges and Orne, 1984, for a review).

Both Daglish and Wright (1991) and McConkey and Jupp (1986) found that those who rated themselves as being of medium hypnotizability showed less accurate knowledge about hypnosis than those who rated themselves as either high or low. Daglish and Wright (1991) conjectured that those who knew least about hypnosis and hypnotizability were rating themselves as medium, rather than that people of medium self-estimated hypnotizability knowing less about hypnosis, or perceiving it differently. Neither case is applicable to the present Chinese sample, however. The current findings show quite the reverse. The self-perceived medium (and low) hypnotizables seem to adopt a relatively more sceptical point of view, which is possibly a more 'accurate' view of hypnosis. These subjects were least inclined to believe, for example, that the experience of hypnosis depends on the ability of the hypnotist but not on the ability of the subject. On the other hand, the self-perceived highs seem to adopt much more 'positive' attitudes towards the uses of hypnosis.

Encouragingly, the psychology students in the current Chinese sample do show more positive attitudes towards hypnosis and are more open to the idea of being hypnotized, though apparently psychology training does not necessarily ensure correct beliefs and perspectives about hypnosis, or help one to avoid misconceptions. In addition, a number of significant associations between the beliefs and attitudes found in the present study highlight the importance of clearing up the common misunderstanding of hypnosis in clinical works.

Although McConkey's inventory is widely used and relatively reliable, there are perhaps some beliefs about hypnosis, which are equally important and may vary with different cultures or backgrounds, not included in this inventory (i.e. 'worth' and 'transcendence' and attitude scales). It may also be worth noting that some of the questions in McConkey's inventory ask about the *nature* of hypnosis – something that the general population and even professionals have hitherto not been ready to answer. Some of the 'misconceptions' are after all not misconceptions at all, but instead controversies, which are still perplexing the experts today.

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