

A Comparison of Attitudes Toward Women as Managers in China and in the U.S.

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A cross-cultural comparison of attitudes toward women in management was conducted through a survey on Chinese and American managerial employees. The survey shows that American respondents have more positive attitudes toward women as managers than Chinese due to differences in cultural heritage, traditions, and women's conditions. Our analysis also reveals that women's participation in management is a common issue facing women worldwide.

Introduction

With the development of economic integration and globalization in the world, more and more women are entering the job market in many countries. The factors that drive women into the workforce include economic conditions, a sense of devaluation of the domestic role, and a desire of self-fulfillment (Murgai, 1999). Women's participation in management jobs has become an increasingly important issue in the corporate world. A common finding shows that women are underrepresented in management all over the world although the degree may vary from country to country (Chen, Yu, and Miner 1997; Adler and Izraeli, 1988). This is a result of differences in cultural traditions, social systems, economic systems, and women's conditions among countries. The purpose of this study is to compare attitudes toward women in management in the U.S. and in China based on a survey of American and Chinese managers and professionals.

China is rapidly becoming an economic power in the world economy and its huge market attracts many American businesses (Phillips, 1999). The U.S. has granted permanent normal trade relations to China and this will create more commercial opportunities for American and Chinese companies (Lawrence, 2000). A 1999 survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in China showed that, while 58% of its members had lower profit margins there than in other global operations, 88% had plans to expand (Holland, 2000). This research addresses the problem of under-utilizing the talents of women in managerial positions, especially in top management positions, and highlights an important issue—women as managers in China and in the U.S.

Women in China

Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, China has promulgated a series of laws and regulations to establish, increase, and protect Chinese women's social status and rights and interests. The most important of these are the China Constitution and the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women. For example, among the 54 articles of the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women, 75 percent of the Law lists in detail the consequences and legal responsibilities for infringements, thus providing an operational legal basis for enforcement of the law. The legitimate rights of women established by Chinese laws can be summed up as follows: women enjoy equal political rights, working rights, and property rights with men and also equal rights with men with respect to culture and education, in marriage and the family, and relating to their persons.

In addition, China has also taken an active part in international women's activities and become a signatory nation to international conventions. China was one of the first signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, took part in formulating and examining the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women of the Year 2000, and ratified the Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value released by the International Labor Organization in 1990. Accordingly, China has enacted laws and adopted policies about women's equal rights with men and submitted timely reports on its implementation of the principle of non-discrimination against women as required by international conventions.

Clearly, the social status of Chinese women has changed dramatically in recent years. For centuries, a woman with bound feet was considered to be the typical Chinese woman. In New China, women are said to hold up half the sky; this expression amplifies the praise that members of the present society bestow upon women. According to the latest statistics published by China State Press in October 2000, China has a total of 330 million working women, accounting for 46.6% of total workforce in the world's most populated country, comparing with 45% in 1990, 45.7% in 1995, and 46.5% in 1999. Female employees in China increased over 17.7 million from 1995 to present time (Agency France Press, 2000).

During the 1990s, the majority of the labor force in China's rural areas were women. In China's countryside, about 200 million women are engaging in various forms of labor, of which 40 million women are working in China's township enterprises. In certain industries or fields, the percentage of women laborers has exceeded men. For example, 95.2% in pre-school education, 75.8% in handicraft production, 74.4% in tailoring industry, 66.4% in textile industry, 66.1% in manufacturing of cultural and sports articles, 61.4% in leather products industry and 57.9% in the printing industry, and 56% in health, athletics, and social welfare (The All-China Women Federation, 1998).

China, as a developing country with over five thousand (5000) years of history, is heavily influenced by old traditions. One factor that prevents women from participating in management jobs is education. In the feudal ages, illiterate women were appreciated by society and men. As a result, women came to bear the sole responsibility of caring for their husbands and families. Half a century ago, 90% of Chinese women were uneducated. The present average schooling for Chinese females over 15 years old is 6.5 years. According to the All-China Women's Federation, in 1999 the percentage of girls receiving education in elementary schools, middle schools and higher levels were 39.2%, 45.9%, and 47.6% while the percentage of female graduate students and undergraduate students account for 30% and 36% of the totals respectively. The level of education for Chinese women is still lagging far behind developed countries. For instance, 60% of Japanese women receive higher education in two-year institutes.

Women in the U.S.

The workforce in the U.S. and women's role in management have undergone major changes in the past half century. About 50 years ago, the majority of children lived in traditional families with the father working and the mother staying at home. Now women comprise about 46% of the workforce in the U.S. (Prescott, 1999). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, there were 61 million working women in the U.S. in 1998. Traditionally the jobs that have been associated with women are secretaries, cashiers, nurses, teachers, and waitresses. Labor statistics revealed that women made up 99% of secretaries, 67% of nurses, and 60% of sales workers in 1992. As Prescott states, the old adage "the more things change, the more things stay the same" is still true for many working women today.

Those traditional jobs mentioned above are still the leading occupations for women while women are underrepresented in certain nontraditional jobs. For instance, women occupied 1% of auto mechanics, 4% of sheet metal workers, 11% of police officers, and 20% of dentists in 1998. The striking fact is that women continue to make less money than men. In 1998, women earned only 76% of what men earned. The median weekly wage was \$456 for a full-time working woman, \$468 for white women, \$400 for black women, and \$337 for Hispanic women. The median weekly wage is \$598 for men in average, \$468 for black men, and \$390 for Latino men. Women managers earned about 68% of what white male managers earned in 1996 (Prescott, 1999).

In breaking through the "glass ceiling" to management positions, U.S. women have made more progress than women worldwide, comprising 46% of the managerial workforce while the average female participation in management jobs worldwide was 20% (Bolger, 1997). However, most of women in managerial jobs in the U.S. are in technical, sales, and administrative support jobs and are in fields where proportionately more women work as employees such as medicine and health, finance and accounting, and personnel and training. Women managers are scarce in the Internet industry and women are less likely to become managers in manufacturing and construction (Griffith 2000, Prescott, 1999). Woman managers in top management positions such as CEOs and COOs are still very low.

Catalyst, Inc., a not-for-profit research and advisory organization that focuses on issues concerning women managers and professionals found that women made up about 5% of senior management positions (vice president level and above) in Fortune 500/Service 500 companies in 1990 while the Glass Ceiling Commission reported that women represented 3 to 5% of senior managers in major corporations. In terms of the highest level of corporate governance, the Board of Directors level, the Catalyst Census revealed that women hold slightly more than one in ten board seats at today's Fortune 500 companies (671 of 6,064 or 11.1%), in comparison with 10.6% in 1997, 10.2% in 1996, 9.5% in 1995, 8.7% in 1994 and 8.3% in 1993. Eighty-six percent (429) of Fortune 500 companies have at least one female director (Catalyst, 1998). Furthermore, in global business, the percentage of female managers is much lower than male managers despite the need for more global managers. Women currently make up only 13% of expatriates in U.S. corporations while making up half of managers and professionals in middle management (Catalyst, 2000).

Method

This study compares the attitudes that managerial and professional employees in China and the United States have toward women in managerial positions. The Chinese results were compared to a previous study conducted in the U.S. (Srinivas, et al., 1998).

Sample

The participants in the study were professionals and managerial employees from China and the United States. One hundred and one (101) managers and professionals in China and 288 in the U.S. completed the survey. Women constituted 24.2% of the Chinese sample and approximately 53% of the U.S. sample. All Chinese participants surveyed received higher education with associate, bachelor, master, or Ph.D. degrees.

Questionnaire

The Attitude Toward Women as Managers (ATWAM) questionnaire (Yost & Herbert, 1985) was administered in Chinese in China and included demographic data, measures on

attitudes toward women as managers, and questions on having female supervisors or female mentors. The survey was translated from English to Chinese by one of the authors and back to English by another person to ensure the translation accuracy.

The ATWAM questionnaire included twelve sets of questions and each set had three statements. The survey instrument used a forced-choice format for each of the three statements. Respondents were asked to indicate the statement that they agreed with the most and the one that they agreed with the least. The reliability and validity of the ATWAM scale have been established through prior research (Yost & Herbert, 1985).

Results

The ATWAM scale was categorized according to positive/favorable attitudes, neutral attitudes, and negative/unfavorable attitudes toward women as managers. The range for the ATWAM scale is from 10 to 70. Scores under 30 display a positive or favorable attitude toward women in managerial positions. Scores between 30-40 display a neutral attitude toward women as managers. Scores over 40 display a negative or unfavorable attitude toward women in managerial positions.

Accumulated data were initially compared to identify differences between the Chinese and U.S. samples in their attitudes toward women as managers. Table 1 below shows the results. In our study, we excluded the participants who did not answer all items on the ATWAM scale. Ninety-nine (99) participants surveyed completed all items on the ATWAM questionnaire and were included in our analysis.

Table 1: Differences in ATWAM for the Chinese and U.S. Managers

Participants	N	Favorable		Neutral		Unfavorable	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
China	99	7	7.1	46	46.5	46	46.5
U.S.	288	131	46	139	48	18	6

The results show that the U.S. sample has more favorable attitudes toward women in management. Approximately 7.1% of Chinese respondents in this group and 46% of U.S. respondents indicated that they had favorable attitudes toward women in management.

A previous study (Allen et al, 1997), which focused on U.S. participants, indicated that several variables including gender, level of education, experience working for a female manager, and experience having a female mentor, positively related to ATWAM. Both men and women managers with more education tended to have more positive attitudes toward women as managers. Additionally, the previous study found that being a woman, or having worked for a female manager, or having a female mentor tended to create a more positive attitude toward women as managers (Allen et al, 1997).

Table 2 compares differences between Chinese men and women in their attitudes toward women as managers. No men in the Chinese sample had positive attitudes toward ATWAM while about 29% of women had positive attitudes toward ATWAM.

Table 2: Differences in ATWAM for Chinese Male and Female Managers

Participants	N	Favorable		Neutral		Unfavorable	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	99	7	7.1	46	46.45	46	46.45
Women	24	7	29.2	15	62.5	2	8.3
Men	75	0	0	31	41.3	44	58.7

In this present study, a chi-square analysis of the Chinese sample was conducted to identify any positive relationship between gender, education, experience working for a female manager and ATWAM. The chi-square analysis shows that only the gender variable had significant relationship to positive attitudes toward women as managers ($P < 0.01$ and the calculated chi-square test statistic value of 33.54 > the chi-square critical value of 9.21). Women had much more favorable attitudes than men toward women as managers. The chi-square test results also indicate that among men and women who had unfavorable attitudes, women were less unfavorable than men toward women as managers.

We combined the Chinese respondents with associate and bachelor degrees in one group and the respondents with master and Ph.D. degrees in another group in our chi-square analysis. No significant relationship was found between educational level and attitudes toward women in management ($P > 0.05$ and the calculated chi-square value of 0.67 < the chi-square critical value of 5.99). As noted earlier, all participants in the Chinese sample received higher education; 60.6% had bachelor degrees, 28.3% had master degrees, 8% had associate degrees, and 8% had Ph.D. degrees. This fact might explain why there was no significant relationship between education and ATWAM.

Finally, our analysis found no significant relationship between working for a female manager and ATWAM ($P > .05$ and the calculated chi-square value of 0.08 < the chi-square critical value of 5.99). Although there were minor violations of the chi-square assumptions, we feel the results will not change since the chi-square value of 0.8 is very weak. It should be pointed out that only 46.5% of the Chinese participants had worked for a female manager while 86% of the U.S. respondents in the U.S. sample had worked for a female manager.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although the small Chinese sample may tell only part of the story about Chinese attitudes toward women in managerial positions, our further analysis of the issue reveals more interesting differences beyond the survey between China and U.S. with respect to women's status in society and women's participation in management jobs. In China, it is China's policy that mandates social acceptance of women's roles in society and in management. It is Chinese administrative intervention with a quota requirement that assures women's participation in managerial and professional jobs in state-owned enterprises and in governmental offices.

According to the All-China Women's Federation, women made up 34% of the total number of administrators and managers or cadres in governmental offices at various levels, state-owned entities and enterprises and professional research institutes. Female scientists comprise 36% of the country's total (Xinhua, 2000). However, women cannot shake off the

yoke of the feudal ethics without transforming people's mindsets. Many Chinese people have not changed their mentality toward women's roles in the family, workplace, and society. Our survey shows that 62.5% of the Chinese female respondents hold neutral attitudes toward women as managers while 29.2% have positive attitudes. Approximately, 58.7% of male respondents have unfavorable attitudes toward woman as managers while 41.3% surveyed take a neutral stand. None of the males surveyed supported women as managers.

Chinese respondents' attitudes toward women as managers are not as positive as American respondents. Family value is the core of traditional Chinese civilization, which believes that women should contribute greatly to the well-being of the family. A good wife must possess chastity, beauty, submissiveness, and diligence. Even though the influence of western culture has changed the face of China's tradition in many aspects, "the traditional values are still strong but adjusted into a slightly different modern version: educated beauty with traditional values" (Yang, 2000). Chinese women can work nowadays but still do most of the chores at home. The double burden of career and family is another barrier for women to assume managerial jobs.

With the transition of China's economic system from a centrally planned economy to market economy, the influence of the administrative power on women's employment and promotion is diminishing and Chinese women find themselves caught between two economic systems. The old state-owned enterprises with secure jobs and social benefits are in decline while widespread layoffs have become a serious threat for women. "Women's jobs tend to be simple, and auxiliary, concentrated in the service sector, and lack development potential" (Gyorgy, 1998). It is very challenging and difficult to try to increase the percentage of women as managers while they are struggling to keep their jobs.

While Chinese women depend more on vested rights and supports from the state policies for women's participation in managerial positions, American women are more individualistic and independent. The issues for American women managers that strive for women's managerial positions are salary increases, entering top management positions, and increasing the number of minority women in management positions. While companies have made efforts to promote more women and minorities and diversify their top management, minority women managers and professionals are lagging behind both white women and minority men in the kind of jobs they hold and the pay they receive.

According to a 1999 American survey, the largest of its kind, many minority women managers and professionals surveyed felt that their company's diversity programs are largely ineffective and say that opportunities have not improved the last five years (Abelson, 1999). In responding to discrimination and inflexibility toward women in workplace, a phenomena worth noting is that more and more American women started their own businesses. In 1999, there were 9.1 million women-owned businesses representing 38% of all business, employing 27.5 million people, and generating more than \$3.6 trillion in sales annually (Prescott, 1999).

Sheila Wellington, President of Catalyst, Inc., states that "There are more similarities among women across borders and overseas than there are differences" when comparing "women's career experiences, their success factors, and the barriers they perceive" across cultures. Women are still excluded from senior positions and are clustered in occupations that are segregated by gender (Bolger, 1999).

The percentages of women's positions as corporate officers are 11.8% in the U.S. and 12% in Canada while the numbers of line positions for women are 6.8% in the U.S. and 6.4% in Canada. Among Canada's 560 largest companies, nearly half of Canada's largest companies (244) have no women officers. In Canada, women hold 12% of corporate officer

positions—690 out of 5,746 corporate officers in Canada's 560 largest companies surveyed, according to Catalyst census in 2000. The percentage of women directors of companies in Japan was 13% in 1997 while a survey of 300 UK companies shows that 3% of board members were women in 1996. A similar pattern holds in other European countries (Bolger, 1997). Linda Wirth, author of the International Labor Organization report, points out that "Almost universally, women have failed to reach leading positions in major corporations and private sector organizations" regardless their abilities or education (Wirth, 1997).

We conclude that women worldwide face similar issues although the degree of seriousness of the problem might vary. Different cultural heritages and historical traditions and differences in women's conditions among countries contribute to different attitudes toward women as managers in different countries. Chinese women need some changes in their socialization in order to prepare themselves through education and learning to compete with men in the market economy on an equal footing. The nature and extent of this change in socialization is a challenge that management educators should address and research.

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