

Attitudes Toward Women as Managers In China: An Examination of Gender, Age, and Work Status Differences

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A number of studies around the world have examined the attitudes toward women as managers. These studies have focused on developed as well as developing economies. The general consensus is that negative attitudes persist across various cultures. While the focus of most of these studies have been on gender differences, this study examined the impact of age and work status as differentiators of the attitudes toward women as managers. Results indicate that consistent with previous studies, men have more negative attitudes toward women as managers in China. Results also indicate that life stage affects Chinese attitudes toward women as managers.

Keywords: China, Women as Managers, Sex, Gender, Age, Working Status

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the differences between men and women have been used as excuses to exclude females from certain jobs. Occupational segregation is the term that has been used to describe the heavy concentrations of men and women into different job categories. For example, occupational segregation supposedly explains why men dominate top-level managerial positions while women are often consigned to other occupations with lower pay, status, and responsibility. The low number of women in top managerial positions is supported by considerable research of the negative stereotypes held about them. Schein (1973, 1975) reported that both male and female middle managers perceived that successful managers in general possessed characteristics ascribed more to men than to women. These characteristics include among others aggression, dominance (Copeland, Driskell, & Salas, 1995), and achievement orientation (Adler, 1988). In fact, the characteristics (e.g., co-operative and communicative) that have often been ascribed to women are considered 'unmanagerial' (e.g., Powell & Butterfield, 1979). Schein (1978) concluded that such stereotyping tends to reduce the opportunities for females to advance within business organizations even though the perceived sex differences do not actually exist. The negative

stereotyping also explains in part why women represent a very low percentage of top executive positions and are often not considered for expatriate assignments (Adler, 1988).

Significant changes have taken place in China over the past two decades. More women are receiving college education and participating in the labor force. Nevertheless, there are few women in leadership roles (Zeng & Thorneman, 2014). In 2016 for example, of all the legislators, senior officials, and managers in China, only about 17 percent were women even though they account for almost 49 percent of the population. In the business sector, less than 20 percent of Chinese firms have women as top-level managers (The World Economic Forum, 2016). Specifically, less than four percent of Chinese companies have women as their Chief Executive Officer (Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2014). The representation of women on corporate boards or serving in the Chief Financial Officer was 9.2 percent and 22 percent, respectively in 2015 (Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2016a,b). Currently the nine-member Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party, the country's highest decision making body, are all men (Howell, 2014).

THEORY

The ascribed positive attitudes toward a particular group is typically promoted by members of the group. In essence, individuals tend to maintain and promote attitudes which reflect an advancement in status, position, or power of the group to which they belong (Darke & Chaiken, 2005; Maithani, et al., 2012; Newport, 2007; Treas & Widmer, 2000; Walker et al., 2007). In particular, the research done to date indicate that women tend to embrace more favorable attitudes toward women managers than their male counterparts (Eagly et al., 2004). Therefore, we propose that:

***H1:** Chinese women will have more favorable attitudes toward women as managers than their male counterparts.*

Over the years, various factors have been hypothesized as indicators and/or moderators of the attitudes toward women. These include prevailing attitudes in a particular nation and the historic and traditional roles within a culture. Age cohorts have also been found to influence attitudes toward women's roles in society. Dambrot, Papp, and Whitmore (1984), for example, found that older men and women are more conservative in their attitudes toward women's role in society than their younger counterparts as confirmed by Sorce, Perotti, and Widrick (2005) that age affects online purchasing behavior. Conversely, Ng and Feldman (2010) found among others that gender, organizational tenure, and education level moderate the relationship between age and job attitudes related to work tasks, colleagues, and supervisors. Also, Bentein et al. (2005) found that job attitudes are likely to change over time. Specifically, Ng and Feldman (2008), found that older workers are more likely to exhibit greater organizational citizenship behaviors and less likely to engage in counterproductive ones. We therefore make the proposition that:

***H2:** Older workers will have more positive attitudes towards women as managers.*

Historically, various studies have assessed the work-related attitudes of college students. The landmark study to assess the attitudes of college students toward women in general was done by Epstein and Bronzaft (1972). They found that first year college students at the time of their study expected to become more career oriented rather than the 'traditional' housewife. Throughout the 1980s, a number of research studies also found support for more positive attitudes toward women in traditionally male-dominated occupations including the presidency of the United States (Cherlin & Walters, 1981). In 1993, a national survey of first year college students (Higher Education Research Institute) found support for women to be more career oriented and less involved in traditional roles like child rearing and house-keeping. In the current study, we focused on students and professionals as a way to investigate the potential delineating effects of life stage on the attitudes towards women as managers. We therefore propose:

H3: Professionals will have more positive attitudes towards women as managers than non-professionals.

H3a: Professional women will have more positive attitudes towards women as managers than non-professional women.

H3b: Professional men will have more positive attitudes towards women as managers than non-professional men.

METHOD

Procedure

The primary source of data for this study was collected through opinion survey. Participants were guaranteed that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and that under no circumstances would anyone be able to individually identify them in any way. Participants in this study were 430 Chinese undergraduate business administration students and 365 Chinese working professionals for a total sample of 795 respondents. Overall, respondents were comprised of 315 males and 480 females. The student participants consisted of 215 males and 215 females whereas the working professional participants were comprised of 100 males and 265 females. On average, the student participants were 22.04 years old whereas the working professional participants were 34.19 years old.

Measures

Women as Managers Scale (WAMS). Participants' responded to a set of twenty-one attitudinal statements concerning different views of women holding managerial positions known in the literature as the Women as Managers Scale (WAMS) Peters et al., 1974; Terborg et al., 1977). The measure included 11 favorably worded items and 10 unfavorably worded items (reverse coded for scale construction) and were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (7=Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree). Higher scores on the WAMS were associated with more favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles whereas lower scores were associated with less favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles. Sample items included "Men and women should be given equal opportunity for participating in management training programs," "It is acceptable for women to compete with men for top executive positions," and "Women are not competitive enough to be successful in the business world," (reverse coded). The reliability and construct validity of WAMS has been detailed in numerous studies (e.g. Ilgen and Moore, 1983). Since questions regarding attitudes and opinions may be more abstract and certain concepts may not be relevant throughout the world, this study followed a regimented process of forward-translation and back-translation, despite the fact that its respondents already maintained a "good command of English." First, the questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese (i.e. Mandarin) by one of the co-authors of this study (who is bilingual). To validate the translation, assistance was solicited from another bilingual Chinese professor from a regional university in the United States to translate the survey back into English. This allowed for identification of questionnaire items that may have posed difficulties for this study's Chinese sample. The Chinese professor in the U.S. was then asked to make any modifications that were necessary on those potentially problematic questions identified through the back-translation, given the English language-based original. Subsequently, a bilingual Chinese professor in the UK was asked to translate the revised questionnaire in Chinese back into English. After this iteration, researchers were satisfied with the correspondence between the English and Chinese-based versions of the questionnaire. This measure demonstrated satisfactory reliability overall ($\alpha=.86$).

RESULTS

Tests for Group Differences

A series of Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were performed to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between sex and working status on the overall WAMS measure. Table 1 lists the mean scores and standard deviations for the 100 youngest respondents (\bar{x} age =

19.72) and the 100 oldest respondents (\bar{x} age = 43.47), Chinese male and females overall, Chinese student and working professionals overall, as well as Chinese males and females and working professional males and females individually, on the WAMS measure.

Results showed that there were significant effects for the age grouping variable (i.e. Hypothesis 2; the 100 youngest respondents vs. the 100 oldest respondents: $(F, 1, 198) = 39.15, p = < .001$), sex grouping variable (i.e. Hypothesis 1; Chinese males vs. Chinese females overall: $(F(1, 791) = 535.88, p = < .001)$), the working status grouping variable (i.e. Hypothesis 3; Chinese students vs. Chinese working professionals overall: $(F(1, 791) = 73.13, p = < .001)$), as well as a significant interaction between the sex and working status grouping variables (i.e. Hypothesis 3a and 3b; Chinese male students vs. Chinese female students vs. Chinese male working professionals vs. Chinese female working professionals: $F(1, 791) = 3.79, p = .05$). Post-hoc analyses confirmed that Chinese female working professionals held more favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure as compared to Chinese female students (Hypothesis 3a; $p = < .001$; 95% CI = .13, .41) and that Chinese working male professionals held more favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure as compared to Chinese male students (Hypothesis 3b; $p = < .001$; 95% CI = .25, .62).

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVES BY AGE, SEX, WORKING STATUS, AND OVERALL FOR
THE WAMS SCALE

	Mean	SD
Age Overall		
WAMS	5.00	.76
100 Youngest Respondents		
WAMS	4.41	.66
100 Oldest Respondents		
WAMS	5.26	.78
Chinese Males Overall		
WAMS	4.37	.54
Student Males		
WAMS	4.24	.47
Working Professional Males		
WAMS	4.67	.57
Chinese Females Overall		
WAMS	5.42	.59
Student Females		
WAMS	5.27	.55
Working Professional Females		
WAMS	5.55	.59
Chinese Students Overall		
WAMS	4.75	.73
Chinese Working Professionals Overall		
WAMS	5.31	.70

Figure 1 illustrates the comparison of mean scores between the 100 youngest respondents and the 100 oldest respondents (i.e. Hypothesis 2). As shown, the 100 oldest respondents ($\bar{x} = 5.26$) responded with

the most favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure as compared with the 100 youngest respondents ($\bar{x} = 4.41$).

FIGURE 1
GRAPH ILLUSTRATING COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES BETWEEN 100 YOUNGEST RESPONDENTS AND 100 OLDEST RESPONDENTS ON WAMS

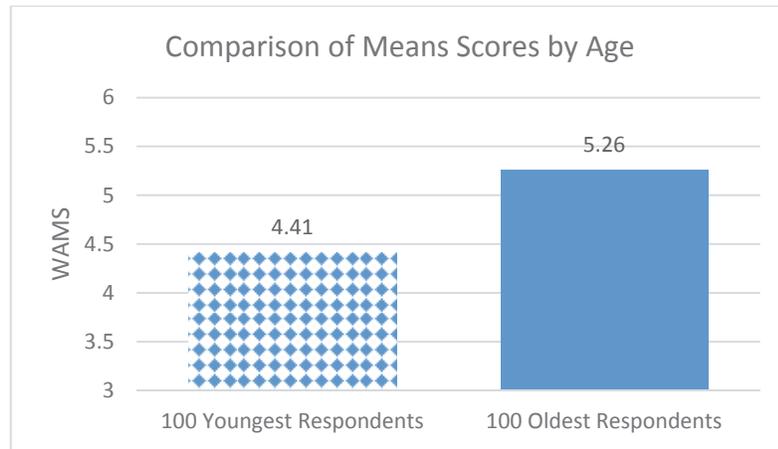


Figure 2 illustrates the comparison of mean scores between Chinese males overall (student males and working professional males combined) and Chinese females overall (student females and working professional females combined; i.e. Hypothesis 1). As shown, Chinese females ($\bar{x} = 5.42$) responded with the most favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure as compared with Chinese males ($\bar{x} = 4.37$). Figure 3 illustrates the comparison of mean scores between Chinese student participants overall (Chinese student males and females combined) and Chinese working professional participants overall (Chinese working professional males and females combined; i.e. Hypothesis 3). As shown, Chinese working professional participants ($\bar{x} = 5.30$) responded with the most favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure as compared with Chinese student participants ($\bar{x} = 4.75$).

FIGURE 2
GRAPH ILLUSTRATING COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES BETWEEN CHINESE MALES AND FEMALES OVERALL ON WAMS

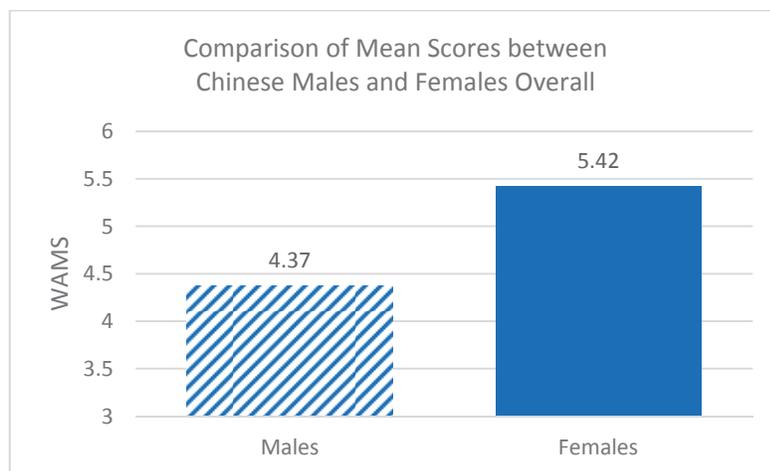


FIGURE 3
GRAPH ILLUSTRATING COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES BETWEEN CHINESE STUDENTS AND WORKING PROFESSIONALS OVERALL ON WAMS

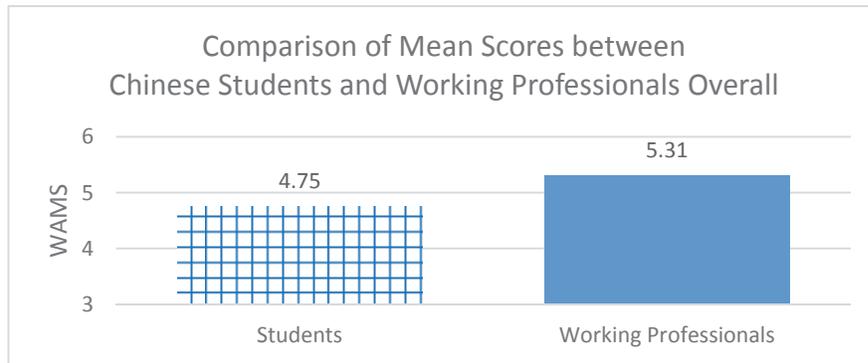
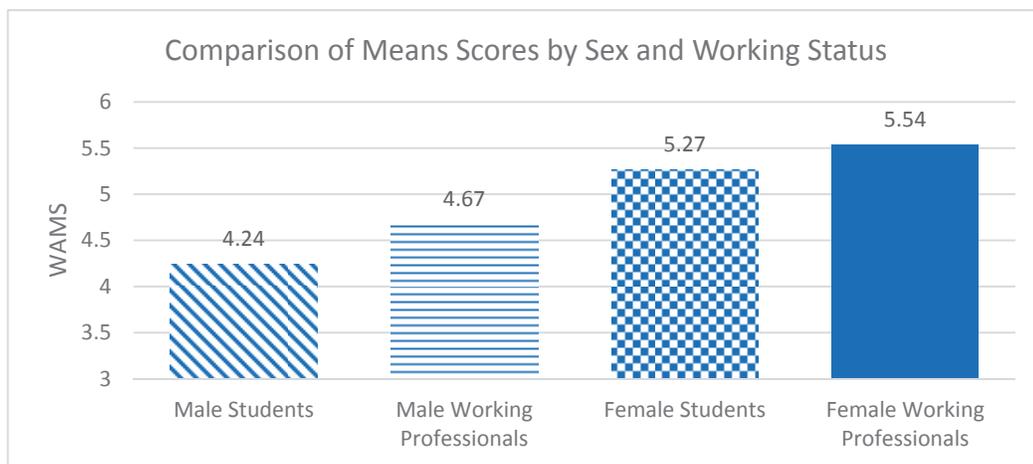


Figure 4 illustrates the comparison of mean scores between Chinese student males and females and Chinese working professional males and females individually (i.e. Hypotheses 3a and 3b). As shown, Chinese working professional females responded with the most favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure ($\bar{x} = 5.54$). Chinese student females responded with the second most favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure ($\bar{x} = 5.27$). Chinese working professional males responded with the third most favorable attitudes towards women in managerial on the WAMS measure ($\bar{x} = 4.67$). Lastly, Chinese male students responded with the least favorable attitudes towards women in managerial roles on the WAMS measure ($\bar{x} = 4.24$).

FIGURE 4
GRAPH ILLUSTRATING COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES BETWEEN CHINESE MALE STUDENTS, FEMALE STUDENTS, MALE WORKING PROFESSIONALS, AND FEMALE WORKING PROFESSIONAL ON WAMS



CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that, consistent with previous studies, the attitude towards women as managers in China, is influenced by gender. Chinese men typically have less favorable attitudes toward women as managers. Nevertheless, some progress has been made over the past few decades as more Chinese women have invested in higher educational and training consistent with the focus of the All-

China Democratic Women's Foundation. Life stage also affects the attitudes toward women managers in China to the extent that professionals have more positive attitudes toward women as managers. This finding is especially important since it was not influenced by gender. This is in line with Ng and Feldman's (2008) conclusion that longer-tenured employees tend to exhibit more organizationally positive behaviors. Perhaps the most disappointing finding is that the attitudes of 'professional men' toward women as managers was less than for female college students. More research is needed to explore and confirm these findings.

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