

**PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF ENABLE FACTORS
ON WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN
STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES (SOES)
OF HUNAN, CHINA**

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UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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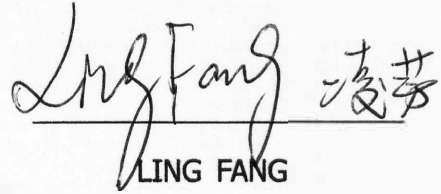
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DECLARATION

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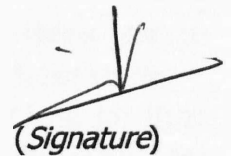
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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of women in the workforce is a world trend. Although women are still underrepresented in the management level in China, there are still some of them can successfully advance into managerial position. The research is about the perceived enable factors associated with women's career advancement in the context of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) at Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan city cluster, in Hunan Province, China. 26 large industrial state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were chosen. Data was collected from 103 respondents and analysed by using SPSS. The final results generated from the study showed that women middle-level managers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) perceived moderate career advancement regarding their career so far. It's also revealed that the factors which were perceived by women managers as significant for their career advancement were networking, mentoring, less family commitment, more family support and career aspiration. Out of these five factors, networking, family commitment and career aspiration showed very strong impact on career advancement. The respondents in this study held strong self-confidence in their beliefs.



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Abstrak

Pengaruh Tanggapan Terhadap Faktor-Faktor Kebolehan Ke Atas Kemajuan Kerjaya Di Kalangan Kaum Wanita Di Sektor Perkhidmatan Awam Di Hunan, China

Penglibatan kaum wanita dalam dunia pekerjaan bukanlah suatu perkara yang luar biasa pada masa kini. Walaupun, hanya segelintir kaum wanita yang melibatkan diri dalam bidang pengurusan di China, namun tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa ada di antara mereka yang berjaya dalam kerjaya tersebut. Maka, tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang membolehkan kaum wanita untuk memajukan kerjaya di kalangan mereka yang terlibat dalam perkhidmatan awam di bandar Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan, di bahagian Hunan, China. Sebanyak 26 syarikat daripada sektor awam terpilih sebagai responden dalam kajian ini. Data yang telah di kumpul daripada 103 responden, di analisis menggunakan SPSS. Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa kaum wanita yang terlibat dalam 'middle-managers' di sektor awam bertanggungjawab sederhana dalam kemajuan kareer mereka. Di samping itu, faktor-faktor yang di anggap menyumbang kepada tanggapan untuk memajukan kareer mereka adalah seperti 'networking', 'mentoring', 'less family commitment', 'more family support' dan 'career aspiration.' Daripada kelima-lima faktor ini, 'networking', 'family commitment' dan 'career aspiration' menunjukkan impak yang kuat ke atas kemajuan kerjaya. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa responden mempunyai keyakinan diri yang tinggi terhadap kedudukan mereka.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

In western countries, for example United States, since mid of 19th Century women have been organizing to redefine their place in society, to demand equality and justice. The women movement has brought many changes in Western society, which includes women's suffrage, more employment opportunities for women at more equitable wages, the right to initiate divorce proceedings, and many others. But as time goes by, the reality tells us to give a sober assessment of the situation, especially for the career women. The number of women in high positions in the organization is very small. The female professionals and managers find it's hard to balance their careers and family life which influence their smooth career paths. This picture, while a bit brighter in North America, exists world wide (Davidson and Burke, 2004).

Traditional views of Chinese women placed women in a subordinate position to men and confined most proper feminine activities to the home (Jiang, 2000). So, the rise of Chinese women movement for equal right was a bit later than the western countries, but still can be traced to 19th century. As the feminist movement began to tie with the May 4th Movement in the early of 20th century in China, feminism and new emphasis for women's social equality were used as core political platforms by the early Republic of China (after 1911), by both the Kuomintang Party and the Communist Party of China (Wang, 1999). Time passes and situations has changed, it seems that the struggles of women in China for the past years have been paid off in various aspect as the government offered equal opportunity for female on education and issued the

special law to protect the rights and interests of women. But according to the *Report on the Main Data from the Second Sample Investigation on Chinese Women's Social Status* (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2001) the proportion of female executives was only 6.1% in urban area and the urban career women's pay was only 70.1% that of urban men's pay, which even worse compare with the data of 77.5% in 1990.

Since it's difficult for women to get a higher position in the organization and "the qualification can reduce but not eliminate gender disadvantage in the workplace" (Simpson, Sturges and Woods, 2004) more and more women choose not to pursue further education and opting for very easy, comfortable position in order to save time for family issues, which reduce their opportunity for promotion in the organization. In the MBA program of Tsinghua University, which is one of the best MBA program in China, the enrollment of female student in year 2007 is only 29%, while their male counterparts hold 71% of the seats (Tsinghua University, 2008). This phenomenon caused a strange circle which seems not easy to be tackled, thus, we should find the root of the problem and try to develop positive strategies to address this situation, and finally help to increase the number of women in management.

In spite of the fact that women are not easy to get promoted, there're still many women can break the ice of stereotyping and own a position in management. A research on women managers (Adler, 1994) discovered that more and more women entering managerial positions resulted from the rapid increases in global competition. Other than this, the increased women representation at management level may attribute to other reasons. This paper was focus on the factors that contribute to women's career advancement in the organization. It hopes that this research would give valuable information on the study of women career advancement and finally contribute to management to resolve the "glass-ceiling" problem in the large industrial state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan (CZX) city cluster in Hunan Province, China.

1.2 Background of Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan (CZX) City Cluster and the Large Industrial State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) in This Area

The three cities of Changsha, Zhuzhou and Xiangtan have a combined urban population of three million, and a total population of 12 million includes rural area population. The city cluster is the urban and economic center of Hunan Province in central-south of China. The three cities only 50 Kms apart from each other and Changsha, the capital city of Hunan, is the service, financial and cultural center, while Zhuzhou and Xiangtan are significant industrial centers. At present, Changsha, Zhuzhou and Xiangtan total economic volume accounts for one third of the province's total (Hunan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

As the traditional industrial center in central-south of China, there are 442 industrial SOEs in the CZX city cluster by the year of 2006. The gross income of these SOEs in 2007(Jan. to Nov.) was 90.136 billion Chinese Yuan, which made them generate a total of 9.838 billion Chinese Yuan profit and tax. Over 60% of these income and profit are produced by the large industrial SOEs in this region.

These 26 (State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of Hunan Provincial People's Government, 2008) large industrial SOEs are powerful engines that drive the industrial development in CZX city cluster. However, most of these large industrial SOEs are confronted the problem which is lacking excellent human capital. The reality is, on one hand, these SOEs suffered from the scarcity of high level human capital, on the other hand, the promotion of women manager in these SOEs were relative slow compare to their male counterpart. For instance, in Hunan Valin Group's branch Xiangtan Iron & Steel Co. Ltd, out of 147 upper-middle-level managers, only 2 are women, and the top management is fully occupied by male executives, this is merely the tip of the iceberg. Are women really not qualified to deserve a position in the management? What are the aspiring women should do if they want to work out the puzzle of women's under-representation in

management? For the women managers, what factors have made them successfully enter the management which is dominated by men?

As the CZX city cluster move ahead in the policy of building harmonious society which set by China Central Government, it's the time to change the status of women in these SOEs, in order to fulfill the requirement of "harmony".

1.3 Research Problem

Over the last 30 years, women's labor force participation rate has dramatically increased; however, Ackah, Heaton and McWhinney (1999) argued that horizontal and vertical segregation of the labor market on a gender basis remains in economic life. As mentioned previously, only a small number of women can obtain higher position in the organization.

Some women remove the hurdle and succeed in their career, but Coe (1991) suggest that women managers are more likely to be found in traditionally "female" service sectors of the economy such as education, hospitality industry, retailing, catering and health caring. Moreover, women are consistently underrepresented at senior levels, even in those occupational groupings where they are in the majority (Rees, 1992). What are some factors has contributed to become the barriers for women? This has been always argued by the scholars. Li & Leung (2001) found that the women managers in Singapore hotel industry perceived work-family conflict as most important obstacles in further career development. While in a survey which is done by Simpson, et al (2004), the top two barriers identified by women MBA holders in Canada were lack of career guidance and exclusive/closed network. The perception of women on the significance of career barriers is various in different countries. Similarly, the career advancement factors are also perceived distinctively by the women in different context. Women librarians in Queensland, Australian feel that it's the striving towards and ultimate achievement of work-family balance allows them to be a "success library manager" (Simon, 1996). However, a research on the career

development for the women managers in Fortune 500 companies in Europe indicate that useful networking relationship which would be advantageous to women's career (Linehan, 2001).

Most of the literatures on the issue of women career advancement were conducted in western countries and it's hard to find the work which was done in the context of China. This paper tried to close the gap by exploring the following questions:

- 1.3.1 Is there a relationship between family commitment and women's career advancement?
- 1.3.2 Is there a relationship between family support and women's career advancement?
- 1.3.3 Is there a relationship between self-confidence, career aspiration and women's career advancement?
- 1.3.4 Is there a relationship between mentoring and networking in organization and women's career advancement?
- 1.3.5 Which factor has the strongest influence on women's career advancement?
- 1.3.6 Do Chinese women perceive the same career barriers as the women in western countries?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research consist of two parts. The first part is the main objectives while the second part is the supplementary objectives.

The main objective of this research is to examine the significance of the relationship between the women's career advancement and the factors that have been sorted from the literature, which include organization-related factors (mentoring and networking), family-related factors (family commitment and family support) and intrinsic factors (self-confidence and career aspiration).

The supplementary objectives of this research is to examine whether the women managers in the context of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) perceive the similar enable factors for their upward career mobility as western women.

Upon the above objectives, the researcher will also try to discuss the possible solution for aspiring women in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to pursue higher managerial position for their own best interests; and try to help the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) find the effective human capital strategies to sustain the qualified women managers.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The researcher surveyed the 26 large industrial SOEs in Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan (CZX) city cluster in Hunan Province, China. Population of this research consists of female upper-middle and lower-middle managers in these SOEs. The survey occurred through questionnaire. The selection of participants is based on the random selection method.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Many researches on the women career advancement issues have been done, while the gap still needs to be closed on the research of Chinese women. This paper gave a helpful trial on this area.

Moreover, since China's fourth pilot zone for comprehensive and coordinated economic reform debuted in December of 2007. CZX city cluster has been selected as one of the pilot zone. The government policy has given impetus to the economic growth in CZX city cluster. On the other hand, it is also a good development opportunity for the large industrial SOEs in this region (People's Government of Hunan Province, 2008). It is well recognized by the business world that the human capital is one of the most important factor which can boost the progress of the enterprises.

Women managers, as part of the human capital, should be carefully treated by the organization.

It's no doubt that this study is limited, but the results of this research can help the SOEs in CZX city cluster to find solutions on the human capital management by advancing development of the women managers. Furthermore, the company can increase productivity, achieve competitive advantage. The results of this research could also serve as a reference for further investigations about women career advancement.

1.7 Definition of Key Items in This Study

The meaning and definition of the following key items will be clarified in the context of this study.

1.7.1 Career Advancement

Based on the finding of Tharenou (1997), the career advancement refers to individual entering and advancing in management in hierarchical organization. It also can be defined as "the highest managerial level and employee has reached" (Hurley and Giannantonio, 1999). Law and Shaffer (1999) give another definition by grouping career advancement into two categories: objective and subjective. Objective career advancement is accessed by extrinsic measures, such as job title, salary or promotion. Subjective career advancement refers to one's own appraisal of career attainment. However, it is argued that subjective career advancement experience does not necessarily parallel objective career advancement measures (Poole, et. al, 1990; cited in Lau and Shaffer, 1999).

1.7.2 Enable Factors

It refers to the circumstances or characteristics that can help the women's career advancement in the large industrial state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan city cluster, in Hunan, China.

1.7.3 Large State-owned Enterprises (SOEs)

SOE is the abbreviation of state-owned enterprises, which is still very common in China due to the government policy and nature of the socialistic China. 26 of industrial state-owned enterprises which were selected as the main scope of this study are under the supervision of State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of Hunan Provincial People's Government. This supervision is considered as the symbol of majority of control comes from the government.

According to "Medium and Large-sized Enterprises for Statistical Purposes Procedures (Trial Implementation, 2003)" issued by the State Statistics Bureau of China, definition of the large industrial enterprise in China is: More than 2000 staff, minimum sales income equals 300 million Chinese Yuan, and minimum total assets equal 400 million Chinese Yuan.

1.7.4. Upper-middle and Lower-middle Managers

Upper-middle and lower-middle managers are defined as the group of managers extending from senior management down to immediately above first-line management. In the context of SOEs in China, they implement the strategies or policies set by senior management.

1.8 Summary

The development of China economy has brought many opportunities to the women in labor market. Although the glass-ceiling still exists here and there, however, there's still many women has broken the ice of stereotyping and got upward career mobility in

the organization.

In the western society, there're bunch of researches have been done on the women's career advancement, but the voice from Asia, especially china, is relatively scarce. In order to close the gap, this paper will tried to provide a trial of study based on the data from large industrial state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan city cluster in Hunan Province, China.

1.9 Organization of Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows. In Chapter 1, the background of this study has been discussed and the significant of studies also explained to justify the study. A clear objective is also constructed to guide the entire study and the scope of the study is stated clearly.

Chapter 2 in this dissertation consists of a comprehensive literature review and synthesizes the relevance of the various past researches that have been done previously. It also highlights the concept behind this study and other theories to support the argument later in this study. This will give the readers more information on what has been done in this particular field. This is also to formulate the research questions, objectives and theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 notifies about research methodology used to conduct the research. This includes the theoretical framework, hypothesis assumption, the nature and type of the study, instrument (design of the questionnaire) used to conduct the research. This chapter also includes the size and group of the sample as well as data collection method and the method for analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 comprises analysis of results obtain through this study. Analysis of raw data collected and converted into data that able to respond and support the hypothesis in chapter three by using the software SPSS.

Chapter 5 encompasses discussion and conclusions report of the findings in the study. It also tells whether the hypotheses is accepted or rejected. Apart from that, it also discusses the limitation of the research which causes the results to vary and the conclusion that has been discovered from this research.



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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews some of the available literature on women's career advancement. It's necessary to review the works that has been done by former researchers in order to have a best understanding of the factors contribute to women's career advancement. The key concepts are grouped into three dimensions: organization-related factors (mentoring and networking), family-related factors (family commitment and family support) and intrinsic factors (self-confidence and career aspiration).

2.2. Women's Career in the Context of China

Women's career advancement is a complex, diverse process (Bierema, 1998). They have made progress in the context of China, but the general agreement is that they have not scaled career ladders fast or high enough. Although Chinese women legally enjoy equal rights with men in employment, Chinese women are still underrepresented in the managerial area (Aaltio & Huang, 2007). Several reasons might explain this situation.

Firstly, existence of stereotyping related to Chinese traditional culture of male superiority in the society, women's role has been emphasized in family. The doctrine of Confucianism, named "three-obedience", teaches that the duties of women in her lifetime are to her father or older brother before get married, to her husband after get married, to her son after the death of her husband (Granrose, 2007). Although