

Report – Female Entrepreneurship in China

Purpose

Our thesis compares challenges faced by female and male entrepreneurs in China. The purpose was to investigate what potential challenges female entrepreneurs face that male entrepreneurs do not face in order to identify an explanation to why there are fewer women than men active in entrepreneurship in China. The aim with investigating the topic was to bring clarity to the field and to add to the already existing literature and research. Our research question was the following:

What different perceived challenges do female and male entrepreneurs face in China?

Method

During the field study in China, a mixed method was used, including both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews with four female and five male entrepreneurs in Hangzhou. Quantitative data was collected through survey responses from students enrolled at Zhejiang University's MBA and EMBA programmes. The latter was mainly conducted to complement the former.

Data from this research was believed to be found indicating that female entrepreneurs face different challenges than male entrepreneurs in China. This was based on that previous research indicate that female entrepreneurs face inequalities in business as well as the authors' perceptions that it could be more difficult for females in certain business environments, such as to start and manage their own businesses.

Main findings

Findings from this study show that most challenges identified during the research are faced by both Chinese women and men. However, findings indicate that there still are, as previous research claims, some gender-related differences in terms of perceived challenges for entrepreneurs in China.

The main finding suggests that there is a greater challenge for women to balance work and family time. The culture in China requires women to take a greater responsibility for the home and children than men, which affect business women in a negative way since many of them carry a feeling of not

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being enough. Men on the other hand are expected to work hard and prioritise job-related issues according to the norm, which makes this much less of a challenge for them.

Another prominent perceived challenge identified for females is the fact that they, in certain contexts, are not being taken seriously because of their gender. This female specific challenge was identified among both males and females in the study.

An aspect that permeated the majority of the findings in this thesis is the perceptions of society. The general view among the female interviewees in this thesis is that that women possess different characteristics than men that make them less suitable for starting and running a business. This view, that seem to derive from a more general view of the society, could contribute to women being of the perception that starting and running a business is not suitable for them.

The cultural norms and traditions are changing in China. However, change of norms takes time and the problem of unawareness of particular constraints faced by female entrepreneurs in the society seem to still exist to some extent. Cultural norms biased against women in business and in the society seem natural for both males and females and may therefore not be perceived as discriminatory. In order to handle inequalities in China, the first step is to raise awareness about them and to problematize them, because there are in fact differences in challenges that could partially explain why fewer women than men choose to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses.

Engagements with Host University

Arriving in Hangzhou we felt very welcomed from our hostess Jun Jin at the Zhejiang University. She and her colleagues provided us with useful contacts in Hangzhou and made sure we had a nice office to work in during our stay. Furthermore, she introduced us to Phd students who took their time to participate in our interviews, acting interpreters and helping us with other language barriers. They also became very good friends of ours. We engaged in several activities arranged by people at the University, such as hiking tours, Chinese dinners and seminars. Furthermore, we had weekly meetings with Jun Jin and her team of PhDs in order to exchange ideas and experiences. The stay in China was truly amazing. It gave us invaluable experiences in terms of cultural exchange and it was an adventure we will never forget.

Top three in China:

- Campus life
- Nature
- Kind people