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A PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY OF POSSIBLE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL  
FACTORS RELATING TO WOMEN'S UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN  
LEADERSHIP IN LARGE CHINESE MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS IN BEIJING CITY

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Research  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

By  
Xiaoxue Xiang


August 2020

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Date Recommended June 15, 2020

  
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This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who encouraged me to pursue  
my dreams and finish my dissertation.

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## CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Purpose and Central Research Questions .....	2
Empirical Research Questions.....	4
Definition of Term.....	6
Media Organization.....	6
<b>CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Women’s Role in Chinese Traditional Culture.....	7
Changes of Women’s Role in Chinese History .....	16
Gender Equality in China .....	30
Nature of Chinese Media .....	50
Influence of Feminism on China’s Gender Equality .....	57
Soviet Influence .....	65
Summary .....	70
<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>73</b>
Research Design .....	73

Participants.....	74
Overview of Instrumentation .....	77
Data Collection .....	77
Data Analysis Process.....	79
Limitations .....	80
Translation .....	81
Research Positionality.....	82
Validity .....	83
Summary.....	84
<b>CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>85</b>
Participants.....	85
RQ 1: What Are the Barriers That Beijing Women Encounter in Attaining Leadership Positions? .....	86
Chinese Media Field .....	86
Local Organizations .....	87
Gender.....	88
Chinese Traditional Culture.....	94
Balancing Work and Family .....	98
Educational Background.....	100
Limited Opportunities to Advance Your Career.....	102

Having Children.....	104
Being Married .....	106
Age.....	108
Years of Working Experience in the Field .....	110
No Other Barrier .....	112
Women’s Self-awareness.....	112
The Difference Between Two Genders.....	113
Promotion Mechanism.....	116
RQ2: What Strategies Do These Women Leaders Identify as Effective Toward Increasing Their Representation in Leadership in Their media-related organizations? .....	
Working Experience .....	117
Education .....	118
Mentoring.....	118
Family Connections .....	120
Coaching .....	120
Connections of Friends or Acquaintances .....	121
RQ3: What Policies or Programs Have Been Helpful to Women Leaders in Enhancing Their Leadership Opportunity in Their Media-Related Organizations? .....	
	124



RQ4: What Policies or Programs of Chinese Media Organizations Are Most Influential in Supporting Women Leaders in Their Media-Related Organizations? .....	125
Opportunities.....	125
Work Environment or Culture .....	126
Possible Changes .....	129
Meaningful Event or Achievement.....	131
Summary .....	134
<b>CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>136</b>
Possible Barriers Beijing’s Women Encounter in Attaining Leadership Positions in Their Media-Related Work Organizations.....	136
Strategies to Help Women Increase Their Representation in Leadership Positions in Media-Related Organizations .....	143
Helpful Factors for Women Leaders in Enhancing Their Leadership Opportunity in Their Media-Related Organizations.....	146
Supportive Characteristics of The Chinese Media Organizations for Women Leaders in Their Media-Related Organizations.....	147
Opportunities.....	147
Working Environment or Culture .....	148
Possible Changes .....	149

Meaningful Event or Achievement .....	150
Limitations .....	152
Areas for Future Research .....	154
Summary .....	155
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	158
<b>APPENDIX A: TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS’ DEMOGRAPHICS A</b> .....	167
<b>APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</b> .....	168
<b>APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER</b> .....	170
<b>APPENDIX D: FIGURE OF AVERAGE VALUE AND RANK OF LISTED STRATEGIES</b> .....	175
<b>APPENDIX E: TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS’ EVALUATIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF LISTEDFACTORS IN CONTEXTS</b> .....	176

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Average Value and Rank of Listed Strategies.....	175
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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants' Evaluations Regarding the Impact of Listed Factors in Contexts .....	167
Table 2. Participants' Demographics .....	176

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Xiaoxue Xiang

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Directed by: John Baker, Lester Archer, and Joseph Cangemi

Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research

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The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of possible factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Chinese media through their lived experience. The 10 participants in this study were from large media organizations in Beijing. The results of this study indicate *Balancing work and family* and *Chinese traditional culture* can be considered as the external possible factors of the barriers women leaders encountered in Beijing large media organizations; the negative influence of traditional culture on Chinese women, which refers to women’s low self-evaluation and negative self-awareness, can be taken as the possible internal factors of barriers Beijing media women leaders encounter in media organizations. One way to improve the situation Chinese women leaders face is to weaken the negative influence of traditional culture on Chinese women.

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **Statement of the Problem**

The term “glass ceiling” is well known as the representation of the barrier that women who aspire senior management positions face since it was coined in 1986 (Wilson, 2014). According to Hogue and Lord (2007), women were scarcely present in top-level positions in most government divisions, corporations, education systems, and various organizations. In 2019, although the share of global women senior leaders was increasing incrementally, only 29% of senior leadership positions were held by women; in the region of North America, the number went up slightly: 31% of senior roles were held by women. In S&P 500 companies, the higher the management level, the fewer the women leaders; e.g., women occupied 26.5% senior-level positions (Catalyst, 2020). It is obvious that women are underrepresented in leadership positions. Recently, women’s underrepresentation in leadership has increasingly been studied in various areas. However, the factors (both external and internal) that influence women’s underrepresentation in leadership has seldom been discussed by academic researchers.

According to Xing (2005), Chinese media was completely controlled by the state until the beginning of economic reform in 1978. Before the economic reform, Chinese media organizations continuously played the role of Party mouthpieces. As the economic reforms were implemented, the government started to invest in such areas as science and education rather than the media (Xing, 2005). In such a situation, “commercialization

was becoming an economic necessity for media organizations” (Xing, 2005, p. 11), which was the beginning of the transformation of Chinese media (Xing, 2005). But this transformation of Chinese media has not been smooth; Chinese media has still struggled between the desire for freedom and the control of state (Cai, 2008). Transformation of Chinese media offers fertile soil for research, yet it has been studied by few academic researchers.

Women have enjoyed legal equality worldwide for a long time. However, women still suffer from gender inequality in the workplace. According to Adler (1993), women were generally segregated into jobs that were highly routinized and often acted in clerical and lower-level positions, involving less risk and lower visibility where they were likely to have little authority. In China, gender inequality in the workplace also exists. According to Burnett (2010), although the Chinese government has made efforts to coordinate with the global community on women’s rights initiatives and Chinese women have enjoyed legal equality for over 60 years, many Chinese women still face gender inequality in the workplace. There is no shortage of studies of gender inequality in the workplace; however, not many researchers have explored this topic in the Chinese context.

### **Purpose and Central Research Question**

This research brings together the issues the author discussed in the prior section. Although many researches have explored the area of women and leadership, not many

have investigated the external and internal possible factors of women's underrepresentation in senior leadership roles. Moreover, Chinese media increasingly has been the subject of much academic research especially since the Chinese media is in its transformation age. However, the majority of research presented about Chinese media has focused on new technology application, commercialization, and social media (Xing, 2005). Few studies have focused on the transformation of Chinese media and the impact of women on this transformation. In addition, gender inequality in the workplace in Chinese context is often not studied, although there is considerable research discussing gender inequality in the workplace.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of possible factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership in Chinese media through their lived experience. To uncover these possible factors, I use the central research question: What do Beijing women media leaders perceive as the reasons contributing to the underrepresentation of women in media leadership in Beijing?

There are two reasons why I chose to focus on Beijing instead of other Chinese cities. First, as the capital of China, Beijing has numerous large media organizations that have long histories. They can represent the best media organizations in China. Therefore, the lived experiences of women leaders in these Beijing large media organizations have representative meaning. Second, it is difficult to gain access to high-level women leaders in Chinese large media organizations without any *connection* (being introduced as an



outsider). Fortunately, the author has an insider in the largest Chinese media organization which is located in Beijing. In this case, it is much easier for the author to reach out to Beijing women leaders than the ones in other Chinese cities.

Through this study, the lived experiences of women who participate as leaders in Chinese media is investigated. This research adopts qualitative research methodology -- the phenomenological research method is used. The author utilizes in-depth interviews as a method to collect data. The population of this research includes women leaders in Chinese media organizations. A purposive selection of participants is used as the sampling strategy in this research.

### **Empirical Research Questions**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), “qualitative research methodologies have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for the social sciences and applied fields” (p. 1). The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of possible factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership in Chinese media through their lived experience. Thus, this study can be considered as an exploratory effort and an investigation of a social phenomenon. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative research methodologies are especially suitable for research that is exploratory and designed to gain a basic understanding of the overall situation. In addition, Marshall and Rossman argued that qualitative research could be adopted for the study of social phenomena. Therefore, this study uses qualitative methodology.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative research utilizes a variety of empirical materials such as observation, interviews, life histories, etc. The specific qualitative method adopted in this study is in-depth interviewing, which is semi-structured. The subjects of in-depth interviews are women leaders in media organizations in Beijing who can be considered as elite in the Chinese media industry. According to Marshall and Rossman, interviewing elites is relatively difficult since it is very difficult to gain access to elites. Fortunately, the researcher has an insider who is a contact to build the bridge between the author and author's potential interviewees. This insider, who has been working at China Central Television, is the predominant national television broadcaster in mainland China and a chief editor for over 20 years. She is in direct contact with women who are in the decision-making level in Chinese media organizations, who are the author's potential interviewees. Those potential interviewees come from several media organizations in Beijing: China Central Television, Beijing Television, and Beijing People's Broadcasting Station. A background survey is used in this study in order to collect demographic information of interviewees.

Since there is limited research on women leaders in Chinese media, few interview protocols exist for these types of interviews. An interview protocol based on Cai's research (2008) is used to create an open-ended protocol. The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: What are the barriers that Beijing women encounter in attaining leadership

positions?

RO2: What strategies do these women leaders identify as effective toward increasing their representation in leadership in their media-related organizations?

RQ3: What policies or programs have been helpful to women leaders in enhancing their leadership opportunity in their media-related organizations?

RQ4: What policies or programs of Chinese media organizations are most influential in supporting women leaders in their media-related organizations?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Leadership in Chinese media.* According to Northouse (2013), the definition of leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). Therefore, in this study leadership in Chinese media is defined as high-level, decision-making female employers in state-owned Chinese media organizations. To be more specific, women leaders in this study, at least, are in the position of department head.

### **Media Organization**

Nowadays, along with the development of internet and mobile devices, the number of Internet Media and Mobile Media is increasing. More and more Chinese media are a mixture of traditional, internet, and mobile media. The three media organizations in this study involve both traditional and internet media. In addition, all of these three Chinese media organizations are state owned.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

To better explore barriers Chinese women leaders have encountered in the media field and what possible factors relate to them, there are several topics that need to be addressed in this chapter. These topics include women's role in Chinese traditional culture, changes of women's role in Chinese history, gender equality in China, nature of Chinese media, influence of feminism on China's gender equality, and Soviet influence.

### **Women's Role in Chinese Traditional Culture**

There are two definitions of Chinese Traditional Culture in Chinese academic field: one is that Chinese traditional culture is synonymous with ancient Chinese culture. The other one refers to Chinese traditional culture that is indistinguishable from Chinese culture that existed in the past but connects to Chinese modern culture (Gu, 1999).

According to Gu (1999), Chinese traditional culture should be defined from its origin and the process of its development. Therefore, Gu (1999) defined Chinese traditional culture as the "live" ancient Chinese culture which formed, accumulated, and handed down in the particular natural environment, economic situation, political structure and ideology and still influences Chinese modern culture. The majority of Chinese traditional culture turned into the Chinese nation's nature and cultural psychology. It also deeply integrated into each aspect of Chinese society, such as politics, the economy, and ideology. Chinese traditional culture finally became a kind of cultural genetic gene that profoundly affects Chinese people's ideology and behavior (Gu, 1999).

The core of Chinese traditional culture is Confucianism (Wei, 2002; Miao, 2016).

The status of Confucian culture was formed and consolidated from the Han Dynasty.

During the period of Han Dynasty, Confucianism established its dominant position. In the Song and Ming Dynasty, Confucianism went through philosophicalization (Miao, 2016; Wei, 2002). Although the Confucian culture suffered a crisis in the feudal dynasty, the general development of Confucianism was becoming more and more orthodox (Miao, 2016). Today, Confucianism is still having a profound impact on Chinese society since its origin and development rooted in Chinese society.

According to Zhang and Li (2018), women's culture refers to the lifestyle unique to women as a human group, including women's behaviors, attitudes, and the sum of material and spiritual wealth created thereby. The emergence and existence of women's culture is closely bonded with the background of society and culture. Therefore, the so-called Chinese traditional female culture is:

the sum of material wealth and spiritual wealth that is rooted in the feudal patriarchal society of China and has existed for a long time in a certain historical period and has played a major guiding role in the values and social behavior of most women. (Zhang & Li, 2018, p. 146)

In addition, Lin (1997) also stated, "Chinese women's culture is accompanied by the formation of China's long patriarchal feudal society and cultural forms" (p. 71). In

this case, the Chinese traditional women's culture is greatly influenced by the core of Chinese traditional culture: Confucianism.

According to Leung (2003), the rigorous hierarchy of authority is a significant part of traditional Chinese culture. "Traditional Chinese society was constituted by an essentially masculine value system developed over thousands of years" (Leung, 2003, p. 360). The hierarchy of authority appears as patriarchal in many aspects of traditional Chinese society. One of the main factors that founded traditional China's hierarchy is Confucius. Additionally, the first priority of Confucianism is to maintain the hierarchical order of the feudal society. Under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese women's social and family status were much lower compared to Chinese men.

Among all rigid requirements and expectations that Confucianism set for Chinese women, there are three that are most important and tightly related to the strict hierarchy between males and females: "Three Cardinal Guides and The Five Permanent Standards", "Three Obediences and The Four Virtues", and "Women Are Inferior to Men." All those three are also the basic content and features of feudal ethics (Huang, 2008; Ding, 2011; Yang, 2017).

Confucian ethics claim that society can only be peaceful and in harmony if everyone obeys the "Three Cardinal Guides and The Five Permanent Standards." The "Three Cardinal Guides" refer to the principles of the three ethical relationships accepted by Confucianism: courtiers should obey the monarch, sons should obey their father, the

wife should obey her husband. The “The Five Permanent Standards” refers to benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and sincerity.

Unlike “Three Cardinal Guides and The Five Permanent Standards” required by both men and women to obey, “The Three Obediences and The Four Virtues” is only made for women to follow. The “Three Obediences” refers to “as an unmarried girl she must obey her father and brothers; as a married woman she must obey her husband; and as a widow she must obey her adult sons” (Leung, 2003, p. 361). The “The Four Virtues” refers to women’s fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech, and efficiency in needle work.

The last one, “Women Are Inferior to Men,” is comparatively easy to understand. Just like its literal meaning: this feudal ethic conveys a meaning to Chinese women that males are supposed to be worth more than females and they also enjoy higher status than women.

Therefore, the role of traditional Chinese women was set to tenderness, obedience, and she needed to whole-heartedly serve her husband and educate their children (especially male heirs). The role Chinese traditional women play is a reflection of the definition and expectation Chinese traditional men gave to women. In this case, divisions of labor in society and family are entirely different for men and women. For example, another central principle of Confucius is, “men are primarily outside the home, and women are primarily inside the home” (Leung, 2003, p. 360). This principle referred to

men as responsible for achieving career, providing economic source for the family, and making social interactions with others. Those things are considered as outside the home. On the other hand, women's role was the opposite. Their main responsibilities were inside the home: taking care of the housework, raising the children, and serving their husbands.

Another major difference between men and women that Confucius advocated is the right to receive education (Leung, 2003; Huang, 2008; Yang, 2017). Unlike men, women were taught "The Virtue of A Lady Is Having No Knowledge," which can be illustrated as a lady with virtue is someone whose intellectual horizons stretched no further than needlework (Wang, 2017). The major factor that caused this kind of gender ideology was the difference between social definition of males and females. "Confucian ethics accepted the subservience of women to men as natural and proper because women were generally regarded as unworthy or incapable of education" (Leung, 2003, p. 360). In other words, women were defined by the social dominant ideology as inferior compared to men. On the other hand, men were afraid that once women received the same education as they did, they would not follow the feudal ethics and be willing to live as men's slaves and tools of reproduction (Huang, 2008).

According to Lin (1997), the emergence of Chinese women's culture is closely tied to the formation of China's long patriarchal feudal society and cultural forms. Thus, it is an ingrained traditional cultural connotation formed in the Chinese women's culture.



In this connotation, gender/position/role/attribute are a series of important cultural identification symbols. The relationship among them is inseparable. The appearance of any one of them also means the same of the remaining symbols (Lin, 1997). In Chinese traditional culture, female is represented as “yin” and “kun.” The attribute of “yin” and “kun” was defined in “The Book of Changes” (written in ancient time) as obedience. In “The Book of Changes,” male is represented as “yang,” which refers to the sun or heaven. On the opposing side, female is represented as “yin,” which refers to the earth. From the cosmology of Chinese ancients, “yang” is above of “yin,” so “yang” represents honorable and “yin” represents humble (Lin, 1997; Zhang & Li, 2018). This has been the origin of Chinese traditional ideology of “men are superior than women” for thousands of years (Lin, 1997; Zhang & Li, 2018). In this case, women’s social and family status were determined once they were born in the feudal society. As a female, her responsibility was determined once she was born: dealing with domestic affairs. The roles she only gets to play in her whole life are daughter, wife, and mother. In order to cultivate females who meet the requirements of feudal ethics for them, before they married their future husbands they had to accept a full set of women's moral education in her family (maiden period) in order to prepare for these roles in the future.

As a woman, her greatest life value is to fulfill the virtue norm, which is to be a filial daughter, a virtuous wife, and good mother (Lin, 1997). Even in today’s society, to be a virtuous wife is the most common expectation that Chinese husbands have for their

future wives. It is also the standard that China's society uses to judge whether women are good wives or not. Because of the master-slave nature of Chinese traditional couples, the wife's duty is to satisfy her husband's needs. Overall, there are two demands for virtuous wives in Chinese traditional culture: first, women must be helpful for their husband's career and daily life; second, women must be loyal to their husbands, no matter that their husbands are alive or dead (Lin, 1997).

The meaning of a good mother also is not completely the same as its modern definition. In the past, a good mother needed to raise children according to certain traditional moral standards. We can see examples from selected Chinese literature. For instance, in a Chinese literal masterpiece "Thunderstorm" (Cao, 1934), the male master forces his wife to take Chinese medicine day after day merely because he believes she is sick. One day, when his wife finally refuses to take the medicine anymore, the master says the following words to his wife: "You may not care about your health, but you should set a good example of obedience for your children" (Lin, 1997, p. 72). We can see the importance of women's obedience in the Chinese feudal family from this example. In fact, obedience is the most important and concrete demand for good mothers in Chinese traditional culture (Lin, 1997).

According to Yang (2017), in Chinese traditional culture men are always in the dominant position; women are treated as mere appendages to men. Women hardly attended any political events and military affairs. Additionally, the value of a woman's

life was to serve men; therefore, women need to shape themselves according to men's desire in both physiological and psychological ways (Huang, 2008). In this case, women lost the consciousness of self-independence and their own aesthetic standards (Yang, 2017). Foot binding (a custom of applying tight binding to the feet of young girls to modify the shape and size of their feet) is an example of how women mutilated their bodies to ingratiate men.

Ancient China was a feudal society with a strict hierarchical system. Due to the constraints of feudal ethics, the Chinese traditional appellation shows obvious hierarchical differences and identity regulations (Gu, 2012). In family relationships, especially the upper-class family in the feudal society, the appellation of women fully reflected the reality of male superiority. For example, in the past, women rarely continued to use their given name after they were married. Their appellations were usually composed of their husbands' surnames followed by their maiden surnames, while men did not need to follow this kind of custom. In addition, women's appellations were varied with their family status due to polygamy. In the upper-class family, children only called the wife "mother" or "mistress" whether she was their biological mother or not; in contrast, children were only allowed to call the concubine "maternal aunt" even though she was their biological mother (Gu, 2012). However, the appellation children addressed their father as father.

According to Zhang (1998), in feudal society appellations the husband uses to call his wife have more or less contempt meanings. The meaning of married women's appellations often presents their duties or living range, such as *nei zhu* (internal help) and *fang nei* (inside the home). These appellations implied the role women play in the society and family in the past. A women's value was to raise their children and do housework, they were not qualified to serve the country and the public. Their activities were limited to the area around the house (Zhang, 1998). Other kinds of appellations a husband often used to call his wife contained insulting meaning. In the Song dynasty, the wife often was called *hun jia* (stupid person); in Ming dynasty, wives were called "bedside person," which has clear intimation of a sexual tool. Besides that, the appellation used by the husband to address his wife in front of others also involved humiliating meanings such as *jian nei*, *jian shi*, and *zhuo jin*. The *jian* and *zhuo* mean lowly and stupid. The *nei*, *shi*, and *jin* refer to the wife (Zhang, 1998).

In general, in feudal society a woman's identity usually was defined by her unquestioning obedience and reverence to her adult male family members. Women were defined as secondary within the collectives of the family and the community. The main factor that caused different social and family status of males and females back in the feudal society is Confucianism—exalting male superiority while demeaning females. In this case, females used those tenets to assess their "behaviour, aspirations, and their status relative to that of men" (Leung, 2003, p. 361).

The domination of Confucianism has been gradually weakened since the 1900s. Along with the collapse of Chinese feudal dynasty, Confucianism began to decline when Western culture was introduced in China. Women's role also started to change along with Chinese history.

### **Changes of Women's Role in Chinese History**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the introduction of western culture into China greatly influenced the Chinese. It shook the domination of Confucianism. When China was experiencing fierce social ideological change, the traditional culture of asking women to be virtuous wives and good mothers also suffered the first major impact. In the early 20th century, Chinese, especially young people, started to pay more attention to the future of China and humanity. In this case, the inhuman treatment of women had been observed and many advocated changes (Lin, 1997). Soon, after getting to know more about Western feminism, more and more women who grew up in comparative liberal Chinese aristocratic or intellectual families started to despise and refuse to submit to their traditional role.

In 1919, the May Fourth Movement occurred in Beijing under the lead of communists. The first women's movement in China, called May Fourth Movement, occurred in the early 20th century. The movement was mainly supported by Chinese communist leaders. It had significant meaning on changing women's social status. One of

the most important features of May Fourth Movement is the combination of women's movement and anti-imperialist and anti-feudalism (Zhang, 2017).

The Chinese women's movement advocated that women should have the same right in marriage as men: freedom of marriage. Moreover, it also asked to put an end to polygamy and prostitution (Leung, 2003). The May Fourth Movement can be considered the first time Chinese women consciously sought liberation. "It drew support mostly from women of the intellectual class in urban areas who sought the rights of education, romantic love, and individual emancipation from patriarchal authority over women" (Leung, 2003, p. 362). Gaining the right to education and work are another two rights Chinese women fought for in the Chinese women's movement. Chinese women extricated themselves from merely being men's slaves through the women's movement. Along with the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chinese women's fate has changed forever.

Despite huge influence Confucianism brought to China's society for thousands of years, Chinese culture changed along with the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. After 1949, the main assertions of previous China's women movements were to be realized: polygamy and prostitution were abolished. Also, the Chinese government passed legislation to protect women's rights in varied areas, such as the right to education, the right to work, the right to vote and be voted on, and the right of marriage by choice (Li & Campbell, 1994). According to Li and Campbell (1994), the

life situation of women in China was revolutionized. In the rural areas women, like men, were given a portion of the land that belonged to them. Until 1957, 70% of rural females worked in agricultural production. In the urban area, numerous women had their own jobs. There were more than three million female workers; the number is 4.5 times larger than in 1949. Moreover, women were allowed to obtain positions in the political field: female representatives constituted 11.9% of the entire group in the first All-Chinese People's Congress in 1954 (Li & Campbell, 1994).

To an extent, Chinese women found themselves in a much better circumstance compared to older times back in early Mao era. However, it was not correct to claim China had already achieved sexual equality back to that time. According to Leung (2003), although the social and family status of women in China had improved greatly during the early Mao's era, "the role of women was to contribute to the struggle and they were mobilized into the revolutionary effort and collective production" (p. 363). During this period, despite females being freed from outdated conventions and regulations of feudal society, women were strictly required to put "work" first and "family" second (Leung, 2003). Moreover, "the Party integrated peasant liberation and women's emancipation into a joint force to fight against intellectuals, landlords and the privileged class" (Leung, 2003, p. 364). In this case, it is hard to say that Chinese women had embraced a complete emancipation.

In 1956, Mao had an epigram that spread throughout the entire country: “Women hold up half the sky.” The meaning of this epigram is self-evident—unlike the older times, women also were considered as strong a resource of labour power as men. However, the epigram was more likely to emphasize women’s power only in production areas rather than in other areas. Given the social background of China during the early Mao period, fighting against the bourgeoisie, therefore, the goal of women’s emancipation back to that time was more likely to encourage them to be a part of the proletariat team. To some extent, “The Party integrated peasant liberation and women’s emancipation into a joint force to fight against intellectuals, landlords and the privileged class” (Leung, 2003, p. 364).

There is no doubting the establishment of new China had freed women from the old, corrupt customs of feudal society so they could have equal rights in various areas with men. However, this kind of emancipation tended to solely consider women as production labor. In this case, just like the famous epigram describes, women’s gender traits were in a position similar to men (Leung, 2003). Therefore, at the same time women enjoyed their equal rights with men in politics, education, work, and so on, they also needed to take the same responsibility in order to achieve the official goal: constructing a socialist society.

Nevertheless, the emancipation did not neutralize women’s gender traits in every area. On the contrary, women’s gender traits were emphasized in certain fields such as



family, marriage, and fertility. According to Yang (1999), “unmarried women over thirty were considered social burdens or sexual abnormalities and often were demonized as lesbians under Maoist norms of conformity” (as cited in Leung, 2003, p. 365). In other words, the most important responsibility still was to bear the next generation. Any rebellious behavior (celibatarian, homosexuality, or dual income, no kids) would be regarded as an aberration. As Leung (2003) stated, while “women might have enjoyed social power as Maoist leaders, they lacked the autonomous sexuality derived from individual female consciousness” (p. 365). Moreover, the establishment of new China did not remove all the patriarchal attitudes and concepts of feudal society. On the aspect of social division of labor, subordinated gender division of labor existed. Identity of China’s women was redefined by women’s emancipation. The government empowered women equal rights with men in various areas; however, women’s main role in society was still related to reproductive activities (Leung, 2003).

In sum, the arduous and complicated Chinese women’s liberation unexpectedly achieved, along with the victory of the proletarian party, the establishment of the proletarian regime (Lin, 1997). In other words, Chinese women could be freed from thousands of years of feudal ethics in such a short period of time mainly because the goal of Chinese women’s liberation overlapped with China’s anti-feudal movement and China’s national revolution. However, although the mission of anti-feudal was gradually

completed, gender discrimination against women started to be overlooked by the government and the society.

During the cultural revolution (1966-1976), the goal of the whole society had changed from socialist construction to class struggle. In that chaotic period of time, every citizen of the country was required to contribute to eliminate the bourgeoisie, and both women and men overall were molded in desexualisation (Leung, 2003). These were determined by the social context: political necessity was more valued than individual necessity. Therefore, Chinese women found themselves in a strange situation: they had achieved gender equality, apparently, but gender discrimination against women still existed in the revolutionary camp; social relations, interpersonal relationships, family relationships, and women's self-awareness. Since the feudal culture has existed for thousands of years, the mission of anti-feudal culture is far from complete, and it is impossible to complete it in such a short period of time (Lin, 1997). Under this circumstance, Chinese women were caught in a situation where they were sensitive to gender issues but had little understanding about it. Gender discrimination was an unspeakable topic in that era (Lin, 1997).

In 1978, under Deng's leadership, China implemented the "Open Door Policy," which brought significant changes to every aspect of the society and ordinary people's life. During that time, Western culture began to gradually show its influence on China's society. The end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s is considered as the second

ideological liberation in China during the 20th century. Chinese women started talking about gender discrimination in the patriarchal society under the influence of Western culture. A dilemma that most Chinese women face was that it was hardly possible to balance the pursuit of independence and play the role of good wife and mother, even for women who received higher education and had a good culture quality (Lin, 1997). To women, love equals sacrifice. They need to sacrifice their own personality to display the traditional female virtue in front of their husbands, such as gentle obedience, and not have a more successful career than their husbands. However, in the meantime, they could not merely be a traditional, virtuous wife and good mother because men would not like a woman who does not have her own personality. In other words, the expectation for married women has become more diverse.

In sum, Western feminism has had two major impacts on Chinese women's culture for nearly 100 years. The first one happened at the beginning of 20th century. It helped advance Chinese women to be freed from feudal patriarchal restraints and realized their marriage autonomy with the help of democrats and Communists. Thus, Chinese women began to gain the right to choose other lifestyles other than the role of traditional housewife. The second one happened in the 1970s to 1980s. Chinese women started to gain more recognition of gender differences. Before that, the recognition that Chinese women had about gender difference was very obscure. Between the 1950s to late 1970s, the way the new Chinese government adopted to achieve gender equality was

desexualization. During that time, Chinese women mistakenly assumed gender equality was implemented by talking like men, working like men, and dressing like men (Lin, 1997). After the late 1970s, Chinese women finally realized their misconception of gender equality; they began to obtain an objective understanding of gender inequality and the historical situation of being female, examine the formation of Chinese women's culture, present the status of women's survival, and strive for their gender interests (Lin, 1997).

The Chinese government legislated women's protection in the workplace. However, some concrete terms of this legislation "might be seen as inhibiting women from attaining equal working conditions and wages as men" (Leung, 2003, p. 367). According to Korabik (1993), nearly 70% of employers preferred male to female employees. It was extremely difficult for women who wanted to make a contribution in their career and take care of their family at the same time.

Chinese women had realized the goal of liberating themselves from feudal ethics nearly 70 years ago. However, the influence of Chinese traditional culture on Chinese women should not be underestimated. Even though Chinese women now have many other choices than being traditional housewives, they still are considered to have unavoidable responsibility to take care of their family.

In any era, a women's concept is closely connected to culture. According to Ding (2011), three factors caused the conflict of balancing work and family that modern

Chinese women were facing. First, the society has double expectations for women. They are expected to actively participate in work and make contributions to the society.

Meanwhile, the expectation for women to take the responsibility of taking care of their family did not fade away. They were still asked to be good at housework after getting married, regardless if they had a job. This practice created barriers in women's life due to devoting their limited time and energy to two duties.

Second, the traditional culture still has a lingering influence in modern society. It is yet very hard for modern Chinese women to disregard the bondage of feudal ethics.

Although women's economic status makes more and more men share housework with their wives, they often are reluctant to do housework. Additionally, men lacked time to share family affairs with their wives, while women tended to understand and support their husbands. However, most men's attitudes are reversed when their wives cannot fulfill their family responsibilities due to the work. Whenever women are facing conflict between work and family, the value of modern women is conflicting with their collectively subconscious morality, causing women to feel guilty and ashamed (Deng, 2011; Yang, 2010). The traditional women's culture is another incentive that causes conflict between women's work and family.

Additionally, women's self-awareness negatively influences balancing their work and family. Many women's self-awareness still is impacted by the traditional culture. They consider doing housework is part of their duty as married women. Some women

would still make time to cook or clean the house for their family, even though they had the money to hire helpers.

Miao (2016) also stated that traditional culture is the main reason why married women often have a hard time in balancing their work and family. Women's value was significantly reflected in serving their husbands and raising children in Confucianism. The success of a woman was the social status of her husband and male offspring in feudal society. The influence of traditional culture on women is huge. Today, no matter how women's social roles change, the role they play in the family is not affected. It is not easy for women to balance their roles in society and family because it requires much time and energy to fulfill those different roles. However, the fact is that women's time and energy are limited. It is barely possible for women to meet expectations of society when it not only asks women to be skillful in the workplace, but also to be the virtuous wife and good mother for the family. According to Miao, women tend to spend much more time taking care of their family compared to men; in the workplace, women also need to work much harder than men to be as "good" as men. Although highly educated women want to pursue the perfect performance in the workplace and family, it is very hard to achieve it.

The majority of Chinese men and women believe women should focus more on the family; they also are inclined not to raise any objections on women's adverse positions in the workplace. This is the result of China's society greatly influenced by its traditional culture. On one side, Chinese women hope to show their value through their

successful career; on the other hand, they feel that as women they should pay more attention to the family. However, the majority of Chinese women still choose to seek a balance between having their own career and taking care of their family, even though it means there would be double pressure on them (Miao, 2016). While Chinese women are struggling with self-identity about their different roles, some choose to devote all of their time and energy to raising and educating their children, while others choose to not get married to avoid adding extra barriers to their professional pursuit. Under the long-term traditional cultural influence, Chinese women unavoidably have the sense of responsibility for family. Therefore, the choice most Chinese women make is full of Chinese characteristics. It is a compromise that Chinese women make given the national condition and the effect of traditional culture (Miao, 2016).

According to Miao (2016), women's personality and value are a reflection of the culture in any era. There are few women who dare to fight against the expectation of Confucianism in feudal society. Today, more and more young women in China are acting "boldly": they claim women should have the right to not be married nor have children. However, most Chinese women still acquiesce to gender inequality (Miao, 2016). For example, many Chinese young women express their anxiety and worry about how their mothers force them to go on a blind date. In the eyes of those mothers, it is unacceptable to not get married after a proper age.

One of the significant differences between highly educated women in China and many developed countries is most Chinese women bear double duties: social duty and family duty (Wei, 2002). Under the multiple contradictions between ideal and realistic traditions and modern Eastern and Western culture, highly educated women in China encounter a very complicated contradiction in reality in the process of balancing work and family.

Highly educated women are a special group in China. They have better self-quality, higher employment level, and social status compared to other female groups in China. The underlying cause of gender inequality in China is the economic status of inequality between males and females (Wei, 2002). Therefore, Chinese women are aware the only way to improve their status is to be economically independent. It is the main reason why most Chinese women decide to continue to work after they are married. In addition, there is a similarity between the past feudal society and today's society: family is still the basic unit that composes society (Wei, 2002). Thus, women are the indispensable part of most families and have the unavoidable responsibility. According to a survey conducted at Peking University about female staffs' selection of dual roles (family role and social role), "94.5% females believe they bear the same responsibilities as males in society and family; 68.5% females believe the happiest thing for women is to own a successful career and happy family; 72% females believe highly-educated women



could be the new “virtuous wife and mother” while they have their own career” (Wei, 2002, p. 17).

However, women’s desire is hard to satisfy in reality sometimes. The influence of traditional culture on Chinese women is still substantial. Looking back at the transition of women’s role in the past 100 years, there is no doubt that women’s status has greatly improved. At the beginning of the 20th century, along with Western culture that was introduced in China, Chinese women started to be aware of the significance of independence. After the establishment of People’s Republic of China (1949), many women participated in the national construction and economic revitalization under the impetus of “the times are different, both genders are the equal” and “Women hold up half the sky.” However, the gender equality showed only in the field of labor production (Wei,2002). The propaganda about gender equality during 1950s was quite simple. They publicized how women could make the same contribution to national construction as men on the physical level, but said nothing about female independent consciousness. In other words, women were asked to work as hard as men in the workplace, but their inferior status in other fields was neglected. For example, although women already gained marriage autonomy, they did not have the right to be unmarried. Any female who was single after she reached a “proper” age (usual around 25) was considered as problematic by the public. Their work organizations often would intrude into single women’s personal life and arrange blind dates for them.

This situation has changed since the 1980s. After the implementation of Reform and Opening policy and the change of the economic system, women began to be aware of the consciousness of the individual under the influence of various Western ideologies. Chinese women, especially the intellectual ones, gradually felt the self-fulfillment could not be achieved only by being a virtuous housewife. Their value also needed to be recognized in the workplace (Wei, 2002). Therefore, modern Chinese women take considerable pressure from their dual roles rather than become a “single-side” individual.

However, the cost of performing very well in both fields is pretty high for women. It requires great time and energy. Additionally, China’s society had not established a system that could make up for a women’s sacrifices (Wei, 2002). According to Peking University’s research about females’ experience in the workplace (Wei, 2002), 91% female respondents believed women need to make more efforts and sacrifices than men to achieve the same status as men.

In addition, the traditional culture is still the major cause of gender inequality in modern China (Wei, 2002). The thought of “men are superior to women” in Confucianism has not faded away. On the contrary, it still affects many Chinese peoples’ cognition about gender equity; 57.6% female staff of Peking University considered traditional values and ethics had an influence on them to some extent; 30.4% female staff of Peking University believed the influence on them was considerable and they would regulate their behaviors in the light of traditional values and ethics (Wei, 2002).

In the past 15 years, Chinese women's self-perceptions and individualism emerged along with the internationalization of China. An increasing number of women have built their individual female consciousness; however, many of them are limited to "appearance and adornment" (Leung, 2003, p. 369). A growing number of women who are inclined to be "chasing freedom" corresponded with increased advocacy of Chinese traditional women's "virtuous" behavior in official media publicity. "Being a perfect wife and mother" is the most typical one. Therefore, women are asked to make contributions to society and family at the same time. The weight of a woman's burden is significant and becomes one of the causes that leads to gender inequality in China.

### **Gender Equality in China**

In China, gender equality was not an issue until the early 20th century because Confucianism, the dominant ideology, "set" women to be inferior to men in either legislation or social customs. "Across thousands of years of Chinese history, Confucianism has served as an officially supported patriarchal ideology that has deemed women inferior to men and has limited the role of women to their households" (Lee, 2012, p. 42). "Three Cardinal Guides and The Five Permanent Standards" is a typical Confucian standard for women. It requires females to play a role that serves and obeys males in various age stages. Women were required to be obedient to their fathers or older brothers before marriage; after marriage they are expected to be obedient to their

husbands; in the case of widowhood, women need to be obedient to their sons (Ding, 2011; Huang, 2008; Lee, 2012; Yang, 2017).

Across thousands of years of Chinese history, women's social and family status had been low under the influence of Confucianism. At the beginning of the 20th century, along with the introduction of Western progressive ideology, women's status had remarkable improvement (Lin, 1997; Miao, 2006; Wei, 2002). After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, women's role had been redefined through a series of legislation. Women started to enjoy equal rights with men in many areas such as work, education, and politics (Lee, 2012; Leung, 2003). On the other hand, the rise of social and family status of women benefited from the disintegration of the patrilineal system (Hong, 1987). The one-child policy was the main cause of weakening patrilineality because "single children do not have nephews and nieces, and their children will not have uncles, aunts, or close cousins" (Hong, 1987, p. 319).

The improvement of Chinese women's social status is significant. According to China's women's social status survey (All-China Women's Federation, 2010), the condition of Chinese women has improved in various areas such as health, education, economic, social security, politics, and leadership. For example, the proportion of women who have received high school, college education, and post-college education increased significantly, by 5.5 and 10.7 percentage points, respectively, over the year 2000.

Additionally, the proportion of women who have served as leaders in 2010 increased by

4.5 percentage points over the year 2000. Besides that, along with the enhancement of women's economic status, women earned more autonomy determining their personal affairs, and men and women are now more equal in decision making on major family matters.

China has taken the first step on the road of achieving gender equality after 1949. However, gender inequality still exists in various areas, especially in education and the workplace. Gender inequality in those fields mainly was influenced by social custom. First, many parents valued the male child only. That was mainly caused by the actual situation, traditions, and parents' bias against daughters. "China's non-farm workforce being completely dominated by males, convinced parents that investing in daughters was a waste of money" (Tsui & Rich, 2002, as cited in Lee, 2012, p. 42). Moreover, "the traditions of co-residence with sons and son-dominated old-age care also prompted parents to invest in sons as long-term insurance" (Lee, 2012, p. 42). The preference of sons was especially ingrained in Chinese rural areas because the old tradition of a son was mainly responsible for taking care of the old (Han, 2007). Therefore, education as an important investment caused parents to tend to invest it in their sons (Zhang et al., 2007). In addition, the prejudice parents had against daughters about their innate intellectual inferiority negatively influenced girls' school enrollment (Bauer et al, 1992).

Second, along with the implementation of the one-child policy, female children's family status and opportunities for education were significantly improved (Lee, 2012).

The only female child enjoyed much more benefits in education compared to a female child inside a multiple-child household. However, speaking of gender equality in multiple-child households, female children enjoyed less rights in education compared to male children. According to Lee (2012), “the years of schooling for girls inside multiple-child households were significantly fewer than the years of schooling for boys inside multiple-child household” (p. 51). In other words, “gender equality has emerged between only-child boys and only-child girls, but that gender inequality still exists in multiple-child households” (Lee, 2012, p. 51). During 1980 to 2015, a birth control policy called One-and-Half Child was implemented in the rural area of 19 of China’s provinces. The couple could have another child *if the first child is a girl* by the One-and-Half Child policy. The purpose of the One-and-Half Child policy was to increase the birth rate. However, it also caused the accommodation of the preference toward a son (Yang, 2010). Some experts believe this policy has contributed to the concept of patriarchalism and is one of the major causes of gender imbalance in Chinese newborns (Yang, 2010).

Additionally, gender ratio was skewed after the implementing of the one-child policy (Lee, 2012). Because the preference for male descendants still existed in the minds of many Chinese parents, their eagerness to have sons resulted in high abortion rates. “It is also noted a higher percentage of boys were only children compared to girls” (Lee, 2012, p. 43). Along with the increasing number of boys’ birth rates, the gender ratio began to be seriously distorted. In this case, women were more valued for their maternal

functions; therefore, they were more likely to be educated to fill the traditional role of the female: being a good wife and mother in order to meet the demand of relieving social aging (Hong, 1987).

Gender inequality in education has been exhibited in several aspects. After the establishment of PRC, the Chinese government initiated the campaign against illiteracy. After four decades, illiteracy fell dramatically among both males and females. However, there was a big difference between male and female in illiteracy. “In urban areas, of the older cohort, 29% of the males and 67% of the females were illiterate, but only 2.3% of younger men and 6% of younger women were illiterate” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 337). Even though illiteracy sharply dropped during the 40 years, males occupied a larger percentage in literacy than females in both older and younger age groups. Also, “the elimination of illiteracy among males occurred earlier and faster than it did for females” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 337). Therefore, women were more likely to be illiterate than men. In fact, in the group of people who were above 15 years old, the illiteracy rate of women was still 7.5% higher than men in 2008 (Xu, 2011).

Moreover, the gender gap in education enormously narrowed in elementary and secondary school (Zhang et al., 2007). “Between 1949 and 1981, the proportion of female students in primary and secondary schools increased steadily” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 337). However, at the higher education level, the large gender gap still remained, especially among the youngest age group. In addition, during 1964-1987 women had less

opportunities to enter university among senior high graduates (Bauer et al., 1987). Either in the younger or older groups, females were less likely to be enrolled in university than men (Bauer et al., 1987).

Other than this, gender inequality in education was not eliminated along with the development of higher education (Liu, 2017). Although the number of college students has increased in recent years, the phenomenon of gender differentiation in science and the professions is increasingly prominent. Female college students were more inclined to select humanities majors such as teaching, Chinese, or foreign languages. Their enthusiasm for participating in science and engineering professional education was not high (Liu, 2017). Some feminists believed the gender imbalance in the distribution of majors was an external expression of the male superior culture.

According to Liu (2017), the main factor that caused gender imbalances in college majors' distribution was the educational system which was affected by the traditional culture. Under the influence of traditional culture, some female college students were blindly obedient to the custom; in this case, they tended to develop some personality traits such as dependence, softness, patience, and passiveness (Liu, 2017). At the same time, some teachers intentionally or unintentionally expressed the ideology of males being better than females in scientific fields, which also exacerbated the intensification of gender inequality in higher education (Liu, 2017). In addition, gender equality is something the Chinese government has lacked. "Currently, the advantage of men in the



structure of China's political rights is still obvious, and female spokespersons are insufficient. Females' voice is insufficient in the decision-making process which makes it difficult to fully protect women's rights" (Liu, 2017, p. 114).

According to Yang (2010), the implementation of the compulsory education system and the enlargement of higher education's enrollment provided young people with direct access to education. Since 1986, the compulsory education system provided equal opportunities for both genders from the perspective of public policy. However, the convergence of educational opportunities between male and female does not mean the differences have been completely eliminated. The latest data show in some cases the probability of female enrollment is still lower than males (Yang, 2010). The gender imbalance in higher education is clear if the educational opportunities are subdivided into bachelor's degree and master's degree. It is more likely women are inclined to be enrolled in the humanities and social sciences, and men tend to be enrolled in engineering and high-tech fields (Yang, 2010). These differences will directly affect their career opportunities, career development, and economic situation in their old age. According to the China's women's social status survey (All-China Women's Federation, 2010), only 25.7% of urban women have received college and higher education, which is lower than the rate of urban men.

Nevertheless, the Chinese government has made considerable effort to ensure women's right to having equal employment opportunities, which has led to a large rise in

the proportion of women in the workplace (Bauer et al., 1987). However, gender inequality still exists in the workplace, and it has been exhibited by the “pattern of participation for men and women” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 350). First, the retirement age of women was earlier than men: “female generally retire at age 55 and males at 60” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 353). Implementing China’s retirement age policy was an overcorrection for improving women’s rights (Yang, 2010). The current retirement age policy is the extension of relevant regulation since the 1950s. Back to that time, women were in a very weak position, so they needed policy inclination and more protection to accelerate the improvement of their social and economic status. The original intention of setting women’s retirement age five to 10 years earlier than men was to protect them. However, women’s earlier retirement has resulted in the lack of experience and seniority (Yang, 2010). The earlier women retire, the shorter their seniority and the less pension they receive. In this case, the retirement age policy becomes a limit or counteraction to the equal employment and labor compensation for women (Yang, 2010). This kind of deficiency has caused women an unfair disadvantage in competing with men for conferring academic titles (Bauer et al., 1987; Yang, 2010). The major two causes of women’s earlier retirement were their lower income and double burdens: “More women than men chose early retirement because their earnings were generally lower and because retired women would help with housework and childcare, whereas retired men would not” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 353).

Second, women were underrepresented in certain types of enterprise. In the late 80s, there were mainly three types of enterprises in urban China: state-owned, collective-owned, and privately owned. “About 70% of urban workers in 1987 were employed in state-owned enterprises, 25% were in urban collective enterprises, and about 4% were individual laborers in private enterprises” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 355). However, male workers were dominant in state-owned enterprises. In 1987, females only held a third of the employee positions in state-owned enterprises. However, women occupied nearly half of the staff and workers in the collective-owned enterprises. The main reason for this was “many collectivities in the 1960s and the 1970s were organized by the government specifically to generate female employment” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 356). Until 1987, female workers who were in state-owned and collective-owned enterprises were highly concentrated in industry, commerce, and public health; male workers were more likely engaged in construction, transportation, government, and party organizations (Bauer et al., 1987).

Third, regardless of the type of enterprise, gender is always an important factor that influences employment. According to Xu (2011), in a survey of the university at Baoding city in China, 23% of college female students believed that “gender” was the factor employers valued most. They also considered “gender” was their disadvantage in job seeking competition. Among previous graduates, 85% of respondents thought males tended to occupy the higher level positions than females in the organization; only 15% of

responders held the opposite view. Also, 80% of college female students claimed they had encountered gender discrimination during the job searching process. In addition, many respondents pointed out that a lot of employers clearly ask for “male only” or “prefer male under the same condition.” Under the same circumstances, the rate of males’ employment is 8% higher than female. Moreover, in some foreign-funded enterprises, many female employees were forced to accept harsh terms like “do not have a child in five years” under the severe employment situation. Even in the recruitment conditions of some state-owned organizations, such as government, bank, hospital, university, and newspaper industry, “males only” was clearly written.

According to Gao (2018), the Workplace Gender Discrimination Survey in 2017 also revealed discrimination against women in the workplace. The data showed 56.7% of the respondents felt that “women had fewer opportunities” during the job search; 91.9% of the respondents felt the employer had gender bias. In the Workplace Gender Discrimination Survey in 2017 made for some women, 65% of the respondents felt they encountered gender discrimination during the job search, and 35% of the respondents said they were *required to* not marry and have children in a certain period of time.

Gender discrimination in the workplace is reflected in three aspects: income, occupation, and the “glass ceiling” (Gao, 2018). According to statistics, the phenomenon of "different pay for equal work" between women and men has been very serious. The China Labor Market Development Report published by Beijing Normal University in

2016 pointed out that the income difference between male and female had increased in the nearly 20 years (Gao, 2018). In 1995, China's income ratio between male and female was 85.9%; the number went down to 84.5% in 2002. However, the income ratio between two genders decreased to 73.9% in 2007; the number grew to 78.2% in 2013. Overall, females' income generally was lower than males'. Moreover, the income difference between male and female had a trend of increasing in the last 10 years (Gao, 2018).

The second aspect that reflected gender discrimination in the workplace is gender occupational isolation. With the development of the market economy and the widespread dissemination of gender equality ideology, men and women should have equal status in the labor market. However, some "female industries" or "male industries" have been formed in reality (Gao, 2018; Yang, 2010). This kind of occupational gender isolation would not only increase the gap between men's and women's income, but also it would affect women's overall employment structure, which makes their employment situation worse. It would not benefit women's future career planning and their social status improvement (Gao, 2018).

The third aspect of gender discrimination in the workplace is promotion discrimination (Gao, 2018). Compared to male employees, female employees are more likely to encounter the "glass ceiling." In 2017, a Chinese job seeking website named Zhaopin conducted a survey on the Status Quo of Chinese Women in the workplace;

12,8576 male and female employees participated in the survey. The result showed the “glass ceiling” was presented in two main aspects.

The first aspect was the required time for females’ first promotion (Gao, 2018). The 22% female responders of the survey believed severe gender discrimination existed in the workplace; 25% female responders claimed serious gender inequality existed in promotions—49% female employees achieved their first promotion in two years, yet the rate of male employees was 59%. Besides that, 44% female responders claimed they had never received a promotion until the day they took the survey, but only 31% male responders had not been promoted until they participated in the survey. In addition, the statistics demonstrated in terms of promotion time costs that women spent more time, but the proportion of promotion opportunities for women was smaller than men. Second, women obviously were underrepresented in leadership roles; 72% responders expressed their direct supervisors were male; only 28% responders replied their direct supervisors were female.

This revealed another gender inequality area in China: professions. The majority of women’s occupations were focused on accountant, clerk, secretary, teacher, medical doctors, and other white-collar professions. However, men’s professions were more like senior management staff of government or party organizations and of enterprises. In other words, “women were more heavily concentrated than men in commerce and service sector jobs” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 359) and also poorly underrepresented in those areas.

According to Han (2007), some feminists have used gender to explain the reason why females usually encountered unfair treatment in the workplace. Chinese sociologists also used gender to analyze gender inequality in the workplace. According to Liu and Niu (2000), the traditional profession of women reflected their common nature. The positive common nature of women included being good at taking care of others, loyalty, dexterous, careful, etc. Therefore, females tended to engage as nurses, social workers, textile workers, and nannies. The negative common nature of women included unwilling to supervise others, lack of physical strength, unwillingness to travel on business and face danger, low ability in mathematics and technology, etc. This made women have a lower proportion of manager positions, construction workers, scientists, pilots, police, etc. Their positive endowments make them more likely to engage in inefficient, monotonous occupations with little human capital requirements. Therefore, women's characteristics limited their freedom of choice for professional and promotion opportunities.

According to Yang (2010), the traditional concept of gender division of labor indicated that the physiological characteristics of female, such as reproduction and upbringing, determined women were suitable for private areas. At the same time, because of men's rational and brave social attributes, they were suitable for public areas such as political, economic, legal, and the military.

Additionally, although there were several laws to protect women's equality in the workplace, discrimination against women still exists. "Many of these Enterprises are

reluctant to hire women because they do not want to provide the services such as childcare and maternity leave, that women workers are more likely to require” (Bauer et al., 1987, p. 364).

According to Xu (2011), fertility and related costs made employers tend to not hire female. Article 51 of the Labor Law of the People's Republic of China stipulates that female employees still can enjoy wages during their maternity leave. Additionally, employers also need to bear the job vacancies and pay the cost. This is the most direct reason why employers are reluctant to hire women. In addition, the issue of fertility makes female employees have to withdraw from the labor market for a period of time. Even if the depreciation of human capital is not taken into account, female employees' actual production capacity would be reduced, which conversely creates an indirect cost burden for the employer (Xu, 2011).

When women return to work after maternity leave, breastfeeding and raising a child still take a certain amount of their time (Han, 2007). Sometimes it affects the time and energy that women spend on work. Therefore, it is highly possible that their work efficiency and work results would be negatively affected. At the same time, the social value created by women in taking care of the family's time and energy could not be calculated into the value of the enterprise's products, nor could it be reflected by the economic benefits of the enterprise; thus, it will cause women to be at a disadvantage in professional competition, resulting in their weak position in social status (Han, 2007). On



the other hand, the time and energy women devote to marriage, fertility, and housework limits their work experience. In addition, the educational level women receive usually is not as high as men, and women also tend *to avoid* science areas. Therefore, women could not provide the same human capital as men in the workplace (Han, 2007). Additionally, women's contributions to the family likely cause their absenteeism and lateness for work, so they are considered to be high-cost and low-value employees from employers' perspectives. Relatively speaking, hiring men is an economic choice for employers (Han, 2007).

Gender inequality in the workplace was exacerbated by women's passive adaptation to it (Han, 2007). As time went on, disadvantaged women gradually accepted and adapted to the socially dominant concept of gender inequality in the workplace. The socially dominant concept of discrimination against women has made women's work enter a vicious circle: the more women shape themselves according to the concept of social dominance, the more they are rejected by society; the more the society excludes professional women, the more women give up their career and intently being housewives (Han, 2007). This becomes a major obstacle for women to achieve equal status.

From the literature the author overviewed in the previous section, it is not hard to see the traditional culture also plays an important role in causing gender inequality in the workplace. According to Xiang et al. (2017), "In recent years, a new word has been created and widely used in China: *sheng nv*—which literally means left women" (p. 100).

The word “Sheng nv” identifies any woman who is 30 years of age (or older), has a stable career, but is still single (Zhou, 2010). In other words, “sheng nv” implies a woman is left behind by eligible bachelors. Although Chinese law ensures women have the right to enjoy autonomy of marriage, the word “sheng nv” shows how society denies women’s autonomy to choose to remain single or to choose their own time to get married.

According to Zhou (2010):

the most fundamental reason for coining the term sheng nv is so men can maintain gender discrimination as well as their perceived domination over women. Their efforts are designed to make modern women return to the traditional role of subservience to the male. (as cited in Xiang et al., 2017, p. 100)

Unfortunately, many Chinese women have accepted the sheng nv ideology by trying to get married before the age of 30 in order to remove the stigma inherent in the term.

According to Kuang (2016), the word “sheng nv” is a concept promoted by society and the nation. “Sheng nv” includes an extremely insulting meaning toward any single women whose age is above 30. To those urban women who are the only child in their family, they have enjoyed more higher education opportunities compared to those who live in rural areas. Therefore, they tend to have their own independent thoughts on marriage and have less influence from the traditional culture. Those urban women are unwilling to get married until they find the “right” one. Although they are more

independent and have stronger self-awareness than rural women, the pressure from their parents, relatives, and the society is still considerable (Kuang, 2016).

However, while the word “sheng nv” was becoming widespread in China, China’s national media did not pay much attention or raise any objection to such an insulting word toward women. The fundamental reason why China’s national media kept silent about such an obvious gender discrimination circumstance was the skewed gender ratio. Along with implementing the one-child policy, the preference for male offspring caused many rural families to have abortions once they found the gender of the fetus was female. This has resulted in a situation that the number of unmarried male adults is 30 million greater than unmarried female adults in China. Thus, the purpose of promoting the concept of “sheng nv” was to urge more and more Chinese women to get married by creating anxiety among them and their parents (Kuang, 2016).

Despite the changes China has made and many achievements in the field of gender equality and women’s development, including healthcare, education, politics, etc. (“Gender Equality and Women’s Development in China”, 2015), women are still underrepresented in high-level leadership. Tang (2011) pointed out that workplace authority is a significant factor to measure gender equality in the workplace. However, existing research on Chinese women's authority in the workplace has usually adopted a narrower approach on the concept of authority. Researchers often focus on elite women who are at the top of the social pyramid. “There is a significant gender gap in authority,

especially in some key management positions” (Tang, 2011, p. 20). Besides that, “women's access to authority is still significantly lower than that of man; this implies that there is clearly gender-based discrimination in access to authority in the workplace” (Tang, 2011, p. 20).

On the other hand, women’s participation in politics often is used as a representation of women’s workplace authority by the government or mass media. However, the proportion of women in senior political leadership positions is very small. The vast majority of women are in basic-level or high-level deputy positions (Tang, 2011). Therefore, it is hard to say Chinese women do not encounter any gender discrimination on their road to leadership positions. The improvement of women’s overall social status does not mean their status has improved in every specific dimension (Tang, 2011). For example, the protection of women’s rights in the field of education, marriage, and politics does not represent that women’s workplace authority has been improved accordingly.

Women leaders are really rare in China’s politics. Politics, as a valuable and scarce resource, always has been controlled by men (Yang, 2010). In contrast, women are not qualified, motivated, or unwilling to participate in politics. Women usually do not earn the qualification to access the politics due to the traditional culture, current policies, and low professional achievement; women are not motivated or unwilling to access the

politicized field usually because of the family's and individual's acceptance of women's traditional roles (Yang, 2010).

Si and Kang (2012) claimed there are three factors negatively affecting women in China's politics. First, the traditional culture, especially the patriarchal ideology, still has a profound and lasting influence on Chinese society. In Chinese traditional culture, only men were qualified to participate in politics. There is a Chinese idiom for those women who want to participate in politics: "The hen in the morning." It means women usurp authority over men. Under the influence of traditional culture, even Chinese intellectual women who received higher education were not motivated to participate in politics (Si & Kang, 2012; Yang, 2010).

Second, women's participation in politics cannot be praised by public opinion and media. The role women play in Chinese advertising, film, and television drama is still traditional housewife in the most cases. On the contrary, women in politics usually are not valued by the public and media. Under the guidance of this propaganda, women must make much more effort than men to become one of the core decision makers in social and political activities. At the same time, Chinese traditional social opinion has had a kind of malicious conjecture for women who are in senior leadership positions in politics.

Third, Chinese traditional culture makes Chinese males subconsciously reject and resist women's participation in politics. Men, as social dominators, are not willing to share political rights with women. In addition, laws that are set to protect women's rights

to participate in politics are misinterpreted at the basic-level government office. For example, the number of women leaders is regulated to one in a basic-level government office.

Moreover, women's voices are rarely heard in the media field in China.

According to Qin (2016), gender equality would hardly be achieved unless women own the same right to speak as men do in Chinese media. In Chinese feudal society, the dominance of males has been built through grasping control of the right to speak (Qin, 2016). In this case, Chinese women lost their subjectivity in all kinds of areas. Despite Chinese women winning their right to speak through legislation after the establishment of People's Republic of China, it usually focuses on women's daily life rather than in the field of media and politics. Today, women's image mainly is presented in fashion or daily life TV shows. The female documentary program "Half of The Sky" on China Central Television Channel 1 (CCTV) went off the air in 2011, reflecting many high-end, serious female TV programs failed due to the low ratings.

On the other hand, the low ratings of those serious female TV shows refers to how Chinese women have been influenced by the traditional culture. Nowadays, the disadvantage of the external environment for women allures women to lower the expectation of themselves; many women prefer marrying a rich man than hard work to have a superior life. In this case, they abandon further development of their own self-personality. According to Qin (2016), another factor that has caused this situation is the

underrepresentation of women high-level leaders in Chinese media. For example, only four of the total 32 media executives of Chinese provincial satellite television stations are women (Qin, 2016).

In sum, gender equality refers to the equal rights and opportunities of both men and women in the private space of family life and in the public sphere of social activities to exert their potential and talents; to participate in public political, economic, social, and cultural development and family decision making; and equal access to social and family development outcomes (Yang, 2010). Although Chinese women's rights have been protected by the law in various aspects, they still face gender inequality in the family, education, politics, media, and workplace. The original purpose of the one-child policy was to suppress population growth; however, it created the severe skewed gender ratio, which caused another social problem that relates to gender inequality. In addition, women tend to gain less higher education opportunities compared to men. Gender inequality is more serious in the workplace, especially in the political field. Women leaders are still underrepresented in both national and private organizations. The fundamental cause of China's gender inequality is still the traditional culture.

### **Nature of Chinese Media**

Along with the political revolution and economic development in China, Chinese media has gone through several stages; the nature of Chinese media has changed from the tool of political propaganda to multiple functions. According to Luo (2015), the long

history of Chinese civilization has made today's Chinese media system. Currently, there are three categories of Chinese media: "Traditional Media, Internet Media, and Mobile Media" (Luo, 2015, p. 50). Traditional Media includes media that falls into the "old fashion" category, such as newspaper, periodical journals, books, radio, television, and movies. Just as its name implies, the Internet Media contains any media that relates to The Internet, such as portal websites, video sites, search engines, social media, online games, and electronic commerce. Mobile Media refers to every type of media associated with handsets.

According to Luo (2015), "there are at least six existing forces influencing Chinese media synchronously through different organizational or social channels, which could be designated as the Party Force, Governmental Force, Capital Force, Professional Force, Individual Force and Cultural Force" (p. 52). Party Force can be considered as the control and influence from the Communist Party of China (CPC). The Governmental Force refers to the power generated from the central government and related administration organizations. Capital Force represents the influence of the "free market." Individual Force refers to media from individual citizens. Finally, Culture Force describes the influence of Chinese traditional culture.

Additionally, other academicians also have proposed similar perspectives. According to Winfield and Peng (2005), there are four main elements that define Chinese media: ownership, the media's role, government control, and market liberalization.



Briefly, the element of ownership represents the dominant right of China's media; the media's role refers to the multiple responsibilities of Chinese media; and government control and market liberalization is similar to Luo's Government Force and Capital Force previously mentioned. Each of these elements or forces has played a significant role in the transformation process of Chinese media's nature.

Back to the time before 1979, the central work of CPC was class struggle. Therefore, the only function and purpose of Chinese media was to serve politics; and this model fits well the Soviet communist mass media model described by Schramm (Huang, 2003). This model was "antiprofessional and anticommercial as they were used instrumentally by the communist party state for various political purposes, particularly as propaganda tool" (Huang, 2003, p. 445). Moreover, Winfield and Peng (2005) also mentioned that Chinese media was an instrument of class struggle before 1979, especially during the 10-year period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. According to Hassid (2008), "During the Mao era (1949-1976), the state tightly controlled all outlets for media, restricting not only their numbers but also their content, length, and format" (p. 416). Unquestionably, the only content that had the permission to be published and distributed was advocating class struggle.

The political environment in China had a sharp transition after Mao's demise; Deng became the one who actually held the power. The significant change in Chinese politics also made China transform from "an orthodox communist media control system

and approaching a more flexible media regulation pattern” (Huang, 2003, p. 448). Since the 80s, the Chinese media system started to transform from totalitarianism to market authoritarianism (Winfield & Peng, 2005; Yang, 2009). Chinese media’s reform and development started in 1979, the same year China began to implement the policy of reform and opening up. Like other industries, Chinese media also began to open up for the market. However, the whole media industry suffered a serious setback with “the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, and subsequently started reforms again in 1992 on to the present” (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 258).

After 1992, Chinese media was no longer the instrument of class struggle because CPC’s central task transformed from class struggle to economic development. In this case, Chinese government allowed advertising to impact the media system since it not only could bring substantial profits to the media company, but also could generate considerable revenues for the national economy (Winfield & Peng, 2005).

“The commercialization of the press significantly influenced China’s media landscape with regard to media ownership and financial support” (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 260). Before 1979, almost all Chinese media were owned by the Party and they relied on the Party’s financial support to survive. Although this made Chinese media play a very crucial role in propagating for the Party and financing all the media organizations, it also brought an overwhelming burden to the Party. After 20 years’ development, the expansion of Chinese media’s institutions, personnel, and missions made the cost of

maintaining the original system of Chinese media increasingly expensive; however, the profit Chinese media organizations earned stayed the same (Yang, 1999). The low efficiency of Chinese media's original system made Chinese media organizations face severe financial difficulties. Consequently, the commercialization of Chinese media was considered as a great opportunity for both sides: The Party could massively reduce the economic burden of financing those media organizations; media organizations could gain some decision-making power in the daily operation by being financially independent. In other words, "such new independence in media financial structures began to impact on media content and media functions as well as the relationship between media organizations and government" (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 260).

The economic structure change of Chinese media caused media organizations in China to not only be influenced by the Party and government, but also to be impacted by the audience and the market. That is to say Individual Force and Capital Force (Luo, 2015) began to play an important role in the field. Ever since the reform of Chinese media, advertisements have become the irreplaceable property of media organizations. "Advertisements not only constituted a necessary condition for economic support as well as new forms of information, but also embodied a new impetus to reach more consumers and to serve the market" (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 260). Media organizations only gain more revenue if they can attract more advertisers or direct sponsors. However, the decisive factor of attracting advertisers is the product's popularity by the audience.

Therefore, the significance of audiences is self-evident. Despite the Chinese media still being ruled by the party state, it also is controlled by the “invisible hand” of the market. “Media control is always there, but the means, extent, and strategy of control have changed” (Huang, 2003, p. 448).

However, the growing influence of commercialization does not mean Chinese media has become fully independent. “Economic liberalization has not translated into much political freedom” (Hassid, 2008, p. 417). The commercialization hardly changed the nature of Chinese media. According to Winfield and Peng (2005), “while media commercialization challenges the current Communist Party orthodoxy by initiating a redistribution of power and interests, the western model of a libertarian press is hardly a possibility” (p. 256). Although it appears commercialization is common in the field of Chinese media, the interests of the Party are specified by law as paramount (Winfield & Peng, 2005). The attribute of Chinese media as a propaganda instrument for the party state has never changed. What has changed is propaganda’s content and method. “Chinese media has been required to serve the country’s ‘reform and opening’ policy with a more rational and pragmatic manner” (Huang, 2003, p. 447).

Compared to the Mao era, despite the CPC’s media control, policy is a more “relaxed and flexible macrocontrol pattern” (Huang, 2003, p. 449); and the party can still control media through ownership, sponsorship, and censorship (Luo, 2015). “The CPC does not own every media source in China, but its propaganda department is in charge of

“censorship of all media content” (Luo, 2015, p. 54). The censorship consists of governmental departments’ censorship and self-censorship by media. Any violation would bring economic or criminal punishment to the media organizations or the profession. According to Winfield and Peng (2005), “the government holds the absolute truth and remains infallible; media professionals are not independent; foreign media are subordinate to the established authority; and all imported media products are state controlled” (p. 266). The main reason that causes the unique nature of Chinese media is that “China's political system remains basically intact and persists while the economic system has been changed” (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 266).

Another method that the CPC has used to keep Chinese media in control is a regime of uncertainty (Hassid, 2008). Regime of uncertainty refers to the Communist Party Department that alone “has the authority to demarcate the boundaries of acceptable coverage, and it does so in such a vague way that even professionals with decades of experience can be caught off guard by its decisions” (Hassid, 2008, p. 422). The CPC gains power through making *unpredictable* decisions. Hassid (2008) claimed the nature of Chinese media has nearly changed since no matter how commercialized Chinese media is, they still need to carry the propaganda message in order to make the Party entrust them. CPC has comparatively loosened the control over Chinese media since 1992; self-censorship becomes the most important and effective method for media organizations to avoid CPC’s punishment. However, regime of uncertainty still makes

many experienced professionals in the field feel as if they are walking on thin ice, especially whenever they express their opinions against politics. From journalist to advertisers, the regime of uncertainty can help the CPC prevent them from going off the rails.

In sum, the uniqueness of Chinese media's nature is due to China's unique political and economic environment. The nature of Chinese media has transitioned from the propaganda instrument for class struggle to a multi-functional role in Chinese society. In short, "Currently, the Chinese media play a dual role: simultaneously commodities in the market and ideological apparatuses" (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 261).

### **Influence of Feminism on China's Gender Equality**

Despite the Chinese government's efforts to improve gender equality in various aspects since the establishment of People's Republic of China, the issue of gender inequality is still evident in many aspects. Due to the severe pressure of population aging, Chinese official media chose to propagate gender inequality ideology in Chinese traditional culture to encourage women to select the "traditional" lifestyle: taking being the good wife and mother as their primary goal. The propagation of "sheng nv" through all kinds of media in China is a good example (Kuang, 2016).

Although the United States of America has gender inequality, the US ranks above average for gender equality worldwide, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018), which measures women's opportunities in politics,

education, health, and the economy. However, China ranked below the global average level in 2018. Moreover, China's gender gap has been growing in the past five years. "The nation ranks 103rd out of 149 countries for gender equality, slipping from last year's 100 out of 144, according to an annual report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Friday" (Teng, 2018, Attire: Why china's gender gap is growing, para 2). According to the global gender equality report 2018, it is the fifth year in a row that China's Gender Gap Index score has fallen.

"A major driver of the growing gender gap has been a widening disparity between men's and women's economic participation. While nearly 70% of countries have narrowed the economic gender gap in the past 10 years" (Teng, 2018, Attire: Why china's gender gap is growing, para 5). Another reason why China ranks below the average level worldwide in gender equality is the political empowerment gap between men and women, which also is below the global average level. "Chinese women lag the furthest behind men in the political arena, where the vanishing number of women in the National People's Congress and State Council — the Chinese parliament and cabinet respectively — put the country's political empowerment gap at 83.6%" (Teng, 2018, Attire: Why China's gender gap is growing, para 9). The third cause of China's gender gap, which is larger than most countries in the world, is the severe gender imbalance at birth. China is ranked at the bottom of the WEF's rankings in terms of women's health and survival.

The fundamental cause of the difference of the gender equality gap between the US and China is the unequal understanding of feminism. Feminism originated from the Western societies. In the past, in Western societies the concept of male superiority was derived from the church, the law, etc., emphasizing the absolute authority of the husband to the wife and the absolute obedience of the wife to the husband. The in-depth development of the industrial revolution in the Western world has greatly changed the social structure and people's concept, following various Western countries' political democratization movements and social reforms (Lian, Ye & Ruan, 2013). The trend of feminism also has developed under that circumstance.

According to Lian et al. (2013), the feminist trend of thought can be traced back to the 17th century. In 1673, François Poullain de la Barre published "On the Equality of the Two Sexes" and proposed a gender equality perspective. During the American Revolutionary War, Abigail Adams suggested the "new regulations" of the US should let women have certain proportional rights, or representation rights. She also was an advocate of married women's property rights and more opportunities for women, particularly in the field of education. Later in 1790, Judith Sargent published an article entitled "On the Equality of the Sexes." Soon after the French Revolution began, Olympe de Gouges published "the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen," which was the world's first declaration of women's rights in French history. In 1792, the



most famous feminist leader of the first wave of feminism, Mary Wolstonecraft, was renowned for “Vindication of the Rights of Women.”

Generally speaking, feminism has experienced three different periods in history, which also can be called the three waves of feminism (Lian & Song, 2012). The first wave of feminism occurred between the mid-19th century and the early 1920s led by the movement for voting rights. The second began in the mid-1960s with emphasis on equality and individual freedom. The third time it was born in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly in Western industrial countries, also known as neo-feminism or post-modern feminism (Lian & Song, 2012).

“Vindication of the Rights of Women,” written by Mary Wolstonecraft, has had a great impact on later feminist ideas. Mary Wolstonecraft also is considered to be the pioneer of liberal feminism. The central argument of her book was the reason why women are enslaved rooted in the socialization process of corruption, which not only hinders the growth of women's minds, but also teaches them that serving men is the noble goal of their lives. Mary Wolstonecraft valued the significance of rationality. She argued women should enjoy the equal education opportunity as men because humankind has rationality regardless of gender. Therefore, she believed if all people could have equal opportunities to develop their rational and moral endowments, they could fully realize their individuality. The core of liberal feminism is to seek gender equality in politics, economy, and education (Lian & Song, 2012).

Unlike Mary Wolstonecraft's emphasis of the equivalent between genders, cultural feminism values the differentiation between man and women (Lian & Song, 2012). In the book, "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" written by Margaret Fuller in 1845, she emphasized the emotional, intuitive level of human understanding. She claimed women have some kind of intuition that goes beyond reason. Through this intuition, women can see the subtle connection between people and all forms of life. However, this uniqueness and greatness of women often was ignored and rejected by men, and women were deeply oppressed (Lian & Song, 2012).

Other cultural feminist advocates, such as Elizabeth Stanton and Joslyn Gage, criticized the patriarchal system of the Christian Church and advocated the use of natural human rights theory to refute the biblical ethics of women's inferiority and revisit the Bible (Lian & Song, 2012). The new explanation pointed out that God's mind has male and female characteristics, and the main principle of the universe is also hermaphrodite. Gilman, the outstanding leader in the first wave of feminist theory, inherited and developed the cultural feminist tradition. She pointed out men are determined by their social and economic environment, while women's social and economic environment is anti-human and artificial; women are economically dependent on men (Lian & Song, 2012). She believed this situation not only hindered the normal development of women themselves, but also caused harm to the progress of the entire human race.

According to Lian and Song (2012), liberal feminism advocates men and women are the same and are able to have the same achievements if social conditions are equal for both genders. They strived to create a society with equal opportunities for both genders from the perspective of law and the social system. They believed equal results would be created as long as the opportunities for both sexes were equal. However, cultural feminism focuses the orientation of differentiation, emphasizing the difference between men and women. They believed people should perform their own duties according to their gender. On the one hand, culture feminists continued to recognize the importance of critical thinking and self-development; on the other hand, they emphasized the role of irrational and intuitive. They were not focusing on the similarities between men and women, but on their differences. From the cultural point of view, they promoted women's uniqueness through analyzing the differences between men and women.

The goal of the second wave of feminism eliminated unequal relations between two genders. At the time, feminists believed women should overcome their femininity and strive to develop masculinity, including aggression and independence (Lian & Song, 2012). They did not agree that maternity was innate; many men also were very gentle and even more caring than women. These characteristics and temperament are not congenital inheritance, but are the result of acquired culture (Lian & Song, 2012). Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" is considered to be the representative work of American liberal feminism (Lian & Song, 2012). It precisely and outstandingly expressed what women

were feeling and thinking at the time of the second wave of feminism. After the Second World War, an ideology dominated women's life in the society of America: the only way to be a real woman was to become a good wife and a good mother. The biggest expectation of a woman was to get married, have five children, and have a beautiful home. Women's primary and only goal was to find a "good" husband and maintain a stable relationship. Friedan vividly described the generation of women's deep sense of loss of self-realization and the lack of self-fulfillment (Lian & Song, 2012). Friedan believed a woman's desire for self-fulfillment could be no longer undifferentiated; and any woman, like any man, was free to assume important roles and responsibilities in the public world (Lian & Song, 2012).

During this period, another book that attracted widespread attention was Shulamith Firestone's "The Dialectics of Sex." Shulamith Firestone is considered as a representative of radical feminism. Firestone believed the material basis of women's oppression is not economic, but biological (Lian & Song, 2012). Women's reproductive function is the main cause of gender division of labor, and patriarchy and its main ideology and gender discrimination are based on gender division of labor. In the 1970s, French post-structural feminism emphasized differences and proposed that women should not use male standards to demand themselves. American feminist Millett also held this view; she said: "Men and women do belong to two cultures." This view is not only opposed to exaggerating differences, but also is against narrowing differences.

In the late 1980s, the post-feminism ideological trend began to appear in Western countries. It usually was considered a part of the third wave of feminism. In sum, the post-feminism ideological trend has three concerns: (1) feminism is a “victim” philosophy, which exaggerates the problem of gender inequality; (2) the problem of gender inequality is created by feminists, and it should not be politicized; (3) the issue of gender inequality should not be raised in a confrontational attitude, but should be raised in an attitude of seeking harmony between the men and women (Lian & Song, 2012). Therefore, in the 1980s, there was an ideology that showed the wave of return requiring women to return to their traditional roles. It claimed the traditional gender order was a natural and reasonable one, and it should not be changed.

In the 1990s, a new ideological trend emerged in the feminist movement: postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism emphasizes the ambiguity of boundaries of the two genders, i.e., there is no binary opposition between men and women (Lian & Song, 2012). It is this potential pluralism that postmodern feminism advocates: multiple possibilities are combined; people’s physiological gender and sexual orientation are no longer combined in a holistic, fixed way. The boundaries among those can be crossed. This blurring of boundaries represents that our original male-female duality concept has been challenged and the philosophical foundation of its existence has been shaken (Lian & Song, 2012).

In 21st century, a new feminism has quietly appeared. Its ultimate goal is to strive for the harmonious development of both genders and the blurring of gender boundaries, ultimately making gender less and less important as a social stratification factor (Lian & Song, 2012). In this case, all individuals can make their personality fully develop, which not only achieves true equality between men and women, but also achieves full equality of social status among all individuals. Therefore, no one would feel any depression due to their gender.

In sum, feminism originated in the Western countries as early as 17th century. In its development of over 300 years, feminism went through four phases: (1) opposing the traditional male superiority concept and promoting gender equality; (2) emphasizing the differences between the two genders, and also claiming that men and women should be equal—women should get the same rights as men; (3) women are superior to men; (4) the gender boundary should be blurred. However, feminism was not introduced in China until 1980s.

### **Soviet Influence**

Like the author mentioned in the section of gender equality in China, the Chinese women's liberation movement began in the early 20th century under the influence of Western culture. The goal of the Chinese women's liberation movement was combined with the goal of anti-feudalism. Thus, the direction of the Chinese women's liberation movement changed after the goal of anti-feudalism was achieved. It was similar to the

ideology trend of the first wave of feminism: emphasizing the complete equality between the two genders and promoting that women should imitate the way men talk, work, and dress. In fact, China's gender equality in the 1950s was greatly influenced by the Soviet Union (Zang, 2008). In the history of China, the influence of the Soviet Union cannot be underestimated. This kind of influence was extremely evident in the 1950s. According to Zang (2008):

Among all of what the Chinese government imitated and referenced from the Soviet Union's experience, the idea of equal opportunity of 'taking up an occupation' was most prominent, the effect of which was so notable that it deeply changed one generation's thought and life. (p. 72)

As a socialist country, China took the Soviet Union as a model. China needed to learn how to mobilize women to participate in socialist construction, how to reflect the influence of socialism on women's liberation, and how to show the world China achieves gender equality (Zang, 2008). In 1949, China's first national-level women's publication, "Women of New China," was issued. This publication reflected how the Chinese government mobilized women to participate in national construction through promoting women's life in the Soviet Union (Zang, 2008). From 1949 to 1955, "Women of New China" had been introducing the life of Soviet Union women at great length. It mainly focused on the promotion of how Soviet Union women actively participated in production and other social activities in the same way as men. Since 1956, "Women of

New China Women" was renamed "Chinese Women," and its introduction to Soviet Union women's articles has gradually been reduced along with the change of the relationship between China and the Soviet Union. The publication of "Women of New China" was sponsored by the All-China Women's Federation (2011), which had its lower organizations in China's every remote rural area. Therefore, the impact of "Women of New China" is also immeasurable.

There were two major features for promoting women's life in the Soviet Union in "Women of New China." First, the publication promoted Stalin's view of women. In the article "Discussion of Working Women," Stalin was included in the first issue of "Women of New China" in 1949. The article stated the mission of women's liberation was significant since female workers and farmers accounted for half of the entire population (Zang, 2008). The support or opposition of the women was very important for the entire destiny of the proletarian movement and to the victory and defeat of the proletarian revolution (Zang, 2008). However, Stalin's view of women involved gender discrimination. Stalin believed in the significance of women's education because of women's innate ignorance. Thus, considering the large population of women in the Soviet Union, women would harm the national construction of the Soviet Union if they could not receive enough education (Zang, 2008). From today's point of view, such discriminatory condescending and masculine language is absolutely unacceptable to women. However, in 1953 the era when the leader's speech was regarded as a God, it was



not only published in a national publication on behalf of the government, but it also became a classical speech that millions of Chinese women must carefully studied (Zang, 2008).

Additionally, except promoting the Soviet Union leader's view of women, "Women of New China" also introduced the Soviet Union's women's life through extremely understandable language to Chinese women (Zang, 2008). In other words, Soviet Union women had been set as a good example for Chinese women in the publication. In "Women of New China," the life of women in the Soviet Union was described as the happiest in the world: Soviet Union women had been completely liberated; the system of gender inequality had been abolished; all discrimination against women also had been eliminated. Women enjoyed the same right in education and the workplace fields. The happiness of Soviet Union women was the result of their active response to the call of the Soviet government and extensive participation in social activities.

According to Zang (2008), some academics claimed desexualization was the feature of China's unique gender equality phenomenon in the 1950s. The gender differences between men and women were ignored. China's gender equality policy in the 1950s was based on the socialist planned economy. The process of promoting the unique gender equality ideology was implemented by China's administrative departments from top to bottom. It could effectively eliminate gender differences at the institutional and

ideological levels. However, it could not fundamentally solve the problem of inequality between men and women and could not completely reform both genders' traditional roles.

Zang (2008) summarized the difference between Western feminism and Chinese women's liberation theory. The core of Western feminism is opposing and breaking the patriarchal society. It emphasizes the rights and inequality caused by gender differences and women's own subjective status and subjective consciousness, and it opposes the marginalization of women in all fields of society, politics, economy, etc. Western feminism is based on human rights and emphasizes women's individual rights. However, the core of Chinese women's liberation theory is opposing feudal oppression and restraint, emphasizing the rights inequality caused by class differences. Chinese women's liberation theory claimed there is no difference between the capability of men and women; it emphasized women's overall interests and liberation.

The feature of desexualization of China's gender equality did not die away until the 1980s. During 1980 to 1987, as a new philosophy theory, feminism was translated and introduced to China (Ma, 2014). According to Ma (2014), the concept of feminism was introduced to China through Western literature that was translated by Chinese foreign literature scholars around the 1980s. Comparing to the Western countries, the time of China's exposure to feminism was much later. In the 1990s, the translation of foreign countries' feminist theories could not satisfy Chinese academic research on

feminism (Ma, 2014). Therefore, scholars started to study the transform and development of feminism in China, and the field of Chinese feminist research has been gradually expanding. However, Chinese researchers in the field of feminism are still puzzled by three difficulties after decades of development (Ma, 2014). Confusion exists in, first, a poor combination of feminism theories and practice; second, misinterpretations and protest of some Chinese men against feminism; moreover, misinterpretations or the lack of correct understanding that female feminist researchers hold for feminism (Ma, 2014). All of these hindered the development of feminism in China. For example, a term of “tian yuan nv quan” has started to be popular in China, which means Chinese *feminazi*. It refers to some Chinese women who do not really understand feminism. They desire the benefit feminism brings to them but refuse to make any contribution in return to their family or society. In other words, “tian yuan nv quan” refers to a double standard some Chinese women hold. They not only require men to take responsibility for making money and supporting the family, but they also ask men not to limit their “freedom.”

### **Summary**

One of the main reasons that caused the difference between the development of feminism in Western countries and China is education. Education, no matter public education or family education, in most Western countries is affected by feminism, which leads to a profound influence on the society. However, many Chinese families are intentionally or unintentionally shaping their children’s gender perspectives (Luo, 2017).

In other words, Chinese parents tend to help their children form some particular characteristics on the basis of their gender. For example, parents are more likely to pick pink color clothes for their daughters and blue for their sons; in their eyes, dolls are more appropriate toys for girls, while toy cars are more suitable for boys. Moreover, in Chinese schools' textbooks, the image of men is often heroes, engineers, and scientists; images of women often are nurses, elementary school teachers, and mothers (Luo, 2017). The Chinese have been accustomed to this kind of gender shaping; thus, they are not sensitive to it. In this case, the significance of education for feminists is evident: it plays an important role in forming an individual's gender and eliminating gender inequality (Luo, 2017).

Another main cause of the difference between the development of feminism in Western countries and China is political ideology. The disparity between individualism and collectivism makes the goal of feminism's development take two different roads. Individualism emphasizes the profit of the individual, but collectivism emphasizes the benefit of the group. In this case, the development of feminism in Western countries inclines to stress individuals' self-fulfillment, equality, and freedom. Chinese women's liberation theory and the combination of feminism and China's society underline women's contributions to society and family as men.

The development of feminism in China is very different from Western countries. It relates to culture, political ideology, and history. It is hard and complicated to combine

feminism and China's society. Currently, the influence of traditional culture still has a significant impact on Chinese society; it also affects the majority of Chinese women's self-awareness. In addition, the misinterpretation of people toward feminism also hinders feminism's popularity and development in China.

In sum, gender inequality still exists in the workplace and puts a negative impact on Chinese women who desire to pursue senior leadership roles in the media field. Chinese traditional culture closely relates to gender inequality in the workplace of China. Although Chinese women's status has been greatly improved and their rights have been protected by legislation since 1949, women's stereotype role in Chinese traditional culture has not fundamentally changed and still has a significant influence on Chinese women. Today, a common dilemma Chinese women are facing is balancing the pursuit of independence and playing the role of good wife and mother, which means their burden has not become any lighter, but heavier. In addition, under the impact of the Soviet Union, desexualization became the feature of China's gender equality in 1950s and did not cease until the 1980s. Although feminism was introduced into China in the 1980s, the influence of Chinese traditional culture and China's political ideology have hindered the development of feminism in China that is far behind Western countries. All of the factors previously stated have led to gender inequality in the workplace in China.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology of the study. This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research method. A total of 10 participants comparably distributed among six employing organizations were selected for this study. The majority of these organizations are stated-owned. Only one of them is a private organization. This study applied in-depth interviewing based on a protocol, which was semi-structured, by using a list of open-ended questions. The author used *in-vivo* coding and description coding to analyze the data.

### Research Design

This study represented a qualitative phenomenological research method. According to Lester (1999), “phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives” (p. 1). Moreover, Husserl’s notions about phenomenology illustrate well how phenomenology was an applicable approach to this study: “For Husserl, phenomenology was to be grounded in the subjectivity of experience, in conscious awareness, because that is where the truth, and the real, were to be found” (Giorgi, 2004, p. 150).

Since the purpose of this research was to identify a range of reasons that have contributed to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in the Chinese media through exploring their lived experience, the author chose to apply the phenomenological

research method, which sought to “explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 19). This type approach usually involves long “in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 19). Additional information regarding the analysis of data can be found in the Analysis Plan.

### **Participants**

The population for this study consisted of women who occupy senior leadership positions in Chinese media organizations in Beijing. This population was drawn from six major media organizations in Beijing.

There were a total of 10 individuals comparably distributed among the six employing organizations (see Appendix E). The sampling strategy was adopted in this study criterion. Only the individuals who met all the criterion were selected as a sample. The participants are all females currently serving as leaders in ABD Television Station, Breaking News, *China News*, *Beijing Weekly*, Orange Video, and Life View. The author assigned pseudonyms for all of these organizations.

ABD Television Station is an organization of a central station for radio and television. It was established in March 2018 and consists of the current China Central Television, China National Radio, and China Radio International.

Breaking News is a state-owned Chinese media organization established in 2016. It belongs to Beijing Media Network. It has the first class of political news qualifications,

which means it is permitted by the Chinese government to report national political news.

Under the overall management of the Beijing Media Network, Breaking News has formed a new format media platform that includes TV, radio, and news media (website and mobile App).

*China News* is the main state news agency of the People's Republic of China. It is the world's most important Chinese news agency, also one of the world's major news agencies, providing real-time news, economic information, news pictures, and charts. China News consists of China Xinhua News Network Corporation and Xinhua News Website.

*The Beijing Weekly* is the largest newspaper in China. It is an official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which was established in 1948. *Beijing Weekly* was named one of the top 10 newspapers in the world by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1992. In addition to its main Chinese-language edition, it has editions in English, Spanish, Japanese, French, Russian, Portuguese, Arabic, Tibetan, Kazakh, Uyghur, Zhuang, Mongolian, and other minority languages in China. The newspaper provides direct information on the policies and viewpoints of the Communist Party.

*Life View* is a magazine sponsored by SDX Joint Publishing Company, which is part of the China Publishing Group. *Life View* is a Chinese journal of news and culture with a good reputation and extensive influence among the mainstream. It is aimed at



intellectual readers who have received higher education and are concerned about the times. The magazine's positioning is "to be a loyal record in the development of the new era." The magazine absorbs the style of the American *Time Magazine*.

In 2017, Orange Video (Beijing) Culture Communication Co., Ltd., was formally established. It covers the fields of food, automobile, sports, fashion, tourism, home, and others. The business involves multi-chains in many fields such as TV program production, news media content production and operation, and e-commerce live broadcasts. The company's self-produced programs include CCTV-Financial Channel "Car God Drive" and "Golden Line"; Guizhou Satellite TV "Car Review"; Jiangsu Satellite TV "Master of Home Room"; Beijing Satellite TV "Chinese Youth League"; CCTV-record channel "The story of Taobao Village," etc. Moreover, Orange Video also owns multiple social media accounts in areas of food and automobile. The total broadcast volume of its automobile social account, "Car Review," is 800 million, and the number of fans is more than 1.3 million.

Five of those six organizations are state-owned Chinese media organizations. The only private-owned Chinese media organization is Orange Video. The main role of ABD Television Station, Breaking News, *China News*, and *Beijing Weekly* is to play national propaganda larynx. Although *Life View* is a state-owned magazine, it mainly focuses on people's lifestyle. Although Orange Video's priority is gaining profit, it is still under the control and censorship of the Communist Party of China.

## **Overview of Instrumentation**

This research applied in-depth interviewing that was carried out based on a questionnaire, which was semi-structured by using a list of open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The subjects of in-depth interviews were women leaders in media organizations in Beijing. Additionally, a demographic survey was applied in this study in order to collect background information of participants. Various questions were included in the background survey, such as gender, age, marital status, educational background, and ethnic group.

Since there is little research that focuses on women leaders in Chinese media, few examples of interview questionnaire of this field could be found. Therefore, the author developed open-ended interview questions, based on the interview questionnaire of Cai (2008), since research subjects were similar.

## **Data Collection**

The author has an insider in the largest Chinese media organization who facilitated the process of recruiting women leaders for this study. The author contacted 15 high-level women leaders in Chinese media organizations in Beijing via email. In the end, 11 of them accepted the invitation. However, one of the participants decided to withdraw from the interview right after she signed the consent form due to personal consideration.

Most of the interviewees expressed they had never before participated in

academic research about women leadership in Chinese media. All participants demonstrated interest in this particular research topic.

Half of the interviews were conducted at participants' offices, and the other half were conducted at café shops. All interview places were the interviewees' choice for convenience. Although the café shops were not as quiet as other interviewees' offices, all interviewees were not affected by the background noise. Therefore, the interview process went quite well.

According to the requirement of the Institutional Review Board at Western Kentucky University, all interviewees were informed of their rights before the researcher conducted her research. In order to protect participants, the consent form (see Appendix C) was shown to all of them before the interview (see Appendix A). All interviewees also signed the consent form to show they agreed to the audio recording of the research. In addition, a little gift was prepared for each participant. Only one interviewee refused to accept the gift. The interviewee expressed the process of participating in the interview was delightful, and she could not accept any gift. Additionally, most interviewees' biggest concern was whether their identity would be protected. After I ensured them their identity would be kept confidential, all of them signed the form.

The average length of the interviews was 45 minutes. The longest lasted more than 1 hour, and the shortest 30 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin and recorded with the researcher's cell phone. Most participants seemed open and informative

during the interview.

The interviewees' personality seemed impacted by the way they reacted to the interview questions. Most of the interviewees seemed to have the ability of expressivity; therefore, they were willing to speak about their thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, they asked the interviewer a few questions. However, two seemed to have no interest in sharing more about their personal thoughts and provided quick and concise answers to my questions. All of interviewees were open and candid. Five of them showed strong interest in the research's topic. Three of them provided casual comments after the interview.

Despite the interviewees' extremely busy schedule, they still spent their valuable and considerable time to participate. More essential and newer information was gained about women leaders in the Chinese media field through discussion with them. Talking to them also helped the investigator to have a deeper understanding of the research questions. Some interviewees strayed from the interview questions from time to time. Therefore, questions were provided following their narratives to lead them back to the interview questions.

### **Data Analysis Process**

According to Marshall and Roseman (2011), the goal of qualitative data analysis is to search for "general statements about relationships and underlying themes" (p. 207). Therefore, qualitative data analysis is a process of "bringing order, structure, and

interpretation to a mass of collected data” (Marshall & Roseman, 2011, p. 207). It is impossible to find a clear-cut formula for the qualitative data analysis. In general, the main steps of qualitative data analysis are organizing the data, coding, and generating categories and themes. According to Saldaña (2015), there are several coding methods for qualitative researchers to use to analyze data. For this study, the researcher adopted *in-vivo* coding and description coding to analyze data.

All interview content was recorded and then transcribed in Mandarin. The researcher used research questions as core analytical categories and developed subcategories based on the common themes that emerged in the interview data. After carefully reading all transcriptions several times, the researcher first used *in-vivo* coding and description coding to analyze the data. Then the researcher summarized the common parts of various responses and identified the themes based on the research questions and interviewees’ responses. Common themes emerged such as lack of ambition, gender difference, Chinese traditional culture, gender inequity, and the unfair leader promotion system. Since the interview questionnaire of this study was designed based on research questions, the researcher also used the interview questionnaire to categorize the data.

### **Limitations**

Participants of this study are from six Chinese media organizations. Five of these organization are large, state-owned Chinese media organizations in Beijing city, and only one is a private media organization. Moreover, the age of all participants is above 41.

Four participants are between 41-50 years old; six participants are above 50 years old.

### **Translation**

Since qualitative research aims at studying meanings in individuals' subjective experiences, the significance of language was obvious. According to Van Nes et al. (2010), "language is used to express meaning, but the other way around, language influences how meaning is constructed" (p. 314). Thus, familiarity of a language directly influenced the accuracy of participants' expressions, understanding, and interpretation of qualitative researchers.

However, qualitative researchers need to face challenges when there are language and cultural differences between participants and researchers. "Language differences generate additional challenges that might hinder the transfer of meaning and might result in loss of meaning and thus loss of the validity of the qualitative study" (Van Nes et al., 2010, p. 314). Additionally, when participants and the main qualitative researcher were speaking the same language, the chance of misunderstanding caused by language in data gathering, transcription, and during the first analyses was very little (Van Nes et al., 2010). However, "the first language differences may occur when interpretations are being discussed among members of a multi-national research team" (Van Nes et al., 2010, p. 314). Thus, a contribution to the best understanding of the interpreted experience of participants was a good way to validate qualitative research (Van Nes et al., 2010). In this case, since the native language of the author and all participants is Mandarin, the

*contribution* in this study was to conduct interviews in Mandarin and translate quotations and themes into English. In this case, the possibility of misinterpretation was reduced. Besides that, because of the limited English proficiency of most participants, it was decided conducting interviews in English would be unrealistic.

To ensure the accuracy of the translation in this study, all translations were first accomplished by the author and then rechecked by another individual, who is fluent in Chinese (Mandarin) and English.

### **Research Positionality**

As a Chinese woman who grew up in mainland China, the author was raised in the context surrounded by Chinese traditional culture. The concept the author holds of women leadership was greatly affected by Chinese traditional culture. The author began to gain a new understanding of women leadership and viewed it through another perspective after she came to US for further education. The difference between Chinese and American cultures urged the author to know more about what barriers Chinese women leaders encountered in the media field and what possible factors related to them.

There were three main reasons for choosing women leaders in the Chinese media field as the study subjects. First, compared to other fields, the author is more familiar with the characteristics of Chinese media through an insider. Moreover, the insider could help the author gain access in contacting women senior leaders in Chinese media. In addition, media practitioners are more open-minded and have better comprehension of

feminism compared to women in other career fields. Therefore, they may have deeper understanding of what barriers women leaders are facing and what strategies can be used to help them.

I am familiar with Chinese traditional culture and have a good understanding of today's social background in China. I do not possess the professional working experience as a senior leader in the field of Chinese media. Unfortunately, this may have led to unintended biases.

### **Validity**

Qualitative research has its own advantages in terms of exploring particular topics through individuals' lived experience. However, it has several limitations, such as the researcher's unintended biases, limitation of access to adequate data, and complexity of the human mind (Hayashi et al., 2019). Although it is impossible for qualitative researchers to completely eliminate biases, there are several ways to ensure the validity of qualitative research. In this study, the author used thick description and member checks to ensure validity. The author uses detailed descriptions to explain situations and contextual information in the following chapter. Moreover, the author emailed interview transcriptions to participants to make sure the data they gave was accurate and not misinterpreted by the author.



## **Summary**

In sum, this chapter describes the study that adopted a qualitative phenomenological research method and collected data through in-depth interviews. Ten Chinese women leaders came from six large media organizations in Beijing and participated in this study. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin and the author translated transcripts to English. The author grew up in the context surrounding the Chinese traditional culture and came to America for further education. The difference between Chinese and American cultures motivated the author to know more about what barriers Chinese women leaders have encountered in the media field and what possible factors related to them. To ensure the validity of qualitative research, the author used thick descriptions and member checks.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

This chapter illustrates main findings related to external and internal possible factors of women's underrepresentation in large Chinese media organizations in Beijing. The results were derived from the interview data with 10 Beijing women leaders in the Chinese media field. The results are discussed following the sequence of the four research questions: (1) What are the barriers Beijing women encounter in attaining leadership positions? (2) What strategies do these women leaders identify as effective toward increasing their representation in leadership in their media-related organizations? (3) What policies or programs have been helpful to women leaders in enhancing their leadership opportunity in their media-related organizations? and (4) What policies or programs of the Chinese media organizations are most influential in supporting women leaders in their media-related organizations? The themes emerging from interview data are presented under each research question. Background information from interviewees was analyzed as it related to barriers women leaders have encountered. Additionally, interviewees' personal original words collected during the interviews were frequently used to illustrate the themes.

### **Participants**

The first part of the interview questionnaire designed by the researcher consisted of seven background questions. A total of 10 interviewees participated in this study. They are all senior female leaders in large media organizations in Beijing. To protect

confidentiality, the author used pseudonyms (in three letters) for all participants and obscured participants' positions (see Appendix E).

**RQ 1: What are the barriers that Beijing women encounter in  
attaining leadership positions?**

This question explored the career barriers interviewees have encountered in the workplace. The interview protocol asked participants to evaluate the impact of those listed factors in two different contexts: a general one and a specific one. In the general context, participants were asked about their experiences in the field of Chinese media; in the specific context, participants were asked about their experiences in local organizations. The impact of each factor was divided into four levels: *None*, *Somewhat*, *Considerable*, and *Significant*.

**Chinese Media Field**

Participants noted that *Limited opportunities to advance your career* and *Being married* are the two factors that have the least impact on being leaders in the Chinese media field. On the other side, ratings of the other eight factors were much more average. Among the eight factors, *Balancing work and family* was rated by nine participants as a barrier on their path to become leaders. *Years of working experience in the field*, *Education background*, and *Having children* were rated by eight participants as barriers; however, three participants rated *Years of working experience in the field* as *Significant*.

*Education background* and *Having children* had two and one rating of *Significant*, respectively.

### **Local Organizations**

All participants did not consider *Being married* as a factor that prevented them from becoming leaders. The other top two factors not rated by participants as barriers were *Gender* and *Limited opportunities to advance your career*. Additionally, the three factors that had the highest rating for hindering participants to be leaders were *Having children*, *Balancing work and family*, and *Years of working experience in the field*.

It is interesting the results in those two contexts had similarities and differences. *Balancing work and family*, *Having children*, and *Years of working experience in the field* all received high ratings in both contexts. For example, *Balancing work and family* received the highest rating in the context of the Chinese media field and the second highest ratings in the context of local organizations. Moreover, compared to other factors, *Being married* and *Limited opportunities to advance your career* were considered to have the *least* negative effects on women leaders in both contexts.

The differences reflected how some participants viewed *Gender* and *Chinese traditional culture* in the two contexts. Three participants expressed that *Gender* is a problem only in the context of the Chinese media field. Three participants did not consider *Chinese traditional culture* a barrier in the context of local organizations; meanwhile, they held the opposite opinion of it in the Chinese media field context. In

addition, two participants indicated *Age* is more likely a barrier in the context of Chinese media field rather than the context of local organizations. Participants' evaluations regarding the impact of listed factors in the both contexts can

### **Gender**

Among all interviewees, Xie, Mei, and Fan held different opinions in those two contexts. They all believed gender has a negative influence on women in the context of Chinese media field but does not hinder women in the local organizations.

However, the reasons Xie, Mei, and Fan had for why they all rated *Gender* as *None* were different. Xie, a deputy editor of a large stated-owned magazine, shared her views about how the factor of *Gender* does not negatively affect women seeking leadership roles in her organization. She said that the work environment and culture in her organization is relatively less restricted than Chinese traditional culture:

I think our organization may gather a group of people who are not bound by traditional values, that is, everyone here actually doesn't care about many traditional ideas. It all depends on a person's ability to judge what kind of work he or she is suitable for. ... I don't feel any pressure from gender inequality (in the workplace). In fact, the atmosphere (of our organization) is relatively free from Chinese traditional culture, it (whether women can become leaders) still has a lot to do with the self-requirement of women and what kind of person they want to be.

Mei, a senior leader of a large newspaper, explained why she did not think *Gender* is a problem for women seeking senior leadership roles in her organization:

I don't think gender is an obstacle .... the factor of *Balancing work and family* is very important. ... I don't think (my) profession has much to do with gender. An important condition for becoming a senior leader is your continuous high-intensity effort. This is one reason. It (promotion) is not the same as earning an advanced professional title. For example, let's say I didn't write any news articles for five or six years due to taking care of my child. After I turned 50, I did a good job for another five years, and received a lot of national news awards. I may still have the advanced professional title. However, if you have a six years gap, it is definitely impossible to be promoted. So, earning an advanced professional title is not like getting a promotion. Women with advanced professional titles are not rare in the media field, but few occupy important leadership positions. This is the current situation. A woman's family has greater impact on it (women seeking senior leadership roles).

Participants' evaluations regarding the impact of each listed factors in both contexts are showed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participants' Evaluations Regarding the Impact of Listed Factors in Contexts*

Factor	Chinese media field Impact				Their own organization Impact			
	None	Somewhat	Considerable	Significant	None	Somewhat	Considerable	Significant
Gender	3	5	1	1	6	2	2	0
Chinese traditional culture	3	5	1	1	5	3	2	0
Balancing work and family	1	3	3	3	2	5	1	2
Educational background	2	3	3	2	4	2	3	1
Limited opportunities to advance your career	6	4	0	0	7	3	0	0
Having children	2	6	1	1	1	8	1	0
Being married	7	2	1	0	10	0	0	0
Age	3	4	1	2	5	4	1	0
Years of working experience in the field	2	2	3	3	2	2	4	2

As the director of a large news department, Fan also contributed to the positive work environment of her organization. There has been no negative impact of *Gender* on women in her workplace:

I feel that my organization's environment about gender equality is very good, very positive. So, gender is not (a barrier), and currently female employees account for the half of all employees. There are more and more women leaders now.

Bao, Sun, and Yin felt *Gender* was not a barrier neither in the Chinese media field nor local organizations. However, they also believed that *Balancing work and family* or *Having children* hinder women to become senior leaders and admitted the close relationship among *Gender*, *Balancing work and family*, and *Having children*. Therefore, although they declined to make *Gender* a barrier in their early interviews, they all agreed that it could be considered as a barrier. There is something that needs to be noticed about Yin. As a deputy editor-in-chief of a large news media organization, Yin expressed her ideas toward the nine listed factors that could only be considered in the context of the local organization. She worried her lack of the knowledge of the entire media industry in China might lead to misunderstandings.



Bao is a senior leader in a large news organization. She admitted the relation between *Gender* and *Balancing work and family* is close:

From my personal feelings, I don't feel *Gender* is a barrier. ... I think the *Chinese traditional culture* may be taken as a barrier that has *Somewhat* negative impact on women. ...Some leaders are more demanding of women and need women to be more capable than men. Women can only be promoted as senior leaders when they satisfy those requirements. ...Because in Chinese traditional culture, women have more responsibilities in taking care of family than men. Therefore, he (a male senior leader) believes that women only can be assigned to senior leadership positions without any worries when they have more capabilities than men. ...In fact, these two factors (*Gender* and *Balancing work and family*) are actually connected, and they cannot be completely separated. In this case, *Gender* also can be considered as a barrier that has *Somewhat* negative impact. However, if it is strictly according to your interview protocols, I don't think it (*Gender*) is a significant one. Yeah, so it can be rated as this (*None*) or this (*Somewhat*).

Zou, Tan, Min, and Lin work in the same media organization, and all of them rated *Gender* as a barrier in both contexts. Zou rated *Gender* as *Somewhat* in the context of the Chinese media field but *Considerable* in the local organization. Tan and Min rated

*Gender* as a *Somewhat* barrier in both contexts. Lin rated *Gender* as a considerable barrier in both contexts. Tan serves as a senior leader of a large news organization; she argued the characteristic of the media field might lead to women having a disadvantage working in this area:

I believe eventually there will be more male leaders than female leaders in journalism. The main reason is this profession is strenuous. For example, China News has reporters all over China and the world. A lot of journalists need to go to very dangerous places to do news reports, right? In this case, the news organization can't just assign dangerous tasks to women journalists without cautious considerations, right? Therefore, men would have more opportunities than women.

Lin holds a post as the chief editor in a newspaper office; she argued that the “glass ceiling” still exists in her own organization:

In fact, you can see it from the proportion of women leaders. That is, take our China News as an example. It took many years to have a female C-level leader in history. Currently, there is none. The probability for women to be senior leaders is very small. Also, it is more difficult for women to attain some particularly important leadership positions, as if there is a “glass ceiling” ... The number of

women deputy leaders in the middle-level is only slightly increased comparing to the past, and it is definitely far lower than the number of male leaders. ... I think the number of women leaders is fewer than men at every level, and it is particularly obvious at the senior leadership level. However, I don't think it's because they (women) don't have the ability of leadership. I don't think it's true that males possess more (leadership) ability than females. So, I feel the factor *Gender* plays a role here. It's like the patriarchy still exists. Although men and women should be equal, I think *Gender* still can be considered as a cause of that (women's under-representation in senior leadership roles).

### **Chinese Traditional Culture**

Bao, Xie, and Mei claimed that *Chinese traditional culture* was only considered as a barrier for women in the Chinese media context. Bao and Mei did not provide any specific reason why they did not consider Chinese traditional culture as a barrier in local organizations. All three of them believed that Chinese traditional culture sets women's role in the family, which makes women take more responsibilities in the aspect of taking care of their children and families. The time and energy women invest in family leads women to a disadvantage in competition with men in the workplace. Xie said:

The so-called traditional culture also refers to the stereotype role women play in the family. Until now, there still are quite a few women in the families in China's first-tier cities who become full-time housewives once they have children. In this case, for those moms who continue to work after having children, sometimes the pressure comes from those full-time moms. ... That is to say, the full-time mom always can be there for their children and meet all requirements of their children's teachers. But for those working moms, they would feel that they are inferior to full-time moms because they don't have the time and energy to satisfy every single demand of their children. In fact, the traditional role positioning of women causes pressure on professional mothers.

On the contrary, Zou, Tan, Min, and Lin argued *Chinese traditional culture* is a barrier to women in both contexts. Tan said she believed her organization does a good job with respect to gender equality; therefore, she did not feel much negative impact of *Chinese traditional culture* neither in the context of the local organization nor the Chinese media field. Min and Zou had similar views. Zou argued the characteristic of the media profession and women's self-awareness demonstrate how Chinese traditional culture affects women's careers:

As you know, the nature of the news media is different from the others. Our organization works 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We need someone always to be there. In this case, male employees wouldn't have many excuses to refuse the working arrangements I made. They usually would obey the arrangement without any hesitation. They don't need to pick up kids at school or to take care of the family after getting off work. However, our female employees always put their children and family first. Their career is not their priorities. Also, in Chinese traditional culture, men are supposed to be succeed, but things are different for women. Instead of being a leader, taking care of the family is the thing that women have to do. Our female employees are usually like: "Oh, I can't work overtime today because my husband has to work later," or "I can't work today because my husband is going to be on a business trip." It's never like "my husband needs to get off work earlier and take care of the family because I have to work overtime today". They just don't particularly care whether to be leaders or not in the workplace.

Lin expressed that the thoughts of some male senior leaders in her workplace were greatly impacted by Chinese traditional culture, which hinders a woman's ability to

achieve high-level leadership roles. Additionally, many women also agreed that Chinese traditional culture has a negative impact on their motivations. Lin said:

For example, there are some male leaders who think it's nice for his female subordinates to be deputy division chiefs, and it couldn't be better for them if they could be division chiefs. The people who determine your "destiny" believe that women are inferior to men, therefore they set the "glass ceiling" for women. Also, most women also may be affected by the gender: they are much less motivated compared to men. Men would be eager to accomplish one goal after another; they would strive for further improvement. However, women are different. Women are usually satisfied with their current situation. They generally would spend their time and energy on their family and children. That's how I feel.

Among all the participants, Fan did not merely think this factor is a barrier; she considered it as a favorable factor for women pursuing senior leadership roles in both contexts. She said:

I think it is a support rather than a barrier. I believe those excellent things, the essence in Chinese traditional culture, are very helpful for people to improve their level of cognition, broaden their minds, and let them have a more peaceful and

stable mindset. It allows you to be more peaceful no matter what position you are in and helps you to gain more real strength.

### **Balancing Work and Family**

Nine participants considered *Balancing work and family* as a barrier to women seeking senior leadership positions to vary extensively in both contexts. Only Sun believed it is not a problem for women in the context of the Chinese media field because she thought there is not much difference between men and women in balancing work and family.

All nine participants expressed that *Balancing work and family* is a negative influence on women in both contexts. They all admitted that women usually devote more time and energy in taking care of family because it is a tradition. Participants mentioned *Balancing work and family* as the most realistic and fundamental barrier for women, and female leaders in local organizations *sacrifice their family for work by not getting married or having children*. Min illustrated the traditional view of women toward the family:

For example, women need to go through all kinds of pain which are caused by pregnancy and breast-feeding, while men don't need to worry about that.

Moreover, it seems mothers' responsibility to pick up children and attend parent-

teacher meetings at school and so on. It seems like... when I go to the parent-teacher meeting, I clearly can that there are more female parents than male ones.

So, there must be a balance problem.

Bao talked about how she enjoyed the process of spending all her spare time maintaining the balance between her work and family. Although she did not see it as a sacrifice, she still believed *Balancing work and family* is a significant barrier for women.

She said:

It is a huge obstacle for women. The first thing I consider when I'm making the decision about my career is whether I can balance work and family. I would never choose this profession if I cannot make my work and family balanced. I believe an individual's values of happiness and life are linked to his or her understanding of the work. I'm lucky because I can balance work and family very well due to my family understandings and support. I also care about my family very much. Apart from work, I basically don't spend any time on socializing with friends, doing spa or salons, or shopping. I almost have spent all my spare time with my parents, my parents-in-law and my child. Therefore, I have balanced my work and family well so far; my family culture also provides me good conditions to help me balance them. So, this factor is very important to me.



## **Educational Background**

Participants' views toward *Educational background* were divided into two groups. Three participants did not think it is a barrier in the two contexts; the other seven participants all believed it matters when women pursue senior leadership roles in either context. Sun, Zou, and Min argued *Educational background* should not be taken as a barrier for women since it is a necessary requirement for both genders. However, the rest of the participants thought *Educational leadership* is definitely a significant factor for women seeking the transition from ordinary employees to senior leaders. Yin argued her opinion from three perspectives:

In my opinion, educational background is very important in China. There are several reasons. First, it is the threshold for entering this industry. For example, applicants for any job in Beijing Television or Breaking News have to possess certain educational background relating to mass media or sociology. The threshold for the entry of this industry is relatively high. You must have an academic degree in relevant areas. Moreover, we mainly recruit people who went to the eight famous universities in China, such as Renmin University of China, Peking University and Tsinghua University. You basically could not join the media field unless you have such an educational background. Second, mass media

is a relatively professional area. For example, we have several channels in a TV station, like sports channel, science and education channel, and satellite TV and news channel. It would be very hard for a person to be competent for this job if he or she doesn't have the corresponding professional abilities. Third, mass media in China has changed a lot. Currently, the Chinese media field, no matter the new media or the old media, is in an era of great change. People have to possess strong professional skills and learning ability to keep up with the times and to not be eliminated. It would be extremely difficult for people who are not capable to be qualified for their current posts; don't even mention being leaders.

Bao, Xie, and Fan argued people usually gain the essentiality of the personal development from their education experience, which includes inner peace, long-term vision, confidence, the breadth of mind, and independent thinking. The inner peace in this study refers to the state of spiritual calm people possess despite the potential presence of stressors. Bao's response was a good summary for the opinion of all three participants:

I believe *Educational background* is very important, very important. Educational background provides you the cognition. The most important things women receive from their educational background are the open-minded mess, the role they want to play in society, the skills of handling all kinds of complicated

relationships and contradictions in their life. This is why I think education is important. My doctoral education background has given me years of academic nurture, which has brought me a very broad perspective and confidence. The education background is extremely important for women because it broadens their horizons, and, most important, is it helps them find the right direction for their life. Also, I feel the breadth of mind is so important for women. In this case, education shows its significance. The nature of education is teaching people how to think.

### **Limited Opportunities to Advance Your Career**

Six participants agreed this factor should not be treated as a barrier in both contexts. Three participants held a different opinion; they believed it is *somewhat* of a barrier in both contexts. Xie was an exception. She only considered this factor as a barrier in the Chinese media field because women retire at least five years earlier than men. However, she argued it did not matter much in her work environment since the environment and culture of the local organization is comparatively free from the constraint of Chinese traditional culture.

Bao, Sun, Yin, Mei, Tan, and Fan considered *Limited opportunities to advance your career* is not a barrier in both contexts. Participants argued gender discrimination

basically does not exist for the individual who is an excellent employee or who is fully prepared for the opportunity.

Bao believed that opportunities for women who are seeking senior leadership roles as not limited, but male leaders still outnumber females in the media field:

I really don't think the opportunities are limited (for women). On the opposite, I feel women have many advantages in the Chinese media field. Of course, it's my personal observation, but I'm not a patriarch; I think, I'm an objective person. In my opinion, women's overall potential and qualities are still inferior to men. So, we have more male leaders than female leaders, although women professionals are not a minority in the field of Chinese media. The media area is not like the business and financial fields, in which men have more advantages. The media field is easier for women in which to compete with men because it requires the combination of sensibility and rationality. So, I believe the media field is well-suited to women. In this case, I encourage girls, but not boys, to enter this field. Afterall, the income level in this industry is not very high, and men still have the responsibility to support their families, which is the role men play in society.

Fan explained her thoughts from a different perspective. She believed women have advantages compared to men.

I've never felt it's a barrier. On the contrary, if we measure one's success from a worldly perspective, for example, an individual's official rank can represent how successful he or she is. I think women have more opportunities in the Chinese media field. Why did I say that? Because I believe women have a great advantage over men. Women are simpler, their career goals are purer, they care more about getting some actual things done and enjoy the pure and simple sense of achievement. I think women media professionals are simpler than men; they don't have so many distractions like men do, such as how to become senior leaders or influential people. Women don't have these distractions; they are doing things wholeheartedly. I can obviously feel that my male colleagues are more anxious than I am.

### **Having Children**

The majority of this study's participants held similar opinions about *Having children*: seven participants believed it is a barrier for women in the context of the Chinese media field and local organizations. Two participants expressed *Having children* is only considered a barrier in their organizations. One participant thought this factor hinders women advancing their career only in the Chinese media field.

Bao, Sun, Xie, Mei, Zou, Min, and Lin claimed that *Having children* is a barrier for women pursuing senior leadership roles in the Chinese media field or local organizations. They all argued a women's energy is focused on taking care of the baby. Therefore, they are at a disadvantage compared to women without children. Xie gave a further explanation why having children would affect women's careers:

I think it can be considered as a *Considerable* barrier. Yeah, because the children have different needs for their mothers at different ages. A mother's responsibility is heavier when her child is little. So, I think this may be a very important cause of the conflict between family and work.

Mei also believed having and taking care of children takes up much of a woman's time and energy. However, she said a woman could still concentrate her energy on work when the child is in kindergarten. The situation is different as the child grows up. Today, in China's society a child's growth needs a parent to make an all-out effort. In this case, mothers usually give up their career for family.

Zou explained why *Having children* hinders a woman's career from an employer's perspective: "I basically would classify a female employee as someone with no family burden if she doesn't have a child. Therefore, I could put her in an important position."

## **Being Married**

In the context of local organizations, not a single participant considered *Being married* as a barrier to women who desire a senior leadership position. However, three of the 10 participants held a different opinion in the context of the Chinese media field.

Mei and Zou felt being married is the main cause why women need to balance work and family. Mei thought more than half of the female senior leaders are either unmarried, single, or divorced; and an unmarried woman's professional competitiveness is strong since they could concentrate on work. Lin claimed being married or not would not make any difference, but not having children would impact careers.

The view of Bao about this factor was interesting as she thought being single is a barrier:

I have never thought of whether this factor is a barrier or not, because I have a very happy marriage. According to my observations, married women tend to handle things more peacefully and maturely in the media field. I'm worry about many of my beautiful female subordinates who are still single. Being single could bring considerable impact on women. A woman's heart couldn't be settled down as long as she doesn't get married. In this case, she would have some unrealistic ideas about her life and career. Of course, this is my observation about our female

journalists. I haven't thought about it from the perspective of female leaders.

Having a stable family is more conducive to women's personal development under the influence of Chinese culture. Although some unmarried women seem to have fast development in their professional field, overall it is better for women to find a balance between career and marriage. China's society emphasizes the doctrine of the golden mean; to have a balanced development can help women succeed more easily. It is also easier for married women to achieve success in such Chinese cultural cognition.

Fan claimed the most important thing is a woman's self-awareness. Neither being single nor being married could really negatively affect her. She said:

I don't think that neither being single nor being married is a barrier. I believe marital status isn't a barrier to individuals regardless of their genders. In fact, as long as you really know what you want and what kind of person you want to be, you wouldn't take those things (listed factors) as (barriers). All of those are not problems to women.

Although Bao, Xie, and Mei considered *Being married* a barrier in the context of the Chinese media field, they all believed it is not a problem for women in the local organizations because their work environment is comparatively friendly for women.



## Age

Six participants agreed *Age* is a barrier to women in both contexts. Three participants disagreed. One participant believed that *Age* is a problem for women in the Chinese media field but not in the local organizations.

Sun, Yin, and Min did not consider *Age* as a barrier both in the Chinese media field and local organizations. Sun and Min believed *Age* is not a barrier only for women; both genders are impacted by it. They argued leaders retire at 60 years old regardless of gender. Yin believed the impact of age on women is little because the promotion is related to the “ladder of age,” which means women are expected to be promoted to a senior leadership level once they reach a certain age.

Fan admitted *Age* has a negative impact on women. However, she also believed the positive influence of age is larger than its negative influence on herself when she looked back. Fan said:

Age has impacts on people. I think its positive influence is larger than the negative ones though. Certainly, it has negative influence, such as people’s memory; experience and learning ability would weaken when one is getting old. Age still has some restrictions on women who are seeking leadership roles in Chinese media field. Overall speaking, the media is a field that suits the young

better; they are more vibrant and competent. So, it (*Age*) must have a somewhat negative (impact), there is not much difference between the young and the old. ...

Now I pay more attention to my inner thoughts, what I really want, my values, my inner peace and freedom. I think I couldn't gain all of these without the experience I have had so far. One thing I'm satisfied with myself now is that I'm more peaceful compared to the old me. Age has brought me a very valuable gift. For example, I'm a good listener now. I used to refuse to listen to others' opinions. Now whenever I have the feeling of "everyone besides me is wrong", I know I'm the one who is making mistakes. I wouldn't gain all of these personal growths until I reached this age.

The other participants all considered *Age* as a barrier in both contexts. Xie, Mei, Zou, Tan, and Lin all argued that age as a negative influence on women is presented through the retirement age policy. Women usually would not be considered for promotion once they turn 50. Xie said: "Women generally would not be promoted to the deputy division chief level after age 50. Leaders usually wouldn't consider promoting any woman who is over 55 to the deputy minister level."

Lin talked about the unfairness of the retirement age policy for women; she explained in more detail why age is a barrier. Lin said: "This regulation seems to benefit

women on the surface. However, it would be a real benefit for women if they could choose whether to retire or not at 55.”

Bao argued *Age* is a barrier for women from a whole new perspective. She thought being older is not the problem, but being younger is the problem:

An Individual’s maturity and ability to manage work have huge differences at his or her different ages. I wouldn’t encourage young people to take “big steps” in their careers. People are able to manage different things at different life stages. I think there is a regular pattern to follow for individuals, like people should achieve certain goals at a certain age. There will be a price to pay in the end if people don’t follow the pattern. I believe leadership is a process of gradual cultivation. So, I don’t think developing too fast in one’s career is good for the young. Steady development is good for management, and management has connection with leadership.

### **Years of Working Experience in the Field**

Eight participants believed that *Years of working experience in the field* is a barrier for women seeking senior leadership positions. Only two participants did not consider it as an obstacle.

Eight participants claimed working experience is valuable because it brings inner peace, open-mindedness, and mental maturity to people; it would be painful for the individual who is not capable for the leadership position. They all agreed there is a big difference between first-hand experience and the experience gained from others' stories.

Bao explained the difference in detail:

Indeed, years of working experience are important. They are precious. Sometimes young people may think that they can gain the comprehension of handling things without much working experience. In fact, it is rarely possible for young people to have the same understanding as experienced people if they haven't gone through failures, pain and struggles. There are differences between inexperienced people and experienced ones. People who with rich experiences also tend to be more peaceful and open-minded.

Sun and Xie disagreed with the opinion held by the other eight participants. They argued that although years of working experience is important, it could not be seen as a barrier only for women. It is indispensable for both genders in the workplace. Xie's answer well represented their opinions. Xie said: "I don't think it has much to do with gender. That is to say, the two journalists who have both worked for ten years, their gender wouldn't be the factor to consider for the promotion."

### **Other Barriers Interviewees Considered as Significant**

Yin and Mei could not think of any barrier other than the listed nine factors.

Another two participants believed women's self-awareness is another significant barrier for women. Half of the 10 participants believed the differences either in the physical or psychological aspect between males and females could put women who hope to achieve senior leadership roles at a disadvantage in the workplace. One participant provided a different view from the others.

#### **No Other Barrier**

Yin and Mei claimed they could not think of any barrier other than the nine listed on the interviewee protocol.

#### **Women's Self-awareness**

Xie and Min believed female self-awareness is another major barrier that should raise women's attention. Min felt the perception the public has of women and women's self-awareness actually limits their development. She claimed that despite Chinese women's population being large, their voices have not been heard enough in the society. The constraint of traditional culture to women is so huge that sometimes women acquiesce to it. In the meanwhile, some women hold an extreme feminist thought, which

only harms China's gender equality. Xie's response was a good example representing their opinions about female self-awareness:

I think another barrier is women's self-awareness. The self-awareness is an inherent factor. Most of the time, how women acknowledge themselves is the key to whether gender is a barrier. I rarely think only from a woman's perspective when I'm working. My gender is not the determining factor in what I choose to do or not to do. The family-work conflict would affect women if their gender is emphasized in the family field. And it is somewhat dangerous for women to have the thought of "I should do certain things because I'm a woman" in the workplace. I think that leaders wouldn't appoint women to the jobs that are dangerous or physically demanding because they think they are looking after women rather than discriminating against them. Women's self-positioning is important. Women can gain the same opportunities as men if they don't consider themselves as vulnerable.

### **The Difference Between Two Genders**

Five of the 10 participants ascribed the barrier women had encountered in their career-life to the difference in physical and psychological aspects between two genders. In other words, they stated women are less suitable for senior leadership roles because

they are inferior to men in many aspects: the ability of solving problems quickly, being visionary, physical strength, learning ability, social skills, leadership skills, and the ability of dealing with complicated relationships. Bao talked about the limitation for women to reaching the senior leadership level reflected in two aspects: women are not rational enough and they could not adapt to Chinese political culture like men. She said:

Women usually lack the ability of recognizing the key of a problem compared to men. It is probably because women are more emotional. Additionally, women's observation of social complexity is not as good as men's. Women can't adapt to the Chinese political culture, or they simply don't like it. However, males are more adaptable to the Chinese political culture, like a duck to water. Therefore, it is a barrier for women.

Xie expressed that men are more visionary and capable in many other aspects than women. Besides that, men are more suitable to do investigative reporting since it usually involves certain dangers. In this case, men have natural advantage due to their stronger physical strength.

Zou's argument about gender difference in the workplace was presented through her detailed explanation about how women are inferior to men in various aspects:

The reason female leaders are less than male ones probably is that women are less capable than men. The Chinese media now requires its practitioners to possess the knowledge and ability in various areas. Comparing to women, men have wider interests and are better at learning technology. Men are more visionary than women. Nowadays, the development of media requires leaders to have a long-term vision. Moreover, men have advantages in learning new stuff and social skills and competencies; they also have much more time to socialize and study because they don't have the burden of taking care of the family.

Tan believed there must be more male leaders than female leaders in the field of journalism. She attributed it to the feature of journalism and gender differences. She argued women do not have as many opportunities as men because they have weaker physical conditions compared to men. Additionally, in her opinion, male leaders are more passionate, capable, and talented in leadership than women. She also mentioned being a leader means he or she needs to spend more time socializing with all kinds of people no matter his or her personal preferences; and she resented that kind of lifestyle.

Fan pointed out that women's simplicity is a double-edged sword for women's career development. On the one hand, it could help women concentrate on their work better; on the other hand, it could be women's weakness when facing complicated



situations. Similar to Bao, she also mentioned women lack the ability to reach quickly to the essence of a complicated problem when they encounter one.

### **Promotion Mechanism**

Lin provided a new perspective on promotion methods. She attributed the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions in her workplace to the lack of a fair and transparent promotion mechanism. She said:

Gender wouldn't matter if there is a better promotion mechanism that allows all individuals to have fair opportunities. The only thing that matters is an individual's working ability. The reason males have more opportunities than females probably is the lack of an objective and transparent promotion mechanism.

Overall, eight participants provided their thoughts about other barriers except the nine listed on the interviewee protocol. Those thoughts can be summarized as women's cognition of the gender and the unfair promotion mechanism in the local organizations.

**RQ2: What strategies do these women leaders identify as effective  
toward increasing their representation in leadership in their  
media-related organizations?**

Yin, Mei, and Zou expressed they only considered few strategies are significant, the rest are all unimportant to them. In this case, the author used 6 to represent all strategies that participants identified as unimportant; the author used 1 to represent the strategy rated by participants as the most important (see Appendix C).

**Working Experience**

*Working experience* was rated as the most important strategy by participants. Yin, Xie, and Min proposed working ability should be the most important strategy. They pointed out that working ability was missed in the interview protocol, which is the most important strategy in their opinion. In this case, Yin rated *Working experience* in the third place, and Xie and Min rated it as the most important.

Mei and Zou expressed that all listed strategies are not important except *Working experience*. Mei argued the contribution employees make for the organization matters the most. Zou's opinion was very simple: everything was unimportant to her except *Working experience*.

Fan put *Working experience* in the second place. She thought the first-hand experience is very important because it is necessary for people to practice if they want to understand things thoroughly.

Bao, Sun, Tan, and Lin indicated the reason they rated *Working experience* so high was similar to the factor of *Years of working experience* in the media field. Both were perceived as a barrier for women.

### **Education**

As a top three strategy rated by the most participants, many participants indicated the reason they believed *Education* is an important strategy for them was similar to the one they provided for why they thought *Educational background* is a barrier for women.

Bao talked about her reason for rating it as the most important strategy was because it provides the foundation for what she has today. Sun believed education is the foundation of people's work ability. Relatively, Yin, Zou, Min, and Lin's reasons for why they considered education is important were simple—a certain academic degree is a necessary requirement for practitioners to enter the field of Chinese media.

### **Mentoring**

Compared to the distribution of participants' opinions about the strategy of *Working experience*, responses to *Mentoring* seemed more average. Six participants rated

*Mentoring* as 4 and 6. They stated the reason they did not consider it important was because they rarely had the experience of being mentored. Fan was the only one who rated *Mentoring* as the most important strategy in this study. She talked about the difference between mentoring and the knowledge from textbooks:

Mentoring is particularly important. Mentors' guidance usually can help people find the key of a problem. It is something the layman can't understand and would take a long time for newbies to gain by themselves. At the meanwhile, sometimes it only takes mentors' few words to make individuals have a comprehensive understanding of many things in the field.

Tan talked about the significant help she gained from her two mentors. Their work style, work attitude, and professionalism deeply impressed Tan. She had learned much merely through observing their daily work. Tan provided her personal experience as evidence of mentoring's significance: "They trusted me and shared with me much valuable experience. So, I always feel thankful for their help, which made my career development much smoother."

## **Family Connections**

Six participants considered *Family connections* the least important strategy. One participant rated it as the second least important strategy. For the other three participants, one of them rated its importance as 2, and the other two rated its importance as 3.

Yin's brief and simple response well represented the other participants who also believed *Family connections* is an unimportant strategy—she never benefited from her family connections in the workplace.

On the contrary, Bao, Xie, and Fan rated *Family connections* as a relatively important strategy. However, it seems they saw *Family connections* more from the perspective of family education. For example, Bao said: "The *family connections* here is defined in a narrow sense, but I think it is still important in terms of the family relations and parents' influence in a general sense. So, I put it in the second place."

## **Coaching**

No participant rated *Coaching* as one of the top three important strategies. Five participants considered it as the least important one; three participants rated its importance level at 4; two participants ranked its importance level at 5. Almost all interviewees expressed they rarely had any professional coaching experience; and more than one participant (Bao, Min, and Fan) indicated they learned much by themselves

instead of gaining from coaching. Xie and Lin claimed coaching is not that important in the media field. Xie viewed coaching as a bonus rather than a required strategy. Yin directly expressed coaching was not helpful for her. Sun was an exception. Although she rated the importance of *Coaching* at 4, she still thought it is important: “Coaching is very important. I require my employees to be regularly coached because it is very helpful for improving their learning abilities, which would also improve their work abilities.”

### **Connections of Friends or Acquaintances**

The majority of participants considered the *Connections of friends or acquaintances* played a small role on their way to becoming leaders. They stated that they did not adopt this strategy for their promotions. Sun frankly said it is common to use *Connections of friends or acquaintances* as a shortcut to promotions in China, but she personally did not benefit from them. Min was the only participant who rated connections as the third important strategy because she believed it is important for leaders to deal with all kinds of interpersonal relationships.

### **Strategies Participants Adopted and Their Strengths**

Seven participants claimed they had never used any strategy to achieve their current positions. Three participants claimed they adopted certain strategies to gain career success and shared them with the author.

With the exception of Xie, Zou, and Lin, all other participants claimed their current leadership positions are complete arrangements from their leaders; they had never utilized any strategy to get them into senior leadership roles. Mei recalled her leader wanted to put someone in charge of a very difficult reform in her organization, and no one wanted this “hot potato.” She was assigned to this job by her leader because she was unafraid to “displease” people during the reform. She said that: “That was a special opportunity for me; my leader put me in an important position because I’m “sillier” than others. Being senior leader who never my goal but here I am.”

Bao expressed it was never her original intention to be in her current position. This quotation from her was a good example of representing these seven participants’ answers to this question:

It’s all my leader’s decision of assigning me to this position. Others would definitely desire (leadership roles) but I don’t. My characteristics are that I never “operate”, never gain connections, never want to (be a leader). I never think about what I should do next to gain a leadership position. I’m not willing to take this job if I had a choice.

On the contrary, Xie, Zou, and Lin shared with the author the strategy they utilized for achieving senior leadership roles. Xie used a metaphor for her strategy—a

long-distance runner. She believed that it is necessary to build an image of continuous and passionate work. She claimed it is unavoidable for people to encounter various difficulties in their life, which might negatively affect their career more or less. Therefore, knowing how to make continuous contributions in the workplace was significant. She talked about it as follows:

When you encounter temporary difficulties, you must have a “long-term” awareness, which is that the job I do is what I love and cherish. I need to build my strength in the long-term. That’s to say, to treat myself as a long-distance runner.

Zou and Lin argued their strategies were to be hard working. Zou described herself as a workaholic. She also expressed her strategy fit into her strengths, which were hard working and not caring about gains and losses. Lin mentioned her strategy was to exceed leaders’ expectations; therefore, she would not miss any opportunity. She stated that her strength also was being a hard worker. In other words, her strategy was to maximize her strengths.

Overall, among all the listed strategies in the interview protocol, participants rated *Working experience* and *Education* as the most significant two strategies helping women to achieve leadership roles in Beijing large media organizations. The other four strategies were rated as relatively unimportant by participants.



**RQ3: What policies or programs have been helpful to women leaders in enhancing their leadership opportunity in their media-related organizations?**

Among the 10 participants, eight of them indicated there is no policy or program in their organizations encouraging women to become leaders. They did not reveal the reason why no policy was present to encourage women to become leaders. Only two participants, Min and Fan, proposed the opposite.

Min pointed out there should be a policy or a program about promoting young women leaders in her organization, but she had no detailed information about it. Fan claimed there must be some policies encouraging the representation of women in leadership in her organization. For example, she noted there is a policy in her organization that requires at least one female at the highest leadership level. However, she also expressed the policy itself shows existing gender inequality in the organization. Another program Fan thought was helpful for women achieving senior leadership roles was the March 8th Red-Banner Pacesetter Award. She claimed the award was created only for women, which could be seen as an encouragement for women to reach leadership positions.

**RQ4: What policies or programs of Chinese media organizations  
are most influential in supporting women leaders in their  
media-related organizations?**

Only two participants thought there are some specific policies or programs used in their organizations; three participants considered there are some leadership positions that specifically require women; one participant believed their organizations make an effort to provide promotion opportunities for women; no participant felt their organizations provide any professional development training opportunities for women.

**Opportunities**

Since Min and Fan claimed their organizations have some specific policies or programs for women leaders, they also indicated their organizations adopts specific policies or programs for helping women to move into leadership positions. Mei, Min, and Lin considered there are some leadership positions that specifically require women. They mentioned women's federation in their organizations as the only department that requires women to take leadership positions. Although Bao, Zou, and Fan also mentioned the department of women's federation in their responses, they thought it did not have a major impact on the representation of women in leadership in their organizations.

Min was the only participant who believed her organization makes a somewhat positive effort to provide promotional opportunities for women. However, she also indicated she did not know much about what specific effort her organization had made.

## **Work Environment or Culture**

### ***Negative Influence***

Five participants (Yin, Mei, Zou, Lin, and Fan) stated there is no positive influence in their work environment or culture only for women. Zou expressed she had some negative impact on female applicants in the recruitment process: “I don’t feel there is any positive influence. Besides that, we are still deliberately suppressing women (in recruitment), and we would reduce the admission proportion of women in the recruitment process.”

Zou also emphasized the features of the media field are closely related to her organization’s negative influence of the work environment or culture on women:

I think the impact of the negative influence on women is great. We have a lot of work that can only be done by male employees. For examples, we have some important news reports to do on holidays; and we often have breaking news. The employees who can take jobs under these situations are usually male employees. Basically, no married female employee would be willing to stay late in the office;

they need to pick up their children at school after getting off work; don't even mention asking them to work overtime. As a leader, I can only choose the employees who would obey my work arrangements. In this case, unmarried female employees are better.

Three participants (Bao, Sun, and Min) rated the work environment or culture in their workplaces had a *somewhat* negative impact on women, and one participant (Zou) expressed her organization's work environment or culture had brought *considerable* negative influence on women.

Sun indicated there was a *somewhat* negative influence of their work environment or culture on women. For example, it is very likely if a female job seeker has no child at her child-bearing age, she would be replaced by a male applicant. Bao talked more about how she viewed the negative influence of this factor in her organization:

In our organization, I think women can't be senior leaders because women are inherently inferior to men. For instance, I don't want to recruit females. I have no problem with promoting females to leadership positions, but I just don't want to recruit females. I would definitely do my best to cultivate my female employees, but I can also avoid recruiting more women to our organization.

### *Positive Influence*

The other participants (interviewees Bao, Sun, Xie, Tan, and Min) held the opposite opinion. Among them, Sun thought her organizational work environment or culture had a *somewhat* positive influence on women leaders or women practitioners who want to be leaders. Bao, Xie, and Tan believed the organizational work environment or culture in their organizations caused *considerable* positive influence; Min considered her organizational work environment or culture had a *great deal* of positive influence on women leaders. Tan said the working culture in her organization is friendly for anyone who has strong working ability. For example, her leaders had never considered the employee's gender as an important factor when promoting anyone. Bao thought this profession had a high degree of matching with women's characteristics, which could inspire women to strive forward. Min held a similar opinion with Bao, and she explained it with more detail:

In fact, it is quite interesting we have a certain definition of women's identity in the media area. Female journalists are considered more attentive and less aggressive than the male journalists. For example, it's not likely that interviewees would turn down a female journalist's request for an interview because people

usually don't have high vigilance against women. So, there are quite a lot of female reporters on the front-line.

Yin, Xie, Mei, Tan, Lin, and Fan indicated they did not feel any of the negative influence of the work environment and culture in their organizations.

### ***Neutral***

Yin, Mei, and Lin all claimed the work environment or culture in their organizations could not be merely considered as positive or negative only for women, since it affects both male and female organizational members. Yin stated the work environment or culture in her organization had neither a positive nor a negative effect on women's access to leadership positions: "It is neutral and has nothing to do with the gender, but it relates to the personal ability."

### **Possible Changes**

Sun, Mei, and Fan expressed they would not make any changes in their organizations, even if they had the power, since gender was not a factor they or their organizations would particularly consider in the promotion mechanism. Mei's answer well illustrated these three participants' opinions:

I wouldn't make any change. I believe it doesn't matter whether it's to be a man or a woman to be the leader. Actually, I think only one thing matters, the leaders'

work ability. The gender of the leader doesn't matter. It's very painful for women leaders if they are unwilling to take the job.

Zou was not satisfied with the current policies of her organization; she believed these policies should be changed if she had the power:

Our policy of checking on work attendance, reward and punishment policy, and management are not strict enough. In this way, women with good family conditions will not value the benefits brought by leadership positions. I think we should set rules like rewarding the diligent and punishing the lazy. In this case, some women would not find various excuses to not work hard. In our organization, the differences in benefits brought by different levels of positions are very large. Actually, your effort goes far beyond your gain here.

Min stated the policy that needed to be changed the most is gender inequality:

I think what needs to be changed is the inequality between men and women, that is, men and women should have equal opportunities. For example, a company cannot refuse to give a woman the opportunity to being promoted to the leadership position. It's one thing if she doesn't want it; but it's a whole another thing whether you provide the fair opportunity to both men and women.

Sometimes it's the entire decision-making hierarchy who doesn't give women enough equal opportunities.

Lin proposed that she hoped the proportion of women leaders could be determined based on the population of women employees:

I think we should, for example, set the ratio of some positions. For example, in an organization, if women employees reach the one third of the whole population, then there should be one third (women) in the leadership positions. It should be the same in the middle leadership level. If there is a fixed proportion of women leaders that is set by the organization, then it's easier for women to become leaders. Otherwise, it's very hard for them to achieve leadership positions. After all, men cannot completely understand our sacrifice.

### **Meaningful Event or Achievement**

Participants' responses were not limited to the particular event or achievement.

Bao mentioned the most important event in her life that helped her to be who she is today was the decision of selecting media as her profession. She said:

The most important event for me is the decision I made. Because I always believed that choosing the media as my profession is especially correct for me.

This profession matches my personality, my educational background, my family



culture, and my perception of life. My first job was a university instructor. After working for more than one year, I found that teaching and doing research were not suitable for me because I am a very passionate and emotional person. Later I thought about being a lawyer because I have a doctoral degree in law. However, I found that lawyers may need to face the conflict between the public power and the client's legitimate interests, which is not in line with my values. Then, I entered the media industry. I found this choice suits me perfectly.

Sun and Min mentioned the support of their family members meant a lot for them. Sun talked about that she could work without worries because all her family members support her work. Min raised the positive influence of marriage and family on women:

Marriage and family are important for women leaders. Compromise is a very important aspect of marriage. It is common that women are the ones who tend to compromise in the marriage. Because of this, I feel women are better at listening in leadership positions. They would not lead the entire team to a wrong direction by insisting on their own wrong judgments. Also, I've worked more efficiently since I became a mother. I feel like many people have overlooked the positive influence of being a mother in the workplace. Actually, I don't encourage my teammates to work overtime under unnecessary circumstances because the work

efficiency would be low once people think they can work overtime. Moreover, I've learned to sacrifice and consider others after I have a child, which is also very important for a leader.

Mei credited her success to the opportunity she once had. Zou mentioned her battlefield journalist experience was very important for her career development because her gender actually became an advantage for her in the battlefield. Lin believed the two positions in which she worked in her organization could be seen as important factors on her way to the senior leadership position. She had made herself shine by making her current department well known in the whole organization. She also received the Top Ten Editor Award from her organization in her current position.

Yin, Tan, and Fan all believed inner motivation is the most important and meaningful motivation inspiring them to strive forward. They claimed this inner motivation could be something people are interested in or passionate about. Yin proposed personal growth and goals as the most important factors in her career life; she would like to devote her passion, time, and energy into her work simply because it is her dream job. Tan also mentioned that the passion for work and persistence had great meaning for her success. Fan raised the sense of mission was especially significant for her:

I think we basically covered all the things that matter. I think Chinese media people have a sense of mission. I've always felt that I have to work hard especially when I am in this position now. We should try our best to do better if what we do can change the fate of ordinary people.

Overall, few participants expressed that their organizations have a specific policy, program, or training to support women leaders in the media field. Participants shared their thoughts about how the working environment or culture of local organizations had a positive or negative influence on them. Three participants provided another thought about the working environment or culture of their organizations. They believed this kind of influence is neutral. In other words, there is no difference between how the working environment or culture of local organizations influences women and men. Some participants believed the unfair promotion mechanism should be changed. Additionally, two participants shared the significance of marriage and family for a woman leader and how they could bring positive influence on her. Moreover, three participants mentioned the inner motivation was the most important factor that kept them moving forward.

### **Summary**

In this chapter the results of the study were presented. The chapter highlighted the responses of the participants. Among the nine factors listed in the interview protocol as

possible barriers, the majority of participants expressed *Balancing work and family* as the most important one in both contexts. Some participants shared their opinions with the author about the other barriers they encountered on their way to achieve senior leadership positions, such as women's self-awareness, the physical and psychological difference between two genders, and unfair promotion mechanism. Among the nine listed strategies in the interview protocol, the most significant two rated by participants were *Work experience* and *Education*. Moreover, most of participants indicated there is no policy or program that would be helpful to women leaders in enhancing their leadership opportunity in their media-related organizations. Additionally, some participants expressed the work environment or culture in their organizations causes a positive or negative influence on women who desire senior leadership positions.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore the possible internal and external factors that have contributed to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in Beijing's Chinese media. This final chapter summarizes the findings, interprets their implications, discusses limitations, and discusses possible future research. This study had four research questions that explored the possible barriers that limit opportunities for Chinese women to achieve senior leadership roles in the media profession, usable strategies to overcome these barriers, helpful factors to enhance opportunities, and supportive characteristics to assist Chinese women in media organizations. In this final chapter, main findings from Beijing's senior women leaders in media organizations are summarized and interpreted within these four research questions.

### **Possible Barriers Beijing's Women Encounter in Attaining Leadership**

#### **Positions in Their Media-Related Work Organizations**

There were nine factors listed in the interview protocol as possible barriers for women who pursue senior leadership positions in Beijing's media organizations.

Participants' ratings on nine factors found three factors that had the greatest influence under both contexts of the Chinese media field and local organizations. These three

factors were *Balancing work and family*, *Having children*, and *Years of working experience in the field*.

Almost all of the participants reached a consensus on whether *Balancing work and family* was a barrier or not. It is clear that balancing work and family is still generally difficult for women in the Chinese media field. It is the most fundamental and realistic barrier for Chinese media professional women. Western culture and feminism have been introduced in China since the implementation of the “Reform and Opening” policy. Under the influence of Western culture, having a successful career has become the goal for more and more Chinese women. Additionally, the financial pressure on normal families also causes the number of housewives to decrease in China (Ding, 2011).

However, the constraint of traditional culture on Chinese women is still considerable, and numerous professional Chinese women are still expected to be virtuous wives and good mothers. Therefore, women in China usually have the double burden from work and family that causes some of them to set a lower professional goal attainment compared to men. In other words, balancing work and family can be interpreted as an external possible factor for women’s underrepresentation in leadership in the Chinese media field, limiting the time and energy for work compared to their male counterparts. This finding corresponds with the opinion of Wei (2002) that the majority

of Chinese highly educated women have the double burden of family and work on their shoulders and try their best to balance work and family.

Participants almost held the same opinion toward *Having children* that is closely related to *Balancing work and family*. Participants stated it is hard for Chinese women to share the burden of taking care of children with other family members. The need children have for their mothers varies with their age. The mother is usually the parent who spends more time and energy taking care and accompanying them when they are younger in ordinary Chinese families. It is also common for Chinese women to give up their career to cultivate their children in order to ensure they achieve high scores on college entrance examinations. Along with the implementation of the two-children policy, many professional women choose to have their second child. The time they spend on nurturing children is doubled, which inevitably occupies the time they have for work. Therefore, the factor of having children is an external factor for women who seek senior leadership roles in the Chinese media field.

Participants tended to have the same opinion on the factor of *Years of working experience*, the third most influential factor. Participants generally considered this factor as a requirement for anyone who wants to compete for senior leadership positions in the media field. However, the retirement age policy in China requires women to retire at least

five years earlier than men in ordinary situations. Thus, women have five less years in regard to this factor than men. In this case, it also counts as an external factor for women.

Han (2007) also mentioned the negative impact of the retirement age policy that put Chinese women in an unequal position in the workplace.

Except for the previously mentioned three factors, *Gender*, *Chinese traditional culture*, *Educational background*, and *Age* were weighted similar in participants' opinions in regard to barriers for women who pursue senior leadership roles. Participants claimed their working culture and organizational policy are the main reasons why they rated *Educational background* and *Age* differently in the two contexts.

Participants held different opinions toward *Gender and Chinese traditional culture* in the two contexts. Seven participants considered *Gender* as a barrier in the context of the Chinese media field; however, only four participants indicated it as a problem for women in local organizations. The distribution of participants' ratings of *Chinese traditional culture* was similar to the ones of *Gender*. Seven participants considered *Chinese traditional culture* as a barrier in the context of the Chinese media field; however, two participants did not see it as an obstacle for women in local organizations. One of the reasons participants' opinions were different was the positive influence of the working environment and culture in the local organizations. Whenever



the working environment or organizational culture is friendly to women, the negative influence of *Gender* and *Chinese traditional culture* is limited. Those positive influences include valuing women's contributions, satisfying women's needs, understanding the difficulties women have, and providing help for women to overcome them. Another possible reason that participants expressed different opinions toward *Gender* and *Chinese traditional culture* relates to the idea of "face" in Chinese culture. Although all interviews were in person, some of them might have avoided exposing the negative aspects of local organizations since they are the senior leaders and revealing the negative aspects of local organizations in front of the author would have made them "lose face." The author did not find anything in the literature about how the idea of "losing face" would affect Chinese qualitative study participants in expressing their true thoughts. Therefore, this may be a new research direction in the future.

*Being married* and *Limited opportunities to advance your career* were the two factors participants believed had the least negative influence on women who desire to achieve senior leadership roles. Although Chinese women's status has been dramatically improved since the establishment of People's Republic of China, progressive economic conditions, and the influence of Western culture, becoming a virtuous wife and good mother is still a part of the standard of a good woman. Thus, getting married was an

important factor to measure whether a Chinese woman is successful or not. However, all participants expressed *Being married* is not a barrier for women in local organizations. The main reason was that most Chinese families' economic burdens are shared by both husband and wife. This may illustrate that a woman's economic independence leads to the improvement of Chinese women's status. Additionally, one participant indicated Chinese society is more friendly to married women, facilitating success and illustrating Chinese traditional culture as a considerable influence on women. This finding aligns to what Kuang (2016) and Xiang et al. (2017) suggested: Chinese single women who are over 30 years old usually have great pressure since the society does not encourage women to be unmarried after they reach a marriageable age.

Most participants did not rate *Limited opportunities to advance your career* as a barrier to women in the two contexts. In other words, most participants believed the barriers women encounter in the workplace are mainly related to the pressure of fertility and taking care of the family, rather than the lack of opportunities. However, two participants also stated the unfair promotion mechanism and the characteristic of the Chinese media profession limit women's career development opportunities.

## **Other Barriers**

There are three other barriers that were proposed by participants: women's self-awareness, gender difference, and an unfair promotion mechanism, which are rarely mentioned in the literature. Two participants believed women's self-awareness plays an important part for women with successful careers. If women identify with the demand Chinese traditional culture has placed on them, they would not set their career goals as high as men's. In other words, a woman who wants to become a virtuous wife and good mother in the Chinese traditional sense has to spend more time on taking care of her family and would not be able to compete for leadership positions with someone who has no family burden in the workplace.

Additionally, women's self-awareness also influences women's perceptions of leadership. Some women may agree with the identification of women leaders in Chinese traditional culture, whereby women leaders are identified as irrational and short-sighted. This impression of women leaders still widely exists in Chinese society today.

Another barrier repeatedly raised by participants was the gender difference. The physical difference between men and women limits women's ability to engage in dangerous assignments. The difference between men and women from a psychological aspect is more complicated. First, women and men have different career goals. Women

tend to set lower career goals than men. Moreover, some participants believed women are inferior to men in aspects of leadership, vision, rational thinking, and personal ability.

Unfair and non-transparent promotion mechanisms were considered a barrier for women.

Lin claimed that the “glass ceiling” was set for a woman through unfair and non-transparent promotion mechanisms in her organization. Appointing people by favoritism is an example of these unfair and non-transparent mechanisms.

### **Strategies to Help Women Increase Their Representation in Leadership Positions in Media-Related Organizations**

The two most significant strategies rated by participants were *Work experience* and *Education*. The other four strategies were rated by participants as unimportant. The majority of participants thought these strategies are insignificant or unimportant.

However, participants’ opinions about *Education* and *Mentoring* were diverse. There were no more than three participants who held the same opinion toward these two strategies. Moreover, it can be seen from the rankings that participants valued strategies that relate to personal ability, such as *Work experience* and *Education*. However, the ones related to networking, which are usually considered important by the public in China, were ranked lower.

There were two possible factors that affected the choices participants made. First, the work environment for most participants was a fair and equitable environment. Thus, the influence of the connection was very limited for them. Second, participants were reluctant to show the true impact of networking in order to save face or to protect the positive image of their working organizations. Participants' responses about networking contradicted the opinion of Xiao and Wu (2014), who pointed out that China is a relationship-oriented society, and "leaders categorize subordinates as belonging either to an in- or an out-group" (p. 169).

### **Other Strategies**

Seven of the 10 participants expressed they had never adopted any strategy to get their current positions. Some of them first showed discomfort for a very short time when they were asked about what strategies they used to attain their leadership positions; they soon denied any strategies had been applied in their career. Almost all seven participants claimed that it was not their original intention to be senior leaders and what they did was to work hard. Their current leadership positions were assigned to them by their superiors. Additionally, the strategies they shared with the author were basically the same—continuous excellent work performance. In other words, the most significant similarity of

the 10 participants' answers to this question involved no particular strategy other than a persistent work ethic.

A contradiction surfaced in the seven participants' answers: they invested much time and energy into their work, yet they claimed being promoted to leadership positions was not their goal. It is undeniable that promotions were one of the important criteria measuring individuals' success in their careers. In this case, there is a possibility that the seven participants may not have expressed their true thoughts about whether they long for leadership positions. Chinese traditional culture probably plays a significant role in this underlying factor.

Women are considered inferior to men, especially in the aspect of leadership in Chinese traditional culture. For example, a Chinese idiom for women who want to gain leadership roles is: "The hen in the morning," which means women usurp authority over men. Presently, Chinese traditional culture still has a major influence on women. Chinese intellectual women who have received higher education are not motivated to participate in politics (Si & Kang, 2012; Yang, 2010). Actually, several participants also stated they thought females lack abilities in various fields; thus, males are more suitable for leadership roles than females. In this case, it is possible that participants did not want to reveal their true feelings about gaining senior leadership roles under the influence of

Chinese traditional culture. Another possibility is these participants truly believed they were less capable than men and lacked the inner motivation for competing with men for senior leadership positions.

### **Helpful Factors for Women Leaders in Enhancing Their Leadership Opportunity in Their Media-Related Organizations**

The findings show that 80% of the participants stated there is no policy or program in their working organizations to support the progression of women into senior leadership roles. Although two participants indicated their organizations have policies or programs particularly targeted to help women become leaders, they could not provide any detailed information about these policies. In other words, the policy or program that was mentioned by these two participants probably is not carried out in their department or organization.

The organizations where all the participants worked in this study are large-scale and first-class media organizations in China. However, gender inequality still exists in most of these organizations, according to participants' responses. Therefore, the scarcity of helpful policies or programs for women seeking senior leadership positions represents that Chinese media industry does not recognize the significance of supporting and cultivating women leaders. Under this circumstance, some women senior leaders also did

not realize the importance of nurturing women organizational senior leaders in the media field. For example, Bao admitted she had never thought about improving the representation of women senior leaders in her organization. This also may explain why most participants claimed that the factor of *Limited opportunities to advance your career* is not a barrier for women either in the Chinese media field or local organizations.

### **Supportive Characteristics of The Chinese Media Organizations for**

#### **Women Leaders in Their Media-Related Organizations**

##### **Opportunities**

The majority of participants stated there is no trace of all four opportunities listed on the interview protocol. Participants' opinions toward the four opportunities were in sharp contrast to their thoughts about the factor of *Limited opportunities to advance your career*. Participants' responses illustrated large-scale media organizations in the Chinese capital have not realized women's underrepresentation in leadership roles in the field as a problem. This is not even mentioned by the media organizations in the medium to small cities. The attitude of those advanced media organizations reflects the absence of gender equality in China's society and government.



## **Working Environment or Culture**

Participants' opinions regarding the influence of the working environment or culture on women who seek senior leadership positions in their organizations were split between positive and negative. Five participants expressed the influence of their organizations' working environment or culture is positive, while four participants indicated they felt the negative influence of their organizations' working environment or culture. Four participants stated they did not feel any positive or negative influence on women who want to achieve leadership roles in their organizations' working environment or culture.

The positive influence included that a friendly atmosphere for women and gender is not an important factor to consider in the promotion mechanism. All the negative influences are tied to women's difficulty in balancing their work and family. Participants felt the working environment or culture of their organizations was not supportive enough for women to balance their work and family. The difference among participants' responses showed some of Beijing's media organizations realize the difficulties women have encountered in their work and have attempted to provide help for them, while the others have not realized that or choose to ignore a women's dilemma.

## **Possible Changes**

Seven participants shared their thoughts on the change they wanted to make.

Three participants indicated they had no intention to make any change to their organizations, since they believed personal ability is more important than gender when selecting to fill leadership roles. These three participants thought there is little difference regarding whether a man or woman holds the leadership position as long as he or she is capable.

Among those seven participants, two expressed changes they would like to make about individuals rather than organizations. These changes include hoping leaders continue to support a developing culture within the organization to improve women's personal abilities. The other five participants thought possible changes could involve the promotion mechanism, opportunities, recruitment, increasing the proportion of women leaders, and lightening the burden on professional mothers. Most of those changes participants wanted to make relate to organizational policies and systems.

Most participants' thoughts about possible changes needed indicate organizational policies and systems in the Beijing media field are not supportive for women who desire to be leaders. Since these participants work in state-owned media organizations, it

illustrates gender inequality still exists in Beijing large state-owned media organizations, and opportunities for women to become senior leaders are very limited.

### **Meaningful Event or Achievement**

The meaningful or important factors participants shared with the author regarding senior leadership positions are not limited to a particular event or achievement. Three participants pointed out the support of family means much to them. Three participants indicated intrinsic motivation provides the greatest help. Other participants listed the following as important: personal choice, important opportunities, significant work experience, and job positions. Except for inner motivation and personal choice, the other factors were included in the interview protocol.

In summary, the influence of Chinese traditional culture on women leaders is imperceptible. It is possible Chinese women do not realize they are under the influence of traditional culture. The desire for power in Chinese traditional culture is shameful, which makes women ashamed to admit their desire for leadership positions. Chasing fame and fortune is not a noble character in the Chinese traditional culture. This kind of traditional concept has a greater impact on women, since Chinese traditional culture holds an extremely negative attitude toward women who long to be leaders. Moreover, the word of the leader in Chinese culture is usually tied to power and fame. Therefore, the

participants' taboo on seeking leadership positions may be due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture.

Additionally, the insufficient attention to women leaders from the national government to the enterprise also may be related to traditional culture. Chinese traditional culture suggests that women are not suitable for leadership positions due to their nature, which not only makes men underrate women's leadership ability, but also makes some women believe they are inferior to men in the aspect of leadership.

Women's physical characteristics also make them incomparable to men in the workplace. Due to women's physical characteristics, the physical discomfort caused by pregnancy and having children makes it hard for women to compete with men or single women in the workplace. Additionally, the position of women in traditional culture also determines they need to invest more energy than men in caring for the family after getting married or having children.

Therefore, Chinese traditional culture can be considered as the fundamental cause of women's underrepresentation in leadership in large Chinese media organizations in Beijing city. Chinese traditional culture itself is the possible external factor; however, the great yet imperceptible influence of Chinese traditional culture on women is the root internal possible factor. Another barrier identified by some participants was a women's

self-awareness. Participants indicated a woman's self-awareness is not formed quickly but tends to identify with the definition of women in traditional culture and becomes a barrier for women in the workplace and hard to correct. The younger women leaders in the Chinese media field may have received less negative influences from Chinese traditional culture than the older women leaders since they have been exposed to the Western culture much more during their careers. However, there are few young women serving in senior leadership positions in large Chinese media organizations in Beijing. Their future career may be affected by the current female senior leaders who believe women are inferior to men in many aspects, including leadership.

### **Limitations of The Study**

There are several limitations of this study. First, although in-depth interviews allowed the author to explore women's lived experiences in the media field and generated rich data, the sample of this study was a very small group of women's experiences in media leadership in Beijing. However, despite the author's word to participants to protect their confidentiality, some participants seemed to have concerns when answering sensitive questions such as gender inequality and promotion mechanism, illustrating interviews as an additional limitation in this study. More concrete examples to further

explain what was meant may have prevented a one-sided interpretation, which could have caused misunderstanding of their original meaning.

The culture background of the author could have created a personal bias. The author may not have perceived some Chinese cultural assumptions and may have failed to properly question the participants since she grew up in the culture. Inappropriate assumptions of Western literature about women leadership to women in the Chinese media also may have biased this study.

Another limitation of this study is the participants' ages. Since the population of this study is women senior leaders in the Chinese media field, the range in ages of the sample is relatively large. All participants in this study are older than 40 and are more likely to be influenced by Chinese traditional culture compared to young people. In this case, the findings of this study may lack generational diversity.

Additionally, the difference between various structural forms and the economic nature of the study organizations may have affected the status of women leadership in organizations. However, five of the six media organizations in this study are stated-owned, and only one of them is private-owned. The uneven distribution of the different nature of the organizations may have affected the findings.

### **Areas for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to discover possible internal and external factors of women's underrepresentation in large Chinese media organizations in Beijing. By the end of this study, there was much to be explored. First, the research about women media leaders in China is severely insufficient. Although this study has uncovered possible causes of barriers women leaders have encountered in the media field in China, more work needs to be done to discover the motivations driving women media practitioners to pursue leadership positions. Additionally, the research on women leaders is also limited in other areas in China.

Additionally, participants mentioned females are the dominant gender in journalism education in China. Yet, the research exclusively devoted to women is very limited. Research is needed to determine why women students choose journalism as their major and to determine their career aspirations. The clarification of these issues could provide a more comprehensive academic understanding of women leadership in media fields in China.

Further studies could focus on exploring the difference between women's representation in leadership roles in different media organizations. This study involved limited interviews with women leaders in private-owned organizations, which prevented

a more comprehensive understanding of women leaders' opinions toward the possible causes of barriers in private-owned media organizations. It would be helpful to gain a better understanding of the similarities or differences that create barriers women encounter in different types of media organizations.

More research should be conducted in an international context. The interview protocol of this study tried to compare the possible barriers women practitioners have experienced in two contexts: Chinese media field and their working media organizations in Beijing. Future research could pay more attention to the comparison of women's thoughts about women leadership in the media field between China and the US. The barriers women media leaders face may be different in the view of men and women. The comparison is needed of the two genders' opinions toward the barriers and strategies women media practitioners have encountered and adopted in order to seek senior leadership roles.

### **Summary**

One interpretation of Beauvoir's claim about gender was gender was socially constructed (Mikkola, 2019). In other words, females are not born as women but “through a process whereby they acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behavior” (Mikkola, 2019, para. 10). This interpretation matches the findings of this study to some



extent. In this study, the author attempted to explore and identify possible causes of barriers women leaders encountered in Beijing media organizations. The results show the biggest cause of barriers participants encountered is related to Chinese traditional culture.

According to Leung (2003), Confucianism was the dominating culture in Chinese feudal society; therefore, the major requirement for women in Chinese feudal society was to obey males' will and to be good mothers and virtuous wives. Although the status of gender equality in China has been greatly improved since the establishment of PRC, the requirement for a woman to be a good mother and virtuous wife still widely exist (Leung, 2003). Under this kind of influence, Chinese women often need to face the conflict of balancing work and family (Ding, 2011). The findings of this study confirm the viewpoint in literature. *Balancing work and family* and *Having children* were rated as barriers by most participants; many participants also mentioned that *Chinese traditional culture* as the potential cause of the other barriers.

Additionally, participants expressed they would like to change the unfair organizational policies and non-transparent promotion mechanism if possible, which reflects the discrimination against women leaders in Chinese traditional culture. Due to the huge impact of traditional culture on Chinese women, some women tolerate or even accept this kind of discrimination. In this study, some participants indicated female

leaders are inferior to male leaders, which can be considered as an example. Moreover, some participants indicated some women leaders choose to be single or have no children in order to be more “competent” leaders compared to men.

In summary, *Balancing work and family* and *Chinese traditional culture* can be considered as the external possible factors of the barriers women leaders encountered in Beijing large media organizations. The negative influence of traditional culture on Chinese women, which refers to women’s low self-evaluation and negative self-awareness, can be considered the internal factor of the barriers Beijing media women leaders encounter in media organizations. One way to improve the situation Chinese women leaders face is to weaken the negative influence of traditional culture on Chinese women.

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**APPENDIX A: TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS**

Table 1

*Participants' Demographics*

Interviewee's pseudonyms	Organization	Position	Num of subordinates	Years of working in current organization	Years of working in current position	Age	Marriage Status	Age of Child	Num of children	Education
Bao	ABD Television Station	Senior leader	2400	24	4	41-50	Married	14-17	1	Doctoral
Sun	Orange Video	Senior leader	270	3	3	>50	Married	>18	1	Master
Yin	Breaking News	Director	50	16	2	>50	Married	-	-	Master
Xie	Life View	Deputy editor	70	16	2	41-50	Married	7-13	1	Master
Mei	Beijing Weekly	Senior leader	32	36	12	>50	Married	>18	1	Bachelor
Zou	China News	Senior leader	21	26	8	41-50	Divorced	>18	1	Bachelor
Tan	China News	Senior leader	20-30	35	20	>50	Married	14-17	1	Bachelor
Min	China News	Director	23	25	15	41-50	Married	>18	1	Master
Lin	China News	Chief editor	6	20	9	>50	Married	7-13	1	Master
Fan	ABD Television Station	Director	2000	30	10	>50	Divorced	>18	1	Bachelor

## APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Project Title:** External and Internal Causes of Women's Under-Representation in Leadership in Large Chinese Media Organizations in Beijing City

**Investigator:** Xiaoxue Xiang, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program,  
[xiaoxue.xiang752@topper.wku.edu](mailto:xiaoxue.xiang752@topper.wku.edu)

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

**You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.**

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

- Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this research is to identify the internal and external factors that have contributed to the under-representation of women in leadership in the Chinese media. The central research question is "What do Beijing women media leaders perceive as the reasons contributing to the under-representation of women in media leadership in Beijing, as perceived by women leaders in this sector?"
- Explanation of Procedures:** Each participant will be interviewed by the researcher. The duration of the interview will be approximately 1-1.5 hours.
- Discomfort and Risks:** The level of risk for the participants is minimal. There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if the participants identify their surveys with their own name - they will be asked to not put their names on the surveys. The researcher will make effort to safeguard their identity by asking them to not provide their name and the researcher will make sure that the researcher and her dissertation committees will be the only people having access to those surveys.
- Benefits:** All participants will be offered 20 dollars or 100 RMB gift card. The participants might be able to identify more potential barriers on the road to their leadership roles and discover more feasible strategies to help them to overcome some barriers. In other words, this study might be providing an opportunity for all participants to gain some new women leadership theories and findings.
- Confidentiality:** The data (recordings and transcripts) will be stored in an encrypted USB driver, which will be kept in a lock file cabinet in Educational Leadership Doctoral Program (EDD) Office on Western Kentucky University campus for a minimum of three years and destroyed by December 2022. The consent forms will all be destroyed with the help of a shredder machine. Only the researcher knows the password for the encrypted USB driver and the EDD office staff has the key to the lock file cabinet.

WKU IRB# 19-438  
Approved: 5/22/2019  
End Date: 12/31/2019  
EXPEDITED  
Original: 5/22/2019

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. **(Initial here)** \_\_\_\_\_

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT  
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY  
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator  
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360



WKU IRB# 19-438  
Approved: 5/22/2019  
End Date: 12/31/2019  
EXPEDITED  
Original: 5/22/2019

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Interview Protocol

#### Background Questions:

1. Age: under 30\_\_\_\_ between 31-40\_\_\_\_ between 41-50\_\_\_\_ over 50
2. Marital status: single\_\_\_\_ married\_\_\_\_ divorced
3. Number of children: under 6\_\_\_\_ between 7-13\_\_\_\_ between 14-17  
above 18
4. Educational credential (check all that applies):  
Less than bachelor\_\_\_\_ bachelor's degree\_\_\_\_ master's degree\_\_\_\_ doctoral degree
5. Number of years that you work in the organization:
6. Number of years that you work in your current position:
7. Describe your current position:  
title:\_\_\_\_\_ number of people supervised

RQ1: What are the barriers that women encounter in attaining leadership positions in their media related work organizations?

1. To what extent do you think the following factors are barriers for women seeking leadership roles in Chinese media field? (mark options that applies)

None          Somewhat          Considerable          Significant

Gender

---

Traditional Chinese culture

None          Somewhat          Considerable          Significant

---

---

---

Balancing work and family

---

Educational background

---

Limited opportunities to advance your career

---

Having children

---

Being married

---

Age

---

Years of working experience  
in the field

---

2. What other barriers of women leadership other than the factors listed above do you think limit women from reaching/ attaining leadership positions in your organization?

3. Within your own organization, explain how the following factors have been a barrier to your advancing leadership positions?

None          Somewhat          Considerable          Significant

Gender	
Traditional Chinese culture	
Balancing work and family	
Educational background	



---

Limited opportunities to  
advance your career

---

Having children

---

Being married

---

Age

---

Years of working experience  
in the field

---

4. Other than the factors listed above, are there any other barriers that you encountered in your career path in reaching / attaining to a leadership position in your organization?

RO2: What strategies could be used to help women increase their representation in leadership positions in media related organizations?

1. Which of any of the following strategies are important to you in reaching your leadership positions? Please rank the following strategies from the 1 to 6 (1 is the most important and 6 is the least important)

Mentoring

Coaching

Family connections

Connections of friends / acquaintances

Education

Work experience

2. What strategies did you use to attain your leadership positions and fully utilize your strengths?

RQ3: What factors have been helpful to women leaders in enhancing their leadership opportunity in their media related organizations?

1. Does your organization have any policies or programs that encouraging the representation of women in leadership?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

2. If your answer to the last question is “yes”, please describe the police or programs that your organization has.

RQ4: What characteristics of the Chinese media organizations are most supportive to women leaders in their media related organizations?

1. Some organizations are intentional in training to create opportunities for women to move into leadership positions. To what extend do you think the following opportunities pertain to your organization

None      Somewhat      Considerable      Significant

Use specific policies or program

---

Provide professional development  
training opportunities for women

---

Leadership positions that specifically  
require a women

---

Make an effort to provide promotion  
opportunities for women

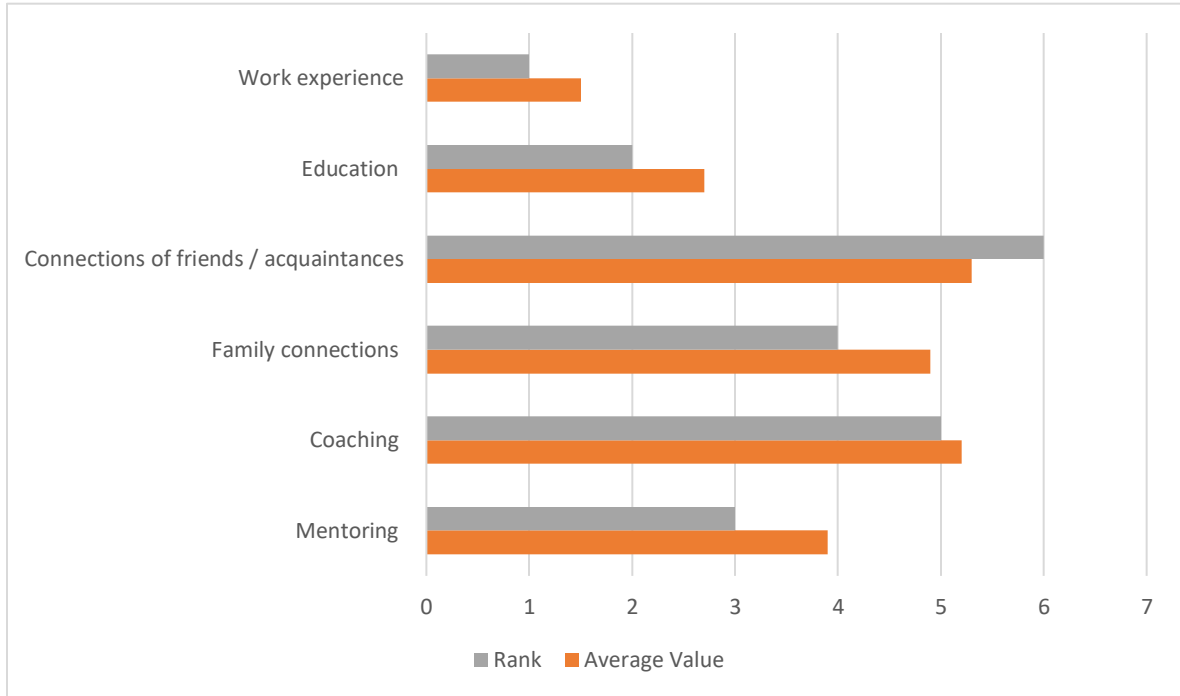
---

2. To what extent do you find the working environment / culture of your workplace positive for women to achieve to leadership positions?  
None\_\_\_\_Somewhat\_\_\_\_ Considerable\_\_\_\_ Great deal
3. To what extent do you find the working environment/ culture of your workplace negative for women to achieve to leadership positions?  
None\_\_\_\_Somewhat\_\_\_\_ Considerable\_\_\_\_ Great deal
4. If you had the power to change something about your organization that would help more women to move into leadership positions, what specific changes would you make?
5. For you, what has been the most important and meaningful event or achievement in your life that lead you to achieve your currently leadership position?

**APPENDIX D: FIGURE OF AVERAGE VALUE AND RANK OF LISTED STRATEGIES**

Figure 1

*Average Value and Rank of Listed Strategies*



**APPENDIX E: TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF LISTED FACTORS IN  
CONTEXTS**

Table 2

*Participants' Evaluations Regarding the Impact of Listed Factors in Contexts*

Factor	Chinese media field				Their own organization			
	None	Somewhat	Considerable	Significant	None	Somewhat	Considerable	Significant
Gender	3	5	1	1	6	2	2	0
Chinese traditional culture	3	5	1	1	5	3	2	0
Balancing work and family	1	3	3	3	2	5	1	2
Educational background	2	3	3	2	4	2	3	1
Limited opportunities to advance your career	6	4	0	0	7	3	0	0
Having children	2	6	1	1	1	8	1	0
Being married	7	2	1	0	10	0	0	0
Age	3	4	1	2	5	4	1	0
Years of working experience in the field	2	2	3	3	2	2	4	2