

# **Gender and Generation: Job Expectations of Chinese Professionals and Students amid Complexity and Change**

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*We note a challenging picture for prospective employers in China related to rapid economic growth and related heightening labor demand, concurrent with labor supply contraction and demographic changes. This research contributes to theoretical and practical understanding in this context, as findings reveal significant differences in mean importance scores for job expectations rated by professionals and students across gender. We suggest that, in order to survive and thrive in this complex and shifting labor market, Chinese firms must learn how to attract and retain the human resources most pivotal to their continuing success.*

*Keywords: gender, culture, professionals, students, china, human resources*

## **INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

In recent history, the Chinese labor force has experienced dramatic change. In fact, until relaxation of governmental control began in the 1980s, private industry and the ideas of labor recruitment, selection, and retention were essentially nonexistent (Belsie, 2012). That is, in earlier times, the government would assign individuals to work for government-controlled firms. With the growth of a more loosely regulated and prosperous Chinese economy, however, came the ability of companies to select employees and the opportunity for prospective employees to have some choice among potential employers. This relatively new economic dynamic brings labor supply and demand issues to the forefront of firms' planning efforts. Specifically, the declining labor participation rate makes human resources scarcer, such that firms may increasingly ascertain the need to compete for the favor of a shrinking and evolving labor supply.

Since reaching its peak in 2016, the Chinese labor pool is indeed shrinking. According to Textor (2020), the labor force reached a high of 806.94 million people in 2016 but decreased to 805.67 million in 2018.

Citing an aging population, the researcher also noted that the decrease exists not only in numerical terms but also as a percentage of the share of the Chinese population that is participating in the labor market. In fact, participation in the labor force has declined steadily from 71.45 percent in 2009 to 68.19 percent in 2019, a decrease of 3.26 percent over 10 years. Further, because of the one-child policy in place from 1979 to 2016 (when it reverted to a two-child policy), there are indications that fewer younger people are entering the labor force, and that this declining labor participation trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future (Qi & Fang, 2018). Accompanying the rise of the Chinese economy to global prominence, this fact highlights the importance of employers' heightened attention to human resource issues.

Along with shifts in the age of the workforce, the gender composition of the workforce is also changing. Even though the percentage of females in the Chinese population remained at approximately 48.7 percent from 1990 to 2019, the ratio of females to males participating in the labor force has been on a steady decline, falling 6.5 percent in that same time period and accounting for only 44 percent of the labor force (World Bank Group, 2020). In fact, just 60.5 percent of women are part of the labor force. Age is certainly a factor in these statistics, yet other, cultural influences contribute to this modest retreat of Chinese women from the labor market. Connelly, Dong, Jacobsen and Zhaou (2018) suggest the impact of a resurgence in China of traditional stereotypes regarding women's roles in society. These views relate to the transfer of responsibility for elder- and child-care from the government to the household in recent decades. With the aging population and the opportunity to have two children instead of one, needs for caregivers are increasing, and the role of caregiver is traditionally ascribed to the woman. Another nuance in implications for the labor force is the fact that the gender gap in higher education is effectively closed; in fact, the pendulum actually has swung the other direction, with women making up nearly 53% of undergraduate students (Society of Women Engineers, 2020).

Thus, we see a challenging picture for prospective employers to consider in their developing human resource strategies and related processes: a) the demand for labor is increasing with the growth of the Chinese economy; b) the labor supply is contracting; c) men comprise a higher portion of the labor force than women; and d) women comprise a disproportionately higher percentage of both the college population and people in a caregiving avocation. In light of these changes, and in order to survive and thrive in this complex shift from a demand-side to a supply-side labor market, firms must learn how to attract and retain the human resources most pivotal to their continuing success. Therefore, it is imperative that employing organizations in China ascertain current and future employees' expectations about their jobs, whether current employees' expectations match the reality that they experience, and how current and future employees' expectations compare with each other.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

We integrate Eagly and Wood's (1999) social role theory and Inglehart's (1977) theory of value change to inform our inquiry in this challenging context. Social role theory addresses the impact of societal role expectations based on gender and holds that gender-related work assignments influence, and may perpetuate, attitudinal and behavioral gender differences, more so than the reverse. That is, even though women's and men's physiological characteristics traditionally led them to pursue different kinds of labor, it is this gender-based division of labor that has impacted their skills, outcomes, and status over time. Men, for example, who were [culturally] assigned roles as warriors and hunters, accrued power and wealth, while women's child-bearing and domestic role assignments led to their development of nurturing and relational skills (Petersen & Hyde, 2014). These factors aid our understanding of the perpetuation of traditional gender roles among contemporary workers in China, including the relatively low labor participation rate of women. Yet, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, combined with the shrinking workforce and related labor demand stress, makes this a conundrum for employers. The fact that women make up the majority of university students, however, may provide a hint of relief on the horizon, in that the labor pool may also be experiencing significant generationally driven value changes regarding social roles. As suggested by the theory of value change (Inglehart, 1977), we note that intergenerational differences are most apparent in countries that have experienced rapid economic advancement (Inglehart & Abramson, 1994; Schmitz,

2019). Clearly, China is a prime example of such transformation; and we infer that female students, whose formative years have been marked by an increase in capitalistic values, may be more inclined to participate in the labor force. At any rate, and consistent with our integration of social role and value change theories, we note the importance of examining potential differences in gender-based attitudes between generations, namely, professionals and students.

We extend theoretical reasoning to assert that these attitudinal differences will include work expectations that employers must understand if they are to meet the labor needs presented by the growing economy. Work is an important part of human existence (Hamid, Pettibone, Mabrouk, Hetrick, Schmidt, Vander Weele, and Berke, 2016). Over the past fifty years, a number of researchers have focused on what current and future employees can expect from their work environments. Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) two-factor theory provided the foundational basis for research focused on job expectations. Perhaps, the seminal piece in this area of research inquiry was undertaken by Manhardt (1972) in developing an instrument that can be used to measure differences in work values research. This scale was developed by Manhardt to provide a less theoretical and more specific method of measuring differences in job orientation. Manhardt's (1972) 25-item survey instrument can be dichotomized into intrinsic and extrinsic factors based on the locus of incentive from the respondent's perspective. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual derives an internal pleasure or enjoyment from engaging in a task and where no obvious external incentives are present (e.g. sense of accomplishment). In contrast, extrinsic motivation occurs when an individual engages in behaviors for express external rewards, whether they be tangible (e.g. pay) or intangible (e.g. praise). This lens is particularly helpful in examining implications of the changing demographics of the Chinese labor force. Manhardt (1972) found eleven of twenty-five characteristics that distinguished the job expectations of males from those of females in his landmark study. Support for Manhardt's conclusion, however, has been mixed (Loscocco, 1989; Brief, Rose, & Aldag, 1977), underscoring the need to understand contextual reasons for such disparities. To date, an array of research has shown that differences in job expectations, be they intrinsic or extrinsic, are important in informing organizational initiatives for employee attraction, selection, and retention (Brief, *et al.*, 1977; Centers & Bugental, 1966; de Vaus & McAllister, 1991; Elizur, 1994; Herzberg, *et al.*, 1959; Loscocco, 1989; Mi'Ari, 1996; Neil & Snizek, 1987).

### **Contextual Influences**

A number of studies have examined differences in extrinsic and intrinsic work values among men and women in various cultures. For instance, Abu-saad and Isralowitz (1997), using a sample of undergraduate students in Israel, found there was no consistent pattern regarding differences among gender pertaining to work values. Females scored higher on extrinsic work values four out of six times. In their study, they found a total of nine gender differences as opposed to eleven in Manhardt's (1972) study and the 18 in Beutell and Brenner's (1986) study. No major differences were reported for the common male/intrinsic values among men and women. Six differences were reported according to the female/intrinsic work-based values.

In Sagan, Tomkiewicz, Adeyemi-Bello, and Frankel's (2008) study, no major differences were observed between Polish men and women regarding intrinsic job factors, however, there were nationality differences in comparison to their Russian counterparts. While Polish respondents valued 'intrinsic job factors,' the Russian respondents preferred extrinsic factors.

With regard to China, Robinson and Beutell (2003) noted that Chinese men and women reported comparable levels of social impact in the retail sector, but because of the patriarchal nature of the society, the male salespeople saw themselves as inferior. Previous research on Chinese students by Tomkiewicz, Brenner, and Damanpour (1994) found no major differences between men and women regarding intrinsic and extrinsic variables. The weakness of the study was perhaps the small sample size. Nevertheless, the authors concluded that women showed a greater variation for flexible work environment and embraced more of 'a life outside of work' philosophy.

In 2011, Tomkiewicz, Frankel, Sagan, and Wang examined job expectations across gender in Chinese college students. Although they found significant differences on six individual items (two intrinsic items and four extrinsic items), they found no significant differences between males and females on either the

intrinsic or extrinsic factors as a whole. Based on these findings, they concluded that both genders could be approached similarly with regard to human resource practices including recruitment and retention. In a 2015 follow-up to Tomkiewicz, *et al.*'s (2011) study, Chullen, Adeyemi-Bello, and Xi compared male and female ratings of job characteristics in a sample of 430 college students. In sharp contrast to Tomkiewicz, *et al.* (2011), they found significant differences on 23 individual items with females assigning higher importance to all 23 items. Moreover, these authors found significant differences between males and females on both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors as a whole, with females reporting a .6+ higher mean difference on each factor. Given the marked differences between these studies, Chullen, *et al.* (2015) covered an in-depth comparison and discussion of their findings in relation to those of Tomkiewicz, *et al.*'s (2011). The weakness of these studies was that they focused solely on college students while ignoring potential differences in job expectations that may exist for those already in the workforce (i.e. working professionals).

Traditionally in Chinese culture, men bring rationality and aggressiveness to the workplace and that females bring what are more likely to be considered non-managerial characteristics like passivity and nurturing demeanor (Hochwarter, Perrew, & Dawkins, 1995). Yet, the changing demographics call for a re-examination of the current and potentially predictive relevance of these perspectives as they may influence best employment practices. Moreover, the existing literature in job expectations in China has focused predominantly on college students at the exclusion of working professionals. Understanding the job expectations of Chinese working professionals currently in the work force is an important area in need of further study. Thus, in the current study, there are three research questions of interest: (1) What level of importance do Chinese professionals attribute to various aspects of their work environment (i.e., job expectations)?; (2) Does the importance assigned to various aspects of the work environment (i.e., job expectations) differ between male and female Chinese professionals?; and (3) Given ongoing societal and economic changes in China, how do the job expectations for Chinese working professionals compare with those of Chinese college students?

## **METHOD**

The primary source of data for this study was collected through opinion survey. Participants were guaranteed that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and that under no circumstances would anyone be able to individually identify them in any way. Prior to administering the survey, participants were informed of the upcoming study (noting that its purpose was to better understand Chinese professionals' job-related attitudes to help improve the quality of their future work life), were encouraged to participate, and were assured that the data would go directly to the authors and that no one would have access to individual responses. One week later, surveys were distributed in person to participants. These surveys were then filled out anonymously and coded for data entry.

### **Sample**

Participants for this study consisted of 365 Chinese working professionals (100 male, 265 female). Overall, participants were on average 34.90 years of age, were predominantly married (74.5%), and reported working an average of 46.77 hours per week.

### **Measures**

Job expectations were measured using Manhardt's (1972) twenty-five item scale. Participants were asked to indicate how important on a 5-point Likert scale (5=Very Important to 1=Very Unimportant) it was to them to have a job which, for examples: "encourages continued development of knowledge and skills...", "provides the opportunity to earn a high income...", "provides a feeling of accomplishment...", and/or "provides advancement to high administrative responsibility..." Since questions regarding attitudes and opinions may be more abstract and certain concepts may not be relevant throughout the world, this study followed a regimented process of forward-translation and back-translation. First, the questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese (i.e. Mandarin) by one of the co-authors of this study (who is

bilingual). To validate the translation, assistance was solicited from another bilingual Chinese professor from a regional university in the United States to translate the survey back into English. This allowed for identification of questionnaire items that may have posed difficulties for this study's Chinese sample. The Chinese professor in the U.S. was then asked to make any modifications that were necessary on those potentially problematic questions identified through the back-translation, given the English language-based original. Subsequently, a bilingual Chinese professor in the UK was asked to translate the revised questionnaire in Chinese back into English. After this iteration, researchers were satisfied with the correspondence between the English and Chinese-based versions of the questionnaire. This measure demonstrated satisfactory reliability overall ( $\alpha=.95$ ), as well as for male ( $\alpha=.96$ ) and female ( $\alpha=.94$ ) participants independently.

### **Analytical Approach**

This study examined and tested its data in a manner consistent with previous research in the job expectations literature (Manhardt, 1972; Bartol, 1976; Bartol & Manhardt, 1979; Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1979; Frankel, Tomkiewicz, Adeyemi-Bello, & Sagan, 2006; Sagan, *et al.*, 2008; Tomkiewicz, *et al.*, 1994; Tomkiewicz, *et al.* 2011; Tomkiewicz, Johnson, & Brenner, 1997). First, as noted above, respondents were asked to rate Manhardt's (1972) 25 job characteristics using a 5-point Likert scale (5=Very Important to 1=Very Unimportant). Mean scores for responses on each of the job characteristics were calculated separately for men and women. In order to answer, "What level of importance do Chinese professionals attribute to various aspects of their work environment (i.e., job expectations)?" the mean scores for each of the 25 job characteristics were rank ordered for males and females separately. For example, the job characteristic that received the highest mean score for males was ranked #1 (the most important). Similarly, the job characteristic that received the lowest mean score for males was #25 (the least important). This process was repeated for female respondents. A Spearman rank correlation was then performed to determine whether males and females assigned a similar rank order of importance to these job characteristics (i.e. Was the job characteristic ranked #1 for males also ranked #1 for females?). Higher scores indicate greater similarity. Additionally, paired t-tests were performed on the standard deviations for each job characteristic for males and females separately to determine which group was more homogeneous.

In order to answer "Does the importance assigned to various aspects of the work environment (i.e. job expectations) differ between male and female Chinese working professionals?" an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, comparing the mean scores between males and females on each of the 25 job characteristics individually. This step addresses whether a statistically significant difference exists between males and females on the importance of, for example, "having a job that requires originality."

Lastly, to answer "Given ongoing societal and economic changes, how do job expectations for Chinese working professionals compare with those of Chinese college students?," Spearman rank correlations and paired t-tests were performed on the current study's findings on Chinese working professionals and the findings on Chinese college students reported in Chullen, *et al.* (2015).

### **Results**

Table 1 illustrates the ranks, means, and standard deviations for Chinese male and female working professionals across all twenty-five job expectation questionnaire items.

**TABLE 1**  
**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MEAN RATINGS ON JOB EXPECTATIONS FOR CHINESE PROFESSIONALS**

<b>Job Expectations Scale Item</b> Please circle either a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 concerning importance on a continuum which ranges from very important (=5) on the high end to very unimportant (=1) on the low end.	Male ( <i>n</i> = 100)			Female ( <i>n</i> = 265)			Significant difference between means
How important is it to you to have a job which:	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	
1. requires originality...	6	4.03	.81	5	4.25	.62	**
2. makes use of your specific educational background...	24	3.64	.90	23	3.64	.76	n.s.
3. encourages continued development of knowledge and skills...	1	4.19	.72	1	4.38	.56	**
4. is respected by other people...	2	4.09	.74	2	4.30	.59	**
5. provides job security...	8	4.01	.67	6	4.22	.60	**
6. provides the opportunity to earn a high income...	9	4.00	.70	7	4.15	.59	*
7. makes a social contribution by work you do...	13	3.92	.76	12	4.04	.63	n.s.
8. gives you the responsibility for taking risks...	10 <sup>^</sup>	3.94	.71	11	4.06	.56	n.s.
9. requires working on problems of central importance to the organization...	14	3.90	.70	18	3.98	.67	n.s.
10. involves working with congenial associates...	3 <sup>^</sup>	4.07	.73	8 <sup>^</sup>	4.11	.67	n.s.
11. provides ample leisure time off the job...	16 <sup>^</sup>	3.86	.73	16	4.00	.71	n.s.
12. provides change and variety in duties and activities...	21	3.74	.84	22	3.72	.81	n.s.
13. provides comfortable working conditions...	12	3.93	.70	8 <sup>^</sup>	4.11	.64	*
14. permits advancement to high administrative responsibility...	20	3.80	.82	20	3.92	.72	n.s.
15. permits working independently...	19	3.82	.70	13 <sup>^</sup>	4.02	.65	**
16. rewards good performance with recognition...	3	4.07	.70	3	4.27	.60	**
17. requires supervising others...	25	3.47	.92	25	3.57	.86	n.s.
18. is intellectually stimulating...	23	3.66	.83	21	3.80	.76	n.s.
19. satisfies your cultural and aesthetic interests...	18	3.84	.75	17	3.99	.68	n.s.
20. has clear cut rules and procedures to follow...	10 <sup>^</sup>	3.94	.69	13 <sup>^</sup>	4.02	.66	n.s.
21. permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect...	15	3.88	.71	19	3.95	.63	n.s.

22.	permits a regular routine in time and place of work...	7	4.02	.65	8 <sup>^</sup>	4.11	.59	n.s.
23.	requires meeting and speaking with many other people...	22	3.72	.79	24	3.62	.84	n.s.
24.	permits you to develop your own methods of doing work...	16 <sup>^</sup>	3.86	.71	13 <sup>^</sup>	4.02	.61	*
25.	provides a feeling of accomplishment...	5	4.06	.65	4	4.26	.59	**

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001;  
<sup>^</sup> indicates tie rankings

Mean scores were calculated for each of the 25 questionnaire items and rank ordered separately for male and female students. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient between the rank orders of male and female respondents was .95 ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the order of importance which male and female respondents placed on job characteristics was very similar. Significant differences between male and female respondents on the job expectations questionnaire were tested using ANOVA. Significant differences ( $p < .05$  or better) were found on 10 of the 25 items. Females reported higher average scores on all 10 of these items. Mean male standard deviations were .75 and mean female standard deviations were .66, indicating that females were more homogenous than males with respect to job expectations. A paired t-test ( $p < .001$ ) for these standard deviations confirmed females as a group are more homogeneous than are the males.

Both male (mean = 4.19) and female (mean = 4.38) Chinese working professionals indicated that having a job which “encourages continued development of knowledge and skills” was of the highest importance to them (i.e. ranked #1/25). On the other hand, both male (mean = 3.47) and female (mean = 3.57) Chinese working professionals indicated that having a job which “requires supervising others” was of the lowest importance to them (i.e. ranked #25/25).

#### *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Perspective of the Survey Items*

13 items (#1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 21, 24, and 25) comprise the intrinsic factor in the Manhardt (1972) scale, whereas 12 items (#5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23) comprise the extrinsic factor. Mean scores for the 13 intrinsic and 12 extrinsic job characteristics were calculated and compared between male and female subjects using ANOVA. Significant differences between male and female participants were found for the intrinsic factor (mean = 3.93 males vs. mean = 4.07 females,  $p < .001$ ) but not for the extrinsic factor (mean = 3.87 males vs. mean = 3.96 females,  $p = n.s.$ ).

#### *Comparison of Working Professionals and Students*

Table 2 illustrates the ranks and means for Chinese male and female working professionals across all twenty-five job expectation questionnaire items as reported in the current study and for Chinese male and female students as reported in the Chullen *et al.* (2015) study.

**TABLE 2**  
**COMPARISON OF CHINESE GENDER DIFFERENCES ON JOB EXPECTATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS**

	Job Characteristic	Gender	Students (2015)		Professionals (Current)	
			Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
1.	Originality, creativeness	Male	3.41	3	4.03	6
		Female	3.89***	11	4.25**	5
2.	Use education	Male	3.14	15	3.64	24
		Female	3.32	24	3.64	23
3.	Continued development	Male	3.46	2	4.19	1
		Female	4.31***	2	4.38**	1
4.	Respect	Male	3.31	7	4.09	2
		Female	4.21***	4	4.30**	2
5.	Security	Male	3.19	13	4.01	8
		Female	4.27***	3	4.22**	6
6.	Income	Male	3.33	5	4.00	9
		Female	4.09***	6	4.15*	7
7.	Social Contribution	Male	3.16	14	3.92	13
		Female	3.82***	13	4.04	12
8.	Risks	Male	3.02	23	3.94	10 <sup>^</sup>
		Female	3.68***	18	4.06	11
9.	Important problems	Male	3.05	21	3.90	14
		Female	3.40**	21	3.98	18
10.	Congenial associates	Male	3.30	8	4.07	3 <sup>^</sup>
		Female	4.01***	8	4.11	8 <sup>^</sup>
11.	Leisure time	Male	3.11	19	3.86	16 <sup>^</sup>
		Female	3.91***	10	4.00	16
12.	Variety	Male	3.23	11	3.74	21
		Female	3.56**	20	3.72	22
13.	Working conditions	Male	3.13	16	3.93	12
		Female	4.02***	7	4.11*	8 <sup>^</sup>
14.	Advancement	Male	3.24	10	3.80	20
		Female	3.81***	14	3.92	20
15.	Independence	Male	3.13	17	3.82	19
		Female	3.72***	15	4.02**	13 <sup>^</sup>
16.	Recognition	Male	3.41	4	4.07	3
		Female	4.20***	5	4.27**	3
17.	Supervising others	Male	3.04	22	3.47	25
		Female	2.96	25	3.57	25
18.	Intellectually stimulating	Male	3.13	18	3.66	23
		Female	3.36***	22	3.80	21
19.	Cultural and Aesthetic	Male	3.11	20	3.84	18
		Female	3.72**	16	3.99	17
20.	Rules	Male	3.32	6	3.94	10 <sup>^</sup>
		Female	3.64*	19	4.02	13 <sup>^</sup>
21.	Superiors you admire	Male	3.01	24	3.88	15
		Female	3.71***	17	3.95	19
22.	Regular routine	Male	3.20	12	4.02	7
		Female	3.98***	9	4.11	8 <sup>^</sup>

23. Personal contacts	Male	2.98	25	3.72	22
	Female	3.34***	23	3.62	24 <sup>^</sup>
24. Own methods	Male	3.26	9	3.86	16 <sup>^</sup>
	Female	3.83***	12	4.02*	13
25. Accomplishment	Male	3.67	1	4.06	5
	Female	4.43***	1	4.26**	4

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; <sup>^</sup> indicates tie rankings

As noted earlier, in 2015, Chullen *et al.* performed one of the only (and still the most recent using Manhardt's 1972 instrument) studies of gender differences in job expectations of Chinese college students. Drawing on a sample of 430 college students, they found significant differences on twenty-three of twenty-five job expectation questionnaire items. Their results showed that females had statistically significant higher scores on all but two items (i.e. item 2 - "makes use of your specific educational background" and item 17 - "requires supervising others") than their male counterparts. Based on an analysis of standard deviations, females were found to be more homogenous than males with respect to job expectations. An analysis of gender differences in job expectations found statistically significant results for both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

The current study and its findings vary slightly from Chullen *et al.* (2015). Interestingly, while Chullen *et al.* (2015) found significant differences ( $p < .05$  or better) on 23 of the 25 items between male and female college students, the current study only found significant differences on 10 of the 25 items between male and female working professionals. Also, while Chullen *et al.* (2015) found statistically significant differences on both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors for male and female college students, the current study only found significant differences for the intrinsic factor for male and female working professionals.

In Chullen *et al.* (2015), both male and female college students indicated that having a job which "provides a feeling of accomplishment" was of the highest importance to them (i.e. ranked #1/25). However, in the present study, this item was ranked #5/25 by male working professionals and #4/25 by female working professionals, respectively. In their study, while "encourages continued development of knowledge and skills" was rated as the second most important for both male and female college students, it rose to #1/25 for both male and female working professionals in the current study. The item "requires supervising others" was rated to be of the lowest importance (i.e. #25/25) for female college students (but not male college students) in Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study and was evaluated to be of the lowest importance for both male and female working professionals in the current study.

Having a job which "gives you the responsibility for taking risks..." (item 8) showed the largest increase in importance of ranking between male college students in Chullen *et al.* (2015) and male working professionals in the current study, moving from #23 to #10. Interestingly, this same item also showed the largest increase in importance of ranking between female college students in Chullen *et al.* (2015) and female working professionals in the current study, moving from #18 to #11. In contrast, having a job which "provides change and variety in duties and activities..." (item 12, moving from #11 to #21) and which "permits advancement to high administrative responsibility..." (item 14, moving from #10 to #20) tied for the largest decrease in importance of ranking between male college students in Chullen *et al.* (2015) and male working professionals in the current study. Interestingly, item 14 "permits advancement to high administrative responsibility..." also showed the largest decrease in importance of ranking between female college students in Chullen *et al.* (2015) and female working professionals in the current study, moving from #14 to #20.

Table 3 illustrates Spearman rank correlation coefficients for the rank orders and paired t-tests for the mean scores, of Chinese male and female working professionals on the job expectations questionnaire for both the current study and for Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study.

**TABLE 3**  
**PAIRED T-TESTS AND SPEARMAN RANK CORRELATIONS: PROFESSIONALS VS. STUDENTS**

<i>Group</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Current Professional Males (1)	3.90	.16
Current Professional Females (2)	4.02	.22
2015 Student Males (3)	3.21	.16
2015 Student Females (4)	3.81	.36

  

<i>Group</i>	<i>t values</i>	<i>r<sub>s</sub> values</i>
(1) vs. (3)	t = 24.40***	.67***
(2) vs. (4)	t = 5.80***	.91***
(1) vs. (4)	t = 2.04	.83***
(2) vs. (3)	t = 24.57***	.71***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

As noted earlier, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient between the rank orders of male and female Chinese working professionals in the current study was .95 ( $p < .001$ ). In contrast, Chullen *et al.* (2015) reported a Spearman rank correlation of .68 ( $p < .01$ ) for Chinese male and female students. These results suggest that the order of importance that male and female Chinese working professionals place on job characteristics is more homogenous than those of male and female Chinese college students. Additionally, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient was .67 ( $p < .001$ ) between male working professionals in the current study and male college students in Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study, .91 ( $p < .001$ ) between female working professionals in the current study and female college students in Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study, .83 ( $p < .001$ ) between male working professionals in the current study and female college students in Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study, and .71 ( $p < .001$ ) between female working professionals in the current study and male college students in Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study. These results suggest that the order of importance male college students place on job characteristics from Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study are similar to those of male working professionals reported here. Likewise, the order of importance female college students place on job characteristics from Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study are similar to those of female working professionals reported here. Lastly, a comparison of the order of importance between male college students from Chullen *et al.*'s (2015) study and female working professionals from the current study as well as between female college students from the Chullen *et al.* (2015) study and male working professionals from the current study are also similar.

Additionally, paired t-tests were performed on the mean scores of each of the 25 items comparing the mean scores reported by Chullen *et al.* (2015) with the present sample. These results show that significant differences exist ( $t = 24.40$ \*\*\*) between the mean scores of male working professionals from the current study and male college students from Chullen *et al.* (2015), between the mean scores of female working professionals from the current study and female college students ( $t = 5.80$ \*\*\*) from Chullen *et al.* (2015), and between female working professionals from the current study and male college students ( $t = 24.57$ \*\*\*) from Chullen *et al.* (2015). Interestingly, male working professionals in the current study reported significantly higher mean importance scores (3.90) across all twenty-five job expectation questionnaire items as compared to male college students (3.21) in Chullen *et al.* (2015). However, while female working professionals in the current study reported higher mean importance scores (4.02) on twenty-three of the twenty-five job expectation questionnaire items as compared to female college students (3.81) in Chullen *et al.* (2015), the magnitude of these differences were quite small.

## DISCUSSION

Our results address the need for Chinese firms to understand their current and prospective employees' attitudes toward work. Specifically, they examine working professionals' and college students' work expectations, as these observations will add to both scholarly understanding and practical efforts to recruit and retain an effective workforce to meet the heightened demands of an increasingly robust economy.

Results related to the first question ("What level of importance do Chinese professionals attribute to various aspects of their work environment (i.e., job expectations)?") show agreement among males and females on nine items that are "important" or "very important" (i.e., with a mean rating of 4.0 to 5.0). In order of mutually ranked importance, they are (1) continued development of knowledge and skills, (2) being respected by others, (3) recognition of performance, (4) feeling of accomplishment, (5) requiring originality; (6) job security, (7) high income opportunity, (8) work with congenial associates, and (9) regular routine. Notably, the top five expectations are all intrinsic and are followed in order of importance by four extrinsic expectations. From this finding, we assert the importance of appropriate job design that creates an environment conducive to intrinsic fulfillment in these areas. For example, a firm could align reward systems with performance so that employees feel recognized. Further, effective recruitment communications that emphasize the potential for met expectations in these areas is an essential consideration for employers.

Findings regarding the second question ("Does the importance assigned to various aspects of the work environment (i.e., job expectations) differ between male and female Chinese professionals?") indicate few significant differences. As noted above, men and women agree in their mutual ranking of important and very important expectations, and the highest-rated of these items are intrinsic. However, mean scores for females were significantly higher than those for males on all items except 'work with congenial associates' and 'regular routine,' indicating males and females regard those extrinsic expectations as equally important. Further, women differed from men in rating eight of the remaining items as important to very important. Of these eight expectations, however, only the mean differences for 'comfortable working conditions' and 'permission to develop one's own methods of doing work' were significant. Thus, even though we see a pattern of significantly higher ratings of important expectations for women than for men, general consensus between the genders regarding their relative (i.e., ranked) importance exists. The two items among the nine that are top ranked by both men and women for which significant differences are not reported are both extrinsic and, ostensibly, under the employer's control or influence. Thus, in addition to job design implications mentioned above, employers may wish to consider working conditions (e.g., schedules and locations) that offer employees a sense of routine. These findings also imply the importance to both genders of firms' efforts in recruiting a complimentary workforce to ensure "congenial" associates.

For the third question ("Given ongoing societal and economic changes in China, how do the job expectations for Chinese working professionals compare with those of Chinese college students?"), results indicate nuanced differences, yet ones that could have implications in the context of a changing business world. Even though female and male working professionals largely agree on the expectations of most importance to them, there were over twice as many items on which males and female scores differed significantly for students. However, the modest differences in rankings are interesting. The most important expectation for male and female professionals is "continued development"; this ranks second for the students. The most important expectation for male and female students is "feeling of accomplishment," which ranks fourth and fifth for female and male professionals, respectively. We speculate that these differences are attributable to age and experience, as might be anticipated. That is, working professionals are more likely already to have experienced a sense of accomplishment and may see continued development as a mechanism toward future achievement. The second most important expectation for male and female professionals is "respected by other people"; this ranks seventh and fourth for male and female students, respectively. We reason that this difference between professionals' and students' rankings may be due to cultural norms of age-based deference, where students simply suppose respect comes with age and experience. The small differences aside, professionals and students ranked items in similar order. Taken together, these findings are potential indicators of a slight generation gap between college students (Gen Z) and working professionals (Millennials and Baby Boomers). However, one potentially important nuance is

that female professionals are the only group indicating that ‘responsibility for taking risks’ is important to them; in fact, male and female students rank this element of risk 23rd and 18th, respectively, with female students’ mean ratings significantly higher than those of their male counterparts. This is interesting in the context of a growing international gig economy (Ashford, Caza, & Reid, 2018), in which risk tolerance is pivotal in successful independent work. The preference for risk-taking and the fact that females tend to stay out of the labor force in favor of caregiving roles could mean both a propensity and an opportunity for females to negotiate with prospective employers for flexible work arrangements. Savvy firms that can benefit from a leaner and more agile staffing approach may view this prospect as one that they can utilize to provide a compelling environment for current and future workers, particularly among higher-educated and relatively under-employed females.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

As with any study, limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting findings. First, for an array of economic and sociocultural reasons, China serves as a country of important focus for research on job expectations. However, important cross-national similarities and differences remain undiscovered in single-national research. In contrast, cross-national comparisons aid our understanding of phenomena and improve the generalizability of our findings. Future research in job expectations should examine additional geographic regions concurrently. These investigations are not only important for scholarly understanding of the convergence/divergence of intrinsic and extrinsic work values, but they also have critical implications for multinational corporations and their staffing decisions.

Second, although all respondents in this study were working professionals, we did not directly measure their organizational or job tenure. Knowledge of respondent work experience (e.g. in years) would allow additional subgroup comparisons that may uncover important insights into the development of intrinsic and extrinsic work values and their shifts over time. For example, Meglino, Ravlin, and Adkins (1989) contended that job expectations may be organizationally induced. Whereas newcomers may enter an organization with one set of job expectations, these may shift over time to match the realities of their organization. Accordingly, future research in job expectations should examine the temporal dynamics of job expectations. Longitudinal studies are needed to measure the formation of respondents’ job expectations in college and then track their stability and/or change as they enter the workforce and continue to gain years of experience. This would allow researchers to chart changes in the convergence/divergence of intrinsic and extrinsic work values both between and within individuals.

Third, this study restricted its analyses exclusively to gender differences. However, even though examining gender is crucial, other demographic differences in job expectations may exist. For example, ethnicity may explain important differences in job expectations as well. Indeed, the Chinese population is officially comprised of 56 ethnic groups. Moreover, some of these groups are classified by the Chinese government as containing their own diverse groups. Future scholars should consider studying job expectations by ethnicity. This approach may further our understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic work values in China. Additionally, scholars should study these variables (gender and ethnicity) together to discover important interaction effects.

### **CONCLUSION**

Unfortunately, common, but nevertheless outdated, beliefs among managerial ranks can hinder their firms’ abilities to attract and retain productive employees. For example, in contrast to the traditional depiction of females as less likely to take certain risks or make extreme sacrifices regarding advancement in their careers, we note Robinson and Beutell’s (2003) findings that women are more likely to start their own businesses, a most risky undertaking. The integration of social role theory and the theory of value change in this work provide a provocative lens for scholarly contribution as well as practical implications in a rapidly evolving context. Consistent with the preceding discussion, the results of our study indicate that although there are some significant differences in mean importance for job expectations across gender for Chinese professionals, there are no observable gender differences in the order of importance that male

and female professionals attribute to their work environment. Further, although we found notable differences in mean importance for job expectations between professionals and students, we found no remarkable attitudinal differences (i.e. rank order) between Chinese professionals and students, indicating a relatively permanent cultural shift toward homogeneity in generationally based expectations of work. However, we note the higher risk propensity among females in both samples, a finding that has implications for worker recruitment and retention in the rapidly changing world of commerce. We assert that, if organizations are not progressive in their attitudes toward their female employees, both current and prospective, they risk losing the talents and contributions of a large portion of the workforce in a burgeoning economy that can ill-afford ineffective human resources practices.

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