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Job expectations of Chinese college students: re-examining gender differences

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine current gender differences in job expectations among Chinese college students, how current job expectations across gender differ from an earlier study, and how they might impact organizational practices such as recruitment and retention.

Design/methodology/approach – Using Manhardt's 25-item measure of job expectations, this study asked Chinese college students to rate the importance of various job characteristics on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very important to 1 = very unimportant). Male and female responses were compared for 430 college students.

Findings – Results of the current study found that males and females differed in their ratings on 23 of 25 items, with females rating all 23 of these items to be of higher importance. These findings differ significantly from an earlier study so they are compared and discussed.

Research limitations/implications – This paper is limited in that it focusses solely on college students and only examines gender as a basis for comparison. Future studies should examine employees and consider other factors such as Chinese ethnicity as a basis for comparison.

Practical implications – Organizations may choose to change/improve aspects of certain jobs to more closely align with job candidates' interests and/or choose to differently implement tools such as realistic job previews in order to improve retention.

Social implications – This paper provides an updated status on gender differences in job expectations of China's soon-to-be emerging workforce. Findings provide organizations with insight on how to develop human resource tools to hold on to talent.

Originality/value – This paper advances on previous work by drawing on a much larger sample and by utilizing a structured forward-translation, back-translation process for its survey.

Keywords Employment, Gender, Culture, Recruitment, Labour market, Students

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

A new global political and economic powerhouse has emerged. For the very first time since 1872, when it ousted the UK, the USA has been knocked out of the top spot as the world's largest economy (Carter, 2014). In 2015, the International Monetary Fund raised China's ranking to number one as the leading global economic superpower based on an index of purchasing power parity of gross domestic product (GDP). The Chinese economy is now estimated to be worth \$17.6tr, slightly higher than the \$17.4tr economy of the USA. China also led the list of world economies in contribution to global economic growth based on nominal GDP in 2014-2015, accounting for 40.2 percent of all growth. The USA trailed behind on this figure at 34.1 percent, coming in second (International Monetary Fund, 2015). To say the least, China's economic growth over



the past three decades has been impressive and it has inspired many other low- and middle-income countries to follow suit including those located in Latin America (e.g. Brazil) and India (Kamrany and Jiang, 2015).

China's burgeoning economy can be attributed to a myriad of factors. For example, China is replacing the USA as the world's leading consumer. According to Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute (2005), China has already eclipsed the USA in consumption of grain, meat, coal, and steel. Moreover, "record-high" domestic savings and a vast trade surplus have enabled China to purchase US treasury securities, underwriting the USA's fast growing debt and leveraging the largest deficit in US history (Brown, 2005). China's growth in part, can also be attributed to an ever-increasing labor workforce supplied by extraordinary populations of college graduates. The number of students expected to graduate from colleges and universities across China has consistently risen over the years, moving from less than one million graduates in 1999 (Huang and Bosler, 2014), to 2.8 million in 2004 (Chinese Ministry of Education), to 6.1 million in 2009 (UPI, 2009), to 7.49 million in 2015 (Magnier, 2015). In 2004, China surpassed the USA in both the number of students enrolled and the number of degrees awarded annually and has never looked back. By 2020, the Chinese government anticipates a total of 195 million college graduates in the labor workforce, contrasted with a projected 167 million in the USA (Huang and Bosler, 2014).

Not surprisingly, this rapid expansion has led to higher unemployment and lower wage growth for Chinese graduates. As supply swiftly surpassed demand, wage premiums paid to college graduates dropped by 19 percent while unemployment rose to 16 percent (Huang and Bosler, 2014). Many status-conscious grads refuse to accept positions in available but low-end prestige manufacturing positions. Rather, they remain hopeful and hold out for the near-nonexistent chance to land an office job in government or state-owned enterprises. However, despite their best steps China's economy cannot stimulate market demand for high-skill labor to match the influx of college graduates. The follies of the college graduate labor market are matched by that of the labor market for those without a college education. The willingness of those without a formal college education to accept blue-collar positions has driven their segment's unemployment rates as low as 4 percent. This has driven wages in industries such as manufacturing and construction to rise more rapidly than those in high-skill industries, resulting in many factory positions paying more than entry-level office positions. This has resulted in the corrosion of China's export prowess and helps explain the reduction in its current account surplus from more than 10 percent of GDP prior to the financial crisis to only 2 percent now (Huang and Bosler, 2014).

The economic circumstances surrounding China's labor force can no longer be ignored. Clearly, employers have a distinct advantage over prospective employees (college graduates) in a market where finding a job, any job, is highly competitive. How important are the job expectations of college graduates, particularly if they are unlikely to leave a job if they are lucky enough to secure one? Indeed, some experts caution that college graduates must readjust their job expectations and develop newer, more reasonable career development plans (China Daily, 2003). From a human resource development perspective, Chinese firms are regularly tasked with understanding and meeting the job expectations of newly hired college graduate workers. It is critical that organizations fully understand the needs and expectations of prospective employees so that they properly utilize human resource management tools to create a working climate that fosters both performance and retention.

Likewise, in spite of the seemingly endless supply of recent college graduates and the general challenges facing the employment market, competition for talent recruitment and retention remains fierce. Retaining skilled, experienced employees has become an increasing concern for Chinese business leaders and yet there does not appear to be an end in sight (Ketter, 2008). For example, a survey of Chinese employees found that one-in-four respondents had already held three or more positions and that one-fifth of them planned to leave their current job in the upcoming year (Ketter, 2008). As job-hopping has become a cultural norm for these sought after workers, business leaders must take initiative to better understand why employees choose to stay or leave their organization. Misalignment between Chinese workers' job expectations and their work environment may be a critical factor explaining this turnover. Successful retention requires a fuller understanding of the congruence between employee job expectations and organizational realities so that employers may customize aspects of the work environment.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to answer the following questions: how important do Chinese college students rate various aspects of their work environment (i.e. job expectations)?; does the importance assigned to various aspects of the work environment (i.e. job expectations) differ between males and females?"; and given ongoing societal and economic changes, how do job expectations for current Chinese college students compare with those from a few years ago?

Background

Bartol (1976, p. 368) defined job expectations as the "values that individuals place on various potential job rewards, including both intrinsic and extrinsic types of remunerations." From a historical perspective, the stream of research on job expectations is the outgrowth of Herzberg's Two-Factor theory of motivation (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959; Herzberg, 1964). The extension of Herzberg's theory to the role of extrinsic and intrinsic factors by gender was initiated by Centers and Bugental (1966).

An abundance of research has focussed in particular, on gender differences in job expectations. Herzberg *et al.* (1959) found that females valued extrinsic characteristics of the job over males. More than three decades later, Loscocco (1989) found similar differences. Other studies such as Brief *et al.* (1977) found no differences between males and females while Neil and Snizek (1987) reported males valued extrinsic job factors over females (Frankel *et al.*, 2006).

Beginning in 1972, many studies began utilizing Manhardt's (1972) job expectations survey instrument. In his seminal work, Manhardt found 11 differences between male and female college graduates across 25 job characteristics. Of these, males rated the importance of aspects of the work environment relating to long-term career objectives (e.g. "working on problems of central importance to the organization") more highly than females while females rated the importance of a comfortable working environment and interpersonal relationships (e.g. "provides ample leisure time off the job" and "involves working with congenial associates") more highly than males. No differences related to intrinsic values between males and females were found. These earlier studies were revisited more than three decades later by Tomkiewicz *et al.* (1994). In contrast to Manhardt (1972), their study identified six differences between male and female respondents across 25 job characteristics with males assigning greater importance to five of these six characteristics over females.

Expanding research beyond gender alone, Bartol (1976) investigated differences in job expectations as a function of professional interest and training in addition to gender. Results indicated that male and female business majors differed significantly on measures of comfortable working environment and pleasant interpersonal relationships. Moreover, business majors were found to differ from psychology majors in measures of job expectations, regardless of gender. Later, Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1979) replicated Manhardt's (1972) study. However, drawing upon a sample of graduating business school students, their study reported differences in job expectations across gender for only eight of the 25 job characteristics. A review of their Spearman correlation coefficients (Manhardt, $r = 0.90$; and Brenner and Tomkiewicz, $r = 0.76$) indicated that the order of importance placed on job characteristics between male and female respondents in each study were similar. Studying newly hired college graduates that same year, Bartol and Manhardt (1979) found that females stressed the importance of their work environment and interpersonal job aspects more so than their male counterparts. However, females gave significantly less emphasis to career objectives as compared with males. Analyzing trends in job expectations over a nine-year period, they also found that preferences between males and females regarding the importance of job characteristics were converging. In other words, they concluded that differences between male and female job expectations were slowly disappearing.

Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1982) were the first to examine racial differences in job expectations between Black and White male and female business college graduates. Findings indicated that significant racial differences existed on ten of 25 job characteristics, with Blacks assigning greater importance than Whites to nine of these ten characteristics. Overall, Black respondents valued job characteristics strongly related to long-range career objectives and structure considerably more than their White counterparts. Similarly, they found gender differences on nine of the 25 job characteristics, with females assigning greater importance than males to five of these nine characteristics. Lastly and perhaps most interestingly, Brenner and Tomkiewicz found significant race by gender interactions for four job characteristics. Specifically White females assigned greater importance to the characteristic "encourages continued development of knowledge and skills" than did Black females, whereas Black males assigned greater importance to this same characteristic than did White males. Black males rated "rewards good performance with recognition" of greater importance than did White males, whereas White females showed a stronger preference for this job characteristic than did Black females. Black males indicated a stronger preference for the job characteristic "provides comfortable working condition" as compared with White males. Lastly, White females showed a stronger preference than Black females for the job characteristic "permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect," whereas Black males rated this item to be of higher importance than White males. In 1997, Tomkiewicz, Johnson, and Brenner revisited this topic, once again investigating racial differences in job expectations between Black and White male and female business college graduates. They reported finding significant racial differences on 12 of 25 job characteristics. Moreover, significant race by gender differences were found on six items. Results led these researchers to conclude, "that both Black and White students want more of everything relative to the earlier study (Brenner and Tomkiewicz, 1982)." Further, they noted "Black's expectations significantly exceeded those of Whites" (Tomkiewicz *et al.*, 1997).

Initially, these studies were restricted almost exclusively to American samples.

Later however, differences in job expectations expanded into the international arena. For example, de Vaus and McAllister (1991) examined gender differences in both intrinsic and extrinsic job characteristics in a large sample drawn from Western Europe. Overall, men placed a greater value on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors over women. However, results on gender differences varied from this when examined at the individual country level.

Elizur (1994) sought to examine the structure of work values for males and females across different cultural environments (namely Hungary, Israel, and the Netherlands) to determine whether gender or cultural differences might be observed. His analysis compared respondents across three dimensions. The first was noted to comprise instrumental characteristics that were material in nature (e.g. pay, benefits, hours of work, etc.). The second was noted to comprise affective characteristics that were concerned with interpersonal relations (e.g. opportunities to interact with people and relations with colleagues, supervisors, and others). The third was noted to comprise cognitive characteristics that were concerned with matters such as interest, achievement, responsibility, and the like. Overall, results indicated that females ranked the importance of affective characteristics (e.g. recognition, coworkers, esteem, interaction, and supervisor) as well as some instrumental (e.g. security and working conditions) and cognitive characteristics (e.g. meaningful work) higher than males, whereas males ranked some cognitive (e.g. influence, independence, and responsibility) and instrumental (pay) characteristics higher than females. However, results also varied for some characteristics across cultures for male and female respondents indicating that cultural environment plays a role in the structure of work values.

Later, despite a significant earning gap between genders, Mahmoud (1996) found that female Palestinian workers reported greater satisfaction with their work (an intrinsic factor) than their male counterparts. Moreover, pay (an extrinsic factor) was found to affect work satisfaction for males but not females while relationship with their employer (an intrinsic factor) was found to affect work satisfaction for both genders. In another study, Frankel *et al.* (2006) examined job expectations in a sample of Polish professionals. They found that job expectations differed between males and females for 15 of the 25 job characteristics. Further, they reported that females as a group were significantly more homogenous than their male counterparts. Two years later, Sagan *et al.* (2008) examined differences in job expectations in a sample of college students from Poland and Russia. While males and females ranked the 25 items similarly in terms of order of importance, significant differences were found on 11 items. Moreover, Polish students were found to have a greater preference for intrinsic factors whereas Russian students were found to have a greater preference for extrinsic factors.

According to de Vaus and McAllister (1991), gender differences in job expectations may vary based on the country and culture that provides the context for the research. Hofstede (1980, p. 45) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.” In general, culture is often used to explain the differences in attitude and behavior of individuals. According to Deresky (2008, p. 91), the culture of a society is typified by “shared values, understandings, assumptions, and goals that are learned from earlier generations, imposed by present members of a society, and passed on to succeeding generations.” These shared values “form the basis for common attitude, codes of conduct, and expectations that subconsciously guide and control certain norms of behavior” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 25). To date, as noted above, US and European countries have been

the predominant focus of most research on gender differences in job expectations. The cultural similarities between these nations however may not provide the necessary context to fully develop our understanding of job expectations. Therefore, a nation with an extensively different cultural profile such as China may further enhance our understanding of job expectations research.

Thus far in the literature, just one study (Tomkiewicz *et al.*, 2011) has previously explored gender differences in job expectations in China. As noted in the introduction, given the significant increasing impact that China's economy plays in the global arena and considering the increasingly problematic labor market challenges it faces, another study on gender differences in job expectations is timely. Drawing upon a much larger sample and utilizing a structured translation process for Manhardt's (1972) survey instrument, this study improves on the design of Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). Additionally, results vary significantly and meaningfully from those of Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). First, findings on gender and job expectations in the current Chinese economy are examined and discussed. Then, these findings are comprehensively compared and contrasted with that of Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). Finally, implications for research and practice are considered, as are potential explanations for findings.

Methods

Procedure

The primary source of data for this study was collected through student opinion survey. Participants were drawn from a national university in China. 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, a "pre-notice" (Dillman, 2000) was provided to all prospective participants. This notice came from a faculty member at the university (who is also one of the authors of this study). It briefly described the upcoming study (noting that its purpose was to better understand students' job-related attitudes to help improve the quality of their future work life), encouraged students to participate, and assured them that the data would go directly to the researchers and that no one would have access to individual responses. One week later, the faculty member distributed the surveys in person to participants. These surveys were then filled out anonymously and returned to the faculty member for data entry.

As noted above, participants were drawn from a national university in China where 475 students were invited to participate. Of these, 22 (13 males, nine females) did not complete the survey. An additional 23 (six males, 17 females) were removed due to incomplete survey responses, resulting in a final sample of 430 student respondents (215 male, 215 female) and a final response rate of 90.5 percent. Overall, these students were on average, 22.04 years of age, predominantly single (1 percent were married), and as noted above, equally represented by gender (50 percent male, 50 percent female).

Measures

Job expectations questionnaire. Job expectations were measured using Manhardt's (1972) 25-item scale. Students were asked to indicate how important on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very important to 1 = very unimportant) it was to them to have a job which, for examples: "requires originality [...]," "rewards good performance with recognition [...]" and/or "provides a feeling of accomplishment [...]" Since questions regarding attitudes and opinions may be more abstract and certain concepts may not

be relevant throughout the world, this study followed a regimented process of forward-translation and back-translation, despite the fact that its respondents already maintained a “good command of English.” First, the questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese (i.e. Mandarin) by one of the co-authors of this study (who is bilingual). To validate the translation, assistance was solicited from another bilingual Chinese professor from a regional university in the USA 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 USA 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 ($\alpha=0.83$), as well as for male ($\alpha=0.70$) and female ($\alpha=0.84$) students 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 and Manhardt, 1979; Brenner and Tomkiewicz 1979, 1982; Frankel *et al.*, 2006; Tomkiewicz *et al.*, 1994, 1997, 2011; Sagan *et al.* 2008). First, as noted above, respondents were asked to rate Manhardt’s (1972) 25 job characteristics using a five-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 “How important do Chinese college students rate 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 no. 1 (the most important). Similarly, the job characteristic that received the lowest mean score for males was no. 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 no. 1 for males also ranked no. 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 males and females?” 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 current Chinese college students compare with those from a few years ago?” Spearman rank correlations and paired *t*-tests were performed on the current study’s findings and the findings reported in Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011).

Results

Main findings

Table I illustrates the ranks, means, and standard deviations for Chinese male and female students across all 25 job expectation questionnaire items.

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 0.68 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the order of importance which male and female respondents placed on job characteristics was similar. Significant differences between male and female respondents on the job expectations questionnaire were tested using ANOVA. Significant differences ($p < 0.05$ or better) were found on 23 of the 25 items. The only items that were non-significant were items 2 (makes use of your educational background [...]) and 17 (requires supervising others [...]). Females reported higher average scores on all 23 of these items. Mean male standard deviations were 1.33 and mean female standard deviations were 0.85, indicating that females were more homogenous than males with respect to job expectations. A paired t -test ($p < 0.001$) for these standard deviations confirmed females as a group are significantly more homogeneous than are the males.

Both male (mean = 3.67) and female (mean = 4.43) students indicated that having a job which "provides a feeling of accomplishment" was of the highest importance to them (i.e. ranked no. 1/25). On the other hand, male students (mean = 2.98) reported that having a job which "requires meeting and speaking with other people," while female students (mean = 2.96) reported that having a job which "requires supervising others," to be of the lowest importance to them (i.e. ranked no. 25/25).

Intrinsic and extrinsic perspective of the survey items. 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 (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959; Loscocco, 1989; Brief *et al.*, 1977; Neil and Snizek, 1987; Centers and Bugental, 1966; de Vaus and McAllister, 1991; Mi'Ari, 1996). 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). 13 items (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 21, 24, and 25) comprise the intrinsic factor, whereas 12 items (nos. 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 students using ANOVA. Significant differences between male and female respondents were found on both the intrinsic factor (mean = 3.84 females vs mean = 3.24 males, $p < 0.001$) and the extrinsic factor (mean = 3.78 females vs mean = 3.18 males, $p < 0.001$).

Comparison to Tomkiewicz et al. (2011)

Table II illustrates the ranks and means for Chinese male and female students across all 25 job expectation questionnaire items for both the current study and Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study.

Job expectations scale item		Male (<i>n</i> = 215)			Female (<i>n</i> = 215)			Significant difference between means
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		Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	
<i>How important is it to you to have a job which:</i>								
1.	Requires originality [...]	3	3.41	1.35	11	3.89	1.05	***
2.	Makes use of your specific educational background [...]	15	3.14	1.27	24	3.32	0.93	ns
3.	Encourages continued development of knowledge and skills [...]	2	3.46	1.39	2	4.31	0.72	***
4.	Is respected by other people [...]	7	3.31	1.34	4	4.21	0.72	***
5.	Provides job security [...]	13	3.19	1.39	3	4.27	0.69	***
6.	Provides the opportunity to earn a high income [...]	5	3.33	1.35	6	4.09	0.81	***
7.	Makes a social contribution by work you do [...]	14	3.16	1.30	13	3.82	0.87	***
8.	Gives you the responsibility for taking risks [...]	23	3.02	1.27	18	3.68	0.85	***
9.	Requires working on problems of central importance to the organization [...]	21	3.05	1.31	21	3.40	0.91	**
10.	Involves working with congenial associates [...]	8	3.30	1.34	8	4.01	0.89	***
11.	Provides ample leisure time off the job [...]	19	3.11	1.34	10	3.91	0.89	***
12.	Provides change and variety in duties and activities [...]	11	3.23	1.27	20	3.56	0.87	**
13.	Provides comfortable working conditions [...]	16	3.13	1.35	7	4.02	0.79	***
14.	Permits advancement to high administrative responsibility [...]	10	3.24	1.46	14	3.81	0.87	***
15.	Permits working independently [...]	17	3.13	1.32	15	3.72	0.90	***
16.	Rewards good performance with recognition [...]	4	3.41	1.37	5	4.20	0.80	***
17.	Requires supervising others [...]	22	3.04	1.32	25	2.96	0.94	ns
18.	Is intellectually stimulating [...]	18	3.13	1.28	22	3.36	0.89	***
19.	Satisfies your cultural and aesthetic interests [...]	20	3.11	1.27	16	3.72	0.86	**
20.	Has clear cut rules and procedures to follow [...]	6	3.32	1.24	19	3.64	0.95	*
21.	Permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect [...]	24	3.01	1.37	17	3.71	0.87	***
22.	Permits a regular routine in time and place of work [...]	12	3.20	1.41	9	3.98	0.89	***
23.	Requires meeting and speaking with many other people [...]	25	2.98	1.29	23	3.34	0.97	***
24.	Permits you to develop your own methods of doing work [...]	9	3.26	1.38	12	3.83	0.88	***
25.	Provides a feeling of accomplishment [...]	1	3.67	1.38	1	4.43	0.65	***

Notes: **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001

Table I.
Gender differences in mean ratings on job expectations questionnaire

Job characteristic	Gender	2011		2015	
		Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
1. Originality, creativeness	Male	3.77	10	3.41	3
	Female	3.72	17	3.89***	11
2. Use education	Male	3.49	18	3.14	15
	Female	3.32	21	3.32	24
3. Continued development	Male	4.62	1	3.46	2
	Female	4.51	1	4.31***	2
4. Respect	Male	3.53	16	3.31	7
	Female	4.06*	8	4.21***	4
5. Security	Male	3.77	11	3.19	13
	Female	4.13	5	4.27***	3
6. Income	Male	3.87	7	3.33	5
	Female	4.13	6	4.09***	6
7. Social contribution	Male	3.72	14	3.16	14
	Female	3.87	12	3.82***	13
8. Risks	Male	3.49	19	3.02	23
	Female	3.36	20	3.68***	18
9. Important problems	Male	3.81	9	3.05	21
	Female	3.68	18	3.40**	21
10. Congenial associates	Male	3.98	6	3.30	8
	Female	3.83	13	4.01***	8
11. Leisure time	Male	3.32	24	3.11	19
	Female	3.96*	10	3.91***	10
12. Variety	Male	3.34	23	3.23	11
	Female	3.83*	14	3.56**	20
13. Working conditions	Male	3.64	15	3.13	16
	Female	3.94	11	4.02***	7
14. Advancement	Male	3.98	4	3.24	10
	Female	4.15	3	3.81***	14
15. Independence	Male	3.47	20	3.13	17
	Female	4.13*	7	3.72***	15
16. Recognition	Male	4.04	3	3.41	4
	Female	4.04	9	4.20***	5
17. Supervising others	Male	3.19	25	3.04	22
	Female	3.19	25	2.96	25
18. Intellectually stimulating	Male	3.74	12	3.13	18
	Female	3.62	19	3.36***	22
19. Cultural and aesthetic	Male	3.40	22	3.11	20
	Female	3.77	16	3.72**	16
20. Rules	Male	3.83*	8	3.32	6
	Female	3.23	23	3.64*	19
21. Superiors you admire	Male	3.53	17	3.01	24
	Female	3.83	15	3.71***	17
22. Regular routine	Male	3.74*	13	3.20	12
	Female	3.26	22	3.98***	9
23. Personal contacts	Male	3.43	21	2.98	25
	Female	3.21	24	3.34***	23
24. Own methods	Male	4.13	2	3.26	9
	Female	4.15	4	3.83***	12
25. Accomplishment	Male	3.94	5	3.67	1
	Female	4.34	2	4.43***	1

Table II.
Trends of Chinese
gender differences
on job expectations
questionnaire

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) performed the first known study of gender differences in job expectations of Chinese college students. They distributed their survey to respondents who had a “good command of English,” in place of utilizing a forward-translation/back-translation process. As noted earlier, although respondents from the current study also maintained a good command of English, a regimented process of forward-translation and back-translation was followed since questions regarding attitudes and opinions may be more abstract and certain concepts may not be relevant throughout the world.

Drawing on a sample of 94 students, they found significant differences on six of 25 job expectation questionnaire items. Their results showed that females had statistically significant higher scores on four items (nos. 4, 11, 12, and 15) while males had higher scores on two items (nos. 20 and 22). 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 on intrinsic and extrinsic factors did not produce statistically significant results.

The current study and its findings vary meaningfully from Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). First, the current study improves upon Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) by drawing upon a much larger sample of Chinese college students (i.e. 430 respondents). A larger sample size better approximates the true population of respondents. Small sample sizes such as those in Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) run the risk of being unusual by chance alone. Moreover, in addition to providing more power a larger sample size reduces standard error allowing for difference between sample means and population means to be more recognizable.

Second, as highlighted earlier, by engaging in several iterations of forward-translations and back-translations for the job expectations questionnaire the current study was able to safeguard against potential misinterpretations due to possible language barriers. Third, in addition to finding significant differences ($p < 0.05$ or better) on 23 of the 25 items, the current study found significant differences on both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors for male and female students with females placing a greater importance on both factors than their male counterparts.

As noted earlier, both male and female students from the current study indicated that having a job which “provides a feeling of accomplishment” was of the highest importance to them (i.e. ranked no. 1/25). However, in Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study, this item was ranked no. 5/25 by males and no. 2/25 by females, respectively. In their study, “encourages continued development of knowledge and skills” was rated as the most important for both males and females (which dropped to no. 2/25 for both males and females in the current study). The item “requires supervising others” was rated to be of the lowest importance (i.e. no. 25/25) for both males and females in Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and remained that way for females (but not males) in the current study.

Having a job which “provides change and variety in duties and activities” (item 12) showed the largest increase in importance of ranking for males between Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and the current study, moving from no. 23 to 11. Interestingly, this same item decreased in importance for females from no. 14 to 20. Having a job which “permits a regular routine in time and place of work” (item 22) showed the largest increase in importance of ranking for females between Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and the current study, moving from no. 22 to 9. On the other hand, having a job that “requires working on problems of central importance to the organization” (item 9) showed the largest decrease in importance of ranking for males between Tomkiewicz

et al.'s (2011) study and the current study, moving from no. 9 to 21. Lastly, having a job which "permits advancement to high administrative responsibility" (item 14) showed the largest decrease in importance of ranking for females between Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and the current study, moving from no. 3 to 14.

Table III illustrates Spearman rank correlation coefficients for the rank orders and paired *t*-tests for the mean scores, of Chinese male and female students on the job expectations questionnaire for both the current study and Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study.

As noted earlier, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient between the rank orders of male and female respondents in the current study was 0.68 ($p < 0.01$). In contrast, Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) reported a Spearman rank correlation of 0.52 ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that the order of importance that male and female respondents place on job characteristics is converging over time. Additionally, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient was 0.73 ($p < 0.001$) between males in the current study and males in Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study, 0.76 ($p < 0.001$) between females in the current study and females in Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study, 0.55 ($p < 0.01$) between males in the current study and females in Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study, and 0.54 ($p < 0.01$) between females in the current study and males in Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study. These results suggest that the order of importance male respondents place on job characteristics from Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study to the present are similar. Likewise, the order of importance female respondents place on job characteristics from Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study to the present appear to be similar as well. Lastly, a comparison of the order of importance between males from Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and females from the current study as well as between females from Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and males from the current study indicate some similarity.

Additionally, paired *t*-tests were performed on the mean scores of each of the 25 items comparing the mean scores reported by Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) with the present sample. These results show that significant differences exist ($t = 19.44^{***}$) between the mean scores of male students from the current study and male students from Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) as well as between male students from the current study and female students ($t = -9.54^{***}$) from Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). Interestingly, male students in the current study reported lower mean importance scores (3.21) across all 25 job expectation questionnaire items than did male students (3.71) in Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). However, female students in the current study reported lower mean importance scores (3.81) on only 11 of the 25 job expectation questionnaire items than did female students (3.80) in Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011).

Group	Mean	SD
Current males (1)	3.21	0.16
Current females (2)	3.81	0.36
2011 males (3)	3.71	0.31
2011 females (4)	3.80	0.37
Group	<i>t</i> -Values	r_s Values
(1) vs (3)	$t = 19.44^{***}$	0.73 ^{***}
(2) vs (4)	$t = 0.05$	0.76 ^{***}
(1) vs (4)	$t = -9.54^{***}$	0.55 ^{**}
(2) vs (3)	$t = 1.56$	0.54 ^{**}

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Paired *t*-tests and
Spearman rank
correlations: current
study vs 2011 study

Discussion

Implications for research

First, it is interesting to note that females in this study rated both intrinsic and extrinsic factors to be of much greater importance (an average of six-tenths of a point on a five-point Likert scale) than their male classmates and that these differences were statistically significant. These findings are contrary to those of Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) who did not find differences in gender across either of the factors. Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) contended that such consistency across genders might benefit firms by simplifying human resource practices and reducing the organization's bottom line. However, they did question whether such consistency across genders would hold true over time as Chinese society continued to evolve. The current study's findings provide preliminary evidence that gender preferences for intrinsic and extrinsic job characteristics are indeed shifting. Future research should endeavor to determine whether this finding holds across other geographic regions, industries, and periods of economic growth (e.g. recessions).

Second, 23 out of 25 items were found to be significantly different between male and female students in the current study with females assigning higher importance to all 23 items. These findings differ from Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) who found differences on only six items, four that were assigned higher importance by males and two that were assigned higher importance by females. It is interesting that items 2 and 17 remained perhaps the only constants across the two studies. Jobs that required specific use of students' educational backgrounds and jobs that required supervising others did not differ meaningfully between males and females from either study and did not change much at all in terms of their relative importance rankings. In fact, while there were many more statistically significant differences on mean scores between males and females in the current study than in Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011), the overall importance rankings across the items between the current study and Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) were similar (as evidenced by the Spearman rank correlation coefficient). Further, it appears that the average mean score across all 25 items did not vary much between the current study (3.81) and Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study (3.80). However, the mean average score for male students across all 25 items appeared to drop significantly from Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study (3.71) and the current study (3.21). Although potential reasons for this drop are offered in a subsequent section, future research should systematically investigate why the mean importance score for males decreased but remained steady for females (i.e. why did males reassess and adjust their preferences but females did not?).

Third, it is interesting to see the marked shifts (both increase and decrease) between the importance rankings of items across genders. For example, "provides change and variety in duties and activities," (item 12) showed the largest increase in importance of ranking for males between Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and the current study, moving from nos. 23 to 11 yet simultaneously decreased in importance for females from no. 14 to 20. In contrast, "permits advancement to high administrative responsibility" (item 14) showed the largest decrease in importance of ranking for females between Tomkiewicz *et al.*'s (2011) study and the current study, moving from no. 3 to 14, also dropping from no. 4 to 10 for males. Job characteristics that consistently move up or down in importance across genders should prove much easier to address than those that significantly move up for one group but significantly move down for another. These fluctuations may make tailoring human resource practices for recruitment and retention all the more difficult to accomplish, but also perhaps all the much more vital.

Implications for practice

Human resource management practices in China have received increased attention over the past few decades (Braun and Warner, 2002; Zhou, 2006). Historically, organizations did not consider human resources to serve an important function. For example, interviews were frequently omitted in the job selection process and university graduates were hired into organizations based almost exclusively on their educational backgrounds or their personal connections (Huo and Von Glinow, 1995). However, such practices began losing momentum following China's Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976. Formal university education was besmirched in the national spotlight and many aspiring college students turned to subsistence farming and the like in lieu of pursuing a formal education (Economist, 2005). As noted earlier, with a generation of management potential having been wiped out, organizations operating in China are now facing challenges (e.g. fierce competition) in recruiting and retaining superior human talent. To aid these human resource management functions, several practical implications and recommendations concerning organizational recruitment, selection, and retention may be drawn from this study's findings.

First, prior research has established that person-job (P-J) fit serves as an important predictor for employees' work-related attitudes including increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment as well as for employees' individual behavior including improved job performance, and decreased absenteeism and turnover (Zhou, 2006). P-J fit refers to how well an individual's personal characteristics align/match with the characteristics of a particular job. Prior research has identified two distinct forms of P-J fit: demands-abilities fit, which refers to how well the knowledge, skills, and abilities of an individual align/match with the demands of a particular job; and supplies-values (S-V) fit, which refers to how well an individual's work-related goals, interests, and preferences align/match with the particular characteristics of a job (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Edwards, 1991). Manhardt's (1972) 25 item job expectations questionnaire directly measures candidates' preferences along the latter form of P-J fit. Thus, it serves as a useful tool for identifying S-V fit between potential applicants and available jobs.

To successfully recruit the right candidates for the right jobs, HR managers must work closely with managers to tailor suitable strategies including leveraging widely available media (e.g. advertising via career internet web sites and newspapers) and face-to-face recruitment venues (e.g. attending job fairs and connecting with campus placement offices). More importantly, in doing so they can integrate knowledge about their own work environment and jobs across the items in the job characteristics questionnaire into their recruitment efforts. This approach models the philosophy of providing a realistic job preview to potential applicants. Thus prospective employees will have a better understanding of the job they are applying for and how the characteristics of that job align with their own preferences. Likewise, at the interview stage, an organization's knowledge regarding how well the job characteristics of their openings align with the job preferences of interviewees can assist both parties in making more informed decisions regarding hiring and career choices. Such knowledge may also be useful for assessment purposes to help predict future job behavior (i.e. withdrawal and turnover).

Second, with regard to selection practices, many employees join their organization without fully understanding the characteristics of their job and therefore cannot fully produce or contribute until some later period of time following an opportunity to properly adjust. Yet, the speed of their adjustment to their new job has important implications for their effectiveness at work (Black and Ashford, 1995). The first days

and weeks of a new job are crucial to new employees' ability to fit in, become as productive as possible, and as soon as possible (Half, 2015). Meglino *et al.* (1989) contend that while college students may enter an organization with one set of expectations, those expectations will begin to conform to organizational realities through exposure to the work environment. However, in order to remain effective in retaining employees, organizations cannot rely solely on this unilateral approach. Rather, they must take proactive initiatives and implement practices that facilitate students' transition from college to work.

Thus an acute knowledge of how well an employee's job preferences align with the particular position for which they have been hired into has important implications for employee onboarding and orientation. Organizations should carefully develop these programs to assist with fast employee acclimation into the work environment and acceptance of their job responsibilities, even if their job preferences do not perfectly align with the realities of the position. Likewise, organizations should carefully review and develop mentoring programs to assist employee integration into their job and the culture of the business.

Third, a recent survey by London-based recruitment giant Hays, found that the business operations of many Chinese firms continued to suffer due to increasing employee turnover (Reporter, 2013). Although 90 percent of firms indicated they were aware of the detrimental effects turnover had on their business, only 38 percent indicated they had plans in place to retain their human talent. Moreover, only half of the overall firms surveyed indicated that they felt their current employees were important for their future success. It should come as no surprise that the three key job characteristics which were highlighted as the main reasons for turnover in Hays's survey are also measured by Manhardt's (1972) questionnaire. Hays reported that employees cited a lack of career progression as the main reason for their turnover (which corresponds to item no. 14 on Manhardt's questionnaire), followed by a desire to engage in new challenges in their work (which corresponds to item no. 12 on Manhardt's questionnaire), and with salary being noted as the third major reason for turnover (which corresponds to item no. 6 on Manhardt's questionnaire). Respondents to the survey also indicated that feeling their job performance was recognized by their employers (which corresponds to item no. 16 on Manhardt's questionnaire) was an important factor in deciding whether to stay with the firm (Reporter, 2013).

Employers have the opportunity to use this information regarding preferences for job characteristics to develop new retention strategies. For example, for employees concerned about career progression and advancement opportunities, organizations must carefully structure their succession planning activities and let their valued talent know that advancing them into higher level administrative positions in the company is a goal. They may also consider extending advanced professional development opportunities to these employees in preparation for their future positions, thereby letting them know the organization has earmarked them for progression into management. Separately, for employees indicating a desire for challenging work, organizations might consider implementing various elements of job design including job enrichment and job rotation to provide these employees with greater skill and task variety.

Employees who express concerns over their salary should not be overlooked either. Rather than simply focussing on salary, organizations might take a more holistic approach to how they structure their compensation packages for these employees. In addition to salary, employers may consider broadening their offering of traditional benefits including contributions to retirement plans, extending paid vacation, and/or

extending paid holiday and sick day leave, to name a few. Organizations may also wish to consider “cafeteria plans” which include such things as discounted products and services (e.g. gym membership), tuition reimbursement, and/or subsidized transportation to and from work, to name a few. Office perks such as on-site dry cleaning, child care, and even spa services may also help retain talent. These types of alternative/additional offerings not only help retain employees, they assist in boosting job satisfaction and employee morale as well.

Lastly, for employees who desire more recognition for their efforts and performance at work organizations must let employees know that their efforts and contributions are valued and appreciated. Organizations can accomplish this in several ways. First, they should offer employees their sincere appreciation and gratitude for a job well done. Acknowledgement, even without monetary rewards, can be a powerful motivator. Second, organizations can highlight employee achievements during meetings, in company e-mails, and in company newsletters. Third, organizations can emphasize to employees how their work has contributed to the organization’s goals. Also, small tokens of appreciation such as extra time off or providing an employee with a designated employee of the month parking space can signal to them that their work is valued.

Considering the above, it is clear that understanding employees’ preferences for the job characteristics covered by Manhardt’s (1972) questionnaire offers organizations the ability to tailor aspects of their human resource practices to better recruit, select, and retain their talent.

Potential reasons for study findings

Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) took a descriptive approach and did not propose any underlying reasons for their study’s findings. Yet several factors may help explain the findings of this study.

First, as China has undergone continued economic transformation and modernization of career development in order to meet the demands of its work force, new social values have emerged (Needham *et al.*, 2009). In particular, this shift in contemporary culture has given rise to values that emphasize self-importance and self-development as they relate to career selection, identity, and motivation (Faure, 2008). Indeed, Zhang *et al.* (2002, p. 227) noted that an individual’s job/career is no longer signified by their “contribution to communism and social improvement.” Rather, a sense of identity that promotes individual performance and self-interest has replaced collective ideology (Needham *et al.*, 2009). Faure (2008, p. 476) has characterized this as a “deep shift in values,” noting that “the territory of the self has increased.” Faure (2008, p. 482) goes on to say “A clear evolution is now taking place in the great burst of modernization. Specific forms of freedom and expression gradually supersede order and harmony.”

This mounting orientation toward self-importance, self-development, freedom, and expression relating to career selection, identity, and motivation appears to be more pronounced in female respondents than in males. Indeed, females in this study assigned greater importance to intrinsic and extrinsic factors as well as to 23 of the 25 job characteristic items. From a historical perspective, Confucian teachings have long perpetuated a patriarchal society in China (Xiao *et al.*, 2011). Women were prescribed conservative ideals whereas men were prescribed permissive behavior. Moreover, men were viewed as breadwinners and women were viewed as reproducers and homemakers. However, modern laws have been enacted to grant women equal status alongside men including joint property rights and the right to divorce. Archaic

practices such concubinage, dowry, child marriage, and foot binding have been prohibited (Xiao *et al.*, 2011). Women's access to education and entry to politics have also increased. As patriarchal dominance has waned, women in China have been experiencing a cultural evolution.

However, men's orientation toward self-importance, self-development, freedom, and expression relating to career selection, identity, and motivation have remained largely constrained due to the Chinese tradition of Filial Piety. Filial Piety is a Confucian philosophy that embraces the virtues of respect and loyalty to one's elders and superiors. A filial son must submit complete obedience to his parent's during their lifetime and take care of them as best as possible as they grow older. Although daughters were originally expected to participate in this tradition as well, female attitudes toward Filial Piety have relaxed and many no longer view elder care as an obligation. In a recent survey, Xiaotian Feng, PhD, a Professor at the Nanjing University, found that only children worried about the issue of elder care less than those with sibling did (Winerman, 2011). Women were less concerned about elder care when they had a brother to rely upon. Additionally, she found that traditional values still held strong among men, but were less enduring among women. Men were much less likely than women to agree nursing homes were a practical solution for care of their parents as they grew older.

Thus, ongoing shifts in social values toward women's rights, equality, and freedom of expression may explain the greater importance females assigned to intrinsic and extrinsic factors as well as to 23 of the 25 job characteristic items in this study in contrast to their male counterparts. Similarly, increasing pressures to conform to the Chinese tradition of Filial Piety, and in recognition of the added responsibilities of elder care without assistance from their siblings, male respondents may have readjusted their expectations regarding job characteristics since Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011).

Moreover, Tang (2002) noted that Chinese students have become increasingly open to recommendations regarding career and job choices from sources outside of their family. Tang (2002) found that in addition to yielding to their parents' advice regarding career and job choices, many non-familial sources significantly influenced their decisions such as no one, media, friends, and school counselors. Growing desires for freedom and independence have been noted as the root cause for this shift (Needham, *et al.*, 2009). Given the shifts in social values for females as contrasted with males, it is quite possible that females are increasingly influenced by sources outside their families whereas males are to a lesser extent.

Additionally, geography may also play an intricate role in value differences related to career and job choices as well. Xueyi *et al.* (2005) and Faure (2008), contended that China was comprised of three social strata including: rural society, industrial society, and post-industrial society. Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011) drew upon a sample from the industrial stratum whereas the present study drew upon a sample from the post-industrial stratum. A review of the geographical locations of the respective institutions as well as their student composition supports that the populations from each sample were wholly from their corresponding stratum. These social strata can be differentiated along several dimensions (Xueyi *et al.*, 2005) and may help illuminate and explain differences in these studies' findings.

First, members of each stratum vary to the degree to which they have access to knowledge capital and occupational prestige capital. For example, members of the post-industrial stratum have access to more prestigious levels of national education than does the industrial stratum. Similarly, occupations of members from the

post-industrial stratum maintain a high appraisal of social status. Second, members of the post-industrial stratum are more heavily engaged in brainwork occupations than are those of the industrial stratum. Third, members from the post-industrial stratum possess high levels of education and professional skills, which are in great demand and rewarded with greater compensation than those from the industrial stratum. Fourth, members from the post-industrial stratum have increased occupational authority as contrasted with members from the industrial stratum. This means workers have greater empowerment in their jobs to advise and instruct subordinates as well as direct the usage of physical assets in addition to a degree of freedom to make suggestions related to the work environment. Fifth, members from the post-industrial stratum enjoy greater compensation including salary, securities, gifts, etc. than those from the industrial stratum. Sixth, members from the post-industrial stratum have the ability to afford greater personal and family consumption than do members from the industrial stratum. Last, but certainly not least, members from the post-industrial stratum possess certain knowledge-based and authoritative capabilities that allow them to speak on and influence public affairs, whereas members from the industrial stratum do not (Xueyi *et al.*, 2005).

Although we cannot ascertain the precise mechanisms that explain the differences in job expectations between these two social strata, it is clear that they differ in significant and important ways. Thus, differences in geographic location may offer insight into differences in job expectations in the current study as contrasted with those from Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011).

Lastly, it is possible that an intricate interplay (interaction) between any of the scenarios outlined above may explain why males and females differ in their job expectations in both the current study and between the current study and Tomkiewicz *et al.* (2011). For now, these are tentative explanations for why males and females might differ in job expectations. As this is only the second study on the job expectations of Chinese college students, future research must continue to search for and verify answers.

Limitations and directions for future research

First, the current study drew from a sample of Chinese college students. While this sample allows for examination of job expectations of China's emerging workforce, it may not be representative of the population of samples at large. For example, employees with established careers may differ from college students in the importance they assign to various job expectations and these differences may be influenced by gender. Thus, results may not be generalizable to other contexts. Additional research is required using different samples from many different regions of China, in many different kinds of organizations, and in many different kinds of industries in order to increase the external validity of results.

Second, the current study is limited in that it does not examine potentially important temporal dynamics associated with the development of job expectations. Differences in job expectations across gender have largely been attributed to historical and cultural factors. However, a systematic study examining how job expectations are formed and change over time (i.e. trends) has yet to be undertaken in the literature. A deeper understanding of how job expectations develop and change over time and how those changes contribute to subsequent changes in important work outcomes (i.e. commitment, job satisfaction, turnover, etc.) is critical. Understanding the process underlying the development of job expectations allows us to identify critical

intervention points and strategies to either modify perceptions and/or management practices. This step begins with longitudinal data measuring job expectations, hypothesized variables of influence, and important outcomes across multiple points in time.

Third, this study drew from student opinion survey as its focal source for data analysis. However, future research may be better informed by alternative data collection methods such as interviews. While they're not without their own drawbacks, interviews may provide a richer context in which to interpret and understand respondents' answers. Interviewing provides researchers an opportunity to probe and prompt respondents for more detailed, better-explained responses. Additionally, being able to physically observe respondents may provide useful information regarding the affective characteristics of their responses. Likewise, interviews yield richer data, details, and insights than many other methods alone. Personal interaction with respondents allows topics to be explored more in depth.

Fourth, the current study focussed solely on gender as a basis for differences in job expectations. Indeed, historical and cultural factors support investigating gender an important variable of interest when it comes to understanding job expectations in China. However, other factors such as ethnicity may play a role in understanding job expectations. For example, Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1982) found that job expectations differed between white and black respondents and that ethnicity interacted with gender to predict job expectations in a US sample of business students. Accordingly, future research should investigate Chinese ethnicity (e.g. Han, Zhuang, Hui, etc.) and the affect it may have on job expectations in China. Moreover, differences in ethnicity may interact with gender to explain important differences in job expectations and thus should be studied as well.

Lastly, the current study did not investigate potentially important outcomes of interest. Since data collection efforts were focussed on college students, work outcomes such as commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover could not be measured. Future studies on employees should endeavor to assess how misalignment between job expectations and organizational realities affect these outcomes. With regard to college students, investigating connections between attitudes concerning job expectations, realistic job previews, and factors such as PJ fit and person-organization fit for various prospective employment opportunities may be an avenue for future research.

Conclusion

The present study highlights existing differences of job expectations of Chinese college students by gender. Additionally, it compares and contrasts these existing job expectations with those held by Chinese college students in 2011. As China's economy continues to grow and as its labor market undergoes rapid changes, understanding the job expectations of its emerging workforce talent is of great importance. This study offers some valuable insights into the current attitudes of Chinese college students regarding their perceived importance of various aspects of the work environment. In response, organizations may choose to change/improve aspects of certain jobs to more closely align with job candidates' interests and/or choose to differently implement tools such as realistic job previews in order to improve retention. Furthermore, organizations may choose to utilize various proactive initiatives and implement practices that facilitate students' transition from college to work such as mentoring.

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