WOMEN INTRAPRENEURSHIP AND GUANXI IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Women intrapreneurship has been the subject of considerable interest in the literature. This stems from its importance in addressing gender imbalances in the corporate sector and the increasing call for organizations to create a culture that enables women to progress and succeed in senior management positions. Pre-existing literature have examined how women can become intrapreneurs within the corporate culture by displaying entrepreneurial initiatives, such as being flexible, risk-oriented and results-oriented (Mainiero, Williamson, & Robinson, 1994; Parker, 2011). This article aims to link intrapreneurship literature with Chinese guanxi-based network to understand its influence on Chinese women managers in the tourism industry. Guanxi is defined here as “creativity and flexibility through a network of personal relationships” (Wong & Tam, 2000: 57). It is an integral part of business practices in China through which resources allocation and crucial decisions are decided based on moral obligations. Built on the continuous exchange of favor, guanxi’s moral principle is underpinned by Confucian structuralism, which conceptualizes an individual (ren) on the basis of individualized transactions with fellow human
beings (Hwang, 2000). It is this social interaction and the consequent influence on individual women intrapreneurs that is of interest here. With extreme limited knowledge on guanxi and gender, the objective of this paper is therefore to articulate the multiple ways in which guanxi influences women intrapreneurship in medium-to-large tourism firms in China. Empirically the study draws on qualitative interviews with 10 middle and senior level Chinese women managers working in medium-sized and large tourism firms (hotels, tour operators, themes parks) in mainland China. The tourism sector is a super sector within the wider consumer services industry, and accounts for the largest proportion of employment for women but men still dominate the upper echelons of senior management. Addressing gender imbalances within this sector can have major societal impacts (UNWomen & UNWTO, 2010; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). This study contributes to deepening predictive recent debates about the role of Chinese women as entrepreneurial and innovative leaders/managers within established non-western organizations. It also advances an agenda for future research on the role of networks in women intrapreneurship.

**KEYWORDS:** Intrapreneurship, guanxi, women intrapreneurship, gender, China

**REFERENCES**


