

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CHINA'S GREATER BAY AREA - A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Nowak M.\*

**Abstract:** As China started its transition from centrally planned to the market economy, entrepreneurship has become one of the major forces for its economic development. However, there is still a significant research gap in the area of female entrepreneurship in China and its correlation with gender inequalities. The shift to the neo-liberalism and promotion of the self-reliance of the individual led to the reinforcement of the traditional gender norms, which affected not only female entrepreneurs, but women in general. Such a context deserves a more in-depth analysis and attention. Applying the method of the semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study, conducted with female business leaders of the Greater Bay Area (GBA), focuses on the ways in which the dominant discourses of both entrepreneurial 'ideal' and gender roles are internalised and reinforced, shaping women's experience and opportunities as entrepreneurs and managers of their businesses. Its findings suggest that despite the fact that economic growth of China continues, the situation for female entrepreneurs is likely not to improve as they are still constrained by their role of primary carer and the traditional gender norms which contradict with their leadership and management positions.

**Keywords:** Female entrepreneurship, China, Greater Bay Area, Gender, Gender inequality

DOI: 10.17512/pjms.2020.22.2.22

*Article history:*

*Received* August 20, 2020; *Revised* September 15, 2020; *Accepted* September 26, 2020

### Introduction

In the recent decades, due to its fast economic development, the 'promotion of entrepreneurship' (Zheng, 2016) and 'emergence' of the post-reform era entrepreneurs, more and more attention is being placed on the economy and the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in mainland China. Nevertheless, the research and knowledge about Chinese female entrepreneurship are "still in its infant stage" (Deng, Wang and Alon, 2011:5). Even less has been done on the topic from the gender perspective's point of view, which becomes theoretically challenging in case of mainland China and its way of transformation from the centrally planned to the market economy. China's 'miracle story' and its economic boom have led to the creation of the hybrid of the socialist and capitalist state, which is being referred to as socialism with Chinese characteristics (Huang, 2008).

On the one hand, the number of female entrepreneurship in China is growing. In 2014 there were 29 millions of women entrepreneurs, which constituted less than 20% of the total number of entrepreneurs. In 2019 the percentage of female business owners grew up to 25.6% (International Labour Organization, 2019).

---

\* **Martyna Nowak**, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University  
✉corresponding author: martyna.nowak85@gmail.com

According to the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Global Report, the TEA (Total Entrepreneurship Activity) index of female to male ratio is at the level of 0.8-0.9, placing China above the global average (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2020). Chinese women are also growing in numbers on the Forbes list of the wealthiest Chinese – out of 393 names listed in 2019, 27 belong to women (Forbes, 2019). These growing numbers led to many voices claiming that the ‘golden era’ for female entrepreneurs is, if not already here, then at least approaching (China Women’s University & Ali Research Institute, 2019; Yang, 2017). It would be unjustified to claim that the economic situation of an average Chinese has not improved, not only in comparison to the pre-reform era but also in comparison to other societies (Whyte, 2010). China has emerged to be one of the top economies of the world and a force to be reckoned with not only financially, but also politically. Moreover, it did so in just 30 years.

At the same time, however, the number of women participating in the labour force has been continually descending since the early 90s. What is more, taking into consideration the growing number of female university graduates, which exceeded that of male, women’s role “as business leaders is lower than expected” (Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2019:19). The latest official data indicates that there are 17,5% of firms in China (both state-owned and non-state-owned) with top female managers (usually in HR and CFO roles). Only 9.7% of board directors from listed companies in China are women (World Economic Forum, 2020). What is more, the correlation between TEA and Established Business Rates for women in mainland China is notably low and places at 11% vs 3% (Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2019). Global Gender Gap Report places China at the bottom part of its list – in 2020, China positioned as 106th among 153 countries included in the study (World Economic Forum, 2020). To compare, in 2008, China placed 57th among 130 economies considered (World Economic Forum, 2008). These discrepancies (Tan, 2008) suggest that the topic of female entrepreneurship in China deserves a more in-depth insight.

Because of that, this paper’s primary purpose is to take a look through a gender lens at the situation of female business leaders in China as perceived by them and to shed more light on this topic, helping to develop a new understanding of the challenges faced by Chinese female entrepreneurs (Yousafzai et al., 2018). It is crucial to understand how the dominant discourses regarding entrepreneurship, management and gender roles are being internalized and reinforced (or challenged), as it is posing significant possible challenges for female entrepreneurs, the ways their business is managed, grown and sustained and affected by the personal life and societal expectations (Harquail, 2020).

It should be noted that due to the major literature gap in the topic, this research should be considered an exploratory study for understanding the situation of female entrepreneurs in China, a first step into identifying the most crucial issues and challenges they are facing, and as an incentive for continuing more detailed

investigations about the correlation between gender and entrepreneurship (Ahl & Marlow, 2012) and opportunities (Golley, Zhou & Wang, 2019).

### Literature Review

It cannot go unmentioned that the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 brought an enormous shift and positive change for women, opening educational and professional possibilities for them. As those who supposedly "hold half of the sky", women enter the labour market in numbers unseen before (Hershatter, 2007) and become the legitimate force contributing to China's economic growth. While in China's pre-reform era the gender inequalities were still persistent, as women were usually denied high-end, managerial and leadership positions and were burdened with the double-shift of employment and housework (Whyte, 2012), it has to be mentioned that, from the gender perspective, a lot has been achieved. Women entered the labour market, and the double-shift problem was at least acknowledged. Gender equality has been "inscribed" in the constitution, and it has opened educational and professional – and, after the opening-up reform, also entrepreneurial - opportunities for Chinese women (Croll, 2012). At the same time, however, with the opening-up reform, many benefits which the socialist state has guaranteed, were taken away and people had to reinvent themselves in an entirely new reality. During those changes of "gradual evolution from central planning to a system of management responsibility and accountability" (Zapalska & Edwards, 2001:287), the "freedom of mobility joined freedom of discrimination, and opportunities blended with insecurity" (Wang, 2003:167).

Looking at China and its economic progress today, it is easy to forget that it was not until 1988 that the Chinese constitution recognized private enterprises as legitimate (He, Lu & Qian, 2018). It was only after the opening reforms which led to the establishment of special economic zones, that entrepreneurship in China has been "unleashed (...) by removing or lowering institutional barriers to market entry and private business development" (He et al., 2018). What started in the 90s as "state entrepreneurialism", when the policy's main objective was to "grasp the large, let go of the small" (Hsieh & Song, 2015), culminated in the dismantling of the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and, by 2015 "mass entrepreneurship and innovation has emerged as a new national economic development strategy" (He et al., 2018) and "considerable attention has been paid to the ability of the private economy to ease a human impact of the transition" (Tsai, 2007:75). In order to grasp the scale of the change, it can be mentioned that while in 2005 there were 51.24 million Chinese working in private enterprises, in 2018 it has reached the level of 139.52 million. At the same time, the number of workers in the SOEs has dropped from 139.52 million in 2008 to 57.4 million in 2018 (Statista, 2018a) – and the majority (62.8%) of the laid-off workers were women (Wang, 2003). Very often without any 'valued' skills and informal networks of connections called

*guanxi* (Burt, 2019), some of them were 'pushed' towards necessity entrepreneurship and informal work (Liu, Li & Wang, 2013).

In 2018, around 14.7 million people in Guangdong province in China were self-employed (Statista, 2018b). Again, the numbers are striking. According to the annual Hurun Research Institute's report (2020), China is in second place in the world ranking when it comes to the amount of the so-called unicorns, start-ups worth at least a billion dollars, 'losing' only to the USA (227 vs 233). Jack Ma of Alibaba Group, Ma Huateng of Tencent or Zhang Yiming of TikTok are just among the few Chinese (men) competing for the title of the richest in the world. Twenty years ago, it would be unimaginable. However, it is an undeniable fact that some Chinese are getting wealthier than others – not only within China but also in the scale of the whole world.

In the recent years, female entrepreneurs have been granted more attention in the academic circles, mainly because, as their sheer number grows around the world, they "create jobs for themselves and others, and provide different solutions to management, organization and business problems as well as to the exploitation of business opportunities" (Ramadani, Fayolle & Gërguri-Rashiti, 2015:1). A significant amount of the research was dedicated to 'prove' that women are capable managers and business leaders. Drawing on the 'classical' upper echelon framework study of Hambrick and Mason (1984) which assumes that "top executives view their situation through their own highly personalized lenses" (Hambrick, 2018), Krishnan and Park (2005) focused on the gender diversity of top management teams (TMTs) showing a "positive relationship between the proportion of women on TMTs and organizational performance" (p.1712). As has been shown by Rosner (2011), certain qualities which are usually 'performed' by women as a result of socialization processes during which gender self is being constructed, and which are not considered as the effective management and leadership qualities (in the traditional command-and-control style), provide alternative management solution which helps organizations to "find the strength and flexibility to survive in a highly competitive, increasingly diverse economic environment" (p.28). Eagly and Carli (2007) in their meticulous research aimed at understanding why still significantly fewer women become business and organizations leaders, claimed that there is "no defensible argument that men are naturally, inherently, or actually better suited to leadership than women are" (p.188). They have come up with the metaphor of a labyrinth (to replace the term of glass ceiling), in which the interwoven forces of social patterns, cultural institutions, dominant work organization policies - and the ways they have in reinforcing the individual prejudices – create barriers and challenges for women.

Admittedly, the majority of the research on female business leaders and entrepreneurs – 83% - came from the Anglo-Saxon region (Ahl, 2004). While the studies on female entrepreneurship admit that entrepreneurial contexts "affect both entrepreneurial cognitive processes and behaviours" (Yousafzai et al. 2018) and shapes how both opportunities and challenges are being perceived, there are still

significant research gaps in the topic on female entrepreneurs in China. Researchers had focused mainly on behaviour theory and personal traits of female entrepreneurs in China (Tan, 2008; Deng et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013) and on women who had started their careers long before the opening-up reforms and had strong connections with the government leaders and/or previous experience of working in the SOEs in the relatively high positions or foreign-owned enterprise (Alon et al., 2011), which hardly makes them a representative sample and does not exemplify the 'reality' of the nowadays entrepreneurs. What is still missing are studies from a gender perspective – and it is imperative to highlight that not every study on women, especially if gender is treated only as one of the 'variables', is gender research, and as such might contribute to the reinforcement to the myth of female underperformance (Yousafzai et al. 2018), which assumes that "alleged performance problem arises from some female deficiency regarding entrepreneurial competency rather than as fundamentally gender-biased assumptions informing the interpretation and representation of performance indicators" (Marlow & McAdam, 2013:115). From a gender perspective it would be essential to reflect on the inequalities which might underline those factors – discrimination in the labour market based on gender, the disproportionate burden of care and housework for women or lack of respect to female entrepreneurs and top managers due to the persistence and internalization of the gender stereotypes, constructs and gender-specific roles (Lockyer, Hoyte & Dewitt, 2018).

The landscape for female entrepreneurs in today's China is very different from the one experienced by the generation of their mothers. Although still far from ideal, institutions are more established (Yang & Li, 2008), the number of female university graduates has exceeded the one of man (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2014) and entrepreneurship and innovation are being one of the critical aspects in which the Chinese government is placing resources, insisting that the chances and opportunities for all Chinese people should be equal (State Council, 2018). However, there is another side to this 'coin', that is affecting women in general and female entrepreneurs as well. Even though Chinese women are now more educated than ever (and often better educated than their male counterparts), their participation in the labour force is continuously dropping significantly. It is at the level of 59.8% in 2020 in comparison to 73.2% in 1990 (World Bank, 2020). Data provided by the Report on the Major Results of the Third Wave Survey on The Social Status of Women in China (2011) conducted by All China's Women Federation (ACWF) and the National Bureau of Statistics of China, points to the fact that female participation rate in the labour market for the age group 24-34 (which is also the age group in which the highest number of female entrepreneur place), who have a child who is younger than six years, is 10.9% lower than the same age group of childless women, due to the continuity of their role of primary carer. Caregiving is one of the most critical topics in the feminist debate (Keister & Southgate, 2012). It gains even more relevance when we realize that the caregiving duties involve not only children but also elderly members of the family, which is

demanding even by law according to the Criminal Law of 1997, Constitution of 1982 and Law on the Protection of the Elderly, which took effect in 2013. As 75% of long term elderly care in China is performed by women (Glass, Gao and Luo, 2013), it becomes a gendered issue even more clearly.

As has been suggested by Nowak (2020), in case of China and its unique way of tackling the transition from the centrally planned to the market economy which creates the one-of-the-kind of the hybrid of a socialist and capitalist state, special attention to gender understood as a social construct is necessary. In case of nowadays China, to the systems of culture and the free market economy we should add a component of the state with its power to create discourses of the 'normalizing powers' which "are constructed and maintained by granting normality, rationality and naturalness" (Davis & Gannon, 2005:318), creating 'truth effects' in their historical and socially specific contexts (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009:49), informing meanings and shaping constitution of reality (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). It has to be noted that the notion of discourses is not associated with language only and does not imply the neglect of the redistributive and materialistic injustices as essential factors in the construction of social inequalities - Foucault's (1991) analysis of power-knowledge and its 'link' to women's studies (Hekman, 2010) which this study adopts, are still focused on concrete, rather than abstract, concepts. An example of the discourse from the side of the state, which reinforces gender inequality is the promotion of the family with its re-established gendered roles as a basic unit of the society and a 'guarantee' for maintaining 'social stability' and 'harmonious society', as well as a pressure on stimulating a baby boom after nearly 40 years of the disastrous effects of the one-child policy (Xi, 2013). On its shift to neoliberalism, the state needs someone to take care of the future generations as well as elderly, especially as the welfare of the pre-reform state is being taken away. Another example is a discourse popularized by ACWF – and, it is essential to remember that is an organ responsible for promoting women's rights, including support for the female entrepreneurs – shaming women who are not married, because they pursue higher education or career, labelling them as "leftover" (*shengnü*), indicating that nobody wants them (To, 2013). Additionally, preference for men is being widespread in the job ads in both the private and public sector, including the high-end and high-pay positions. One of China's technology giant has been trying to attract (men) talent by promising the company of good-looking female co-workers, describing them as 'late night benefits' (Human Rights Watch, 2018), indicating that women might be someone you work with, but not whom you work for.

The internalization and reinforcement of these discourses are reflected in the growing numbers of both men and women who support the traditional belief of "women living inside, men living outside" – in 2010, 61.6% of men and 54.8% of women agreed with this statement (in the year 2000 it was 54.8% and 50.4% respectively) – and the belief that good marriage is better than having a career. This second statement (Chen, 2018) was supported by 48% of women in 2010 (in

comparison with 37.3% in 2000) and 40.7% of man (in 2010-30.2%), indicating the change of the expectations about marriage and a big 'come back' of traditional gender roles (Evans, 2008).

This translates directly to lower labour market participation by women and deepening of the gender pay gap – women in cities are paid 67% of man salary, while in the 1980s it was at 80% (Golley, Zhou and Wang, 2019). Questions about marital status or plans for having a family have become so common that nobody is even frowning upon them. Even the president of China's Association of Women Entrepreneurs, Zhu Rui, claims that "female entrepreneurs' advantage is that they are willing to fulfil their social responsibilities". As women are urged to focus on domestic life (Qin, 2019) and more than half of them is "caught in the sticky floor and never advance beyond lower-level positions" (Liu, 2013), the navigation through the labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) towards the leadership and management position becomes even more winding and discouraging, which creates lost not only to women as individuals but is also contributing to the waste of resources and potential that, as shown by research mentioned before, might be used to enhancing performance and provide new effective solutions for entrepreneurship, as well as management (Brescoll, 2016).

### **Methodology and Research Design**

The gender theory adopted for this study highlights the importance of gender "as a social practice, not a biological attribute, and that it must be looked for in everyday interactions, read in relation to broader symbolic-cultural domains and considered as an outcome of mediation and representation work in these various domains" (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004:410-11). Entrepreneurship is happening within women's (gendered) lives and experience, not somehow in parallel with it – the "private and public spheres blur and overlap" and the issue "cannot be captured in closed, economically focused research instrument" (Ahl & Marlow, 2012:550). This explanation is not meant to 'discredit' the value of quantitative methods and statistical data, as it often provides important insight, background information and suggestions for the issues that deserve more in-depth exploration. A perfect example here is the previously mentioned disproportion between the TEA and established business rates for female-led businesses in China. However, a more in-depth insight that provides a deeper understanding of such finding is necessary (Neergaard & Ulhoj, 2007). When 'matched' with the interpretivism paradigm, qualitative analysis are aimed at a deep understanding of the phenomenon, rather than at providing a straightforward answer to the hypothesis. As Bryman (2003) lists it, the focus is placed on the importance of the point of view of the research participants, seeing social life as a process and lack of underlying structure. It also accepts the changeable and often self-contradicting character of the interpretations given (Bryman, 2012), assuming that social reality cannot be regarded as homogenous and is 'non-totalizable' (Lyotard, 1984).

As the primary purpose of this research is to understand what are the biggest challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in nowadays China and to ‘explore’ the ways of “how a gendered construction of the entrepreneurial discourse is produced and reproduced” (Ahl & Marlow, 2012:550; Foucault, 1991) throughout their experiences, the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews, during which women were asked open-ended questions about their backgrounds, motivation for starting a venture, challenges and difficulties, what they perceive to be crucial for successful business development, how do they perceive the status of female entrepreneurs and how are they managing their team. During the interviewing process, I adopted the approach of dialogism and cooperation (Coulter, 1999) between both interviewer and interviewees, believing that it paves a way to a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.

Planned initially as in-person interviews, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 at the turn of 2019/2020, the interviews were conducted as video calls, with durations ranging from one hour to one hour and forty-five minutes.

Due to the sheer size of China, the focus of this research was placed on Guangzhou province’s tier 1 cities (Shenzhen and Guangzhou). It has been chosen as a ‘starting point’ not only because it was one of the first places where the market economy was ‘permitted’ during Deng’s reform era, but it is also one of the most significant entrepreneurship hubs in China and hence allows the presumption that it might provide less ‘prejudice’ for female founders. The research participants were deliberately chosen to allow to examine the situation of the “newest” generation of women business leaders. Since this research is conceived as an ‘introductory’ study, I did not want to focus on one sector only and tried to include both women from ‘traditionally’ female sectors, as well as those typically associated with men. Interviewed women had their business in PR, IT, accelerators, e-commerce, cosmetics, services, international trade, food tech and food alternatives, luxury products, electronics and entertainment. I have chosen to focus on women who are in business for not more than ten years (and no less than two), as they represent the ‘generation’ which is being currently most affected by the discourses of the re-installment of traditional gender norms and, at the same time, the one that can ‘enjoy’ the benefits of better-established institutions, access to education and the possibilities that the boom of e-business had offered. In the process of selecting the interviewees, I have excluded those whose co-founders were men, as well as those who are running a one-person business, because it was important to explore the way those young entrepreneurs are managing their teams.

A total of ten in-depth semi-structured interviews was conducted. The age of the participants was between 24-39 years. All but one participant had a previous experience working (in both the public and private sector) before they have decided to start their own company. All but one had university degree (undergraduate or graduate degree) in various fields, ranging from business, design, languages, social sciences and humanities and engineering. Only two of them were married and had children. In the majority of cases (69%), the money needed to start



the venture came from the family, friends and/or savings. Other financing methods come from bank loans, investors and, in one case, government grant.

### **Results and Discussion**

It is not possible to include or even organize so many hours of discussion into one research paper. Every woman who has agreed to talk to me and share with me her experience had their particular circumstances and went through many different and unique situations. It is important to acknowledge that although they were faced and are continuously facing many challenges (but also enjoy successes and satisfaction from their jobs), this paper aim was to focus on the perception of the challenges these entrepreneurs perceive as women business owners and managers in China. Thought as an explanatory study, the most reoccurring themes of the conversations were grouped into issues regarding balancing professional and personal life, networking and team management.

#### ***Balancing work, balancing life***

As every story is different and experiences vary, so did the reasons for starting their business. Initially, financial causes (46% of respondents) and the effect of glass ceiling/sticky floor (23%) were given as the main reasons for starting an entrepreneurial career. Some women also wanted to prove themselves and even claimed that they want to make a difference in the world. However, as the conversations went on, another 'theme' started to emerge. One of the interviewees, a graduate of one of the top Chinese universities with eight years of extensive experience working in big advertising companies, resigned from her stable job when she got married and then pregnant with her first baby. She thought that having her own business would give her more flexibility and allow her to manage her time better and balance work and family responsibilities, because, as she mentioned, she can regulate her work time (which does not mean that she is working less), pick kids up from the kindergarten and do extra work at night when they sleep. Strict hours of her previous job would not make it possible. Although it is not surprising, it is crucial to acknowledge that for many women, even those who do not have kids yet, balancing the personal life and the career is perceived as one of the biggest challenges in their entrepreneurial activity – especially since they 'know' the family will be mainly their responsibility and main 'task'. Yet another respondent, when comparing her experience and the one of her non-Chinese colleague pointed out that in China only women need to balance the career and family responsibility and that despite family's support, 80% of work-related to kids has to be done by women. Another example was provided by a 28-years old entrepreneur (who is hiring 49 people in her five years old company) who mentioned that men are seen as natural leaders and women are not – not only because they are significantly fewer of them in leadership, but also because at a certain age they will have to "return back home" and focus on household duties and bringing up children.

As was observed by Zapalska, Bugaj and Rudd (2005), as women are obliged to perform multiple roles at the same time, it can affect their professional success, as well as satisfaction. As shown in the literature review and as can be seen from the experience of the entrepreneurs, in China women “are first and foremost seen as mothers and homemakers and women’s entrepreneurship is portrayed as something competing with this, more primary role” (Ahl & Marlow, 2012:555). What is more, women are internalizing this gendered role and find it “natural” to have to find a way to balance the role of the entrepreneur and that of a wife, mother and, most probably, in the near future, of the daughter who will take care of elderly parents as well. The ‘absoluteness’ of this belief has been expressed by one of the interviewees who said:

“Society tends to see female entrepreneurs as a failed mom or wife, who is not able to take care of the family. Since we need to balance business and family, we will need to find a smart way to get things done instead of working hard, so little by little, we will develop a system to work efficiently”.

On the shift from centrally planned to the market economy and the neo-liberalist market logic behind it (Chen, 2018), the traditional role of women as a primary caregiver is being reinstated, and the traditional beliefs and the state’s push for increased birth rates make it more pronounced. The shift to individual responsibility, commercialisation and privatisation of the childcare services, paired with the effects of population control policy and the need to create the new ‘high quality’ generation placed on mothers (Greenhalgh, 2010) has amplified the weight of intense motherhood. The reinforcement of the ‘comeback’ of the gender order and traditional gender roles can also be reflected in the perceptions shared by the youngest of the entrepreneurs. One of the youngest respondents who has been in business only two years (and employs 13 people), has it clear – the advantage of being female entrepreneur lies in the fact that she only has to work until she becomes a mother. Another interviewee, who is also in her late 20s, plans or to include her future husband in her business, or hire somebody who will run it for her while she takes care of her (future) family. She thinks that the business will be stable enough by then (in 2 years) and she will ‘supervise’ it from time to time. Of course, these are just the ideas not followed by first-hand experiences, but they also point out to the popular belief that women cannot be a good mother and entrepreneurs at the same time and that they should choose. Moreover, for those young girls, it also seems, being a parent is not considered an effort – and the clash with reality might be very harsh on them (Chen, 2018).

#### ***Social network and networking***

It would be tough to argue against the statement that networking is not vital for business, be it in China or any other place. All of the interviewed women acknowledged that *guanxi* – a system of network and informal connections - is of high significance and importance not only while starting the business but at every single stage of it. 67% of the participants admitted that it is more challenging for women to create and maintain *guanxi*. A lot of networking events and gatherings

are happening in the evenings, which collides with the household responsibilities women are burdened with. However, time was not the only problem identified by the research participants. As many of them have mentioned, doing *guanxi* often involves gatherings where there is much alcohol – one of the participants claimed that for maintaining *guanxi* drinking was “a primary way”. This makes women feel uncomfortable or excluded. It creates a significant ‘clash’ between their gender-selves and entrepreneur-selves – they do not want to miss out, but they also feel awkward and as if they do not belong. This situation has been accurately described by Kelan (2009), who mentioned that women “get the colloquial slap on the back as honorary men, but the door is held open to treat them like ladies”(p.181). Women described their discomfort as they felt they need to ‘balance’ the way they are perceived and do not want to be seen, as mentioned by one of the participants, as “too strong women”, as it is “not necessarily a positive description, as it can mean that women are too tough or dominant”, but neither as too feminine and ‘not taken seriously’. One of the respondents summarized it by saying: “Female leaders still need to pretend or sacrifice and cannot be who they are if they want to make it work.”

These findings correspond to those presented by Liu (2013) who, while interviewing Chinese corporate top-managers and executives, also highlighted the fact that even for those women who were already at the top, the access to informal networks, in which majority are men, is still limited. Bu and Roy (2005), while studying career success network (CSN) of senior and middle managers in China, additionally found out that the ‘pattern’ is repeated as both male and female leaders prefer to create ‘power ties’ with men and are “more reluctant to include middle-aged or elder women in their CSN” (Bu & Roy, 2008:1088).

Even women who do not see the ‘reality’ of doing *guanxi* as problematic, explain it in the way which points to the internalisation of the dominant (and masculine) norms. One of the youngest participants, for example, while admitting that many cases of sexual harassment during those events are being reported and that the first rule is always to have an emergency contact and to ‘protect yourself’ – does not see it as a problem because she sees herself as a good drinker who seldomly gets drunk and can handle it very well. Another given explanation was that of not being typical and having a more man-like personality. Such an experience in the entrepreneurial world has been accurately described in the phrase: “women are not excluded but are measured according to masculine values” (Bendl, 2010). Moreover, they tend to ‘apply’ that scale to themselves as well.

#### ***Being a women, being a boss***

For top female executives in China, “gaining legitimacy was also a challenge”, even when they were already in the high-end positions (Liu, 2013:486). Similarly, when asked about the most significant challenge encountered on their entrepreneurial path, the most reoccurring answer among young Chinese business leaders included in this study was the fact of not being taken seriously (38%). They have felt like this not only while networking but also in more ‘formal’ occasions.

One of the respondents shared with me a story – she was invited to a pitching event and conference during which she would be able to talk to potential investors and successful entrepreneurs about the ways to develop and extend her business. When they sat at the table, while she already felt that she does not belong, one of the men asked her to go to pick up some food for him. She highlighted that it happened while they were actually talking about work. When I asked how did she react, she said that as he was a very successful person, she could not confront him and so, feeling helpless, she did as she was told. Other respondents also mentioned that often they are not taken seriously or that they have two “try twice as hard” or “always having to prove themselves” to be considered as a business partner and somebody who can be trusted – be it for clients or potential investors. Another repeated topic when talking about challenges, mentioned by 31% of the respondents, were the problems with managing the teams and finding talent (23 %). One of the interviewees, who is managing a team of nearly 20 people (only four women among them) admitted that the most challenging thing for her is to gain the respect of her male employees and for them to accept her management and leadership position. Another participant mentioned that one of the worst experiences for her is that on the execution level. She mentioned that when she makes a strict request about the job to be done, her employees see it as “an act of paranoid women, not a serious command”. This reflects the still persistent stereotypes of gender-specific leadership styles. Men continue to be seen as those who are ‘in charge’, who take risks and who lead, while women are those who try to keep the harmony and follow the lead (Furst & Reeves, 2008) – and it influences both the perception of women, as well as that of the others (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Eagly, 2005). Yet, the women I spoke with have problem with attracting talent to their businesses, because, as they mentioned, potential employees think that their position will be more stable if a man is their boss. Another woman mentioned that men with talent, who will potentially bring value to her company, do not have confidence in female leaders and her capabilities. As one of the participants summed it up: “By their nature, men do not want to work beneath women”. These deeply internalized beliefs, on the organizations level, might be affecting certain human resources management practices, limiting opportunities and chances for women (Liu, 2013). But it is actually being reproduced by women who took part in this study, despite the fact that they themselves experienced the disadvantages associated with being a female leader in China’s context. When asked about preferences regarding employees, initially all the participants mentioned that they only look at the skills and it does not make a difference for them if they are men and women. However, in further conversation, the preference for male co-workers or women of a certain age was ‘exposed’. The interviewee who is planning to cede her business once married (because, as she said, it is not good for a ‘house harmony’ if you have a strong woman and a strong man) mentioned that she would only consider a man or a woman who is already married and had grown kids for the position. Another participant, whose all employees are

very young women (23-25 years old) claimed that it is due to the fact that her sector is dominated by women (and more suitable for them, as they are more detail-oriented) and she simply couldn't find any male employees, which she found regretful, because she thinks that mixed team would be better for company dynamics. Yet another entrepreneur also mentioned that for positions in sales she does not mind hiring young girls, but for higher-end and executive roles she will not hire women who are about the age to get married and have kids. "That is just a realistic situation. It is not prejudiced. It is just [that] when you have a baby, you will be less flexible, less committed to work" – one of the participants highlighted. And it is true, especially if it is 'automatically' assumed that all, or at least majority of the responsibilities related to childcare and family (not to mention the assumption that every woman will become a mother), will fall on the mother. While younger women – those, who are not yet 'about the age' of getting married - have been shown to have more opportunities in the labour market, especially in the rapidly developing services sector (Otis, 2011) despite still thick 'glass ceiling', for women who are 'older' these opportunities are narrowing - this phenomenon has been referred to as a 'rice bowl of youth'(Hanser, 2005). And it is accepted as something 'normal'. One of the interviewees, whose business has been particularly strongly affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, is very worried, because, as she is 38 years old (she called herself 'older'), she will not be able to find another job, despite her experience of running for eight years a prosperous international trading company.

As it seems to be such a deeply internalised and accepted 'truth' that, for business stability, it is better not to hire a woman at the specific age, it seems only natural that women worry about their future in case the business does not succeed. When they are 'too young' they are not taken seriously. When they are in their 30s, they are seen as a liability, and as the retirement age in China for women (for the public sector) is 55, there seems never to be a good time for them. While trying to juggle their roles as women and entrepreneurs and plan around the common conceptions and labels that are placed on them, they might be missing not only opportunities but also confidence in themselves.

Interestingly, while man leadership is associated with stability, the interviewed entrepreneurs also acknowledged that men are more capable of taking risks and that that is one of their advantages over women entrepreneurs. In the research on entrepreneurship, risk-taking has been traditionally associated as a 'desired' characteristic (Fairlie & Holleran 2012), even though how it corresponds to the value of stability is not clear. However, as has been observed by Lafontaine and Shaw (2016), what very often makes a successful entrepreneur is the learning process which they acquire from the previous, failed businesses and applied to their new ventures. It seems worth to mention that Alibaba was Jack Ma's third attempt to create a business, and so was Xiaomi for Lei Jun.

Being constrained by the gender roles and its perceptions, women entrepreneurs' and professionals' enormous potential is often getting lost as they will not have the

time or opportunity to reapply the knowledge and experience gathered. One of the interviewees shared with me a story of a failed entrepreneur (though admittedly she was from northern China) who, because of the serious illness of her son and the need to take him to the hospital every other day, had to quit her job (she is a single mother and waiting time in the hospital was usually very lengthy) and later tried – and succeeded – in creating the platform which permits to organise the time for hospitals visits better and even performing some check-ups without the need of the patient's (and his mothers') presence in the hospital. How many more solutions and benefits (not only material one) could be unleashed, if women were given a fair chance(s), might be imaginable. Despite still strongly pronounced barriers in career advancement and obstacles, women are proving to be capable, successful leaders in their undertakings, and whose leadership and management style can bring benefits to organisations. But, as suggested by Liu (2013), "to overcome these barriers, organisations should strive to address the invisible but powerful beliefs held by many managers that hamper women's careers" (p.490). This might include creating gender-balanced HR practices, providing better awareness about different managerial styles and their benefits and having more female mentors – which was also the issue mentioned during the interviews I have conducted. However, the 'toughest' work will be to remove the beliefs that we all, men and women alike, have internalised as 'truths' and do not even realise or reflect while acting upon them.

### **Conclusion**

This 'introductory' research of the perceptions Chinese female entrepreneurs have on their careers and the ways they internalise and reproduce dominant discourses highlights the importance of the fact that "doing entrepreneurship is also doing gender" (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009:561). Approaching it from the gender perspective allowed to look at the entrepreneurship not only as a neutral construct but as a process of "a complex nexus of intertwined socio-economic politically framed activities shaped by contextualised institutional frameworks. Thus, entrepreneurship, as a socially constructed 'doing' is embedded within the prevailing gendered order which privileges masculinity as the dominant mode of thought, deed and action" (Ahl & Marlow, 2012:556). It is crucial to understand how the normative gender roles and norms are being internalised, taken for granted and reinforced in the economic and social context of China, because "this would reveal, analyse and illuminate the meaning of entrepreneurship through women's experiences and so ensure that their activities are afforded greater credibility and legitimacy and so rebalance analytical framing and understanding" (Ahl & Marlow, 2012:550). Such an approach can enhance the research on female entrepreneurship not only from a theoretical perspective, but also by providing an additional voice which is necessary for 'destabilisation' of the dominant discourses, and, even though admittedly it will not happen from one day to another, it might lead to a

situation in which “certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, or at least no longer so un-hesitantly, performed” and because of that “contribute to changing certain things in people’s ways of perceiving and doing things” (Foucault 1991: 83). It also allows going beyond the material possibilities that are available to women (which does not mean that they are being neglected), giving us “a sophisticated account of how ideology (or discourse) makes these choices impossible or contradictory” (Pilcher&Whelehan, 2004:113-4). The stories of the young women entrepreneurs shared in this paper point not to the role of the institutions, disadvantaged position in obtaining education or funds, but rather to the persistent gender role and the perception of it – that of women as the ones responsible for children and ‘homemaking’ – as the biggest challenge and obstacle. Without the policies for the socialisation of care, sharing the responsibilities and the alternative approach to parental leave, which is more equally distributed to both parents, the situation for female entrepreneurs (and all the women of the workforce) will likely not change, even if more policies for supporting women-owned business will be implied, and especially if those policies will be designed with the gender-blind lens of ‘neutral’ entrepreneurship ideal.

Hopefully, studies like this one will lead to some form of reflection and self-reflection – from both men and women (entrepreneurs), researchers, policymakers, as well as investors, managers and mentors - on what is though as natural, normal and so ‘obvious’ that it is being considered as common sense and hence, very often unconsciously, internalised and reproduced and translated into the dominance of gender inequalities.

One ‘additional’ observation regarding the existing policies has been made during this research, as none of the participants was aware of any particular policies and programs aimed at supporting female entrepreneurship – even though they do exist. It might suggest that those undertakings are not well-promoted. Hence, their impact is meagre – an issue that needs further elaboration, especially as the numbers of participants in this qualitative study is not big enough to draw a ‘general’ conclusion.

The small number of participants is not the only limitation of the study. As have been mentioned before, because of the scope of the research, women entrepreneurs from different industries were included. However, future research might aim at focusing on the specific areas of business and sectors only. Also, a study of a similar approach, but applied in different locations, might yet bring a deeper understanding of the issue. The situation in tier 2 and tier 3 cities in China might be different and differently perceived. Also, as one of the participants of the research suggested, it might be interesting to conduct gender-lensed research on entrepreneurs in Shanghai, as it is a city where, historically, women in general (not only entrepreneurs), were enjoying relatively high status in the society. It would be beneficial to conduct a study on serial female entrepreneurs, highlighting how the experience and knowledge gathered in ‘failure’ helped them to create and manage new ventures.

However, in case of China and its emphasis on collective goals for the whole nation, the ‘fight’ for it will be more crucial than the one “for gender equality as an end in itself” (Pittinsky & Zhu, 2005), it seems possible that the existing gender roles and norms will not be challenged, but continue getting even more ‘recognition’ of the ‘universal truths’, continuing to be significant obstacles in the ‘labyrinth’ path for female entrepreneurs and women in general.

## References

- Ahl, H., (2004). *The scientific reproduction of gender inequality*. A Discourse Analysis of Research Texts on Women's Entrepreneurship. Liber, Malmö.
- Ahl, H., Marlow, S., (2012). Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: advancing debate to escape a dead end? *Organization*, 19(5), 543-562.
- Alon, I., Misati, E., Warnecke, T. and Zhang, W., (2011). Comparing domestic and returnee female entrepreneurs in China: is there an internationalisation effect?. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, 6(3-4), 329-349.
- Alvesson, M. & Billing, Y. D., (2009). *Understanding gender and organizations*. Sage.
- Ayman, R., Korabik, K., (2010). Leadership: Why gender and culture matter. *American psychologist*, 65(3), 157-170.
- Bendl, R., (2010). Gender Subtexts—Reproduction of Exclusion in Organizational Discourse. *British Journal of Management*, 19(1), 50–64.
- Brescoll, V. L., (2016). Leading with their hearts? How gender stereotypes of emotion lead to biased evaluations of female leaders. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), 415-428.
- Bruni, A., Gherardi, S. and Poggio, B., (2004). Doing gender, doing entrepreneurship: An ethnographic account of intertwined practices. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 11(4), 406-429.
- Bryman, A., (2003). *Quantity and quality in social research*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bryman, A., (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bu, N., Roy, J. P., (2005). Career success networks in China: Sex differences in network composition and social exchange practices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 22(4), 381-403.
- Bu, N., Roy, J. P., (2008). Chinese managers' career success networks: the impact of key tie characteristics on structure and interaction practices. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(6), 1088-1107.
- Burt, R., (2019). The networks and success of female entrepreneurs in China. *Social Networks*, 58, 37-49.
- Calás, M. B., Smircich, L. and Bourne, K. A., (2009). Extending the boundaries: Reframing “entrepreneurship as social change” through feminist perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 552-569.
- Chen, M., (2018). Does marrying well count more than career? Personal achievement, marriage, and happiness of married women in urban China. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 50(3), 240-274
- China Women's University & AliResearch. (2019). *2019 Global Research Report Of Female Entrepreneurship & Employment*. Retrieved from: <https://photos.pnasia.com/prnk/20191029/2625038-1>



- Constitution of the People's Republic of China (2004). *The State Council of the People's Republic of China*. Retrieved from: [http://english.gov.cn/archive/laws\\_regulations/2014/08/23/content\\_281474982987458.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/laws_regulations/2014/08/23/content_281474982987458.htm)
- Coulter, D., (1999). The epic and the novel: Dialogism and teacher research. *Educational Researcher*, 28(3), 4-13
- Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China (1997). Retrieved from: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/eng/dbtyw/jdwt/crimelaw/t209043.htm>
- Croll, E., (2012). *Feminism and socialism in China*. Routledge.
- Davis, B. & Gannon, S., (2005). Feminism/Poststructuralism. In B. Somekh & C.Lewin (Ed.), *Research methods in the social sciences* (pp. 318-325). London: Sage.
- Deng, S., Wang, X. and Alon, I., (2011). Framework for female entrepreneurship in China. *International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets*, 3(1), 3-20.
- Eagly, A. H., (2005). Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: Does gender matter? *The leadership quarterly*, 16(3), 459-474.
- Eagly, A. H. & Carli, L. L., (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business Press.
- Evans, H., (2008). *The subject of gender: daughters and mothers in urban China*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Fairlie, R. W., Holleran, W., (2012). Entrepreneurship training, risk aversion and other personality traits: Evidence from a random experiment. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 33(2), 366-378.
- Forbes. (2019, November 6). China's Richest 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/china-billionaires/list/#tab:overall>
- Foucault, M., (1991). Questions of method. The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality (74).
- Furst, S. A., Reeves, M., (2008). Queens of the hill: Creative destruction and the emergence of executive leadership of women. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(3), 372-384.
- Glass, A. P., Gao, Y. and Luo, J., (2013). China: facing a long-term care challenge on an unprecedented scale. *Global Public Health*, 8(6), 725-738.
- Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2020). 2019/2020 Global Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.gemconsortium.org/report/gem-2019-2020-global-report>
- Golley, J., Zhou, Y. and Wang, M., (2019). Inequality of Opportunity in China's Labor Earnings: The Gender Dimension. *China & World Economy*, 27(1), 28-50.
- Greenhalgh, S., (2010). *Cultivating global citizens: Population in the rise of China*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.
- Hambrick D.C., (2018) Upper Echelons Theory. In: Augier M., Teece D.J. (eds) *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Strategic Management*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Hambrick, D. C. Mason, P. A., (1984). Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. *Academy of management review*, 9(2), 193-206.
- Hanser, A., (2005). The gendered rice bowl: The sexual politics of service work in urban China. *Gender & Society*, 19(5), 581-600.
- Harquail, C. V., (2020). *Feminism: A Key Idea for Business and Society*. Routledge.
- He, C., Lu, J. and Qian, H., (2018). Entrepreneurship in China. *Small Business Economics*, 52(3), 563-572.
- Hekman, S., (2010). *The material of knowledge: Feminist disclosures*. Indiana University Press.

- Hershatter, G., (2007). *Women in China's long twentieth century*. University of California Press.
- Hsieh, C. T., Song, Z. M., (2015). Grasp the large, let go of the small: the transformation of the state sector in China (No. w21006). National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21006>
- Huang, Y., (2008). *Capitalism with Chinese characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the state*. Cambridge University Press.
- Human Rights Watch (2018). Only Men Need Apply. Gender Discrimination in Job Advertisements in China. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/04/23/only-men-need-apply/gender-discrimination-job-advertisements-china>
- Hurun Research Institute. (2020). Hurun Global Unicorn Index 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.hurun.net/EN/Article/Details?num=918BE8371452>
- International Labour Organization (2019). *Women in business and management: the business case for change*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Keister, L. A., & Southgate, D. E., (2012). *Inequality: A contemporary approach to race, class, and gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kelan, E., (2009). *Performing gender at work*. Springer.
- Krishnan, H. A., Park, D., (2005). A few good women—on top management teams. *Journal of business research*, 58(12), 1712-1720.
- Lafontaine, F., Shaw, K., (2016). Serial entrepreneurship: Learning by doing?. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34(S2), S217-S254.
- Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=12566&lib=law>
- Liu, P., Li, L., Wang, X., (2013). The sex difference in the spirits of entrepreneurs: a study based on the perspective of motive of starting a business (in Chinese). *Management World*, 2013(8), 126–135
- Liu, S., (2013). A few good women at the top: The China case. *Business Horizons*, 56(4), 483-490.
- Lockyer, J., Hoyte, C. and Dewitt, S., (2018). Still bringing up the rear: Why women will always be 'Other' in entrepreneurship's masculine instrumental discourse. In S. Yousafzai, A. Fayolle, A. Lindgreen, C. Henry, S. Lindgreen, C. Henry, S. Saed & S. Sheikh (Ed.) ). *Women entrepreneurs and the Myth of 'underperformance': A New Look at women's entrepreneurship research* (230-246).Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Lyotard, J.F., (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marlow, S., McAdam, M., (2013). Gender and entrepreneurship: Advancing debate and challenging myths; exploring the mystery of the under- performing female entrepreneur. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 19(1), 114-124.
- MasterCard. (2019). Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE) 2019. Retrieved from: <https://newsroom.mastercard.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Mastercard-Index-of-Women-Entrepreneurs-2019.pdf>
- Neergaard, H. & Ulhoj,P.J., (Eds.) (2007). *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Entrepreneurship*. Camberley: Edward Elgar.
- Nowak, M., (in press). China's Transition to the Market Economy and its Impact on Gender Inequalities – a Theoretical Perspective. *Forum Scientiae Oeconomia*.

- Otis, E. M., (2011). *Markets and bodies: Women, service work, and the making of inequality in China*. Stanford University Press.
- Pilcher, J. & Whelehan, I., (2004). *50 key concepts in gender studies*. Sage.
- Pittinsky, T. L. & Zhu, C., (2005). Contemporary public leadership in China: A research review and consideration. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(6), 921-939.
- Qin, A., (2019, July 17). A Prosperous China Says 'Men Preferred,' and Women Lose. New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/world/asia/china-women-discrimination.html>
- Ramadani, V., Gërguri-Rashiti, S. & Fayolle, A. (Eds.). (2015). *Female entrepreneurship in transition economies: Trends and challenges*. Springer.
- Report on Major Results of the Third Wave Survey on The Social Status of Women in China (2011). All-China Women's Federation and National Bureau of Statistics of China. Retrieved from: [http://www.china.com.cn/zhibo/zhuanli/ch-xinwen/2011-10/21/content\\_23687810.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/zhibo/zhuanli/ch-xinwen/2011-10/21/content_23687810.htm)
- Rosener J.B., (2011) Ways Women Lead. In: P. Werhane & M. Painter-Morland M. (Eds.) *Leadership, Gender, and Organization* (pp. 19-29). Springer, Dordrecht.
- State Council of People's Republic of China. (2018). Opinions of the State Council on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Creating an Upgraded Version of "Entrepreneurship and Innovation among All the People." Regulatory Documents of the State Council. Retrieved from: [https://www.pkulaw.com/en\\_law/8cfe8d5aea8ad43abdfb.html?tiao=1](https://www.pkulaw.com/en_law/8cfe8d5aea8ad43abdfb.html?tiao=1)
- Statista. (2018a). Employees at state-owned, collective-owned, and private enterprises in China 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/252924/employees-at-state-owned-collective-owned-and-private-enterprises-in-china/>
- Statista. (2018b). Self-employment in China 2018, by region. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/252924/employees-at-state-owned-collective-owned-and-private-enterprises-in-china/>
- Tan, J., (2008). Breaking the "bamboo curtain" and the "glass ceiling": The experience of women entrepreneurs in high-tech industries in an emerging market. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 80(3), 547-564.
- To, S., (2013). Understanding sheng nu ("leftover women"): The phenomenon of late marriage among Chinese professional women. *Symbolic Interaction*, 36(1), 1-20.
- Tsai, K. S., (2007). *Capitalism without democracy: The private sector in contemporary China*. Cornell University Press.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2014). Higher education in Asia: expanding out, expanding up: the rise of graduate education and university research. Retrieved from: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/higher-education-in-asia-expanding-out-expanding-up-2014-en.pdf>
- Wang, Z., (2003). Gender, employment and women's resistance. In E.J. Perry and M. Selden (Ed.), *Chinese society: Change, conflict and resistance* (pp.162-186). London: Routledge Curzon.
- Whyte, M., (2010). *Myth of the social volcano: Perceptions of inequality and distributive injustice in contemporary China*. Stanford University Press.
- Whyte, M. K., (2012). China's post-socialist inequality. *Current history*, 111(746), 229-234.
- World Bank (2020). Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate). Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.tlf.cact.fe.zs?locations=CN0-CN>

- World Economic Forum. (2008). The Global Gender Gap Report 2008. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2008>
- World Economic Forum. (2020). Global Gender Gap Report 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>
- Xi, J., (2013, October 31), "Jianchi nannü pingdeng jiben guocce, fahui woguo funü weida zuoyong" [Upholding the fundamental state policy of equality between men and women, asserting women's great role in our country]. Xinhua Net. Retrieved from: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-10/31/c\\_117956150.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-10/31/c_117956150.htm)
- Yang, J. Y., Li, J., (2008). The development of entrepreneurship in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 25(2), 335-359.
- Yang, V., (2017, November 9). Five ways China's women are closing the gender gap. World Economic Forum. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/chinese-women-are-closing-the-gender-gap-heres-how/>
- Yousafzai, S., Fayolle, A., Lindgreen, A., Henry, C., Saeed, S. & Sheikh, S., (Eds.), (2018). *Women entrepreneurs and the Myth of 'underperformance': A New Look at women's entrepreneurship research*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Zapalska, A. M., Edwards, W., (2001). Chinese entrepreneurship in a cultural and economic perspective. *Journal of small business management*, 39(3), 286-292.
- Zapalska, A. M., Bugaj, M. N. and Rudd, D., (2005). Female entrepreneurship in transition Polish economy. *Problems and perspectives in management*, (2), 32-39.
- Zheng, J., (2016). *New feminism in China: Young middle-class Chinese women in Shanghai*. Springer.

## PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚĆ W GBA W CHINACH - PERSPEKTYWA PŁCI

**Streszczenie:** Kiedy Chiny rozpoczęły przechodzenie od gospodarki planowanej centralnie do gospodarki rynkowej, przedsiębiorczość stała się jedną z głównych sił napędowych ich rozwoju gospodarczego. Jednak nadal istnieje znaczna luka badawcza w obszarze przedsiębiorczości kobiet w Chinach i jej korelacji z nierównościami płci. Przejście do neoliberalizmu i promowanie samodzielności jednostki doprowadziło do wzmocnienia tradycyjnych norm dotyczących płci, co dotknęło nie tylko kobiety przedsiębiorcze, ale ogólnie kobiety. Taki kontekst zasługuje na głębszą analizę i uwagę. Wykorzystując metodę częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadów pogłębionych, badanie to, przeprowadzone z kobietami liderami biznesu z obszaru Greater Bay Area (GBA), koncentruje się na sposobach internalizacji dominujących dyskursów zarówno ról przedsiębiorczych, jak i ról płciowych. oraz wzmocnione, kształtowanie doświadczenia i możliwości kobiet jako przedsiębiorców i kierowników swoich przedsiębiorstw. Wyniki sugerują, że pomimo utrzymującego się wzrostu gospodarczego w Chinach, sytuacja kobiet-przedsiębiorców prawdopodobnie nie ulegnie poprawie, ponieważ nadal ogranicza je pełniona przez nie rola głównej opiekunki oraz tradycyjne normy dotyczące płci, które są sprzeczne z ich kierownictwem i stanowiskami kierowniczymi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przedsiębiorczość kobiet, Chiny, Greater Bay Area, Płeć, Nierówność płci

## 中国大湾区的企业家精神-性别透视

**摘要:**随着中国开始从中央计划经济向市场经济过渡,企业家精神已成为其经济发展的主要力量之一。但是,在中国女性创业及其与性别不平等的相关性方面,仍然存在重大的研究空白。向新自由主义的转移和个人自立的促进导致传统性别规范的加强,这不仅影响了女企业家,而且也影响了整个妇女。这样的背景值得更深入的分析 and 关注。该研究采用半结构化深度访谈的方法,与大湾区(GBA)的女性企业领导人进行了研究,重点研究了如何将企业家的“理想”角色和性别角色的主流话语内化加强并塑造妇女作为企业家和企业管理者经验和机会。调查结果表明,尽管中国经济持续增长,但女企业家的状况可能不会改善,因为她们仍然受到主要照顾者的作用以及与领导和管理职位相抵触的传统性别规范的制约。

**关键词:**女企业家精神, 中国, 大湾区, 性别, 性别不平等