



OULUN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY of OULU

OULU BUSINESS SCHOOL

**Anna Nikkilä**

**CROSS-CULTURAL VIEWS ON FEMALE LEADERSHIP: LITERATURE REVIEW OF  
LEADERSHIP STUDIES IN THE USA AND CHINA**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The world has come a long way since women's suffrage movement was gaining followers in England in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but women are still underrepresented in senior management roles worldwide (Grant Thornton International 2016). From this it could be concluded that gender equality has yet to be achieved at workplace, especially at higher level of management.

The United States of America has long valued freedom for all, and the studies of women and gender in general that are conducted in the United States by far outnumber the research coming from anywhere else (Bellah 1986: 23–25, Wiesner-Hanks 2001: 9–10). However, Grant Thornton research (2016) showed that the USA placed slightly under the global average on the number of women in senior management, with only 23 percent of senior roles being held by women in 2015. This contradiction would suggest there is still a need for research specifically on the culture of the United States and its effects on gender equality.

According to Central Intelligence Agency (2017), China was the largest economy in the world in 2015, and in the same year it performed better than the global average on Grant Thornton research (2016) on women in senior management roles, with 30 percent of senior positions in private sector being held by women. The country's population has extraordinarily high male to female ratio at birth (Central Intelligence Agency 2017), and as such China poses an interesting subject for research on gender equality.

Why should companies and executives be interested in gender equality? Research has shown that companies that have higher female representation in senior roles show greater excess stock market returns and superior corporate profitability than those with low levels of female representation (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2016). Women make up half of the talent pool available to companies, and ignoring that talent could be fatal in today's rapidly developing society (ILO 2015).

## **1.2 Research questions and objectives**

While there has been a substantial amount of research on the topics of gender equality in the workplace and barriers that women face while aiming for leadership positions, there is still a need for research focusing on the cross-cultural aspects of leadership and gender (Eagly & Carli 2007, Bullough, Kroeck, Newburry, Kundu & Lowe 2012). In this thesis, multiple research sources are combined to form a comprehensive picture of female leadership specifically in the USA and China, and conclusions will be drawn focusing on the similarities and/or differences in these countries. This thesis will discuss not only the ways women advance in their careers but also whether or not there would seem to be a difference in how they act after reaching a leadership position in an organization when comparing to men in similar positions.

This thesis will focus on the following research questions:

1. What are the culture-related success factors and barriers that women face when pursuing leadership roles in the USA and China?
2. Do women lead differently from their male counterparts? Are the gender-related differences similar in both the USA and China?

## **1.3 Methodology**

In this thesis, the reasons behind the absence of women in senior management in both the United States and China will be examined, and possible similarities and/or differences between these reasons will be studied as well. This is done by analyzing earlier research on the topic and drawing conclusions from these results. To research rather a large phenomenon like this, data gathered from small-scale interviews would not have been sufficient, which is why this thesis is written solely by relying on earlier research and by reviewing other literature surrounding the topic.

A considerable amount of the data used is from two sources, Grant Thornton International Business Report and Credit Suisse Gender 3000. Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) is published annually by a global assurance, tax,

and advisory firm Grant Thornton. Credit Suisse Gender 3000 is published bi-annually by Credit Suisse Research Institute, and the most recent one was published in 2016. Credit Suisse Research Institute is a part of Credit Suisse, a global private bank and wealth management firm, and the goal of the institute is to research and study long-term economic and social developments that are likely to have a global impact across different business sectors. (Grant Thornton International 2016, Credit Suisse Research Institute 2016.)

The data in Grant Thornton International Business Report was gathered from 5,520 interviews conducted in the latter half of the year 2015 with chief executive officers, managing directors, chairmen and other senior decision-makers from all industry sectors in mid-market businesses in 36 economies. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 business leaders from inside and outside Grant Thornton. (Grant Thornton International 2016.)

In Credit Suisse Gender 3000 report, the data used is gathered from the database of Credit Suisse Research Institution and it consists of over 3,000 largest companies globally. The data covers all major business sectors, and it maps 27,000 senior managers worldwide. (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2016.)

#### **1.4 Terminology**

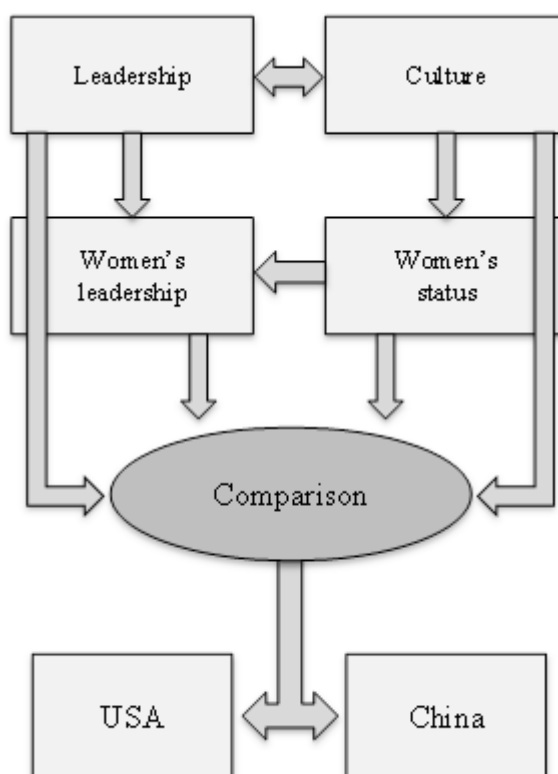
Both Grant Thornton International Business Report and Credit Suisse Gender 3000 focus on higher management and board levels, but there are some differences in how senior management has been defined in the studies. In Grant Thornton International Business Report, the term *senior management* has been used to refer to people holding so-called C-Suite jobs, such as chief executive officer (CEO), chief finance officer (CFO) and chief operating officer (COO), and thus the research maps employees with these titles. Credit Suisse Gender 3000 defines *senior management* as “CEO and those reporting to the CEO”. (Grant Thornton International 2016, Credit Suisse Research Institute 2016: 12.)

## 1.5 Structure

This thesis will start by introducing some definitions of leadership, after which the connection between leadership and culture will be discussed. Then a theory of transactional and transformational leadership is presented and linked with research on women's style of leadership.

In chapter 3, the background of women's leadership will be studied through research focusing on women's career advancement. Chapter 4 will further study culture and gender equality in history, and connect everything discussed into a comparative analysis of female leadership in the United States of America and China.

In chapter 5, *Conclusions*, the main findings of the comparative analysis will be discussed, and recommendations for future research as well as managerial implications will be introduced. This chapter will also briefly discuss the limitations of this study.



**Figure 1. The structure of the thesis.**

## **2 LEADERSHIP**

This chapter will focus on defining leadership and examining its connection to the culture in which it is manifested. A theory of transactional and transformational leadership will be introduced, and in later chapters linked with studies of female leadership.

### **2.1 Defining leadership**

The idea of leadership has interested humans since long ago. During the early stages of human life on Earth, people would gather around those individuals who were particularly good at hunting or gathering, and later in many societies leadership was dependent on one's family tree or a consequence of a believed special connection with gods. When we study history, we often find ourselves studying what the leaders of a certain time period were doing and why. Many myths and stories have been created surrounding leader-like heroes, and even old religious scripts and Greek philosophers talk about the qualities of a good leader. (Goethals, Sorenson & Burns 2004: 33, Bass & Stogdill 1990: 3–4.)

As far as defining leadership goes, there is no universally recognized definition for it. Leadership has, for example, been defined as a way the acts of an individual can impact others so that a common goal can be achieved (Bird & O'Connor 2010: 419), but a more inclusive definition would probably be a process that involves both leaders and followers as well as situations (Goethals et al. 2004: 840).

Authority, the power to demand obedience, or to influence thought, opinion, or behavior, is a concept that is closely related to leadership (Cambridge University Press 2017, Goethals et al. 2004: 540). According to Goethals et al. (2004: 540), authority is seen in relation to others, and it has also been linked with gender throughout the history. Goethals et al. (2004) also note that while there have been leadership figures of both genders, male authority figures have been dominating the field across cultures at most times.



## 2.2 Leadership and culture

A country's leadership culture and the way leadership is seen is related to the country's culture itself. As stated by Hofstede (2001: 240): "Trying to study "management culture" without insight into societal culture is a trivial pursuit. Managers share the cultures of their society and of their organization with their subordinates—a category to which, often, they once belonged themselves."

Hofstede's theory on cultural dimensions is one of the most well-known theories on the field of cross-cultural psychology. This thesis will briefly discuss two of Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, individualism versus collectivism and masculinity versus femininity and their connections to leadership. These dimensions were chosen for their relevance to the topic of this thesis. The USA is usually considered to be a very individualistic culture, whereas China is seen as one of the most collectivistic ones. To study female leadership in particular, the masculinity dimension in these countries has to be taken into account as well. (Hofstede 2001, Cheung & Halpern 2010.)

The individuality level of a country can be manifested in how and what kind of groups people in the country live with, but also in the societal norms and how organizations and institutions function. Leadership and management in individualistic countries is usually seen as managing individuals and individual performances, which has often been reflected in the way leadership has been studied, since much of leadership research is conducted in individualistic countries. This means the results may not accurately represent the leadership culture in collectivistic countries. (Hofstede 2001: 240–241.)

In collectivistic societies, harmony within groups is considered extremely important, whereas independency and autonomy are held to a high esteem in individualistic ones (Cheung & Halpern 2010). These cultural assumptions affect many aspects of leadership, e.g. who to give bonuses to or how to give feedback to others, and they may result in conflicts when it comes to cross-cultural leadership (Hofstede 2001: 241).

In the case of masculinity versus femininity, Hofstede's theory suggest that only actions linked with procreation, or childbearing basically, can be linked strictly with either gender. In societies, however, many actions are considered more masculine or feminine than others, and these ideas are often dictated by cultural norms. The masculinity versus femininity index that Hofstede introduces shows to which extent the respondents in the countries studied showed interest in or valued traits that are considered masculine. Categorizing traits as masculine does not mean that all men show more of such traits, or vice versa, categorizing them as feminine does not mean that all women must behave that way, but rather that statistically men show more traits categorized as masculine, and women more traits categorized as feminine. According to Hofstede and his research, both the USA and China scored above average on the masculinity index (Hofstede 2001: 284–285, The Hofstede Center 2017.)

Where a country is placed on the masculinity index affects how work is seen, and what aspects are valued at workplace. Respondents in countries that scored higher on the masculinity index seemed to put more value on things like pay, security, and job content, whereas respondents from countries scoring lower emphasized relationships and physical conditions of the workplace. Besides the work itself, there is a difference in how management and leadership are seen in the contexts of high and low masculinity cultures. Historically, management as a concept and the theories surrounding it were developed in Western cultures with high masculinity index scores, such as Great Britain and the USA, and the manager or leader was often seen as a sort of a hero. In lower masculinity countries, leadership would seem to have been seen less as a heroic stunt and more as a normal action of the workplace. (Hofstede 2001: 311–314.)

### **2.3 Transactional and transformational leadership**

One of the most widely-cited leadership theories was introduced by James Macgregor Burns in his book *Leadership* in 1979. In his book, Burns criticizes the way leadership has been discussed as something only leaders do, which has separated followers from the picture and made them out to be a faceless mass of people rather than active participants in the leadership process. (Burns 1978: 3–5.)

Burns categorizes leadership into two styles, transactional and transformational. According to his theory, transactional leadership is a leadership style that is based on transactions: a leader engaging in transactional leadership might, for example, ask voters for votes in exchange for creating new jobs, or offer financial bonuses for important projects. However, the leadership process does not go beyond the initial purpose. Both parties have their own goals that are related yet separated. After these goals have been achieved, there is nothing holding the parties together anymore, since no higher purpose for the relationship to continue was ever attained, nor was there ever any intention to attain it. The act of leadership was there, but after it was done, the parties could go their own ways. (Burns 1978: 19–20.)

In contrast, transformational leadership happens when the parties start from having separate goals that later on became not only related but fused together. The leader motivates the followers not by promising profitable transactions, but by motivating and engaging with them, and they in turn motivate and engage with the leader. By doing so, they raise each other's motivation and attain a higher purpose for their relationship. This process transforms both parties and helps them achieve the now common goals. (Burns 1978: 20.)

In his theory, Burns (1978: 426–427) relates leadership to the values people hold, saying that transactional leadership is concerned with *modal values*, such as honesty and fairness, whereas transformational leadership is connected to *end-values*, such as liberty and equality. Burns emphasizes the importance of understanding the moral side of leadership, and that leadership is not only found in high political positions, but that it is wider of a concept that one might think.

### **3 WOMEN AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

In this chapter, a few theories and metaphors concerning women's career advancement will be introduced and discussed. These theories are well-known in the area of female leadership studies and as such are important for the topic of this thesis. These theories will act as a background and offer context for the comparative analysis in the next chapter and help understanding the conclusions drawn in chapter 5.

#### **3.1 Glass ceiling**

*Glass ceiling* is a metaphor that has been widely used to represent the invisible barriers that women frequently face when climbing the corporate ladder. In a widely-cited Wall Street Journal article from 1986, Carol Hymowitz and Timothy D. Schellhardt discussed the metaphor, and defined the glass ceiling as a barrier that prevents women at managerial positions from advancing any higher in an organization. According to Hymowitz and Schellhardt, women get promoted until a certain point, after which they can no longer advance in their workplace. Because this barrier is not visible, it is referred to as a ceiling made out of glass: you can see through it, yet you cannot move past it. Hymowitz and Schellhardt argued that women's career paths were blocked by corporate traditions and prejudice, and that this might lead to brain drain in an organization, when frustrated women at lower management would start leaving their jobs for smaller companies with more options for career advancement, or quit their jobs in order to start their own businesses. (Hymowitz & Schellhardt 1986.)

#### **3.2 Labyrinth**

In 2007, Harvard Business Review published an article in which Alice Eagly and Linda Carli argued that the glass ceiling metaphor was no longer an accurate description of the situation women face in today's society and workplace. To replace it, they proposed a new, alternative metaphor to represent women's career advancement: *a labyrinth*. According to Eagly and Carli, women's path to leadership positions is not blocked by one glass ceiling, but that it is a path with a series of obstacles and walls that women have to overcome to be able to reach their goals. Unlike the glass ceiling metaphor, which suggests that the obstacles women face would be manifested only

when trying to reach the top, Eagly and Carli argue that women will face problems at all levels of an organization. The labyrinth metaphor acknowledges the obstacles and problems women might face, but Eagly and Carli also mention that since labyrinths can always be navigated through, this metaphor is not quite as discouraging as it might first seem. (Eagly & Carli 2007.)

### **3.3 Glass cliff**

*A glass cliff* is another phenomenon related to women's career advancement, and it was first introduced in an article by Michelle Ryan and Alexander Haslam in 2005. It was written as a response to another article published in *The Times* in 2003, in which the author claimed that companies with more women in their boards would tend to have worse performance than those companies that had a board consisting of only men (Judge 2003).

Ryan and Haslam pointed out some problems with the analysis of the study, and by further research on CEO appointments and gender managed to get results indicating that the direction of the causality is actually reversed: according to them, it is not that women in the company board would lead to poor company performance, but rather that companies tend to appoint women to their boards when they are already doing badly in the market. According to the results of the study, it would seem that women, while underrepresented in leadership roles in general, often get promoted to leadership roles when the company is undergoing problematic circumstances. Ryan and Haslam described this phenomenon as a glass cliff, to link it with the earlier metaphor of the glass ceiling, and to emphasize the dangers of positions that fall under the described circumstances. (Ryan & Haslam 2005.)

The glass cliff phenomenon was also discussed and studied in *Credit Suisse Gender 3000*, but the findings were somewhat mixed. In the original study conducted by Ryan and Haslam, the performance of a company was measured by using its stock prices, and by doing the same *Credit Suisse Research Institute* found that glass cliff did indeed exist. However, when measuring a company's actual performance rather than its stock prices, the results showed practically no difference in returns before or after appointment of a female or a male CEO. Only when a company's return on assets was

taken into consideration as well were there any implications of the existence of a glass cliff. The research suggested that a glass cliff could be created when the board and investors are making short-term decisions while considering a very narrow range of performance criteria. (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2016.)

### **3.4 Male as the default gender**

Listing gender-specific obstacles in career advancement for women might make it sound like as if there are no obstacles that men face, which is obviously untrue. However, Wiesner-Hanks (2001: 89–92) argues that since the male gender has been historically treated as the “default” gender, they are less likely to be stereotyped and consequently less likely to run into gender-specific obstacles. Another reason for the absence of male-specific barriers is that there is simply not enough research on them: according to Wiesner-Hanks, making the male gender out to be the default one has also resulted in deficiency in research on male-specific phenomena.

## 4 FEMALE LEADERS IN THE USA AND CHINA

In this chapter, there will be a comparative analysis of female leadership in the USA and China. This analysis will consist of four parts: cultural values and gender stereotypes, success factors for women, barriers for women, and leadership styles women engage in. In all parts, there will be separate chapters focusing on the topics in both the USA and China.

### 4.1 Cultural values and gender stereotypes

Cambridge Dictionary defines *stereotype* as “an idea that is used to describe a particular type of person or thing, or a person or thing thought to represent such an idea” (Cambridge University Press 2017). While stereotypes are often viewed as negative, there are stereotypes holding positive connotations as well (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu 2002). The stereotypes and ideas that people hold within groups vary by individuals (Aries 1996: 164) but studies show that there are certain stereotypes that are often linked with specific genders by many people, especially in the context of leadership (Goethals et al. 2004: 550). Stereotypes can be either accurate or inaccurate, and according to Aries (1996: 163), accurate ones can help us by guiding our behavior in unexpected or new situations, whereas inaccurate ones can lead to unjustified and prejudiced perceptions or actions towards the stereotyped individuals.

Research would seem to suggest that gender stereotypes can be divided into two categories: *descriptive* and *prescriptive* (Heilman 2001, Heilman 2012, Terborg 1977). According to Burgess and Borgida (1999), descriptive stereotypes are beliefs of characteristics that women have, whereas prescriptive stereotypes are beliefs of characteristics that women should have. While these two categories may somewhat overlap, there is a difference in how they affect how women are seen in the workplace. Descriptive stereotyping might lead to women not being considered as candidates for certain positions because of characteristics they possess, while prescriptive stereotyping might lead to women being sanctioned for not acting like women are supposed to (Burgess & Borgida 1999).

Gender stereotypes affect the behavior of people, but they can also affect the results of leadership studies and research. Much of the research on the effectiveness of leadership is made by conducting interviews with leaders and their subordinates, but such interviews are often rather vulnerable to stereotypes that the interviewees hold. Expectations of how someone should behave can affect how they are perceived and evaluated, or how they perceive and evaluate themselves, against someone else in similar situations, which can lead to results that do not mirror the reality, but rather the opinions and mindsets of the people interviewed. (Goethals et al. 2004: 554–555.)

Many studies show that people seem to associate traits such as being sympathetic, emotional and tactful with women, whereas personality traits such as being aggressive, ambitious and competitive are most often associated with men. Using psychological terms, we could say that women are often associated with communal qualities and men with agentic ones. These agentic traits would also seem to be what many people associate with effective leadership, possibly because of the long history of male domination in the field of leadership. (Aries 1996, Cheung & Halpern 2010.)

Subsequently, women in or aiming to be in leadership positions might find themselves in something called a *double bind*. If they show too many communal qualities while working, they may end up being criticized as too soft-spoken or not driven enough, but if they show too many agentic ones, they may get told they are too aggressive or bossy. This makes for a very thin line for women aiming to be taken seriously in their workplace, for they must act like men; yet if they act too much like men, they might get called “bitchy”. (Eagly & Carli 2007, Klenke 2011: 64.)

Because there are stereotypes for both men and women, it would not be strange for men to have a similar double bind for themselves. However, several studies assessing reactions to different amounts of communal and agentic qualities in men and women in leadership positions show, rather surprisingly, that men do not face a double bind of their own, but that they actually have more freedom in how they can act and how they are consequently perceived. (Eagly & Carli 2007.)



#### 4.1.1 The United States of America

According to Hofstede's (2001) theory on cultural dimensions, masculinity and values associated with it are more valued in American society than feminine values. Individualism and freedom are very well-embedded in the society, and Bellah argues that it is the very idea of freedom that is the basis for the respect of individualism in America (1986: 23–25). There is a high resistance to anything that is seen as a threat to the individualistic choices in the USA, and Bellah (1986: 23–25, 142–143) claims that this has made people stubbornly ignore power structures and made them more fond of the traditions of the past.

Christianity and biblical religion are widely accepted as having made an impact on the culture and the values of the people in the USA (Bellah 1986: 28). The Christian values and ideas of women are not always consistent even within individual branches of Christianity, but some basic ideas about women's role persist across Christianity even today. In some religious Christian texts, women are forbidden from preaching and are seen as impure, especially if they are not virgins. In the 1980's, the Christian church in the USA started labeling itself as the defender of "traditional family values", and as such promoting women's role as homemakers and good wives. While Christian values seem to be in the decline in Europe, it would not seem to be so in the USA, where Christianity is still holding out strong. (Wiesner-Hanks 2001: 127–132.)

In a study conducted in the USA by Williams and Bennett (1975), the participants were given a list of adjectives, and asked whether these adjectives were more frequently associated with men or women, or alternatively with neither gender. The results showed that women were more often associated with such adjectives as affectionate, gentle, and sensitive, whereas men were more often associated with being assertive, self-confident, and unemotional. In another book by Williams (1990: 19–22), he notes that these findings were in accordance with other research on the same subject in the USA. Here it could also be noted that the results are also very similar to the cross-cultural research on associating personality traits with gender discussed earlier in this thesis.

#### 4.1.2 People's Republic of China

Many cultural values in China have their roots in Confucianism, as do many ideas about women and men as well. The patriarchal family model, which has long been the norm in Chinese society, is also based on Confucianism and its teachings. Women have traditionally been in supportive roles in the family, and often treated as almost invisible. (Leutner 2005: 57–85 via Airaksinen, Sinkkonen & Valjakka 2016: 11.)

In Confucianism, a person is often viewed through their relationships to other people. For women, this has basically meant their relations to their family. In Chinese society, a woman has traditionally been defined through their family relationships by defining them not as themselves, but always as someone's daughter, someone's wife or even someone's mother. This could also be seen as something that derives from the collectivistic nature of Chinese culture, where a person is rarely an individual, but most often a part of a group. (Rosenlee 2006: 47–48.)

One of the historical customs specific to China and Chinese women was foot binding, in which a girl's feet were bind by forcing her toes down under the heel, eventually breaking bones in her feet and making walking difficult. This practice had many reasons behind it, one of which was the idea of women who were supposed to be weak and stay inside the homes rather than work, or do any labor to that matter. This further strengthened the stereotype of a feeble woman in Chinese society. (Wiesner-Hanks 2001: 103.)

When observing the cultural dimension theory Hofstede, it can be seen that China, much like the USA, is located rather high on the masculinity index (The Hofstede Center 2017). This is well in line with the Confucian patriarchal ideology and as such comes as no surprise. In the workplace, high score on the masculinity index can be manifested in a "living in order to work" attitude, which is easily seen in Chinese society, where workers might sometimes abandon their families for long periods of time in order to get better pay in another city (Hofstede 2001: 312, The Hofstede Center 2017).

## 4.2 Success factors for advancement

Nowadays different solutions for achieving gender equality at work are being generated around the world. In Europe, quotas and targets for female representation have been widely adopted among many sectors. However, whether or not these quotas are effective is debatable. Credit Suisse Gender 3000 found that instead of adding more female members to their boards, several companies resorted in cutting the overall number of people in their boards in order to achieve targets or quotas. The results showed that companies were 35 percent more likely to drop a male member of the board than they were to recruit a female one to make the quotas. Judging from this, quotas are less than effective at promoting gender diversity at board level. (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2016.)

As discussed earlier, women tend to engage in transformational leadership style more than men do (Eagly & Carli 2007). A study by Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996) linked transformational leadership with effectiveness and better outcomes, and other studies have confirmed such findings (Eagly & Carli 2007). From this it could be concluded that since women on average engage in a type of leadership that is considered to be specifically efficient, women in leadership positions could help companies to be more efficient as well. This could be seen as an advantage for women aiming for higher positions in companies where career advancement is linked with the performance of the manager and their subordinates.

According to Klenke (2011: 75–76), many organizations today seem to be moving towards a less hierarchical organizational structure, and there seems to be a clear intention to move away from the traditional organization which involves many vertical structures. Less strictly defined work roles and more horizontal structures in an organization could be beneficial for women, since organizations like this tend to focus more on results and talent than networking.

### 4.2.1 The United States of America

One of the factors helping women attain gender equality in the workplace in the USA is the amount of research that is conducted on the topic there. Gender studies coming

from the USA outnumber those coming from anywhere else, and this could potentially lead to higher awareness of the issue and discovering new solutions. (Wiesner-Hanks 2001: 9–10.)

According to Hofstede, in the individualistic society such as America, following one's own interests is seen as a good quality in a person, no matter their gender. In a study by Peus, Braun, and Knipfer, American women managers saw risk-taking as a good thing, which is also very typical for people coming from individualistic countries. High level of individualism seems to give an advantage to women seeking to advance in their careers in the USA. (Peus, Braun & Knipfer 2015, Hofstede 2001: 235–237.)

#### 4.2.2 People's Republic of China

In his politics, Mao Zedong (1893 – 1976) emphasized the idea that women are capable to just as much as men are, and that they were figuratively holding up half the sky (Airaksinen et al. 2016: 76). The legacy of communism and its ideas of equality seem to still be affecting not only China, but Eastern Europe and Russia as well, with all of these countries surpassing the global average in the amount of women in senior management in 2015 (Grant Thornton International 2016).

Communism and collectivism would also seem to affect how women see combining family and work: a study by Yang, Chen, Choi, and Zou (2000) found that Chinese people saw sacrificing family time for their careers as a benefit for the whole family rather than something to be frowned upon. In a leadership study by Peus, Braun, and Knipfer (2015: 62), one Chinese manager was quoted saying: “I do not think much about the negative impact on my family life. I think it is completely right to devote yourself to your work because you get something in return, such as respect from the others.”

### 4.3 Barriers to advancement

A leadership study conducted by Peus et al. (2015) revealed that essentially all the barriers women managers in the USA and Asia regard as significant are consequences of gender stereotypes. These barriers lead to women having a disadvantage when

applying for jobs in male dominated fields, and in leadership positions they are evaluated lower than equivalent male leaders, especially in positions usually occupied by men (Eagly & Carli 2007).

#### 4.3.1 The United States of America

The highly valued masculine traits and the tendency to associate women with communal qualities seem to pose a challenge for women in several cultures, but this would seem to be specifically true in the USA. This was noted by Peus et al. (2015), who found that when comparing with woman managers from Asia, the ones from the USA were more likely to mention double bind as a barrier in their careers. This is also consistent with earlier research findings, which also suggest that the career barriers created by gender stereotypes are indeed high in the USA (Williams & Best 1990: 294).

In their research, Yang et al. (2000) found that individualistic cultures tend to value family and personal time more than collectivistic cultures: in a situation where work conflicts with family, an American worker is expected to side with family. This makes combining a family and a career very challenging for women, who are often expected to be the primary ones taking care of the children in the family (Eagly & Carli 2007). Yang et al. (2000) point out that in the USA, focusing on one's career at the expense of family time is commonly seen as a failure to take care of one's family. For American men, having children is generally considered a sign of stability, and it rarely has a negative impact on their careers, but for women the opposite seems to be true (Eagly & Carli 2007, Cheung & Halpern 2010).

Studies continue to show that in the USA women still handle most of the housework and childcare at home, even if they are working full-time (Eagly & Carli 2007). Much of the social networking needed to advance in one's career is done during after-work activities which are difficult to combine with the amount of housework that women in the USA are expected to do (Klenke 2011: 71–72).

#### 4.3.2 People's Republic of China

In China, the idea of leadership as a paternalistic act has long been the norm, with its roots possibly deriving from the Confucian ideology (Peus et al. 2015). This combined with the cultural mindset that women are supposed to be subordinates to men creates strong barriers for Chinese women aiming for managerial positions (Zhu, Konrad & Jiao 2016).

One of the distinctive characteristics of doing business in Confucian cultures is the importance of personal relationships and connections. The Chinese refer to this as *guanxi*, and it is often considered to be more important for one's career than technical knowledge or expertise. Social networking in business happens outside Confucian societies as well, but *guanxi* is usually seen as being more than just building relationships: some aspects of *guanxi* could even be considered nepotism, and many business decisions are based on one's personal *guanxi* rather than objective evaluations. (Yeung & Tung 1996.)

In an article by Zhu, Konrad, and Jiao (2016), they argued that building *guanxi* is more difficult for Chinese women than it is for Chinese men, partly because of the expectations of the paternalistic leadership and hierarchical order where men are considered to be more important as business partners than women, and also because of cultural expectations of appropriate relationships between men and women. Zhu et al. (2016) also found that ultimately women had very few *guanxi* strategies they could use in order to advance in their careers, and that building *guanxi* networks with other women either had a negative or no impact on women's careers as opposed to building *guanxi* with men.

Another challenge for reaching gender equality in China is the unbalanced gender statistics. In 1979, China began its controversial One Child Policy, which resulted in fines and other sanctions for families that had more than one child after the implementation of the policy (Ebenstein 2010, Central Intelligence Agency 2017). Ebenstein (2010) argued that because of the preference for boys in Chinese families, the policy had unforeseen consequences by resulting in more boys than girls being born. The policy was loosened in the beginning of 2016 by allowing couples to have

two children instead of just one, but the gender statistics at birth are still heavily unbalanced, with 115 boys being born against every 100 girls (Central Intelligence Agency 2017). This means that in the future, the pool of female candidates for management positions will be smaller than the pool of male candidates, and even maintaining the current percentage of women in senior management might be difficult.

#### **4.4 Leadership styles**

Do women lead differently than men do? Several studies would seem to argue that they do. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women engage in collaborative and participative leadership styles generally more often than men do. There is, however, no genetic reason for this difference, but it is most likely a question of adopting a different style of leading in order to overcome obstacles in the environment. When using James Macgregor Burns' framework of transactional and transformational leadership styles, it would seem women tend to be more transformational than their male counterparts (Eagly & Carli 2007). Throughout studies, women also stressed the importance of communication and team work as a part of leadership (Cheung & Halpern 2010).

##### **4.4.1 The United States of America**

In their research, Peus et al. (2015) found differences in how women from different cultures saw leadership and what kind of leadership styles they engaged in. In their cross-cultural study, women from America emphasized leading by one's own values and being self-aware in their leadership more than women from countries in Asia. Unlike managers in China, American ones practically never mentioned task-orientation as a part of their leadership styles, but values such as integrity and honesty were seen as being an important part of how they lead others.

##### **4.4.2 People's Republic of China**

In the same study by Peus et al. (2015), women managers in China were found to put more emphasis on task-orientation and instructing people when in leadership positions. Chinese managers also found being able to appoint the right people into right positions

as being an important aspect of good leadership. Cheung and Halpern (2010) also noted that in their research women managers from China often mentioned leading like a mother or a grandmother, which included being firm yet supportive. This was rarely mentioned by their American counterparts.



## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, the research questions will be answered and recommendations for managerial use as well as future research are introduced. Limitations of this study will also be discussed in depth.

### **5.1 Research questions**

In the introduction of this thesis, the first research question posed was as follows:

1. What are the culture-related success factors and barriers that women face when pursuing leadership roles in the USA and China?

By assessing several sources, some non-culture-related success factors and barriers were presented, as well as those related to certain cultures only. The culture-related advantages seemed to have been derived from each country's political history and cultural values. Cultural values presented not only success factors for women, but disadvantages as well. Judging from the results of this analysis, cultural values hold certain stereotypes that would seem to create barriers for women aiming for leadership positions. General theories on women's career advancement, such as glass ceiling, labyrinth or glass cliff seemed to hold even in cross-cultural inspection, and the terms were often brought up by researchers from both the USA and China.

Some of the biggest culture-related success factors for women advancing in their career paths in the USA seemed to be the high level of individualism and the amount of feminist research. In China, the history of communism could be seen as the most significant advantage for women.

The barriers to career advancement in both countries had a common aspect of gender stereotypes affecting women in the workplace, but culture-specific disadvantages were found as well. In the USA, highly-valued masculinity was seen as preventing women from reaching the top and forcing them into a double bind. In China, ideas of paternalistic leadership as well as the lack of options for forming social networks, or *guanxi*, seemed to hinder women's career advancement. Overall the long history of

male gender being associated with leadership seemed to pose challenges for women in both countries.

The second research question was:

2. Do women lead differently from their male counterparts? Are the gender-related differences similar in both the USA and China?

By analyzing multiple studies, it could be concluded that there are indeed differences in how women and men lead. In this thesis, a well-known framework by Macgregor Burns was used to determine and assess differences in leadership styles. This framework divides leadership into two styles, transactional and transformational. By assessing different studies, it was found that women tend to engage in transformational leadership style more often than their male counterparts. Transformational leadership is often linked with superior corporate performance, from which it could be concluded that not only do women lead differently from men, but that they tend to engage in more efficient leadership more often than men do.

Differences in female leadership styles were also found between the USA and China, with the main difference being that women managers in China put more emphasis on task-oriented leadership whereas managers in the USA found leading by values as being more important. In the studies that were analyzed, women leaders from China and the USA mentioned different traits when being interviewed on good leadership, which would seem to imply that the culture's effects on seeing and shaping one's leadership style are stronger or at least as strong than the effects of one's gender.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

### 5.2.1 Managerial implications

In the editorial of the first edition of Credit Suisse Gender 3000, Rohner, Dougan, and Bohnet (2014) summarize the purpose of corporate level gender equality quite well:

“It is not a case of a greater ability of one gender versus the other but that a more diverse group makes for better decision making and corporate performance.” (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2014: 3.)

As discussed earlier, studies show that companies with higher female representation at their senior management level enjoy greater excess stock market returns and superior corporate profitability, so in order to maximize their returns firms should aim for gender diversification in higher management. However, as Peus et al. (2015) discovered in their research, most of the barriers preventing women from climbing the corporate ladder, and consequently preventing them from making it to the senior roles and board level as well, are consequences of gender stereotypes. Therefore, to be able to effectively diversify their senior management and thus earn higher returns, firms should first address these stereotypes. The studies also imply that setting up quotas for the number of female members is not a desirable course of action, as it does not result in assessing efficient pipelines for women aiming for higher positions in an organization.

Some researchers also remark that while there are still certain aspects of leadership that are being related to certain genders, it is possible that by diversifying the pool of leaders today, in the future the image of authority will be detached from gender stereotypes (Goethals et al. 2004: 540). According to the findings of this thesis, eliminating gender stereotypes surrounding leadership is indeed one of the very first steps towards achieving gender equality in the workplace, since it was found that most of the problems in gender equality are derived from these stereotypes.

### 5.2.2 Future research

According to Central Intelligence Agency (2017), China’s economic growth has more than tripled that of the USA for each year of the past four decades. For the USA to be able to compete in the global marketplace, its organizational culture should be looked into as one variable according for economic growth and innovation. Because of this, gender equality as a part of a bigger picture should still be further researched.

A company's success and its relation to the diversity of its top management is more complex of an issue than numbers might lead one to think, which means that just promoting women is not guaranteed to make a firm more successful. In addition to researching women in senior positions, the organizational culture and its effects on a firm's returns should be studied as well. In doing so, the number of women could be used as a variable or an indicator rather than an absolute.

In the case of China, it is still unclear how the unbalanced gender statistics have affected the position of women in society, family and workplace. Many of the women born during the time of the One Child Policy are now adults, and thus have already joined the work force. Whether the after-effects of the policy will affect their career advancement should be further researched, especially considering how some research would seem to imply that women's status in society has improved as the result of the policy (e.g. Fong 2002).

### **5.3 Limitations**

General research on leadership has historically been done mostly from the viewpoint of individualistic countries, and whether or not these theories are applicable to collectivistic cultures as well is debatable. It has been mentioned that most of the feminist research comes from the USA, and as such that too might hold some limitations when it comes to connecting these theories to other cultures.

Much of the research used in this thesis was done by interviewing women in leadership positions, and as such it reflects more how these women see themselves as leaders, rather than how their surroundings see them. Conducting similar research on their subordinates or even their families or spouses might give out different results.

Some of the barriers preventing women from advancing in their careers have to do with motherhood, and as such it could be argued that as long as men are not able to give birth, completely equal standing for women and men in the workplace cannot be achieved. Because of this, research on gender equality will more often than not be limited by the reality of human reproduction and its effects on workplace dynamics.

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