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# Emotional Intelligence Travels to China

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There has been increasing managerial and research interests in the role that emotions play in organisations since at least, Hochschild's (1983) seminal book on emotional labour: *The Managed Heart* (Nair 2007). It is argued in Diggins (2004) that effective management needs emotional intelligence (EI) that entails a combination of self-management and interpersonal relationship skills. Hence, since the early 1980s, the study of EI in management has matured into a widely accepted tool that has much evidence to support its usefulness (O'Boyle et al. 2011).

In parallel with the rise of EI, China's economic transformation and increasing impact on the world economy has been dramatic since the 1980s, and subsequently China has become a great source of managerial and research interest (Guthrie 2012). The fact that China possesses a very different culture and business contexts compared to the West makes it challenging to implement Western management methodologies and practices (e.g. Dashpande et al. 2005). Nevertheless, in order to understand the challenges facing management in China and to understand how to manage interaction with Chinese organizations, a dialogue between China and Western management learning and practices is vital. Recent work on the application of EI on cultures suggests that EI is a productive mechanism for such a dialogue (Gunkel et al. 2013; Li et al. 2013). This research contributes to such a dialogue. The

paper, with a focus on the emotional intelligence of the Chinese employees of different managerial and personal backgrounds, presents part of the data that were collected in a research project to investigate how the Chinese employees of different emotional intelligence manage interpersonal conflicts at work.

### **Emotional Intelligence: Selecting measures and relationships for travel**

Though much of the work on emotional intelligence has been done since 1990s the literature is vast and it is not the attempt of the paper to present a comprehensive review. Influential research such as Mayer and Salovey (1997) and Mayer et al (2004) provide such reviews. What is attempted in the paper is give a sense of how the measures of EI used were selected in the literature by setting them against a very condensed view of the literature's development.

Social intelligence was used to refer to the importance of emotions to intellectual functioning in some research work as early as in Thorndike (1921). Hochschild's (1983) confirmed the significant role of emotions in organizations. The term of emotional intelligence (EI) did not receive academic attention in the mainstream psychology until the early 1990s. Studies such as Mayer et al (1990); Salovey and Mayer (1990); Diggins (2004) have extended it into the field of management. It should be pointed out that despite its popularity of EI as a research topic, there is very little agreement over whether EI represents a cognitive ability for processing emotional stimuli, or attributes of personality such as integrity and character, or some facilities for adapting to challenging situations (Matthews et al 2004). Davies et al. (1998) argued that EI is not intelligence in the same sense as IQ and they suggested that EI should be studied as a group of personality traits. In the light, some scholars go further to argue that there is no way to prove the existence of EI since "a thorough search of the scientific literature failed to provide any studies which demonstrated the criterion-related validity of emotional intelligence for any specific occupational area" (Robertson and Smith 2001: p.443). Bar-On (1997) characterized EI as "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (p.232). Goleman (1995)'s definition on EI represents all positive qualities that are *not IQ*. As Goleman (1995; 1998)

used EI to describe certain abilities that are found in excellent employees in business contexts, his view has been widely accepted (Matthews 2004).

These abilities entailed in EI were summarized in Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) as the verbal and nonverbal abilities that ‘enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own, and others, emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures’ (p.72); in Mayer and Salovey (1997) as one’s ability to reason about emotions, own emotions and others emotions; in Zeidner, Matthews and Roberts (2004) as the abilities of ‘appraisal and expression of emotions, assimilation of emotions in thoughts, understanding emotion, and the regulation and management of emotions’ (p.372); and in Matthews (2004) as three sets of abilities: the ability to accurately perceive, appraise, and express emotions; the ability to access or generate feelings that facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

There is another debate in the literature about what represents the components or areas of EI. Studies such as Goleman (1998; 2001) and Boyatzis, Goleman, and Rhee (2000) identify the following primary components of EI: awareness of emotions in self; awareness of emotions in others; management of emotions in self; management of emotions in others. However, Zeidner, Matthews and Roberts (2004) critique that while this analysis suggests some fields of inquiry, “it does not identify a unifying common element to the different components. Furthermore, this conceptualisation does not tell us how to distinguish EI from other distinct abilities and personality traits that may influence recognition and regulation of emotions (e.g. trait anxiety, coping dispositions)” (p.373).

Nevertheless, despite the continuing debates in EI, there has been development in the models used to operationalise the concepts. Kerr et al. (2006) and Perez et al. (2013) pointed out some main models of EI in the existing literature, which include: the multifactor emotional intelligence scale (MEIS: Mayer et al.. 1999); the Mayer Salovey Caruso emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT: Mayer et al. 2000); the emotional competency inventory (ECI: Goleman 1998); the emotional-quotient inventory (EQ-I: Bar-On 1997); the EI quotient (EIQ: Dulewicz and Higgs 2000); the emotional intelligence test

(SREIT: Schutte et al. 1998); the Swinburne emotional intelligence test (SUEIT/Genos EI Assessment: Palmer and Stough 2001); the trait meta mood scale (TMMS: Salovey et al. 1995); the workgroup emotional intelligence profile (WEIP: Jordan et al. 2002), the emotional intelligence self-regulation scale (EISRS; Martinez-Pons, 2000) and more. Among them, Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong and Law, 2002) is a measurement that have received a great amount of attention (e.g. Perez et al 2013; Karim 2010). One advantage of WLEIS is that it comprises 16 items, compared to EQ-i of 133 items, MSCEIT of 141 items for instance, and it is easy for use in management research. It measures four dimensions of EI, understanding self, understanding others, use of emotions, and regulation of emotions. WLEIS is a self-report measure of EI containing only 16 items and has been praised in the literature as ‘having good internal consistency reliabilites of the measures’ (Perez et al 2013 p: 136). Also, since WLEIS is developed for Chinese respondents (Wong et al. 2007) and the present study is to investigate the EI of the Chinese employees, WLEIS was adopted.

### **EI and its antecedents**

Age has been recognised to be positively associated with EI (Mayer and Salovy 1997; Goleman 1998; Fariselli et al 2006). Fariselli, Ghini and Freedman (2006) particularly examined the relationship between age and EI. Their conclusion is that EI did increase with age. The advantage that age offers can be exhibited in the area of older people knowing their own feeling better and knowing better how to control their feelings in emotion-charged situations, supporting the argument in Goleman (1998). In the Chinese culture, when it comes to age and wisdom dominated by controlling emotions, it is believed that ‘older ginger is more spicy’. Therefore we propose the following hypotese:

**H1:** Older Chinese employees have higher EI.

In general, employees who have worked in an organisation longer have found ways to adjust their emotions, or otherwise they would have left the organisation. The significance of EI, either being a trait or abilities, is that eventually all employees need to learn to cope with their emotions at work if they want to stay employed. Therefore, in the same light, we hypothesize:

**H2:** Those Chinese employees with longer duration tend to have higher EI.

Another question that motivates a myriad of researchers is whether there are gender differences in EI. Goleman (1998) claimed that men and women are equally able to increase their emotional intelligence. Kahlili (2011) researched non-Western people in Malaysia and found no significant difference between men and women's EI. Stein (2006) investigated the gender difference on the different dimensions of EI and found that women tended to over-perform mean on empathy and social competence while men were better on stress tolerance and self-confidence. In a traditional Chinese society, women were expected to work at home while their men bring in income. The republican mentality that swept China since 1911 by promoting 'three principles of people' has enabled women to be exposed in a social and economic spotlight as much as men. While agreeing with Goleman (1998), we believe Chinese men and women should have equal abilities to acquire and improve their EI. Hence we hypothesise:

**H3:** There is no gender difference in EI of Chinese employees.

As early as in 1962, Fleishman and Harris (1962) noted that competent leaders were able to establish mutual trust, respect and close relationships with other members. In Fariselli, Ghini and Freedman (2006) such a statement is also evidenced, EI is very much important for leaders at the workplace. The more that managers have to deal with people and emotions, the higher their EI scores (Goleman 1998). Goleman's (1998) reasoning is on the higher level a manager is working at, the more they need to deal with people within and outside the organisation, which requires them having higher EI. The Chinese wisdom about the impact of the managerial position is that those 'senior and sophisticated' people tend to be 'experienced, tactful, diplomatic and slippery'. Therefore the same assumption would hold true in a Chinese context. We therefore hypothesize:

**H4:** Chinese employees in higher managerial positions have higher EI.

The general agreement in the literature about the impact of sectors is that employees working in those sectors where they need to deal with lots of people tend to have higher EI (Nikolaou and Tsousis 2002; Fariselli, Ghini and Freedman 2006). For example, in a Greek study conducted by Nikolaou and

Tsaousis (2002) in the sector of mental health, it is found that employees possess higher EI compared with those in other sectors. The advantage is higher EI helps the health staff members endure less stress in such a people-oriented workplace. This supports the theory in which those employees with higher EI benefit from being able to regulate their emotions such as calming down (Wong and Law 2002). In China, public workers are dealing with lots of red tapes as well as rather complicated interpersonal relations as Guanxi has been heavily documented in the literature (e.g. Luo 1997). Consequently they have to be able to control their emotions or they will unlikely enjoy their jobs. Therefore, we hypothesise:

**H5:** Chinese employees working in public sectors have higher EI than those working in private sectors.

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

A total of 1221 managers working and living in the city of Dalian participated in the study. It took 3 months to complete data collection from March to April 2014. The researchers used the MBA and MPA alumni members of a national university in Dalian as the gate keepers to gain access to the organisations they worked in. Due to missing data, only 1066 questionnaires are usable, which accounted for 82% to the total participation. A detailed demographic analysis of the participants is presented in Table 1.

### **Measures and the questionnaire**

Emotional intelligence was measured by using Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong and Law 2002), in which there are 16 questions measuring four dimensions. The questionnaire was originally designed in English and then was translated by one bi-lingual researcher into Chinese. A back translation was done by another bi-lingual researcher to confirm the consistency of the two versions. Age, gender, managerial levels, professions, duration and sectors were included in the questionnaire.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarised in Table 1. It needs to be stressed that the total percentage of employees working in the public sectors is 65.9%. Among them, 22.6% of them worked in the government as civil servants. 24% participants worked in the public sectors (excluding state-owned enterprises) such as education, science and technology, cultural and health services. 18.9% of them worked in the state-owned enterprises. 19.9% of them worked in 'Others', which was referred to those who are entrepreneurs and those who work in foreign-owned or collective enterprises in China.

Data was examined over the issues of abnormality and outliers. Neither of them was detected. Exploratory factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation methods was performed on emotional intelligence. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy indicator is .870 at the significance level of .000. Once confirmed by the tests, the 16 questions was categorised into four factors, with four questions in each factor. Such findings support the studies of Karim (2010). The four factors have Eigen values of 5.60, 1.97, 1.74, and 1.43 respectively, and explained 35.02%, 12.29%, 10.86%, and 8.91% variance, which in total accounted for 67.08%. The reliability test of Cronbach  $\alpha$ 's were .881, .804, .830, and .807 respectively, all above the recommended values with high reliability. Such results support Karim (2010)'s analysis. Therefore, we were pleased to proceed by using the sum of the four items that were confirmed in each factor to calculate the four dimensions, namely Self Emotions Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotions Appraisal (OEA), Use of Own Emotions (UOE) and Regulate Own Emotions (ROE) as used in Karim (2010). Also one overall EI score was obtained by using the sum of the four factors. In the next stage, multi-factorial ANOVA and the post hoc analysis was performed to examine the differences between different groups of participants. Results are presented in Table 3.

The results are so limited that we could not conclude that age is an advantage among the Chinese employees, although Mayer and Salovy (1997) confirmed in their study that older people possess higher EI, and so did Fariselli et al (2006) and Goleman (1998). To test H1, we did not have



consistent results showing older people have higher EI than younger people. Specifically, we only had the group of 51 years of age and above who showed higher overall EI than two groups: the group of 30 years of age and below and the group of 31-40 years of age. There is no difference between the groups of 30 years of age and below versus 31-40 years of age. Therefore, we could only conclude that the EI of the Chinese employees were higher once they reached 51 years of age and above.

Regarding H2, we have found no statistical evidence of a difference. There is no different in the EI of the Chinese female and male employees. This supports Goleman (1998)'s argument on men and women have equal ability to grow their EI.

On the effect of duration in H2, those Chinese employees who had worked in their organisations for 7-9 years possess higher EI scores than their counterparts who had worked in the organisation for less than one year. On the effect of education, those employees with masters and above degrees have higher overall EI scores than those who only attended junior high school.

Regarding H3, employees working in the public sectors including civil servants and employees in other public organisations such as health officers, possess higher EI than employees working in the private sectors. Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2009) found that high levels of emotional intelligence mitigate negative attitudes at workplace, such as burnout, exit intentions, and negligent behaviour. However, due to the nature of the public sector job, public workers are more likely to use tactics and politics at work regardless of their emotional intelligence level.

H4 is confirmed partially. The Chinese employees at a high management level possess higher EI scores than the junior-level employees; and the medium-level managers have higher EI scores than the junior-level employees. There is no evidence on employees at a high managerial level have higher EI than middle-level managers. Such a finding is partly supportive of Diggins (2004) in which managers need to be aware of their own as well as others emotional intelligence in effectively dealing with everyday life.

In the next stage, the four dimensions of EI, namely self emotions appraisal, others emotions appraisal, use of emotions and regulate own emotions, are analysed together with Age, Gender,

Profession, Duration, Education and Managerial levels by using MANOVA with the four dimensions of EI identified in the earlier stage being the dependent variables. Results are presented in Table 4. Interesting findings are: Age has significant effect on SEA (self emotions appraisal). The older the Chinese employees are, the more they can understand their own emotions. Gender has significant effect on OEA (others' emotions appraisal). It is the female Chinese employees who are doing better than their male counterparts in understanding others emotions. Stein (2007) had similar findings in which women were better than their male counterparts on empathy and social responsibility. Gender and Education have an interactive effect on UOE (use of own emotions). Gender, Profession and Managerial Levels have an interactive effect on ROE (regulate own emotions), and Age, Profession, Duration and Managerial levels have an interactive effect on UOE (use of own emotions).

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Table 1 Demographics of the Participants

<b>Variables</b>						<b>Total</b>
<b>Age</b>	30 and below	31-40	41-50	Above 51		
	39.3	34.2	18.6	7.9		100%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	Female				
	50.5	49.5				100%
<b>Profession</b>	Civil servant	Other Public sectors	State-owned enterprises	Foreign-owned and private	Others	
	21.5	24.0	19.9	15.2	19.5	100%
<b>Duration</b>	Less than one year	1-3 years	4-6 years	7-9 years	Above 10 years	
	9.6	28.7	22.0	12.6	27.1	100%
<b>Education</b>	Junior high school and below	Senior high school and lower cert	Higher cert	Degree	Master's and above	
	4.2	11.2	20.8	49.7	14.2	100%
<b>Managerial level</b>	Lower level	Middle level	Higher level			
	60.5	32.1	7.4			100%

Table 2 Factor analysis (Pattern Matrix)

	<b>ROE</b>	<b>UOE</b>	<b>SEA</b>	<b>OEA</b>
	.886			
	.871			
	.848			
	.806			

		.823		
		.809		
		.771		
		.750		
			.857	
			.841	
			.823	
			.710	
				.835
				.803
				.758
				.713
Eigen value	5.60	1.97	1.74	1.43
% of variance	35.02	12.29	10.86	8.91
Crobach $\alpha$	.881	.804	.830	.807
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy			.870***	

a. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation

Table 3 ANOVA

Variables	F	Post Hoc	Turkey HSD
Age	7.40***	Below 30 vs above 51	-6.83***
		31-40 vs above 51	-5.08**
Gender	1.36	-	
Profession	4.10*	-	



(public vs private)			
Duration	3.230*	Less than one year vs 7-9 years	-4.90*
Education	2.186	Below junior high vs master and above	-6.52*
Managerial levels	10.412***	Junior level vs middle level	-3.03**
		Junior level vs higher level	-5.38**

\*\*\*p < .000 \*\* p < .01 \*p < .05

Table 4 MANOVA of the Four Dimensions of EI

Independent variable(s) – Dependent variables	F
Age – SEA	3.870**
Gender - OEA	3.952*
Gender * Education - UOE	3.052*
Gender * Managerial Level * Profession - ROE	3.779*
Age * Profession * Education * Managerial level - UOE	3.985*

\*\* p < .01 \* p < .05