

Globethics Repository



Essay: Chinese Female Entrepreneurs Versus the Social Responsibility of Sustainable Development

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Shi, Qingqi
Publisher	American Scholars Press, Inc.
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-14 05:06:41
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/173702

ESSAY: CHINESE FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS VERSUS THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Qingqi Shi

China Association of Women Entrepreneurs, Beijing, China

Abstract: An enterprise's primary responsibility is enabling the enterprise itself, the local community, the region, and even the world community to pursue sustainable development. Each enterprise acts as a member of the world community. Once humanity lacks "sustainable resources" and a healthy environment, no enterprise will be able to develop or survive. Therefore, an enterprise must undertake its own responsibilities in economic, social, and environmental terms and fulfill its social responsibilities. Most Chinese female entrepreneurs, from the first time they stepped into the business world, have had to overcome a thicket of problems and compete against rivals of great competence. Women entrepreneurs must, also, shoulder such heavy tasks as saving resources, environmental protection, upgrading of the industrial mix, job placement, and social security in spite of great fluctuations in the wake of industrial restructuring initiatives. In the past 20-odd years since China's adoption of her world-acclaimed policy of opening and reform, Chinese female entrepreneurs have made great efforts, received generous support from the government and society, undertaken the task of pursuing sustainable development, and accumulated a great deal of valuable experience.

Keywords: enterprise, social responsibility, female entrepreneurs, sustainable development

An enterprise's primary responsibility is enabling the enterprise itself, the local community, the region and even the entire world community to pursue sustainable development. Each enterprise acts as a member of the world community. Once humanity lacks "sustainable resources" and a healthy environment, no enterprise will be able to develop or survive. Therefore, an enterprise must undertake its own responsibilities in economic, social, and environmental terms to fulfill its social responsibilities. Otherwise, an enterprise will gradually lose its vitality and, even, sink into a disadvantaged position when unaware of the necessity of corporate social responsibilities.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENTERPRISES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Enterprises' Intrinsic Role in the Pursuit of Sustainable Development

Enterprises create wealth, pay taxes to national governments, and provide job opportunities, thus contributing to the advancement of humanity. In light of today's circumstances in China, enterprises constitute a major force that helps build up a well-off society in a well-rounded way in order to realize a

new form of industrialization. Economically speaking, enterprises are the microcosmic foundation and serve as the cells of the larger, national economy. Besides, enterprises are the subjects of economic growth and technological advancement. Speaking from the perspective of sociology, enterprises shall, in the capacity of social citizens, bear the social responsibility of pursuing sustainable development. Furthermore, each enterprise is like a value chain that relates to the interests of a series of people living in the society. The enterprise brings value to its employees as well as those people living in its local community, city, and region. Therefore, speaking in spatial terms, a successful enterprise propels the development of many regions and many people.

According to the major aspects of sustainable development determined in the Johannesburg Conference, all national governments on the earth bear joint responsibility for water, energy, healthcare, agriculture, and biological diversity. However, when it comes to promoting sustainable development in all these domains, enterprises need to be mobilized in order to take an active part in the pursuit of sustainable development. In other words, it is necessary for enterprises, with support granted by government, to operate in an industrialized and market-oriented manner that embraces sustainable development. In this new economy, each enterprise is also like a big school, as a corporate culture requires people to constantly learn new knowledge and create new things. Ultimately, as evident from globalization and the characteristics of this new economic era, today's world features development of all parties in company with one another.

Competing tit-for-tat becomes an irrelevant business method. Instead, a newly emerging mode of corporate operations features co-existence, mutual assistance, and the phenomenon of the strong helping the weak. This method leads to more intelligent and efficient environmental resource management and also establishes an important foundation for constructing a new, market-oriented, socialized system. Only by using this new business method does it become possible to construct a new scene characterized by harmony amongst enterprises, harmony between enterprises and society, and harmony between humans and nature. It thus follows that enterprises occupy an important position and also play an indispensable role in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Enterprises' Negative Influences in the Pursuit of Sustainable Development

As some enterprises observe that the mode of production and consumption of the rich prevail in the world, some enterprises fling caution to the winds by increasing their production volumes. These enterprises may also advocate modes of consumption that lead to wasted resources. Enterprises' ineffective use of resources has, thus, faced opposition by the entire world. Meanwhile, pollutants generated by enterprises have caused the health conditions of humans to deteriorate and decreased biological diversification. According to a report released by the UN in 2006, pollution of indoor and outdoor air has caused over 3 million persons, mostly women and children, to die too early. In addition, enterprises' production and developments have resulted in the exhaustion of non-recyclable resources. The current efforts to utilize recyclable resources, clean energy, and natural resources necessary to human survival, such as drinkable water, are far from enough. Especially of note is the fact that poverty is the core issue in regard to sustainable development. With the tide of globalization and growth of the new economy, a few consortiums in developed countries grasp an increasing amount of humankind's wealth. Very serious competitive forces impede the entry of products and services of developing

countries (and especially under-developed countries) into the world market. These economic phenomena result in a relative surplus of products and low level of service skills in developing countries, causing the poor to become poorer and the rich to become even richer.

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF ENTERPRISES

Enterprises shall bear the following social responsibilities in the pursuit of sustainable development:

1. Enterprises must constantly pursue innovation, enhance their productivity, foster new points of economic growth, and keep up with the latest economic developments resulting from globalization. Meanwhile, enterprises shall establish a good reputation, help propel the sustainable development of China's economy, pay more taxes to national governments, and create more job opportunities for society, (especially for women) to alleviate or eliminate the worldwide prevalence of poverty.

2. Enterprises shall meet the requirements of environmental protection, resource conservation, and stewardship while emphasizing survival and sustainable development of humankind in all stages. Important considerations must be given to safeguard and develop education, scientific research, design, manufacturing, transportation, sales, and after-sales service. Other responsibilities include taking good care of the workforce, creating production and operating environments that meet national and international standards, and working to enable workers and staff members to enjoy adequate social security services. Enterprises shall pursue and advocate efficient modes of production and consumption that are conducive for sustainable development. They should use their best endeavors to meet consumers' rational demands. Enterprises should also strive to reduce their use of energy and materials, as well as provide low-cost, non-polluting, high-quality, and eco-friendly products and services.

3. It is required to pay extra heed to those major domains that relate to sustainable development determined in the Johannesburg Conference, such as energy, water, healthcare, agriculture, and biological diversity. Discussion of these issues brings into full play the distinctive advantages of entrepreneurs and mobilizes them to help develop operations in an industrialized and market-oriented manner, and intensify the efforts in research and development of products and services while considering intellectual property rights. Entrepreneurs paying attention to environmental preservation accelerate the transformation of scientific and technological results into productive forces, and, meanwhile, learn and usher in state-of-the-art technologies, seek partners worldwide, and emphasize sustainability.

4. In the new era of economic globalization, enterprises shall seek common development while co-existing with others, avoiding waste of resources as a result of destructive rivalry and constructing harmony among enterprises, society, and the world. Meanwhile, all enterprises shall strive to become "schools" because efficient and innovative thinking and a high caliber of human talents are the key elements for the pursuit of sustainable development. Therefore, entrepreneurs shall intensify their efforts in educating and training their workers and staff members. Entrepreneurs should also be aware of what is going on in the world, as well as focusing on enhancing their personal competitiveness. This keen focus on human resources and world current events will develop managers in technical, operational, and managerial fields for good, sustainable development.

5. Elimination of poverty remains the core task of sustainable development. Entrepreneurs shall pay close attention to the need of poverty elimination, and endeavor to raise to new heights humanity's

standard of living, conditions of health, levels of education, and overall development. In order to create a bright future for their offspring, entrepreneurs need to take an active part in trans-regional and cross-cultural communications and cooperation, pursue sharing and sustainable development of economic and social resources, and protect the common homestead of humanity – the earth.

In sum, in today's world featuring extreme inequalities in both economic and social terms, enterprises in all countries, big or small and rich or poor, should actively follow the United Nations' "World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation." Enterprises should value the United Nations' "Agenda 21" in accordance with the principles of equality and fairness to realize the hope that the earth might allow us to reach the ideals of humankind.

The social responsibility of the above-said enterprises has enabled enterprises to enjoy a wider space in the course of pursuing sustainable development. On the other hand, enterprises have furnished themselves with an awareness of sustainable development and a sense of social responsibility. Enterprises' social awareness beneficially enhances the social images of enterprises as citizens in society and changes the general public's view of enterprises, thus making consumers willing to accept enterprises' products and services. Otherwise, enterprises do not develop into stronger companies. Therefore, enterprises are closely associated with sustainable development. In this way, even micro-enterprises might make heavy contributions to the pursuit of sustainable development.

CHINESE FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Different from their counterparts in developed countries, Chinese female entrepreneurs stepped onto the stage and have been seeking development in an era in which China underwent the middle phase of industrialization. At that time, developed world countries had long before gone through their respective phases of industrialization and post-industrialization and even embraced a new economic era. The negative influences brought forth by humanity's modern civilization accelerated consumption of resources, deteriorating pollution of natural environments, global warming, deserts' intrusion into mountains and grasslands, and a fast-growing population, have worked together to jeopardize the survival and development of humanity.

Unlike their counterparts in developed countries, Chinese female entrepreneurs working in the mid-phase of industrialization have had no opportunity to cause pollution in the course of industrialization and later work out solutions. Instead, very early in the process of industrialization, these women have needed and continue to need to measure up to the world's environmental standards at huge prices. Second, due to the tide of globalization, all players interact with the world market. Multinationals hailing from developed countries have managed, by virtue of their gigantic competitive forces, to occupy most of the Chinese market and the rest of the world market. In contrast, Chinese industrial products have remained in the dry tree in the market, which has directly given rise to a relative surplus of inferior Chinese industrial products.

This phenomenon has further impeded the integration of rural laborers into industrial sectors in China and has resulted in greater fluctuations in China during her course of industrial restructuring and upgrading. Third, with the tide of globalization and growth of the new economy, knowledge has been updated at an increasingly fast pace. Each and every enterprise must adapt itself to the latest market conditions to meet the demands of the world market. Often, this reorganization requires that women

entrepreneurs rethink the flow of corporate operations by means of information technology. Therefore, most Chinese female entrepreneurs have had to overcome a thicket of problems and compete against rivals of great competence from the rest of the world.

Women entrepreneurs have also had to shoulder such heavy tasks as resources saving, environmental protection, upgrading of the industrial mix, job placement, and social security in spite of great fluctuations in the wake of industrial restructuring initiatives. In the past 20-odd years since China's adoption of her world-acclaimed policy of opening and reform, Chinese female entrepreneurs have made great efforts, received generous support from the government and society, undertaken the task of pursuing sustainable development, and accumulated a great deal of valuable experience in this regard.

Chinese Female Entrepreneurs and the Natural Resources Environment

Female entrepreneurs have now stood at the forefront of sustainable development by means of transforming technologies and upgrading traditional industries. For example, the Haier Group succeeded in re-designing the flow of its corporate operations to catch up with the tide of globalization and the development of the new economy. A number of enterprises have now met world standards and China's national standards in regards to environmental protection. Some enterprises have made their technical standards measure up to world standards; some other enterprises have been producing products with China's unique competitive edges. For instance, the Haier Group and the Tasly Group are participating in the formulation of world standards in the industries in which they operate.

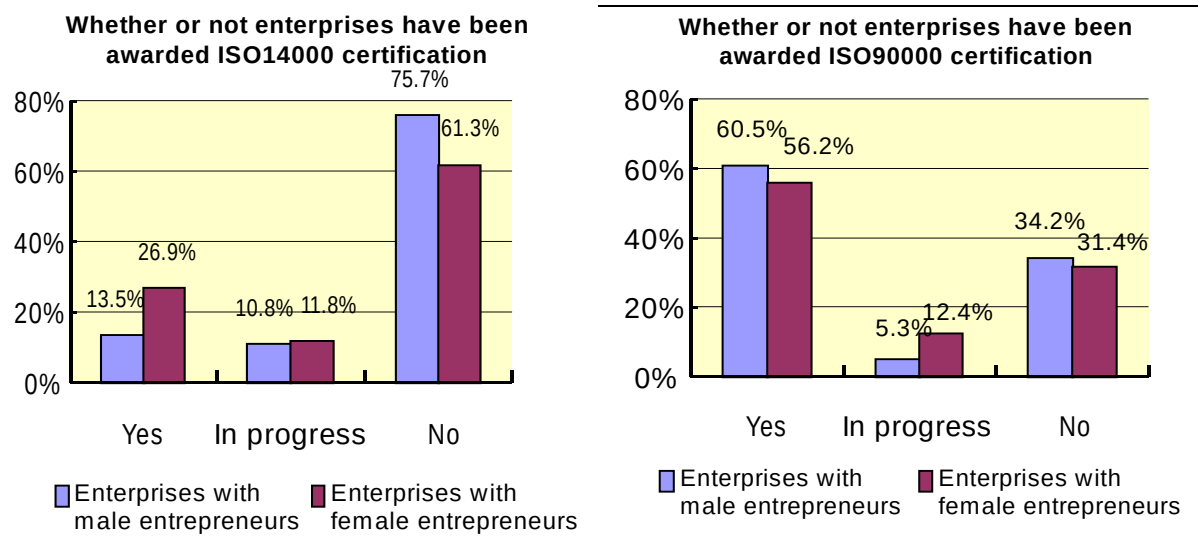


Figure 1. Endeavors made by Chinese enterprises led by female entrepreneurs in meeting world standards.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

Quite a few female entrepreneurs are working intensively to disseminate and apply eco-friendly energy strategies. Some of them use waste in energy production. To cite an example, the Liaoning Gongyuan Cement Group has utilized advanced technology to use solid waste, such as fly ash, tailings and ardealite

phosphogypsum, in energy production to help alleviate pollution of the natural environment.

Chinese Female Entrepreneurs and the Construction of New Rural Villages

The “three-dimensional rural issues” from 17th CPC have been among those key issues concerning China’s socio-economical development, poverty elimination, and holistic build-up of a prosperous, well-rounded society. In today’s China, agriculture still takes up a relatively huge percentage of China’s GDP. This indicates that Chinese female entrepreneurs may bring their own potentialities into play in the agricultural domain. In reality, Chinese female entrepreneurs have already made solid efforts in this domain, and achieved amazing effects.

China New Cooperation Group mobilized women to set up one-hundred stores in counties within China. These efforts not only promoted the emergence of small-sized enterprises led by women, but also helped construct a new distribution network for rural areas, which allows the enterprises to distribute their goods nationally. At present, the China Association of Women Entrepreneurs is expanding on this original project, which is titled “New Ventures by Female Entrepreneurs.” Another example of an extraordinary initiative of Chinese women entrepreneurs is the Shandong Rizhao Huatai Food Co., Ltd., a company regarded as a role-model exporter. Apart from helping local peasants get wealthy, this enterprise has enabled its aquatic products to measure up to the world’s advanced levels. This company’s products occupy overseas markets in Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia.

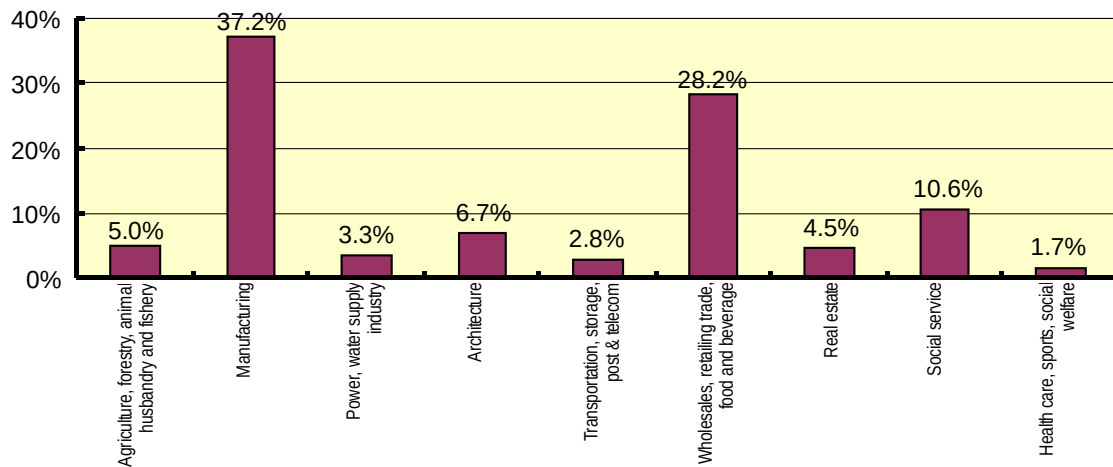
The Work of Female Entrepreneurs in Human Services

Many female entrepreneurs have been operating those enterprises engaged in such businesses as human life, healthcare, entertainment, beauty care, and education. Many female entrepreneurs work to improve the reproductive health of humans and care for the elderly, children, and women. Involved in this work of preserving and improving life, women enhance their personal qualities, image, and well being. Some people reckon that women can demonstrate their God-given advantages over men very clearly in these domains. For example, many people credit women as possessing the traits of tenderness, consideration, and conscientiousness, as well as great motherly love. Although female entrepreneurs have operated enterprises of different sizes and have varying personal qualifications, almost all entrepreneurs have kind hearts and dedicate themselves to the pursuit of sustainable development.

With the growth, upgrading, and restructuring of China’s economy, China’s service industry will grow even stronger. A majority of service sectors are rather suitable for women to embrace opportunities. As long as the government and general public grant women further support, certain women desirous of launching their own businesses or finding employment in service sectors are expected to contribute immeasurably to China’s pursuit of sustainable development in the years to come.

A Research Demonstration of Female Businesswomen’s Social Commitments

Female entrepreneurs work in diversified industrie. Female-led enterprises are engaged in all industries and trades within China. They are mainly in manufacturing (37.2%), wholesale, retail, trade, and catering industries (28.2%) and social services (10.6%) (see Figure 2).



Figures 2. Proportion of female-led-Chinese enterprises in various industries.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

Female entrepreneurs and the employment of women. Figure 3 shows that in large corporations of over 1,000 people in female led-enterprises, the female proportion of the workforce is 50% higher than male-led enterprises.

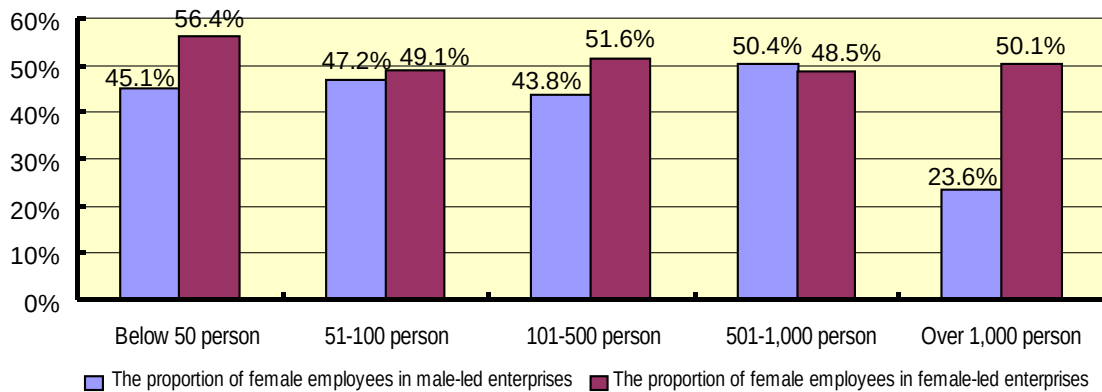


Figure 3. Comparison of the proportion of female employees in both male-led and female-led enterprises in 2005.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

Female entrepreneurs and the international market. In over 53% of female-led enterprises, exports account for over 30% of sales income.

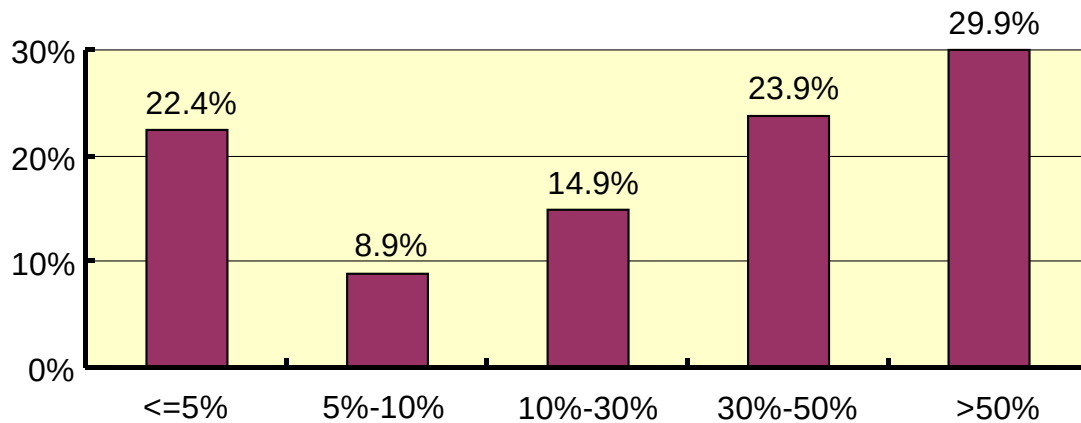
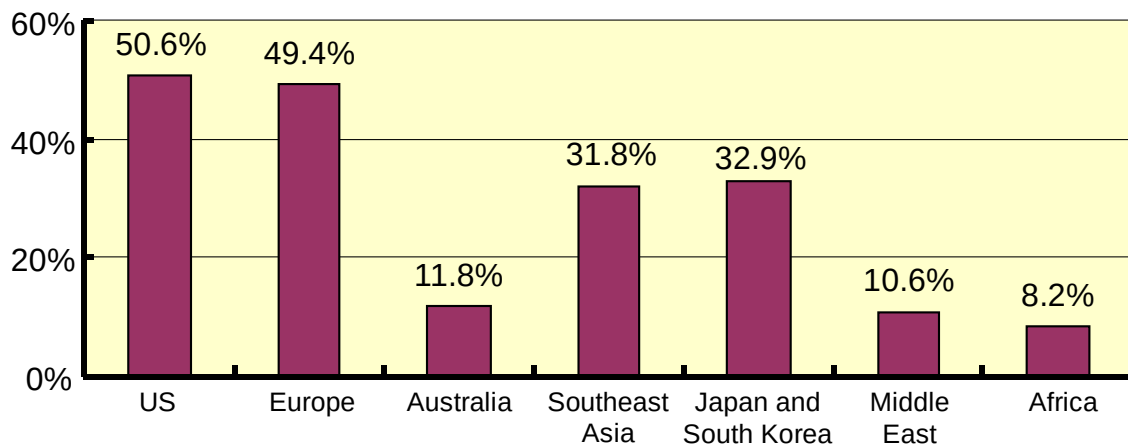


Figure 4. Proportion of exports in sales income in female-led enterprises.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

As displayed in Figure 5, America and Europe have become the main countries and regions where female-led enterprises export their products. Compared with 2003, the main exporting regions for China's female-led enterprises are not confined to Asia. Rather, America, Europe, and other developed countries have become Chinese women entrepreneurs' main trading partners.



Fi

Figure 5. Female-led enterprises main export destinations.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

Education Level of Female Entrepreneurs

Figure 6 shows that female entrepreneurs are slightly better educated than male entrepreneurs.

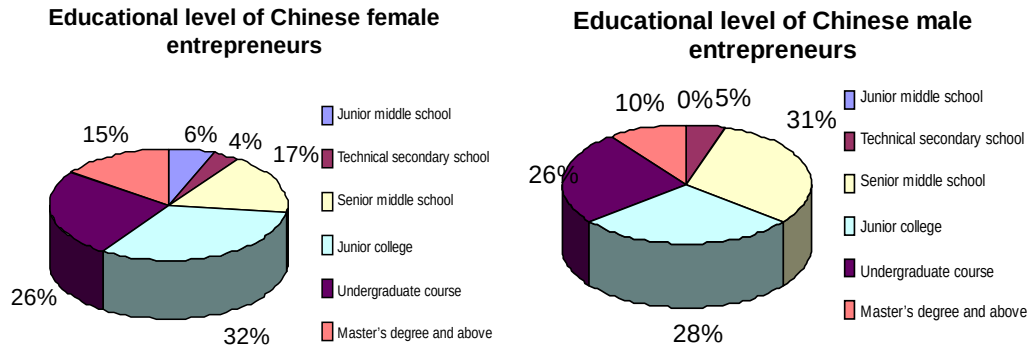


Figure 6. Gender comparison of educational level of Chinese entrepreneurs.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

The Developmental Trends of Female Entrepreneurs

Mirroring the investigation conducted in 2003, nearly 80% of female entrepreneurs are registered after 1995. After 1995, more and more female entrepreneurs started businesses in China. This growth trend continues today.

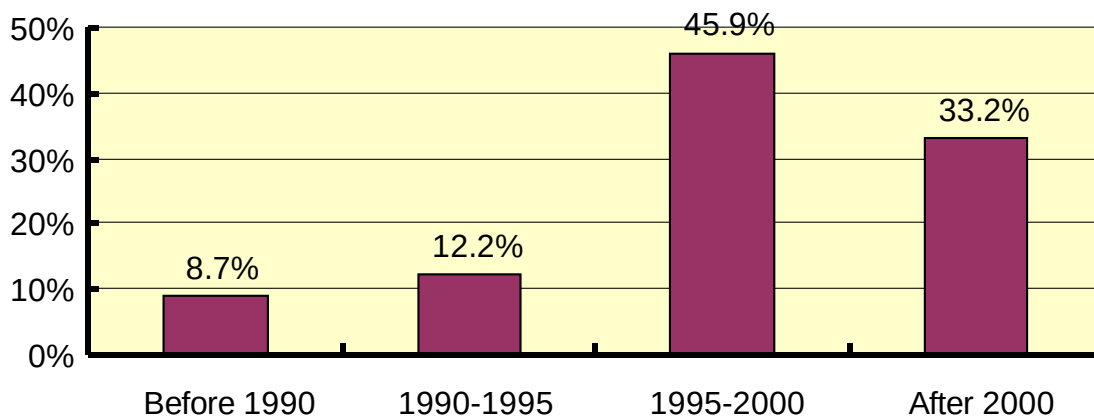


Figure 7. Categorization of female-led Chinese enterprises according to the time of incorporation.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

Female Entrepreneurs' Future-Oriented Approach

Most entrepreneurs have an optimistic attitude towards future enterprise development. Nearly 2/3 of female entrepreneurs are optimistic or very optimistic about the prospect of enterprise development in the future. More than 1/3 of entrepreneurs think the prospect is just so-so, and 4.3% of female entrepreneurs take a pessimistic or very pessimistic view of the future of enterprises.

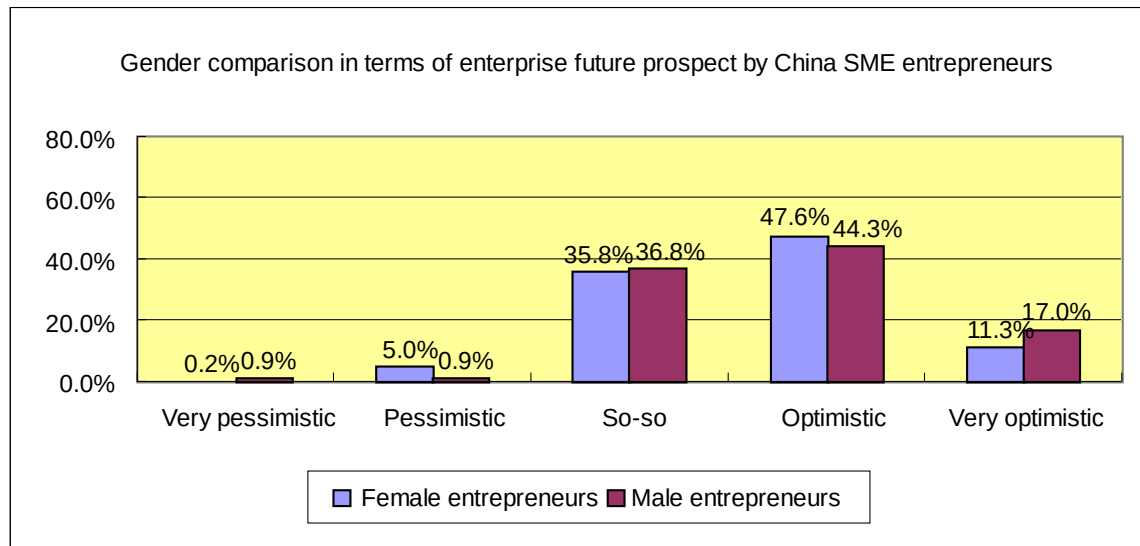


Figure 8. Gender comparison of entrepreneurs (in SMB) attitudes towards future enterprise development.

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

Female entrepreneurs' endeavors to conserve natural resources

Chinese enterprises have employed technologically backwards equipment and remained at relatively low levels in the industrial mix. Enterprises' adoption of immature technologies have caused the waste of resources (especially energy sources) and environmental pollution. Therefore, China has failed to accomplish her goal in terms of energy-saving, waste and emissions reduction under her 10th Five-Year-Long National Development Program. In 2006, the initial year of China's 11th Five-Year-Long National Development Program, China has failed, once again, to attain her goal in terms of energy saving, waste and emission reduction. In the final analysis, the coarse mode of economic growth stands as a principal barrier against China's move toward poverty elimination.

1. In 2006, CAWE fielded a sample survey of 120 Chinese enterprises led by female leaders, and reached some negative and discouraging findings. From 2001 to 2005, that is, the period of China's 10th Five-Year-Long National Development Program, 60.3% of the surveyed Chinese enterprises led by female leaders have registered a savings ratio of raw materials per unit of production that is below 10%. Among others, 45% of these surveyed female-led enterprises have not only failed to save raw materials, but also made heavier input in each unit of production, thus resulting in the waste of raw materials.

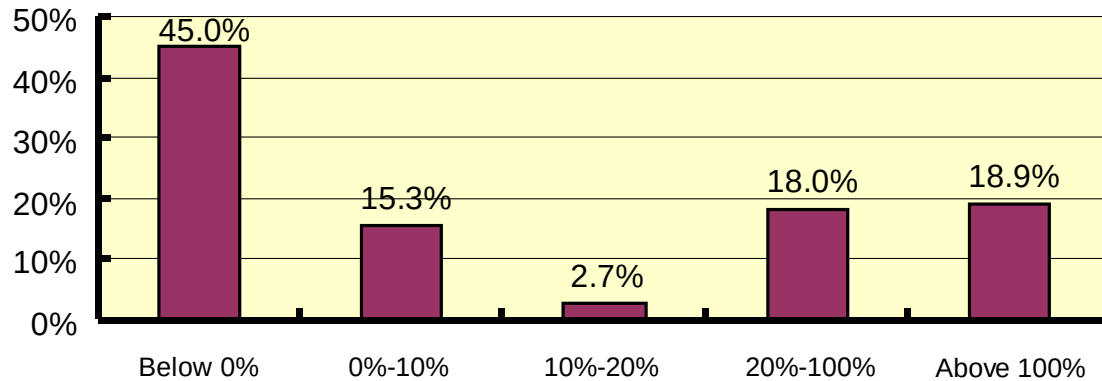


Figure 9. Saving ratio of raw materials in Chinese enterprises led by female leaders (2000-2005).

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

2. Meanwhile, CAWE has conducted an energy saving survey with these same 120 female-led enterprises. Figure 10 shows the findings of this survey. As shown in Figure 10, during the period of China's 10th Five-Year-Long National Development Program, 56% of surveyed enterprises have failed to meet the energy-saving requirement (i.e. a 20% reduction in energy consumption per unit of production); 42% of these enterprises have seen their efficiency in energy utilization drop, thus increasing the waste of energy resources.

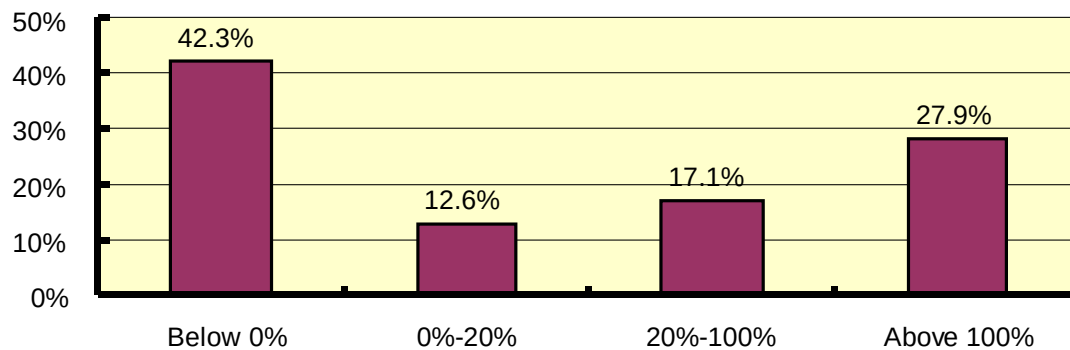


Figure 10. Energy saving practices of Chinese enterprises led by female leaders (2000-2005)

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

3. The findings of the survey also indicate that the emission reduction movement in the surveyed Chinese enterprises reflects the situation of Chinese enterprises as a whole and show a failure in meeting the national requirement. Figure 11 sets out the findings of a sample survey given to female-led enterprises. The survey examined the businesses' efforts to reduce their emissions (including water, gas, and solid wastes). One group of 53 companies was selected for an analysis of emitted water waste, 37 enterprises were selected for an analysis of waste gas, and 40 companies selected for an analysis of solid waste levels. According to the findings, 57%, 77%, and 66% of these surveyed Chinese enterprises led

by female leaders have reached only a less-than-10% reduction in their emissions (including waste water, waste gas, and solid wastes.) In fact, some of the surveyed Chinese enterprises led by female leaders have not only failed to reduce their emissions of the three types of pollution mentioned, but have increased their emissions. To be more specific, 18.9%, 54.3% and 41.4% of these surveyed enterprises led by female leaders have increased their emission of water, gas, and solid wastes. In particular, a rather high percentage of these surveyed enterprises have increased their emissions in waste gas and solid wastes.

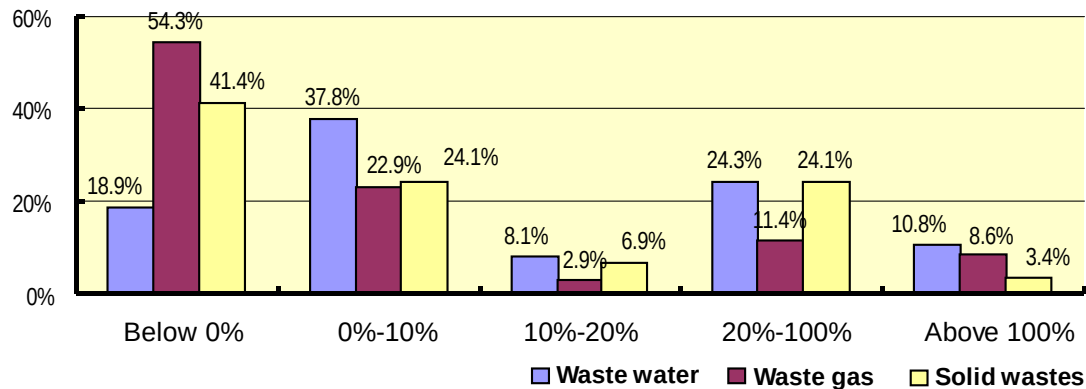


Figure 11. Reductions of Chinese enterprises led by female leaders in three wastes (2000-2005).

Source: Findings of a survey fielded by the Research and Consultation Center of China Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 2006.

In 2002, a delegation of 16 Chinese female entrepreneurs attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, and were interviewed by the former Chinese premier, Zhu Rongji. After this delegation returned to China, the China Association of Women Entrepreneurs organized the International Forum on Sustainable Development and Chinese Female Entrepreneurs. During this forum, the 16 representative Chinese female entrepreneurs who had attended the Johannesburg Conference voiced a proposal to the business circle with regard to the necessity of enterprises' taking prompt actions to pursue sustainable development. At the moment, efforts are being made in this regard.