

Gender Disparity and Determinants of Job Satisfaction among Expat Professionals in Mainland China

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Introduction

Job satisfaction, defined as the degree to which employees have a positive emotional orientation toward their employment (Price, 2001), is crucial for immigrants not only for job performance and occupational stability but also for psychological well-being and migration intentions (Wang and Jing, 2018; Bastida et al., 2023).

Gender differences in job satisfaction among immigrants have been widely observed in western developed countries, albeit with inconsistent conclusions. In mid-to-high-end labor markets, some studies suggest that women face more severe occupational downgrading, discrimination, or prejudice, leading to greater interpersonal and promotional barriers and consequently lower job satisfaction (Smith and Plant, 1982; Remennick, 2005; Ghosh et al., 2021). Conversely, other studies propose a gender-job satisfaction paradox, where despite women's disadvantaged positions, their lower expectations and fewer job opportunities result in higher job satisfaction compared to men (Kaiser, 2007; Bijedić et al., 2019). Some research indicates no significant gender differences in certain professional fields.

In China's domestic labor market, relevant studies have not identified significant gender differences in job satisfaction (Chen and Tao, 2011; Xu and Qi, 2016). However, research on job satisfaction and its gender differences among expat professionals in China remains scarce. Since China's reform and opening-up, the country has progressively opened its labor market to foreigners and established a tiered point-based entry system. Expat professionals constitute the majority of immigrants in China, as a highly skilled selective group, mainly comprising high-end talents and professional, especially in major eastern cities.

Given China's early stage of international immigration, its immigration system and policies remain incomplete, leading to low transition rates from employment to immigrant status among expat professionals. The significant cultural differences between China and Western countries result in distinct employment experiences, social adaptation challenges, and job satisfaction for expatriates. Research indicates that expats in China primarily encounter issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited career development opportunities (Zhou, 2023). This paper utilizes 2023 data to explore job satisfaction and its gender differences among expat professionals in China.

Theoretical Framework

Factors influencing the job satisfaction of expat employees include work-related aspects such as job expectations, work environment, performance, and interpersonal interactions; social adaptation factors; and sociodemographic characteristics like gender, age, ethnicity, and race (Wadsworth et al., 2007; Moyes et al., 2007; Townsend et al., 2014; Wang and Jing, 2018).

Gender differences in job satisfaction are explained by variations in work experiences/outputs and social adaptation (mediating effect), as well as differences in the impact of these factors on job satisfaction across genders (moderating effect). The analytical framework is depicted in Figure 1.

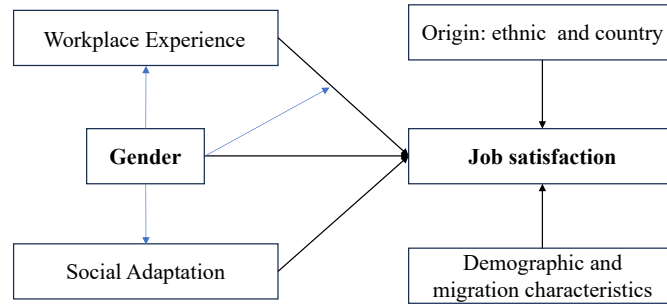


Fig1. Explanation Framework for Job Satisfaction and Gender Disparity Among Expat Professionals

Data and Methods

The data used is from a survey conducted by the Xi'an Jiaotong University team between April and October 2023, in Guangzhou and Shenzhen—two major southern Chinese cities with high foreign national concentrations. The survey targeted foreign nationals with valid Category A or B work permits who had been working in these cities for over three months, using Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS). The sample size was 512, with 254 respondents from Shenzhen and 258 from Guangzhou, with 67.22% of respondents from developed countries. RDS sampling passed convergence tests for gender, Chinese origin, and education, and the data were weighted by gender.

Job satisfaction, the dependent variable, was measured using scores from three 5-point Likert scale statements: "I am basically satisfied with my current job," "If I can choose again, I will still choose my current job," and "My current job is basically meeting my expectations." Factor loadings exceeded 0.75, with KMO value at 0.66, Cronbach's Alpha at 0.70, and a significant Bartlett test of sphericity. The score range was 1-5, with a median of 4. Due to non-normal distribution, a generalized linear model was used for regression analysis.

To test the determinants of job satisfaction, stepwise regression was conducted. Model 1 included gender only. Models 2-4 sequentially incorporated sociodemographic characteristics, workplace factors, and social adaptation factors. All the factors are included in Model 5. Following identification of gender disparities, the mediating effects of workplace and social adaptation factors was tested by three-step test approach. Subsequently, Models 6 and 7 introduced interaction terms between workplace factors and gender based on Models 3 and 5 to assess moderating effects.

Results

Gender disparity and determinants of job satisfaction

In Table 1, there is significant gender difference in job satisfaction among expatriate professionals in China, with female expatriates reporting lower job satisfaction than males. Meanwhile, workplace experience and social adaptation significantly influence job satisfaction. Expats in foreign-owned companies report lower satisfaction compared to those in Chinese-owned enterprises and institutions. Expats perceiving better career opportunities than their Chinese colleagues exhibit higher job satisfaction, while perceived unfair treatment

towards foreigners reduces it. While salary levels and interpersonal workplace relationships do not significantly impact job satisfaction. In terms of social adaptation, a larger friend network in China significantly enhances expats' job satisfaction.

Table1: Regression results of job satisfaction: Coefficient (SE)

Generalized Linear Models	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5
Workplace Experience					
<i>Type of affiliation (Chinese Company or Others as Ref)</i>					
<i>Foreign-owned companies</i>			-0.102 ⁺		-0.101 ⁺
<i>Income (Monthly)</i>			0.066		0.064
<i>Perception of equal opportunity (Equal to or less than as Ref)</i>					
<i>Better than</i>			0.150 [*]		0.148 [*]
<i>Interpersonal relationship in workplace</i>			-0.052		-0.051
<i>Negative attitude in work palace</i>			-0.141 ^{**}		-0.131 ^{**}
Social Adaptation					
<i>Number of friends in China</i>				0.031 ^{**}	0.029 ^{**}
<i>Proportion of Chinese friends</i>				-0.052	-0.055
<i>Chinese fluency (Self-reported)</i>				-0.123 ^{***}	-0.039
Female	-0.224 ^{***}	-0.218 ^{***}	-0.204 ^{***}	-0.190 ^{***}	-0.181 ^{***}
_cons	4.215 ^{***}	4.207 ^{***}	4.470 ^{***}	4.350 ^{***}	4.444 ^{***}
N	501	501	501	500	500

Notes: + p < 0.10* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Age, marriage, education, Chinese ethnic and developing/developed countries are also controlled in model1- model5.

The explanation of gender disparity: Mediation effect analysis

Results in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that only the mediating effect of the friend network size is significant.

Female expats' smaller networks lead to lower job satisfaction, might due to insufficient emotional, social, and material support.

Table2: The Impact of Gender on Mediator Variables: Coefficient (SE)

	Affiliation (Logit)	Income (oLogit)	Perception of equal opportunity (Logit)	Interpersonal relationship (oLogit)
Female	0.142	-0.485 [*]	-0.33	0.04
	Negative Attitudes (oLogit)	Num. of friends (OLS)	Proportion of Chinese friends (OLS)	Chinese fluency (oLogit)
Female	-0.11	-0.639 ^{**}	-0.022	0.177

Notes: + p < 0.10* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Age, marriage, education, Chinese ethnic and developing/developed countries are also controlled.

Table3: Test results of direct and indirect effects of gender on job satisfaction: Coefficient (SE)

	Effects	Confidence interval
Direct Effect of Gender in Model 3	-0.204 ^{***}	(-0.2999894 , -0.1089894)
Indirect Effect: Income	-0.032	(-0.1132923 , 0.0495665)
Total Effect of Gender in Model3	-0.236^{**}	(-0.3716297 , -0.101075)

Direct Effect of Gender in Model4	-0.190***	(-0.2844848 , -0.0950836)
Indirect Effect: Number of friends in China	0.020+	(-0.0395489 , 0.0005435)
Total Effect of Gender in Model4	-0.209***	(-0.3081718 , -0.110402)
Direct Effect of Gender in Model5	-0.181***	(-0.2715752 , -0.0897068)
Indirect Effect: Income	-0.031	(-0.1214743 , 0.0595751)
Indirect Effect: <i>Number of friends in China</i>	0.019+	(-0.0390962 , 0.0017444)
Total Effect of Gender in Model5	-0.230**	(-0.3688058 , -0.0917272)

Notes: + p < 0.10* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

The explanation of gender disparity of job satisfaction: Moderation effect analysis

Results in Table 4 shows the significant interaction terms between income and gender, and perceived negative attitudes and gender. For women, income increases have a stronger positive effect on job satisfaction, and perceived negative attitudes have a stronger negative effect.

Table4: Results on the moderation effects: Coefficient (SE)

	Model6	Model7
<u>Moderation1:Affiliation*Female</u>	0.024	0.023
<u>Moderation2:Income*Female</u>	0.221*	0.214+
<u>Moderation3: Opportunity *Female</u>	-0.200+	-0.187
<u>Moderation4:Interpersonal Relationship *Female</u>	0.058	0.049
<u>Moderation5:Negative Attitude *Female</u>	-0.227**	-0.237**
Female	0.106	0.152

Notes: + p < 0.10* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Model 6 include all variables in model3 and moderators. Model 7 include all variables in model5 and moderators.

Conclusions

Utilizing data from the 2023 survey on expatriate professionals in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, this paper examines the determinants of job satisfaction and the mechanisms behind gender differences in job satisfaction among expatriates in China. Key findings include:

1. Determinants of job satisfaction primarily include organization type, perceived development opportunities, perceived negative workplace attitudes, and number of friends in China. Salary levels and interpersonal relationships are insignificant.
2. Female expats report significantly lower job satisfaction than males, attributed to lower salary levels and fewer friends. The gender disparity can be explained by the mediating effect of friend network size and the moderating effects of gender on the relationships between income, perceived negative attitudes, and job satisfaction.
3. Social integration, including proficiency in Chinese and localization of social networks (proportion of Chinese friends), does not significantly correlate with job satisfaction.
4. Factors such as Chinese ethnic background, origin from developed or developing countries, and educational level do not significantly impact job satisfaction among expatriates in China.