

Horizontal Gender Inequality and Segregation at Workplace in China: Understanding How Implicit and Unconscious Gender Stereotypes Produce and Reinforce Workplace Gender Inequality in China through Interview- Based Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract : In the past several decades, the market transition in China has brought in not only more opportunities for women in the labor market but also more attention to gender inequality in workplace. Although some pieces of literature have mentioned gender inequality and segregation at workplace in China, the paper looks into the variations of gender inequality and segregation: working women have little feeling about 'hierarchical inequalities', which define the status and position of women at the workplace. However, at the same time, they unconsciously reinforced 'horizontal inequalities', which creates gender segregation across occupations and job titles. Using qualitative interviews with women employers and employees of various occupations and job titles in Eastern and Southern China, this paper finds evidence that working women's understandings of the division of labor based on the characteristics and expectations of women and men are not as a result of rationality and efficiency, but instead, are the products of gendered stereotypes and traditions. However, holding positive views of gender equality at workplace, working women are not aware of the existence and influence of such gendered stereotypes and traditions. By distinguishing the concepts of 'horizontal inequality' and 'hierarchical inequality' with a cultural sociological approach, this paper contributes to the understanding of gender inequality and segregation in contemporary Chinese society. Moreover, this paper explains the logic behind the paradox in which gender inequality and segregation at workplace persist while women are feeling equal.

Keywords : gender equality, segregation, hierarchical inequality, horizontal inequality, China

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