



DO RACE AND GENDER MATTER IN INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS TO/FROM ASIA PACIFIC? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ATTITUDES AMONG CHINESE AND KOREAN EXECUTIVES

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Based on a survey of EMBA students in China and South Korea, this article examines how two sensitive but potentially salient criteria—race and gender—affect the selection of an executive to head the (a) foreign operations of a U.S. multinational in China and South Korea and (b) newly acquired U.S. operations of a Korean multinational. The results reveal a fairly complex picture of how gender, race, and the interplay of these two factors might affect these decisions. In the Korean sample, competencies mattered more than race and gender in a senior executive appointment to the U.S. operations of Korean multinationals. Also in the Korean sample, race and gender outweighed competencies in assignments to Korea. In the Chinese sample, competencies outweighed race and gender in a senior executive appointment in China. Overall, Koreans had a more positive attitude toward foreign-born Koreans than the Chinese toward foreign-born Chinese for senior executive appointments. Implications for international human resource management and diversity management, both theoretical and applied, are discussed. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Since the publication of Tung's (1981) seminal work on expatriate assignments of U.S. multinationals, there has been an explosion of interest in the subject (Harzing, 1995). Various aspects of international assignments have received much research attention, including the staffing criteria, training for cross-cultural

encounters, performance of expatriates, and women's suitability for international assignments.¹ Despite the findings that women succeed in male-dominated countries, there has only been a moderate increase in the use of women in international assignments.² Thus, it is logical to ask why highly qualified women still are kept away from international

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