

## Differences between odd number and even number response formats: Evidence from mainland Chinese respondents

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**Abstract** Scholars have speculated that the Chinese may be more reluctant to express their opinions strongly and that this may be reinforced if the odd number response format with a mid-point option of “no opinion” or “neither agree nor disagree” is provided. This may undermine the quality of survey data because less variances or even inaccurate information will be collected. This study provides empirical evidence from 532 mainland Chinese employees in Beijing to test this speculation. These employees were randomly assigned to complete either an odd number or even number response format questionnaire. In contrast to the speculation, in a wide variety of measures that are relevant to the area of organizational behavior (OB) and human resource management (HRM), it appears that the odd number response format does not show systematic differences when compared with the even number response format. This result holds even for some sensitive measures of personal beliefs, evaluation of and judgments about employing organizations, supervisors, and colleagues. Given the increasing number of studies surveying Chinese and other Asian respondents, we call for further research on this issue.

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In the past two decades, studies on Chinese and other Asian management issues have been increasing (Bruton & Lau, 2008; Quer, Claver, & Rienda, 2007). Many such studies have used a survey methodology, with multiple-item questionnaires capturing psychological and management constructs (e.g., Peng & Luo, 2000). The potential influence of the response scale format, such as the number of dimensions and type of labels on the validity of data collected, is an important issue for this measurement method (Baker & Kaciak, 1992; Churchill & Peter, 1984; Crask & Fox, 1987). Chinese people in Hong Kong, for instance, are reluctant to make their opinions known on politically sensitive matters (Hoadley, 1970; Podmore, Chaney, & Golder, 1975). A similar lack of extreme response style has also been found in other non-Chinese Asian populations (Chun, Campbell, & Yoo, 1974). Researchers in Taiwan and Hong Kong have speculated that this reluctance, among Chinese people in particular, may be reinforced if the odd number response format is used (e.g., Yang, 1982). They have speculated that Chinese people would avoid choosing the extremes of the scale and choose the mid-point (i.e., neither agree nor disagree, or no opinion) regardless of their true feelings or attitudes. This leads to several artifacts of the observed results (Chun et al., 1974). First, variances for each item are reduced and so the internal consistency reliability is lowered. Second, the magnitude of correlations among measures may be lowered because of smaller variances. Third, differences in the extent of extreme response style between groups can produce differences in group means that are not directly comparable.

Given the potentially detrimental effects of the response format on the quality of data collected from Chinese and other Asian respondents, it is surprising to see very little research on this speculation. Wong, Tam, Fung, and Wan (1993) appear to have conducted the only empirical study that investigated this issue directly with Hong Kong Chinese respondents. They surveyed student and employee samples by randomly assigning the respondents with either an odd number or even number response format. No systematic differences are observed in internal consistency reliability, means, variances, and correlations among the measures of the two groups of respondents. However, the study has two limitations. First, it includes only Hong Kong Chinese respondents who may not be representative of other ethnic Chinese populations, especially mainland Chinese, who face very different social and economic situations. Second, the management-related measures investigated are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and job perception. While these measures represent important variables in the area of organizational behavior (OB) and human resource management (HRM), they are only concerned with the respondents' perception and attitudes towards their own job and organization. In this regard, these variables are relatively neutral because these perceptions and attitudes are personal feelings that do not involve others such as supervisors and colleagues. Thus, more empirical evidence may be needed before we can rule out the speculation concerning the artifacts of odd number response format when surveying Chinese and other Asian respondents. In fact, Wong et al. (1993) are aware of the limitations of their study, and thus call for more empirical evidence from other

Chinese samples with a larger range of variables relevant to management studies. Unfortunately, little has been reported in the literature following Wong et al. (1993).

The purpose of the current study is to continue this line of research by providing empirical evidence to address the speculation about the potential effects of the odd number response format on mainland Chinese respondents. To examine the potential relevance concerning the issue of response format, we first review recent practices reported in papers published in the leading journal on management issues with Asia relevance—the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM)*. We then report empirical evidence from our survey of 532 mainland Chinese employees.

### Survey research in Asia

All the papers published in the six most recent and online issues of the *APJM* (i.e., from 2008 to the middle of 2009) are surveyed. A total of 26 papers have used Likert-type response format in their data collection. Fourteen of them studied mainland Chinese samples (Chan, Huang, & Ng, 2008; Chen & Tjosvold, 2008; Gao, Xu, & Yang, 2008; Huang, Davison, & Gu, 2008; Lam & Yeung, 2008; Law, Wang, & Hui, 2009; Law, Wong, Huang, & Li, 2008; Li & Li, 2009; Li, Schulze, & Li, 2008; Lin, Liang, Xu, Li, & Xie, 2008; Loi & Ngo, 2008; Redfern & Crawford, 2008; Tjosvold, Peng, Chen, & Su, 2008; Zhang & Li, 2008). Three of them investigated Korean samples (Bstieler & Hemmert, 2008; Kim & Gray, 2009; Park, 2008). Two of them studied Japanese samples (Ando, Rhee, & Park, 2008; Isobe, Makino, & Montgomery, 2008). Indian, Filipino, Singaporean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese samples were investigated each in one study (Lu & Hwang, 2008; Rothausen, Gonzalez, & Griffin, 2008; Sarkar, 2009; Su, Tsang, & Peng, 2009; Zhan, Chen, Erramilli, & Nguyen, 2009). Finally, one study examined an Egyptian and a Thai sample (Wongtada & Rice, 2008), and the other study involved samples from ten Asian countries including China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Turkey (Terjesen & Hessels, 2009).

Of these 26 studies, four of them did not report the number of responses in the Likert-type scale. Twenty studies used either seven-point or five-point format while one study used 11-point format. Only one study used six-point format. Most of the researchers have assumed that the odd number response format would not affect the quality of the data collected. However, is this assumption really true? With little empirical evidence reported in the literature, it is difficult to give a definitive answer.

To conduct a more comprehensive investigation than Wong et al. (1993), we include three types of variables in this study. The first type includes traditional OB and HRM variables such as personality, job satisfaction, job and organizational commitment, turnover intention, and job perception. The second type includes more sensitive personal opinions such as people's general beliefs about themselves and the world. Specifically, Leung et al. (2002) have developed the social axioms construct that contains five dimensions. *Social cynicism* indicates the extent to which actors expect positive versus negative outcomes from their engagements with life, and with powerful others. *Social complexity* indicates a person's judgments about the

variability of individual behavior and the number of influences involved in determining social outcomes—both issues reflecting a complex theory of social causation. *Reward for application* indicates how strongly a person believes that challenges and difficulties will succumb to persistent inputs, such as relevant knowledge, exertion of effort, or careful planning. *Religiosity* indicates an assessment about the positive, personal, and social consequences of religious practice, along with the belief in the existence of a supreme being. *Fate control* indicates the degree to which important outcomes in life are believed to be fated, but are predictable and alterable. Among these general beliefs, some may be sensitive to the specific social situation in mainland China. For example, the status of religious beliefs may be a more sensitive issue in mainland China because it is still under communism. Social cynicism may also be sensitive because within a transition economy and a strong bureaucratic government system, mainland Chinese may not be willing to express their views and opinions on relationships with powerful others. Thus, some of these general beliefs may be more sensitive for mainland Chinese respondents.

The third type of measure is even more sensitive because it involves judgment on the organization, supervisor, and colleagues. Whether the organization is treating its employees fairly is an important issue that has received much research attention in the management literature (Colquitt, 2001; Moorman, 1991; Price & Mueller, 1986). However, mainland Chinese employees may be more sensitive about expressing their judgment concerning the organization's distributive and procedural justice. An even more sensitive issue may be the experiences of gender discrimination in the workplace. While female employees in mainland China are treated better than those in other traditional societies such as South Korea and some Middle Eastern countries (Ghorbani & Tung, 2007; Syed, 2008; Tung, 2008), gender discrimination still exists in mainland China (Peng, Ngo, Shi, & Wong, 2009). Thus, we also include the experience of workplace gender discrimination in this study.

For the supervisor, we include the working relationship with supervisor (i.e., leader-member exchange (LMX), Scandura & Graen, 1984) and the interactional justice that the supervisor provides to the employees. These two variables represent employees' evaluation about their supervisors. Employees may not be willing to provide their true evaluation in a questionnaire survey. We also include a measure of feedback-seeking behavior towards supervisors (VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000): that is, when employees attempt to seek information about their role and performance from their supervisors. Admitting this behavior may be perceived as sensitive because interacting proactively and aggressively with one's supervisor may not be socially desirable in mainland China. Thus, a measure of feedback seeking behavior from the supervisors is also included.

Finally, there may be sensitivity towards evaluating one's own colleagues, especially in terms of any wrongdoings towards the organization. Thus, we include measures on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and anti-social behavior of colleagues in our study. These judgments of the organization, supervisors, and colleagues are much more sensitive than traditional measures such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. If the "no opinion" option can in fact reinforce the mainland Chinese reluctance to express opinions, the odd number response format should make a systematic difference to their responses.

## Methods

### Sample and procedure

Our sample consisted of 532 Chinese employees who worked in various business organizations in Beijing. At least one manager of each organization had personal contact with one of the authors, and so it was possible to collect data from these organizations. While this is not a random sample of organizations in Beijing, these organizations have operations in various industries including manufacturing, electronics, and insurance. Following approval from the organizations, we sent questionnaires to the employees whom the organizations agreed for us to survey. The respondents received the questionnaire with a cover letter explaining that their participation in this study would be voluntary and anonymous, and that the information collected would be used for research purposes only. All items in the questionnaire were translated into Chinese using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). There were two versions of the questionnaires. One used the four-point Likert-type response format while the other one used the five-point Likert-type response format with a mid-point of “neither agree nor disagree” or “no opinion.” These versions were randomly assigned to the respondents, giving each respondent a 50% probability of receiving either. As the respondents were allowed to complete their questionnaires during work, all of the questionnaires were completed and returned. The sample was demographically diverse, with about half male, half married, one-fifth holding managerial positions, two-thirds degree holders, and an average age of approximately 32.

### Measures

*Personality* The big-five personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness to new experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) were measured by the adjective scale (McCrae & Costa, 1987). We selected 30 out of the original 80 items to reduce the length of the questionnaire.

*Job satisfaction* This was measured by the four items adopted from the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). We also added one item on the overall job satisfaction of the respondents.

*Job commitment* Five items, modified from the work of Amatea, Cross, Clark, and Bobby (1986), were employed to measure job commitment.

*Affective organizational commitment* Six items from Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) were used to measure this variable.

*Turnover intention* This was measured by the three-item scale developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1979).

*Job perception* This was measured by a three-item scale developed by Wong (1997).

*Social axioms* The five dimensions of social axioms were measured by the scale developed by Leung and Bond (2004). Social cynicism, reward for application, religiosity, and fate control were measured by ten, six, nine, seven, and six items, respectively.

*Procedural justice* This is measured by the seven items developed by Moorman (1991).

*Distributive justice* Distributive justice was assessed by six items modified from Price and Mueller (1986).

*Perceived gender discrimination* Four items, adopted from Sanchez and Brock (1996), were used to measure respondents' perception of gender discrimination in the workplace.

*Leader–member exchange* Seven items, modified from Scandura and Graen (1984), were used to measure this variable.

*Interactional justice (with supervisor)* This was measured by the nine items adopted from Colquitt (2001).

*Feedback-seeking behavior* Five items, validated by VandeWalle et al. (2000), were used to measure feedback-seeking behavior.

*Colleague's OCB* Respondents were asked to think of a colleague with whom they were familiar. They were asked to evaluate this colleague's OCB by the 11 items adopted from Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Morrman, and Fetter (1990).

*Colleague's anti-social behavior* Respondents were asked to refer to the same colleague and evaluate their anti-social behavior according to the nine items adopted from Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly (1998).

The appendix contains the English version of all the measurement items of personality, job satisfaction, job commitment, affective organizational commitment, turnover intention, job perception, social axioms, procedural and distributive justice, perceived gender discrimination, leader–member exchange, interactional justice, feedback seeking behavior, and colleague's OCB and anti-social behavior.

*Politically, socially, and economically sensitive statements* As past evidence of the lack of an extreme response style is focused on politically sensitive matters (Hoadley, 1970; Podmore, Chaney, & Golder, 1975), we also included eight statements that were judged to be politically, socially, and economically sensitive by one of the authors. This author is a native mainland Chinese, educated in the mainland and now works at one of the universities in Beijing. These statements cover a variety of issues such as the effect of reform and the open door policy, corruption, Falun Gong,<sup>1</sup> use of military force for the unification of Taiwan, homosexual affairs, entrance to the WTO, and the role of business enterprises.

<sup>1</sup> Falun Gong is a spiritual discipline founded in China in 1992. In 1999, the Chinese Government regarded it as a kind of cult and banned the practice.

## Analyses

To examine the potential effects of the odd number response scale, we conducted four sets of analyses. First, we calculated the internal consistency reliability coefficients for all the measures in the four-point and five-point response format and compared their differences. Second, we transformed the four-point format into an equivalent five-point format by a linear formula used by Wong et al. (1993). Third, we compared the mean and standard deviation differences of the four-point versus the five-point sub-sample using the *t*-test and *F*-test, respectively, for all the measures included in this study. Fourth, we calculated the correlations among all of the measures for the two sub-samples and compared their differences.

## Results

The results of the internal consistency reliability coefficients are shown in Table 1. Coefficient alphas of the two sub-samples appear to be very similar and there is no

**Table 1** Reliability coefficients (alphas) of all measures.

Variables	Number of Items	5-point (n=266)	4-point (n=266)	Difference in Alpha
1. Neuroticism	6	0.81	0.72	0.09
2. Extraversion	6	0.78	0.75	0.03
3. Openness	6	0.74	0.72	0.02
4. Agreeableness	6	0.82	0.77	0.05
5. Conscientiousness	6	0.79	0.84	-0.05
6. Social Cynicism	10	0.73	0.66	0.07
7. Social Complexity	6	0.69	0.68	0.01
8. Reward for Application	9	0.78	0.80	-0.02
9. Religiosity	7	0.63	0.65	-0.02
10. Fate Control	6	0.55	0.42	0.13
11. Job Satisfaction	5	0.85	0.84	0.01
12. Affective Commitment	6	0.89	0.85	0.04
13. Turnover Intention	3	0.79	0.76	0.03
14. Job Perception	3	0.63	0.58	0.05
15. Leader–Member Exchange	7	0.91	0.90	0.01
16. Procedural Justice	7	0.95	0.93	0.02
17. Distributive Justice	6	0.94	0.93	0.01
18. Interactional Justice	9	0.93	0.92	0.01
19. Job Commitment	5	0.72	0.70	0.02
20. Gender Discrimination	4	0.87	0.85	0.02
21. Colleague's OCB	11	0.88	0.90	-0.02
22. Colleague's Anti-Social Behavior	9	0.95	0.95	0.00
23. Feedback-Seeking Behavior	5	0.92	0.90	0.02

evidence supporting the speculation that the odd number response format will systematically reduce the level of this coefficient. In fact, some of the coefficients are at a higher level for the sub-sample responding to the odd number response format.

The results of the *t*-tests of mean differences and the *F*-tests of standard deviation differences for all measures are shown in Table 2. While some significant mean and standard deviation differences are observable between the two sub-samples, the pattern does not appear to be systematic, favoring any one of the sub-samples. In addition, the differences are relatively small when compared with the absolute mean and standard deviation level. Hence, there is little support for the speculation that the odd number response format will have important effects on the data collected.

The correlation coefficients among all of the measures for the two sub-samples are shown in Table 3. We have highlighted the correlations that are statistically significant for one sub-sample but not for the other. Similar to the mean and standard deviation differences, there appears to be no systematic pattern showing that the

**Table 2** Results of mean and standard deviation differences for all measures.

Response Format	5-point Format		Transformed 4-point Format		Mean difference	S.D. difference
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
1. Neuroticism	2.60	0.73	2.54	0.65	0.06	0.08
2. Extraversion	3.00	0.77	3.03	0.75	0.02	0.02
3. Openness	3.09	0.67	3.10	0.71	-0.01	-0.04
4. Agreeableness	3.96	0.60	4.07	0.62	-0.11*	-0.02
5. Conscientiousness	3.75	0.62	3.89	0.74	-0.14*	-0.12*
6. Social Cynicism	3.13	0.48	3.06	0.43	0.07	0.05
7. Social Complexity	3.84	0.51	3.73	0.50	0.11*	0.01
8. Reward for Application	3.79	0.51	3.70	0.56	0.09*	-0.05
9. Religiosity	2.98	0.53	2.96	0.55	0.02	-0.02
10. Fate Control	2.92	0.52	2.91	0.48	0.01	0.04
11. Job Satisfaction	3.41	0.71	3.31	0.61	0.10	0.10**
12. Affective Commitment	3.46	0.71	3.31	0.66	0.15*	0.05
13. Turnover Intention	2.51	0.82	2.55	0.76	-0.04	0.06*
14. Job Perception	3.21	0.72	3.16	0.66	0.05	0.06
15. Leader-Member Exchange	3.45	0.71	3.34	0.64	0.11	0.07*
16. Procedural Justice	3.21	0.76	3.12	0.74	0.09	0.02
17. Distributive Justice	3.17	0.83	3.10	0.74	0.07	0.09
18. Interactional Justice	3.52	0.66	3.49	0.57	0.03	0.09*
19. Job Commitment	3.58	0.56	3.45	0.56	0.13*	0.00
20. Gender Discrimination	2.55	0.76	2.55	0.71	0.00	0.05*
21. Colleague's OCB	3.66	0.49	3.54	0.47	0.12**	0.02
22. Colleague's Anti-Social Behavior	2.07	0.74	2.28	0.74	-0.21**	0.00
23. Feedback-Seeking Behavior	2.92	0.97	3.10	0.87	-0.18**	0.10

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .



**Table 3** Correlations among all variables.

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Neuroticism	1.00						
	1.00						
2. Extraversion	0.07	1.00					
	0.07	1.00					
3. Openness	-0.01	0.35**	1.00				
	-0.11	0.45**	1.00				
4. Agreeableness	-0.16*	0.07	0.11	1.00			
	-0.22**	0.08	0.19**	1.00			
5. Conscientiousness	-0.31**	-0.14*	0.14*	0.54**	1.00		
	-0.31**	-0.10	0.14*	0.52**	1.00		
6. Social Cynicism	0.19**	-0.00	-0.02	-0.07	-0.10	1.00	
	0.24**	0.01	-0.11	-0.07	-0.15*	1.00	
7. Social Complexity	-0.02	-0.02	0.11	0.22**	0.13*	0.28**	1.00
	-0.06	0.08	0.12	0.19*	0.13*	0.22**	1.00
8. Reward for Application	-0.08	0.07	0.21**	0.28**	0.26**	0.07	0.44**
	-0.17*	0.04	0.13*	0.31**	0.28**	0.12	0.59**
9. Religiosity	0.18**	0.10	0.12	0.07	-0.07	0.18**	0.09
	0.06	-0.08	-0.04	0.02	0.03	0.13*	0.09
10. Fate Control	0.24**	0.10	-0.07	-0.08	-0.20*	0.30**	0.05
	0.21**	-0.05	-0.02	-0.07	-0.05	0.32**	0.01
11. Job Satisfaction	-0.23**	0.03	0.08	0.12	0.11	-0.09	-0.03
	-0.27**	0.08	0.12	0.16*	0.24**	-0.14*	0.07
12. Affective Commitment	-0.19**	0.03	0.08	0.09	0.16*	-0.15*	-0.05
	-0.18**	-0.03	0.01	0.18**	0.27**	-0.15*	-0.05
13. Turnover Intention	0.10	-0.04	-0.06	-0.10	-0.12	0.15*	0.03
	0.23*	-0.01	-0.02	-0.23**	-0.22	0.22**	-0.02
14. Job Perception	-0.05	0.00	0.10	0.09	0.08	-0.06	-0.02
	-0.16*	0.11	0.09	0.05	0.12*	-0.18**	-0.05
15. Leader–Member Exchange	-0.19**	-0.08	0.11	0.14*	0.14*	-0.17**	-0.02
	-0.20**	0.03	0.11	0.10	0.20**	-0.26**	0.02
16. Procedural Justice	-0.14*	0.00	0.11	0.15*	0.16**	-0.14*	-0.04
	-0.22**	0.09	0.17**	0.11	0.23**	-0.06	-0.02
17. Distributive Justice	-0.10	0.01	0.05	0.11	0.05	-0.11	-0.03
	-0.22**	0.10	0.11	0.09	0.06	-0.05	-0.02
18. Interactional Justice	-0.19**	-0.13*	0.06	0.16*	0.19**	-0.14*	0.10
	-0.27**	0.02	0.15*	0.22**	0.24**	-0.04	0.19**
19. Job Commitment	-0.07	0.09	0.25**	0.15*	0.24**	-0.04	0.29**
	-0.16*	0.02	0.19**	0.26**	0.29**	-0.10	0.21**
20. Gender Discrimination	0.05	-0.00	-0.14*	-0.11	-0.03	0.03	-0.16*
	0.18**	0.03	-0.13*	-0.11	-0.13*	0.12	-0.23**
21. Colleague's OCB	-0.13*	-0.06	0.10	0.06	0.08	-0.15*	0.08
	-0.30**	0.04	0.26**	0.27**	0.25**	-0.17**	0.15*
22. Colleague's Anti-Social Behavior	-0.02	0.06	-0.11	-0.15*	-0.08	0.13*	-0.14*
	0.26**	0.04	-0.06	-0.19*	-0.15*	0.17**	-0.29**
23. Feedback-Seeking Behavior	-0.08	0.11	0.05	0.15*	0.16*	-0.14*	-0.05
	-0.22**	0.00	0.15*	0.10	0.11	-0.19**	-0.04

Numbers in the first row are from the five-point sub-sample while numbers in the second row are from the four-point sub-sample.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3** (continued).

Variables	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Neuroticism							
2. Extraversion							
3. Openness							
4. Agreeableness							
5. Conscientiousness							
6. Social Cynicism							
7. Social Complexity							
8. Reward for Application	1.00						
	1.00						
9. Religiosity	0.01	1.00					
	0.02	1.00					
10. Fate Control	-0.01	0.26**	1.00				
	-0.07	0.49**	1.00				
11. Job Satisfaction	0.10	0.04	0.03	1.00			
	0.30**	0.04	-0.02	1.00			
12. Affective Commitment	0.14*	-0.08	-0.04	0.46**	1.00		
	0.19**	0.04	-0.00	0.59**	1.00		
13. Turnover Intention	-0.14*	0.07	0.08	-0.40**	-0.64**	1.00	
	-0.16*	-0.08	0.02	-0.52**	-0.59**	1.00	
14. Job Perception	0.17*	0.04	-0.03	0.43**	0.36**	-0.34**	1.00
	0.14*	-0.06	-0.09	0.44**	0.34**	-0.26**	1.00
15. Leader-Member Exchange	0.15*	-0.04	-0.07	0.42**	0.48**	-0.51**	0.38**
	0.10	-0.07	-0.14*	0.50**	0.50**	-0.40**	0.42**
16. Procedural Justice	0.15*	-0.03	-0.02	0.34**	0.44**	-0.46**	0.26**
	0.21**	-0.07	-0.01	0.42**	0.38**	-0.27**	0.23**
17. Distributive Justice	0.13*	0.10	0.07	0.36**	0.39**	-0.43**	0.19**
	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.30**	0.35**	-0.36**	0.10
18. Interactional Justice	0.24**	-0.07	-0.04	0.31**	0.50**	-0.49**	0.25**
	0.26**	-0.01	-0.10	0.37**	0.25**	-0.25**	0.14*
19. Job Commitment	0.25**	0.00	-0.08	-0.06	0.25**	-0.19**	0.05
	0.42**	-0.13*	-0.15*	0.25**	0.28**	-0.16*	0.13*
20. Gender Discrimination	-0.13*	-0.07	0.13*	-0.07	0.07	0.10	-0.02
	-0.19**	0.03	0.21**	-0.04	0.03	0.08	-0.04
21. Colleague's OCB	0.13*	-0.00	-0.03	0.22**	0.36**	-0.29**	0.14**
	0.20**	0.00	-0.06	0.27**	0.20**	-0.22**	0.08
22. Colleague's Anti-Social Behavior	-0.23**	-0.03	0.06	-0.01	-0.10	0.29**	-0.05
	-0.22**	0.10	0.21**	-0.14*	-0.13*	0.19**	-0.05
23. Feedback-Seeking Behavior	0.05	-0.05	-0.10	0.19**	0.26**	-0.14*	0.23**
	0.11	-0.00	0.03	0.25**	0.29**	0.24**	0.21**

15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20	21.	22.
1.00							
1.00							
0.53**	1.00						
0.37**	1.00						
0.46**	0.55**	1.00					
0.34**	0.35**	1.00					
0.66**	0.56**	0.51**	1.00				
0.49**	0.52**	0.36**	1.00				
0.21**	0.20**	0.08	0.18**	1.00			
0.25**	0.31**	0.03	0.29**	1.00			
-0.10	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	-0.16*	1.00		
0.00	0.07	0.08	-0.01	-0.10	1.00		
0.44**	0.36**	0.31**	0.50**	0.15*	-0.00	1.00	
0.26**	0.34**	0.30**	0.49**	0.30**	-0.13*	1.00	
-0.29**	-0.24**	-0.15*	-0.26**	-0.19**	0.26**	-0.39**	1.00
-0.19**	-0.04	-0.08	-0.29**	-0.28**	0.37**	-0.43**	1.00
0.28**	0.32**	0.13*	0.23**	0.18**	0.10	0.22**	-0.00
0.39**	0.34**	0.25**	0.23**	0.24**	0.00	0.21**	0.09

**Table 4** Results of politically, socially, and economically sensitive statements.

Statements	Number (%) of not responding		Mean (S.D.)		Transformed 4-point	Mean Difference	S.D. Difference	Number (%) of choosing mid-point for the 5-point sub-sample
	4-point	5-point	5-point	5-point				
<b>I. Politically sensitive statements</b>								
1. The Reform and Open Door Policy has brought extraordinary economic achievement to China.	8 (3.0%)	4 (1.5%)	4.12 (0.65)	4.12 (0.65)	3.99 (0.71)	0.13*	-0.06*	17 (6.3%)
2. The current corruption problem is mainly due to the deficiency of the institutions rather than the ruling political party.	15 (5.6%)	3 (1.1%)	3.49 (1.04)	3.49 (1.04)	3.43 (0.96)	0.06	0.08**	50 (18.6%)
3. Falun Gong is a kind of cult and should be outlawed.	16 (6.0%)	2 (0.8%)	3.97 (0.89)	3.97 (0.89)	3.98 (0.93)	-0.01	-0.04*	49 (18.2%)
4. Taiwan is part of China and if necessary, military forces should be used in order to achieve unification.	11 (4.1%)	2 (0.8%)	4.19 (0.90)	4.19 (0.90)	3.99 (0.94)	0.20*	-0.04*	20 (7.4%)
<b>II. Socially and economically sensitive statements</b>								
5. So far as it does not affect others, homosexual affairs should be allowed by the society.	11 (4.1%)	3 (1.1%)	3.40 (0.93)	3.40 (0.93)	3.32 (0.94)	0.08	-0.01	86 (32.0%)
6. Entrance to the WTO is not beneficial to Chinese economy.	12 (4.5%)	6 (2.3%)	2.53 (0.93)	2.53 (0.93)	2.56 (0.82)	-0.03	0.11**	65 (24.2%)
7. The major objective of business enterprises is to create economic benefit, so all their activities should target this objective.	12 (4.5%)	7 (2.6%)	3.39 (1.01)	3.39 (1.01)	3.33 (0.88)	0.06	0.13**	48 (17.8%)
8. Hosting the Olympic Games can help promote the Chinese image.	8 (3.0%)	2 (0.8%)	4.12 (0.73)	4.12 (0.73)	4.10 (0.79)	0.02	-0.06**	23 (8.6%)

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

correlation coefficients of the odd number response scale sub-sample are smaller. Moreover, even among the highlighted correlations, most of the differences are quite small. Again, these results do not support the speculation that the odd number response format will lower the correlation coefficients among measures.

Table 4 shows the responses to the politically, socially, and economically sensitive statements. While seven out of the eight statements have significant differences in standard deviations between the two sub-samples, the pattern is not systematic and the absolute differences are relatively small. Some statements from the five-point response format show greater variance. Although the mean scores of two statements have significant differences and the four-point subscale shows higher means, the differences are less than one-fourth of the standard deviation. As for the non-responses, it is clear that the four-point response format has induced a larger number of respondents to simply not respond to the statements. However, the absolute number and percentage of non-responses is quite small even for the four-point response format. Table 4 also reports the number and percentage of the five-point sub-sample, which chose the midpoint (“neither agree nor disagree”). Interestingly, the two greatest percentages are for the statements about homosexual affairs (32.0%) and entrance to the WTO (24.2%). For all other statements, the percentages are quite small. Thus, even for these politically, socially, and economically sensitive statements, the odd number response format does not appear to make a significant difference in the data collected.

## Discussion

Similar to the results of Wong et al. (1993) for Hong Kong Chinese, the results of this study on the mainland Chinese do not support the speculation that the odd number response format will systematically affect the quality of data collected in surveys. This conclusion appears to hold not only for traditional OB and HRM constructs, but also for more sensitive beliefs towards and evaluations of the respondents’ employing organizations, supervisors, and colleagues. This result is good news for studies of Chinese samples that have used the odd number response format, because it means that the format has not undermined the quality of the data collected.

Most of the measures included in this study show good internal consistency reliability, with the exception of fate control. Future research may need to be more careful when this measure is used on mainland Chinese samples. The correlations among constructs commonly used in OB and HRM such as personality, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, LMX, and organizational justice are quite similar to those reported in the literature. In this regard, it appears that mainland Chinese employees may be similar to those in other societies.

For the politically, socially, and economically sensitive statements, more mainland Chinese chose not to respond when they were not given a choice of “neither agree nor disagree.” However, the absolute number and percentages of such respondents were quite small, indicating that the odd number response format does not make a significant difference in the data collected, even when that data is sensitive.

Encouraging as this study is, it has an important limitation. Our sample comes from the Beijing area and two-thirds of the respondents are degree holders. They may be most representative of the middle- to upper-working class. Therefore, our results may

not be generalizable to mainland Chinese workers who are from less developed areas of the country and with lower education levels. Thus, future research should include respondents with more diverse backgrounds. Given the increasing number of management studies using the survey method to investigate Chinese employees, more effort put into this fundamental research method should be worthwhile. Finally, similar evidence should be collected for other Asian samples so that we can be sure about the quality of data collected when Likert-type response format is involved.

## Conclusions

It is a general belief that Chinese and other Asians may be less willing to express their opinions. However, results of this study illustrate that the quality of data collected using odd number response format is not adversely affected for mainland Chinese. This is true even for politically and socially sensitive issues. Thus, reviewers should not be skeptical about past studies that use odd number response format and researchers do not need to avoid this format in collecting data from mainland Chinese samples. Researchers in other Asian countries and regions are encouraged to conduct similar investigations to make sure that results of this study are generalizable to their research participants.

## Appendix Scales and items included in this study

Interested readers can contact the authors for the back-translated Chinese version of these items. For non-profit making studies, we offer them at no charge.

### *Conscientiousness:*

- (1) careless–careful
- (2) disorganized–organized
- (3) sloppy–neat
- (4) late–punctual
- (5) aimless–ambitious
- (6) unenergetic–energetic

### *Extraversion:*

- (1) retiring–sociable
- (2) cold–warm
- (3) quiet–talkative
- (4) passive–active
- (5) unfeeling–passionate
- (6) submissive–dominant

### *Openness to New Experiences:*

- (1) conventional–original
- (2) uncreative–creative

- (3) simple–complex
- (4) unartistic–artistic
- (5) uncurious–curious
- (6) prefer routine–prefer variety

*Agreeableness:*

- (1) ruthless–soft hearted
- (2) uncooperative–helpful
- (3) rude–courteous
- (4) critical–lenient
- (5) disagreeable–agreeable
- (6) serious–cheerful

*Emotional Stability:*

- (1) calm–worrying
- (2) at ease–nervous
- (3) unemotional–emotional
- (4) secure–insecure
- (5) objective–subjective
- (6) patient–impatient

*Job Satisfaction (satisfaction with):*

- (1) The amount of personal growth and development I get in doing my job.
- (2) The feeling of worthwhile accomplishment I get from doing my job.
- (3) The amount of independent thought and action I can exercise in my job.
- (4) The amount of challenge in my job.
- (5) The overall content of my job.

*Job Commitment:*

- (1) I want to work, but I do not want to have a demanding career.
- (2) I expect to make as many sacrifices as are necessary in order to advance in my work/ career.
- (3) I value being involved in a career and expect to devote the time and effort needed to develop it.
- (4) I expect to devote a significant amount of my time to building my career and developing the skills necessary to advance in my career.
- (5) I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/ career field.

*Affective Organizational Commitment:*

- (1) I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
- (2) I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
- (3) I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to this organization.
- (4) I feel "emotionally attached" to this organization.
- (5) I feel like "part of the family" to this organization.
- (6) This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

*Turnover Intention:*

- (1) I often think about quitting my job.
- (2) I will probably look for a new job in the next year.
- (3) If I were completely free to choose, I would prefer continue working in this organization.

*Job Perception:*

- (1) My job is very challenging.
- (2) My job content is very complex and complicated.
- (3) My job scope is very broad.

*Social Cynicism:*

- (1) Kind-hearted people usually suffer losses.
- (2) Power and status make people arrogant.
- (3) Powerful people tend to exploit others.
- (4) Kind-hearted people are easily bullied.
- (5) People will stop working hard after they secure a comfortable life.
- (6) It is rare to see a happy ending in real life.
- (7) To care about societal affairs only brings trouble for yourself.
- (8) The various social institutions in society are biased towards the rich.
- (9) People deeply in love are usually blind.
- (10) Young people are impulsive and unreliable.

*Social Complexity:*

- (1) People may have opposite behaviors on different occasions.
- (2) One's behaviors may be contrary to his or her true feelings.
- (3) Human behavior changes with the social context.
- (4) Current losses are not necessarily bad for one's long-term future.
- (5) There is usually only one way to solve a problem.
- (6) One has to deal with matters according to the specific circumstances.

*Reward for Application:*

- (1) Adversity can be overcome with effort.
- (2) One will succeed if he/she really tries.
- (3) One who does not know how to plan his or her future will eventually fail.
- (4) Every problem has a solution.
- (5) Hard working people will achieve more in the end.
- (6) Knowledge is necessary for success.
- (7) Competition brings about progress.
- (8) Caution helps avoid mistakes.
- (9) Failure is the beginning of success.

*Religiosity:*

- (1) Belief in a religion helps one understand the meaning of life.
- (2) Religious faith contributes to good mental health.
- (3) Belief in a religion makes people good citizens.



- (4) There is a supreme being controlling the universe.
- (5) Religion makes people escape from reality.
- (6) Religious people are more likely to maintain moral standards.
- (7) Religious beliefs lead to unscientific thinking.

*Fate Control:*

- (1) There are many ways for people to predict what will happen in the future.
- (2) Individual characteristics, such as appearance and birthday, affect one's fate.
- (3) Good luck follows if one survives a disaster.
- (4) There are certain ways to help us improve our luck and avoid unlucky things.
- (5) Fate determines one's successes and failures.
- (6) Most disasters can be predicted.

*Procedural Justice:*

- (1) In my organization, procedures are designed to collect accurate information necessary for making performance appraisal.
- (2) In my organization, procedures are designed to provide opportunities to appeal or challenge the performance appraisal.
- (3) In my organization, procedures are designed to have all sides affected by the performance appraisal represented.
- (4) In my organization, procedures are designed to generate standards so that performance appraisal can be made with consistency.
- (5) In my organization, procedures are designed to hear the concerns of all those affected by the performance appraisal.
- (6) In my organization, procedures are designed to provide useful feedback regarding the performance appraisal and its implementation.
- (7) In my organization, procedures are designed to allow for requests for clarification or additional information about the performance appraisal.

*Distributive Justice:*

- (1) I am fairly rewarded considering my responsibilities.
- (2) I am fairly rewarded in view of the amount of experience I have.
- (3) I am fairly rewarded for the amount of effort I put forth.
- (4) I am fairly rewarded for the work I've done well.
- (5) I am fairly rewarded for the stresses and strains of my job.
- (6) I am fairly rewarded in view of the amount of education and training that I have had.

*Perceived Gender Discrimination:*

- (1) At work, I sometimes feel that my gender is a limitation.
- (2) My gender has a negative influence on my career advancement.
- (3) At work, many people have sex stereotypes and treat me as if they were true.
- (4) At work, I'm excluded from some activities because of my gender.

*Leader–Member Exchange (LMX):*

- (1) My supervisor is satisfied with what I do.
- (2) My supervisor understands my job's problems and needs.

- (3) My supervisor recognizes my potential.
- (4) Regardless how much formal authority he/she has, my supervisor would use his/her power to help me solve problems in my work.
- (5) Regardless how much formal authority he/she has, my supervisor would “bail me out” at his/her expense.
- (6) I have confidence in my supervisor that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so.
- (7) I have good working relationship with my supervisor.

*Interactional Justice (during the process of performance appraisal):*

- (1) My direct supervisor treated me in a polite manner.
- (2) My direct supervisor treated me with dignity.
- (3) My direct supervisor treated me with respect.
- (4) My direct supervisor refrained from improper remarks or comments.
- (5) My direct supervisor was candid in his/her communications with me.
- (6) My direct supervisor explained the procedures thoroughly.
- (7) My direct supervisor’s explanations regarding the procedures were reasonable.
- (8) My direct supervisor communicated details with me in a timely manner.
- (9) My direct supervisor seemed to tailor his/her communications to my specific needs.

*Feedback Seeking Behaviors (seeking feedback for):*

- (1) His or her overall work performance.
- (2) His or her social behavior.
- (3) His or her technical performance on job.
- (4) His or her role fulfillment.
- (5) Whether his or her values and attitudes were appropriate for the firm.

*Colleague’s OCB:*

- (1) Is always ready to help those around him/her.
- (2) Helps orient new people.
- (3) Helps clients for their personal concerns.
- (4) Gives of their time to help others, who have work-related problems.
- (5) Is punctual to every appointment with clients regardless of weather, traffic, etc.
- (6) Does not complain unnecessarily to coworkers about what the company is doing.
- (7) Does not make problems bigger than they are to coworkers.
- (8) Attends functions not required but help the company or the job (road shows, promotion activities, etc.)
- (9) Actively participates in company meetings.
- (10) Takes actions to reduce the negative impact of their behaviors on coworkers.
- (11) Takes steps to try to prevent problems with coworkers.

*Colleague’s Anti-social Behaviors (frequency of the following behaviors):*

- (1) Damage the property owned by my employer.
- (2) Say something or do something deliberately to hurt my colleagues.
- (3) Accomplish the job badly, in the wrong way, or not in time on purpose.
- (4) Complain to my colleagues.

- (5) Distort or break the rules deliberately.
- (6) Criticize other people at work.
- (7) Do something that has a bad impact on my employer or boss.
- (8) Initiate quarrel with other people at work.
- (9) Say something rude on the boss or organization.

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