

New evidence about the four temperaments and Chinese and Australian managers

Ian L Ball

Psychological Type Research Unit,
Deakin University, Australia

Huifang Yang

Nanjing University, Nanjing, P.R. China
The University of Newcastle, Australia

Shuming Zhao

Nanjing University, Nanjing, P.R. China

Knowledge of temperaments can play a role in the interplay of cultures

Doing business in China is increasingly likely for Australian business managers. According to Austrade (2007):

Australia has good credibility in China. On the commercial level, our business culture suits the Chinese, and Australians like to immerse ourselves in Chinese culture and learn about the place [so much so that] it is now imperative for Australian businesses to include China as part of any export strategy.

China is now Australia's biggest export trading partner, and much effort has been put into the formulation of advice about cultural factors such as etiquette and how to conduct negotiations (Austrade, 2009). While more work has been done about cultural factors, relatively little effort has been given to issues of how Chinese and Australian managers can relate to each other on personality factors.

This paper reports two landmark studies of the four temperaments of Chinese and Australian managers, and the observed similarities and differences. Some new evidence about the relative distributions of the temperaments across Chinese and Australian managers is also presented. The role of gender differences is explored.

These comparisons highlight the significant role that knowledge of temperaments might have in the interplay of different cultures in developing business new opportunities.

Identified cultural factors

There have been several studies of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Australian managers. These have considered various individual behaviours and attitudes, as well as more general cultural factors.

An analysis by Liang and Whiteley (2003), reproduced in Table 1, found fundamental differences in how dimensions of social life are perceived. These were summed up as a basic difference in cultural orientation, 'passion' versus 'mind'.

Table 1: Cultural orientations of Chinese and Australian managers

Chinese		Australian
'mind'	Emphasis	'passion'
Organisational		
respect for and obedience to superiors	Hierarchy	egalitarian
basic knowledge, basic skills	Training and education	problem solving, technical skills
long term	Planning	short term
process oriented	Controlling	result oriented
tall, ambiguous	Organisational structure	flat, clear-cut
Individual		
circular	Way of thinking	linear
harmony and human touch	Prioritising	efficiency
risk-avoiding	Risk-taking	experimenting
effectiveness	Patience	efficiency
situational	Flexibility	absolute
situational	Responsibilities and initiatives	absolute
personal	Loyalty	organisational
passive	Motivation	self-started
outer-directed	Self-confidence	inner-directed
situational	Time reckoning	efficiency
personal	Power	organisational

Liang and Whiteley (2003), reported in Whiteley (2004)

This analysis was part of an interpretative study of Australian managers in northern China (Beijing region) and their Chinese colleagues. While both similarities and differences were found at the national and corporate levels, Table 1 reports only the differences.

The idea of four temperaments

According to Dunning (2004, p12), temperament theory asserts that individuals are born with a predisposition to act and interact in certain ways to meet underlying needs:

The theory is not about labelling or otherwise limiting individuals. Rather, it is a tool for exploring individual differences.

The temperament concepts were refined by Keirsey (1998), who noted regularities in observations of behaviour patterns that he termed 'temperament styles'. A long history of these four behaviour patterns exists from the time of Hippocrates through to the four spirit keepers of the American Indians, and to the investigations of Kretschmer and Spranger.

Temperament theory uses a systems field theory model in its descriptions of the four temperaments. Keirsey and Bates (1978, p 30) observe that

one's temperament determines behavior because behavior is the instrument for getting us what we must have, satisfying our desire for that one thing we live for.

In temperament theory, behaviours cluster into distinctive activity patterns that can be organised around core themes or values specific to each temperament.

A useful instrument to identify which of the temperaments is at play is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The MBTI was developed using patterns of preferences identified by Myers, drawing on Jung's work on differences in the use of cognitive processes. Myers, McCaulley, Quenk and Hammer (1998) set out the theory, where introversion and extraversion play significant roles in the use of cognitive processes.

It should be noted that Keirsey's conception places greater importance on the sensing-intuition dichotomy than does Myers, and uses an idea not found in Myers, about the difference between affiliation and pragmatism.

Nevertheless, the four temperaments can be discerned within the MBTI codes. Each represents a pairing of either a *concrete* or an *abstract* attitude with a theme based on either *affiliation* or *pragmatism*.

A shorthand code is often used to indicate the particular cognitive processes. According to Kroeger and Thuesen (1995), the first letter of a temperament pair represents one's preferred information-gathering process, S (sensing) or N (intuition). The second letter is dependent on what the first letter is.

If the first letter is S, the preference for gathering information is concrete and tactile, and the next most important question is *What you do with those perceptions?* Do you:

- organise them, J (a judging function); or
- continue to take them in or perhaps even seek more, P (a perceiving function)?

This leads to the first two temperament groups, SJ and SP.

If it is N, the preference is for gathering data in abstract and conceptual ways. The second most important question is *How do you prefer to evaluate the data you have gathered*, either:

- objectively, T (thinking); or
- subjectively, F (feeling).

This leads to the second two temperament groups, NT and NF.

Berens's approach to the temperaments

In her updating of temperament theory, Berens (2006) has illuminated the four distinctive patterns in a series of portraits, and has developed a new terminology to bring the essence of the SJ, SP, NT and NF concepts to the foreground. This terminology is depicted by the temperament matrix in Table 2.



Ian Ball (ISTJ) is an honorary fellow at Deakin University where he manages the Psychological Type Research Unit. This involvement has produced a number of published reports on type theory and practice, as well as conference presentations.

Ian is a fellow of the Australian Psychological Society and an honorary life member of the Australian Association for Psychological Type. His research interests are emotional intelligence, type theory and practice, and multiple intelligences.

gmagpa@bigpond.net.au

Table 2: Berens's formulation of the temperament matrix

	Abstract attitude	Concrete attitude
Affiliative roles	'Catalyst' NF	'Stabilizer' SJ
Pragmatic roles	'Theorist' NT	'Improviser' SP

Source: after Berens, 2006, p 37

Descriptions of the four temperaments

People with the **Catalyst** temperament rely on the use of the mental processes of *intuition* (N) and *feeling* (F). Such people use the *feeling* judgement process to give them ways to act in accordance with their value set, and use the *intuition* perception process to think about what is or what will be significant in the long run.

Catalysts seem to be forever in search of the question *Who am I?* as they establish that what they are doing has meaning, contributes to some higher purpose, and is valued by others. Their key talents are building bridges between people and using their empathetic skills to help to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

People with the **Stabilizer** temperament have needs for membership or belonging, and for responsibility or duty. These needs are met through *introverted sensing*. The reference point for these people is usually what has gone on before, and their stored images and impressions (S) inform their decision-making that tends to be logistical (J) in focus.

Stabilizers have a strong need for connectedness and clarity about their place in a group. Their focus on traditional ways of doing things expresses their desire for stability. They have a talent for logistics and knowing what the right sequence is to get the right things in the right place, quantity and time, to the right people.

People with the **Theorist** temperament have strong needs for being competent. Their search for expert knowledge and mastery is supported by their use of *intuition* (N) and *thinking* (T). These people are often found dealing with the world of theories and strategy, and prefer making objective decisions.

Models, systems and organising frameworks are used frequently to assist in these processes, as **Theorists** favour logical analysis. They are happy working with a level of abstraction, and have a talent for thinking through contingencies and developing multiple plans for them.

People with the **Improviser** temperament use the *extraverted sensing* process. This process keeps them in touch with the needs of the moment and the tactical moves they can make to seize opportunities. There is a pairing of *sensing* (S) with *perception* (P).

Improvisers value their freedom to respond and their ability to make an impact 'here and now' through their drive to take action. They are seen as having special talents for troubleshooting and being able to 'read' a situation.

The dynamics of the four temperaments

The 2 x 2 format of Table 2 depicts that each temperament pattern has something in common with each of the others. These commonalities reveal themselves in the ways that people communicate: their style of language, preferred roles and focus of attention.

The **vertical** dimension, *abstract* versus *concrete* attitudes, illustrates differences in the way we tend to think about things, and the way we use words.

Language usually reflects our natural, preferred way of viewing the world. The Catalyst and Theorist share a preference for working with the *abstract*—talking about concepts and patterns, and searching for their meanings. The Stabilizer and Improviser both prefer the *concrete*, talking about tangible realities—those based on their experiences and observations.

The **horizontal** dimension, *affiliative* versus *pragmatic* roles, illustrates differences in the way we prefer to interact with others. The Catalyst and the Stabilizer share an interest in *affiliative* roles, where people act in community with a sense of what is a good outcome for the group. The Improviser and Theorist are more interested in *pragmatic* roles, in which people are guided by what they see as needing to be done to achieve desired outcomes.



Language reflects our natural way of viewing the world

The two diagonal relationships express the focus of attention on *structure* versus *motive*. The Catalyst and Improviser share a focus on motive, or why people do things; the Theorist and Stabilizer share a focus on structure, valuing order and organisation.

The important distinction is the *nature* of what attention is paid to, not what people's *interests* are. This model of the dynamics of interaction explains why people can become polarised and have difficulty in communicating and working with others of a different temperament.

In the next section we review two early landmark studies of the distribution of temperaments—one in mainland China, and the other in Australia.

The four temperaments and Chinese managers

Broer and McCarley (1999) conducted a study of the MBTI profiles of managers undertaking workshops in a joint venture company with about 800 employees. This appears to be the first published study in the West of the MBTI in China.

The profiles were from Chinese nationals in managerial and professional positions. There were 66 males and 53 females, and their ages ranged from 22 to 43 years. Some 96% had degrees from Chinese universities. The following analysis has been drawn from the published data of psychological type distributions.

Broer and McCarley found that managers reported strong SJ preferences: 41.5% of females and 57.6% of males were classified as Stabilizers, the highest frequencies for each sample. Next were NT Theorists (34.0% of females and 19.7% of males), followed by small numbers of SP Improvisers (13.2% of females, 12.1% of males) and NF Catalysts (11.3% of females, 10.6% of males).

Overall, there were no significant differences between the genders in the distribution of the four temperaments: the order of frequencies and their magnitudes are very similar. The results were virtually identical for reported type and validated type results.

The four temperaments and Australian managers

In a landmark study, Guthrie reported the MBTI profiles of managers undertaking leadership and executive development courses at the Australian Management College (1993).

This was a significant sample of managers ($n = 2288$), whose profiles were collected in the period 1990 to 1993. There were 280 females and 2008 males. All participants had management roles in the private sector, statutory corporations, government, or the military. Less than 1% were self-employed or business owners.

Guthrie reported on the frequencies of psychological types, as well as temperaments. The results clearly indicated significant differences between the two genders for each temperament. Of particular interest was the difference in frequencies between males and females:

- males indicated a strong SJ Stabilizer pattern (48%), followed by NT Theorist (38%)
- the results for females were NT Theorist (45%), followed by SJ Stabilizer (32%)

Both of these differences were significant ($p < 0.001$).

The patterns for the other temperaments were also different:

- male managers indicated SP Improviser (9%), followed by NF Catalyst (5%)
- female managers indicated NF Catalyst (17%), followed by SP Improviser (6%)

Both of these differences were significant ($p < 0.01$).

After making comparisons with data from the USA and the UK, Guthrie noted that there is a consistent pattern, in that in the Australian data

... there are more female managers that are change oriented than their male counterparts ... and more female managers than male managers have preferences that take account of values in the decision-making process. (p 16)



Huifang Yang (ISTP) is a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Business, Nanjing University, and is currently a research fellow at the University of Newcastle.

Dr Yang has interests in personality and human resource management. She is participating in several international co-operative research projects.

hfyang126@hotmail.com

New evidence about Chinese and Australian managers

A paper by Yang and Zhao (2004) provided the stimulus for a new look at the distribution of the four temperaments of managers in China and Australia. Yang and Zhao reported on the range of types for **Chinese** managers. Their results echo the Broer and McCarley (1999) study.

Yang and Zhao drew a random sample from students undertaking postgraduate courses in business management. There were 253 Chinese business managers in the sample (195 males and 58 females), employed in state-owned enterprises, joint venture companies and private enterprises in various industrial sectors in Jiangsu province and Beijing.

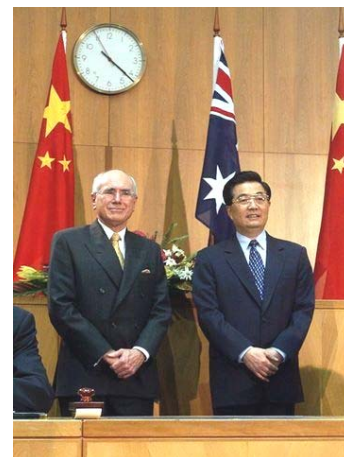
Yang and Zhao (2007) noted that the ratio of 77% male to 23% female corresponds to the gender distribution of managers in China. The managers included individuals of higher, middle and lower rank, responsible for management positions including human resources, technology, sales, finance, strategic planning and project management. They were aged from 25 to 55, and most had a college or university education.

The managers responded to a Chinese version of Form M of the MBTI. Further information on this version is available in Yang and Zhao (2007). Figure 1 shows the high frequency of the Stabilizer temperament in the Chinese samples.

The **Australian** sample was extracted from the MBTI Australian Data Archive, an ongoing project of the Psychological Type Research Unit at Deakin University. The data were from Form K and Form G profiles for 300 females and 650 males, from donated data from a range of leadership and management courses conducted by MBTI practitioners across Australia. These profiles did not include any of the profiles used by Guthrie (1993) and were of more recent origin.

The sample ratio of 68% males to 32% females approximates the gender ratio for persons classified as ‘managers’ in the 2006 Australian Census (66% males to 34% females). This Australian sample is drawn from samples of convenience, and is not presented as a random sample of managers.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of frequencies in the Australian samples and the gender differences in these distributions.



Stabilizers had the highest frequencies in both groups

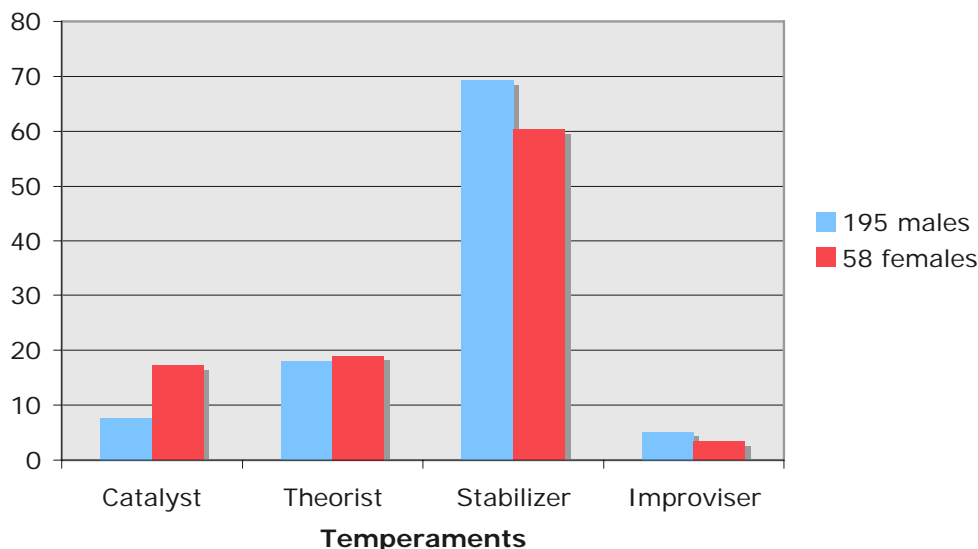


Figure 1: Frequencies of the temperaments in the Chinese sample of managers, by gender

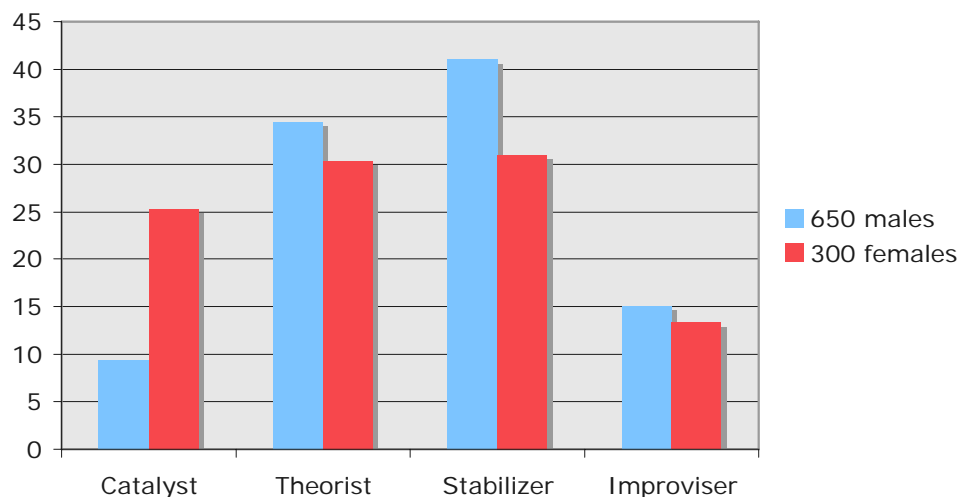


Figure 2: Frequencies of temperaments in the Australian sample of managers, by gender

Gender differences in the temperaments of Chinese and Australian managers



Shuming Zhao (ENFJ) is dean of the School of Business at Nanjing University and dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Macau University of Science and Technology.

Professor Zhao has had many international engagements and regularly visits the University of Southern California. His research interests are human resource management and international business.

zhaosm@nju.edu.cn

Comparisons of the temperaments derived from MBTI data from the Australian and Chinese samples were analysed using SPSS and the Selection Ratio Program (Moody, Granada and Myers, 1993).

Within the national groups, there are significantly more NF preferences shown by female Australian managers, compared to male Australian managers ($p < 0.001$). Overall, the modal temperament is SJ, the highest frequency for managers of either gender, but these results are stronger in the Chinese than in the Australian samples.

When comparing the males across national groups, there were significant differences between Chinese and Australian managers: the frequencies for NT, SJ and SP were all significantly different ($p < 0.001$). This evidence seems to suggest there is more variety in the distribution of temperaments in male Australian managers compared to male Chinese managers.

The comparative data for the Chinese and Australian female managers show two significant differences for SJ Stabilizer ($p < 0.01$) and SP Improviser ($p < 0.05$). It appears that female Chinese managers are more closely aligned to having a high proportion of SJ as their male counterparts, but this difference is not as apparent for female Australian managers.

Tables 3 and 4 present the percentages of males and females across the Chinese and Australian samples who expressed preferences for one of the temperament patterns.

Table 3: Comparison of temperaments of Chinese and Australian managers—*male*

	Chinese male managers (n = 195)	Australian male managers (n = 650)
NF Catalyst	7.7%	9.4%
NT Theorist	18.0% ^{***}	34.5% ^{***}
SJ Stabilizer	69.2% ^{***}	41.1% ^{***}
SP Improviser	5.1% ^{***}	15.1% ^{***}

^{***} $p < 0.001$

The comparison of the **male** Chinese and Australian managers shows significant differences for three of the four temperaments. These results could occur by chance about once in a thousand times ($p < 0.001$), implying that the two sets of managers are not alike in their distributions of temperaments.

Although the Stabilizer temperament has the highest frequency in both groups, only about four in ten Australian managers express that temperament, compared to nearly seven in ten Chinese managers.

The percentages of the Improviser and Theorist temperaments are higher among the male Australian managers than among the male Chinese managers.

Table 4: Comparison of temperaments of Chinese and Australian managers—*female*

	Chinese female managers (n = 58)	Australian female managers (n = 300)
NF Catalyst	17.2%	25.3%
NT Theorist	19.0%	30.3%
SJ Stabilizer	60.3%**	31.0%**
SP Improviser	3.5%*	13.3%*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Comparison of the two **female** samples shows statistical significance for both the Stabilizer and Improviser temperaments, but with directional differences between the two samples. Compared to the female Chinese managers, there are approximately half as many Stabilizers in the sample of female Australian managers, but relatively more Improvisers.

Discussion

There are several issues highlighted by the new evidence, which, by and large, supports and extends the earlier landmark studies.

For example, the Chinese studies indicated a high frequency of the Stabilizer temperament in Chinese managers of both genders. The new data show the sharper contrast between the temperaments of male and female Australian managers. Clearly, the distributions of the four temperaments are different for the two countries.

The implication for Australian managers dealing with Chinese managers is that they should not assume that as much variety in the range of temperaments exists in China. Australian managers might expect some communication difficulties because of the mismatch between their temperaments and those of the Chinese managers.

Conversely, Chinese managers may be unprepared for the wider range of temperaments, and corresponding behaviours, of Australian managers, particularly when they are likely to encounter some variation in temperament ranges between male and female managers.

These variations are likely to be exhibited in what managers take for granted in business interactions. Different world views may lead to misunderstanding, where one manager is working on a different basis from others in their group because of their underlying difference in temperament.

Consider the case of a female Australian manager communicating with a male Chinese manager. This is quite likely to be a combination of (respectively) an NT Theorist and an SJ Stabilizer. What temperament differences (in addition to the cultural differences alluded to in Table 1) can lead to misunderstandings, and how could the managers be coached to bring about better communication?

The Stabilizer's tendency to rely on factual language and to value anything useful can be contrasted with the Theorist's more conceptual language and valuing of anything conceptual. Moreover, the Stabilizer will be interested in the *what* and *how*, while the Theorist will be asking *why* and trying to understand the logic.

We have been discussing their differences, but we need to remember that the Theorist and Stabilizer temperaments have things in common: when interacting, they are linked by their attention to the structure of situations, rather than people's motives. It is here that the coach should maintain a focus for better understanding. The intent is to become more in control of events, rather than feeling that one is subject to random forces.

Berens (2006, p 21) suggests that Stabilizers will want to inform others about what is appropriate and what might be expected, e.g. *Where do we start?* The Theorist wants everyone to be more competent and efficient; this might lead to *Let's be strategic and systematic*. Both the Stabilizer and Theorist will be more comfortable when the order of things is clear.

Perhaps this is the area the coach should work on with either group. The Stabilizer will tend to lead by establishing *procedures*, the Theorist by developing *strategies*. Berens (2006) and Denning (2004) provide more detailed and useful strategies for the coach seeking better understanding of the role of the temperaments in interactions. ❖

References

- Austrade. 2009. <<http://www.austrade.gov.au/China-Doing-business/default.aspx>> retrieved 18 June 2009.
- Austrade, 2007. Australia: China exports largest growth this century. <www.industrysearch.com.au/Features/AustradeChina_exports_largest_growth_market_this_century-1162> retrieved 28 July 2007.
- Berens, L. V. 2006, *Understanding yourself and others: An introduction to the four temperaments*. 3e. Telos, Huntington Beach.
- Broer, E. & McCarley, N. G. 1999, Using and validating the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in mainland China. *Journal of Psychological Type*, vol. 51, pp. 5-21.
- Dunning, D. 2004, *Quick guide to the four temperaments and change: Strategies for navigating workplace change*. Telos, Huntington Beach.
- Guthrie, J. 1993, The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator at the Australian Management College, Mt Eliza, *The Practising Manager*, April, pp. 11-18.
- Keirse, D. 1998, *Please understand me II*. Prometheus Nemesis, Del Mar.
- Keirse, D. & Bates, M. 1978, *Please understand me*, 3e. Prometheus Nemesis, Del Mar.
- Kroeger, O. & Thuesen, J. M. 1995, *Type-watching*. Bantam Doubleday Dell.
- Liang, S. & Whiteley, A. 2003, Australian businesses in China: searching for synergy, *Asia Pacific Business Review*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 41-60.
- Moody, R. A., Granada, J. G. & Myers, I. B. 1993, *Selection ratio type tables for the Macintosh*, Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Gainesville.
- Myers, I. B., McCaulley, M. H., Quenk, N. L., & Hammer, A. L. 1998, *MBTI Manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, 3e, Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto.
- Whiteley, A. M. 2004, Preparing the supervisor and student for cross cultural supervision. *International Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, vol. 7, no. 6, pp 422-430.
- Yang, H. F., & Zhao, S. M. 2004, A research on the personality types of business managers, *Psychological Science (China)*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 983-985.
- Yang, H. F., & Zhao, S. M. 2007, *Understanding Chinese business managers' personality type and locus of control: The MBTI approach*, unpublished paper, Nanjing University, Nanjing.