

Personality Trait Structure of Shanxi Business-tycoons in the Chinese Ming and Qing Dynasties

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Abstract

Taking lexical hypothesis of personality trait theory as methodology, this paper attempts to give a quantitative analysis on the personality structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Chinese Ming and Qing dynasties (PSSM) from psychology views. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of data from a sample of 152 effective questionnaires shows that their personalities consisted of four factors, including “honest and righteous”, “wise and confident”, “calm and persevering” and “determined and promising”. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of data from another sample of 305 effective questionnaires further confirmed PSSM factorial validity, and fitting indexes were all reasonable. The above results have indicated the cultural inheritance of personality trait as well as the uniqueness and continuity of regional personality trait.

Keywords: Chinese personality, Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing Dynasty, Personality structure

1. Introduction

Jin Merchants in the Ming and Qing dynasties usually refer to the Shanxi merchants of the Ming and Qing dynasties in ancient China. As the earliest merchants in Chinese history, they are dated back to Spring-Autumn and Warring States periods of China. The Ming and Qing Dynasties were the golden age of Shanxi merchants, which had occupied the first place among China's top ten merchant leagues. During that time, they had accomplished numerous business miracles with their great financial strength, advanced management, integrity-based business culture and vast business territories. Their stores, selling salt, iron, cotton, textile, fur, silk and tea, and banks had covered every part of China, and even reached Europe, Japan, South East Asia and Arab countries, ruling China's business circle for 500 years(Liu, Feng, & Ji, 2004). They had been ranked with Italian merchants, thus enjoying a world-wide reputation. As a special group - both merchant and Confucian flourishing- in Chinese socio-economic arena from the end of the 14th century to the early 20th century, they have not only become the focus of some traditional participants, such as history, economics and sociology etc., there are also some scholars researching their organization culture, management and recognition etc. from psychology views recently (Yang & Zheng, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). The glory they achieved not only associates with the social and historical background of that time, but also has close relationship with their personality traits forming under the influence of Chinese traditional culture and Chinese civilization in the Yellow River valley. Most of studies on Shanxi merchants' personality adopt qualitative study pattern and start from history and sociology views(Cui, 2005; Guo, 2006); while this research, after reviewing and summarizing relevant achievements on “Chinese Personality”, “Ancient Chinese Personality” as well as “Ancient Chinese Merchants’

Personality”, takes lexical hypothesis of personality trait theory as methodology, and then attempts to give a quantitative analysis to the personality structure of Shanxi business-tycoons during the Ming and Qing Dynasties from psychology views. Besides, existing researches show that there is high correlation between leaders’ personality trait and organization’s management performance; meanwhile, proper manager can be picked up by measuring the personality trait. Therefore, the study on Shanxi merchants’ personality structure will not only promote the localized research on Chinese personality, but also bear significant theoretical and practical meanings for enriching the achievements of Shanxi merchants, summarizing the personality trait of high performance leaders and promoting modern social and economical development etc.

Personality, as the mixture of individual’s capability, interest, attitude, qualities, thought, mood and other behavioral differences, is individual’s typical and relatively stable dynamic system of behaviors(McCrae & Costa, 1994); meanwhile, personality structure is also a result that individual’s inherited characteristics, social situation and culture act together(Wang & Cui, 2000). Therefore, the similarity or diversity of personality structure is partly due to the similarity or diversity of social situation and culture at that time, and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures also make their personality structure and behavioral patterns different from each other. Faced with the problem - whether the western personality theory formed under the background of western culture is also applicable to Chinese, it appears to be imperative and necessary to sinicize and localize the personality study(Huang, 2004).

In recent years, apart from some scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan(Li & Yang, 2006; Song, Zhang, & Zhang, 1993; Wen & Xiao, 2006), researchers in Chinese mainland also studied Chinese personality and put forward “Big Seven” Factor Model(Cui & Wang, 2003; Wang, Cui & Zhou, 2005; Wang & Cui, 2003, 2004) and “Big Six” Factor Model (Cheung et al., 1996; Cheung et al., 2001; Zhang & Zhou, 2006)concerning Chinese personality. Some western psychologists think that the “Big Five” Model for westerner’s personality, which consists of extraversion, agreeableness, impartiality, emotional stability and openness, is correct for all cultures, and has cross-cultural consistency(McCrae & Costa, 1997); but some studies have shown that the four dimensions for Chinese personality (“outgoing and active”, “gentle and amiable”, “precise and self-controlled” and “warm and straightforward”) partly correspond to the dimensions for western personality (extraversion, agreeableness, impartiality, emotional stability), but the other three dimensions, which are “smart and capable”, “plain and honest” and “kind and friendly”, are typical features of Chinese; whereas “openness” which is absent in Chinese personality is typical for westerner(Wang, Cui & Zhou, 2005; Wang & Cui, 2004). However, Zhang & Zhou (2006) have adopted CPAI (China Personality Assessment Inventory) and found the Six Factor Model of Chinese personality which consists of emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, out-inwardness, social relations and openness. The “Big Six” Model includes both “social relations”, which shows Chinese humanity and ethical spirit, and “openness”, which reflects western spirit of exploration.

The localization of Chinese personality study has made certain achievements, but it needs to be further strengthened in both scope and depth. Meanwhile, apart from inheritance, individual’s personality is also greatly influenced by the society, environment and culture of that time. Therefore, the study should also emphasize the unique culture of China, while learn from western experience, so as to assess and research the formation, development and transformation etc. of Chinese personality from deeper cultural views. Although China’s modernization has been more than one hundred years, Chinese history has branded both Chinese individual and society with unique cultural features. Therefore, obviously, accurately grasping Chinese personality trait needs to understand ancient Chinese personality and its structure firstly. Currently, psychological studies centered on ancient Chinese personality are rare to see, and most of them belong to qualitative studies from history and culture views. Among them, studies on the ancient Chinese Confucians personality showed that the ancient Chinese had regarded loyalty, faithfulness, etiquette, righteousness and benevolence as their ideal personalities for self cultivation, and pursued integrity and personal independence (Zhang, 2005). Ancient Chinese personality had been influenced by Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism and Mohism etc. together (Zeng, 1993; Zhang, 2006). Confucius put forward the physical type theory of personality(Yan & Wang, 2008; Yang, 1997), dividing personality from virtue, intelligence and nature and emphasizing the unity of virtue and intelligence(Jing, 2008); Xun Zi focused on “courage” of personality; Mo School paid attention to “chivalry”; and the Personality Records, a book on ancient Chinese personality wrote by Liu Zhao, put forward the intellectual traits of ancient Chinese personality: virtue (Moderation, flat) and courage (intelligent, brave) (Shang, 2006).

In recent years, some scholars in Chinese mainland have attempted to study the personality of ancient Chinese and historical characters with quantitative method. Some researchers adopted historical psychology to study the personality of Liang Shu-ming, a Chinese Confucian master, with a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis(Zheng, Huang, & Zhang, 2003); besides, Yang(2005)carried out a quantitative study on ancient Chinese

personality structure by a method integrating factor analysis with content analysis, and further analyzed and explained the meaning of benevolence, intelligence, courage and confident by combining Chinese tradition philosophy. However, although the above groundbreaking studies mark significant attempts by using quantitative study method, many shortages still exist in the aspect of research techniques (such as the selection of subject, the regulation of statistical processing etc.), which demand attention in the future research.

The cultural situation in which ancient Chinese merchants lived was much different from that of western merchants. Ancient Chinese business always mingled with traditional Confucian culture. Therefore, it can be found from the studies on ancient Chinese merchants' personality that their personalities involve many Confucian factors. As shown in current resources, there has no empirical result in this field, and the researches still mainly center on history, ethics and sociology etc.

As for the personality study of ancient Chinese Confucian merchants, some researchers summarized their personality traits into the following five aspects: first, doing business with righteousness; second, emphasizing the family's public benefits instead of individual's benefits; third, doing business with honesty; fourth, living economically; fifth, loving the country and the people (Li, 1997). Meanwhile, it is believed that the merchants value justice above material gains with a high virtue (Yang, 2000), and the researchers emphasize that "honest" is the ethic basis of Confucian merchants (Bian, 2003). The personality studies concerning merchants of late Qing Dynasty also put forward that Chinese merchants are characterized by independence, justice, intelligence, civilized poise and aggressiveness (Ma, 2004). And the studies on Shanxi merchants' personality point out their personality traits – honest, faithful, righteous, wise, courageous (Cui, 2005) and benevolent play an important guiding role in their daily business and ethical codes, and focus on their "loyalty" (Guo, 2006). Besides, it can be found from the studies on ancient Chinese merchants of other places that "Confucian" is a significant personality trait of Huizhou merchants (Yu, 1994); while Yue merchants are characterized by practical, aggressive, flexible, superstitious and politically plain personalities (Ou, 2004).

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were drawn from Shanxi University, Shanxi University of Finance and Economics and Shanxi Normal University, and they were all students and teachers majored in history, economics, sociology and management studying Shanxi merchants. 457 effective questionnaires were available after screening. Among them, 228 for men, and 229 for women; 55 for teachers, and 402 for students; age ranged from 22 to 50; 152 for history, 134 for economics, 62 for sociology and 109 for management; 422 for master's degree, 25 for doctor's degree and 10 for bachelor's degree (some teachers were at bachelor's degree).

2.2 Materials

According to existing research works of Shanxi merchants, researchers of this study wrote a reading material - *Memoir of Shanxi Business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties*, which involved the most representative "Host" and "Shopkeeper" in the group, 16 people in total; and the Personality Inventory which consisted of 248 Chinese adjectives (Zheng, Huang, & Zhang, 2003) was applied to this study, using 7-points scoring method. 16 master's and doctor's degree students in Shanxi merchants from Shanxi University (12 master's and 4 doctor's degree students, half men and half women) were asked to read the material, and marked for Shanxi merchants' personality based on their own understanding and knowledge, and then selected 27 adjectives which got over 5 points (which meant agree, relatively agree and totally agree respectively) to form the "Personality Inventory for Shanxi Business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties". Kendall coefficient of concordance was adopted on the basis of the students' selection to calculate the consistency reliability, $W=.33(p<.001)$, which showed that the scoring results of the participants reach a high consensus.

2.3 Procedure

Participants were asked to read the supplied material - *Memoir of Shanxi Business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties* in one week, and assessed the merchants' personality in the "Personality Inventory for Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties". And the received 457 effective questionnaires were divided into two parts in the ratio 2:1, according to Latin-square allocation principle. They were used to study and test the personality traits structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and the sample size were 152 and 305 respectively; meanwhile, the data was managed and analyzed with SPSS13.0 and LISREL 8.70.

3. Results

3.1 Feasibility Test of Factor Analysis on Personality Structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Chinese Ming and Qing dynasties

The variables involving in exploratory factor analysis were 27 Chinese words concerning the personality traits of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Bartlett test was carried out according to the relations among variables, and the checksum for Approx. Chi-Square was 1486.72, $df=231$, $p<.001$; meanwhile, the statistics for KMO was .87, greater than 0.7, which indicated that the data was available for factor analysis.

3.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis on Personality Structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties

By using principal component analysis and orthogonal rotation, personality structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties was analyzed from exploratory factor, and the results were shown in **Table 1**. Judgment based on the pie chart showed that it was reasonable to extract four factors, if characteristic root value was greater than 1, communality was greater than .40 and factor loading was greater than .50. After canceling five adjectives – innovative, dutiful, stubborn, capable and aggressive, totally 22 words entered factor structure, and Factor analysis showed a total explained variance of 56.70%.

Based on exploratory factor analysis, the first factor drawn from it included nine adjectives, which were kindhearted, modest, righteous, honest, freehanded, reliable, generous, passionate and chivalrous respectively. All of these were used to describe someone's moral character, so we named it as "honest and righteous"; the second factor included five adjectives, which were competitive, confident, outstanding, self-respected and wise. By analyzing their meanings, it could be seen that they all described individual capability and confidence, so we called it as "wise and confident"; the third factor included four adjectives, which were calm, steady, staid and tough. The four words mainly represented individual's volitional quality and behavioral style, so we summarized it as "calm and persevering"; the last factor included four adjectives, which were persistent, decisive, cooperative and promising. These words showed individual's will and attitude of another type, so we named it as "determined and promising". In addition, the variance contribution rate for the first factor reached 36.031%, while that for the second factor reduced to 8.700%. Therefore, it was believed that the first factor "honest and righteous" was the core personality of Ming and Qing Shanxi merchants.

3.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was taken as the internal coincident indicator to conduct reliability detection of homogeneity on the questionnaires. The result showed that the homogeneity reliability for the four dimensions were all within the range of .70~.88, indicating good reliability. The results were shown in **Table 2**.

3.4 Tests on Personality Structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties

According to the result of exploratory factor analysis, the personality of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties was preliminarily designed as a structural model which consisted of four factors. In order to test the model's rationality, LISREL 8.70 was used to analyze the 305 questionnaires and test the model, thus getting a second-order four-factor model concerning the personality structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties, as shown in **Fig. 1**.

In SEM, sample usually does not influence the fitting exponential of GFI, CFI and RMSEA. GFI mainly describe how the theoretical model fit with the correlation, and AGFI is its adjusted index; CFI represents the fitting situation between data and theoretical structure by comparing with unreal model; as for RMSEA, when $it<.05$, the fitting situation is good. When it is $.05\sim.08$, the fitting situation is relatively good. And when it is $.08\sim.10$, the fitting situation is only acceptable. NFI and NNFI are not easily influenced by sample size. χ^2/df is an estimated value, generally ranging from 2 to 3. It is best to be smaller than 2, but acceptable when it's smaller than 5 (Barbara, 1998).

By using LISREL 8.70 to analyze the data and adjust the model, it could be found that the modified index between "modest" and "aggressive" was 45.35, which was the biggest among all the modified indexes. This result indicated that if we changed its path, χ^2 would reduce 45.35. Certainly, we could not decide the modification of model only relied on data. After careful analysis, it was believed that still putting "modest" into the first factor "honest and righteous" was more reasonable theoretically and easier to explain; besides, it could be seen from the test result (as shown in **Table 3**) that all the indexes were within a reasonable range. Therefore, the model fitted well with data. In addition, by comparing with the single-factor model, the four-factor personality model for Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties was better from the view of fitting index.

4. Discussions

4.1 Analysis on Personality Structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties

According to the result of factor analysis, “honest and righteous” is taken as the core personality of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Chinese traditional culture and Confucian morality both emphasize benevolence, faith and righteousness. Although feudal society was in decline in Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chinese traditional culture still had profound and significant impact, becoming the moral standard in mind and behavior for the merchants; meanwhile, this is in line with their business philosophy, which is “take credit as first, value justice above profits (Yang & Zheng, 2005)”, and further consist with the basic personality traits of ancient Chinese merchants (Bian, 2003; Ma, 2004; Li, 1997; Yang, 2000). After winning a good public praise as honesty, Shanxi merchants innovatively employed fellow villagers, who became stockholders with their labor, and realized their wishes of “Land of Wealth” with confidence and courage, which just reflected their “wise and confident”. Shanxi business covered the whole country, and even stretched out to Asia, Europe and Russia etc. There must be lots of unexpected difficulties arose in their course of doing business. Among those merchants, many of them were business leaders who opened firms, so they must be “calm and persevering” in mind and “determined and promising” in behavior when they came across difficulties and changes in environment, society, politics and business etc. Therefore, “calm and persevering” and “determined and promising” are necessary for Shanxi merchants to create glorious achievement in business.

By analyzing from the structure, this paper put forward that the personality structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties consist of four factors, which are “honest and righteous”, “wise and confident”, “calm and persevering” and “determined and promising”. And this result consists with the existing study on Chinese personality. In the study of Wang and Cui, three unique dimensions for Chinese have been raised, which are “smart and capable”, “plain and honest” and “kind and friendly”. This result highly consists with the two factors - “honest and righteous” and “wise and confident” in this study (Cui & Wang, 2003; Wang & Cui, 2003, 2004). In particular, “plain and honest” and “kind and friendly” correspond to “honest and righteous” in Shanxi merchant’s personality, which further prove that “benevolent” is the core personality trait of Chinese (Li & Chen, 2003), and reflect “people are inherently good” in Chinese culture and in their mind (Wang & Cui, 2006); meanwhile, the working style (rigorous, self-control, steady) as well as capability traits (decisive, persevering, alert) of Chinese people correspond to the “wise and confident”, “calm and persevering” of Shanxi merchants (Cui & Wang, 2005; Wang & Cui, 2005). As for the studies on Chinese personality (Song, Zhang, & Zhang, 1993), Chinese people are characterized by “nice”, “extroverted”, “persevering and careful”, “weak and inferior”, “harmonious” and “kind”. Among these traits, “nice” and “persevering and careful” obviously corresponds to the “honest and righteous”, “calm and persevering” and “determined and promising” of Shanxi merchants. Besides, in the study of ancient Chinese personality, it is believed that the ideal personality consists of four factors, which are benevolence, intelligence, courage and confident, or five factors, which refer to benevolence, righteousness, etiquette, wisdom and faithfulness (Yan & Liu, 2005; Yang, 2005). By comparing with the four-factor model, other factors in it except “confident” are all reflected in the personality structure of Shanxi merchants. The lack of “confident” may be related with the special occupational requirement of merchant, which ask them to communicate with others; in addition, ancient Chinese greatly emphasize the cultivation of mind, asking people to be confident, low-keyed and careful. Merchants, however, are asked to be decisive and dare to run the risk facing various changes of market. Therefore, except for “determined and promising”, other factors in the personality structure of Shanxi merchants highly correspond to the five-factor model of ancient Chinese personality.

4.2 Relation between the Personalities of Shanxi Business Tycoons and Shanxi People

Shanxi is a mountainous province. On the west and south is Yellow River; on the east is Taihang Mountains and on the north are the Great Wall and Gobi desert regions. It leans against the hill and faces the river with a high-altitude, molding their diverse characters. According to the existing studies on Shanxi people’s personality (Hou, 2005; Liu & Han, 2000; Xin, Han, & Liu, 1994), Shanxi people are characterized by brave, hardworking, strong, sincere, heroic, wise, tolerant, patient, thrifty, eloquent, open, competitive, modest, elegant, bold, kind-hearted and adaptable etc. If we summarize these words mentioned above, it is easy to find that they apparently consist with the personality traits of Shanxi business tycoons, as shown in **Table 4**.

Beside, Shanxi is in the Yellow River basin. And it can be seen from the studies on personality traits of Yellow River people that people in that region are characterized by faithfulness, benevolence, righteousness, etiquette and faithfulness (Jiang, 1996), which are also similar with the personality traits of Shanxi merchants. By comparison, it can be seem that the personality of Shanxi merchants have obvious characteristics of Shanxi

personality, which indicate the cultural inheritance of personality trait as well as the continuity of regional personality trait.

4.3 Personality Comparison between Shanxi Business Tycoons and Huizhou Merchants

Among the top ten business groups of Ming and Qing Dynasties, the one which can compete with Shanxi merchants is Huizhou merchants (Dai, 2004; Ge, 2004; Wang & Zhang, 2005; Yu, 1994). After carefully analyzing the personality traits of Huizhou merchants and comparing with Shanxi merchant, it can be found that: from the view of structure, Shanxi merchants are more “calm and persevering” and “determined and promising”, though Huizhou merchants also have these personalities. This can be reflected from personnel system, management, business philosophy and operational areas etc. Both of the two groups are characterized by “honest and righteous”. This not only closely relates with the social and historical environment of that time, but also has relations with the Confucian virtue’s huge impact on individual’s mind and behavior; however, by analyzing this factor carefully, it can be found that there are some differences between them. That’s to say, Shanxi merchants value righteousness more than honesty, and the “righteousness” here mainly means personal loyalty. This may be because that Shanxi is the hometown of Kuan Kung (god of war), thus making Shanxi people and merchants value personal loyalty while value honesty (Cui, 2005; Guo, 2006). In the personality structure of Shanxi merchants, the factor “honest and righteous” just can reflect “chivalric”; on the other side, Huizhou merchants have a special feeling and respect toward Zhuxi, so etiquette is much more reflected in their behavior. Although both of the two groups express strong business abilities and confidence in business practice, the “wise” of Shanxi merchants mainly reflects in their innovative management strategies, they usually stress on benefits rather than reputation; while the “wise” of Huizhou merchants mainly reflects in their study on traditional culture. They often try to win a degree in civil examination after getting profits from business, which may relates with Huizhou’s developed cultural education and numerous schools of that time. From the above analysis, we can see the unique qualities of Shanxi merchant.

5. Conclusions

The personality structure of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties consist of four factors, which are “honest and righteous”, “wise and confident”, “calm and persevering” and “determined and promising”. By comparison, it can be seen that this result shows high consistence with the existing achievements of “Chinese Personality” and “Ancient Chinese Personality”. The personality traits of Shanxi business-tycoons in the Ming and Qing dynasties are different from those of Huizhou merchants, and the personality of Shanxi merchants have obvious characteristics of Shanxi personality, which indicate the cultural inheritance of personality trait as well as the uniqueness and continuity of regional personality trait.

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Table 1. Results of EFA of Personality Trait Structure of Shanxi Business-tycoons ($n=152$)

Variables	Factor1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Kindhearted	.73	.12	.27	-.06
Modest	.70	.11	.19	.10
Righteous	.68	.03	.17	.38
Honest	.64	.16	.15	.01
Freehanded	.61	.18	.12	.30
Reliable	.60	.16	.24	.30
Generous	.59	.22	-.08	.31
Passionate	.55	.22	.47	-.04
Chivalrous	.51	.04	.25	.29
Competitive	-.13	.73	.14	.04
Confident	.23	.68	.05	.22
Outstanding	.32	.68	.19	.16
Self-respected	.35	.64	.34	-.08
Wise	.29	.60	.07	.28
Calm	.43	.02	.77	.09
Steady	.24	.12	.74	.15
Staid	.22	.20	.66	.31
Tough	.07	.26	.54	.35
Persistent	.29	.01	.22	.69
Decisive	.06	.44	.00	.66
Cooperative	.26	.13	.14	.61
Promising	.03	.20	.29	.59
Eigen value	7.93	1.91	1.34	1.29
Percentage of variance explained (%)	36.03	8.70	6.11	5.86

Table 2. Analysis on reliability of item

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor	Cronbach's Alpha
Honest-righteous	.88	Calm-persevering	.80
Wise-confident	.79	Determined-promising	.70

Table 3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis ($n=305$)

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	NNFI	CFI	IFI
Null	6393.17	231	27.68							
Single-factor model	1159.57	209	5.55	.130	.71	.65	.82	.83	.85	.85
Four-factor model	815.90	205	3.98	.077	.93	.90	.91	.93	.94	.94

Table 4. Comparison on Personality of Shanxi People and Shanxi Business-tycoons in the Chinese Ming and Qing Dynasties

Shanxi Business-tycoons	Shanxi People
honest-righteous	modesty, kindness, elegant, courtliness, kind-hearted, sincere, thrifty, tolerant
wise-confident	eloquent, plausibility, hardworking, wise, adaptable
calm-persevering	strong, persevere, patient
determined-promising	straightforward, heroic, brave, open, competition, bold

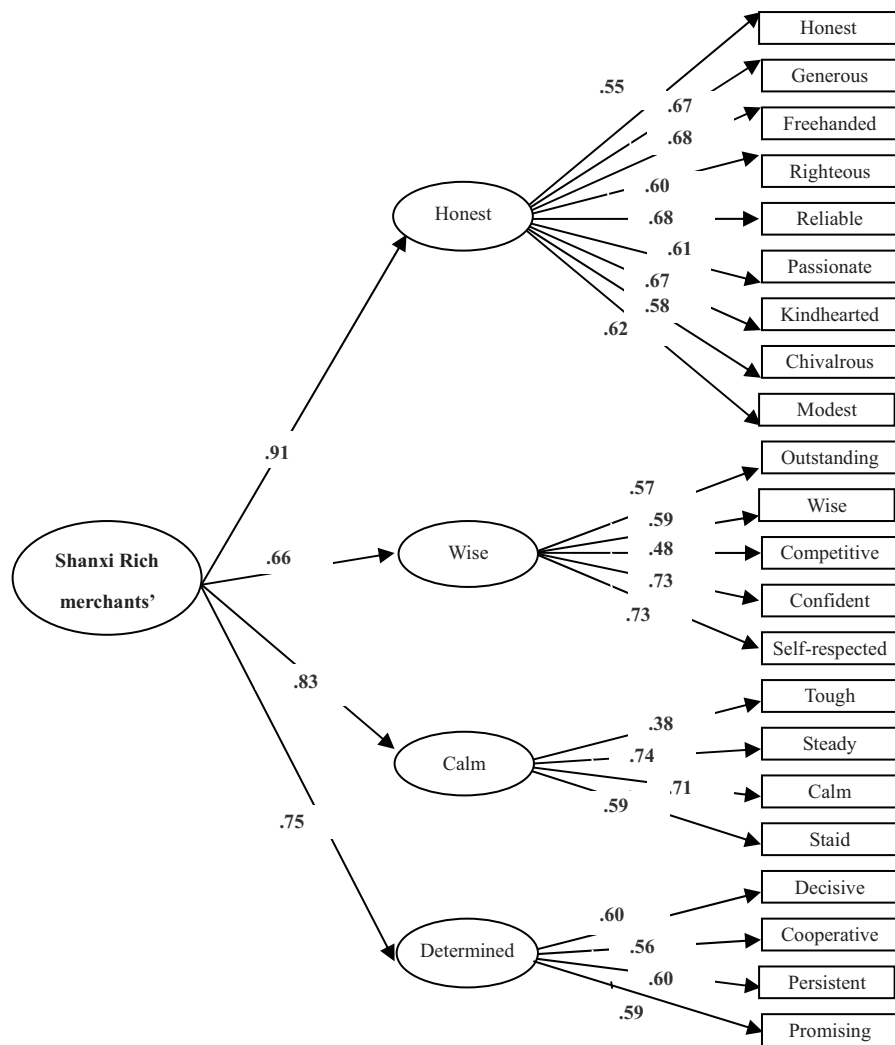


Figure 1. Four-factor Model on Personality Trait Structure of Shanxi Business-tycoons