

The effects of new lease accounting standards on enterprises cash holdings: Evidence from China

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Abstract: The objective of this research is to analyze whether the new lease accounting standards IFRS16 and China CAS21 affect the enterprises' cash holding decisions. This article regards the new lease standards as a "quasi-natural experiment" and uses a multiple-time-point difference-in-difference (DID) model for research. The research results show that changes in lease accounting standards will lead to enterprises' decisions to reduce their cash holdings, and non-state-owned enterprises (N-SOEs) and higher leasing levels enterprises will reduce their cash holdings more. At the same time, there are significant differences among enterprises with different sizes and different listed ages. The reduction of cash holdings by enterprises is significantly related to the new lease standards changing the financial leverage, debt maturity structure and total asset cash recovery ratio of enterprises.

1. Introduction

Holding cash is very important for enterprises. A reasonable amount of cash holding can improve their survival ability, competitiveness, and optimize their development prospects. Cash assets held by enterprises have comprehensively reflect the governance status and financial management strategy of enterprises. The cash holding policy of enterprises has a significant negative correlation with their borrowing capacity [1]. At the same time, there is a substitution relationship between leasing and debt [2, 3]. Leasing can increase the debt capacity of enterprises[4], which affects the enterprises' cash holding policy. When the cash flow of enterprises is tight, enterprises are more inclined to use leasing to obtain assets[5].when the financial constraints of enterprises are strong, enterprises will be more inclined to obtain additional capital through leasing [6].

Although leasing can solve the financial problems of enterprises, the disclosure of relevant leasing models has always been a major challenge. Operating leases did not need to be disclosed in the balance sheet. Practitioners, regulators, standard setters and scholars believe that operating leases cannot truly reflect the financial condition of the lessee enterprise [7], embellishes the true solvency of the enterprise, conceals the actual financial situation of the enterprise, and may cause information bias in the enterprise's financial statements. Financial statement users cannot detect the source of the rapid expansion of the enterprise's assets, overestimate the enterprise's debt repayment

ability and future development potential. To solve this problem, the IASB issued IFRS16 in January 2016, China promulgated CAS21 in December 2018. The new lease standard requiring all leasing transactions to be included in the balance sheet, except for low-value and asset leases of less than 12 months. This requirement will affect enterprises' debt capacity, investment and financing decisions, and cash flow, thereby affecting the cash holding decisions of enterprises.

After the release of the new leasing standards, it has attracted widespread attention from the academic community. Most of the literature focuses on exploring the economic consequences of the new leasing standards on enterprise financial indicators [8-13]; Part of literature explores its impact on enterprise value [14, 15], stock value [16], investment and financing decisions [17, 18]; There are also literature discussions that the overall operating cash flow quality of the enterprise will decline[19]. However, based on the currently available literature, there is no relevant research on whether the new leasing standards affect enterprise cash holding decisions.

Cash holdings are an important area of enterprise financial management. Enterprise cash holdings are closely related to investment and financing activities, and also reflect the enterprise governance strategy and operational situation. Therefore, studying the impact of new leasing standards on cash holdings is of great significance. This article is based on the regulations of the Chinese Ministry of Finance, domestic and foreign listed enterprises that adopt international accounting standards will begin to implement the new lease standard from January 1, 2019, and other listed enterprises will begin to implement the new lease standard from January 1, 2021. Using the multiple-time-point DID model, empirically research on whether the new leasing standard has changed enterprise cash holding decisions.

This study has made important contributions in the following aspects:

- For the first time, comprehensive evaluation demonstrated the degree and direction of implementing the new leasing standards to change the cash holding decisions of enterprises. This not only expands the research content on the economic consequences of the new leasing standard;
- After in-depth analysis of enterprise financial leverage, debt maturity structure, and total asset cash recovery ratio, this study reveals the inherent mechanism of the new leasing standards on enterprise cash holding decisions. In addition, a detailed analysis was conducted on the heterogeneous effects of ownership structure and leasing level of enterprises. This article examines the differences in the implementation of the new standards among enterprises of different sizes and listed ages. These tests help to expand the understanding of the impact of the new leasing standards on enterprises in theory;
- After the change of accounting standards, management can reasonably formulate cash holding strategies based on the situation to optimize the efficiency of capital utilization. The management can accurately evaluate the development prospects and governance efficiency of enterprise to accurately reflect the cash holding levels of different types and sizes of enterprises.

2. Literature Review

In the production and operation activities of enterprises, cash flow has become the lifeblood of enterprises and is the fundamental basis for investment, research and development, market development, financing and development decisions. Adequate cash flow is like the blood of an enterprise, which will bring sustainable development to the enterprise. On the contrary, the lack of cash flow can stagnate the enterprise's development and even lead to bankruptcy. Therefore, it is crucial for the survival and development of enterprises to formulate a reasonable cash holding policy and improve the utilization rate of funds. Scholars have conducted research on the issue of enterprise cash holdings. Jensen [20] believes that cash flow can increase enterprise liabilities, reduce managers' inefficient investment, improving enterprise performance. Chaplinsky and

Niehaus [21] believe that an increase in cash flow helps reduce enterprise liabilities. Fazzari, Hubbard and Petersen [22] believe that the sensitivity of enterprises to cash holdings is positively correlated with the degree of external financing restrictions. Opler, Pinkowitz, Stulz and Williamson [1] found that the debt capacity and external debt situation of enterprises are negatively correlated with cash holdings; however, growth opportunities, investment opportunities and cash flow have a positive impact on cash holdings. Subramaniam, Tang, Yue and Zhou [23] believes that if an enterprise maintains too much cash flow, it will give managers the opportunity to make inefficient investments, causing damage to the enterprise. However, Denis and Sibilkov [24] believe that when an enterprise has more cash flow, it will make it easier for the enterprise to seize investment opportunities and obtain more benefits. Lee and Park [25] found that financing constraints and enterprise governance have a significant impact on enterprise cash holdings. Guangsheng [26] showed that there is a positive correlation between enterprise cash holdings and the growth rate of total assets, net cash flow and current liabilities, and a negative correlation with the growth rate of total liabilities. Therefore, scholars generally believe that the debt capacity, investment and financing decisions and cash flow of an enterprise have a significant relationship with the cash holdings of the enterprise.

A large number of studies have shown that the new lease accounting standards will affect the debt capacity, investment and financing decisions, and cash flow of enterprises. Callahan, Smith and Spencer [27] believed that lease capitalization has increased the relevance of liability value, enhanced transparency and reliability. Öztürk and Serçemeli [28] found that operating lease capitalization will lead to increased enterprise liabilities and weakened debt capacity. Białek-Jaworska, Dobroszek and Szatkowska [8] found that the new lease standards led to an increase in the debt-to-asset ratio of lessees. Górowski, Kurek and Szarucki [12] found that the new standards would lead to a deterioration in financial leverage indicators. Kim and Choi [19] found that the debt ratio increased, the interest coverage ratio decreased, and the current ratio and net cash flow decreased. Tao Zhang and Chuan Zhang [29] found that the implementation of the new lease standards weakened the ability of leased assets to predict future operating net cash flows. van Kints and Spoor [18] found that accounting treatment under IFRS 16 helps improve the quality of investment financing decisions, but does not necessarily help make investment financing decisions. Chen, Correia and Urcan [30] showed that lease capitalization significantly reduced the investment expenditure of lessee enterprises, and the impact was greater for enterprises subject to financing constraints. Christensen, Lynch and Partridge [17] showed that enterprises affected by the change in lease accounting standards had significantly improved investment efficiency in the year before the implementation of the standards.

Through literature review, it was found that the implementation of the new lease accounting standards will affect the debt capacity, investment and financing decisions and cash flow of enterprises, and the debt capacity, investment and financing decisions and cash flow of enterprises have a significant relationship with the cash holdings decisions of enterprises. Therefore, the implementation of the new leasing accounting standards will to some extent affect the cash holding decisions of enterprises.

3. Research Samples and Models

3.1. Research Sample

The research samples of this paper are enterprises listed on China's A-share market from 2016 to 2023. The relevant financial data are sourced from the CSMAR and WIND databases. In order to avoid the impact of abnormal samples, this paper processes the original data: Exclude listed enterprises in the financial industry; Exclude listed enterprises with stock abbreviations marked

with "ST" and "*ST"; Exclude listed enterprises with serious data deficiencies. Finally, there are 3069 enterprise samples and 24552 observations of panel data.

3.2. Model Construction

Considering that listed enterprises in China and abroad have begun to implement the new leasing standards in stages, this study choose to use the multiple-time-point DID model for evaluation and construct the following model:

$$\text{Cash}_{it} = \alpha + \beta \text{Lease_Post}_{it} + \gamma \text{Control_Var}_{it} + \eta_i + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Among them, the explained variable Cash_{it} represents the cash holdings of the enterprise, Cash_{it} equals cash and cash equivalents/total assets; the explanatory variable Lease_Post_{it} is a dummy variable, which is used to measure the interaction term between whether enterprise "i" implemented the new lease standard in year "t" and the dummy variable of the implementation time of the standards, Specifically, this article sets the enterprises that implement the new lease standard to 1 as the experimental group, and sets the enterprises that do not implement the new lease standard to 0 as the control group; the time dummy variable Post before and after the implementation of the new lease standard is set to 0 and 1 respectively; Control_Var_{it} represents all control variables, the control variables in this paper are: enterprise size (Size), cash substitutes (Liq), and cash flow (Cflow); η_i represents the firm fixed effect, μ_t represents the year fixed effect; $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ is the random interference term ; the coefficient β measures the average difference in the cash holdings of the enterprise before and after the implementation of the new lease standard.

4. Analysis of Empirical Results

4.1. Benchmark Regression Results

Table 1: Benchmark regression results

Variables	Column 1 Cash	Column 2 Cash	Column 3 Cash	Column 4 Cash
Lease_Post	-0.0084*** (-5.8578)	-0.0072*** (-2.8797)	-0.0072*** (-4.9931)	-0.0075*** (-3.0433)
Size			-0.0002 (-1.0212)	0.0012*** (5.1018)
Liq			-0.0731*** (-11.0180)	-0.1138*** (-13.8274)
Cflow			0.2301*** (16.4959)	0.2060*** (13.9557)
Firm fe	No	Yes	No	Yes
Year fe	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	24,552	24,552	24,552	24,552
Number of firm	3,069	3,069	3,069	3,069

Note: The data in brackets are the corresponding t-values under robust standard errors; ***, **, and * are significant at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. The same applies to the following tables.

Table 1 provides the regression results of the new lease standard on the cash holdings of enterprises. The results show that regardless of whether control variables and fixed effects are considered or not, the coefficient of Lease_Post is significantly negative, indicating that after implementing the new lease standard, enterprises have significantly reduced their cash holdings. The estimation results of column 4, after fully considering relevant factors, passed the test at a

significance level of 1 %. The estimated coefficient value of Lease_Post is -0.0075. Enterprises that implement the new leasing standards have an average decrease of about 0.75% in cash holdings compared to those that have not.

4.2. Parallel Trend Test

The prerequisite for the multiple-time-point (DID) model is to satisfy the parallel trend test hypothesis. According to the event study method of Jacobson, LaLonde and Sullivan [31] the time dummy variable of each enterprise in the experimental group reflects its observation results "n" years before, in the current year, and "n" years after the implementation of the new leasing standards. As shown in Figure 1, the coefficient estimates in each period before the implementation of the standard are not significant, and there is no significant difference in the financial risks between the two groups. After the implementation of the standards, the coefficients in each period are significantly negative and continuously declining, indicating that the new lease standards have increased the financial risks of enterprises. The study sample passed the parallel trend test.

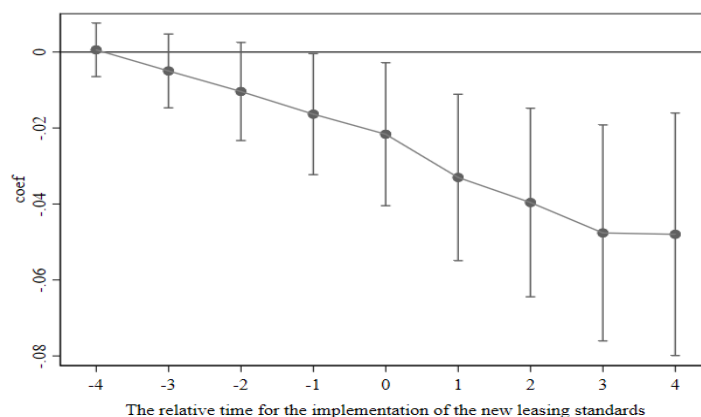


Figure 1: Parallel trend test results

4.3. Placebo Test

Table 2: Placebo test and robustness test

Variables	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
	Cash	Cash	PSM-DID	Exclu-revenue	Exclu-financial
Lease_Post-false2	-0.0042 (-1.6245)				
Lease_Post-false3		-0.0001 (-0.0274)			
Lease_Post			-0.0076*** (-3.2192)	-0.0071*** (-2.9052)	-0.0060*** (-2.7250)
Revenue_Lease				-0.0044 (-1.5463)	
Imf_Lease					-0.0085 (-1.6296)
Control_Var	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Firm and Year fe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	24,552	24,552	23,774	24,552	24,552
Adjusted R-squared	0.0465	0.0463	0.0542	0.0472	0.0472

Time changes may lead to differences in financial risk between the experimental group and the control group of enterprises. We advance the implementation time of the new lease standard by 2

years and 3 years respectively, represented by $Lease_Post^{false2}$ and $Lease_Post^{false3}$, and perform regression on benchmark regression mode (1). The analysis results in Table 2 Column 1 Column 2 show that the coefficient estimates of the dummy variables $Lease_Post^{false2}$ and $Lease_Post^{false3}$ do not reach a significant level. This means that there is no systematic difference in the time trend between the two groups of enterprises.

4.4. Robustness Test

4.4.1. Propensity Score Matching Difference-in-Differences Model (PSM-DID)

In order to prevent the influence of selection bias on research data and eliminate endogeneity issues that may be caused by sample selection bias, we adopted the PSM-DID method and used the caliper nearest neighbor matching method (1:2) for matching. The kernel density plot in Figure 2 shows that the matching results satisfied the balance test. Table 2 Column 3 present the relevant data of the PSM-DID regression results, the coefficient estimate of $Lease_Post$ passes the test at the 1% level, and the result is robust.

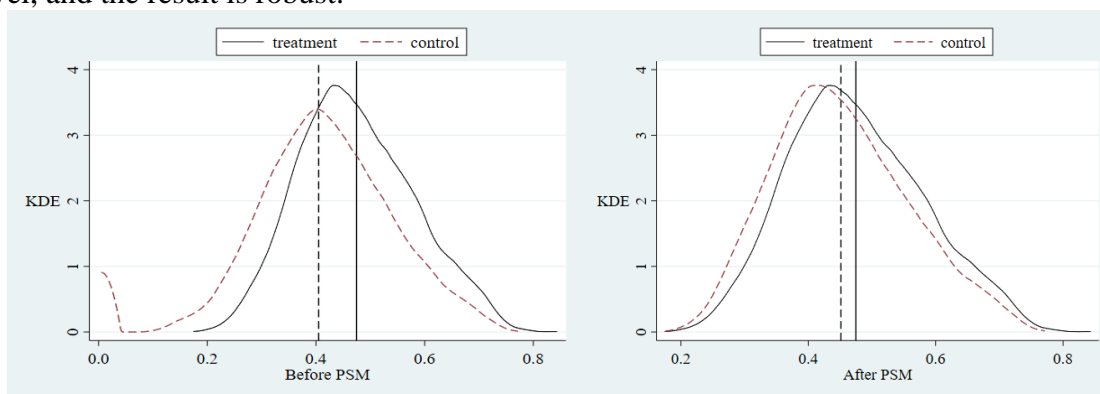


Figure 2: Kernel density plot of propensity score values

4.4.2. Exclude the Impact of Other Accounting Standards

During the investigation period of this article, China issued CAS14 on July5,2017, requiring enterprises to implement the new revenue standard in batches in 2018 and 2020; and issued CAS22 on March31, 2017, requiring enterprises to implement the new financial standard in batches in 2018 and 2019. Due to the overlap during the implementation of the three new standards, it may cause bias in the benchmark estimation results of the new lease standard. Therefore, in this study, a dummy variable for the year of implementation of the new income standard and the year of implementation of the new financial instrument standard were sequentially added to the benchmark regression model (1) to control for the impact of these two standards on the benchmark estimation results as much as possible. Table 2 Column 4 Column 5 show that after controlling for these two standards, the coefficients of the dummy variable $Lease_Post$ are still significantly negative, and the results are robust.

4.5. Heterogeneity Analysis

4.5.1. Heterogeneity of Enterprises of Different Ownership Structures

Compared to N-SOEs, Chinese SOEs are more inclined to use financial leasing rather than operating leasing. SOEs executives develop enterprises through financial leasing to obtain more remuneration and subsidies [32]. Therefore, the impact of the new leasing standards on SOEs is

relatively weak. This paper takes SOEs as 1 and N-SOEs as 0. Furthermore, the interaction term between the ownership structures enterprise CN and the Lease_Post dummy variable is substituted into formula (1). Table 3 Column 1 show that the estimated coefficient of CN*Lease_Post is significantly positive, indicating that N-SOEs have reduced their cash holdings more than SOEs after implementing the new leasing standards.

4.5.2. Heterogeneity of Enterprises with Different Leasing Levels

The more leased assets an enterprise has, the greater the impact of the new lease standard will be. And the enterprise is more likely to structure more operating lease arrangements to meet specific needs. This article sets the value of 1 for enterprises in the top 25 percentile of the distribution of the proportion of Right-of-use assets to total assets in 2021 when the new lease standard is fully implemented in China, and takes the value of 0 for other enterprises. Furthermore, the interaction term between the lease level (High_Lease) and the (Lease_Post) dummy variable is substituted into equation (1). Table 3 Column 2 show that the estimated coefficient of HighLease*Lease_Post is significantly negative, indicating that enterprises with high lease levels will reduce their cash holdings more after implementing the new lease standard.

Table 3: Heterogeneity analysis of different enterprise ownership structures and enterprise leasing levels

Variables	Column 1	Column 2
	Diff-ownership	Diff-leasing levels
CN*Lease_Post	0.0097*** (4.8066)	
Highlease*Lease_Post		-0.0047** (-2.1820)
Lease_Post	-0.0108*** (-5.1356)	-0.0063*** (-3.0372)
Control_Var	Yes	Yes
Firm and Year fe	Yes	Yes
Observations	24,552	24,552
Adjusted R-squared	0.0480	0.0472

4.5.3. Heterogeneity of Different Enterprise Scale

According to the different scale of enterprises, regress the sample data of Large-scale, Medium-scale and Small-scale enterprises using equation (1). As shown in Table 4 Column 1-3, in the Medium-scale enterprise group and the Small-scale enterprise group, the coefficient of Lease_Post is significantly negative, while the Large-scale enterprise sample fails to pass the significance test in the benchmark regression model. This shows that after the implementation of the new lease standard, enterprises of different scales have different cash holding decisions.

4.5.4. Heterogeneity of Enterprises of Different Ages

By studying whether there are differences in the degree of reduction in cash holdings of enterprises of different ages after the implementation of the new lease standards. This paper uses the median age of listed enterprises as the dividing line and divides them into old and new enterprises for regression analysis. As shown in Table 4 Column 4 and Column 5, the estimated coefficient of Lease_Post for new enterprises is significantly negative, and the old enterprise sample fails to pass the significance test in the benchmark regression model. This indicates that there are differences in cash holding decisions of enterprises of different ages after the implementation of the new lease standards.

Table 4: Heterogeneity of different enterprise scales and ages

Variables	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
	Different enterprise scales			Different enterprise ages	
	Large_scale	Medium_scale	Small_scale	New	Old
Lease_Post	-0.0023 (-1.0845)	-0.0159*** (-2.9389)	-0.0483*** (-3.3327)	-0.0154*** (-5.1132)	-0.0014 (-0.5785)
Control_Var	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Firm and Year fe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	19,640	4,264	648	12,853	11,608
Ad R-squared	0.6802	0.5915	0.5839	0.6440	0.7385

5. Mechanism Test

In order to examine the impact mechanism of the new leasing standards on enterprise cash holdings, this paper constructs the following mediation effect model:

$$\text{Inter_Var}_{it} = \alpha_1 + \beta \text{Lease_Post}_{it} + \gamma_1 \text{Control_Var}_{it} + \eta_i + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Cash}_{it} = \alpha + \delta \text{Lease_Post}_{it} + \theta \text{Inter_Var}_{it} + \gamma \text{Control_Var}_{it} + \eta_i + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

Among them, Inter_Var_{it} is the mediating variable, which is replaced by three variables: debt assets ratio (Lev), debt maturity structure (Debt), and total asset cash recovery ratio (Ability). The other variables are consistent with formula (1).

5.1. Test of Debt Assets Ratio Mechanism

Substituting the debt assets ratio (Lev) as the mediating variable into model (2) (3) for regression, as shown in Table 5 Column 1 and Column 2, the Lease_Post coefficient β , δ and the Lev coefficient θ value are all significant. Further sobel test results show that the P value is 0.000, which passes the significance test at the 1% level, indicating that the debt assets ratio has a partial mediating effect.

5.2. Test of Debt Maturity Structure Mechanism

Substituting debt maturity structure (Debt) as the mediating variable into model (2) (3) for regression, as shown in Table 5 Column 3 and Column 4, the Lease_Post coefficient β , δ and the Debt coefficient θ are all significant. Further sobel test shows that the P value is 0.000, and which passes the significance test at the 1% level, indicating that the debt maturity structure has a partial mediating effect.

5.3. Test of Total Asset Cash Recovery Ratio Mechanism

Substituting the total asset cash recovery ratio (Ability) as a mediating variable into model (2) (3) for regression, as shown in Table 5 Column 5 and Column 6, only one of the Lease_Post coefficient β and coefficient θ is significant. Further sobel test, the P value is 0.000, and it passes the significant test at the 1% level, indicating that the total asset cash recovery ratio has a partial mediating effect.

Table 5: Heterogeneity of different enterprise scales and ages

Variables	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
	Debt assets ratio		Debt maturity structure		Total asset cash recovery ratio	
	Lev	Cash	Debt	Cash	Ability	Cash
Lev		-0.3147***				

Variables	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
	Debt assets ratio		Debt maturity structure		Total asset cash recovery ratio	
	Lev	Cash	Debt	Cash	Ability	Cash
		(-49.6957)				
Lease_Post	0.0101*** (4.9709)	-0.0043** (-2.2916)	-0.0105*** (-3.6349)	-0.0072*** (-3.6382)	0.0004 (0.3063)	-0.0076*** (-3.8556)
Debt				0.0248*** (5.2839)		
Ability						0.2078*** (21.9155)
Sobel test	Z = 4.867 P = 0.000		Z = -10.920 P = 0.000		Z = 5.830 P = 0.000	
Control_Var	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Firm and Year fe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	24,552	24,552	24,552	24,552	24,552	24,552
Ad R-squared	0.3151	0.1453	0.0746	0.0482	0.1247	0.0678

6. Conclusion

This study is the first time to use actual data from five years after the implementation of the new leasing standards, comprehensively evaluate and demonstrate the impact of the new leasing standards on enterprise cash holdings, which is different from previous literature research. This paper uses 24,552 observations from 3,069 Chinese A-share listed enterprises from 2016 to 2023, constructs multiple-time-point DID model and systematically evaluate the impact of the new leasing standards on enterprise cash holdings. The study found that enterprises that implemented the new leasing standards reduced their average cash holdings by approximately 0.75% compared with enterprises that did not implement them. Heterogeneity analysis found that non-state-owned enterprises (N-SOEs) and enterprises with higher leasing levels tend to reduce their cash holdings more. At the same time, among different enterprise scales, small-scale and medium-scale enterprises reduced their cash holdings after implementing the new leasing standards, while large-scale enterprises did not make significant changes to their cash holdings. Among enterprises of different ages, the new enterprises reduced their cash holdings after implementing the new lease standards, while old enterprises did not make significant changes to their cash holdings. The mechanism test shows that the new lease standards enable enterprises to make decisions to reduce their cash holdings by increasing the debt assets ratio and total asset cash recovery ratio and reducing the debt maturity structure of enterprises.

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