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Female Managers in Taiwan: Opportunities and Barriers in Changing Times

WEN-CHI GRACE CHOU*, PATRICIA FOSH** & DEBORAH FOSTER**

*Department of Labor Relations and the Institute of Labor Studies, National Chung Chen University, Taiwan, **Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, UK

ABSTRACT   *Women workers' chances of becoming managers, and their experiences once promoted to that level, are increasingly important in Taiwan, a region that is in the throes of socio- economic and legal change. While it is clear that there are proportionally more male than female managers in Taiwan, little systematic research has been undertaken to investigate the reasons for this under-representation of women. The authors' exploratory study suggests that the work–family conflict and Taiwanese cultural values contribute to the barriers female employees encounter in their climb up the organizational hierarchy and may lead to the depression of their career ambitions; however, a proportion of the female managers interviewed felt that their promotional opportunities and their experiences as managers had improved significantly in their generation. The authors make suggestions to guide future research on women managers in Taiwan.*

KEY WORDS: Taiwan, female managers, cultural values, work–family conflict, career ambitions, glass ceiling

Introduction

The study of female employees' chances of becoming managers and their experiences once appointed to this grade are an important topic in the study of women in Taiwan at the present time as this region is experiencing rapid change. Particularly important changes are Taiwan's rapid economic development, particularly the increases in foreign investment and the service sector – both largely based on female labour and leading to an increase in women's participation in the labour force, and the increase in women's education levels (Taiwan Women Web, 1998). Also important to consider is the increase – from a low base – of women's legal rights following the approval of the controversial Gender Equality in Employment Law in 2001. The intentions of this new law were to ensure equal opportunities at work, to provide maternity leave and benefits, to create employment opportunities for women, to enhance women's participation in the workplace, to promote harmony between the genders at work, to increase economic growth and social prosperity, and to remove barriers to women's

Correspondence Address: Patricia Fosh, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Aberconway Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff, CF1 3EU. Email: foshp@cardiff.ac.uk

employment. The implementation of the Gender Equality in Employment Law, however, is fraught with difficulties: there is stiff opposition from employers. Several women's organizations, such as the Awakening Foundation, have stressed that, although they have won the battle, they still have a long way to go (China Times, 2002).

Our contribution seeks to answer the following key questions: 'What are the opportunities for female employees' to reach managerial levels in Taiwanese organizations today?' and 'How do female employees' opportunities for promotion to managerial levels interact with their ambitions, family responsibilities and Taiwanese cultural values?' In this contribution, we first assess the shortcomings of the current literature on female managers in Taiwan. We then set out the proportion of those of managerial rank that are female and show in which industries they are concentrated. We then examine the findings of an exploratory interview survey of Taiwanese female managers that we conducted. Finally, we set out what we consider to be suitable guidelines for research on female managers in Taiwan.

Studies of Female Managers in Taiwan

Little research has been conducted on female managers in Taiwan. Cheng and Liao (1994) summarize the few early studies of female managers in Taiwan. Their view was that, in Taiwan, women's primary role was still seen in traditional terms as within the family and women working outside the family did so primarily to supplement family income. Whilst there have been more studies of Taiwanese female managers since the 1990s, these are an eclectic mix, focusing on disparate aspects of female managers' traits, attitudes and experiences.

Our review examines, firstly, the most prominent studies that are quantitatively based. These studies are often cross-cultural comparisons that test very specific USA-derived scales. Some include male managers for comparison and others do not. Lin (1995) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of 356 USA, Japanese, Chinese male and female managers, focusing on the influence of individualism–collectivism in choice of career goals and tactics. Tang (1992) conducted a questionnaire study of 208 female managers' perceptions and perspectives. Siu *et al.*, (1999) conducted a comparison of managerial stress amongst 347 male and female managers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, utilizing an adapted USA-established scale for measuring occupational stress. The contributions by Wu and Minor (1997) and Wu *et al.*, (2000) derive from the same study comparing female managers in Hong Kong and Taiwan: the first compares the role perceptions, personal traits, lifestyles and leadership of just over 200 Hong Kongnese and Taiwanese female managers and the second compares the views of the subordinates of these female managers on what they consider to be their managers' role perceptions, personal traits, lifestyles and leadership. Of the qualitative studies of male and female shop floor workers and managers, the most prominent is by Hsung and Chow (2001), who report on how institutions and networks construct gender inequality in manufacturing plants in export processing and industrial zones.

Both the quantitative and qualitative studies suffer from a number of limitations. Some of them fail to include male comparators: whilst the lack of male comparators is less important for qualitative studies, it damages the credibility of quantitative research. There have been few case studies: frequently, the respondents are drawn from a number of different workplaces and no linkages are established between female managers' experiences and features of the organizational environment within which they work. Thus, Hsung and Chow's (2001) study produced satisfyingly rich qualitative data but they neglected to report on the characteristics of the organizations that employed the interviewees. Studies that take account of the employment environment are rare. Exceptions are Chou's (2000) case studies of textile companies and Chen and Fosh's (2003) case studies of managerial decision-making in the banking industry.

We now summarize the findings of the studies detailed above. Hsung and Chow (2001: pp. 140–147) found that their female interviewees considered that the factories in which they worked had glass ceilings and that there were significant pay differences between men and women; further, the higher the rank, the more women encountered gender inequality. Similarly, Tang (1992) found evidence of female managers' disadvantage: female managers believed that they had fewer occupational opportunities than their male counterparts, especially with regard to compensation, promotion and dual career marriages. However, in contrast to Hsung and Chow (2001), both high and low paid female employees expressed the same level of concern about their unfair treatment and lack of promotion opportunities. Chou (2000: p. 210) found that, whilst female employees constituted the majority of shop-floor workers, only a few held section leader or management positions.

The female managers in Tang's (1992: p. 103) and Hsung and Chow's (2001: pp. 140–41) studies attributed their lack of opportunity, not to their lack of ability, but to organizational barriers. In particular, Tang refers to senior managers' views of female managers' family responsibilities: senior managers assumed that single women would marry and move away and that married women who wished to combine family and career were not committed to the organization. Hsung and Chow (2001) refer, in particular, to stereotyping of women's and men's abilities: men were seen as better managers and supervisors. These authors also refer to informal men's groupings that excluded women.

Siu *et al.* (1999), in their stress-focused study, felt that their findings, alongside those of Lin and Liu (1996) and Lu (1997), supported the 'role conflict' thesis. This states that the socially approved characteristics of femininity (such as nurturing and submissiveness) may often come into conflict with the requirements of a 'masculine' managerial role (such as toughness and assertiveness). These authors argue that 'the prevailing hostility against females, the lack of female role models, non-supportive superiors (usually males), long established business practices with sexual overtures and the dilemma between career commitment and family duties may all compound to produce the high level of work stress encountered by female managers in a particularist Chinese society such as in Taiwan' (Siu *et al.*, 1999: p. 20).

The existing studies also offer some guidance on Taiwanese female managers' experience of the dilemma between career commitment and family duties. Several

show that female managers in Taiwan do not prioritize their work above their family role and find combining these dual roles difficult. Tang (1992: p. 100) explains that, for a woman, excelling in her career is more difficult as she experiences the multiple responsibilities of her role as wife, mother and manager and she feels guilty if her husband has to take over household responsibilities. Hsung and Chow (2001: pp. 45–46) found that female employees were concerned that their work conflict would increase if they climbed the organizational ladder; in consequence, some female employees lowered their career aspirations. Wu and Minor (1997) and Wu *et al.* (2000) also note that the female managers in their study did not rate the work role as their most important role. Their female managers referred, however, not to their domestic and childcare duties but to the demands of their 'gender role', interpreted as women's need for support and approval from men. Note, however, that Lin (1995), in contrast, found that there were no gender differences in managers' preferences for career goals and tactics. And Chen and Fosh (2003) found no differences between male and female managerial decision-making style in the banking industry; instead, managerial decision-making style varied significantly by bank ownership.

The thrust of these studies of female managers' experiences of inequality and of the impact of Taiwanese cultural values is reinforced by more general studies of working women in Taiwan. Chen (2000) has provided a thorough statistical analysis and summary of much earlier research. She demonstrates how the under-representation of women in managerial ranks and female managers' lesser opportunities are a reflection of the general gender inequality in Taiwanese society. She analyses the long-standing wage gap between men and women and notes that this gap does not appear to have narrowed in recent years. She argues that women experience difficulties in entering industries, such as transport, where jobs are labelled as 'male'. She notes how certain public sector organizations, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Enterprise Corporation, have restricted women's recruitment and promotion and how employers in the private sector have adopted restrictive practices against women to a level described as 'extreme'. She also reviews the marriage and pregnancy bans common in Taiwan that have contributed to this situation. Chen (2000) sets her review of Taiwanese women's experiences of inequality within a framework of state policies where family and market are seen to provide the solutions to childcare problems and where the role of the state is that of guiding the market rather than providing childcare services itself.

Chen (2000) demonstrates how working women's inequality in Taiwan is related to women's role at home. She offers a useful way of conceptualizing Confucian teachings on social life in Chinese society as it affects women's lives – 'family and gender ideology', arguing that, while family ideology has changed only slightly in recent decades in Taiwan, gender ideology has changed significantly. Thus, familism and its attendant mutual dependence between generations are still notable Taiwanese traits and the paternalistic extended family remains a male-dominated culture, although women's power has increased in the nuclear family. In contrast, younger and older generations in Taiwan now hold very different gender ideologies. Younger women no longer regard housework and childcare as women's natural responsibility and hold a more egalitarian attitude

towards marriage; employment is regarded as a career, not just a means of supplementing family income.

In an earlier study, Chou (1994: p. 161), utilizing the Taiwan Social Change Survey Data 1991, found that married males had a more traditional orientation towards gender roles than married females. She also found that Taiwanese women after entering the labour market still played the major role in Chuang and Lee's (2003: pp. 455–456) analysis of data drawn from the 1989 Taiwan Women and Family Survey confirms the enduring effect of husbands' influence over wives – a husband's negative attitude toward a working wife was of more significance in discouraging a woman from attaching herself to the labour market than the presence of young children in the family.

The studies reviewed above do not constitute a satisfactory body of work on the prospects and experiences of female managers in Taiwan. Also we note that none of these studies provide an adequate overview of the numbers and distribution of female managers in Taiwan. As our contribution to the understanding of the position of women in management in Taiwan, we set out below a statistical analysis of the numbers and distribution of female managers and the findings of an exploratory study we conducted of female managers' experiences and aspirations.

A Contribution to the Understanding of Female Managers' Positions in Taiwan

Numbers and Distribution of Female Managers in Taiwan

Table 1 gives, for the year 2002, the total number of male and female managers and the numbers of males and females employed disaggregated across 16 industrial sectors in Taiwan. This table shows that most women workers in Taiwan are employed in manufacturing and trade. Women form the majority of the workforce in health and social welfare services, electrical services, other services, accommodation and eating/drinking places and professional, scientific and technical services. Conversely, women were a small minority in construction, agricultural and allied sectors, and electricity, gas and water.

We consider that it is most useful to assess the success of female employees in reaching managerial levels in relation to the proportion they form of the relevant workforce. We disaggregated the data available for each industrial sector into eight occupational categories – legislators and government administrators; business executives and managers; professionals; technicians and associate professionals; clerks; service workers and shop and market sales workers; production machine operators and related workers; and agricultural, animal husbandry, forestry and fishing workers. We present these data in a way that facilitates comparison between women and men. For determining which occupational groups constituted 'managers' exclusively or primarily, we decided that legislators and government administrators (relevant for only 3 of the 16 industrial sectors), together with business executives and managers, formed the most appropriate categories. The remaining occupations were either exclusively or largely non-managers. The placement of 'professionals' in the

Table 1. Numbers of male and female managers and of total workers and odds ratios of male to female attainment of manager status in industrial sectors, Taiwan, 2002

Industrial sector	No. of male managers	No. of males in industry	No. of female managers	No. of females in industry	Odds ratio
Construction	28,310	744,276	3,123	75,626	0.92
Health care & social welfare services	292	87,218	650	199,593	1.03
Transport, storage & communication	14,004	376,826	3,561	116,730	1.23
Accommodation & eating/drinking places	6,075	269,808	4,661	343,894	1.68
Real estate rental & leasing	2,588	43,250	503	20,399	2.52
Professional, scientific & technical services	19,291	147,087	8,611	156,554	2.59
Cultural, sporting & recreational services	10,216	99,474	3,101	98,043	3.50
Public administration	13,481	208,318	2,194	116,144	3.59
Trade	78,989	936,836	20,487	836,576	3.67
Electrical services	7,845	163,736	3,912	317,353	4.03
Manufacturing	146,089	1,656,360	13,817	1,036,713	7.16
Finance & insurance	19,786	160,488	3,832	223,194	8.05
Other services	12,902	383,299	947	312,576	11.46
Mining & quarrying	466	8,983	0*	1,310	71.68
Electricity, gas & water	557	30,925	0*	5,370	98.49
Agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry & fishing	1,060	524,796	0*	195,932	396.55
Total:	361,951	5,841,680	69,399	4,056,007	3.79

Note: Zeros replaced by a notional '1' in order to permit calculation of finite odds ratios.
Source: Calculated by authors from data supplied by Direetorate-General Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, Republic of China.

non-management category might appear anomalous on grounds of occupational status. It could equally be argued, however, that the professional category will contain a substantial proportion of employees with little or no managerial responsibilities. Whether professionals were included as non-managers or excluded altogether from the analysis made a significant difference to the value of the summary statistic to be used in only 2 of the 16 industrial sectors – educational services, and professional, scientific and technical services. In each case, the statistic was reduced by inclusion of professionals as non-managers in a direction indicating less female-male difference in achieving manager status. This was due to the relatively higher proportion of male than female professionals among all workers of the respective genders in these industrial sectors.

Our aim was to analyse and compare the attainment of women and men of managerial status as opposed to each gender not having this status for the whole labour force in Taiwan and between the 16 industrial sectors. A parsimonious method of presenting such data is by the use of odds ratios, which contain a comparison of the odds of a male worker being a manager as opposed to a non-manager and of the analogous odds for a female worker (Rudas, 1998: 6). The statistic to be used for this is the 'cross product ratio', which is calculated as:

$$f_{11}f_{22}/f_{12}f_{21}$$

where, in the present case, $\mathbf{f}_{11}$ is the number of male managers in each industrial sector, $\mathbf{f}_{22}$ is the number of female non-managers, $\mathbf{f}_{12}$ is the number of female managers, and the $\mathbf{f}_{21}$ is the number of male non-managers, as symbolized in a conventional two-column two-row table, where columns are gender and rows manager/non-manager. Which column is to left or right of the other and which row is above or below the other is, of course, arbitrary, but the proposed arrangement provides odd ratios with a simple interpretation. If their value is one, women and men are equally likely to be managers as opposed to non-managers; if their value is less than one, which is unusual, women in that case are more likely to be managers than are men; if the value exceeds one, women are less likely to be managers and the relative extent of the departures from one for each industrial sector indicate the relative degrees of female disadvantage in attaining manager status.

Table 1 shows that, across the whole labour force, the value of the odds ratio is 3.79, indicating that, overall, the odds of a man being a manager are almost four times those for a woman. Comparing the different industrial sectors, perhaps surprisingly, construction is the only sector where female attainment of manager status actually exceeds that of males. In health care and social welfare services, where there are exceptionally low proportions of both males and females with manager status, the gender difference in manager attainment is insignificant. The ratios for the three most extreme categories are distorted by the absence of any reported female managers, though one of these, agriculture and allied sectors, is a substantially-sized sector. Particularly noteworthy are the cases of the three next most extreme sectors, manufacturing,

finance and insurance, and other services, in each of which the odds of a man being a manager are between seven and twelve times those for a woman. The case of manufacturing is especially important with a ratio of 7.16, since it is by far the largest sector of the Taiwanese economy.

An Exploratory Study of Female Managers' Experiences and Aspirations in Taiwan

Our data is drawn from an in-depth and exploratory study of female managers conducted between 2001 and 2003. These interviews provide guidance for new research on female managers in Taiwan.

Conduct of Fieldwork

We interviewed a total of 14 female managers in Taiwan. We initially asked a small group of female managers from among our contacts to be interviewees. We then asked these contacts to recommend other female managers in a 'snowballing' fashion. In selecting interviewees, we sought to interview female managers from a range of industries and with different family situations. Of the 14 female managers, 11 were established in their managerial careers and 3 were beginning their careers (all were graduates). In terms of industrial background, five interviewees were managers in privately-owned, international hotels, one of whom was a Human Resource (HR) Director. Three were managers in a state-owned chemical company, including a senior manager. One was the only woman branch manager in a large privately-owned bank. Another was an Associate Professor in a leading university. Other interviewees worked in the media, the sales sector, the engineering industry and consultancy. In terms of family background, five interviewees were single, eight were married and one divorced. Six of the interviewees had children. In terms of age, three interviewees were middle-aged and established as senior managers (over 40 years) and three were in their twenties; the rest were in their thirties. While we cannot claim that our interviewees are representative of female managers in Taiwan, we feel that their experiences and aspirations are sufficient to allow meaningful comparison and contrasts to be drawn.

Ten of the female managers were interviewed in Taiwan and four in Cardiff – the latter were MBA students, all of whom had work experience in Taiwan. The interviews were conducted on a confidential basis in offices, conference rooms or restaurants; they were conducted in English, lasted for 30 to 45 minutes each, and were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The interviewees were given pseudonyms. The interviews focused on the interviewees' ambitions, perceptions of their prospects for promotion, their experiences of work–family conflict and their views on Taiwanese cultural values. The interviews were informal and the interviewers sought to explore in detail the issues raised by the interviewees rather than to impose any framework upon the interviews. As a consequence, all interviewees did not give opinions on all topics.

Analysis of Interview Material

We first examined our interviewee's views on their opportunities to climb the management hierarchy in their own organizations and on the opportunities for women in general within Taiwanese organizations. Opinions of the nine interviewees who discussed this issue were mixed. Three interviewees strongly believed that the organizations in which they worked had a 'glass ceiling' preventing female employees from moving into senior managerial levels. Thus, Joann, an Associate Professor in a leading university, and Linda, the branch manager for a large private bank and one of the older interviewees in our survey, made the following comments.

> I have a strong sense of feminism . . .. I feel that there is always some invisible ceiling there to prevent me from getting into the hard power core. . .. I always found that whenever you get moved upwards . . . a small rung of the ladder – the academic ladder – you find fewer and fewer female comrades out there.

> In Taiwan a woman is still considered not as good at management as men, like I am the only female manager in our bank. . .. So I think it's very difficult unless I be very, very aggressive. . .. Unless I have a very good chance to improve myself, to show them I can do it, I don't think it's that easy for me to get ahead, actually a higher position in the bank like Vice President or something like that.

Two interviewees considered that there were no glass ceilings in their sector, the hotel sector, where they felt they were offered considerable opportunities for promotion and recognition. They believed, however, that there were glass ceilings in organizations in other sectors in Taiwan. Thus, Carrie, who is a Senior Manager in the Sales and Marketing Department of an international hotel, contrasts the position of female managers in the hotel and high-tech and manufacturing sectors.

> It really depends [whether there is a glass ceiling or not] on . . . which industry you are talking about: in some of the industries like there are more women managers than men. For example in the hotel [industry] . . . like our hotel nearly half . . . of the managers are women. Well, the general manager is a man but we have nearly half of the managers are women and so in other hotels like maybe the general manager is a woman, like our chairlady is a woman. So I don't really see a big difference in this industry. In the service industry women are easier to get into managerial positions but in like high tech companies and . . . more of the producing industries, like . . . car company or something it's very difficult for women to be in a managerial position. If I work in a car company now they would be . . . nice to me, but they wouldn't really be nice when it comes to competition between me and another [man] and which one should get promoted. Their attitudes are nice but the way the opportunities are distributed is not really equal.

Three interviewees felt they had not experienced glass ceilings and that, as a consequence of recent changes in Taiwan, there was now considerable equality between men and women; two of these interviewees, Carol and Edie, were the youngest in the survey. Carol, who is the Associate Director of Communications for a small consultancy firm, stated the following.

> . . . the work I have been involved in don't have this kind of discrimination [against women] yeah because like for example, in my previous [job] nearly two thirds of managers or directors were female. . . my boss, to be very flexible and very open-minded they tend towards equal opportunities as long as you prove yourself on the work.

Zara works in the sales department of a small company and she also referred to the number of successful female employees in her company. Edie, who had worked previously for two branches of large USA-owned companies located in Taiwan, felt that if women were ambitious they could compete equally with men as promotion in Taiwan was based on performance.

We turn to consider the part Taiwanese values about women's roles play in the creation of organizational glass ceilings. While all eight of the interviewees who had views on this topic believed that Taiwanese cultural values disadvantaged women in their careers, they were split as to whether or not Taiwanese values were changing and becoming less disadvantageous for career women. This split echoes the one identified previously between those who perceived organizations to have glass ceilings and those who felt that women's chances of promotion were increasing in present-day Taiwan.

Four interviewees felt that Taiwanese culture disadvantaged women and did not consider that any significant changes were taking place in cultural values. Thus, Joann, the Associate Professor whom we met above, gave her view of the impact of Taiwanese cultural values on family roles.

> I think . . . so-called Taiwanese culture. . . there's always something holding them [women] back. . . you should not be so aggressive, that you should not try to become better than men. Even within the family I think there are [these values]. . ., see for example my family, I still think my family has some preference, they prefer son to daughter and if the daughter has quite an achievement they will always think why is it not my son who gets those achievements. You know in Taiwan, well I'm the only daughter in my family. . . well I'm supposed to be the most cherished child in my family, . . . I had three elder brothers, but still down inside my heart I think my whole family has some problems, they still think son is more important than daughter and daughter has to be always to be the one to sacrifice [herself to] her family and not the son.

Four interviewees felt that, while Taiwanese culture certainly disadvantaged women, the situation was improving. Poppy, who is the HR Director for a large international hotel and was one of the older interviewees in our survey, felt that, although the hotel industry offered equal chances to women and men, Taiwanese

culture in general disadvantaged women. She felt, however, that cultural values in other industries were also changing, offering women more opportunities.

> …if you ask me why are there still more male managers and male supervisors in local companies… I think it [is because of] Chinese culture, call it Confucianism…the Chinese culture is still male dominated … For a woman to walk into a business conference, to hold a presentation where half or most of the audience are males is quite daunting, not to mention that you know some males or people will challenge because oh [S1]…a female you think you know more than us! … If you look outside the [hotel] and you look at a lot of the local organization, it's still a male dominated business world….The good news is that in a lot of local companies and even in government offices you're starting to see an increase of women in higher places, but I think it's no secret that the pace is much slower than in western countries. I think the society here in Taiwan now is that men actually prefer their wives to work at least among my age group…. So I think that men are more supportive…. of women in the workplace than they were 10 or 15 years ago when it was still not so advanced.

Maggie, the Assistant Manager in the Training Section of an international hotel, also felt that Taiwanese society was changing, although she considered that the 'surface equality' she saw between men and women in industry and commerce would take another five or ten years to transmute into substantial change in men's and women's roles.

Taiwanese cultural values play an important part in the generation of work–family conflict, a phenomenon that has a strong influence on women's career patterns. There were 11 interviewees with views on the impact of work-family conflict on their careers. These interviewees were again split into two groups. The group with significant experiences of work–family conflict (or anticipated significant experiences of work–family conflict after marriage and having children) was the much larger group, including eight interviewees.

The difficulty of combining work and family roles in Taiwan is well expressed by Queenie, who is a senior manager in a state-owned chemical company, married with children and one of the oldest interviewees in our survey.

> ….when a female worker becomes a mother, a wife, then I think she will carry the major weight of the family, so I think in the past 20, 25 years or so … my difficulty is mainly because of the internal struggle between my job and the family. And sometimes I feel that I really should pay more attention to the kids, my family, but I try my best to get a balance between these two… The men [are] usually given more room to seek for all the success in their career. If they need to have a business dinner or go for a business trip they can just go. But, as a female worker, when I have to travel abroad, I have to think, I have to try to shorten my trip sometimes but I don't want to be away too long from my family because I worry a little bit about my kids. Because

even my husband supports me but he is not a good cook and when I usually return I find a mess at home or something.

Poppy, the hotel HR Director, whom we met before and know also to be one of the oldest interviewees in our survey, is married; she focused on the interaction between Taiwanese cultural values and women's domestic burdens.

It's also a fact of life, women, eventually you know, you work up to mid-management and you get married, right? and you have kids. . . . And a lot of women will probably think well do I really want to run as fast. . .as fast as I used to, now that I've got a husband and kids to look after. So I think it's a combination of two things, I think it's . . . still a male dominated society and . . . women by virtue of the fact that once they go into marriage and motherhood are tied back, are held back a little bit. . . if a male has to put in 12 hours for three years to reach a certain position, a female will probably have to put in 16 hours for six years, double the time and hours. But with a family and kids you know [how can you do that]? . . . So I think that sometimes hinders women to go further: . . .first, what they achieve or the recognition that they should get because. . .it's [society] still male dominated; second, because of personal reasons, motherhood and stuff, it sort of slows down the pace a little bit.

A smaller group of interviewees reported that they did not experience work–family conflict (one interviewee) or that they did not anticipate experiencing work–family conflict when they became married and had children (two interviewees). Amie, the Purchasing Departmental Manager in a state-owned chemical company, who was married with children, described a well-organized routine that left her free to concentrate on her job.

Well after they were born [the children]. . . we deliver them to the home of baby-sitter and then we pick up them after work so it's quite a routine. And fortunately my husband he also works for this company so we pick up each other so we might split it. . .. . . and sometimes my parents they pick up, say that yesterday I was just back from a business trip abroad so my parents come to pick up, take care of the kids. We can ask them to give us a hand any time, that's parents!

We also have in the second group Carol, whom we met before and know to be one of the youngest interviewees and single. She did not anticipate any conflict between marriage and children and her career in consultancy. She was confident that, when she married, her boyfriend would fully accept her wish to work, or not to work, and that his family would help her take care of the baby.

. . .my boyfriend he is quite understanding for my personality and because we used to be working together so he knows me quite well. . . . He told me that if I want to carry on working there's no problem but if I

want to stay at home that's no problem neither. . . because he already said that he is modern, my mother, my future mother-in-law will take of the baby because . . . they are home all the time yeah. And if I want to continue working there's no problem but for me.

Given that a significant number of the interviewees believed that organizations in Taiwan no longer have glass ceilings and that Taiwanese cultural values disadvantaging women were changing, it is surprising that the interviewees as a group displayed a low level of career ambition. Nine interviewees articulated their degree of ambition. Only one interviewee, Joann, who as we have seen was an Associate Professor in a leading university, was ambitious for her career and this was so despite her belief that her organization had a glass ceiling. On the other hand, her single status may have given her more freedom to develop her career goals. The remaining eight interviewees were not ambitious. They were often concerned to perform well in their jobs but this was not connected to a desire to move up the management hierarchy. Thus Amie, who is a Department Manager in a state-owned chemical company, was not ambitious, although she was determined 'to try my very best to make it [her job performance] perfect'. She stated that 'it's not my ambition to get a promotion because the pay is already good enough for us to survive and besides we have to take care of our kids. . .'. The preference for time with their families and a work/family life balance, as opposed to the demands of a fast-moving career, was raised by other interviewees as well. Maggie, who is a hotel Assistant Manager, as we saw above, and who is married with children, gives her view.

> Actually my ambition is not big at all 'cos I think life is, how to say, I think the value, what I value of course is family, I put it first place, . . . I think my husband and my daughter and the whole family give me a lot of support in everything. So the work is . . . just part of your life but the main thing for me is my family.

An important corollary of these interviewees' low career ambitions was a lack of career planning. Poppy, who was, as we know, the very successful HR Director of a large international hotel, described her acquisition of this post, however, as fortuitous. At various points in her career, senior managers have suggested she try particular jobs and she has always been willing to give it 'a go'. Now, however, she wants to have a child, and she is 'happy to stay as I am'.

> I've worked so hard over the last 20 years. I've always worked, I've never worked anything under ten hours, I've taken work home and you know at this age I feel,OK if I have to start a family, I'd better start it soon. And I'm not . . . getting younger and so I'd like to be able to put more energies on the home front than in the past because in the past the distribution was such that is was 80 per cent for work and 20 per cent for myself. And that 20 per cent was just going home and getting some sleep . . . and everything else was for work, right? So now I'd like to . . .

get myself established, to get a very smooth and well oiled division so that I can hopefully shift the percentage.

We argue that the female managers' low level of career ambition can be understood when we consider the significant degree of interaction in Taiwan between cultural views on the appropriate role for women, women's experiences of work–family conflict, and women's level of career ambition. Poppy, the hotel HR Director who was as we know, one of the oldest interviewees in our survey and whom we have seen previously to hold strong views, described the linkages between Taiwanese cultural values and women's domestic burdens.

> In Taiwan [to be] a businesswoman is very, very, very difficult because most of the Taiwanese men they think – housewife, housework – belongs to women. They don't help out in the kitchen; they don't help with housework at all. In Taiwan, because Taiwan men, since they were little, their family raised them that gentlemen, [keep] away from the kitchen, ….so they don't touch any [thing], they don't help you take care of the kids, they don't help you clean the house, nothing. ….Taiwan woman managers, they're scared because they still live in a man's world, because they've been brought up to think that their father figure is the master of the house. So when they go to men's work they still think that they are in a second position, this is automatic.

Queenie, who as we saw was a senior manager in a state-owned chemical company and one of the older managers in the survey, explained how getting married and having children had affected her career ambitions.

> I have to say when I was younger I was more ambitious than I am right now because as time passed by, I mean, people changed, I'm not that ambitious as I was [when I was] young because nowadays I feel that life has so many ways and seeking a successful career definitely should not be the first, the only purpose of the life. There are so many other things we should look after.

We now relate the findings from our exploratory study to those of the studies reviewed earlier and discuss how our findings can guide further research on female managers in Taiwan.

Conclusion and Guidance for Further Research

The female managers in our survey had mixed views as to whether or not women face glass ceilings in Taiwanese organizations, although a majority of female managers believed that their own organizations did not have glass ceilings. Our interview data, overall, suggest that female managers, particularly younger ones, felt that their own opportunities for climbing the organizational hierarchy in Taiwan were improving, even if improvements were seen to be limited. This is congruent with the findings of several recent writers on Taiwanese female

managers and reinforces Chen's (2000) view that Taiwanese women, particularly younger women, see their prospects as improving. It is clear that the position of female managers has changed significantly since Cheng and Liao (1994) set out their views in the early 1990s.

While our interviewees were also divided as to whether or not Taiwanese cultural values limited women's opportunities at work, they were more unanimous in their view that work–family conflict – and the cultural values associated with that area of women's lives – was an obstacle to aspiring women. The views of the older, more established interviewees were particularly strong. The nurturing role of women within the family remains important amongst our interviewees and this reinforces the findings of Tang (1992), and Hsung and Chow (2001) that female managers felt a strong sense of responsibility for their families' welfare. Also, Chuang and Lee's (2003) view of the importance of husbands' attitudes towards their wives' working lives was echoed by some of our interviewees.

What was a surprising finding in our interview survey, given the above views, was the interviewees' low level of ambition for their careers. The female managers' low level of career ambition in our survey appears to be a consequence of the interviewees, consciously or unconsciously influenced by Taiwanese cultural values, putting their family interests above their career interests and, in consequence, downshifting their career ambitions to fit with their families' needs. In this, our survey findings are congruent with those of Wu and Minor (1997) and Wu *et al.*, (2000) whose female managers did not rank work as their most important role.

Our review of previous studies illustrates why further research on the opportunities for Taiwanese female employees and their managerial prospects is important. Our exploratory study suggests that, in future research, it is crucial to consider the impact of Taiwanese cultural values on female managers' experiences of work–family conflict and their levels of aspiration, and to include both established and recently-appointed female managers.

In our exploratory research, however, we did not have the opportunity to examine the female managers' organizational contexts and these contexts have, as we have seen, been largely ignored by earlier researchers. We argue that future research on female managers in Taiwan should be case study-based so that female employees' career aspirations and chances of success can be related to factors such as their employing organization's policies and practices, attitudes towards female employees, including women's exclusion from informal organizational groupings, and organizational norms. The inter-relationship of these case study factors to general cultural factors, such as the role of women in Taiwanese society identified as important by our exploratory study, should also be examined.

Future research should cover a variety of different industries. At the beginning of this contribution, we demonstrated that female employees in different industries had different chances of reaching managerial level. Thus, future research should investigate women employees' chances of becoming managers in industries such as health care and social welfare services where women's managerial chances are high, and in industries, such as manufacturing, where women's managerial chances are low. Finally, such research should explore the articulation between women's chances, employers' provision of family-friendly policies and state provision of public childcare. It should also assess the impact on

women's working lives of the fledgling equal opportunities movement and the Gender Equality in Employment Law 2001.

Acknowledgements

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