A SURVEY OF WOMEN MANAGERS IN TAIWAN: PERCEPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Michael T Tang*

More open governmental and industrial policies have changed business operations dramatically in Taiwan in the past few years. There are now more women managers than there were just a few years ago. Currently, the growing body of research on women employees has been discussed in many diverse publications, but data on female managers in Taiwan are scarce. The purpose of this study is to conduct a regional survey to solicit women managers' perceptions of today's working environment in Taiwan. Variables employed to measure the perceptions of overall workplace were: qualification/credential, compensation, colleagueship, leadership style/role of supervisor, sexual harassment, corporate policy, advancement on the job, and demographic profile. The targeted sample group was made up of 500 women managers who were executives in a wide range of the private sector in the metropolitan Taipei area. Two hundred and eight of the 215 questionnaires returned were included in the analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's studies have already become a viable and legitimate concern for all people living in the newly-developed and prosperous societies of the Pan-Pacific Region.[12] The more open and flexible governmental and industrial policies in Taiwan have changed business operations dramatically in the past few years. In a 1984 study, women in the United States held 33% of all managerial and administrative positions.[18] There are no such statistics available for Taiwan. However, there is narrative evidence indicating the influx of women managers into every corner of Taiwanese society, but no hard data to figure out the potential problems associated with this phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of female managers by soliciting their perceptions toward today's working environment in Taiwan.

2. METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to collect raw data regarding female managers' perceptions of various concerns. The targeted sample group was made up of 500 female managers who work in the Metropolitan Taipei area. The companies selected for this study represent a wide range of private sectors including the service, retailing, publishing, international trading, electronic appliances, and news media industries.

---

* Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Radford University, USA.

A research instrument in English was developed and sent to the female managers in each targeted company. The questionnaire was designed to collect information in the following categories:

1) types of qualifications/credentials deemed as prerequisites for hiring and/or promoting female managers;
2) compensation received;
3) organisational environment;
4) advancement/promotion; and
5) demographic profiles.

The research design of data collection involved two steps. In the initial step, both cover letters and questionnaires were mailed to the general managers of targeted companies asking for their assistance in this project. There were 97 completed questionnaires returned in the first mailing of 500. In the second step, in order to maximise the response, questionnaires were personally delivered and briefings were given to female managers of the targeted companies. This led to an additional return of 118 questionnaires. The overall response rate was 43%.

3. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

No previous statistics have been available as to the make-up of women managerial and administrative positions in Taiwan. In this study, it is found that most of the respondents have bachelor's degrees, with 35% possessing advanced degrees (master's or doctoral level). Their average annual income ranges between $20,000 to $30,000. The women managers supervise from one to 50 subordinates. The titles and levels of respondents varied substantially (from assistant finance manager to functional vice-president). Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

4. QUALIFICATION/CREDENTIAL

Managing is a two-dimensional interactional activity comprised of both skills and attributes. A study by Raudsepp[14] enumerates important personality attributes for being an effective manager: resourcefulness, self-confidence, persuasiveness, assertiveness, open-mindedness, adaptability, cooperation, consideration, decisiveness, courtesy, and receptiveness.

If any female aspirant is climbing the corporate ladder, sooner or later she will face the challenge of becoming a manager. Although she may have mastered the tools of her business, this does not necessarily mean that she is ready to be an administrator. It is believed that a general lack of non-technical business skills such as assertiveness, leadership, goal-setting, communication and self-confidence contributes to the fact that women are still not radically moving up the corporate ladder.[6]

ADAPTABILITY

It is too often felt that female managers cannot exhibit the necessary toughness. They are often cited as lacking the necessary confidence and ambition to deal with a complicated

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDING WOMEN MANAGERS

		Percentage (%)
Years of Managerial Experience	0–1	6
	1–2	27
	2–3	31
	Over 3	36
Formal Education	High School	2
	Junior College Degree	10
	4 years College Degree	53
	Master Degree	27
	Doctorate	8
Age	20–30	24
	31–40	48
	41–50	17
	Over 50	11
Marital Status	Single	43
	Married	57
Income	Less than $20,000	41
	$20,000–$30,000	48
	Over $30,000	11

business environment. It is also generally felt that they would rather settle for a comfortable niche in the organisation that does not require either the sacrifices or the political mastery necessary for the top positions.[1]

The majority (72%) of the responding female managers in this study agreed that adaptive skills (ability to adjust to a rapidly changing environment) are of moderate importance in achieving success in their industries. They do recognise the legitimacy and importance of an adaptive capability.

TECHNICAL/SPECIALISED SKILLS

In today's high-tech workplace, simple entry-level jobs are almost nonexistent. Growing competition demands that both male and female members of the work force develop more technical skills and more productive capabilities.

Women are often encouraged to accept staff positions (*eg*, assistant to general managers). This could be a trap that many female professionals fall into which blocks them from moving up because they are perceived to be too specialised in one discipline or lacking in management experience, both of which are prerequisites for moving up. Meanwhile, because women are stereotyped in this way, they tend to become specialists instead of

future managers. For example, female bankers may be encouraged to enter customer service or public relations. The unfortunate aspect of this vicious circle is that specialised positions are left to women, while men shun specialisation in order to pursue managerial posts.

Close to 90% of the responding female managers in this study indicated that technical skills (*eg*, analytical, computer, communication, *etc*) are needed to be a successful administrator. In today's world economy, Taiwan has an edge in that they have a large, skilled labour force to transform into technology-intensive services. To remain competitive, it is important to master technical know-how and to adjust to an increasingly innovative work environment.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Women tend to listen better and to be more responsive to people's needs. This could be used to their advantage or to their disadvantage. However, in the corporate culture of male dominance, this may not work to their advantage. In the study of patterns of leader spirits by Konner,[5] he found five key characteristics that apply to both male and female managers: innovation, communication, sharing, commitment, and motivation. One significant difference showed up in other features: "appreciation" and "cheer-leading". He notes that the female managers in the sample were more willing to listen in order to develop a consensus, to gather and integrate alternative points of view, and to build a team. The majority of female managers (76%) in this study also strongly agreed with the statement that interpersonal skills are important to their success.

Most of the respondents appeared to agree strongly that within the business community there should be an understanding even among female management that women should be held to the same kind of standards as male counterparts for managerial positions in all areas of adaptive, technical, specialised, and interpersonal skills.

5. COMPENSATION

Traditional lower rates of pay for women were based in part on the fact that women tended to have less education and fewer skills than men. However, many of these reasons for pay differentials are changing; younger women are now entering more remunerative lines of occupations. Are women managers in Taiwan getting equitable pay? With virtually no industry statistics available, this study did not specifically address the comparable worth issue. For example, there exists a gender gap in the average monthly earnings of all employees across industries in Taiwan.[10] However, an extended study needs to be done to assess the average income of male groups against females. Nonetheless, the perception of equal pay by women managers was explored in this study.

Most respondents (68%) in this study concluded that inequality is reflected in the pay scale for women managers. Only 21% of female managers "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they receive compensation relatively comparable to that of male managers. Many complained of being treated as inferior and child-like, whatever their real age, expertise, or education. Most women managers indicated that they were often expected to take considerable responsibilities, but were not recognised or paid accordingly. Unfortunately, as long

as we continue to have a sex-segregated work force some discrepancy in compensation will continue. For example, women earn an average of 70 cents per every dollar that a man earns, according to the most recent United States Bureau of Labor Statistics figures, though disparities vary considerably by profession.[18] The mean annual income of $20,000–$30,000 certainly appears relatively low compared with what typical male managers earn in the modern day affluent Taiwanese society, but additional circumstances beyond simple raw scores are needed to establish this.

6. ORGANISATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Surveys conducted by the Psychological Research Service of Pittsburgh[2] found that managers of both sexes share materialistic values (an appreciation of the better things in life) and show little concern for social problems. By contrast, non-managerial women tend to be motivated more by aesthetic and social values and a desire to be of service to others. In a recent study of women management in the United States, 91% of CEOs indicated that companies should change their cultures to meet women's career goals.[3]

MALE COLLEAGUES

Although there have been visible changes in sex roles and norms in Taiwan as elsewhere in the world, men are still typically raised to be more assertive and independent while women are raised to be more cooperative and communicative.

In one recent study, 60% of women managers of large corporations in the United States identified a male-dominated corporate culture to be a hindrance to women's success.[8] Men build good relationships with a slap on the back and by going out with the boys for a social drink while female managers are not necessarily comfortable socialising with male colleagues.[4] Most men still find it easier to work with men because the working atmosphere is much more casual. In fact, it may be more difficult for women to deal with office politics. They are criticised for having a lack of social presence when they are not making business conversation.

More than half of the female managers (58%) in this study reported comfortable professional relationships with male counterparts. However, the data indicate that those respondents with higher incomes tend to report less cordial relationships with their male colleagues. Since Taiwan is still a highly male-dominated society, female managers are less willing to socialise with male groups. Also, the issue of office romance can be tricky. Very strict anti-dating rules rarely work,[8] but having reasonable personnel policies (*eg*, internal grievance committees, performance reviews, favouritism) can prevent valuable male and female employees from leaving the company.[11]

ROLE OF SUPERVISOR/LEADERSHIP STYLE

All cultures differentiate male and female roles, expecting males to behave in certain ways and females in others. Studies have shown that people tend to associate managerial attributes (*eg*, ambition, resolution, aggression, and decision-making) with masculine traits rather than feminine traits.[2] However, a broadly accepted scholarly review of the past

decades of academic research suggests that neither gender can claim superiority in management effectiveness nor a monopoly on a given leadership style.[13] In addition, different career opportunities and societal expectations may lay the groundwork for a new generation of female managers.

In traditional Chinese culture, the female role reinforces many behaviours contradictory to those defined as managerial. Men are still typically raised to be more aggressive and independent; women are still raised to be more social and receptive. For example, a stereotyped perception that women are not emotionally equipped for management has long been a hindrance for women cultivating managerial ambitions. But, women managers who adopt a typically masculine style are often viewed negatively.

The data indicate that a growing number of women managers feel comfortable with male subordinates. Indeed, a majority (75%) of today's women managers state that they personally feel at ease with supervising male colleagues. Not surprisingly, acceptance of a female as a manager rises with the educational level. Approximately 92% of those with advanced degrees (Master/PhD) express comfortable/confident attitudes toward the role of being women supervisors.

A recent issue of the *Harvard Business Review* indicated that 41% of male managers were opposed to working for female bosses, and another third said that it had an adverse effect on morale.[16] Usually, male hostility may be found in the form of ridicule (*eg*, a woman's promotion must be a result of a sex image or that she "slept her way up the corporate ladder"). The same study revealed that gender may also affect the way subordinates react to a particular style of supervision. For example, hands-on style or close supervision by female managers is misinterpreted as a lack of confidence in male workers.

Women managers in Taiwan must walk a tightrope between these perceptions, and they must be strong enough to encourage confidence, but not so aggressive that they intimidate their subordinates. They should assess their leadership style and look for a fit with the right firm and industry that accepts and values that style. For example, an interactive style relying on charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or personal contact may come more naturally to women managers.[15]

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual innuendoes or propositions happen everywhere regardless of culture or national origin. Any employer serious about retaining and promoting women managers should have a sexual harassment policy. One intriguing aspect of the data collected is the assertive attitudes of the female managers in complaining about sexual harassment. In this study more than one-fourth of the female managers (28%) reported being sexually harassed (verbally or physically) by either their supervisors or clients. Sexual harassment protestors constitute a very heterogeneous group of women managers. These assertive attitudes do not seem to relate closely to supervisory responsibility, income, marital status, or educational level.

However, one specific characteristic can be singled out which may conceivably describe the occurrence. As shown in Table 2, a cross-tabulation analysis of positive relationships with male colleagues against experience of sexual harassment reveals that

TABLE 2
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH MALE COLLEAGUES VERSUS
EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Positive Relationship with Male Colleague		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Sexual Harassment	Yes	8%	14%	22%	40%	16%
Experience	No	24%	34%	26%	12%	4%

female managers who have positive professional relationships with male colleagues report fewer sexual harassment experiences. Obviously, reaching professional compatibility with male colleagues is more relevant in the context of an unpleasant or sexually hostile workplace. An off-colour joke, for example, is just a short step from sexual harassment. What constitutes an off-colour joke might not be clear. Office "humour" could be a form of fun and relaxation for some while others may perceive it as being rude and offensive. This particular categorisation leads us to assume that having a good rapport with male colleagues might prevent the episodes of "insensitivity" or "harassment" from occurring.

CORPORATE POLICY

A recent article in *Business Week* indicated that there were identifiable barriers preventing women in the United States from climbing the corporate ladder.[3] Among the stumbling blocks mentioned were stereotyping (81%) and a lack of careful career planning and planned job assignment (47%). For the most part, women managers who have left their jobs to have children are either not coming back or are caught in a tug-of-war between their jobs and their families. This is a negative development for female professionals because they do not stay long enough in the pipeline for promotions.

Juggling family and work may be a fact of life for some career women, but a feeling of being dead-ended in their jobs was reflected by more than half (63%) of the respondents in this study. The major reason for their dissatisfaction was that they felt stymied and unable to grow within their professions.

No previous research has been done on the realistic side of corporate policies for Taiwanese women managers, even though the proposed benefits (*eg*, day-care centres, maternity leave and honeymoon vacations) are becoming popular with both employees and employers. Among those responding to this question, 69% indicated negative impressions of corporate policy in general. Overwhelmingly, complaints about corporate policy for female career development focused on the child-care issue. But, a few female managers suggested that management should move beyond a focus on benefits to a fundamental change in corporate culture (*eg*, a mentor programme, leadership development, continuing education, and meaningful work and responsibility).

Attitudes toward sensible corporate policy vary with the respondent's marital status. Of the married respondents, 82% expressed a negative attitude toward their corporate policy. The common assumption that Chinese female employees were not being assertive over company practices was not confirmed in this study.

A cross-tabulation examination of formal education against opinions of corporate policy shows that female managers who possess higher terminal degrees were more likely to voice their criticism on this issue (see Table 3). In other words, it is important to note that in general higher educational credentials have moved women into being harsher critics of corporate policy, while women managers with only high school education are reluctant to challenge company practices. Differences in education seem to have more influence on being outspoken than one might expect.

TABLE 3
FORMAL EDUCATION VERSUS CORPORATE POLICY

Opinions of Corporate Policy	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
High School	0%	0%	24%	68%	8%
Associate	6%	19%	44%	28%	3%
Bachelor	25%	34%	29%	10%	0%
Master	32%	44%	18%	6%	0%
PhD	52%	48%	0%	0%	0%

MARRIAGE/RELATIONSHIP

Taiwanese cultural norms still reinforce the notion that women are primarily responsible for child-care. Excelling in one's own career is more difficult for women in this culture because they experience the multiple responsibilities of their roles as wives, mothers and managers. Women managers, like most mothers of their generation, probably grew up in a family with an at-home mother, so they are vulnerable to criticism that they are not spending enough time with their family. Social expectations also lead women to believe that they must take care of the family first, and they actually feel guilty if their husbands take over the household responsibilities in addition to their own roles.

Alarmingly, 47% of the respondents in this study indicated that their jobs do interfere with their marriage/relationship to either "a fair extent" or "great extent". When combined with those responding "neutral", the percentage goes up to 76%. For most of them, the often strenuously discussed problem of combining family and work does apply when it comes to interpreting the quality of their private lives. The respondents' income may also influence their opinions. More than 84% of the respondents in the $40,000 and above annual income brackets indicated that their jobs do somewhat interfere with their marriage/relationship. Some respondents also enclosed written comments on this issue. They generally paint a bleak picture about dual-career marriage in Chinese society, especially if women seem to be more successful than their companions. It may suggest that financial success, even of married women, could be explained within the context of higher expectations of the quality of their marriage/relationship. Doubtless, this is an important context, but it certainly is not the only explanation for the many interferences and changes in women's marriage/relationships.

Forty-three percent of the respondents remain unmarried. In addition, a slight majority (74%) of those with graduate degrees devoted more hours to work and were more likely to have remained single. These indicators may tie in with the occurrence of rising divorce rates and postponements of marriage in Taiwan.

7. ADVANCEMENT ON THE JOB

Women managers, like their male counterparts, have to learn how to take risks, delegate, negotiate and compromise in order to get to the top. There are two different groups of women managers: those who put career first, and those who need a flexible schedule to fulfil family responsibilities.[7] Women managers who quit jobs tend to do so not because of family obligations, but because they feel blocked from advancement.[17]

Single women in Taiwan are sometimes passed over for a promotion because management is afraid that they will get married and move away. Those married women who want to combine family and career also voice similar fears. A growing number of corporations offer flexible working hours, child-care, and permissive maternity leave to recruit qualified women. Nonetheless, women who take advantage of these opportunities often find themselves left behind in terms of partnership, money, promotion, and assignment.

Based on the findings of a study by Catalyst of women in managerial roles in 1,000 leading United States companies, 79% of CEOs acknowledged that women face barriers to advancement. Stereotyping and unwillingness to risk promoting a woman are two main hurdles cited in this study.[3] Taiwanese women managers in our study, regardless of the range of salary received, expressed concern about unfair treatment for promotion opportunities. A slight majority (66%) believed that in their particular companies, women face profound resistance when seeking promotion. They agreed that women in management positions have to work twice as hard and do twice as good a job as their male counterparts to prove themselves worthy of promotion in the management hierarchy. A similar figure (72%) indicated that the promotion received was not necessarily equated to an increase in job responsibilities and decision-making authority.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

General perceptions of female managers in other parts of Taiwan might vary since the regional nature of the sample argues against applying the results to the entire population of women managers in Taiwan. The next step in research should be directed towards increasing the sample size, geographic range and representation. Data should also be sought through other sources such as interviews, company records, and industry statistics.

9. CONCLUSION

Attitudes on many issues concerning women managers in corporate Taiwan were examined in this study. While perceptions do not necessarily reflect reality, they are important because individuals often base their actions on what they perceive. The results of this study provide empirical support for many propositions found in the Western but not in the Asia Pacific literature.

Most of the respondents in this study believed that to successfully integrate into management they have to hold the same credentials as their male counterparts (*eg*, especially technical, interpersonal, adaptive, and specialised qualities). However, it is generally accepted among women managers that they have fewer occupational opportunities, especially with regard to compensation, promotion, organisational environment, and dual-career marriage/relationships. They attributed this lack of opportunity to structural barriers (*eg*, corporate policy and stereotyped image) and not to their own "incompetence". This scepticism by women managers seems to bolster the belief that women must be exceptionally superior to succeed in business.

Nonetheless, women managers in Taiwan seem to have grown sufficiently in self-confidence to have discarded the traditional stereotypes, and to have managed according to the dictates of their own sensibility. For instance, women with graduate degrees are found in relatively higher numbers among the forceful critics of corporate policy. This distribution confirms the thesis that higher education is rewarded with a better position and that this leads to a greater assertiveness regarding special prerogatives. The same holds true for expectations of marriage/relationship.

Social, economic, and legislative changes in Taiwan have provided increased opportunities for women to pursue management careers. Women are more apt to assert their rights and interests in the workplace and pursue their goals both in and outside the home. These findings seem to confirm that feminism, which is now being taken for granted by many women in the West, is beginning to be recognised and advanced in Taiwan. It is hoped that the perspective of women managers will be heard and acted upon. They will then, in cooperation with others, be able to achieve mobility, fulfilment, and equality with male counterparts.

[Note: Questionnaire is available on request.]

REFERENCES

1. Adler, N J, (1984), Women in international management: Where are they? *California Management Review* 26 (4), Summer, 78–89.

2. Cecil, E A, Olins, R A, and Paul, R J, (1973), Perceived importance of selected variables used to evaluate male and female job applicants, *Personnel Psychology*, Fall, 397.

3. Garland, S B, (1991), Can the feds bust through the glass ceiling? *Business Week*, April 29, 33.

4. Gilligan, C, (1982), *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

5. Konner, M, (1982), *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirits*, Harper Colophon, New York.

6. Larwood, L, Radford, L and Berger, D, (1980), Do job tactics predict success? A comparison of female with male executives in 14 corporations, *Proceedings of Academy of Management 40th Annual Meeting*, August 9–13, 386–390.

7. Lewin, T, (1989), Mommy career track sets off a furor, *New York Times*, March 8, col 1, A18.

8. Lonrad, W, (1990), Welcome to the women-friendly company, *Business Week*, August 6, 48–55.

9. Mathis, R, (1989), Managers' shoptalk, *Working Women*, August, 16.

10. Monthly Bulletin of Earnings and Productivity Statistics, No 193, (1989), published by Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, Republic of China, November.

11. Neese, W T, Cochran, D S and Bryant, J A, (1989), Should your firm adopt an anti-fraternization policy? *SAM Advance Management Journal*, Autumn, 25–28.

12. Osako, M M, (1978), Dilemmas of Japanese professional women, *Social Problems* 26, 15–25.

13. Stinhoff, Patricia, G and Tanaka, K, (1987), Women managers in Japan, *International Studies of Management and Organisation* 17 (3–4), Fall–Winter, 108–132.

14. Adler, Nancy J, (1987), Pacific basin managers: A gaijin, not a woman, *Human Resource Management* 26 (2), Summer, 169–192.

15. Powell, G N, (1988), *Women and Men in Management*, Sage Publications Inc, Newbury Park, CA.

16. Raudsepp, E, (1988), Are you management material? *Executive Female*, March/April, 41.

17. Rosener, J, (1990), Ways women lead, *Harvard Business Review*, November/December, 119–125.

18. Schwartz, N F, (1989), Management women and the new facts of life, *Harvard Business Review*, January/February, 65–76.

19. Tronst, C, (1990), Women managers quit not for family but to advance their corporate climb, *Wall Street Journal*, May 2, Col 3, B1.

20. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment and Earnings, (1990), United States Government Printing Office, Washington DC.