



Women In Business

It is now close to axiomatic in Hong Kong governance and political leadership circles that, "sometimes the best man for the job is a woman."

Anson Chan, Hong Kong's former secretary for administration is internationally respected. She leads a growing list of impressive women chiefs of departments: Fanny Law, former Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower; Anna Wu, formerly Equal Opportunities Commission; Margaret Chan, formerly Health; Denise Yue, formerly Treasury etc. Legislative politics is dominated by strong women: Rita Fan, Christine Loh, Emily Lau, Selina Chow, Margaret Ng and Audrey Eu have all made indelible marks during their tenures.

The unsung heroines of the 'Asian miracle', the women who overwhelmingly peopled the factories of electronics, garments, toys, watches and other light industrial goods exporters over the past 30 years, still underpin local wealth with their toil - though, today, most do so in Guangdong province's Pearl River Delta, serving Hong Kong intermediaries. Those left in Hong Kong are now mostly mothers of an educated generation of women working in the white collar, service industries that generate over 90 percent of local wealth.

In mid-2006, slightly more than half (52.3%) of the population in Hong Kong was female (more than 3.5 million out of a total population of over 6.8 million). Their life expectancy at birth is about 85.6 years. With the introduction of nine years' free and universal basic education, girls and boys now enjoy equal opportunity to education. (In June 2001 the Equal Opportunities Commission won a case in the High Court forcing the Director of Education to end the system of gender quotas in co-educational secondary schools.) According to the Hong Kong government, more women graduate from Hong Kong's universities than men today; in such subjects as business and law, the percentage of female students is higher than men, 60.8% and 58.6% respectively. Women are entitled to equal pay for doing the same work as their male counterparts. Pregnant employees enjoy maternity protection in terms of maternity leave, maternity leave pay and employment protection.

In terms of community participation, women in Hong Kong are making an ever increasing

and important contribution to the development of Hong Kong's economic, political and social life. In the fourth quarter of 2006, they made up about 45.6% of the labor force and the labor force participation rate of women was 53%. Women also contribute through their unremunerated work in looking after their families and other voluntary services. Women make up more than one-third of the civil service and about 26.5% of the directorate staff, 16% higher than the early 90s. Among the 18 Permanent Secretaries, the highest-ranking officials in the civil service, eight (44%) were women, as at June 2006. In 2006, four out of the 29 Executive Council Members, the Chief Executive's top policy-making group, were women. There were 11 (18%) women legislators in the 60-seat Legislative Council, including its President and House Committee Chairperson; and 91 (18%) women were serving on District Councils. The number of women serving on Government advisory and statutory bodies was 1,294 (25.8%) as at June 2006. Women also make up 54% of the Administrative Officer grade, whereas two decades ago, only 16% were women. About 21 percent of judicial officers and judges are women; in September 2004, 7 women were among 10 newly appointed judges and public prosecutors.

A third group of women workers with a unique impact in Hong Kong is unfamiliar to most Westerners until they arrive: an army of foreign domestic contract workers from other, poorer Asian countries. Nearly 9 percent of all households employ foreign live-in maids. During the last quarter of 2004, a total of 218,236 non-Chinese domestic workers were working in the city, according to the latest census and immigration records. There were 121,534 Filipinas, 87,842 Indonesians, 5,068 Thais, and 3,792 other nationalities living and working in virtually all expatriate households and most middle-class Hong Kong Chinese apartments. They are an important component to the ability of spouses to get out into the workforce, acting as household anchorwomen for child-rearing, cooking and cleaning chores, and they constitute about half of the foreign expatriate population here.

One result is significant sophistication and organization of business and professional women in Hong Kong, as witnessed by women's business organizations listed in this book.

Another result is that there is an easy mesh of local women executives with the needs of multinational corporations recruiting here, just as there are growing numbers of Western women being sent to Asia to fill regional management postings. There are also many successful women entrepreneurs, local and expatriate.

In January 2001, Hong Kong established a Women's Commission (WoC) specifically tasked to promote the wellbeing and interests of women in Hong Kong. The commission, chaired by Sophia Kao, comprises 21 members including 17 non-official members and four ex-officio members, ie Secretary for Health and Welfare,



Secretary for Education and Manpower, Secretary for Home Affairs and Director of Social Welfare.

The Women's Commission (WoC) is focusing on women empowerment in health, education and training, economic wellbeing, safety at home and in public places, and participation in political and societal affairs.



With a view to eliminating discrimination on the grounds of sex and promoting gender equality in the community, Hong Kong enacted the Sex Discrimination Ordinance in 1995 and established the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was extended to Hong Kong in 1996. The government also participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women held by the UN in 1995, at which the Beijing Platform for action was endorsed.

To the extent local biases are still true to the much-touted 'Asian values', they often become a pretext to hold women inferior to men. That leaves a mine of rich staffing opportunities to those companies unencumbered by such received wisdom.

'WOMEN OF INFLUENCE' AWARDS

The annual Women of Influence (WOI) awards were held in October 2007, organized by AmCham with the *South China Morning Post*.

THERE ARE FOUR AWARDS HONORING THREE HONG KONG WOMEN FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND ONE LOCAL CORPORATION FOR ENLIGHTENED MANAGEMENT:

- △ *Entrepreneur of the Year will be awarded to a woman who is demonstrating outstanding success in running her own business.*
- △ *Professional of the Year will be awarded to a woman who has successfully become an influential and leading practitioner in her chosen professional field.*
- △ *Young Achiever of the Year will be awarded to a woman under 40 who has achieved inspirational business success.*
- △ *Best Company for Women will be awarded to a company that has shown outstanding achievement in supporting the development of women in business and providing innovative work life programs to enable women to pursue careers. This company will have operations in Hong Kong.*

VEUVE CLICQUOT BUSINESSWOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD HONG KONG

Established in France in 1972, the Veuve Clicquot Businesswoman of the Year award pays tribute to businesswomen who show the spirit of enterprise, courage, daring and outstanding results. It is awarded in 16 countries, with Hong Kong being the first Asian location to host the awards in 2004 when Betty Yuen, managing director of CLP Power, was awarded the prize. There were three finalists in 2007: Dr Winnie Tang, founder and CEO of ESRI China (Hong Kong) Ltd, Dr Annie Wu, vice chairman and managing director of Beijing Air Catering Co Ltd, and Vivienne Tam, CEO and designer, East Wind Code Ltd. Ms Tam was declared overall winner on June 22, 2007.

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HONG KONG ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN (HKABPW)

The Hong Kong Association of Business and Professional Women was established in 1979 in Hong Kong and is the local chapter of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women. Locally, it has about 150 members from various sectors such as marketing, public relations, law, medicine, health, accounting, etc.

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) was established over 80 years ago in the US and currently is the largest women's business network in the world. IFBPW has over 200,000 members worldwide, in 108 countries. What sets BPW apart from other international women's organizations is that all BPWs strive for local, regional, national and international equality of women and girls through legislative and government channels. In addition, IFBPW has UN Consultative Status No 1, which means that there is a BPW representative at many of the UN organizations such as UNIDO, FAO, UNESCO, UNIFEM, et al located in New York, Vienna and Geneva.

HKABPW has long supported equal rights legislation, which promotes the status of women in the HKSAR, and lobbied the Hong Kong government on various employment issues; land ownership rights for women in the New Territories; and for gaining fair compensation in the employment system.

HKABPW has direct ties to the Women's Commission, Health and Welfare Bureau, Equal Opportunities Commission, other government advisory bodies, and to other business and professional women's organizations in Hong Kong. It is also in touch with major entrepreneurs in Hong Kong and one can utilize the networking aspects of HKABPW. It regularly organizes events for business and professional women to improve their careers and personal development.

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