

Focus: Women in the Workplace

China Daily set to host leadership discussion

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On Jan 19, *China Daily* will host a female business leaders' panel at the Asian Financial Forum in Hong Kong, focusing on women as change agents, innovators and entrepreneurs.

Eight top Asian female leaders will share their leadership stories with senior executives from Fortune Global 500 companies, China's top 500 enterprises and think tanks, as well as academics and media experts across Asia.

Gender inequality is not only a human rights issue, but it also has a major economic impact. A report by management consultancy McKinsey, released in September 2015, showed that \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, could be added to annual global GDP by 2025 if women's potential in labor markets was fully recognized. This is roughly equivalent to the combined GDP of China and the United States.

Despite the fast economic developments in China and many emerging economies in Asia, the full potential of women's contribution to society remains untapped. The *China Daily* panel will highlight the importance of women leaders from the financial, cultural, creative and other strategic sectors.

Speakers will provide lessons and discuss challenges as they share their personal experience and suggestions on how women can motivate themselves to assume leadership in their fields and also take full ownership of their lives.

After the panel session, the 2016 Asian Women Leadership Awards, co-organized by *China Daily* and the Asia News Network, will be presented to outstanding Asian women for their career achievements and strategic influence in their fields.

The speakers include Rebecca Brosnan, managing director and head of product development at Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing; Christine Loh, under secretary for the environment in the Hong Kong government; and Jing Ulrich, managing director and vice chairman of Asia Pacific at JP Morgan Chase.

28

trillion dollars

Increase to annual global GDP by 2025 if women's potential in labor markets is fully recognized

Rethinking gender roles in the office

FEMALE BUSINESS LEADERS DISCUSS THE MAJOR ISSUES THAT HINDER WOMEN IN ASIA FROM ADVANCING TO HIGHER POSITIONS

By SYLVIA CHANG
and DENG YANZI in Hong Kong

Workplace gender equality in Asian countries, especially at the management level, has not yet generated enough awareness.

According to a 2014 report by Community Business, a Hong Kong-based non-profit organization dedicated to advancing responsible and inclusive business practices in Asia, the average representation of women at senior levels in Asian countries is 24.3 percent, much lower than at the middle and junior levels, which are 39 and 56.3 percent respectively.

Female leaders interviewed by *China Daily Asia Weekly* speak from their own observations on why women tend to get pigeonholed in certain roles.

The main reason, they think, is widespread cultural stereotyping in Asia that hinders women from advancing to higher positions.

It is deeply ingrained in the Asian psyche that women are the primary caregivers and that they are used to taking instructions rather than making a decision by themselves.

The situation is particularly true in Japan, said Kumiko Shimamoto, vice-president of Getty Images Asia and Japan country manager.

"It usually is not their intention to not want to lead, but they are often too careful of not stepping on anyone's toes and so it comes across as though they are not being proactive," she said.

Fern Ngai, CEO of Community Business, was previously a board member at Standard Chartered Bank. She said the "breakthrough" for her in the corporate world came when she was encouraged by her bank boss to take on the position of head of human resources after she had been in the technology field for many years.

"In terms of advancing in one's career, women tend to be more delib-

24.3
percent
Average representation of women at senior levels in Asia

erative and sometimes do not put themselves forward when opportunities arise. Women tend to be humble about their own abilities and achievements, and need to gain the confidence to 'lean in' and take charge of their careers."

Ngai said that the natural strengths of women lie in their creativity and attention to detail. Women also have a greater sense of teamwork, and they pay more attention to people's emotions and reactions when an instruction is given. Thus they tend to have better communication skills than men.

Ngai thinks that areas like IT, financial services, accounting and banking,

42
percent
Proportion of firms surveyed that hired more women in senior tech roles in Hong Kong

public relations, medicine and education create some of the most female-friendly jobs.

The IT industry and sectors in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — referred to as STEM — are mentioned the most by female leaders as among the highly promising fields for women to work.

A reason that jobs in these areas are traditionally male-dominated, said Su-Mei Thompson, CEO of The Women's Foundation, a Hong Kong charity, is due to perceptions that "the masculine workplace cultures have a higher tolerance of behaviors that border on sexual harassment,

bullying and discrimination".

However, she is optimistic that the rapid advance in technology will soon make it important for women to work in these sectors.

A 2015 survey conducted by Robert Half, a United States-based recruitment agency, showed a growth in the number of female employees hired by technology-related companies.

Among about 900 chief technology officers and chief information officers in eight countries interviewed, 42 percent of companies in Hong Kong recruited more women to take technology-related positions in the past five years. The survey also shows that the recruitment of female employees in these companies will rise.

A major struggle for women, many female leaders said, is to achieve a balance between life and career.

Some female leaders, who had been in the management level of a corporate, chose to leave their positions and enter

a non-governmental organization.

Lisa Genasci, CEO of Hong Kong-based ADM Capital Foundation, once wrote a column on women and work. Many issues she wrote about still exist today, she said.

For example, many companies still do not provide flexible hours for women to work.

"That is quite difficult for women who could be good employees as well as good mothers," she said.

As for promising industries for women to work in, Genasci considers more on how a company views work than the nature of an industry.

The flexible hours, a family-friendly working environment, and the evaluation of employees' performance based on the quality of work instead of attendance are important elements, she said.

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Redressing the balance

HONG KONG WOMAN LEADER URGES MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS TO ACHIEVE GENDER DIVERSITY AND RETAIN TOP TALENT

By DENG YANZI



Laura Cha Shih May-lung, non-official member of the Executive Council of Hong Kong.

Laura Cha Shih May-lung believes a flexible working hour policy is a basic and crucial effort in nurturing women leaders in the city.

Cha, a non-official member of the Executive Council of Hong Kong — the body of advisers to the special administrative region's chief executive — as well as a board member of several international corporations including HSBC and Unilever, has been an active advocate for women in the workplace and leadership positions.

Women, with extra family responsibilities, do need to work harder than men to rise to the same rank and gain the same level of recognition, Cha said. She urged Hong Kong companies to allow their employees to work more flexible hours.

"To let women rise up the ranks, I believe that having flexible hours is key," Cha said.

She explained that a flexible working policy allows employees — both men and women — to work the same amount of core hours, while scheduling the rest subject to the need of the employees. This would be especially beneficial for working women who have responsibilities in

raising children and taking care of the elderly.

Cha added that a flexible policy can also allow employees to take half-year or one-year sabbaticals with a guaranteed position to return to. The policy can be applied to employees who have reached a certain level, which helps companies to retain valuable staff members in whom they have invested

training and other resources. Family responsibility has been the main reason that women drop out from their careers, producing a leakage of female talent on the way up the corporate ladder.

As a result, women executives are sorely underrepresented in the boardroom. Currently, only 11.1 percent of board seats in Hong Kong's leading companies on the Hang Seng Index are occupied by women, according to research last year by non-profit organization Community Business.

Requiring companies to meet a certain quota for female board members has become an increasingly common practice in some European countries including Norway, France and Germany.

However, Cha does not consider this is the way to achieve gender diversity in boardrooms.

"I don't believe in a quota," Cha said. "It's good to have an aspirational goal, but to set a quota is sometimes artificial."

The quota system does not necessarily do women any service in the sense that bringing women on board may begin to be considered as merely a superficial act to meet a certain target, she explained.

Keeping women in the workforce

CHAMPION OF GENDER EQUALITY ADVOCATES POLICIES TO SUPPORT FEMALE EXECUTIVES ALSO COPING WITH CARE-GIVING ROLES

By DENG YANZI



Su-Mei Thompson, CEO, The Women's Foundation.

Su-Mei Thompson was a corporate high-flyer when she joined the non-profit organization The Women's Foundation seven years ago. Since then, she has never looked back in her efforts to promote the importance of women in the workplace.

Starting her career as a corporate finance lawyer, Thompson later held senior management roles at The Walt Disney Company, the *Financial Times* and eventually became one of the co-heads at Christie's Asia division. Today, she continues to serve on a number of non-profit and corporate boards. But she knows that the career path for female executives is not always easy.

"It was during a year-long sabbatical that I realized how hard it is for women who give up work to return to the workplace, and how much confidence, courage and determination it takes," Thompson said.

The transition from full-time work in the corporate world to a non-profit organization was triggered in 2008, after she gave birth to her second daughter and decided to take a year off to spend more time with her girls.

She decided to become a champion of the women who are working hard to remain in their careers while balancing other demands, or to return to suitable roles after taking a break from the

"Demographic factors make it imperative for Hong Kong to retain women in the workforce because of the double whammy of a rapidly aging population and a low birth rate," Thompson pointed out.

In Hong Kong, a significantly higher labor force participation rate for single women (69 percent) than for married women and women who have been married (49 percent) reflects that women are likely to exit the labor force after marriage, as government statistics show.

According to the Women's Commission in Hong Kong, 31 percent of women cited caring for family members as the primary reason they left their jobs.

To ensure that more women are staying in, and entering, the workforce, Thompson called for new legislation in Hong Kong to alleviate the hidden burden of care for elderly family members on working women, as well as to create more part-time jobs that appeal to women with care-giving responsibilities.

The Women's Foundation is also seeking to persuade the government to reframe maternity and paternity leave, to encourage men and women in the family to take up equal roles as earners and caregivers.

"We won't have equality in the workplace until we have greater equality at home," Thompson stressed.

soundbite



I believe that technology is an ideal field for women to work in, as it plays to women's strengths. From my own experience as a software developer in the early stage of my career, the job required me to think logically, be analytical and

detail-oriented, and a good team player.

As team leaders, women tend to be good at managing and motivating people, and planning and organizing. If you are involved in supporting mission-critical systems, if a production problem occurs, you have to be able explain to the business user what the issues are, what is being done to fix the problem, and how long it will take — and also fix the problem.

This requires problem-solving, decision-making and communication skills, in which women tend to excel.

FERN NGAI, CEO of Community Business



Research shows that women have the very skills — relationship and team-building — that modern leaders need to have to drive their organizations to the top. Asian cultures need to see that men and women are different but they bring

equally valuable skill sets to the workforce. By not capitalizing on the full potential of women employees, organizations that do not promote women into senior positions or that are not providing women with the same development opportunities as male employees are de facto handicapping themselves to less than half the labor pool and are not being socially responsible corporate citizens.

CHRISTINA SUE-CHAN, associate head and associate professor at the Department of Management at City University of Hong Kong



What I see is that more and more employers in the high-tech industry have begun to emphasize the benefits of female executives in the management team, because they treasure the different perspectives that female

leaders could bring to the team. For example, when the management level is dealing with a human-related issue, male leaders usually handle it in a tough way, whereas female leaders tend to consider the emotions of employees.

JUNI YAN, managing director of Hong Kong and Taiwan, F5 Networks



We believe that image is a powerful and effective tool to overturn gender stereotype. Eight years ago, visual representations of fatherhood were steeped in masculine clichés — fishing, bottles of beer or sport.

Today, sales of images key worded "modern dad" and "stay-at-home dad" on Getty Images are up 450 percent over the last three years, and searches for "dad changing diaper" are up seven times over the same period.

Image searches in Southeast Asia for terms such as "male" and "fatherhood" are showing a preference for visuals that support a new balance of domestic roles and blend parenthood with professional concepts.

KUMIKO SHIMAMOTO, vice-president of Getty Images Asia and Japan country manager



In PwC Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, 31 percent of our partners are female, and 66 percent of the staff members below partner level are female. We anticipate that the percentage of female partners will grow in the next few years.

I think a good nurturing environment is important. For example, a generous maternity leave and flexible working hours for women who would like to spend more time with their families.

We understand that people have different priorities in life and sometimes the priority is not up to you to arrange because of age and biological development. So in PwC we try to come up with a win-win strategy between our company and employees.

FLORENCE YIP, Asia-Pacific tax leader of financial services and asset and wealth management, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)



Companies that don't offer flexible hours, or encourage their employees to spend time with their families (namely, by entertaining clients excessively in the evening, discouraging employees from taking time off to participate in a child's

school activity or working from home to care for a sick child) risk losing women, and men, who want balance in their lives. They also risk having less motivated employees.

I know it's a cliché but the people who work for you are the most important asset your company can have, so why not care for them. Training employees involves investing in them.

LISA GENASCI, CEO of ADM Capital Foundation