

# Research on Gender Factors Related to Career Development in Hospitality Management in China

Mengjie Gong

The Department of Tourism Management, Zibo Vocational College, Zibo 255300, Shandong, China

---

**Abstract:** Owing to the continuous development of China's market-oriented economy, the service industry has become a dominant industry in China. As the pillar sector of the service industry, hotels have also flourished unprecedentedly. Human resources are the key for hotels to maintain sustainable development, and to be in an invincible position amongst fierce competition. According to statistics, female managers accounted for two thirds of the total managers in hotel industry in China. The study found that social culture affects people's perception on women managers' ability and the glass ceiling effect affects women's career development in hotel industry in China. The findings suggest that there is room for China's hotel industry to review the effect of barriers on women's career development.

**Keywords:** Hotel industry; Human resource; Women managers; Gender stereotyping; Glass ceiling.

---

## 1. Background Information

Female status in China is of increasing political and practical importance as China moves toward a more market-oriented economy. The political, social and financial status of female managers has risen steadily over the past decades, as illustrated in the famous Chinese proverb that "women hold half of the sky." Nevertheless, women are still severely underrepresented in top positions in corporations, governments, and in academia. Although the hospitality industry has no shortage of women entering the business, vertical and horizontal sex segregation has been shown to exist in the hotel industry. Senior managers are predominantly male; women middle managers are in housekeeping, front desk, personnel and training and conference and banqueting, whereas male managers are in finance and control, property and security and purchasing the latter more likely to lead to the general manager's job. However, in managerial positions, the gender ratio for hotel managers is 3:2 male to female in China. In Hong Kong, the proportion of women in management in the hotel industry rose from 25.9% in 1989 to 33.7% in 1999<sup>[1]</sup>. Although the proportions have improved over time, it still remains low and gender discrimination still exists.

In response, there has been growing political and social pressure to promote gender parity in top positions via explicit or implicit gender quotas. For example, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the protection of rights and interests of women in 2005 states that equal pay for equal work shall be applied to men and women alike; women shall enjoy equal rights with men in contracted management of land, and in the distribution of the earnings of the collective economic organisations.

The focus of this article, as far as possible, is to answer why the hotel sector is lack of female managers and to find the reasons for the existing barriers to women's advancement, or to analyse if the barriers are really there. It will be helpful for future studies which take the challenge to find solutions, ways and means to break the barriers and improve the situation in China.

## 2. Glass ceiling effect

Gender stereotyping of the managerial position fosters bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions. These obstacles that lead to the under-representation of women in leadership and upper level management positions are commonly described in scholarly works and the media as glass ceilings<sup>[2]</sup>. The glass ceiling constitutes an invisible barrier for women and minority groups, preventing them from moving up the corporate ladder. However, as demonstrated in the labour market statistics described above, gender appears to be affecting the advancement of women in a detrimental fashion. Theories and models accounting for the emergence of gender-related behaviours in organizations, and thus the creation of a glass ceiling, fall into three categories: Biological explanations, socialisation explanations and structural/cultural explanations.

Researchers conducted interviews which reveal that the perception of glass ceiling barriers faced by women differed depending on where they were in their career cycle. They were revealed as the "long hours" culture, hiring practices and geographical mobility. These significantly influenced women's work-life balance, and personal-life choices<sup>[3]</sup>.

High position managers tend to display gender-specific strength-and-weakness stereotype. The higher women rise in organisations, the larger the gender gap becomes, while the pay gap remains one of the most persistent forms of gender inequality. This opinion is examined by many researchers.

Studies show that the gender wage gap was increasing throughout the wage distribution and accelerating at the top, indicating the glass ceiling effect. Using data for European countries, researchers find that glass ceiling effect for highly educated women, and a sticky floor effect for primary and secondary educated women in Spain, Britain, Netherlands, and this effect to a scarcity of senior women

in high-skilled, white-collar occupations, the majority of the gender gap is attributed to differences in rewards to the labour market characteristics of male and female workers in<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3. Glass ceiling effect in China**

Furthermore, Lin and Gunderson (2014) discuss the glass ceiling in the context of the gender pay-gap in China. They find female managers receive much lower pay than male managers in China by investigating the sticky floor effects (large pay gaps at the bottom of the pay distribution) in China, and some limited and weaker evidence of the glass ceiling (large pay gaps at the top of the distribution). In the meantime, they also find, apart from China, Western countries are also affected by the glass ceiling effect. A larger portion of the gender earnings gap can be attributed to firm-level characteristics than individual characteristics. Female managers tend to have fewer firm-level characteristics that are associated with higher pay, and when they do, they tend to receive a smaller pay premium for those characteristics. This is especially the case for the firm size variable where female managers are less likely to be employed in higher paying large firms, and when they are, they receive a smaller firm-size premium. Researchers also find that two important driving forces behind the glass ceiling effect are: women are less likely to be at higher ranks of the organisation; and the female education level is lower compared to their male counterparts in those higher ranks<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **4. Obstacles to career development**

209 questionnaires were therefore distributed in three cities in China. At the time of the survey there were five hotels being surveyed comprising three three-star hotels, one four-star hotel and one five-star hotel. The HR manager assistants were asked to be the coordinator of data collection, and emails with questionnaires were sent to the staff in managerial positions.

To assess the difference in perceptions of career success factors and obstacle by gender, the author compared the average score of each question from males and females.

Female and male managers in the hotel industry in China had different opinion about what are the main obstacles to their career development. The scale in the part two of questionnaire was from 1, totally disagree, to 5, totally agree. They had agreement on three of the top four major obstacles: lack of support system at work, lack of equity in promotion and inadequate job knowledge. In terms of the lack of equity in promotion, women showed higher average score 3.63 to men accounting for 3.26. It indicates women were not confident enough and more sensitive on the equity of promotion and they believed their careers would be blocked if it really happened. They had agreement of the two least obstacle as being married and sexual harassment with very similar scores. It was on the middle range factors that the female and male managers had disagreement. Women also highlight lack of equity in pay as the major obstacle that ranked it fourth. While men ranked it seventh. To the rest obstacles, women managers ranked the factors as 'lack of mentoring', 'childcare responsibility', 'conflict with family activities', 'difficulty in establishing credibility', 'old boys information network', 'job characteristics', 'lack of role model' and 'lack of equality in training'. Male managers ranked the factors as 'difficulty in establishing credibility', 'lack of equality in training', 'lack of equity in pay', 'lack of role model', 'job characteristics', 'old boys information network', 'conflict with family activities' and 'childcare responsibility'. In terms of 'childcare responsibility' and 'conflict with family activities', men and women had a very big difference as men ranked them twelfth and eleventh with average scores of 2.18 and 2.26, while women ranked them sixth and seventh with average scores of 2.97 and 2.85. This difference indicates that men were less influenced by childcare and family activities. On the other hand, women managers had more responsibility with children and family. And they also awarded this stress might cause obstacles to their career development.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1. Social culture affects people's perception on women managers' ability.**

With reviewing the literature previously, traditional cultures have tended to be based on a sexual division of labour reflecting traditional views about appropriate male and female roles. China is categorised to countries with high masculinity index by previous researchers would exhibit a higher degree of traditional male values, which means China is a country with gender inequality. And with its Confucianism, and origins in an agrarian culture, Chinese culture is about reverence for the elderly, rule by men of virtue and a convention for steadiness. The roles of male and female tend to be hierarchical, with strong degrees of role distance and expected deference between high- and low-status jobs. In this circumstance, women are difficult to climb up to higher positions and it is more difficult for women than for men.

The transformation of gender-cultures is likely to result only after women have firmly established themselves within organisations at all levels. In the meantime, women should make use of the current forces which are favourable to equality work, precisely because they require a customer focus and effective communication.

### **5.2 Women manager have work-family conflict.**

With the culture issues towards women managers discussed above, it is easy to understand that the pervasive awareness of women have responsibilities on childcare and domestic affairs. While the barriers related to women managers' career progression, they were also a significant influence on women's work-life balance, and their personal-life choices. It is also showed on the findings of last chapter that female managers ranked childcare responsibilities and conflicts with family activities much higher than male managers. Also the average scores were much higher than men. It becomes a negative factor for women with young children, as in the majority of cases; women remain the primary caregiver with the added responsibility of household organisation. Any attempts by women to reduce hours of work or to work flexibly in senior professional occupations in order to deal with domestic responsibilities are usually perceived, in contrast to men who have a higher chance of promotion by remaining within their existing organisation.

### **5.3 Glass ceiling effect affects women's career development in hotel industry in China.**

Gender stereotyping of the managerial position fosters bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions. Through the previous literature review, these obstacles that lead to the under-representation of women in leadership

and upper level management positions attribute to glass ceiling phenomenon. It is showed on the findings of the obstacles to career development that female managers ranked on the equity of promotion and lack of equity in pay as two of the top four obstacles. And the average score were higher than men. The two obstacles are also highlighted in the literature review. Many researchers have already examined that the wage gap was increasing throughout the wage distribution and accelerating at the top, which means higher women rise in organisations, the larger the gender gap becomes. While the pay gap remains one of the most persistent forms of gender inequality.

## 6. Summary

The findings of this research also indicate that not all women experienced the barriers to career progression however. Both female and male managers showed their preference on supervising female subordinates. Previous researchers find that the higher the level of women, the higher the possibility of the employee leaves his post, means that the female career development in the hospitality industry resistance is bigger.

In terms of career development, hotels should provide more opportunities for female staff. The equality of men and women is one of the basic national policies to promote the social development in China. Therefore, in order to keep the top position of female employees, the hotel must provide more opportunities for career advancement reduce the happening of the glass ceiling phenomenon, strive to eliminate all kinds of human gender segregation in women's career development. Break the gender segregation of each position within the hotel that women employees can be added to the currently male-dominated engineering department, security and other jobs. In addition, the society and organisations to actively create a good cultural atmosphere and the policy environment, ease housework burden of women in family life, women have more time and energy into work.

## References:

---

- [1] Ng, C.W. and Pine, R., (2003), Women and men in hotel management in Hong Kong: perceptions of gender and career development issues *Hospitality Management* Vol.22, pp.85–102. [i.p.1,38,51]
- [2] Barreto, M., Ryan, M.K. and Schmitt, M.T. (2009) *The Glass Ceiling in the 21st Century Understanding Barriers to Gender Equality*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC. [i.p.14]
- [3] Mooney, S. and Ryan, I., (2009) A woman's place in hotel management: upstairs or downstairs?, *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, Vol.24 Iss:3, pp.195–210. [i.p.4,16,29]
- [4] Lin, X. and Gunderson, M., (2014) Glass ceiling or sticky floor? Quantile regression decomposition of the gender pay gap in China, *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol.35 Issue:3, pp.306–326. [i.p.17,19]