

Women in leadership

By Mary Pang

Despite the accession of Hong Kong SAR's first female Chief Executive, the region's highest leadership office, just 12% of Hong Kong boardroom members are women. **Dr Mary Pang, Associate Dean (Internationalization)**, describes the evolution of the Hong Kong job market, and how CB is working with Wellesley College in the United States – to help promote our female students into future leadership roles.

Amongst many achievements, Hong Kong has the distinction of being the undisputed holder of the title of the World's Freest Economy – for 23 consecutive years according to the Washington-based Heritage Foundation. Yet Hong Kong has few natural resources, and so the region's success and prosperity have been built on one main asset: its people.

Beneath the surface of this bustling, workaholic metropolis, lies a remarkable statistic. The city's gender imbalance is increasingly skewed. Hong Kong has just 876 males for every 1,000 females. It is no surprise, then, that women constitute a significant

proportion of the labour force, 49% according to the latest Hong Kong Government Yearbook. But what sort of jobs are these women doing, and how prominent are women in leadership roles?

Toys, flowers, and jewelry

Female participation in the economy took off during Hong Kong's rapid industrialization in the 1960s, as the city's light manufacturing industries boomed. Women went to work producing plastic flowers, toys, jewelry and watches, textiles and garments, and electronics, whether in the flourishing home-based cottage industries or in factories located in industrial buildings in the urban areas.

CB Internationalization team: (from left) Jasmine Wong, Connie Chan, Dr Mary Pang, Angie Cheung and Edna Yu

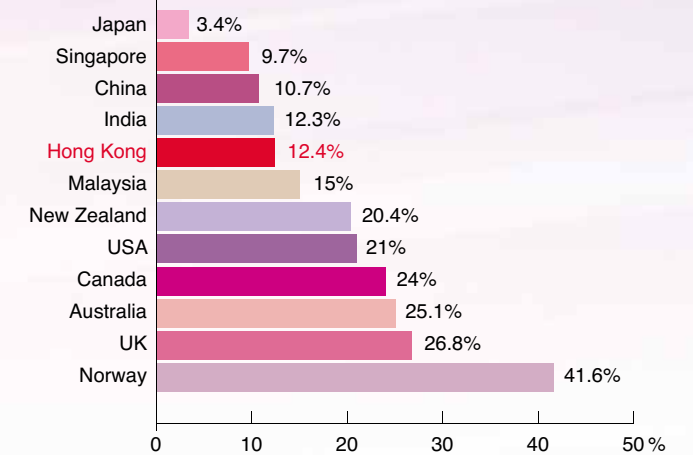
城大商學院
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Carrie Lam, Hong Kong SAR's first female Chief Executive

Female Board Membership



Source: Women On Boards Hong Kong 2017 Report

With the equally rapid de-industrialization process that occurred from the late 1980s through the 1990 and the relocation of Hong Kong's factories and manufacturing base to the Shenzhen and other Special Economic Zones in PRC, some women retreated back to domesticity. Nevertheless, the employment doors had been opened, and the majority of female workers in Hong Kong remained in work. There was a huge demand for labour as a vibrant economy transitioned into the expanding services industries, that currently employs more than 80% of Hong Kong's workforce.

This high female participation rate in Hong Kong's labour market has long been facilitated by the importation of another group of female workers: the large numbers of foreign domestic helpers presently totaling over 350,000, primarily from the Philippines (54%) and Indonesia (44%). These live-in domestic helpers released the local Hong Kong women from their familial and household duties, thus enabling them to maintain an active role in the workplace.

Women on Boards

Despite women's laudable contributions to the economic growth and prosperity of Hong Kong

during the past 60 years, as in most other societies, equality for women here has yet to be realized. For example, there is a woeful under-representation of women in the upper echelons of the corporate world. According to a recent 2017 study, Women on Boards published by the Hong Kong based NGO Community Business, just 12.4% of board members here are women. This lags far behind western countries such as Norway, leading the world with 41.6% female board membership, or the UK second at 26.8%.

Role models and dreams

There appear to be few role models to inspire young women in corporate Hong Kong. However, the swearing in of Hong Kong's first female Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, on July 1st 2017 may provide a glimmer of hope in local society for women aspiring to reach the top of their career ladders, regardless of profession.

Being a sociologist who specialized in the areas of racism and discrimination for my doctoral studies, I am more than conscious of the issues of diversity, be they race, ethnicity or gender-related. And being one-third of the women represented in the Dean's management team in our College of Business, I am



Women at work in Hong Kong's post-war garment industry, a pillar of society at that time



Photo courtesy of Chicks, a brand of Chun Au Knitting Factory Ltd

About Wellesley College

Wellesley College is the top-ranked private women's college in the United States. It is a long-time incubator for socially-engaged leadership: Hillary Clinton, US Presidential candidate, is the College's most famous alumnae, though former Ambassador Madeleine Albright, the late director Nora Ephron, public health champion Ophelia Dahl, journalists Diane Sawyer and Cokie Roberts, and businesswoman Lulu Chow Wang are also highly noted alumnae.

Wellesley is known for the excellence of its education, the beauty of its setting, its gifted faculty, and the uniqueness of its campus culture. But most of all, Wellesley is known for the thousands of accomplished, thoughtful women it has sent out into the world for over 100 years—women who are committed to making a difference.

Contemporary Women's Leadership: Perspectives and Practices

A 5-week residential programme – Overview

Academic Courses

- Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies
- Breaking the Glass Ceiling – Women and the Workplace
- Organizational Psychology

Social Activities

- Golf for business seminar
- First Republic Bank
- Greater Boston Food Bank
- Mentoring workshop

Experiential/Leadership Activities

- Being a data informed leader
- Contemplative practices in leadership
- Career tips for professional women
- Wellesley College alumnae panel: Leadership journeys
- Using golf as a networking tool for business

cognizant of the responsibilities I have to encourage our young female students to not set boundaries on their dreams.

Wellesley

So, it was surely a stroke of serendipity that I was introduced to Nancy Coleman, Associate Provost, Wellesley College, in the autumn of 2016. It became quickly apparent during the course of our conversation that this leading women's university in the United States was willing and able to craft a 5-week programme on Contemporary Women's Leadership for our College of Business BBA students. And by Summer 2017, six of our young women BBA candidates were attending the inaugural programme in Boston.

The future

The Contemporary Women's Leadership programme was a huge hit with our CB students, who rated all aspects of the programme highly. Following enthusiastic feedback from the participants, CB looks forward to sending a larger group to join the programme next summer, while Wellesley College also plans to recruit widely to increase the diversity of the attendees and further enrich the student learning programme.

From the following participant sharings, it is apparent that the programme succeeded in stimulating our students, to realize and aspire to the limitless possibilities from the precedents set by Wellesley alumni, but most crucially in shifting their mindsets.

Large numbers of foreign domestic helpers enable Hong Kong women to join the workforce. HelperChoice is an ethical online platform that helps employers find the right domestic worker, and also helps to foster a fairer and happier working relationship



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Contemporary Women's Leadership programme at Wellesley College

*This summer the College of Business sent six BBA students to the Contemporary Women's Leadership programme at Wellesley College in the United States as part of the [Study Abroad programme](#). In the first three of the following articles, our students **Ray Yue Mingrui**, **Catherine Tsui Tsz-ching**, and **Sharon Poon Hui-wa** portray – from their perspectives – some of the main achievements of prominent Wellesley graduates. **Victoria Sze Yeuk-ning**, **Camille Zheng Chuhang**, and **Yuki Zhang Hao** then follow with reflections on their Wellesley experience this summer.*

Soong Mei-ling

By Ray Yue, BBA Finance student

Soong Mei-ling was the first lady of the Republic of China from 1948 to 1975. Partly due to the lack of reportage in China, her achievements as a woman have been undervalued yet she contributed greatly to the prosperity of her nation. Soong Mei-ling encountered many obstacles after her graduation from Wellesley College in 1917 but gradually became active in the civic life of her country. Her ambitions were not recognized by her father, but after his death she was encouraged by her sister to progress her career. During the Second Sino-Japanese War she rallied her people against the Japanese invasion and in 1942 conducted a speaking tour in the US to obtain support.

Back home she set up a report and supervising system, encouraged transparent government and praised the reporting of corruption, contributing to the better governance of the country. In addition to outstanding English skills, Soong Mei-ling could speak



Soong Mei-ling on the cover of Illustrated Magazine, January 1944

six languages, was accomplished at piano, chess, writing and painting. As diplomatic assistant to her husband Chiang Kai-shek, Soong took an active role in woman's leadership, and explored new possibilities as a woman in the community.

Soong Mei-ling's life was an extraordinary exception to the prevailing culture and atmosphere in China, a patriarchal society where women were the subject and men the ruler. Women were barely allowed a voice in political and military affairs at that time. Wellesley College has a history of encouraging women to stand out in a male dominated world. Soong Mei-ling benefited from that education and seized the social capital. Building on her own abilities, she blazed a pioneering role in woman's leadership, and opened up new possibilities for women in Asian.

Shirley Young

By Catherine Tsui, BBA Marketing student

Shirley Young, formerly Corporate Vice President of General Motors Corp, is an entrepreneur, social activist, and Wellesley graduate. She founded and leads the Committee of 100, an independent non-profit group of prominent Chinese-Americans based in New York.

In her childhood, Shirley Young had a hard time in World War II. The capture and death of her father, who was a diplomat, changed her life dramatically. After several years in Manila sharing a home with six families, her family received help to start a new life in the US. She went to Wellesley College on a scholarship.

After graduation, initially she could not find a job because women were expected to do jobs such as secretary, but her aspiration was higher than that. She dreamed to make a contribution to the world. Despite voicing her aspirations, all initial prospective employers turned her down. Finally, a Wellesley College senior offered her a market research job, which led to her career in the marketing and advertising industry.



Shirley Young, former Corporate Vice President of General Motors Corp

However, she did not forget her dream to become a diplomat and finally she founded an association with the Chinese elites to promote relationships between the people and leaders of the US and China.

What impresses me most about Shirley Young is not just her achievements in business, but her dedication to voluntary work. She left China when she was only two years old. She spent most of her lifetime in the US but she did not forget her Chinese identity. She took a big step forward to help other Chinese-Americans and promote their full participation in the society

Shirley once mentioned that Wellesley College taught her to "connect the dots", which reflects my own experience this summer. Meetings with women leaders, gave us opportunities to build networks. There is a saying that "Knowing more people is better than knowing more about stuff". Relationships will come in handy someday. For my future career, I will place much focus in building and maintaining relationships.

Heidi Wang – Girls Teaching Girls to Code

By Sharon Poon, BBA Marketing student

Software engineering seems to be dominated by male in most organizations. This was also true of **Heidi Wang's** internship in a small startup in San Francisco. When she first attended an all-staff meeting, she was shocked that she was the only woman engineer in the firm. The situation of gender imbalance triggered her thought of teaching girls computer science. During her master's degree in Stanford University, she collaborated with three female classmates to invent Girls Teaching Girls To Code (GTGTC). Their proposal was to organize a one-day code camp for high school girls, and gather help from computer science and math teachers from all high schools nearby. The camp originally was set to accommodate 120 participants, however, with overwhelming popularity, they received many more enrollments than they expected. Therefore, the problem of insufficient funds emerged.



Heidi Wang, second left, with co-founders of Girls Teaching Girls to Code

They sought support from local businesses, and of course, they encountered setbacks and discouragements. With determination and persistence, they made GTGC a great success by collecting extra funding to offer a wide variety of courses such as web design, computational biology, and cryptography. More than 1,000 girls joined GTGC, and the camp continues to develop by adding more elements like workshops, events, and company tours (Wellesley College, 2016).

Gender inequality still exists in the workplace, for instance, just 14.5% of engineers are women. Wang's internship experience in the computer science firm reflected the gender imbalance situation, inspiring her to empower girls through education. Reflecting Wellesley College's commitment to women, Wang's innovative idea intended to improve young women's competitiveness, especially in the science, math, and engineering areas.

Referring to what I learned in the organizational psychology class in Wellesley College, women's career path is like a labyrinth, meaning that it takes considerably more time and effort for them to be promoted to leadership positions in organizations. Finding yourself a mentor is essential to provide you with more opportunities in the workplace that can facilitate your personal growth and utilize your full potentials.

Challenging people's ideas is OK

By Victoria Sze, BBA International Business student

The Contemporary Women's Leadership classes at Wellesley are small and discussion-based. For me one big change was that I became more confident in presenting and expressing my ideas in front of people. In the first week, I was shocked that classes were so interactive! Students would express their opinions and share their experiences with all of us. They would relate the class topic to their personal experiences and share it with people.

At first, I was not very confident in speaking in front of the whole class. Since participation counts as part of the course grade, I talked in class a little but most of my contributions were short. As the days went by, I became used to these heavily discussion-based lessons, and less afraid to raise my hand up and talk. And I did not think of the grading criteria every time! I become more willing to share and exchange my ideas with others.

I used to believe that challenging people's ideas was not a polite act. However, after this summer, I see that these challenges are ways to learn and absorb knowledge from more sources other than the teaching materials prepared by teachers and from the internet. It is always important to learn from people next to you. Not only do you learn to think from multiple perspectives, you also learn to think from the opposite stance.

People's comments made me think how to defend my point of view and to see if my thoughts were well grounded or not. Wellesley College is such a prestigious school and the students are intelligent and eloquent. Being well-prepared for classes is key to keeping your edge and impressing your teachers.

A sense of fulfillment

By Camille Zheng, BBA Business Economics student

The Contemporary Women's Leadership programme contains participants of different nationalities, offering a platform to meet people with diverse cultural backgrounds. It is a precious gift for me to make friends with all these girls. They are all warm, kind, and helpful. Through all these five weeks, I feel like we have become a big family.

I would recommend this programme as it could be a valuable experience to every female college student. It offers an insight into how women could be successful in a male-dominant environment and how women should deal with potential gender discrimination. Before entering society as a woman employee, it is of great importance to know what dilemma you might be trapped in and in what ways you might be able to overcome the obstacles. This programme contains a regular four-week summer course term and a one-week business-related activities component.

You will be seated in the same class together with other Wellesley College students and enjoy classes taught by amiable professors. The courses are discussion-based, meaning that you will have plenty of opportunities to express your own points of view and have close interactions with your classmates and professors.

Although I would not say it is easy to deal with a pile of readings, assignments, and examinations, you can always find a way to manage all these tasks and gain a sense of fulfillment and achievement in the end. When you are done with the last paper, the following week's activities are more fantastic than you could ever imagine. Having an opportunity to share lunch, sitting face to face with the managers at the First Republic Bank, attending the speech given by Leeza Gibbons, a famous American talk show host, and doing voluntary work at Greater Boston Food Bank were all really exciting experiences.

In conclusion...

By Yuki Zhang, BBA Accountancy student

We took two fascinating courses, amongst many others focussing on feminist history and the organizational psychology including gender perspectives. We obtained a great deal of knowledge including understanding of the current situation of women in the workplace and useful skills to deal with the stereotypes of women. Besides, conversations with successful and wonderful women have given us a lot of precious experiences, helping us to prepare well before entering organizations. Although on a daily basis the workload was heavy, the professors were very kind and gave us a lot of explanatory feedback when grading. So, especially if you have a positive attitude, the study side can be extraordinary beneficial.

As for leisure time, we experienced various colourful and rewarding activities: We visited the museum in Boston to appreciate beautiful paintings. We went to famous universities to soak up the academic atmosphere. We hung out in Boston to go shopping and taste American food. We took a trip to visit Charles River by Duck Boat which was a very exciting experience. On weekdays, we might not go out but we had nice meals in school and we could relax by visiting different places in the school which has a long history. In conclusion, this programme was not only a study experience but also a multifaceted cultural trip to Boston. It was very enjoyable. I feel very lucky to have joined it!

From left, Catherine, Victoria, Sharon, Camille, Ray and Yuki

The Greater Boston
FOOD
BANK

