

Common Careers, Different Experiences

Women Managers in Hong Kong and Britain

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Lives and Careers of Women Managers in Hong Kong and Britain

This book explores the lives and careers of women managers in Hong Kong and Britain. In doing so, it seeks to examine why the particular patterns of career path that exist have emerged and how the women themselves understand and account for their careers. The intention is that such research should shed light on the role played by culture, as compared to other factors, in influencing patterns of working life. It is argued that while culture plays a crucial role in making sense of social reality, its role can be understood only through the different networks of social relationships that it encourages. Culture, it will be argued, is not the only cause of such relationships, but rather, is one of a number of processes generating specific sets of circumstances that predispose individuals to relate to each other in particular ways. Of special significance to the lives of women managers are the varying sets of relationships that characterize and give shape to the construct of 'family' in the two societies, and the variation in the nature of the social relationships between men and women in Hong Kong and Britain.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the specific research aims, provides definitions of central concepts and explains the organization of the book.

AIMS

This book provides a cross-cultural comparison of women managers'

experiences of career and work. In so doing, the intention is to explore the relationships between the macro and the micro levels by examining how cultural and social processes become manifested in individuals' lives. As a part of this overall aim, there are a number of secondary aims.

To Examine How Cultural Differences Are Manifested in the Day-to-Day Lives and Experiences of Individuals

Existing research has identified dimensions along which cultural differences can be measured (Hofstede 1980a). Although influential, by concentrating on the macro-level comparisons, that research has focused less on what those dimensions mean to the individuals involved. Consequently, misunderstandings still occur. For example, although collectivism is discussed in the literature as a feature of some societies, it is argued here that a Western interpretation of what collectivism means may be very different from that of the Hong Kong Chinese. As this is the case, it seems probable that the Hong Kong Chinese collectivist orientation is rather different from the collectivist orientation identified in many African societies (Hofstede 1980b; Trompenaars 1993). By examining just two societies in-depth, the intention is to achieve a detailed understanding of the role culture plays in the lives of the members of those societies.

To Examine How Women Managers in Hong Kong and Britain Experience, Interpret and Explain Their Careers, Career Paths and Career Choices

Secondly, this book seeks to explore how individuals interpreted and experienced the situations they faced in their careers, what the situations meant to them and what led them to make the particular choices that they did. In this way, the book seeks to establish the important and influencing features of culture for the women studied. By starting from the premise of what was important to these individuals, it is possible to avoid the pitfall of imposing particular cultural biases on cross-cultural research. The women in the sample have been able to identify what has been important to them throughout their lives and thus their voices can be heard through this research. Cross-cultural research that is reinterpreted into abstract notions and models can become so far removed from the experiences of the people it identifies that it can no longer be said to be explanation of their lives. This reinterpretation in cross-cultural research is particularly dangerous because the interpretative process

involves the researcher's own cultural assumptions and biases becoming enmeshed in the developing model. To avoid these biases, this book uses the women's own explanations of their careers as a means of constructing an understanding of choices before moving on to draw conclusions on the work presented. It is with this aim in mind that the two chapters of case-study material have been included in which these women's voices can be heard most vividly.

Hofstede, perhaps the most influential researcher in the field, uses a hugely male-dominated sample (Hofstede 1980a). Other research also has utilized groups of international businessmen. Women are often scarce in these samples. This study seeks to rectify the balance and examine how culture has affected a particular group of women and the role it has played in influencing the choices they have made regarding their careers and families.

Although there is a larger body of research exploring Western women's lives, there is still a relative dearth of such material in Hong Kong. Much of the research that has been done tends to be based on quantitative surveys (Westwood 1997). Among the small numbers of academics working in the field, there has been an increasing call for more qualitative studies (Westwood 1997; Choi and Lee 1997). It is partly as an attempt to respond to such calls that this research has taken the form that it does, thus utilizing the rich, in-depth analysis of a qualitative approach substantiated by its location within a broader, more quantitative enquiry.

BACKGROUND DEFINITIONS

What Is Culture?

The problem any discussion of culture faces is that there is no agreement as to what the concept actually entails. In different fields, culture is different things, and even within similar discussions, various authors mean different things by it. Just as the content of 'culture' varies over time and space, so do its definitions. Definitions have ranged from the erroneously narrow to the meaninglessly broad. A popular statement (see for example Ajiferuke and Boddewyn 1970) is that there are as many different definitions of culture as there are authors on it. Many definitions of culture separate it into a series of different layers (e.g. Sathe 1985; Hofstede 1980a). Sathe (1985) suggests that there are three layers of culture. At the most overt level, there is manifest culture which is evident in behaviour and language, such as dress, gestures, mannerisms, body language, verbal language and patterns of behaviour. The

next level is expressed values, which refers to how the people of a culture rationalize and explain their behaviour. Finally, at the deepest and least easily observed level, culture also includes the basic assumptions about the world that people hold and the basis on which they act.

Although it is true that there is a vast range of definitions of culture, the majority of these can be classified as one of two types. The first of these is the area of attitudes and values. In effect, this refers to the personality of a group, be it a society or some small social group or club. It is, therefore, the shared attitudes and values which make one group what it is and which distinguish it from other groups. The second area often subsumed within the use of the term 'culture' has become known as 'artefacts'. It is this notion of culture that might lead us to describe someone as 'cultured'. Artefacts are the products of cultural values: paintings, literature, films and so on. However, more than this, other artefacts, or cultural products, are the organizations and institutions of society. Triandis (1972) terms this 'objective culture'. Objective culture is the tangible products of culture that are manifestations or evidence of the subjective culture held by the members of the group.

Although artefacts may be cultural in the sense that they are the outward manifestations of culture, they reflect culture, they reinforce it, they support and maintain it, ultimately they are not culture. Therefore, art and social institutions are *cultural* but not *culture*, and are a useful means of discovering the distinguishing attitudes and values of a society or group that are otherwise difficult to discern. So we will also be discussing the cultural as the outward manifestations of the values, attitudes and norms of the two cultures to the extent that they add to our understanding of the operation of culture on women managers' lives.

As has been suggested above, notions of culture are products of time and place. While there are a variety of definitions of culture at any one time, these have also varied in emphasis over time. For many years, culture has been the area of interest for anthropologists. However, for a long time this was where it remained, and it was rarely discussed within the other social-science disciplines. Within this usage, culture was the description of what characterized particular societies or tribes. Within sociology, the major theoretical dilemma has been, and still is, that of structure versus agency. Culture has often become subsumed within this debate rather than figuring as a major area in its own right. In fact, very often, culture has been used as synonymous with structure and consequently has been frequently neglected within sociology (Archer 1988). However, culture is not simply synonymous with structure nor is it just an epiphenomenon of structure. That is, culture is not simply produced by structure, it is not a by-product generated entirely by structure with no ability itself to influence.

There is a vast amount of literature dated from the mid-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century that investigates what culture is and introduces culture as a concept explaining a society's way of life.

Culture or civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

(Tylor 1913, p. 1)

This view remains influential today. Much of this early work on culture was an attempt to understand the mechanisms through which societies were held together as identifiable units. For instance, religion forms a part of this cohesive mechanism and consequently figured strongly in these analyses (Durkheim 1984; Malinowski 1944).

Outside anthropology, culture became of increasing sociological and economic interest after Japan's rapid rise to economic success. The 'Japanese miracle' demanded explanation: how had this country, destroyed by war, risen to such heights so rapidly? One explanation put forward was its unique culture that produced a nation of apparently obedient, loyal, committed and hard-working workers (Morishima 1984). However, this argument has also been refuted (Koike and Inoki 1990).

More recently still, with the rise of multinational companies, business people are increasingly coming into contact with business communities of other cultures. Consequently, awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural difference is essential, and this is reflected in the rapid rise of cultural-awareness training and related schemes which businesses are taking more and more seriously.

In many ways, this relatively recent change has meant the demise of culture as a theoretical discussion. The academic and theoretical dimension of culture is being overlooked as culture becomes a more popular concept of practical necessity in business. Look for instance at the now highly influential work of people in this field: Hofstede (1980a, 1984, 1988, 1991, 1994), Bond (1986, 1991), Trompenaars (1994) and others. These authors have produced influential academic texts, but they have also had more popular success in the forms of business books or as consultants.

Thus perhaps we are losing sight of, or maybe never really came to terms with, culture as an academic concept in a modern sense. Rather we seem to be transposing culture to the more lucrative, but less academically rigorous, domain of business and consultancy. The definitions too have become more popularized.

. . . the essence of culture is not what is visible on the surface. It is the shared ways groups of people understand and interpret the world. So the fact that we can all listen to Walkmans and eat hamburgers tells us that there are some novel products that can be sold on a universal message, but it does not tell us what eating hamburgers or listening to Walkmans means in different cultures.
(Trompenaars 1993, p. 3)

The diversity of definitions has encouraged the vagary of their use. How culture is viewed in different circumstances is inextricably tied to why it is examined. For example, within business, there is often what might be considered a functionalist view of culture. Culture is seen as part of the operation of a business and, at the macro level, as an environment for business and organization that generates a sense of cohesion. Interest in culture may also be concerned with how to bring particular phenomenon about, how to make things work *despite* culture, how to get round cultural barriers. Another concern is with changing cultures and how one can change a culture to make an organization more successful (e.g. Drennan 1992).

Perhaps in this context, it is easy to forget that culture is also a mechanism of power and control. Culture reflects and reproduces power differentials as different groups have different degrees of influence on the form any particular society's or group's culture actually takes. Thus culture is not just about harmony and how we live and work together, but it is also about manipulation and control in the interests of some groups over others. For instance, culture is concerned with the exercise of power and may be said to operate against the interests of groups such as women or particular social classes. Consequently, culture cannot be seen simply as a neutral, unbiased source of cohesion and harmony. Some have the opportunity to influence culture more than others. One example of this power influence can be seen through the assertion that culture played a significant part, though probably not all, in explaining Japan's unprecedented economic growth. The ruling élite and the Japanese government were able to emphasize certain elements of their culture, such as loyalty, and manipulate others, such as filial piety, to create a form most suited to their interests. Consequently, the filial piety was transposed to the organization, and the enforced loyalty that this brought could thus be utilized (Morishima 1984). In this way, there has been a controlled metamorphosis of a cultural attitude. Cultural engineering is therefore a possibility (though not necessarily desirable), and some groups are more able to manage that engineering than others are. Cultural engineering is constantly referred to indirectly in business. An organization's leadership wants to change that organization's culture and says so. Surprisingly, this rarely raises outrage in itself, though the actual process

it entails may do. In fact, this admission of a desire for cultural change is a confession that attempts will be made to change attitudes and behaviour *en masse*. This is a confession of cultural engineering.

These notions of cultural change imply that culture can be generated and directed. This may not be possible to the degree that some might wish. Culture is by definition evolutionary in nature. What culture is today reflects what has been going on in, and around, that society or group in the past. Culture is inherently a historical construct and thus cannot be changed overnight. History cannot be simply forgotten, nor will it just go away. However, over time, powerful social groups are more able to shape, to varying degrees, what the cultural values of the future will be. Culture is made up of the people who exist within it. Some of those people have a greater chance of strongly embedding their interests within a culture than others. However, this does not make everyone else passive empty vessels to be socialized into the ruling group's culture unwittingly, they also engage in the changing and shaping of cultural values and norms, though their power to shape may be on a lesser scale.

So in summary, culture seems to operate at a number of levels. It is clear that culture is, at least in part, concerned with power and control. The meaning of the term 'culture' varies as its usage spans different discursive arenas. It was also suggested that currently there is a tendency for the dialogue surrounding culture to be moving away from academic and theoretical discourse towards a more popular, applied concept within the domain of business. Finally, while there is nothing wrong with this move, it serves to give the impression of a vague concept of harmonious values which ignores many academic areas of debate and exploration.

What Is Management?

There is a vast body of literature that defines what management is, what managers do and different approaches to, and styles of, management. (See for example Drucker 1989; Fayol 1949; Kerr et al. 1960; Kotter 1982; Billsberry 1996; Mintzberg 1973, 1990.) It is not the aim here to provide an exhaustive review of this literature, but simply to outline the concept briefly for our purposes here.

Management, despite now being widespread, has emerged as a strong force in a relatively brief period of time (Drucker 1989, 1990). Management is not a separate function but is a process common to all functions within an organization. Generally, 'management' is deemed to be the art of getting things done without actually doing the task oneself (Eyre 1993). A manager controls

and organizes those who are actually doing the physical work, and thus management is an intellectual occupation, reliant on paperwork (or at least communicated ideas) rather than physical work. Fayol (1949) suggests that there are five main elements to management. These are: planning action; organizing resources (material and human) required for the organization's activities to take place; commanding personnel (in order to get the maximum out of employees for the interests of the organization as a whole); co-ordinating the activities of the organization; and controlling the process to ensure that everything occurs according to plan. Fayol's definition acts as a basis for many modern definitions of management that continue to identify a range of similar activities as the responsibility of management today. Management in some organizations does literally refer to positions in which the task is to manage other people. However, management in other organizations may imply nothing more than that it is a position above a certain point in the organization's hierarchy (Ashburner 1994). The above indicates that management is a generic term that covers a multitude of activities. Management is by no means homogenous nor are managers themselves. This diversity means that it is difficult to find a commonly agreed definition of management, but a useful way to examine it is by distinguishing 'management' from 'doing'. In the context of this book, management incorporates not just organizational and individual variation in concepts of management, but also cultural variations in conceptions of what management is and the nature of effective management. As we will go on to see the various individuals within the sample in this study represent a range of managerial activities, approaches and circumstances. What unites them all is the fact of their work being concerned with getting tasks done through the supervision of others.

What Is a Career?

During the 1960s, in the phase of initial sociological interest in 'careers', the term was deemed to refer only to that which was pre-planned and actively sought in an attempt to reach a long-term goal. A career was classified as a series of sequential occupations, each of which represented upward mobility towards a goal (see for example Wilensky 1961; Slocum 1966). The origins of such an analysis were very much within the confines of the male-dominated sociology of the 1960s. Careers were defined in terms of the male experience of an occupation or profession and the patterns of *his* employment they encapsulated. As a consequence of this, women were disadvantaged in the sense that if the patterns of their employment differed from those of men, they would be considered imperfect. Thus, a wide range of more recent

literature on women and career discusses the need to redefine the concept totally (e.g. Evetts 1994a).

From what we now know of the characteristics of women's working lives in Britain, it is readily apparent that the conventional definition of career does not lend itself to the analysis of women's working lives. This definition would exclude significant numbers of working women as they frequently suffer downward mobility and periods out of the labour market because of their role in the family of child-rearer and home-maker (Dex 1987). There is less information on career models in Hong Kong. However, it is clear that for our interests, the definition outlined above is far too narrow.

The definition utilized in the forthcoming chapters follows more closely the usage of Spilerman (1977) and Haveman and Cohen (1994) who consider career within the broader context throughout the life cycle. In such a definition, factors outside paid employment are brought into the picture, thus shedding further light on why patterns emerge as they do. In some economic contexts, current trends are towards fewer people being employed in the traditional manner and more people experiencing unemployment and non-standard forms of employment. Under these circumstances, the traditional concept of 'career' may not be appropriate for men either and is relegated to explaining a working life of the past. For our purposes, it is not necessary to enter into vast detail on what constitutes a 'career' and to redefine our notions of it. Rather, the focus is to understand the women managers' involvement in paid employment, the routes that they have taken to be in their current position, and how they experience and perceive their own working lives and 'careers' in relation to other aspects of social life. Thus we are able to examine work histories that are not necessarily orderly and progressive patterns of employment. To understand women's involvement in paid employment, it may be necessary to look at what Evetts (1994a) terms 'career contingencies'. Family and personal life, while not being a part of a career in paid employment, may well have a significant impact on the choices and decisions made about that path, and consequently require examination if we are to understand why women encounter the experiences at work that they do. The choices women make regarding their employment cannot be fully understood if we do not understand the circumstances in which the decisions were made. If those circumstances take place outside the environment of paid work, we need to know their significance. Consequently, the only way to understand women's working lives is to look at their paths through life that have brought them to where they are today. This definition and premise forms the basis for the following research.

METHODOLOGY

To reiterate, the central concerns of this book are:

- to examine how cultural differences are manifested in the day-to-day lives and experiences of individuals; and
- to examine how women managers in Hong Kong and Britain experience, interpret and explain their careers, career paths and career choices.

This book is based on a study using a cross-cultural sample of managers drawn from the two societies of Hong Kong and Britain. Much of the existing comparative study of women's experience has tended to utilize solely quantitative methodologies. Moreover, that which has set out to explore the relationship between culture and work-related values has also been based on questionnaires, usually formulated from a Western perspective. Hofstede's work is an example of this (Gamble and Gibson 1999). Despite the development of some questionnaires designed specifically for use in an Asian context (e.g. Chinese Culture Connection 1987), the questionnaire approach to this kind of cultural data has been criticized (Beyer 1993; Gamble and Gibson 1999). Gamble and Gibson suggest that this kind of research has three essential requirements. Firstly, the respondent should be able to express strength of feeling on the issues that they identify as being most significant. Secondly, they should not be able to detect what the researcher is looking for, and finally, there should be some means of corroborating what was being said. By combining the use of both the quantitative questionnaire approach and the qualitative interviews, this book hopes to achieve all three of these aims while also providing the opportunity for these freely expressed opinions to be heard.

The quantitative survey stage collected data from a final sample of 401 male and female managers (164 in Hong Kong and 237 in Britain). This was designed to provide a broad picture of attitudes and career issues from a wider group that could then be explored in depth through the interviews with a sub-sample of women drawn from the survey. This resulted in 45 interviews (23 in Hong Kong and 22 in Britain). Within a broad general structure, the in-depth interviews were largely structured by the interviewees to enable the respondents to set the agenda by identifying the issues and factors that had been significant for them. The interviews sought to establish the women's career experiences and to uncover their understandings, explanations and interpretations of their own careers and career choices. In this way, the methodology made it possible to examine the underpinning attitudes which explain behaviour and help us understand the reasoning behind it. Many existing studies provide, sometimes vast, databases of responses to attitudinal and behavioural questions. However, without an additional qualitative stage,

these studies have been unable to understand what answering in a particular way actually means to the individuals and collectivities involved. Thus the meaning contained within an answer, which is precisely where understanding of cultural variation emerges, is lacking in such research. Here, the specific aim is to understand what the behaviour means to the individuals involved and therefore seeks that rational (and cultural) basis for behaviour.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was divided into a number of sections. The first three sections consisted of attitude statements. The statements were concerned with attitudes, firstly about society generally, secondly about women in work, and finally questions regarding women in the respondent's own working environment. The reasoning behind these divisions was primarily a theoretical one. Tayeb (1988) had argued that one of the main problems with past research into organizations in different cultures was their failure to disentangle the organizations' culture from the national culture, resulting in a confused analysis of a mixture of the two. To avoid this conflation, the general attitude section and those concerned specifically with the respondent's organization were separated. However, it seems plausible that organizational culture is not constrained to the organization alone. There is no reason to assume that organizational culture does not actually seep out of the organizational context to permeate organization members' perception of the outside world. Similarly, organizational culture is inevitably shaped by attitudes and values brought in from outside by the individuals who come to it. Thus, the distinction which Tayeb demands, is somewhat blurred. In addition, by asking questions about general social attitudes, the distinction can be made between what individuals believe about society in general and what actually goes on in their workplace.

The fourth section of the British questionnaire consisted of a work history diary to gauge the entire career of both the women and the men contacted. This diary showed how long an individual had been in any one occupation and the reasons for any changes in the career. A more limited career history was implemented in the Hong Kong questionnaire to gain information on first jobs and the length of time spent in key posts in managers' careers.

The final section of the questionnaire sought demographic information about the respondent, including age, sex, ethnicity, place of birth, educational background, social class background etc. This section also sought more detailed information about the current workplace of the individual in terms of sector, size, and the proportions and distribution of men and women within their own organization.

In-depth Qualitative Interviews

A sub-sample of female, questionnaire respondents was selected for interview. Those selected for interview were all those women who expressed a willingness to be interviewed and were available for interview during the specified interview period. This lack of specification of the sample was deliberate in order that the selection process did not contain cultural bias as to the categories that I, bound by my own cultural assumptions as a female Western researcher, felt would be important.

The interview schedule was designed to probe how the respondent felt about and explained their career, what they saw as the sources of influence and hindrance, the particular events and experiences encountered, and the reasoning behind the choices they had made. This second stage of research provided a mechanism through which the implications of the questionnaire results could be explored more qualitatively.

Each of the 45 interviews was tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewee and subsequently fully transcribed. In order to maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout the book, and details that would identify specific companies have been removed.

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF MANAGEMENT

The argument propounded in this book is that there are distinctive career paths for women managers in Hong Kong and Britain. These different paths emerge because of the way in which the women organize their working lives *vis-à-vis* their family lives. A series of processes and attitudes make these different sets of arrangements possible and also make them the probable choice for the women managers. These processes exist at a number of levels. Firstly, it will be argued that the process of industrialization creates particular sets of conditions that impact upon women's careers. Secondly, differences at the socio-political level mean that women in Hong Kong and Britain are acting within rather different structural contexts. Finally, differences at the level of cultural values in Hong Kong and Britain predispose women to act, respond to events and interpret their careers in different ways. We can understand the variations in career paths and career experiences depicted in this study only through exploring the complex interaction among all three of these levels. What makes this particularly interesting is the clear relationship between the attitudes, the processes and the experiences of the women. This interrelationship suggests

that neither the macro nor the micro level explains or determines patterns of social life, but rather that it is the interaction among these levels which results in the particular configurations of relationships that give shape to social life. Studies such as those of Hofstede's or Trompenaars' are inadequate to explain these women's career patterns and experiences because they focus solely on the level of culture.

Women managers in Hong Kong seem to follow a different pattern of career path than women managers in Britain. The questionnaires and interviews have helped to understand not just that these patterns exist but why. Cultural, historical and economic processes combine not to *determine* the career path, but rather to predispose individuals to act in particular ways and to tend to experience their surroundings in some ways rather than others.

In particular, the roles of women in the family, and the degree to which that family life exists in isolation from, or as part of, other social structures, are fundamental in moulding the way women move into and out of the labour market. We know that the family provides the context for value formation and the development of selves, yet we have seen that rapid economic growth and rapid industrialization present a particular set of problems for this process in Hong Kong that are not present in Britain where industrialization has been slower and more gradual.

Family and family relationships are of considerable importance in Hong Kong. Their influence can gain an individual entry to an organization and influence how far they progress within it. Additionally, the family plays a large part in motivating the individual to achieve, so aspiration is realized through family success and survival. In contrast, in Britain, higher levels of individualism encourage the achievement of individual goals to become the motivation to succeed.

Economy, education, legislation and class are all significant. However, the individual behaviours which define the nature of these structures vary significantly between Hong Kong and Britain because of the combined effects of the nature of historical processes and cultural attitudes (which themselves are influenced by each other). In addition to the social structures of society and its historical roots, perhaps where culture is most clearly visible is in the manner in which individuals, or groups of individuals, relate to each other. It is these relationships that make culture visible within structure. It is these relationships that join people together into groups which we see as structures, whether that is the organization, the family or any other apparent 'structure'. It is these relationships which differ culturally, and so build different skeletal forms, which give shape to social life. These relationships can serve to motivate individuals to succeed, but they also can have less positive implications for career progression.

The central figurations of relationships that shed light on the particular experiences and understandings that women have of their management careers are the nature of the family figuration and the nature of the relationships between men and women. These sets of relationships in conjunction with historical and economic processes encourage particular types of orientations to work which are reflected in the experiences of the careers and the nature of the career paths.

Additionally, the way in which people relate to others in society has an impact on their actions within it. Consequently, understanding and examination of the collectivist environment of Hong Kong, as compared to the more individualistic nature of Britain, is crucial in explaining the differences in patterns of attitudes and careers that have emerged in this research. The consequences of this explain what the individuals are hoping to achieve through work and also how they view the people they encounter at work and around them at home. The more individualistic stance found in Britain combined with the particular nature of family relationships generates pressure for women to hold multiple roles of housewife, mother and manager. Often, the roles conflict, and there are limited opportunities to gain assistance. In Hong Kong, the more collectivist culture combined with a rather different set of relationships within the family means that both the organization and the family tend to be viewed more broadly than they are in Britain, and that networks spread among members of the family beyond nuclear groups and among organizations. Within the context of these family networks, domestic roles still rest very much on the shoulders of women. However, there is a network of support that enables some women to concentrate on their management careers, knowing that the roles of mother and housewife are still well taken care of through other mechanisms than solely their own labour. In Hong Kong, this network of support is further enhanced by its economic situation *vis-à-vis* the countries around it. Consequently, the steady supply of cheap foreign labour provides domestic assistance without significant loss of income. The combination of a collectivist orientation and a diffuse perception in the case of Hong Kong and the individualistic orientation and the specific perception of the social world in Britain seems to encourage these particular configurations.

Much past research has aimed to isolate the various dimensions of culture. Although such a model may be necessary in order to understand the nature of culture, a true picture cannot really be achieved unless these are all reassembled together again. Through an examination of the interaction of culture as a whole, rather than of isolated dimensions, this research has been able to take part in this reassembly. Culture can truly be understood only by investigating the way in which the various elements or dimensions operate in conjunction

with each other. Understanding of each aspect adds to the understanding of the others.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 explores the issues raised in existing literature on women managers. Most of the existing literature revolves around a relatively limited range of areas. These broad areas are explored and the gaps and limitations in existing research identified. Chapter 3 moves on to explore the literature on culture, how it has been measured and studied previously. The chapter then examines what we know of the specific cultures of Hong Kong and Britain and their attitudes to women.

Chapter 4 describes the career paths and the career path experiences of the samples of women managers in Hong Kong and Britain. Chapters 5 and 6 then provide a number of case studies that illustrate the nature of the career and the way it was experienced and understood by the woman manager herself. These are divided by marital and family status in order to illustrate the crucial differences in the manner in which the events surrounding marriage, childbirth and child-rearing are organized in Hong Kong and Britain and the differing impacts that this has upon the career. Because of the importance of family structure and the division of labour in the family, Chapter 7 takes this as its focus. The chapter takes us chronologically through the family lives of these women showing the family context as children, as they grew up and moving on to the organization of family life in adulthood, and the impact of all of these stages on the women's working lives. In this way, we explore the significance of the family throughout these women's lives so as to start to explain the career experiences and patterns illustrated in the earlier chapters.

Finally, Chapter 8 seeks to explain the patterns presented by demonstrating how our understanding of women's careers must recognize the interaction among the three levels of industrialization, socio-political context and cultural values. It is argued that culture is just one of a number of levels that together form a model that explains women's experiences of management. Failure to consider factors at other levels has resulted in deterministic stances towards culture or industrialism. However, it is argued here that it is the way that these levels interact that results in the specific combination of circumstances within which experience and choices are embedded.

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