

# THE MAKING OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN HONG KONG

Priscilla Pue Ho CHU

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The image shows the Chinese characters for '香港大學' (Hong Kong University) written in a highly stylized, square-shaped calligraphic font. Each character is contained within a square frame, and the overall composition is vertical, reading from top to bottom.

Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.

"At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed."

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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## CHAPTER 1

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### Introduction

This book is focused on the social and economic life of female entrepreneurs in Hong Kong and how it manifests itself through industrial entrepreneurship. Three major background factors should be considered. First, the conceptual and business climate in Asia, with growing markets and production centres in the People's Republic of China, Thailand and Malaysia, and the impressive economic development of the newly industrialized countries of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, has been overwhelming and has become a lesson for other developing countries. In particular, the outstanding economic success of Hong Kong, progressing from industrial export leader to financial centre, is most striking. Second, there is the turbulent situation faced by Hong Kong's manufacturing industries. In order to compete in cost, they have had to shift most of their manufacturing base to mainland China or other less developed countries. In order to overcome quantitative restraint from major markets set up for some key manufacturing industries in Hong Kong, they have had to move up-market for survival. Third, there is the fact that the roles of women in Hong Kong have undergone dramatic changes over the last forty years: from being housewives to doing subcontracting work at home, to being paid employees at work and to being employers themselves. Female participation in the workforce has been striking and women's level of education, involvement in decision making and pay scales have also been greatly affected. These social phenomena have generated interest in gaining a better understanding of female entrepreneurship in one of Hong Kong's major industries — the clothing industry.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN HONG KONG

Entrepreneurship, particularly industrial entrepreneurship, has been the main building block of economic success in Hong Kong since the 1950s (Wong, 1988). Female entrepreneurship has made its significant contribution but was neglected in studies in Hong Kong as well as in Asia. Therefore, the study of female entrepreneurs in one of the major industries in Hong Kong in this particular time frame will present some insights into how female entrepreneurship is developing in the male-dominated manufacturing sector. It is hoped that the account of Chinese female entrepreneurs in Hong Kong will help to answer two questions: first, what are the distinctive features of Chinese female industrial entrepreneurship? And second, what are the factors that go into the making of female entrepreneurs?

### Interest in Entrepreneurship Studies

The entrepreneur and entrepreneurship are not new concepts. For the last two decades, the topic has occupied a key position on the research agenda of various education and research institutions in a variety of disciplines. Why this new-found popularity? In the USA, between 1950 and 1970 new jobs were created by either government or big business. Since the late 1970s, employment in the Fortune 500 firms declined by over 4 million workers, while by the end of the 1980s 1.3 million new enterprises started up each year, including the newly self-employed averaging half a million per year (Birch, 1990). This new wave of development was related to the changes in value, perception, attitudes and demographics as well as economic and technological factors (Drucker, 1985). As this phenomenon was incompletely understood, a growing number of scholars from various disciplines have been attracted to its study. Interest in the study of entrepreneurship has not been limited to the USA; it has also moved across to Europe. In Europe, due to recession, there has been as much interest in generating employment as in America. The need to create jobs is the same in the UK, France, Spain and other European countries. With the political upheavals in central and eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a market opened up to private sector entrepreneurship which had not been thought of in the past. In the case of Germany, Fritsch (1993) identified that 65.8% of the total employment in West Germany in 1987 was with small companies of fewer than 500 employees and job generation in small firms was more than in the

large plants. With the need to create more jobs for the people of East Germany and to take advantage of the opportunity of the East German market, an interest in entrepreneurship would seem to be inevitable. Aldrich (2000) noted points of differences in entrepreneurship researches across North America and Europe. The assumption of universality of research models is more accepted by researchers from North America. The degree to which researchers rely on qualitative fieldwork methods is higher for European researchers. Hong Kong tends to follow the European tradition rather than the North American in these respects.

For Asian countries, interest in entrepreneurship has been related less to employment creation but more to economic development and wealth creation for individuals as well as their extended group, from their families to their respective countries. The 'four tigers' in the region, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore, have not been as interested in the study of entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship as the Americans and Europeans. However, in this region the idea that entrepreneurs are the prime generators of economic progress has been well recognized and the actual pursuit of entrepreneurship has been encouraged. Although interest in the study of entrepreneurs is less than interest in entrepreneurship itself in Hong Kong, the number of new start-up companies has always been huge. With the opening of the pent-up market in China, the opportunities for Hong Kong entrepreneurs were very favourable. The popularity of entrepreneurship expanded from Hong Kong to China and has been multiplying at great speed since the open-door policy of the PRC started in 1978, accelerated by the joining of the WTO in 2001.

### **Industrial Entrepreneurship**

The economic success of Hong Kong has been a phenomenon made possible by two major types of factor: historical factors, which account for the inflow of labour and capital and entrepreneurial skills and the decline in entrepôt trade in the 1950s, and institutional factors, which consist of British administration and *laissez-faire* capitalism. Hong Kong can be viewed as an entrepreneurial society (Chen, 1995). The entrepreneurial spirit has continued to display itself throughout the years since the early days of industrial entrepreneurship in the late 1940s to the early 1950s. The society has been founded by entrepreneurs of one kind or the other, starting from extremely small businesses such as hawkers on the street or 'briefcase' traders who engaged in buying and selling without a permanent office, to public



companies with multinational magnitude such as manufacturers in various light industries, giant property developers and shipping company owners.

From the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, Hong Kong was a trading city, relying heavily on China for its business. For Hong Kong, emigrant entrepreneurs from Shanghai were the main contributors to the economic success of industrialization from the late 1940s onwards (Youngson, 1982). These Shanghainese entrepreneurs fled to Hong Kong because of its laissez-faire policy and unhindered immigration at the time that the communists took over China. They possessed expertise, capital and experience in manufacturing of textiles. They set up mills which were among the most modern cotton spinning mills in the region, and created the textile industry in Hong Kong (Wong, 1988). From its beginnings in the late 1940s to early 1950s, the manufacturing sector has grown considerably. In addition to textiles and clothing, it is characterized by light industries producing mainly consumer goods including electronics, plastic products, electrical appliances and watches and clocks. The major factor that contributed to Hong Kong's past success as a manufacturing centre were flexibility and the ability to adopt changes which continued to work well. Other factors which still operate are a simple tax structure and low tax rate, efficient infrastructure including excellent telecommunications and transportation, innovative entrepreneurs and a well-trained workforce, support of linkage industries, free trade and a free enterprise policy. With the PRC close by, Hong Kong manufacturers can take advantage of the added benefit of lower land and labour costs.

The textile industry was the major industry between the 1950s and the early 1960s. Thereafter, it never reached the same dominance in terms of value of domestic export as the clothing industry, which took over as the major exporter. The electronics industry started to grow in 1970 and by 1980 it reached 19.7%, replacing textiles in the second position from then on. By 1994, the electronics industry's export value reached HK\$58,091 million, 26.2% of total manufacturing exports. The watches and clocks industry has grown considerably in the last three decades. From 1980 to 1993, its export value was more than that of the textile industry. In 1993, in quantity terms Hong Kong was the world's largest exporter of watches and the second largest next to Switzerland in terms of value (Hong Kong Government Industry Department, 1995). However, the textile industry exceeded the watches and clocks industry in 1994 and resumed its third position. The shortage of usable land has generally constrained diversification into capital or land-intensive industries.

**Table 1.1** Contribution to GDP at Factory Cost by Major Economic Sectors, 1970–2000 (value in HK\$millions)

Economic sector	1970	1975	1980	1987	1990	1993	1996	2000
Manufacturing	5,913 (30.9%)	9,954 (26.9%)	30,549 (23.8%)	75,761 (21.7%)	98,352 (17.6%)	92,582 (11.2%)	82,769 (7.3%)	69,661 (5.9%)
Wholesale, retail & import/export, restaurants & hotels	3,755 (19.6%)	7,663 (20.7%)	26,169 (20.4%)	80,720 (23.2%)	140,722 (25.2%)	224,462 (27.0%)	301,277 (26.7%)	308,163 (26.1%)
Finance, insurance & real estate	2,855 (14.9%)	6,283 (17.0%)	29,292 (22.8%)	63,365 (18.2%)	113,127 (20.2%)	214,550 (25.8%)	284,119 (25.1%)	273,922 (23.2%)
Community, social & personal service	3,440 (18.0%)	6,918 (18.7%)	16,066 (12.5%)	52,298 (15.0%)	81,328 (14.5%)	130,408 (15.7%)	198,967 (17.6%)	250,308 (21.2%)
Transport, storage & communication	1,458 (7.6%)	2,657 (7.2%)	9,645 (7.5%)	30,309 (8.7%)	52,927 (9.5%)	78,993 (9.5%)	111,087 (9.8%)	121,612 (10.3%)
Others	1,698 (8.9%)	3,499 (9.5%)	16,692 (13.0%)	45,864 (13.2%)	72,990 (13.0%)	89,174 (10.8%)	151,993 (13.5%)	157,034 (13.3%)
Total	19,119 (100%)	36,974 (100%)	128,413 (100%)	242,423 (100%)	559,446 (100%)	830,169 (100%)	1,130,212 (100%)	1,180,700 (100%)

Source: Estimates of Gross Domestic Product 1970 to 2000, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics

Note: Figures in the brackets denote the percentage share of GDP contribution of Major Economic Sectors in the respective years.

The manufacturing sector has gradually declined from its peak in the 1970s as the largest single contributor to Hong Kong's GDP. By 1987, wholesale, retail and import/export trades, restaurants and the hotels sector moved into the first place. By 1990, finance, insurance, real estate and business services moved into the second position. By 2000, manufacturing, the fifth largest single contributor to Hong Kong GDP following transport, storage and communication, still accounted for 5.9% of the total GDP (Table 1.1). Manufacturing was the largest economic sector in its contribution to employment from the 1950s to 1989. By 1990, it was overtaken by wholesale, retail, import/export trades, restaurants and hotels sector. By 1996, it was overtaken by finance, insurance, real estate and business services. By 2001, it was overtaken by community, social and personal services, but still

**Table 1.2** Persons Engaged by Major Economic Sectors, 1971–2001 (thousands)

Economic sector	1971	1976	1980	1985	1990	1993	1996	2001
Manufacturing	677 (42.8%)	774 (49.7%)	892 (46.0%)	849 (39.2%)	730 (29.5%)	508 (22.6%)	327.5 (13.9%)	209.3 (9.0%)
Wholesale, retail & import/export trade, restaurants & hotels	182 (11.5%)	371 (23.8%)	447 (23.1%)	590 (27.2%)	815 (33.0%)	958 (42.7%)	1,046.6 (44.6%)	1,027.3 (44.3%)
Financing, insurance, real estate & business service	26 (1.6%)	72 (4.6%)	127 (6.5%)	179 (8.3%)	273 (11.0%)	336 (15%)	391.2 (16.7%)	437.3 (18.8%)
Community, social & personal services	312 (19.7%)	124 (8.0%)	167 (8.6%)	203 (9.4%)	250 (10.1%)	275 (12.3%)	314.5 (13.4%)	377 (16.3%)
Transport, storage & communication	115 (7.3%)	51 (3.3%)	75 (3.9%)	95 (4.4%)	130 (5.3%)	153 (6.8%)	179.8 (7.7%)	184.2 (7.9%)
Others	270 (17.1%)	163 (10.5%)	230 (11.9%)	251 (11.6%)	273 (11.0%)	13 (0.6%)	88.5 (3.7%)	84.8 (3.7%)
Total	1,583 (100%)	1,556 (100%)	1,939 (100%)	2,167 (100%)	2,471 (100%)	2,243 (100%)	2,348.1 (100%)	2,319.9 (100%)

Sources: Figures for 1971 from population censuses. Figures for 1976 to 2001 from reports of Employment and Vacancies Statistics, Census and Statistics Department.

Note: Figures in the brackets denote the percentage share of GDP contribution of Major Economic Sectors in the respective years.

maintained its position as the fourth largest contributor to employment, employing 209,300 and 9% of the total working population (Table 1.2). In terms of providing employment, the manufacturing industry's influence on the working population in Hong Kong needed special attention as blue collar workers are more difficult to train to work in other lines of work. The manufacturing industries in Hong Kong mainly consist of small and medium-sized factories. With increases in automation and the shift of labour-intensive and lower-end production to the PRC, the average size of an industrial establishment had dropped from 22 in 1975 to 11 in 2001 (Table 1.3). The small and medium-sized operations are closely linked to the larger factories through an efficient network of subcontracting processing arrangements. This network structure of subcontracting provides the industrial sector with flexibility and the ability to respond rapidly to the demands of the external environment.

In the 1990s, Hong Kong was at a turning point. Because it is a small, open economy, Hong Kong is vulnerable to the fluctuations in the international economic and political situation that alter market and product demand from buyers and prices and delivery changes from raw material, component and accessory suppliers. Moves towards protectionism from major trading partners on top of increased competition from nearby newly developing countries have inhibited the growth of major industries. The quantitative restrictions on textiles and clothing imports imposed by the United States and the European Union have restricted the growth of these two industries in terms of export quantities to these major markets. Manufacturers have also faced rising labour costs and recruitment difficulties. They have responded by shifting labour-intensive and low-value-added production to the PRC or countries in South East Asia, particularly Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. However, these countries do not provide the same advantages as the PRC, in particular Guangdong, which has the same language and cultural background as well as proximity. Guangdong would continue to be the most favoured location for outward processing or relocation of present operations.

With this shift in Hong Kong's manufacturing base, and its participation as the bridge between China and the rest of the world, the demand for and opportunities offered to entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are many. Whether Hong Kong will maintain its growth depends on how the manufacturing sector can improve its levels of productivity and technology, upgrade the quality of its products, and diversify its markets in Europe, Japan, and other South East Asian countries. With the relocation of the more labour-intensive and lower-end products to the PRC and other South East Asian countries, manufacturers can concentrate their efforts on higher-value-added and knowledge-based activities in order to support their offshore productions. Hong Kong is to be transformed into a regional manufacturing centre and will continue to perform this role with great success.

## **THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY AND WOMEN AT WORK**

The clothing industry has been the largest manufacturing industry in terms of employment, exports and gross output since the 1960s. To remain competitive in this basically labour-intensive industry, manufacturers have invested in automation and moved up-market to produce higher-end products. In addition to being one of the world's leading exporters of clothing,

Hong Kong has also become the regional garment-sourcing centre in recent years. Some more established manufacturers broke away from their traditional role of an original equipment manufacturing (OEM) producer (that is, manufacturing products according to buyers' designs and specifications) to producing their own brands and marketing in local and overseas retail shops. Well-known examples are Giordano, G2000 and Episode. Although the original importance of the clothing industry in terms of providing employment and generating exports in Hong Kong has declined, the development by Hong Kong clothing industrialists of offshore manufacturing in mainland China and other developing Asian countries has been so impressive that it has resurrected the Hong Kong clothing industry in another scenario.

### **History of the Clothing Industry**

In 1950, at the beginning of the clothing industry in Hong Kong, only 41 factories were established, which employed less than 2,000 workers. They accounted for 2.8% of total manufacturing establishments and 2.4% of total manufacturing employment (see Table 1.3). Taking advantage of the influx of capital, entrepreneurs and labour from China, the industry started to grow from the 1950s onwards. By the early 1960s, it overtook the textiles industry to become the largest export contributor as well as the major employer in the manufacturing sector. The industry continued to grow from the 1960s to the 1970s. As the clothing industry has always been a labour-intensive industry, it was fortunate that the supply of labour was plentiful during that period. This advantage has gradually been eroded due to relatively high production costs. The industry was pushed to respond by moving to high-quality and fashion goods from the 1980s. The boom in the clothing industry was also restricted by quantitative restraints in the form of a quota system originally set up as a temporary measure to control exports. From the short-term Cotton Agreement of 1961, it has been continually extended to cover a wide range of products. By 1993, more than 90% of Hong Kong's textile and clothing products to the United States and more than 70% to the EEC countries were restricted by quantitative limits (Hong Kong Government Industry Department, 1994).

**Table 1.3** Establishments and Persons Engaged in Clothing Industry, 1950–2001

Year	No. of establishments	No. of persons engaged	Average no. of persons engaged per establishment	
			Clothing industry	Manufacturing industry
1950	41 (2.8)	1,944 (2.4)	47	55
1955	99 (4.1)	4,261 (3.9)	43	45
1960	970 (18.1)	51,918 (23.8)	54	41
1965	1,514 (17.5)	87,454 (25.6)	58	39
1970	3,491 (21.1)	158,025 (28.8)	45	33
1975	3,603 (18.3)	194,515 (33.4)	54	22
1980	8,991 (19.8)	255,677 (28.7)	28	20
1985	9,267 (19.3)	259,911 (30.6)	28	18
1990	8,695 (17.7)	217,234 (29.7)	25	15
1994	4,153 (12.2)	101,544 (23.2)	24	13
1997	2,697 (10.2)	55,555 (18.0)	21	12
2001	1,770 (8.9)	31,747 (15.2)	18	11

Source: Figures for 1950–1970 from Employment Statistics, Labour Department.  
 Figures for 1975–2001 from Reports of Employment and Vacancies Statistics, Census and Statistics Department.

Note: Figures in brackets denote the percentage share of all manufacturing industries in the respective years.

### The Clothing Industry in Transition

Since the late 1980s, a high-fashion image has been achieved and the clothing industry of Hong Kong has acquired a position as one of the major garment sourcing centres. Orders that are not subject to quantitative restraint, and if generally relatively simple and large in quantity, are usually processed by the industry's offshore production bases mainly in southern China, to take advantage of low production costs and an abundant supply of labour. For orders subject to quantitative restraint, only limited outward processing is allowed in order to satisfy the requirement that they should be of Hong Kong origin and that the majority of manufacturing process of each order still has to be conducted in Hong Kong. Orders of small quantities, or with short delivery times, or those that are complicated or high priced, are logically being produced in Hong Kong for better control of time and quality.

The clothing industry has been the largest single sector of Hong Kong's manufacturing industry since the 1960s. The number of establishments and persons engaged has increased in absolute terms from 1950 to 1985. By 1990 the absolute count of the number of establishments and persons engaged started to decline, and in 2001 the industry employed 31,747 workers or about 15.2% of total industrial employment. Since 1960, the average number of persons engaged per establishment has been larger for the clothing industry than the manufacturing industry as a whole. However, the size of both the clothing industry and the entire manufacturing industries have been shrinking steadily over the years. The average size per establishment for the clothing industry decreased from its peak of 58 persons in 1965 to 18 persons in 2001, and for all manufacturing industries the decrease was from 55 persons in 1950 to 11 persons in 2001. The major strength of the clothing industry is the experienced and skilled workforce and management that can fulfil a wide variety of orders within a short lead time, and together with well-coordinated supporting industries can provide both standard and non-standard accessories which are crucial for higher-end products. Hong Kong's large quota holdings for the USA and Western Europe are another major influence enabling Hong Kong to sustain its leadership in export to those countries. There are four major constraints on the clothing industry, as disclosed by the Techno-Economic and Market Research Study of Hong Kong's Textiles and Clothing Industries 1991-1992, conducted by the Hong Kong Government Industry Department. First, the cost advantage is diminishing, driven by escalating land and labour costs. Second, the diminishing availability of labour makes it difficult for clothing firms to maintain their production capacity. Third, competition is high from lower-cost countries in the ASEAN region and South America. Many of these countries have closed in on the quality advantage of Hong Kong as well. Fourth, the retail industries in the United States and Western Europe are increasingly moving to short cycle times and rapid replenishment in buying decisions. Hong Kong is geographically distant from these markets, which creates a disadvantage in competing with the domestic industries.

These high production costs, the increasing difficulty in retaining quality workers, the competition from developing countries and the short cycle time of orders are problems that the Hong Kong clothing industry needs to solve. The long-term growth of the industry will depend on its capacity to produce even higher-value-added products, its ability to penetrate new or non-quota markets and its proper utilization of outward processing

arrangements in the PRC to overcome ever-increasing production costs and the shortage of skilled labour. Hong Kong must maintain a sound level of production to fulfil orders with quota restrictions while still concentrating on product development and staff training. Strategies also have to be formulated to be able to compete with domestic industries in the United States and Western Europe for short-cycle-time orders. Altogether, the Hong Kong clothing industry is facing a transitional period, which requires an individual company to be even more efficient in order to survive.

**Table 1.4** Female and Male Working Population in Selected Occupations, 1976–2000 (nos. of persons)

Occupation	Sex	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2000
Managers and administrators	M	36,450 (90.8)	55,567 (86.1)	79,331 (83.1)	198,857 (79.8)	282,969 (76.6)	176,800 (75.8)
	F	3,710 (9.2) *0.6	9,007 (13.9) *1.0	16,086 (16.9) *1.6	50,390 (20.2) *4.9	86,354 (23.4) *7.1	56,500 (24.2) *4.2
	T						
Professionals and associate professionals	M	60,780 (58.6)	90,694 (62.2)	125,090 (56.7)	232,637 (61.3)	301,535 (57.9)	454,200 (62.0)
	F	42,950 (41.4) *6.4	55,044 (37.8) *6.3	95,438 (43.3) *9.6	146,603 (38.7) *14.3	219,188 (42.1) *18.1	278,300 (38.0) *20.6
	T						
Clerks	M	105,470 (57.8)	141,159 (47.2)	159,698 (41.4)	135,665 (31.4)	155,547 (30.3)	162,000 (27.6)
	F	77,140 (42.2) *11.5	157,899 (52.8) *18.0	225,889 (58.6) *22.7	295,986 (68.6) *28.8	357,172 (69.7) *29.5	426,000 (72.4) *31.5
	T						
Total	M	1,255,760 (65.1)	1,607,843 (64.7)	1,649,688 (62.4)	1,686,366 (62.1)	1,833,305 (60.2)	1,854,500 (57.8)
	F	672,420 (34.9)	878,893 (35.3)	993,585 (37.6)	1,028,737 (37.9)	1,210,393 (39.8)	1,352,800 (42.2)
	T	1,928,180 (100)	2,486,738 (100)	2,643,273 (100)	2,715,103 (100)	3,043,698 (100)	3,207,300 (100)

Source: Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics, Census and Statistics Department.

Notes: (1) The classifications of occupation between the 1976, 1981 and 1986 population censuses were the same. There was a change that started since the 1991 census. Only comparable figures were being quoted. The different occupations listed would not be equal to the total.

(2) Figures in brackets denote the percentage of males or females in those occupational categories as a percentage of total working population.

(3)\* Denotes percentage by occupation of female labour force.



## Female Participation in Employment

The extensive participation of women in the labour force is one of the factors contributing to economic success in Hong Kong (Wong and Levin, 1995). Modern Hong Kong women lived in a society that provided chances that were not available to their mothers. The social and economic changes in the last three decades have created opportunities for and better acceptance of women in business. During this period, a large percentage of women have been entering the workforce. The number of females participating in the workforce has increased from 672,420 in 1976 to 993,585 in 1986 and 1,352,800 in 2000. Women now comprise about 42% of the total labour force. The labour participation rate for men has been stable, but for women it has increased over the years. This trend of increased female labour participation in Hong Kong is shared by other Western societies (Arber and Gilbert, 1992).

By presenting statistics over time, Westwood, Mehraïn and Cheung (1995) disclosed the changing position in recent years of women in a number of important social fields. When comparing the employment statistics, the percentage of women holding higher posts has risen tremendously over the years (Table 1.4). The ratio between males and females in administrative and managerial posts has dropped from 10:1 in 1976, 6:1 in 1981, 5:1 in 1986, 4:1 in 1991, to 3:1 in 2000. However, female managers still faced the 'glass ceiling', in that very few of them actually reached the top management positions. Women with the same educational level do not earn as much or rise as high as men (T. W. P. Wong, 1995). This same situation existed in other developed countries. The females were usually concentrated in the field of clerks, plant and machine operators and assemblers. Although wage differentials between men and women still exist, the gap has narrowed since the 1970s, and the difference in terms of mean earnings has been reduced by about 10% from 1976 to 1986. Chan and Ng (1994) show that the employment segregation still persists for females in Hong Kong in terms of horizontal segregation (i.e. by occupation) and in terms of vertical segregation (i.e. by rank and pay). As far as gender equality in employment in Hong Kong is concerned, they perceived no grounds for undue optimism.

Salaff (1981) discussed the impressive contribution that working daughters have made to their families during the industrialization of Hong Kong. As the core features of the kinship institution are deeply rooted, the modified centripetal family has upheld the patrilineal system, which has

continued to mould women's status and circumscribe their opportunities in Hong Kong. Ng's study (1991) of married women from low-income families in Tuen Mun showed that they seemed to be even more impeded by family demands than the working daughters of Salaff's study. Cashmore's study (1989) of women occupying senior positions in commerce and industry, the professions and government, provides further empirical confirmation that industrialization in Hong Kong has not affected the dominance of patriarchy.

Gender study has emerged as an important area of discipline in sociology (Giddens, 1992). Giddens discloses that gender socialization from parents and other cultural influences begins during infancy. All known societies are patriarchal, but the inequalities between sexes vary depending on culture. In industrialized countries, women are under-represented in positions of power and influence. Women are also at a disadvantage in average wages and they are more frequently in part-time employment; at home they have a disproportionate share of responsibility for domestic work and childcare. Unpaid domestic work is of enormous significance to the economy of the modern world as a whole. Gender segregation in employment is further reinforced by unequal access to education and training for females, and stereotypes of women in certain kinds of subordinate work roles (Witz, 1993).

In comparison with women in neighbouring countries and some other Western developed countries, women in Hong Kong tend to be in a more favourable environment (Pearson, 1990), but this comparatively smaller disadvantage in the workplace should not be viewed with complacency. In their recent collection of studies on women, Pearson and Leung (1995) caution that one should not let the optimistic view disguise the difficulties that remain entrenched in social, political and economic institutions. On the surface, women in Hong Kong seem to be at an advantage when compared with their counterparts in other South East Asian countries. In reality, as Choi (1993) points out, only a small number of women succeed in formerly all-male territory, and the fundamental structure of gender division is still unchanged. Gender issues have been studied in the West since the 1960s and have only been gaining attention in Hong Kong since the 1980s. In recent years there has been concern for positive measures to ensure equal opportunities for women in Hong Kong. The Green Paper on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was produced in August 1993 to enable the public to express their views on where and what kind of action is needed to promote the status of women and thus achieve equal opportunity. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

Women was extended to Hong Kong on 14 October 1996 and started to apply to HKSAR with effect from 1 July 1997 (Hong Kong Government, 1998). It is clear that gender inequality does exist, but the government is concerned and moving to eliminate it.

### **Female Participation in Entrepreneurship**

Female entrepreneurship has been concentrated in the area of traditional female lines of business, mostly in small service businesses. Hong Kong government does not provide statistics on entrepreneurs as a group. Therefore, discovering the composition of entrepreneurs in different industries by gender is very difficult. The only available information on the number of employers by gender is from the population censuses carried out in 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2000. The number of female entrepreneurs has been increasing in most industries from 1981 to 1991. The largest increase in number of entrepreneurs is in the field of manufacturing. However, from 1996 onwards the number for this sector has been decreasing. Research into the numbers of male and female entrepreneurs in different sectors in the manufacturing industry was initiated, but no information was forthcoming as figures are not available from the Industry section of Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong. How should one interpret the growth of entrepreneurs in manufacturing? From informal discussions with a group of entrepreneurs in manufacturing it can be concluded that this impressive increase of entrepreneurs (employers) in the manufacturing sector from 1981 to 1991 may be due to several reasons. First, some family businesses have been taken over by second or third generations, the number of employers increasing due to the dilution of holding among family members. Second, some émigré entrepreneurs who still maintain their operations in Hong Kong invite either capable staff within the company or family, friends, or business associates to become partners, thus increasing the number of employers. Third, some of the entrepreneurs start their operations to take advantage of the low cost and surplus supply of labour in China. With sufficient manufacturing experience in Hong Kong, they have managed to fulfil their entrepreneurial dream by setting up manufacturing operations in the PRC and offices in Hong Kong. These interpretations are sound explanations for the fact that the number of establishments of the manufacturing sector has been declining (Table 1.2) in Hong Kong but the number of entrepreneurs or employers has increased during the same period.

From the few studies of entrepreneurs in Hong Kong, Tuan, Wong and Ye (1986) only mentioned that there were four females among the 46 interviewees, and the other two related studies by Sit and Wong (1989) and Sit, Wong and Kiang (1979) indicated that the female entrepreneurs had grown in proportion from 5.1% in 1978 to 8.2% in 1987 in the manufacturing sector studied. As to Wong's (1988) and Redding's (1990) studies, there were no female owner-managers in their samples. However, the trend towards an increase in the percentage of female entrepreneurs in the total entrepreneurial population can be observed both from research studies and from government statistics.

## **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

Research interest in the area of entrepreneurship has increased in the last few years in Hong Kong. To maintain Hong Kong's ability to grow economically as before, it is crucial to encourage and to understand entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. Although there have been numerous research studies worldwide on female entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, the two areas are practically unexplored in Hong Kong. In view of this gap and the growing contribution of women entrepreneurs, research on female entrepreneurs, their characteristics, their conditions and their entrepreneurial behaviour should be fruitful in several ways. On the academic side, it can first of all provide knowledge in this field and prepare the way for further investigation. It may also serve as a comparative study to other research being done elsewhere in the world. For the female entrepreneurs, the research itself is an acknowledgement of their collective success and contribution to Hong Kong's economy.

### **Background of the Research**

In Hong Kong, the importance of industrial entrepreneurship has been acknowledged by local scholars (Sit and Wong, 1989; Wong, 1988a) and by professional bodies like the Federation of Hong Kong Industries in their sponsorship of the Young Industrialists Awards. It is also evident that the status of female entrepreneurs has been improving in Hong Kong, and they have been accepted into the structure of the business domain. The clothing industry, which has been one of the major industries in Hong Kong since 1960, has made a remarkable economic contribution and comprises a large

female owner-manager population. The impact of this industry is not limited to its achievements as an export earner and one of the major employment providers in Hong Kong, but includes a sizeable establishment of offshore manufacturing units in mainland China and in other developing Asian countries as well. The study of this group of entrepreneurs is useful in understanding entrepreneurship in one of the most influential industries in Hong Kong. Since the clothing industry is undergoing a transitional period, a study of major decision makers together with future strategies would point in the direction of the future of the industry in Hong Kong and Asia.

With the increase of females in the work place and as entrepreneurs, interest of studying female entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship has also increased in the United States, the United Kingdom and other European countries. In Asia, female participation in the workforce is as impressive as in the West, but the studies of female entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs are rare. In view of this relative scarcity of literature pertaining to local female entrepreneurs, one of the important purposes of this study is to generate more interest relating to females in business, which is under-explored in Hong Kong. The role of women has gone through a revolution. Our industry depends on female workers, our offices depend on female clerks and there are now more women in top executive posts. However, there still exist huge gender differences in business ownership. It has been my intention to investigate industrial female entrepreneurship in Hong Kong as compared to their male counterparts. However, the focus of the present study is not a narrowly defined women's study, but an entrepreneurship study, looking at the gender differences in entrepreneurship and centring on how female entrepreneurs fare in an industrial setting.

To apply any locally developed model universally would be problematic. As to the major area of research problems that need to be discussed, it would be useful to follow the pattern of studies already carried out in other countries so that comparison can be made to disclose some culturally distinct phenomena. The major studies of female entrepreneurs include: Hisrich and Brush (1986) on American female entrepreneurs; Hisrich (1984) on American and Puerto Rican female entrepreneurs; Hisrich and Fan (1991) on American and PRC female entrepreneurs; and Watkins and Watkins (1984), Coffee and Scase (1985), Carter and Cannon (1992), Allen and Truman (1993) on British female entrepreneurs. The main focus of the existing female entrepreneurship studies is on the general characteristics of the entrepreneurs. But the beliefs and behaviour that constitute the making of entrepreneurs

can be studied from a personal, family, business or societal perspective. Lau (1984) considers utilitarianistic familism, the normative and behavioural tendency of an individual to place his familial interests above the interests of other individuals and groups, as the dominant cultural code in the Chinese society of Hong Kong. Actually, Hong Kong's brand of industrial capitalism and modified patriarchy is more in line with S. L. Wong's (1991) entrepreneurial familism, which explains Hong Kong's economic dynamism in terms of the family being the basic unit of economic competition. Entrepreneurial familism permeates the whole society, in that the rich as well as the less well-off families cultivate resources for collective advancement (S. L. Wong, 1988b). This cultural factor can define another approach to the study of entrepreneurship.

The following are the five main approaches that can be applied in studying female entrepreneurship. The first is the general characteristics approach: this includes studies that look into entrepreneurial profile, background and problems. The studies of Hisrich and Brush (1986) and Carter and Cannon (1992) are representative of this type of study. The second is the process approach: the theme for this type of study is to investigate the process of venture creation. Gartner (1985) has developed a framework for this type of approach. The third is the specific industry or sector approach: these studies are concerned with entrepreneurship in one specific industry or sector that has been influential in that particular country or area. S. L. Wong's (1988a) study of entrepreneurs in the cotton spinning industry and Sit and Wong's (1989) study of entrepreneurs from small to medium-sized manufacturing firms are examples. The fourth is the major issue approach: this type of research generally concentrates on exploring and discussing one or two major factors that influence entrepreneurship. Silin (1976) discloses the leadership and value beliefs of entrepreneurs and Numazaki (1992) reveals the network and partnership of entrepreneurs in Taiwan. The fifth is the cultural and societal approach: the emphasis of this approach is a wider view of how culture and society inspire the group of entrepreneurs to manifest entrepreneurship in the particular setting. Redding (1990) relate that Chinese owner-managers' beliefs constitute the spirit of Chinese capitalism. S. L. Wong (1988a) and Chan and Chiang (1994) explore the influence of migration on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Lee and Low (1990) examine private and state entrepreneurship in Singapore and the grounds for the imbalance of private entrepreneurs.

Because of the lack of relevant studies on Chinese female

entrepreneurship in Hong Kong and the exploratory nature of this research, it would have been good to cover as many of the above approaches as possible so that an overall view of Chinese female entrepreneurship can be emerge. However, the process approach has been less developed in the study than the others, in order to focus on the content of entrepreneurship in the research.

### **Review of Entrepreneurs**

From a historical point of view, the study of the entrepreneurs has always been the crucial part of research on entrepreneurship. The study of entrepreneurship has always been considered as the study of entrepreneurs as well as entrepreneurial behaviour, in that the person and his behaviour should be deemed to be different parts of the entire entity. Before embarking on the study of entrepreneurship, a review of past research serves to shape the framework for the study.

#### *Definition*

It is difficult to define the terms entrepreneurship and entrepreneur and to reach consensus on these definitions. There are many definitions based on various combinations of characteristics from different historical themes, and it has been quite a common practice for researchers to make up their own definition. A typical example is Hebert and Link. By focusing on three key factors characterizing entrepreneurship, 'uncertainty, innovation and adjustment', Hebert and Link (1988: 155) came up with the definition of the entrepreneur as 'someone who specializes in taking responsibility for and making judgmental decisions that affect the location, the form, and the use of goods, resources or institutions'. The definition incorporates many of the main themes of entrepreneurship: risk, uncertainty, innovation, perception and change. These authors believe that entrepreneurship is mixed with other economic activities, but can be conceptually isolated and separately analysed. Venkataraman (1997) suggests that it would be a mistake to define entrepreneurship by defining entrepreneurs, and proposes to define the field in terms of central issues concerning the majority. The concept of entrepreneurial behaviour is also commonly defined as being innovative and risk taking in starting a new venture. Long (1983) summarized the definitional attributes of entrepreneurship from 1730 to the time of his study and stated that the three themes of uncertainty and risk, complementary managerial

competence, and creative opportunism have been interwoven in most theories of entrepreneurship.

From the business study viewpoint, Sexton (1982) concluded that research in the area of entrepreneurship is highly fragmented. Much is being learned about specific topics, but there is no theoretical framework to unite the research into an overall definition of the entrepreneur. In behavioural approaches to the study of entrepreneurship, it is seen as a set of activities involved in organization creation, while in trait approaches, an entrepreneur is represented by a set of traits and characteristics. Mintzberg (1973) presents the entrepreneurial mode of strategy making both in terms of creating new firms and in terms of the running of ongoing enterprises. The general characteristics of the entrepreneurial mode are an active search for new opportunities, centralized power, strategic leaps through major bold decisions and a predominant orientation towards growth. Gartner (1989) has done an excellent job in organizing a list of important literature on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. This reveals a startling number of traits and characteristics that have been attributed to the entrepreneur. Learning from the history of research on leadership, Gartner suggests that it would be more fruitful to focus on the behaviour of the entrepreneurs and to determine what situational factors affect their behaviour. Gartner (1990) explores the meaning of entrepreneurship to researchers and practitioners, and he concludes that no one definition of entrepreneurship is needed, but that it is important for researchers to say what they mean. It can be said that if one theoretical definition cannot be reached, an operational definition is required for each individual study.

From the economist's point of view, various scholars have come up with different definitions. Cantillon (Scott, 1933) views entrepreneurs as those engaging in market exchange at their own risk in order to make a profit. Schultz (1975) considers entrepreneurs as creators of developmental disequilibria. Schumpeter (1934) believes entrepreneurs to be those carrying out new combinations that include the development of new goods, a new method of production, new markets, new sources of raw material, or a new organizational form. He attributes the fundamental nature of change to the innovator and established a basis for meaningful economic progress. Kirzner (1982) does not distinguish arbitrageurship from entrepreneurship, but regards entrepreneurs as those who alter profit opportunities (arbitrage activities), exploit these opportunities, and allocate resources. Yu (1997) concludes that Schumpeterian entrepreneurs are those responsible for creative



responses, and Kirznerian entrepreneurs are those responsible for adaptive responses. The Hong Kong entrepreneurs, who capitalize on profit opportunities by employing business strategies such as small-scale enterprise, product imitation, subcontracting and spatial arbitrage, fit in well with Kirznerian definition.

**Table 1.5** Major Works on Chinese Entrepreneurship

Author	Focus	Methodology
Wong, S.L. (1988)	Ethnic concentration in industry and features of Chinese entrepreneurship	Interview 40 directors of cotton spinning mills in Hong Kong
Redding, S.G. (1990)	Economic culture	Interview 72 owner-managers in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Indonesia
Hamilton, G.G. (1991)	Chinese business networks: a comparative view	A collective research project on the development and spread of Asian business networks
Sit, V. F. S. and Wong, S. L. (1989)	Firm, business and entrepreneurial characteristics; subcontracting relationships and joint ventures	295 questionnaires collected from petty, small and medium manufacturing firms, 24 questionnaires on large firms, interviews and ventures surveys carried out on joint
Sit, V. F. S., Cremer, R. D., and Wong, S. L. (1991)	The potential and problems of small and medium firms of Macau	Survey on manufacturing sector of Macau (99 small and medium firms, 20 large firms)
Yu, T. F. L. (1997)	Entrepreneurship and economic development	Questionnaire and interviews in electronics, textile and garment industries
Chan, K. B. and Chiang, C. (1994)	Migration and Chinese entrepreneurship	Interpretative content analysis of oral history interview tapes and transcripts (51 Chinese entrepreneurs in Singapore)
Lee, T. Y. and Low, L. (1990)	The local private and state entrepreneurship; Private entrepreneurs' motivation, problems and performance	Primary study: 20 interviews; Secondary material: accounts of entrepreneurs were summarized from published material
Silin, R. H. (1976)	Leadership and values of large-scale Taiwanese enterprises	One single case, 35 hours of interviews carried out on 8 individuals
Numazaki, I. (1992)	Network and partnership of Chinese business elites in Taiwan	Secondary data from published material and primary data by interviewing people familiar with business

### *Chinese Entrepreneurs*

In the light of the economic performance of the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, Li's (1990) study on Taiwanese entrepreneurs reconfirms that Chinese traditional norms and values are compatible with entrepreneurship. From an economic point of view, the free market system and the export-led economy in Hong Kong have allowed all emigrant entrepreneurs to make use of their technical expertise and talents since the late 1940s. From the socio-cultural aspects, the Hong Kong Chinese are living on the margin between East and West. They can neither feel that they belong to China (Chan, 1986) nor that they are part of the Western world. Facing both internal and external challenges, they modify their traditional values and beliefs to achieve their ends, which King (1987) conceptualizes as rationalistic traditionalism. The traditional family ties furnish capital pooling, income sharing and investment risk diversification (Wang, 1977). Psychologically, Hong Kong Chinese are materialistic and keen on pursuing wealth (Redding and Wong, 1986). All these external and internal factors provide a great impetus for entrepreneurship endowment. Nevertheless, the studies on Chinese entrepreneurship are in fact fragmented.

A comparison of the interest and volume of research conducted on entrepreneurs in the West with Hong Kong's volume of research shows that research on Hong Kong entrepreneurs is behind. The major studies related to Chinese entrepreneurs in Asia are listed Table 1.5. Most of them are empirical studies carried out in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore over the last fifteen years. S. L. Wong's (1988a) book on the relationship of ethnicity and entrepreneurship provides a sociological perspective of Shanghaiese entrepreneurs in the cotton spinning industry in Hong Kong. The characteristics of Chinese industrial entrepreneurship include the ability to handle people, dedication to the job, good market judgement, technical proficiency and reputation, honesty and level-headedness, long-term perspectives and weakness in management skills. The strong drive towards autonomy and proprietorship is generated by an economic ethos, which Wong called 'entrepreneurial familism'. This ethos involves the family as the basic unit of economic competition and might constitute a particularly Chinese style of entrepreneurship. Ethnic concentration in economic niches can be explained by cultural explanations. Wong's study enhances our understanding of the nature of successful Chinese industrial entrepreneurship in Hong Kong.

Redding (1990) suggests that culture is an important but not the sole determinant of economic behaviour. Chinese capitalism has been flourishing impressively outside China. Redding follows the Weberian theme: there is no capitalist development without an entrepreneurial class; there is no entrepreneurial class without a moral charter; there is no moral charter without religious premises. The moral charter begins with Confucianism as a religion, which stabilizes and provides meaning for Chinese society. Filial piety, human-heartedness, paternalism, reasonableness, compromise and propriety are religious principles in the Chinese context. The representative form of organization is classifiable as a family business with Confucianism to provide vertical stability, paternalism based on long-standing patrimonial tradition and trust bonds reinforced by obligation and reciprocity. These forces have shaped a special kind of co-operative system and contribute to economic efficiency. This study concludes that the economic culture of the Chinese is the aggregate of values and ideas in the heads of owner-managers and those values play a significant part in determining the economic behaviour of the entrepreneurs.

In contrast to the conventional approach of explaining Asian economic growth in terms of macro-level reasons like government policy, cultural factors or political institutions, Hamilton (1991a) presents in an edited collection of papers arguments on the development and spread of Asian business networks. The reason for the focus on a micro-level inter-firm relationship is that the most important organizational feature of Asian capitalist economies is their organization through networks of firms. These networks differ among the different societies in East and South East Asia. The Chinese networks are similar in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, but differ from Japanese and South Korean networks. In this collection of papers, S. L. Wong (1991) examines the dynamics of Chinese entrepreneurship and claims that a blending of personal trust and system trust is the underlying foundation of entrepreneurship. Redding (1991) argues that the reliance upon personal trust narrows an organization's growth and the firms tend to be relatively small and weak, but inter-firm networks tend to be strong. Hamilton (1991b) compares historically Western and Chinese societies; the Chinese networks are rooted in kinship and regionality, while Western firm autonomy rests upon states and legal institutions. These papers provide a theoretical background for Chinese business networks.

Yu (1997) examines the role of entrepreneurship, particularly in the form of entrepreneurial strategies employed by the electronics, textile and

garment industries and their relationship with firm performance. Yu concludes that Hong Kong has an 'incubated', Kirznerian, entrepreneurial economy. Sit and Wong's (1989) study attempts to provide a comprehensive review of entrepreneurship and business characteristics of Hong Kong's small and medium-sized manufacturing industries. It is the only longitudinal study of Hong Kong small to medium-sized industrial firms and their owners that can be compared with Sit, Wong and Kiang's (1979) survey results. The work of Sit, Cremer and Wong (1991) is a study of industrial entrepreneurs and enterprises in Macau. This study is similar to Sit and Wong's previous studies carried out in Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong data are used as a comparison with the Macau findings. These four studies provide a comprehensive background to the manufacturing industry and Chinese entrepreneurs in Hong Kong and Macau at different times.

There have been two major works carried out in Singapore regarding Chinese entrepreneurship. Chan and Chiang (1994) base their study on oral histories collected by the Oral History Department of the Singapore Government from 51 Chinese entrepreneurs. They analyse the content and interpret the records of interview transcripts in order to discover and reconstruct the patterns that created these Chinese entrepreneurs in Singapore. Their book highlights the cultural and socio-psychological aspects of entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurs migrated to Singapore by 'stepping out' of a village structure to discover new possibilities of pursuing their dreams by working for their own business empire. Three socio-cultural factors can be used to explain their business successes. The first is their personal orientation towards life, characterized by hard work, commitment, perseverance, determination and realism. The second is the family, for both emotional and economic reasons. The family and the values associated with it provide the entrepreneurs with effective ways to start and maintain a business. The third is the ability to organize entrepreneurs themselves and to manipulate socioeconomic boundaries by 'family-izing' business relations. The extension of networks is through the structure of trade and clan associations or clubs. These are the bases on which Chinese emigrant entrepreneurs have built success in Singapore.

Another important study was carried out by Lee and Low (1990). This study is the result of the policy-oriented projects funded by the Institute of Policy Studies to promote interest in Singapore's political, cultural and historical heritage. Local entrepreneurship is considered an important subject. Contrary to popular belief, the evidence regarding the lack of local

entrepreneurship is mixed when compared with Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, the fact that there is a greater percentage of entrepreneurship in commerce and services than in manufacturing is indisputable. The local entrepreneurship in Singapore tends to be small when compared to multinational and public firms. The particular pattern of entrepreneurship as developed in Singapore comes from the distinct economic history of the country, the industrialization strategies pursued and the size of the domestic market. The studies of Chan and Chiang and Lee and Low both evidence the distinct Singaporean characteristic of government influence either in the form of funding for the study or in the use of funded data.

The studies relating to Chinese entrepreneurs in Taiwan are mainly on owners of large-scale firms or the business elite. Silin's (1976) study is of a large manufacturing firm, from its management practices and leadership to the values that seem to lie behind them. A more current study presented by Numazaki (1992) describes the ties that bind the Taiwanese business elite. The business relations formed by entrepreneurs are traced historically and the system of business relations is shaped structurally. Three main conclusions are drawn from this study. Partnerships similar to the traditional Chinese merchant culture are still the dominant form of business organization. The development of Taiwan-wide networks of large firms and close social bonds within an elite group indicates the existence of the capitalist class. The 'culture' and 'political economy' codetermine the social structure of the Chinese business elite in Taiwan. This particular pattern of networks and partnerships of the Chinese business elite in Taiwan also explains the dominance of the capitalist class in a few major lines of business.

There are other studies not included in Table 1.5 that also have different impacts on the study of Chinese entrepreneurship. Sit, Wong and Kiang (1979) started their pioneer study on small-scale industries and owners. Theirs is one of the early studies on entrepreneurs in Hong Kong. Tuan, Wong and Ye (1986) carried out a comparative study of Chinese entrepreneurship in Hong Kong and China. Chu and Siu (1993) investigated female entrepreneurs in Hong Kong. Chu (1996) compared social network models of Chinese entrepreneurship for Chinese entrepreneurs in Hong Kong versus Chinese entrepreneurs in Canada. Chiu (1997) conducted a study of small family business in retail business in Hong Kong. Chua et al. (2002) reported their measure of Hong Kong's entrepreneurship activity level. Butler, Brown and Chamornmarn (2000) explained how *guanxi*, a special version of relationship building among Chinese, contributes to the formation of effective business.

networks for overseas Chinese entrepreneurs in South East Asia. K. B. Chan (2000) edited a collection of essays on Chinese business networks, the volume is critical of culturalist explanation of Chinese business conduct and demonstrates the virtue of taking into account history, politics, contexts and social structure in offering contending explanations.

### *Female Entrepreneurs*

Carter (1993) relates that many significant studies have been undertaken from economic, business and sociological perspectives. The bulk of work to date has concentrated upon the male-owned enterprise. Research into female entrepreneurship has been neglected (Goffee and Scase, 1985). By the end of the 1980s, new research interest in female entrepreneurship has been awakened, reflecting both the rise of women entrepreneurs and the nature of entrepreneurship. The early studies of female entrepreneurship concentrated mainly on the motivations for start-up (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Goffee and Scase, 1985; Scott, 1986). The cumulative knowledge of female entrepreneurs remains limited (Curran, 1986). They tend to be younger and seek more business training (Birley, Moss and Saunders, 1987), have more education, less working experience, are more likely single and have higher divorce rates (Stevenson, 1986); have less experience in their chosen field but delegate more (Cuba, Decenzo and Anish, 1983); use spouse for advice and are more tolerant and understanding in human relations (Hisrich and Brush, 1986). The women entrepreneurs tend to start small businesses in the retail or service sector, their number of employees are fewer (Collerette and Aubry, 1990) and they hire more females than male-run businesses (Birley, 1989). Lee-Gosselin and Grise (1990) state that women entrepreneurs employ their spouse and children and their most frequent problems are lack of confidence from banks, suppliers and customers, lack of start-up capital and family problems. Neider (1987) discloses the most common problem experienced by women entrepreneurs is the conflict between personal life and career, the inability to delegate.

In most cases, women entrepreneurs have to work harder to become successful (McGrath, 1987) or to prove their competence as a business owner, because women have been excluded from the existing networks dominated by men (Buttner, 1993). Woodward (1988) reveals that entrepreneurs would be successful to the extent that they could obtain adequate and timely resources through their social networks. Women entrepreneurs' networks are similar to those of men and they are just as active in their networking

(Cromie and Birley, 1992). Other factors affecting success include entrepreneurial experience (Stuart and Abettie, 1990); market opportunity, people and financial skills, idea generation, previous experience and motivation (Brush and Hisrich, 1991); and support and understanding from family members (Hisrich and Fan, 1991). As to the management or leadership style of women entrepreneurs, the findings tend to vary between studies and are inconclusive; Richard (1990) remarks that there are no gender differences in the managerial or decision making style of entrepreneurs, Petzall and Teo (1993) comment that female entrepreneurs are more directive than male counterparts and Chaganti (1986) observes that female entrepreneurs are more people-oriented and less autocratic.

There has been more interest and research into the nature and experience of female entrepreneurs in North America than in Britain (Carter and Cannon, 1992). Belcourt (1990) constructs a profile of successful Canadian entrepreneurs. Hisrich and Brush's studies of 1984 and 1986 are among the most comprehensive work on American female entrepreneurs regarding their motivation for start-up, demographic characteristics, problems and training needs. Some investigations attempt to move beyond entry level; Diffley (1983) examines business competency and Nelson (1987) takes a look at the information needs of the female entrepreneurs. Among the British studies, Watkins and Watkins (1984) find that the background and experiences of females differ from males. Goffee and Scase (1985) develop a useful typology for British female entrepreneurs and Cromie and Hayes (1988) attempt to test the typology.

The study of female entrepreneurship is developing and maturing. Interest in the topic has been growing continuously and it is expected that this new phenomenon will attract more interest from different academic disciplines and different regions in the world. However, there are very few studies regarding this topic in Asia. Licuanan (1992) is the only large-scale study in Asia that covers women entrepreneurs in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. This study of ASEAN women entrepreneurs is divided into two parts: a regional survey of successful women entrepreneurs on their profile, and selected case studies across five countries. Recently, a study of Singaporean women entrepreneurs (Teo, 1996) and a study of Malaysian women entrepreneurs (Rashid, 1996) have been published. These two studies are basically similar to the previous studies carried out by Hisrich and Brush (1986) and Chu and Siu (1993) in that they concentrate mainly on characteristics, motivation, problems and success factors. Hisrich

and Fan (1991) have carried out a study on Chinese women entrepreneurs in the PRC based on Hisrich's research framework and questions in his previous studies, and this is useful as a comparison. There are very few studies focused on women entrepreneurs only in Hong Kong. Chu and Siu have carried out an exploratory study on women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing industry and have published three articles on their findings (Chu and Siu, 1993; Siu and Chu, 1994; Siu and Chu, 1994b). Therefore, research in this area has both the advantage of having an open field and the disadvantage of not being able to build on and compare with other local studies.

### **Research Framework and Objectives**

As Bygrave (1989) comments, the entrepreneurship paradigm has taken over the methods and theories of other sciences. Entrepreneurship begins with a disjointed, discontinuous, non-linear event that cannot be examined by a smooth, continuous, linear process. Sophisticated methods used by advanced fields such as economics should not be forced onto the investigation and analysis of entrepreneurship. It is further suggested that research methods for entrepreneurship study should be based on more empirical models that describe observed phenomena; less concern with sophisticated statistical analyses that are more appropriate for physical science; more field research, as the subject is not a steady-state phenomenon; more longitudinal studies that provide richness; and less obsession with revolutionary science, as the majority of research is routine rather than revolutionary and the concentration should be on excellence rather than revolution. In this study, the above guidelines will be followed as much as possible, except that a longitudinal study has not been feasible within the time constraints of this research project.

#### *The Research Framework*

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) acknowledge that there is a lack of a conceptual framework for the phenomenon of entrepreneurship. They draw upon previous research conducted in different disciplines to create a conceptual framework for the field to explain the phenomenon of entrepreneurship. With a holistic approach, the present study will include the psychological, sociological, economic and management mainstreams instead of concentrating on one specific area to construct the phenomenon of entrepreneurship. The research framework is an attempt to integrate



current theoretical and empirical knowledge in order to conduct a more systematic investigation that may then be applied to the research questions and objectives. The framework postulates influences of societal factors on individual entrepreneurs and on their entrepreneurial behaviour, as well as relationships between the individual entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial behaviour. Societal factors include two key components: societal environment relating to social, economic, political and technological situation and cultural environment relating to value and attitude on entrepreneurship and gender issues. Individual entrepreneur's factors include two key parts: psychological and sociological aspects, and conditions arising from organizational and family situations. Entrepreneurial behaviour is viewed from the perspective of both past satisfactory and unsatisfactory entrepreneurial experience and entrepreneurial behaviour in innovation, risk taking and reinvestment, taking into account process as well as content. The emphasis is on what are the important societal and individual factors and how they are linked with entrepreneurial behaviour. Bygrave (1989) proposes that the model should allow finding pieces from which patterns emerge to explain the phenomena and build partial theories.

#### *Problem Statement and Objectives*

The major area of study can be divided into four parts. The two more personally related factors are characteristics and conditions. The two societal factors are cultural context and societal context. 'Characteristics' are the personal aspects that include the psychological and sociological background of the entrepreneur. 'Conditions', the immediate surroundings, include the entrepreneur's family and company environment. 'Context', or societal environment, includes economic, political, technological and societal situations in the society where the entrepreneur resides. 'Culture', a collective programming of the mind (Hofstede, 1980), includes values and beliefs that are representative of the country in which the entrepreneur is living or where he or she originated. The focus is on the collective view on entrepreneurship and gender.

For all the significant contributions made by female entrepreneurs in Hong Kong, their story remains untold. The purpose of this study is to provide a detailed account of female industrial entrepreneurship in the clothing industry to fill a gap in our knowledge of female industrial entrepreneurship in general. It is hoped that the account will help to answer two questions. First, what are the distinctive features of Chinese entrepreneurs

and entrepreneurship, particularly among females? Second, what are the factors and conditions that constitute the making of Chinese female entrepreneurs in Hong Kong?

The objectives of this study include the following:

- (1) To identify both psychological and sociological characteristics of the entrepreneurs.
- (2) To study the conditions within the entrepreneur's company environment: the family environment, the organizational structure and the strategy
- (3) To determine the cultural and social factors and their influence on women entrepreneurs.
- (4) To study entrepreneurial experience, including the entrepreneurs' satisfactory and unsatisfactory experience.
- (5) To record the entrepreneurial behaviour: the amount of innovation, reinvestment and risk taking that is engaged in by the entrepreneurs.
- (6) To explore gender differences, if any, in personal, family, organizational, cultural and societal environment or in entrepreneurial behaviour and experience.
- (7) To understand the making of Chinese women entrepreneurship, build typology and model for female entrepreneurship in Hong Kong.

By fulfilling the objectives, the making of entrepreneurs can be revealed. However, to isolate the part of making from being made in the study of entrepreneurs as a person, a member of a family, an organization, as a society and a culture is not feasible. For this study, it would be more appropriate to declare that the making of entrepreneurs includes the action of making and being made.

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