

Women in the Kitchen: Barriers Faced by Female Chefs in Hong Kong**TANG Yee Pik & Watson Baldwin**

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Abstract

The gender gap in kitchens in Hong Kong hinders the number of female chefs in the kitchen. Previous literature has shown that gender discrimination exists within the workplace in the hospitality industry and professional kitchens of Hong Kong. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to provide an in-depth perspective on the phenomenon. For the research, five female chefs in the height of their careers were interviewed. Results showed that the barriers they faced included; physical ability, gender discrimination, less opportunities for learning and promotion, and work-family conflicts. They found passion and having a positive attitude towards their job experience as solutions to those barriers. They tend to consider themselves as chefs who contribute positively to their craft in the kitchen. Among the themes discovered, the cultural background of the chefs affected their experience in the kitchen. From the study, it was found that Chinese philosophies and beliefs may be related to the overall situation in the culinary industry in Hong Kong. Recommendations focus on education, government assistance and future studies are proposed at the end of this paper.

Key words: Gender Equality, Hospitality & Culinary Industry, Hong Kong, Gender Discrimination**Introduction**

Hong Kong is commonly praised as a 'food paradise' with over 14,000 restaurants (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2019). These include traditional Chinese, high-quality fusion cuisine as well as famous Michelin-starred restaurants. However, compared to the other parts of the world, it is not difficult to notice that the proportion of female chefs in professional kitchens is much lower than that of male. According to the Michelin Guide, there are only 6 women out of 110 chefs being awarded three stars (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a). In Hong Kong, there are more than 30 Michelin starred or Bib Gourmande rated restaurants, one of those is female (Michelin, 2019; Baldwin, 2017). The overall proportion of gender regarding labor in the restaurant and hotel sector is male (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). It is possible to be related to traditional history and culture, the difference of physical ability between men and women and barriers like 'family' which women may consider (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017). Yet in domestic kitchens, the mother is always the host, similar to some Asian countries, with the unwillingness of men cooking at home (Cheung, Lai, Au & Ngai, 1997). This culinary gender gap in Hong Kong is becoming obvious in this industry dominated by men and may further hinder the number of female recruits in the kitchen.

There is a paucity of research done about the phenomenon of imbalance of gender within the culinary industry in Hong Kong. As a prior investigation on barriers faced by women chefs (Haddaji et al. 2017; Druckman, 2012; Harris, 2015), this would be beneficial to the academic field, the F&B industry, also the society as a whole. Academically, the research would help to form a fundamental background for hospitality and for students studying gender studies to have a further investigation on gender issues in the food and beverage sector as well as the masculine industries Hong Kong. With a better understanding of difficulties women chefs encountered in their career paths, the industry can try to modify itself in the recruitment of females to help solve the problem of the labor shortage. Lastly, by knowing more about the present situation of gender equality, the government could make corresponding enhancement on policies and public education to raise awareness of gender equality.

This research sets out to investigate the reason behind the low recruitment of female chefs by interviewing female chefs of various restaurants in Hong Kong. Its purpose is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between gender stereotypes, the willingness of women to become chefs in Hong Kong, and its effects on the proportion of women in the professional kitchen. This study aims to fill the gap of knowledge and benefit the industry by enlarging the possible pool of labor under the present shortage. Moreover, the research may provide more insight into female management style in the kitchen.

Literature Review

Gender Equality

The Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘gender quality’ as ‘the act of treating women and men equally’. It also refers to a goal that ‘women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development’, according to the United States Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2003). Hong Kong, which has been influenced by Western civil and women’s rights movements, has mitigated gender stereotypes somewhat (Cheung et. al, 1997). Confucianism, referring to a philosophy in China suggesting ‘human role relations are cultivated and developed within a male-centered world’ (Leung, 2003), may be a possible factor from the aspect of Chinese culture.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2017), gender biases exist in many occupations, which leads to a losing out on the benefits of diversity. Therefore, the workplace could be one of the indicators to show whether a place is treating both genders fairly, or, whether they are having the same competitiveness while finding a job. To clarify the present situation, the issue is broken down into three parts as shown in Figure 1.

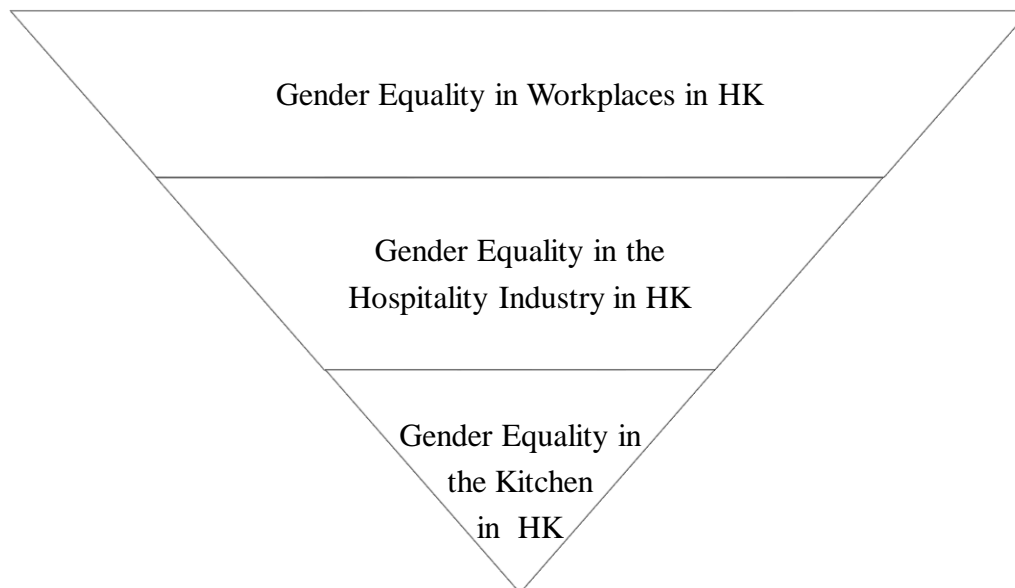


Figure 1: Gender Equality Pyramid

In the Workplace

According to a survey conducted by the Women’s Commission (2011), it is agreed by more than 70% of interviewees that women are commonly discriminated in the workplace despite the existence of Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance. On top of that, more than 70% of participants expressed noticing income inequality between the genders. They noticed that men received higher pay than women when they are in the same position. Other highlighted points include but are not limited to: women need to sacrifice more than men to be successful, women are stereotyped as homemakers which keeps them from working, and women are not preferred in managerial positions (Women’s Commission, 2011).

In terms of legislation, Cheung et. al (1997) pointed out the insufficient protection on women's rights in the workplace. She stressed that legislation alone cannot help with eliminating the problem. In her book, she discovered findings in 1982 surveying women in the workplace; it showed that taking care of children could be a deterring reason for them not to work or hard to do so at that time. This revealed the problem has never really been solved in the past decades. The character of women is stereotyped as family-oriented and thus trap them within it, which shows that family status discrimination is interwoven with gender discrimination in the workplace.

In the Hospitality Industry

With reference to a study on Family Status Discrimination in the Workplace in Hong Kong (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2018), Accommodation and Food Services is one of the sectors reported more discrimination cases on family status when hiring or at work. As the hospitality industry is a labor-intensive with long working hours, it is not beneficial to people with family status (mostly women) to compete within the industry. The report especially stressed women with family status tend to be considered negatively during the hiring process, and mothers are more severe victims of discrimination. This may explain why there are more female casual workers than full-time in hospitality since they must strike a balance between career and family responsibility. Baum & Cheung (2015) mentioned in their White Paper that although women took up nearly 70% of the workforce in the hospitality industry in Hong Kong, they seldom reach senior positions. Another research paper further pointed out that women in hotel management in Hong Kong are less preferred as supervisors (Ng & Pine, 2003).

In the Kitchens

Although there is a lack of academic research and statistics focusing on the situation in the professional kitchens in Hong Kong, traditional and online media has some related news articles or interviews highlighting the problem. A female sushi master in Hong Kong once mentioned some difficulties faced when she started entering the industry in an interview by Apple Daily (2018). For example, women were not allowed to enter the sushi bar nor making sushi in the past because their taste buds were said to be affected by periods. This case reflected the issue of gender discrimination in kitchens. Where in some restaurants females may face criticisms due to their gender.

Barriers Faced by Female Chefs in the Industry

Physical Ability

Research shows that males have better performance on muscular strength when comparing gender differences in physical ability (Courtright, 2013). It is true that much work in the professional kitchen requires strong muscle strength, so working in the kitchen requires physical strength. The demanding work may be a reason to segregate female chefs to the professional kitchen from domestic one, thus excluding women from the industry (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a).

Masculine Culture

Harris and Giuffre (2015) pointed out that female chefs had to fit in the 'homogenous environment' of a male-dominated kitchen, including refusing help and avoiding feminine behaviors or emotions so that they would not disrupt the masculine culture. According to Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós, and García-Segovia (2017b), the interviewed female chefs showed dissatisfaction with the masculine culture as males would find it easier to get professional advice via male idiosyncratic behaviors and companionships. Some of them reflected that women received fewer opportunities for decision-making and building professional networks. They concluded that female chefs are required to work more to prove themselves, thereby meaning it is easier for men than women to succeed in the professional field. The subordination of women in the kitchen also leads to the low status of female chefs (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a).

Work-Family Conflicts

Among the reviewed research, the family barrier is the most stressed factor deterring women chefs' advancement. Females have been stereotyped as homemakers as mentioned in previous sections, which impacts negatively in their career path. Especially for mothers, it is nearly impossible to achieve work-life balance as they must make choice between career and family (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a). Some successful

female chefs need to 'distance themselves from relationships to focus solely on work to achieve success' (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a; Harris, 2015). To improve that, women chefs are required to develop entrepreneurial skills so as to strike a better time management balance (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017b).

External Factors

Media

Media, in all forms, seems to be one possible influencing factor of making gender inequality in the kitchen a 'normal' situation (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017b; Duckman, 2012). Harris and Giuffre (2015) reported that positive media attention helps female chefs in gaining financial resources when needed. It could promote both notoriety and recognition of female chefs, which can be a significant facilitator (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a).

Education System

According to the Vocational Training Council (2019), the only institute that offers culinary arts programs with laboratory hours in the kitchen, they provide diploma, higher diploma, and bachelor's degrees, where the latter one is newly established in 2013. According to the data from the Faculty of Management and Hospitality of the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (2019), the gender proportion of the Bachelor degree in culinary arts and management shown that female is more than male, excluding those who left the program, until 25 April 2019. This shows the willingness for young women to get in the industry may be even greater than male, or at least, women have increased interested in the culinary sector. It also suggested the possible input of chefs with relatively higher education level could be more likely female, which explained the importance of a female-friendly working environment, instead of what found at present.

Opinions from the General Public

In an interview with a chef given the title Best Female Chef in Asia (Apple Daily, 2017), she mentioned that she considered the education system of Hong Kong is way behind than that in foreign countries, with no room for creativity, and the social status of chefs is very low. From that interview, there are many negative comments centered on this issue. Opinions included from critique on her professions to personal attack. Meanwhile, interviews conducted with male chefs by the same newspaper has no comment below, and are written with a more positive approach. One as an example from Apple Daily in 2012, they embraced the male chef's outlook and highlight how hardworking he was. By comparing the two interviews, it is noticed that males are receiving fewer objections than female. For instance, both of them are with a foreign background but only the female's culinary stature was challenged, even she may have a higher level of qualification. The above examples demonstrate that the public is not aware of how important chefs are in a society, and they tend to critique female chefs more.

Methodology

This exploratory research was conducted using a qualitative approach by doing in-depth semi-structured interviews (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Five female chefs in Hong Kong from different countries and different areas of the culinary field were interviewed to see whether the phenomenon of gender inequality exists in the industry. The number of interviews was set and modified according to two similar types of research with around 7-8 selected cases (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a; Haddaji et al. 2017b). It is believed that 4-6 interviews would be supportive enough regarding the scale of this research, within the scope of female chefs in leadership positions in Hong Kong. Of the six invitations were sent, and five positive replies were received as one chef declined to be interviewed. In this case, interviews provided a detailed informative view inside the kitchen culture from the female chef's perspective. Interviewees were recruited through searching online, with reference to Harris & Giuffre (2010). The selected chefs are representable as 2 of them are awarded Best Female Chef in Asia, another 2 established their own restaurants, and the last one filled the perspective of future development as a student. Below the research objectives and proposed hypotheses are listed.

Research objectives:

1. Barriers women chefs faced when into the masculine culture in the kitchen
2. Identifying factors contributing to the phenomenon
3. Status in the kitchen between genders

Proposed hypotheses:

1. Female chefs in Hong Kong face work-family conflicts, like having children, influences their work decisions.
2. Female chefs share common methods or difficulties to overcome the problem.
3. Female chefs view themselves positively as women in professional kitchens.

Results and Findings

Demographic Analysis of Interviewees

	CHEF A	CHEF B	CHEF C	CHEF D	CHEF E
BACKGROUND	Hong Kong	American	Canadianborn Chinese	Canadianborn Chinese	Hong Kong
RESTAURANT TYPE	Western	American fast food	Chinese Fusion	Fusion Vegetarian	Japanese Omakase
EXPERIENCE	3 years	19 years	10 years	16-17 years	20 years
FAMILY STATUS	Single	Single	With girlfriend	Single	Stable relationship but not married, planned not to have children

Table 1: Demographic Analysis of Interviewees

General Phenomenon

All interviewees reflected that the professional kitchen is a male-dominated industry. Three suggested that there is a low percentage of women in professional kitchens, and one chef pointed out this also happens in front of the house of restaurants. Their responses also showed that there is a stereotype on women to be less capable in the hot kitchen, to be more emotional than men and may affect their task performance. Women may have to avoid such 'feminine behavior' to get in the masculine culture, as described by Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós, and García-Segovia (2017b). The above perception from people leads to a different job experience for women chefs, which according to the definition of Gender Equality (United States Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2003), the present situation fails to meet the criteria.

1.1 Barriers Faced

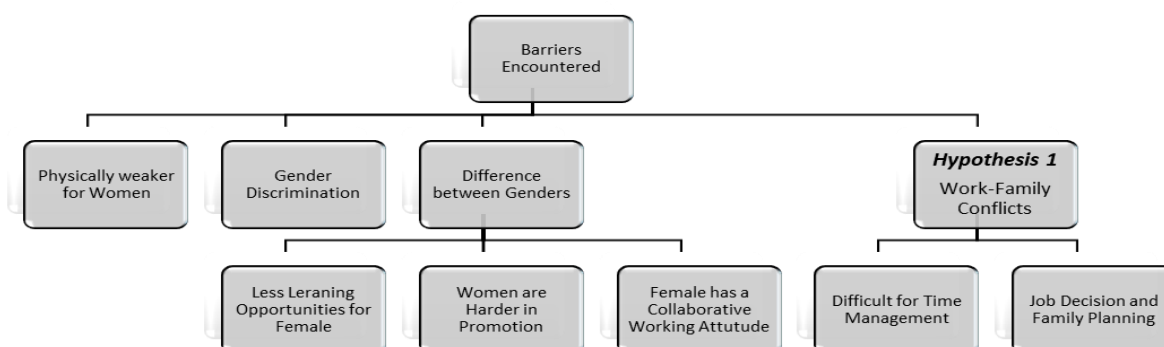


Figure 2: Tree Diagram: Barriers

Physical Ability

Chefs A, C, D, and E said they faced criticisms on their physical abilities, including their ability to lift up heavy loads, the heights or even body temperatures, corresponding to the research mentioned earlier (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia, 2017a). The interviewees recalled that they were prohibited from doing jobs that are considered 'hard to do' or 'not suitable for female', which they may actually be capable to handle.

Differences between Genders

Learning Opportunities

Instead of decision-making opportunities stated in academic research (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós, and García-Segovia, 2017 B), interviewees reflected on fewer learning opportunities than males. Chef A agreed that males would receive more opportunities in terms of learning. She suggested that some people consider women work in the professional kitchens just for fun, with no real motivation or reason, so instead of providing practical training, they only offer women 'something to play with'. Chef E had a similar experience, and she considered the reason behind it that female chef's shorter career life because they would get married and may have children to take care of. Therefore, from the company's point of view, they prefer investing resources on males who are more likely to stay for a longer period of time than females.

Promotion

Chef C mentioned the difference in the path to promotion within a culinary operation. She said women are always classified and allocated to the pastry kitchen, but a pastry chef can never become the executive chef in the kitchen's hierarchy. So, the starting position has a close relationship affecting promotion opportunities. Chef D noted that in hotels, female chefs are harder to be promoted, and that may imply a stereotype on women. This is also explained in previous research about how women are not preferred as management or supervisors and are seldom promoted to senior positions (Women's Commission, 2011; Baum & Cheung 2015; Ng & Pine, 2003).

Working Attitudes

Chef C noticed a mentality that can be described as 'male is competitive while the female is collaborative', which resulted in a general difference in the kitchen environment. She proposed that women tend to think the best for the restaurant and they do not ask for promotion or compensation. Whereas male is more 'critical about their career placement', so they generally ask for more salary or opportunities as well.

Work-Family Conflicts

Time Management

Chefs A and C mentioned that the long working hours in the kitchen led to less time spent with family and partner. This supports previous research from the Equal Opportunities Commission (2018) which concluded long working hours is causing an impact on people with family status. Chef E further shared that her partner once suggested her to work less or not to work anymore because the job in the kitchen is too tough, and by that, they could maintain a more work-life balance. However, it is not feasible, she said, because companies would not accept this as a reason to reduce working hours for female workers, even women have to take care of children or elderlies at home.

Chef C also shared a similar experience, which she described women to have 'multiple positions' including wife and mother, that they are required to cook at home, to take care of children, parents of own and husband's, etc., especially under the Chinese culture. She pointed out that, to be a successful chef, one needed to spend a lot of time in the professional kitchen. The time constraints could be too cumbersome thus female chefs face difficulties striking a work-life balance, which may lead to sacrificing own career for the success of the husband (Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós, and García-Segovia, 2017a).

Job Decision and Family Planning

Chefs C and E are in a stable relationship, and both of them agreed that there is a conflict between career and family planning, including getting married and having a baby. Chef C goes on to say that 'the common age to get

married for women could be the same peak of career', which if women choose to have a family, scarification is required. Chef E also pointed out women would face another struggle after giving birth of baby, that is to get back to work or not, and they must give up either side or step back at some area.

Hypothesis 1 **supported**: Female Chefs in Hong Kong face work-family conflicts, like having children, influences their work decisions (Harris & Giuffre, 2010).

1.2 Possible Solutions

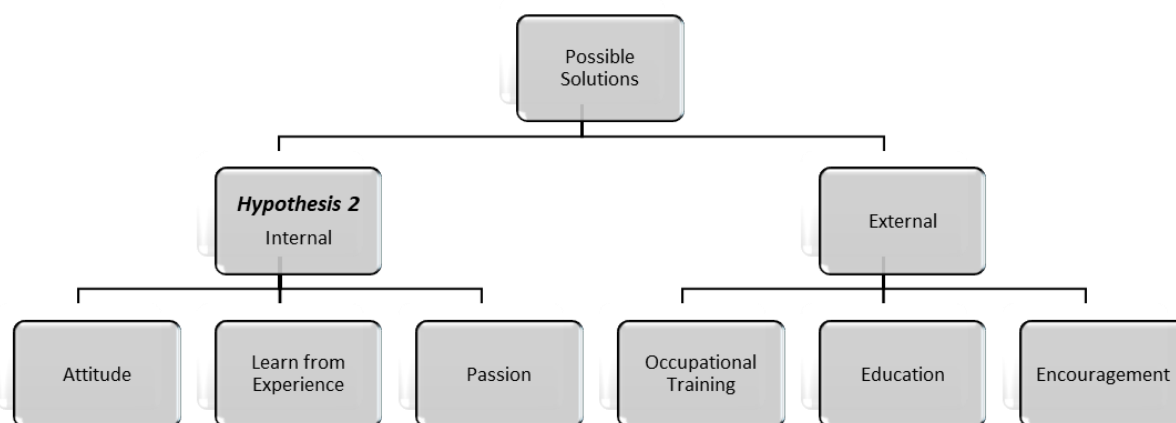


Figure 3: Tree Diagram: Possible Solution

Internal

Attitude

All interviewees say that women chefs need to be tougher and take the initiative to learn. It is considered important to 'learn to play the game of males', which is to survive in a more competitive environment, as mentioned by Chef C. They agreed women chefs should voice out what they want so as to receive more opportunity.

Learn from Experience

Chef C suggested women chefs have a role model and work in a 'nurturing environment with sharp-minded people'. As males and females prefer a different management style, working in an appropriate environment would help developing one's talent. Chef E recommended women chefs to work in a wider range of restaurants so as to build up one's skills and to be admitted.

Passion

Passion was found to be a significant facilitator for the interviewees because goals could drive oneself to continue what one is doing. Kitchens that operate on a passion based environment promotes the sharing of creativity and enjoy what they are doing can help them with overcoming the barriers. According to Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós & García-Segovia (2017a), passion is seen to be a common drive for female chefs because the working environment is stressful with a long working hour and low pay. This factor promotes their "love of art" and "of the act of offering to the public" that drives for their career choices.

Hypothesis 2 supported: Female Chefs in Hong Kong share some common ways or difficulties to overcome the problem (Harris & Giuffre, 2010).

External

Occupational Training

Most interviewees doubted that occupational training is possible assistance on the situation because the culture or the mindset of stereotype is too rigid to be changed. They stressed that the point is not about the capability of women, which building up knowledge and skills is not dealing with the problem directly. Yet Chef E agreed that training does help since practical skills form the base of a chef so that he or she can cook.

Education

All interviewees agreed that education helps, as it allows women to learn more and get inspired. Chef C especially pointed out higher education helps women to 'identify to their model', whereas education before 7 years old can build up the mindset and confidence of young ladies. Chef E from a different perspective believes the vocational school can provide an opportunity for women to at least try before getting into a professional kitchen.

Encouragement

It is mentioned by Chef C that the support from parents since a young age is significant regarding the confidence of young girls, which 'when the mindset is free, anything is possible'. Chef A viewed that company culture is another external factor because an appropriate and attractive working environment can encourage women to get in the industry. If there are women in the management of the company, it would be more convincing for other women.

Viewing of Women in the Kitchen

Chef B and E were the chefs with the most experience in the industry within this study, they concluded that the problem of stereotype has changed a lot in the past 20 years. Now there are more women in culinary schools and kitchens, also there are more channels such as the Internet to learn so that women do not rely on pleasing senior chefs to get admitted and taught. They noticed less criticism but more appreciation. Chef D expressed that most famous female chefs in the world are self-entrepreneur instead of working for a company, which is true regarding the interviewees in this research. She pointed out that those experienced chefs work in hotels are seldom mentioned among the public. Media is another point she made that it is not helping with the enhancement of women's status in the professional kitchen, or even making the inequality problem become normal as said by Haddaji, Albors-Garrigós, and García-Segovia (2017b).

Overall, although there are many barriers, interviewees tend to have positive comments on women chefs including themselves as they have ways to overcome, and the improving situation led them to be optimistic towards the future development of female in the industry.

Hypothesis 3 supported: Female Chefs in Hong Kong view themselves POSITIVELY in professional kitchens as women.

Discussion

Chinese Culture vs Culinary Workplace Culture

By comparing the data collected from this research, along with the global perspective of the literature review, it can be seen that the overall situation of gender stereotypes is similar in different countries, which may reveal that it is a worldwide problem. However, from the cultural backgrounds of the interviewees and their differences in attitude towards the problem, there may be a relationship between national culture and culinary workplace culture. Among the five interviewees, in the table above, there is one American, two Canadian-born Chinese and two local Hong Kong nationals. When they mentioned about the criticism they faced, surprisingly Chef B, who is from America, stated that she did not notice any inappropriate comments. Even if she did, she said she would not be affected at all. Meanwhile, the other four respondents reflected different levels of discrimination, of which Chef C and D, who grew up in Canada, have relatively more optimistic attitudes than the local Hongkongers. Regarding Chef A and E from Hong Kong, the latter, with much more experience in the kitchen, was found to be more passive about their own future development; she has no career goal and she works for a living more than for passion. From the findings, a cultural difference between chefs from different backgrounds can be seen. Whereas, even though the culinary culture may be similar, gender criticisms also exist. It could be concluded that the problem of gender equality is common in both foreign and Hong Kong contexts, yet the experiences chefs perceived could vary because of their own culture discussed below.

Chinese Philosophies and Beliefs

Referring to the Literature Review, culture is proposed as a factor in gender equality in Hong Kong, which is proved correct after conducting the interviews. Feng (2016) used Yi Jing (Literally translated as The Book of

Changes, ranked first of the five classics of ancient China), as a cutting point in her book discussing Chinese culture and female chefs. Yi Jing mentioned 'only by making food at home can women ensure the harmony and prosperity of the whole clan', this implied the overall status of women in Chinese philosophy must be lower than males, with the division of Yang (male) and Yin (Female). It shows the long history of the culture and how it rooted in people's mindset. Confucianism is another 'main cultural heritage' in East Asian countries (Pascall & Sung, 2007), which stressed the virtue of three obedience factors – to father, husband, and son; women are also cut off with their family after marriage because they have to belong to her husband's family. Although there is no research investigating the relationship between the culture and the workplace, it still suggested the reason behind such strong family barriers and pressures on women reflected by the interviewees. With Confucianism, the importance of 'family' is way greater than personal development, and the male stature overpowers females, thus limited women to have their own career. It also supported the assumption above about chefs in East Asian countries may encounter more family-work conflicts compared to the West.

Comparisons between East and West

It is suggested by a previous research study the effects of culture and gender by comparing students from Canada and China (Bu & McKeen, 2001). The study interviewed educated women from both countries and demonstrated that they have similar difficulties to strike a balance between career and family. This is corresponding to the findings above, and further shows that the struggle is not limited to women chefs only, but an overall gender barrier. The West, without the influence of Confucianism, also faced the gender inequality problem in terms of restaurant culture. According to Freedman (2014), women in the nineteenth-century United States were 'admitted with restrictions', for example, they must dine in rooms that are designated to women. They are also restricted from high-end restaurants without men's companion in the late half of the 19th century, which may be related to the creation of 'casual dining places'. The reason suggested is that people at that time assumed dangers of letting women enter dining place freely. Yet, the situation improved because restaurants later recognized female as a huge customer group, thus catered to them. From the successful case of the United States in enhancing the social status of women by identifying the needs of the market, the same could be practiced in Hong Kong, that by letting the industry know the potential of the female labor force, the status of women in professional kitchens may also be enhanced.

Education

It is agreed that the traditional mindset should be tackled from a young age, but it requires a long time to see the effect. Those beliefs mentioned above may have their values in the past, but they may not suit modern society. Nowadays, we stress the significance of equality in gender and race, plus we are encouraged to have self-achievement, more than putting oneself after the goods of others. The idea of 'a female can also be tough' should be introduced at a young age. To educate, as suggested by Chef C, parents would be the main executor to encourage and support their children to try and do whatever they want. Before that, boys and girls should be treated equally, with equal opportunity to participate in different activities, which would be beneficial to find their own goals. However, recommendations on preschool education are out of the scope of this research. Instead, targeting higher qualifications may be easier to practice.

Recommendation

Education

From the interviewee's responses, it can be seen that education acts an important role in changing people's perceptions towards the occupation of being a chef itself, as well as women's role in a professional kitchen. According to observed data, the social status of chefs in Hong Kong is low, and women chefs are even lower. Barriers against women chefs are not limited to gender, but the industry itself is also classified as 'not ideal'. To improve this situation, it is suggested to enhance the image of chefs and educate on gender equality in the kitchen at the same time.

Higher education would be a more practical and effective way of enhancing the image of chefs in Hong Kong, as well as eliminating gender discrimination in a kitchen. There are opinions about Hong Kong's current education system that it leans too much on preparing for public examinations but not for their future (Aslam, 2017). Young people thus have limited career paths because they are always 'supervised' to take 'the right approach to success'. This is reflected in the culinary sector, where chefs are commonly looked down upon because they usually do not have a high academic qualification and they often earn less than other fields even though the job is considered tougher than many sectors. Within this, women chefs are regarded with even lower social status. These opinions may deter young people from entering the industry. With the availability of more higher education related to culinary arts, such as higher diplomas and bachelor's degrees, there would at least be a standardized ability level; ultimately negating any criticisms of female chefs' ability due to qualifications. Students who are interested in professional kitchens can learn more about the industry in the programs before getting into it. Furthermore, an improved overall academic level helps enhance the image of chefs, which is also essential for recruiting new talent and solving the problem of labor shortages.

Government and Organization

It is proposed by the interviewees that the cooperation of organizations can help improve the situation. Company culture is important in changing mindsets because changes often start internally. For example, it is recommended that companies could include more females in their management team, so as to build confidence for other women and convince them to join the organization. Mother-friendly schemes, such as flexible working hours, can also attract women who left the industry due to family planning. Furthermore, organizations can also check and regulate the proportion of genders within departments. Affirmative Action in America is an example. It is a government policy promoting equality among minority groups including genders and races (Cornell Law School, 2018) and aims to help those groups in employment and education. It does not need to be an established law in Hong Kong, but companies could review their situations in each department; if a serious imbalance is noticed, they should try to achieve a more neutral proportion by hiring more of the minority to ensure a diverse working environment. They could set timetables and goals to plan their milestones towards equality. Some may critique that reverse discrimination may occur because women benefit a lot under the policy, yet it would be the opposite if the minority became males, then the policy would instead be helping men. For example, in a pastry kitchen, there may be more females than males; in this situation, the restaurant should consider hiring more males to achieve a balance.

As for the government, the Equal Opportunities Commission Hong Kong should put more resources on promoting their policies to different workplaces, as many people do not have the awareness on their offense to law, and victims may not know they are protected as well. It is believed that the Commission is essential to maintain equality from the legal aspect. A qualification framework should also be enforced so that employers could understand they should check the qualification framework of employees instead of their gender.

Media

To effectively reach and educate the public, the media is the easiest way because it penetrates people's daily lives. Media companies could conduct a series of interviews about famous female chefs in the industry, including those who work under large companies and entrepreneurs. This can help spread the message that females can be part of, or even heard of, the professional kitchens. This can encourage females to join the industry as well as reduce the stereotypes towards women in the kitchen. Hong Kong's media platforms are recommended to take reference from foreign media companies such as Netflix, where they have a documentary series named 'Chefs' Table'; each episode would introduce one influencing chef in the world, and the series included many females. Although the audience may still have their own thought after watching, at least they could gradually get used to the fact that women are fine to be in a professional kitchen. If the broadcasting companies and press could help, the stereotype issues could hopefully be reduced. They are also recommended to promote the International Chefs Day on every October 20th (International Chefs Day, 2019), which is a day to celebrate the profession with the 'sense of pride'. It is not noticed

for the public, even not for some chefs. With a world committed a day of celebration, chefs may be easier to be widely promoted.

Directions for Future Researches

There are very limited published research articles about the culinary industry, but there are many gaps waiting to be filled, including those related gender issues. For example, the relationship between national culture and the culture in the professional kitchens regarding genders; the effect of culinary education and how it affects the industry; research from the perspective of males regarding the criticisms about the imbalanced proportion of gender in the industry, etc. Restricted to the scope of this paper, many of the aspects cannot be discussed deeply or even mentioned; more research is needed in the future.

Limitation & Conclusions

It is expected to interview at least one mother chef so as to fulfill the information needed regarding marriage and motherhood problems, yet the selected interviewee has no reply about the invitation. There may be insufficient evidence to show such conflict with only one respondent who planned not to have a baby, which requires more research regarding this aspect. Moreover, most interviewed chefs are single, so the part of work-family issues are not asked. Yet, they could have been asked conditionally so as to obtain as much information as it can, instead of leaving the part blanked. Plus, some chefs requested to finish the interview quickly as they are busy in the kitchen, or they have to pause so that they can handle orders first, which may affect the flow of conversation.

The qualitative analysis of this paper lacks the broadness data within Hong Kong's vast culinary industry as it focuses on only several people. The result cannot represent the whole situation with such a small sample size. Originally, the study planned to invite 8 female chefs who are currently in the industry to be the interviewees, but it is further reduced to 4-6 as they may have a tight schedule. Studies like this are heavily reliant on the chefs' availability and their time in-depth interviews. More research is called to be done with quantitative or mixed methods to increase the subjects reached. With the restriction on resources of this project, only general ideas could be drawn. It is suggested that more investigations should be done focusing on the above-mentioned aspects.

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