

# TEN TAIWANESE WOMEN

Experienced Entrepreneurs  
in Small Restaurant and Lodging Businesses

*Chatham University 2014 ASIANetwork-Freeman Research Team*

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# TAIWAN OUR JOURNEY



# INTRODUCTION

BY KAREN S. KINGSBURY

In May and June of 2014, a Chatham College research team went from Pittsburgh to Taiwan to study women proprietors of small-scale restaurant and lodging businesses. Their research was both exploratory and disciplined, reaching out to new people in unfamiliar places while carefully following social science protocols for interview technique and data-recording.



The team, comprised of six undergraduate students and two professors, conducted interviews in central, southern, and eastern Taiwan, and also on the smaller island of Penghu. Inspired by a similar project conducted by Scott Simon and published as *Sweet and Sour: Life-Worlds of Taipei Women Entrepreneurs* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), the Chatham researchers focused instead on smaller cities, well outside the capital megalopolis that Taipei has become. The women interviewed for this project are owners (or co-owners) of eleven different establishments. The interviewers asked about the general organization and pattern of each business, including considerations related to visual and spatial design; they also asked about any gender-equity issues the women had faced, the role of relationship networks in starting and maintaining a business, the impact of family dynamics, and the women's own perceptions of and attitudes toward feminism. In addition, the researchers developed a printed survey questionnaire that was completed by each of the interviewees, along with about three dozen other women proprietors in a wider range of businesses.

An analytical summary of the research team's findings can be found in Sook Yee Leung's concluding essay, in which she details the complex

meanings of empowerment that are illustrated and tested by the experience of these women business owners. Leung's conclusion, echoed in many discussions among the research team members and their oral presentations on this work, is that these women's achievements include "comfortably balanc[ing] family and work roles and...buil[d] positive relationships to successfully manage employee and customer relations."

Since achievements like these, whether as a business proprietor or professional employee, rank high among the life goals of many men as well as women—and not in Taiwan alone—the details of these women's experience should be of interest to many readers. Even those details that do not directly support that overall finding are worth recording and reflecting on, because they offer useful insights into work-worlds similar to, yet different from our own. That is the considered view of this research team, and the reason why, after returning from Taiwan, they combed through the interview transcripts and crafted this set of narrative essays.

The ten women whose business-and-life stories are here featured come from different socioeconomic statuses as well as different parts of Taiwan, and they range in age from early twenties to late sixties. Some



were so fluent in English that no interpreter was needed; others had family members who could interpret for them; in other cases the research team relied on the gracious, capable help of student interpreters from Tunghai or Tamkang University. All of the interviewees were forthright and cooperative, even if the interview proposal had come to them on short notice. Their flexibility and sincerity must be included among the traits that make them successful business proprietors: indeed, only the youngest had been in business for fewer than five years, and all of the middle-aged women had run successful enterprises since their early twenties. Several of the establishments described here have been in continuous operation since the early 1990s.

The team interviewed two pairs of sisters, and represents them here in different ways. Pin and Pei Hsin, the highly articulate and engaged owners of a feminist hostel in Tainan, are covered in a joint profile that is filled with vivid ideas and details. In the case of the Tsai sisters, who jointly run a student eatery at Tamkang University's Lanyang campus, a focus on one sister (Chiu Min) seemed the best way to convey this material, especially given the many parallels with Yu Jin Lin (Auntie), the Tsai sisters' nearby neighbor along the row of campus eateries.

The remaining three interviewees not included in this volume deserve, in fact, much more attention. Chimei Lee and Ingrid Yang, joint proprietors of Bianca Italian Restaurant in Taichung, are not only lifelong friends and inspiring lights in this editor's personal life, but played a vital role in this project's inception—at a meal enjoyed with them in their restaurant, in the summer of 2013. Telling their full story, including the many amusing turns in Chimei's work as horticultural and culinary innovator, and Ingrid's steady rise to leadership posts in her local community, is a longer tale for another time. Similarly, Nakaw, proprietor of Cifadahan Café in eastern Taiwan, is an accomplished sculptor and Ami community leader (the Ami are one of Taiwan's many aboriginal peoples), as well as the proprietor of the largest—and arguably, most dramatic—restaurant we visited: her menu includes fish and vegetables cooked tableside in water heated to boiling by the addition of blazing hot rocks. This menu item, and Nakaw's story as a whole, would best be framed within the wider context of ethnic-democratic transitions in Taiwanese society over the past several decades. Given the relevance of Taiwanese experiences like these, for understanding and elaborating key cultural developments of our era, it seems reasonable to believe that a suitable opportunity for telling these stories will arise, all in good time.

As already mentioned, the research team's activities were greatly furthered by the advice and assistance of students, as well as faculty and staff, at Tunghai University, Tamkang University, and Donghua University. A complete list of all who helped would fill a full page, so we hope instead to convey our gratitude by delivering to them this volume.

Finally, but also foremost, the research team wishes to thank the Freeman Foundation for generously funding this study, and ASIANetwork<sup>1</sup> for administering that grant program and helping to guide the research team toward achievement of its goals.

<sup>1</sup> *A consortium of liberal arts colleges and universities that works to further Asian studies in American higher education.*



# 1

CREATING COMMUNITY, DESIGNING FOR COMMUNITY

MEI-YING (MINDY) TSENG AND TUNG HAI LAND YOUTH HOUSE

BY CHARLOTTE E. LOTT

After thirty hours of travel, we arrived at our first lodging and also our first woman-owned business, Tung Hai Land Youth House in Taichung City. "Youth House" could imply a cramped, spartan hostel offering little to no privacy, but we found a warm and hospitable lodging with an emphasis on community living and plenty of space in each of the two-person rooms.



When we later interviewed Mindy, the owner of the Youth House, we found that the private and community spaces had been specifically designed to foster interaction among residents, both the short-term travelers who stayed for a minimum of ten days and the long-term student residents who lived there for a semester or a year. Mindy's closing statement, in her interview, was her hope students who lived at Tung Hai Land Youth House would have a good experience of being treated well and then, in their careers and lives after university, would give back to society and promote social welfare in all dimensions.

## *SPACE FOR LIVING*

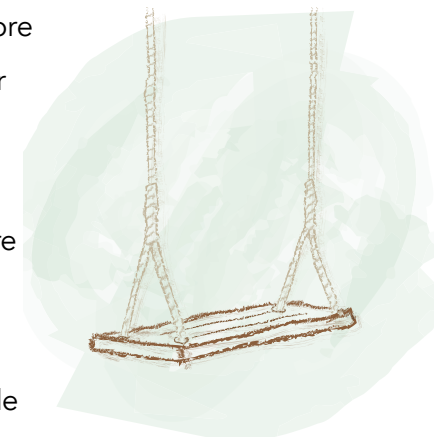


Rebecca Lin, the manager of the Youth House, gave us a tour at the beginning of our stay. The place felt secure, yet open and welcoming. The building entrance was locked at night, and each hallway had a locked entry—in the hope that residents would feel safe enough to leave their own rooms open, and interact freely with their immediate neighbors. The community space on the first floor included two spacious rooms: a living room and a community kitchen/dining,

both of which we used for our meetings and interviews. It felt much more like a home than a hotel or dormitory lobby—there even was an indoor swing, inviting everyone to unwind.

All the art pieces in the community space and individual rooms were one-of-a-kind, but as an ensemble they created unifying themes. Over the entry door, gold and red banners offered mottos encouraging diligence in study, in order to realize one's own potential for success. Inside the building, a sky blue color scheme linked the paintings, textile art, and graphic design work—the Youth House's tree logo, rendered in paint on a glass room divider. The blue scheme appeared even in the Push/Pull signs on the doors. The community space had a wall chalkboard where residents left messages and art sketches. The modern art pieces that appointed each room were individualistic, even quirky: one room featured a collection of cloth shopping bags, framed and hung on the wall.

The building's rear windows looked out on a green garden with small birds in the treetops and larger birds moving slowly across the lawn: an oasis in a busy cityscape.



Tung Hai Land Youth House is in the Tunghai Village District in the Taichung urban area, just off Hsin-hsing Road and near the rear entrance to Tunghai University. It is a teeming place, filled with small shops, eateries, and service establishments. The street is quiet in the morning but by midday is jammed with pedestrians, scooters, and cars. Scooters are the favored mode of transport among students, but they are used by people of all ages, including families and older people. Bicycles are scarce. While the area is so crowded that even pedestrians can find it hard to maneuver, it is clean with no trash on the streets even though there are no public trash receptacles. The convenience stores, however, have trash cans that anyone can use. The smells from the food places permeate the air, and the rain causes a damp smell. There are exhaust fumes from the cars and scooters, but there is practically no public smoking or tobacco smoke in the air.

The description on the Tung Hai Land blogsite emphasizes these features of the hostel and its location:

"Tung Hai Land Youth House is a friendly and cozy hostel with 28 beds and wide open commune area for international students and short term business travelers. We value culture exchange and care

[for] the environment. With convenient metro transportation, we encourage our guests to relax after working hour at our talking pit on the roof where you can view the whole city of Taichung, or to mingle at Tung Hai night market where you can shop and taste the yummy local snacks."

## COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Mindy and her husband built the hostel with funds from their successful construction company. She told us that when she and her husband saw the movie comedy *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), they were inspired by the depiction of a vibrant community that fights and defeats the gangsters that threaten them. The two of them wanted to build a residence hall that could foster community spirit and the value of working together. The building is fully occupied and successful, but the motivation for the business is to promote their vision of a caring community for students and other visitors.

In addition to providing a community living space and kitchen area, Mindy and her building manager are available to help with personal problems or issues. She does not intrude on her tenants, but she and her



staff are ready to talk with them and provide a supportive emotional environment. They also ask a tenant from each floor of the building to serve as a counselor or helper and to be available via phone to other tenants on the floor. Her description sounded very much like the role of residential life staff on American college campuses. For foreign visitors, Mindy will plan activities, such as a visit to a traditional night market in Taichung. Mindy considers herself an ambassador of Taiwanese culture and wants visitors to experience

typical Taiwanese experiences. She also makes sure that the supplies purchased for the residence hall, from bedding to artwork, are made in Taiwan.

This commitment to community extends to the three women employees who work there. Mindy emphasized that the business provides a stable employment opportunity for the women and that she accommodates their personal and family responsibilities. She allows her employees to attend to personal obligations, particularly those related to their families and children, during office hours. She explained that she sees her em-

ployees every day and has an ongoing relationship with them. However, she considers her suppliers more impersonally, and emphasizes service and quality in her transactions with them. If a supplier does not do a good job, she will change to another firm.

## *FAMILY FIRST*

Mindy and her husband built the youth hostel after they had already established a successful construction company. Mindy therefore indicated that while she has received emotional support from her family, she did not need any financial support; she and her husband were able to finance the youth hostel from their personal savings. She also indicated that the flexible nature of her work gives her time to take care of her three children. While work-life balance and gender roles are in the news in the United States, Mindy's discussion of family indicated a traditional view of women being responsible for the family and needing to step back from career when children are born. She thought she was lucky because she and her husband had already established their first business before having children.

→ "THIS TRADITIONAL VIEW OF WOMEN'S RESPONSIBILITIES HAS MADE SOME YOUNG TAIWANESE WOMEN POSTPONE MARRIAGE OR NOT MARRY AT ALL. WHILE SINGLE CAREER WOMEN ARE MORE COMMON, A NEGATIVE IMAGE OF UNMARRIED WOMEN AS 'OLD MAIDS' STILL PERSISTS."

This traditional view of women's responsibilities has made some young Taiwanese women postpone marriage or not marry at all. While single career women are more common, a negative image of unmarried women as "old maids" still persists. Mindy said that unmarried women are stereotyped as having personality problems. Married women who lose their tempers or are impolite are excused as being under pressure from family responsibilities. But unmarried women who express their emotions in anything other than a positive manner are branded as having a troublesome personality or being odd.

Being a business owner makes her feel better about herself, and she enjoys being an entrepreneur. She acknowledged that owning a business can bring pressures into family life, and that there may even be disagreement about work decisions, but noted also that it serves as a common interest, something she shares with her husband and which gives them a subject-matter outside the range of family concerns. When asked about sacrifices she has made to maintain the business, she indicated that she had little time for holidays or rest. When she had to, she would bring her work home and stay up past midnight. With her family first, and her business second, she used her personal time to keep her life in order.

When she first started out in the business world, she had business cards with a specific title that provided her with an identity outside of family life. Over time, that business identity has become less important, and she now thinks of herself primarily as a person. Her second business venture, Tung Hai Land Youth House, is not a business to make money but a place to create a caring community. There is a sense that over time she has learned to balance all three parts of her life: family, business, and self.

## *A WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD*

The construction business is definitely a male-dominated industry, and in that business a woman who wields authority is at a disadvantage. Mindy said she worked hard to avoid the caricature of the boss lady. In Taiwan, the boss lady (whether the wife of the boss, or the boss herself) is stereotypically imagined as a picky, small-minded, bad-tempered woman who is hard to get along with. She therefore felt she had always to speak in an even-toned, highly reasonable manner. She said that when she was in a man's world, she had to put on a performance. And even though she was in charge of finances, she felt she had to get someone else (a man) to speak to other people if they were not following the rules and regulations. She also does not often attend business club meetings and social

events, which are important venues for developing commercially useful relationships; she lets her husband attend such events while she stays home to take care of the family. Mindy said that even though the lodging industry is also male-dominated, a woman in this field enjoys some advantages, because she can be viewed as a mother figure or an older sister.

We asked each woman business owner to give her own definition of feminism, describe how feminists are perceived in Taiwan, and tell us whether she considered herself to be a feminist. The Taiwanese women often started out confused by the questions, but this part of the interview always generated an interesting discussion in the end. Mindy, along with other interviewees, identified the term "feminist" with women who speak publically about the need for gender equality. These women are portrayed as tough or pushy women, a term that implies criticism, not praise. Strength and assertiveness appear to be identified as masculine characteristics. Mindy noted that a woman in the business world who is also able to take care of her family and devote time to raising her children is admired and considered fortunate. But the clear understanding is that the basic responsibility of women is to care for her family. If she

is also able to be successful in the business world, then she is indeed a fortunate person.

Mindy thinks it should be recognized that women have as much ability and intelligence as men. However, she said the reality is that after women get married and have children, they will cut back in the social and business arenas and spend more time taking care of the family. That's why, she says, women who are primarily family caretakers should also be recognized as the equals of men. On the questionnaire she strongly agreed with the statement "I consider myself to be a feminist." Throughout her interview, she underscored her belief that she is very fortunate, blessed to have a good marriage and happy family, along with her profession. Life has been good to her.

→ "MINDY THINKS IT SHOULD BE  
RECOGNIZED THAT WOMEN HAVE AS  
MUCH ABILITY AND INTELLIGENCE AS  
MEN."



# 2

## THE HEART OF A FAMILY BUSINESS LILY BRUCE AND FINGA'S BASE CAMP

BY CHLOE BELL

Walking into Finga's Base Camp, a bright little diner and grocery store in the midst of bustling Taichung, is likely to give a Western tourist the striking feeling of home. The Western-style seating and layout is not by coincidence, however; to hear the matriarch tell it, Finga's family-oriented, Western-style atmosphere is the source of its success. Finga's triples as a restaurant, bakery, and grocery store selling specialty foods from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S., and is co-owned and operated by husband-and-wife team, Dereke and Lily Bruce, as well as Lily's sister, Rebecca.



As I sat down to peruse the extensive menu, filled with a variety of Western food styles, I couldn't help but smile at the loud, infectious laughter of Dereke, head chef. He may be the personality behind Finga's authentic vibrancy, but it quickly becomes clear that Lily is the heart.

Lily is small but mighty; the mother of two and sister of five has been operating the logistical side of Finga's since its initial opening over twenty years ago, in 1993. At age 22, she began working for an import company that imported Western food to Taiwan, a career choice that has greatly influenced Finga's versatile stock of food supplies. Four years later, she and husband Dereke, originally from New Zealand, decided to open a restaurant to allow him freedom in his work as a chef. The couple decided to let the restaurant double as a Western import grocery store in order to attract foreigners. According to Lily, twenty years ago it was nearly impossible for foreigners to find food from home in Taiwan: cue the creation of Finga's, to fill this specialty niche.

Two decades later, Finga's employs 25, half of whom are female, and shares what Lily calls a work family. The notion of family expands far beyond those behind the scenes at Finga's. Lily notes that her customers

are predominantly family groups and says, "I don't think I have too many skills for running a business, what I know is that I treat my staff like family, I treat our customers like family, that's what I do every day." Lily believes that this family manifesto allows her to truly connect with her customers and help them find the products they are looking for. Lily also has a strong passion for teaching her Taiwanese customers how to cook and eat Western foods, as a way of introducing them to new experiences.

Due to the variety of products that Finga's makes and sells, a variety of suppliers is needed. Lily says there is a fifty-fifty split between imported versus locally purchased products; the latter includes meat and other fresh foods. In either case, she notes that her suppliers are predominantly male. As for the creative force behind the hands-on production of prepared foods, the "Finga's" of the restaurant's name are those of Chef Dereke himself.

Finga's competition is with businesses that don't bring such a personal essence to their establishment: chain grocery stores like Costco and Carrefour. Lily points out that Finga's is a specialty grocery store, unlike the big chains, and that customers come to grab their must-haves—cer-

*"FINGA'S COMPETITION IS WITH BUSINESSES THAT DON'T BRING SUCH A PERSONAL ESSENCE TO THEIR ESTABLISHMENT: CHAIN GROCERY STORES LIKE COSTCO AND CARREFOUR."*



tain spices or niche products that they can't find elsewhere— rather than to complete all of their grocery shopping. Lily says this distinction is what has kept the business open for more than two decades.

Despite this Western specialization, Lily has found that the percentage of Taiwanese customers has grown from 20% to 60% since the business began. She believes this is due to Taiwan's economic growth and increased travel by its citizens. When they come home, they are in love with new specialty products, and thus find their way to Finga's, the Western smorgasbord of Taichung. As the mastermind behind this versatile stock, Lily says her goal is constant, open-minded learning about the ever-expanding food enterprise. Although she is a woman restaurant owner in what she says is a male-dominated world, Lily believes that her gender status has had

no negative effect on her success. In fact, Lily does not believe gender determines success in the restaurant business; instead, she says that what's crucial is one's ability to foster connections with customers.



As the matriarch of the ever-growing Finga's restaurant family, Lily says she doesn't feel that she plays different roles as a business owner, a mother, a wife, and a sister; instead, she feels that these roles blend together to define who she is. And it's no wonder that her business life is inextricable from her family: when Dereke and Lily first conceived their dream of opening Finga's, Lily's parents helped by providing startup capital. Lily is careful to note that her family's help is more than financial; she says that running a business requires lots of help, in all sorts of different ways. She says of her family: "When you need help, they'll always be there. That's really important."

Today, two of Lily's sisters help run Finga's. One lives in Tennessee and helps import products, while the other, Rebecca, works upstairs in Finga's bakery as the head baker. Rebecca asked Dereke to teach her to bake Western products and now she makes 100% of Finga's delicious bakery products.

Despite the close bond Lily shares with her family, business demands during the first ten years of running Finga's made it hard for her to spend time with her children. The couple has had almost no days off since

Finga's was established; the only days off have been for family trips or their kids' school events. She describes Adam, her older child, as low-maintenance and independent; in fact, he was born in 1993, the year the business started. The business started small, so the first few years were very difficult for the couple; when asked if she had to make sacrifices, Lily



says, "In every business you make sacrifices, just like you would sacrifice for your kids." Eventually Dereke's close attention to detail and dedication to authentic handmade food, led to Finga's lasting success. Like any business, Finga's has endured transition; when their daughter was born, Lily said she needed to change. She marks this point as her transition from less of a businesswoman to more of a mother.

These days, Lily is wondering whether her son might decide to take over the business, since he is so good with people. But for now, she says she and Dereke only think of maintaining their authentic style and customer relationships. Their business is deeply rooted in their marriage, the two of them having inevitably grown together over the past twenty years. As Lily describes, "We grew up together, we grow

together...it's easy to talk about the business. I understand him and he understands me." She does not think that she has a business identity outside of her family. For Lily, the two are inseparable.

This idea of shared identities is echoed when Lily is asked what she thinks of the term "feminism." She looks at us calmly and leaves us with this profound thought: "I've never thought about female/male. It's how you treat your job, it's how you do your work...if I see a successful female, good. You are not successful because of yourself, but because a lot of people help you, a lot of people work for you and then you can be a successful woman or successful businessperson. But one person can't do it alone."

"YOU ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL  
BECAUSE OF YOURSELF, BUT BECAUSE  
A LOT OF PEOPLE HELP YOU, A LOT  
OF PEOPLE WORK FOR YOU AND THEN  
YOU CAN BE A SUCCESSFUL WOMAN  
OR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSPERSON.  
BUT ONE PERSON CAN'T DO IT  
ALONE."



# 3

BONJOUR, GOOD MORNING  
CONNIE LEE AND HERBALIFE

BY SOOK YEE LEUNG

Before becoming a Herbalife distributor, Connie Lee was a Samsung employee in public relations, a translator for renowned Taiwanese movie director Ang Lee, and an English tutor. Through these experiences, she developed skills in communication, organization, and discipline. She returned from Taipei to Taichung due to familial obligations to care for her father, who was diagnosed with melancholic depression. The use of Herbalife products improved her father's condition. Along with her father, Connie also tried Herbalife products for a year and saw great improvement in her health.



Impressed with the results, she decided to train as an employee and work for the company. Originally a part-time employee of Herbalife, Connie was so productive that this business soon became her full-time occupation. A true self-starter, she opened Bonjour, her own Herbalife storefront, after just one year with the company.

Connie wholeheartedly believes that Herbalife products could have prevented her grandfather's death. Her grandfather died from medical complications related to an overuse of pharmaceutical medication. Along with Herbalife, she wants to offer customers a better quality of life through the use of Herbalife's products.



Connie said she offers a range of services including personalized health consultation, good advice for healthy living, training in meal preparation (the nutrition shakes). She meets most of her customers at her storefront, Bonjour, and her customer base is augmented through referrals from existing customers. Her main competition is conventional breakfast eateries.

In the United States, Herbalife has faced accusations that it is a pyramid scheme and uses false advertising claims to attract distributors and customers. According to the Herbalife website, it is an enterprise renowned for its pro-social orientation towards optimum health and successful distribution and marketing strategies, resulting in more than two million independent distributors in 75 countries.

The following statement of Herbalife ideas was posted in Connie's store:

*MISSION:* To change people's lives by providing the best business opportunity in direct selling and the best nutrition and weight-management products in the world.

### *VALUES:*

*OUR DISTRIBUTORS:* We are driven by the needs of our distributors and inspired by their stories.

*OUR STAKEHOLDERS:* We pursue profitability and growth to increase value for all our stakeholders, including distributors, customers, shareholders, and employees.



*OUR EMPLOYEES:* We respect each other, succeed as a team and value a sense of humor.

*OUR PRODUCTS:* Our commitment to the highest scientific and safety standards in product development and manufacturing is an integral part of our mission for nutrition. We are products of the product.

*OUR COMMUNITIES:* We make our communities better places to live and work.

*OUR WORK:* We make decisions based on facts, not hearsay. We work hard and hold ourselves accountable. We strive for excellence.

*OUR ETHICS:* We do the right, honest, and ethical thing. We take the high road.

*OUR PHILOSOPHY:* We use it, wear it, talk it.

*OUR ATTITUDE:* We make it fun, simple, and magical.



Connie says that after she has reached her goal of 100 customers who consistently subscribe to the Herbalife breakfast diet or other diet plans, she will open another shop elsewhere. She plans to remain in contact with customers via phone, internet, and the main location. According to Connie the process consists of "giving all the information to all the people here and [perhaps] two years later everybody knows this shop and they've changed their diet habit."

→ "CONNIE SAYS THAT AFTER SHE HAS REACHED HER GOAL OF 100 CUSTOMERS WHO CONSISTENTLY SUBSCRIBE TO THE HERBALIFE BREAKFAST DIET OR OTHER DIET PLANS, SHE WILL OPEN ANOTHER SHOP ELSEWHERE."



# 4

## DISHING OUT MORE THAN SPAGHETTI ADA YEN AND PAPA MIA

BY KRISTINA HRUSKA

While Italian restaurants are colloquially deemed “pasta houses” in Taiwan, just one look at Papa Mia’s menu will show you that this quaint Italian restaurant can dish out much more than spaghetti. Ada Yen, the owner, earned a degree in tourism from Providence University and upon graduation started working in an Italian restaurant. There she quickly realized that the best way to hone her skills in Italian cooking would be to spend time in Italy. After interning in a restaurant in Italy, Ada returned to Taichung to take on the challenge of opening her own restaurant.



When it was first established, Papa Mia had ten equal shareholders. As time went on and lives took different directions, Ada slowly began to buy out her partners' shares and eventually became the restaurant's sole owner. Today, Ada has a partner who supervises the dining room, which



allows Ada to run the kitchen. Papa Mia has about eight employees, making it a close-knit environment. This family-like setting has proven beneficial to Ada, as she has been away from her family for over twenty years. While Ada does travel to southern Tainan to visit her family, owning a restaurant does not allow her to make these trips as frequently as she would like. Fortunately, her family understands her position, and is very supportive of her business endeavors.

Ada's experiences within her family and within the male-dominated restaurant industry have given her many insights relevant to feminism. Ada feels that because she is a woman she is viewed as more emotional and less serious-minded than her male competitors. Often, people believe that women open restaurants as a hobby, not a long-term career move. These assumptions can harm a woman's standing in the industry.

As a result, when young male chefs are seeking employment, they are reluctant to work in a woman's restaurant. Ada believes that men are skeptical of how much they will learn from a female chef in a smaller restaurant, so they are more likely to work in larger, more well-known restaurants.

Ada believes that the discrimination women face, especially in the restaurant industry, is imbalanced and unfair. She noted that the current generations of Taiwanese women are very independent and do not need to seek approval from the male figures in their lives to make decisions. Despite this feminist perspective, Ada would not label herself a feminist. Although some Taiwanese still believe in traditional gender and family roles, Ada believes that a majority of people would agree with her interpretation of female empowerment. However, the lack of an actual feminist movement and discussion has prevented the Taiwanese from adopting the feminist label. Ada believes that "girl power," as she called it, is on the rise, and she is interested to see how women embrace their independence and strength in the future.



→ "ADA BELIEVES THAT "GIRL POWER," AS SHE CALLED IT, IS ON THE RISE, AND SHE IS INTERESTED TO SEE HOW WOMEN EMBRACE THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND STRENGTH IN THE FUTURE."



# 5

## DISTRICT MAYOR AND NOODLE MAKER HUANG-ZI AND CHAO NOODLESTAND

BY KRISTINA HRUSKA

If you venture down the alleys outside of the market in the Chongwei District of Tainan, you are bound to come across Chao Noodles. Chao Huang-Zi, the shop's owner, serves her breakfast-style sesame noodles from 5:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m. After trying Huang-Zi's delectable dishes, one would find it hard to believe that the cold noodle business was not her first calling. In fact, Huang-Zi has tried her hand at many kinds of small entrepreneurship: a flower shop, a hair salon, a bookstore, and another small breakfast restaurant, before she started the noodle stand over twenty years ago. And she got into the cold noodle business without really intending to do so.



When she found that her aging parents were having difficulty with foods hard to chew or digest, Huang-Zi took up the art of the cold noodle because it would be easier for them to manage. After perfecting her recipe, she decided to turn her newfound skill into a business.

Because she started the noodle shop with her family in mind, Huang-Zi has worked hard to make sure that her business does not take her away from her family. Her husband is the only other person that works in the business, and she prefers to think of him as a coworker as opposed to her employee. Huang-Zi believes that working with her husband has strengthened their relationship and caused them to grow closer. However, Huang Zi has had to make many sacrifices over the years for her business. Owning her own business prevented her from spending all of her time with her children and participating in their school activities. She also does not know whether or not the business will continue after she retires, as she does not want her children to feel obligated to abandon their careers and carry on the noodle shop. Despite

these sacrifices, Huang-Zi believes that family comes first, and she truly feels that she has devoted everything she can to her family.

Being a woman in the business world has given Huang-Zi a great deal of insight into the discrepancies in how men and women are treated. While Huang-Zi was not familiar with the term "feminism," she did seem to agree with feminism's general belief that men and women should be equal in all aspects. Huang-Zi noted that men tend to put a lot of pressure on females, especially in the entrepreneurial world. In order to combat this, she says, women must be prepared to fight for respect. Women must be willing to rise to power in order to gain others' respect, but gaining others' respect is itself a precondition for rising to power: it's a difficult problem. Huang-Zi is not alone in this belief, and she stands by the notion that women are capable of much more than society usually says is possible for them.

In addition to being a business owner, Huang-Zi participates in her local government and holds the title of *li zhang*, or district mayor. A *li* is the smallest urban administrative area in Taiwan, and Huang-Zi's *li* is comprised of 1,790 households, with a total population of 3,350. The *li zhang*

*"BEING A WOMAN IN THE BUSINESS WORLD HAS GIVEN HUANG-ZI A GREAT DEAL OF INSIGHT INTO THE DISCREPANCIES IN HOW MEN AND WOMEN ARE TREATED."*



has a variety of duties. Huang-Zi organizes traditional activities for holidays to promote cultural awareness. She also is responsible for providing “family services,” meaning that she offers assistance and support to families that are experiencing hardship, often by helping them apply for government services such as welfare relief. Additionally, Huang-Zi coordinates volunteer days on which community members come together to clean up their neighborhoods. The *li zhang* position does not come with a personal stipend or salary, only a small budget (around US\$1380 per month, according to published sources) for community service projects and general administrative expenses. In fact, Huang-Zi said she regularly helps to sponsor projects on her own dime.

Huang-Zi has a few new projects in mind if she is re-elected to another four-year term. Her first priority would be updating the community’s public buildings. Some of those buildings are over thirty years old, so they need cleaning and renovation. Her second priority would be



constructing a public park. As *li zhang*, Huang-Zi is very concerned about promoting physical activity while also building a sense of community. Huang-Zi believes that creating a space that can be used by all members of the li will liven up the community that she loves so dearly.

Over the last two decades, Huang-Zi has faced no competitor larger than herself. Her need to continually improve has driven her to work hard in every aspect of her life: in her business roles, community roles, and family roles. Huang-Zi firmly believes that anyone who is willing to push themselves will develop the confidence and skills they need to succeed, and make the best of any situation they face.

→ “HUANG-ZI FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT ANYONE WHO IS WILLING TO PUSH THEMSELVES WILL DEVELOP THE CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED, AND MAKE THE BEST OF ANY SITUATION THEY FACE.”



# 6

## SISTERS IN A FEMINIST PROJECT PIN AND PEI HSIN AND SOCORRO (LADY) HOSTEL

BY ASHLEY HENRY

Imagine being able to travel anywhere you like in an UFO. Sounds pretty interesting, right? Well that's what two sisters Pin and Pei Hsin from Tainan, Taiwan thought too. Quietly tucked away on a side street in Tainan there is a small intimate hostel consisting of two rooms with four beds known as Socorro (Lady) Hostel. The business has been open for three years. The size of Socorro is not the only thing that makes this small hostel unique. It is also an all women hostel; therefore the name: Socorro (Lady) Hostel.



Pin and Pei both feel this all female setting helps parents of young woman feel more at ease knowing that the hostel where their daughters are staying is all female. We interviewed both young women about their business--the history behind the start up, the continuation of the business, and day to day duties of the owners of this very unique hostel.

Where did the sisters come up with the idea of owning and operating a hostel? The idea came from Pin. She had previously worked in other hostels and hotels in Taipei, Taiwan, and from these experiences she had an understanding of how to run a hostel. The two sisters decided it was a better idea to have a small hostel rather than work in a large corporate setting. Pei also recounted her feelings and experiences as a foreigner traveling in different countries. The generosity of the people from those countries led her to want to create this same atmosphere in her hometown. The ability to provide detailed attention to each guest was a founding idea behind this very intimate hostel for females only.

Pin and Pei named the hostel Socorro for personal and linguistic reasons. Pin was a high school exchange student in Socorro, New Mexico, and she has good memories of her time there. The word socorro

in Spanish means help or relief, and the sisters provide help to their guests. She also indicated that the pronunciation of socorro sounds like a Chinese word that means to take care of your guest. So, altogether the name seemed perfect for the hostel. The logo of the hostel is a UFO in the sky which is a reference back to Socorro as well since it was the site of a well-known UFO sighting in 1964. Pei thinks it would be the greatest thing to travel by UFO.

The small hostel has a modern feel in a traditional building and setting. The small lobby interior has dark brown walls with track lighting and brightly colored, well-lit paintings on the wall. The newly renovated interior is small but welcoming. The stone steps lead to a second floor small, common room with natural light from windows and more original paintings on the wall. The back of the first floor has a shared compact bathroom with two small sinks and a combined toilet/shower room. Upstairs beyond the common room are two bedrooms each sleeping two people, one with two singles and one with bunkbeds. There is an additional hide-away bed upon request to reach a total sleeping capacity of five. The two sisters run the business and do everything from cooking, cleaning, registration, and customer relations. The hostel has all the

*"THE GENEROSITY OF THE PEOPLE FROM THOSE COUNTRIES LED HER TO WANT TO CREATE THIS SAME ATMOSPHERE IN HER HOMETOWN."*

modern conveniences, such as free wifi and individually wall-mounted air conditioning units (as in many Taiwan establishments).

The hostel owners Pin and Pei work around the guest times for arrival and departure, so their hours of business change constantly. Having to wait for a guest when they arrive late is one example of how the hours of business fluctuate. Average hours of business are from ten AM to three PM. The hostel has around forty guests per month. Socorro gives very tailored, local services for each guest and informs guests of the activities that are happening in the different areas of Tainan and provides a map of the area designed by the owners. Pin and Pei enjoy taking their guests out and showing them around to shopping festivals and any other activity the guest may enjoy. Pin and Pei grew up in Tainan and have the local knowledge that helps them to know the events happening on a day-to-day basis.

The owners have no employees, so they gather most of their own supplies from cleaning stores depending on the best deals of each product from these select stores. Most of the supplies consist of cleaners, toiletries, and refreshments. Finding guests to stay at Socorro is mostly

done through the internet from websites like Facebook. Guest can book and contact Socorro from a site they are familiar with and able to navigate easily. The business' primary languages are English and Mandarin Chinese. The guests of Socorro are mostly from Asian countries with a few Western guests. Pin indicates that it is very important to understand the background, nationality and ethnicity of each guest.

We asked Pei why Socorro is only for female guests. Pei indicated that males can be more trouble than females. Space is also an issue. Because it is a small, shared space, there can be a more relaxing environment when the clients are all female. This female only policy may seem to cause a strain on guest occupancy, but this is not the case. Pei says that operating a hostel for all female accommodation is different than running a hostel for both genders. When anyone is packing for their trip, certain items, such as nail polish, are not packed because they are not a necessity. So, the hostel supplies little items like nail polish and feminine products to help ease the guest stay at Socorro. The paintings in the hostel are female-centered and greatly add to



the welcoming atmosphere; however, the original space design did not include these paintings. One of Pei's close friends likes to paint, and the sisters invited her to have an exhibition for the hostel opening. The paintings fit well with the design of the space, and so they remain on the walls. The paintings resonate with the female theme of the hostel and with the sisters' intention to have creative work in the hostel.

During the interviews we asked both Pin and Pei about their family relationships. How did their family help with the start up of the business and how does the business affect their relationship with their family? Pei tells us that her father helped financially with start up money, along with Pin's savings. Their family, especially their father, helped with the construction of the building and with moving the furniture which was donated to the hostel by other family members. During the development stages of Socorro Pin and Pei's family thought the business would fail and that it was just a waste of money. Pin shared with us: "They (her family) now trust us when we say we can do what we said we would do." Pin and Pei proved themselves to their family by opening and maintaining Socorro (Lady) Hostel. And when Socorro finally opened, friends and family helped to advertise as well as be there for emotional support. Family

members even pretended to be guests for a trial run. Running the hostel makes helping out with family household duties very difficult Pin says.

Pin and Pei are co-owners of Socorro, so they are running a family business with a sibling. Pin indicates that they fight a lot but always are able to come to a point and figure it out. As partners in business they are both the boss and employee. Pin recounts that she didn't want to take orders and yet, she didn't want to give orders either. Running a small business makes it possible for Pin to be her own boss and yet not have to worry about employees; she is able to not take or give orders. Pin thinks owning a business has a higher social standing in Taiwan, yet she is a bit embarrassed by her business and tells us she feels people think she is joking when she tells them how small the hostel is. Pin does not think of herself as an entrepreneur and wants to be a playwright. Pei, on the other hand, talks about how people admire her for being so young and owning a business. The sisters note that running a business takes over other parts of one's life. Being an entrepreneur is a 24/7 job where personal life and the job mix because there is no off the clock.





During our interview with Pin and Pei we asked if their business interferes with their love life. Pin told us how she met her boyfriend while running Socorro. When Socorro first opened, many guests booking a reservation would not read the female only policy of the hostel and the hostel name was only Socorro in the early stage of the business. Therefore, men made reservations to stay at Socorro. This is how Pin met her boyfriend. He was one of the men who booked a room and did not read the policy stating that only women could stay at Socorro. Pin has some work-life balance issues. Pin's boyfriend understands her duties as an entrepreneur because he was a guest. However, he does get a little mad when a guest is late because Pin or Pei has to wait for the guest and they are not making any money for the time they are waiting. Pin does have a conflict between her love life and her business because her boyfriend lives in Hong Kong and has a good job, so Pin thinks she will have to move to Hong Kong and give up operating the hostel. Pei indicates that her romantic relationship is a long distance relationship, but it has not progressed to the point where one of the partners needs to decide to move.

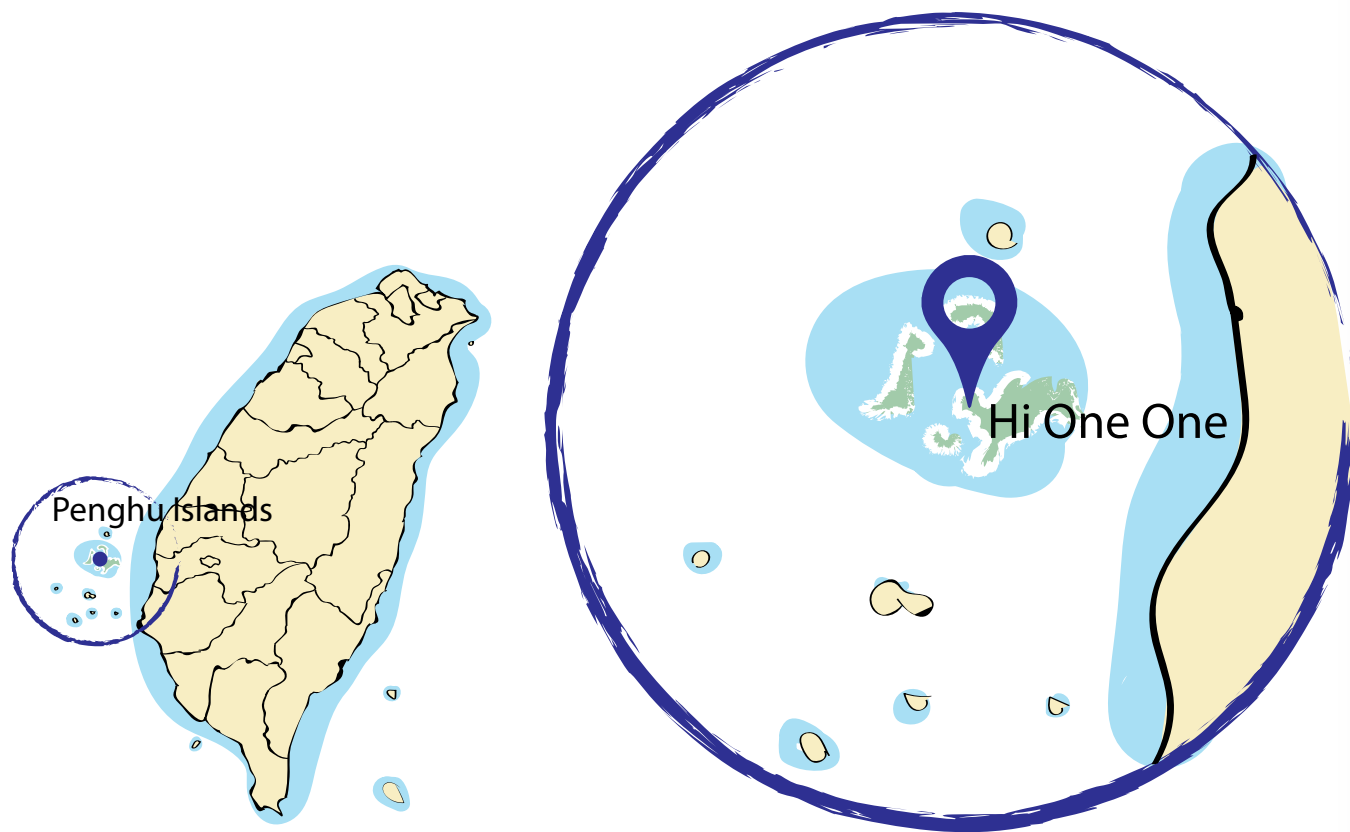
Pin tells us how both her and Pei wanted to make a professional network of other hostel owners in Taiwan. Yet, the business is constantly changing. People open a hostel in a year and then maybe next year the hostel is closed. They indicate that it is hard to formalize a network that is constantly changing. Pin goes into detail about how one gentleman, who we will call Mr. Hong Kong, helped Pin and Pei with a great deal of advice. Mr. Hong Kong has a health business running hostels in Taipei. During Mr. Hong Kong's free time he enjoys advising other hostels during their start up period. The main piece of advice he gave to Socorro was to add to the name (Lady) hostel. Because men would make reservations and stay, when the hostel is for women only. Pin and Pei, like Mr. Hong Kong, are helping out a new hostel in Tainan: Good Gardens. They help out where they can and try to give advice. The Chatham research team of eight stayed at the newly opened Good Gardens Hostel in Tainan.

In response to our questions, both sisters gave their own personal definitions of feminism. Pei said, "Female is as capable as Male. Basic personal ability should not be based on gender but on advancement of goals." Pei considers herself a feminist. Female objectification makes Pei

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very angry, especially on TV programs. Pei studied art and says she has been influenced by Frieda Kahlo, a Mexican painter whose work, especially her self-portraits, is very female-centered.

Pin also identifies as a feminist. "Yes, I feel I am. For example: I become very angry when I go to the store and buy Feminine products and they put it in a brown bag instead of a clear bag. They feel you are embarrassed about having to buy the products. This makes me very angry." Pin also thought there was a double standard where men who cannot find a Taiwanese bride will import one from Southeast Asia, so why can't a Taiwanese woman mail-order a groom. Pin indicates that some people think that feminists don't care about other people, they just do what they want and are very self-centered. But, in general Pin thinks that people will judge women based on the things that she does and not condemn her as a feminist. Pin also thinks people should be judged based on their actions not by their gender.



# 7

## AMBASSADOR FOR PENGHU ISLANDS MEI-HUI AND HI ONE ONE HOMESTAY

BY CHARLOTTE E. LOTT

We almost did not go to the Penghu Islands. As our Chatham research team planned the itinerary for our Taiwan research travel, the Penghu Islands, a set of small islands off the west coast in the Taiwan Strait, seemed out of the way and perhaps without a lot of benefit for our project of interviewing women entrepreneurs. However, the students were very excited about going to as many places as possible while we were in Taiwan, so we retained our three night stay on the Penghu Islands. We contacted a woman entrepreneur who had a homestay on the main island as our place of residence and for an interview to further our research. Our stay on Penghu Islands ended up being a highlight of our adventures.



The Penghu Islands have both geologically and historically interesting sites along with beautiful beaches. We had a day of water fun on sandbars, and a daylong tour of island sites. We saw a huge banyan tree hundreds of years old, columnar basalt formations, Chinese forts, lava outcroppings, giant turtles living in a temple, and a traditional historic village. We had a traditional meal, stinky tofu and a night of fireworks. The Penghu Islands are a tourist destination for Taiwanese and mainland Chinese as well as tourists from further away like us.

In a residential area of the island, north of the center city and overlooking a bay, the five boldly colored houses around a grass lawn were built five years ago and have all the amenities of a modern guest house. The Siwei Ocean group of five homestays is a project of five women who wanted to retire together. So, they decided to share a residential area, then they decided to each open a homestay. On the web site for the homestays there are five colored house pictures. Each picture takes the browser to the website of one of the five homestays. At Hi One One (the green house) the guest rooms accommodate sixteen guests and have luxurious modern bathrooms attached to each one with a maritime theme for each floor. The downstairs common area is large, modern and

comfortable with tables and chairs for eating, a lobby area, and a separate lounge area with couches. The private family area is on the first floor.

Mei-Hui's husband thought up the name of the business—Hi One One. The group of five homestays all agreed that all five names should begin with “Hi,” which means ocean or sea. “One” is the second syllable in Taiwan and it means a cove or an indentation in the coast line; so, the initial name was Hi One. However, the name sounded too formal or stiff, and they wanted a more playful feeling. Doubling the second word made the name Hi One One, which was approved by their friends as more attractive. The name was memorable for our group, and we always referred to this interview with the name of the business.

Mei-Hui wants to work with people who treat other people with dignity and fairness. She and her business friends do not try to take advantage of others or just make money off their guests. Her relationship with her friends depends on sincerity, reliability and honesty. Her philosophy of life means she treats all her relationships as though people were her family. Just as she wants members of her family to be happy, she also wants her relationships with her business partners, her suppliers, her

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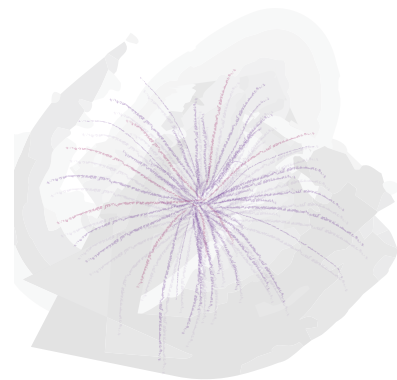
employees, and her guests to be built on happiness and satisfaction. Mei-Hui's goal in business is to make her guests like Penghu and want to come back again.

Mei-Hui works very long hours to provide complete service to the couples and families (and groups like ours) who seek accommodation at the Hi One One homestay. She reported that she often starts her day at 6am to have breakfast available and to assist her guests to get ready to leave for a day of activities on the islands. And then she often works until late in the evening to arrange for transportation, tours, restaurant reservations or any other activity for her guests. She said, "You can say it's a long time, but it's a very happy time." We experienced her dedicated service when we arrived. She sat down with the faculty leaders of our group and helped us to plan our stay, including a trip to the beach, a restaurant with traditional Penghu food, a day of water activities, a visit to a cultural museum, and a daylong tour of the islands. Mei-Hui helped us to find activities to satisfy each member of our group.

Operating the homestay allows Mei-Hui to combine family and work-life. As a tour guide, she worked very long hours away from her family;

at the homestay she still works long hours, but now she is also able to tend to her family. Her relationship with her husband and her sons has improved with her ownership of the homestay. She indicated that her sons can now see how hard she works at her job, and they respect her ability as a business owner. One of her sons also works in the business and her husband is able to help out on the weekends with maintenance of the facility. Mei-Hui also thinks of her female employee as a member of the family like a goddaughter. In fact Mei-Hui used a reference to family to discuss her suppliers and her customers. She thinks of her relationship with suppliers as a friendship relationship where they can discuss things together each providing their own opinion and then find a solution to any problems. She wants her customers to feel like her place is their home with wide open, comfortable but uncluttered common spaces and well-designed private rooms. She thinks of herself as maintaining all of these relationships—employee, supplier, customer—in such a way that everyone is happy.



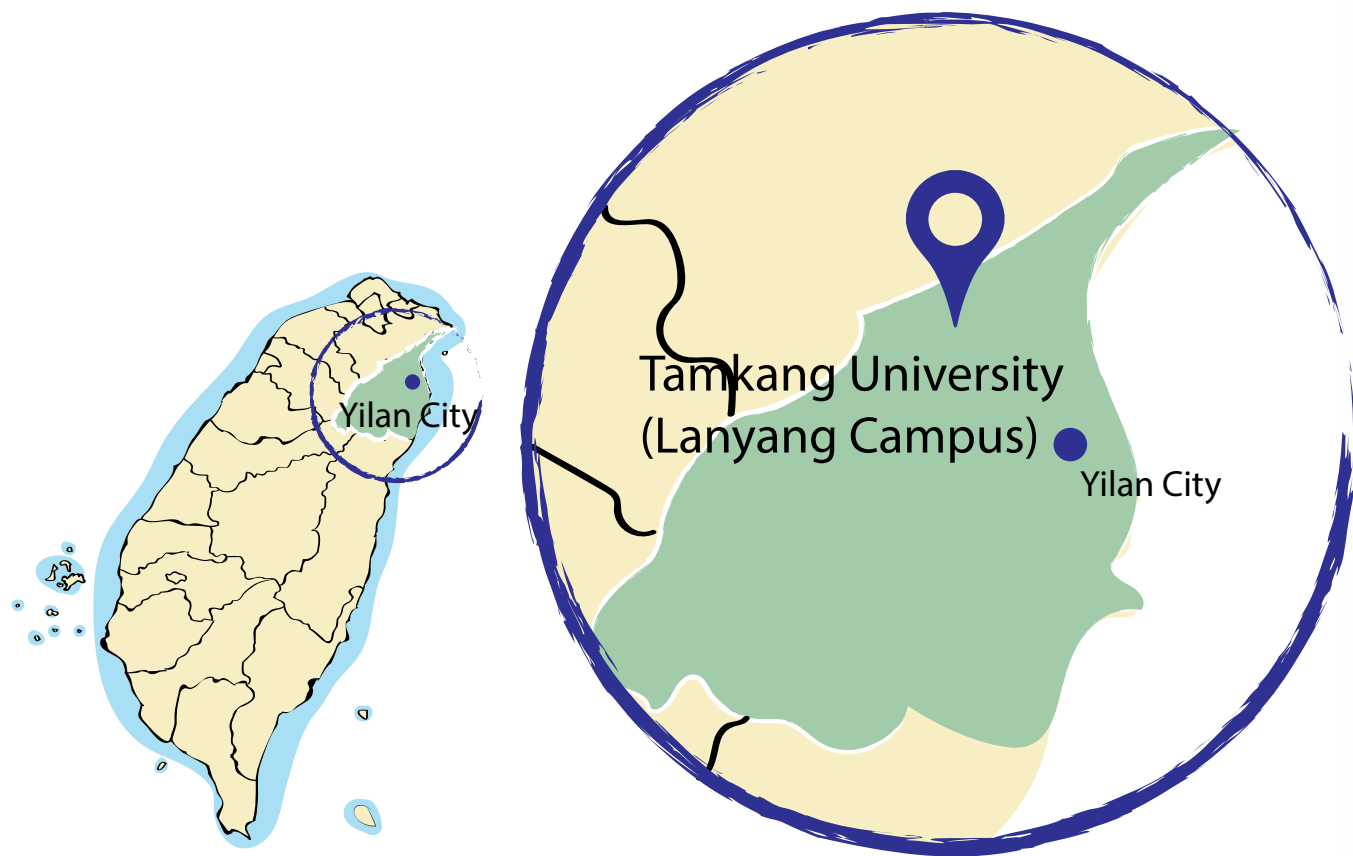


Like many of women we interviewed, Mei-Hui identified feminism with aggressive and even tough women and with being very serious and competitive. She associated feminists as being over on the big island in Taipei or other big urban areas. While she indicated that she very much likes her work, she thinks of herself as being in the recreational business and about having fun. So, she does not identify with that type of feminism. But on the survey she agreed that she was a feminist and in the interview she told about how she was the first female tour guide hired at the tourism agency where she worked before running the homestay. The tour guide business had its head office in Taipei, and the male owner did not want to hire female tour guides because he believed that women would be absent from work due to family obligations, so they would not be reliable and they would not do the work well. He thought women tour guides were "a lot of trouble." After she convinced him to hire her, she worked very hard at her job and proved him wrong about women tour guides. Then, the company had a change of policy and hired other women to be tour guides. She was pleased to report, "I am very happy that I was able to change his opinion and his outlook."

Mei-Hui believes that Taiwan is still a male dominated society where men have greater positions of power in society. But over the past years there has been a movement for gender equality which she thinks has been successful in achieving more equality for women in many spheres of life. She does not think being female has created any problems for her in her business life. She is a very optimistic person, and she said that if something doesn't work out then something else comes along. So, she does not feel she has any challenges to overcome. When talking about her female employee and her son who works in the business, she did believe that women have strengths in some areas and men in other areas. She thinks women are more detail oriented and good at following instructions which makes them better at management of the business while men are better at things that require independent judgment and handling external business relations. She thinks that women are well suited to run homestays which are a fairly small businesses. She said that women are very attentive and conscientious and make certain to see what their guests need and then to take care of that.



Mei-Hui is an ambassador for the Penghu Islands. She indicated that homestay lodgings have become an essential part of the tourist industry on Penghu. These homestays emphasize complete service to the guests to help them to find what they want to do on the Islands. Mei-Hui ended the interview by relating that several of her guests really fell in love with Penghu and they came back and built houses and became residents. She feels great satisfaction when people enjoy the Penghu Islands.



# 8

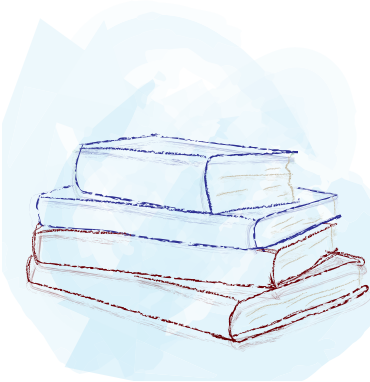
AUNTIE ON CAMPUS  
YU JIN LIN AND AMBROSIA EVERYTIME

BY RACHEL McNORTON

The black dry-erase board outside reads, “每日特餐” or “daily special,” and the special today is “紅燒肉” or Hóng shāo ròu -- red braised pork, a classic pork dish from Mainland China. It is made with pork belly and a combination of ginger, garlic, spices, chili pepper, sugar, soy, and rice wine. The board also features a cartoon pig with a pink, curly tail, and the price of the daily special: \$60 New Taiwanese Dollars (NT). There is also a smiling caricature of a student in glasses.



Ambrosia Everytime is a campus eatery owned and operated by Yu Jin Lin, who goes by Āiyí (阿姨), which is Taiwanese for “Auntie.” Aiyi’s eatery is on the Lanyang Campus of Tamkang University (TKU), near the small city of Chiao-hsi, in Yilan County. The campus is on the slope of Mt. Linmei, and stretches across forty acres of picturesque mountain scenery. Spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean and Turtle Island (Guishan Island) can be seen in the distance.



Aiyi opened her own restaurant six years ago. Her original location was also on campus, next door to the current space, but it was too small. She has been in the current space for only one semester, but she thinks it is better. The previous owner named the restaurant Ambrosia Everytime, and Aiyi never bothered to change the name because she doesn’t think it matters very much. Her focus is on the food she prepares and the relationships she develops with her student customers.

Aiyi’s day begins at 6 a.m. when she arrives at the restaurant and begins to prepare black tea. Business hours are from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m, but her day is over at 10 p.m., after she has cleaned up and prepared everything for the next day. The interior is plain and functional, with white

tables, white chairs, and white walls dotted with monochrome images of trendy pop culture figures, including a photo of Andy Warhol. The kitchen space is strictly utilitarian with metal tabletops and every type of crockery imaginable.

The décor may be simple, but the aromas from the kitchen are anything but that. Aiyi’s food is an explosion of Taiwanese flavor and the comforting flavors of home. Taiwanese cuisine relies on an abundant array of seasonings for flavor, such as soy sauce, rice wine, sesame oil, pickled daikon, peanuts, chili peppers, cilantro, and a local variety of basil (九層塔, káu-chàn-thâh in Taiwanese, jiǔ céng tā in Mandarin: literally, “nine story pagoda”).

As a female entrepreneur and business owner, Aiyi says her relationship with the students is like that of a “mother and kids.” Aiyi treats the students like her family. She is their “auntie” on campus. She enjoys the simple environment of TKU Lanyang’s Campus because her clientele is mainly students and professors. She does not want the students who volunteer in her restaurant to pay for their food, but instead gives it to them as a “thank you” for their help and support. However, the volun-

→ *“AS A FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR AND BUSINESS OWNER, AIYI SAYS HER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STUDENTS IS LIKE THAT OF A ‘MOTHER AND KIDS.’ AIYI TREATS THE STUDENTS LIKE HER FAMILY. SHE IS THEIR ‘AUNTIE’ ON CAMPUS.”*

teers still pay for the food because they think that Aiyi works very hard and deserves it even though they have helped her. In response, Aiyi then buys something special to cook and treats them to that dish, as a sign of her thanks to them.

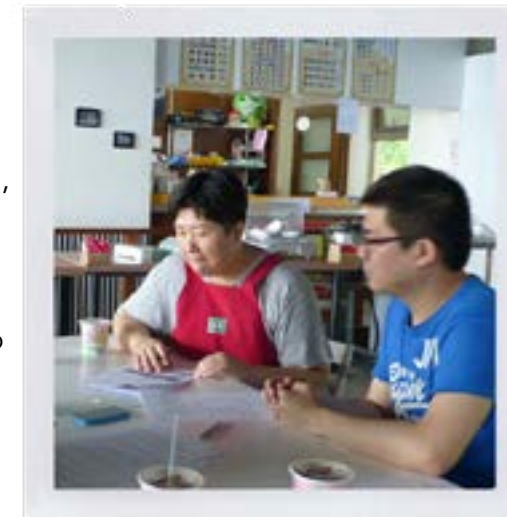


Aiyi has no formal training as a cook or business owner. Her start-up capital was borrowed from her sister, and her cooking skills were learned from her parents. All of the recipes were perfected through trial and error. She opened the restaurant because she needed a way to support herself, and a friend suggested she try this kind of work. Aiyi owns and operates the business alone, with occasional help from student volunteers and, during

exam periods, her mother as well. She doesn't belong to any business associations or other networks. She's an independent enterprise.

Aiyi says she has no free time outside work. Even though she lives with her mother, and her sister is also nearby, she seldom shares with them the pressure and stress she encounters while at work. She says her

mother is getting older, and her sister is busy with her own business—a real estate company where one of Aiyi's sons also works—so she doesn't want to burden them. Aiyi's other son lives in Kaohsiung, nearly a full day's journey by train from Chiao-hsi. However, she does get help with the accounting from her sister, and feels lucky that her relationship with her family has not been adversely affected by her work as a restaurant owner. Still, she has very little time for herself.



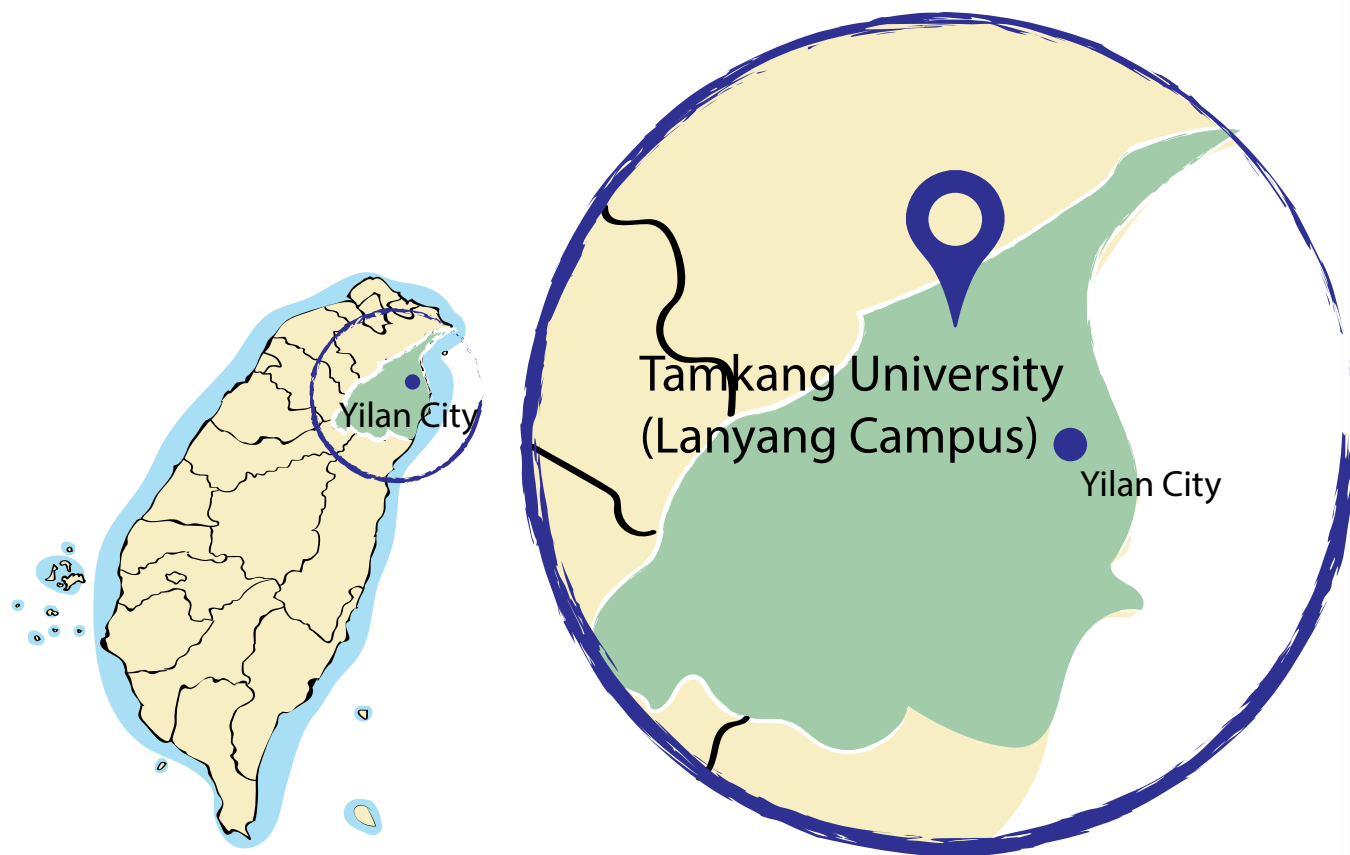
Being an independent restaurant owner has afforded Aiyi the opportunity to have an identity outside of her family. She describes herself as "a small form of boss." Aiyi explained that she opened the restaurant to make a living, not to make lots of money. She enjoys her everyday interactions and the relationships she has developed with the students. She doesn't want to expand her business because that might diminish the closeness of those relationships.

→ "SHE DOESN'T WANT TO EXPAND HER BUSINESS BECAUSE THAT MIGHT DIMINISH THE CLOSENESS OF THOSE RELATIONSHIPS."

She has developed good, cooperative business relationships with her suppliers, who are male. She prefers male suppliers because she thinks they are more direct. She has never worked with a female supplier, as she has found them more difficult to communicate with. She says they are less straightforward.

On more than one occasion, Aiyi has wanted to give up. The mounting responsibilities and lack of free time weigh on her, along with her inability to spend time with her family, but then she thinks of the students. Aiyi feels that the students are her family and she cannot shake her affection for them. She finds the students to be remarkably supportive, encouraging her and helping her when they can, and in turn she provides them with delicious and comforting food.

Aiyi says she doesn't understand what the term "feminism" means. However, she is familiar with the "Women's Movement" in Taiwan. She says she has not found many feminists in Taiwan.



# 9

SINGLE MOTHER, BUSINESS-PARTNER SISTER, AND  
CAMPUS CHEF  
CHIU MIN TSAI AND STEAMED DELICACIES  
BY KRISTINA HRUSKA AND CHLOE BELL

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of Tamkang University's beautiful hilltop campus, the Tsai sisters have established the college students' dream: a healthy, affordable restaurant with a wide variety of options. Steamed Delicacies, as the name suggests, offers noodles and rice with steamed or braised vegetables, tofu, and assorted meats. The sisters also make their own delightful dumplings. Customers, who are solely campus members, i.e. students, faculty, and staff, often call orders in to avoid long waits. On busy days, the two sisters rely on help from hungry student volunteers, who are given food in exchange for work. And with the 1,000 customers in and out during the week, one can see where the help of volunteers would be necessary.





Chiu Min Tsai, the sister interviewed for this profile, explained that the restaurant is operated on the basis of an annual contract with the university. While the contract may restrain her ability to design the space as she pleases, she does have full control over the menu items, which is something she takes pride in. She works from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. most days, to cover all the regular meal hours for the university community. She says that the key to her restaurant's success is treating her customers, the students, as if they were her own family. She has been known to have homemade soup delivered to students who are feeling under the weather. Chiu Min believes that making the customers feel at home will encourage them to continue their patronage while also providing a sense of family they may be missing while away at college.

It is quite apparent that family is a very important part of Chiu Min's life. Chiu Min opened Steamed Delicacies almost ten years ago as a way to support her family. As a single mother, she has worked harder than most to provide for her three daughters. Unfortunately, owning a business to support a family often puts Chiu Min in a catch-22 situation. Chiu Min works long hours to make ends meet, but in turn, these long hours at the restaurant take the place of spending time with her daughters.

Because of her long hours at the restaurant, Chiu Min cannot run to her daughters' aid at the drop of a hat. Thankfully, her family is very supportive and willing to help. If she runs out of vegetables at the restaurant or needs someone to pick up the girls from school, Chiu Min knows she can rely on her family for assistance.

Chiu Min's experience as a single mother in Yilan has certainly been impacted by the conventional ideologies of the inhabitants of this rural area. Although many people in Yilan do believe in the concept of equal pay and female empowerment, these ideas are at war with traditional gender roles. Many hold the belief that women ought stay at home and take care of the home and children. Chiu Min has experienced some difficulty in balancing all her roles, as she has to act as both a mother and father figure for daughters. She must be the breadwinner and the nurturer, and yet there simply are not enough hours



in the day to do it all. Chiu Min hopes that as society becomes more progressive, it will become easier for single parents to raise and provide for their children. Until then, she will continue doing the best she can to provide a great life for her family.

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# CONCLUSION

MEANINGS OF EMPOWERMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF OUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

BY SOOK YEE LEUNG

Empowerment is not a simple, one-dimensional concept. Take, for instance, the empowerment of Taiwanese female entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry: there are economic, gender, and national-cultural dimensions for all of the individuals in this group. Through our research, it became clear that all of these dimensions should be taken into account.



From an economic perspective, these female entrepreneurs are empowered because they are earning a stable income from their work—and can support themselves. All but one of our fourteen participants had owned and operated their businesses for many years; eight of them had been in business for more than a decade. This point reminds us of “A Room of One’s Own,” in which Virginia Woolf proclaimed women’s right of access to the financial means needed for pursuing their own dreams.

However, from the social perspective, those of us from a western society may question whether these entrepreneurs are truly empowered. That is, are these female entrepreneurs equal to their male counterparts? From a wider societal gender perspective, the entrepreneurs may be working to perpetuate the inherently unequal manner of labor distribution among males and females: they are working in hospitality, an industry that is stereotypically female—and are now cooking and cleaning of their own volition (McAdam, 2013, p.9). Moreover, all the participants except one (whose restaurant accommodated between 100 and 300 customers daily) stated that her business was smaller and less commercially successful than the restaurant and hotel chains of her male counterparts.

Nevertheless, economics and societal observations only describe part of the story. Due to the in-depth interview nature and small participant sample (similar to Scott Simon’s anthropological research in *Sweet and Sour*), we gained insight into the personal nature of empowerment for these entrepreneurs. According to the academic literature in management and psychology, empowerment can be described as the ability ‘to enable’ the individual and others around the individual to achieve a common goal (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p.473). In our interviews, we found that each entrepreneur described how she became more able to control her life and also effected, through her work, meaningful change in others’ lives.

It seems that the nature of personal empowerment in Taiwan differs fundamentally from the individualistic perception of empowerment in western societies. Taiwanese society idealizes harmonious relationships among all, whereas Western societies idealize the pioneering individual over the status quo (Hwang et al., 2009). Unsurprisingly, business relationships or *guanxi* are a key element in Taiwan’s business world (Hwang et al., 2009, p.235). *Guanxi* can be described as an inter-personal system promoting “mutual obligation, assurance, trust, and understand-

ing" for "long term and social business relationships" (Hwang et al., 2009, p. 235).

Inherent in guanxi cultivation is social interaction within a context that facilitates gender norms. Taiwanese gender norms ascribe to men characteristics that seem more apt for entrepreneurs than those ascribed to women. Taiwanese cultural gender roles provide a clear distinction of expectations of male and female work: "[b]oys are raised to be dominant, assertive, and goal oriented, while girls are taught to be passive, obedient, and adaptable" ("Taiwan", 2003, para. 16). Research has also indicated that women who challenge gender norms may incur "penalties such as dislike and immense negativity" (McAdam, 2013, p.27). Therefore, the ideal female entrepreneur in the Western sense would be seen as too independent, disharmonious with society, and, perhaps, too aggressive. A female entrepreneur in this industry who exhibits the western individualist characteristics typical of entrepreneurs may risk alienation from her peers and others in her guanxi network.

Nevertheless, a major finding of our work is that these women successfully negotiated with surrounding individuals in ways that furthered

their work. Our entrepreneurs tended to surround themselves with individuals who supported or, at least, did not oppose their work. Married participants, in particular, described their marriages as allowing a role balance in sharing and/or making time for household work and business (Xu & Lai, 2004, p.319). Our entrepreneurs were also resourceful: they used stereotypes as differentiators. The hospitality industry emphasizes feminine characteristics, so when these entrepreneurs negotiated gender norms on a personal and interpersonal level, they made choices that strategically established and maintained their businesses. When, for instance, these entrepreneurs described their relationship-focused approach to customers and employees, they seem not merely to be following typical habits in an industry that prioritizes close social contact and a warm manner, but leveraging their own gender ascriptions in ways that contribute to the success of their businesses. The limited scale of most of their businesses may be a consequence, however, of this relationship-focused approach.

Research has shown that female entrepreneurs tended to employ transformational leadership more than men (Burke & Collins, 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003).

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Transformational leadership leverages forming “positive relationships with subordinates in order to strengthen employee and organizational performance” (Burke & Collins, 2001, p.245; Eagly et al., 2003, p.583). By way of contrast, males have been found to employ leadership tools like management-by-exception, a tool which, in a patriarchal society, is traditionally available to males. This type of leadership leverages positional rank to “reward/penalize subordinates” in order to maintain employee performance (Burke & Collins, 2001; Eagly et al., 2003). The entrepreneurs in our study might, however, also be influenced by other, Taiwanese-style cultural patterns: as shown in Javidan and Carl’s (2005) research comparing Taiwanese and Canadian managers, Taiwanese management styles “are more focused on cooperation, work climate, and belongingness to the organization” (Javidan & Carl, 2005, p.40). In any case, our interviewee accounts show that positive relationship formation was a goal among female entrepreneurs for employees and customers alike.

Therefore, it is not surprising that their businesses often had characteristics typical of the third place, i.e., a gathering place for patrons that exists apart from work and home (Oldenburg & Brisset, 1987, p.267).

Our interview participants described many efforts towards maintaining and forming positive relationships with regular guests, such as chatting with restaurant patrons or helping hostel guests become acquainted with each other to build a sense of community. One participant remarked that she did not wish to expand her business because she would lose the personal interaction she had with customers.

In sum, the thematic qualitative analysis of our participants’ interviews demonstrated that empowerment has multiple layers, which offers further insight into the complex nature of personal empowerment. Our entrepreneurs made choices negotiating gender norms on a personal and interpersonal level as they strategically established and maintained their business. Throughout the process, our Taiwanese female entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry (1) comfortably balanced family and work roles and (2) built positive relationships to successfully manage employee and customer relations.

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