

# foodtalk



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Maymay Wan

# It's a Woman's World

March 8th this year marked the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. More than a century since the first women's reforms, how have women's lives changed in the workplace? We speak to four of Hong Kong's leading ladies.

## 女性撐起「整」片天

今年的3月8日是國際婦女節的100週年紀念。婦女解放運動迄今已經超過一個世紀，女性在職場中的待遇有何改變？以下我們將會看一看本港四位餐飲業女性的經歷。

Since she was little, **Maymay Wan** has wanted to be a pâtissière. "Cakes are delicious and the shapes are so intricate - it's almost magical," she would muse. These were the things that lured her into training professionally as a pastry chef. From her first job at popular chain Italian Tomato, she moved through hotels like the five-star Hong Kong Hotel, and then started her own custom cake business. "It was my dream, to be able to create and realise my concepts," Wan says, but after a few years she found that she "could go further with (her) creativity," and when the SARS epidemic hit, it was a sign for her to end her entrepreneurial phase and rejoin the workforce to learn more. She started at premium patisserie chain Le Gouter Bernadaud, most famous for their macarons, around 8 years ago, and has since led the fledgling pastry kitchen for around five. "Men have accepted that they will be working with women, but whether they want them to be management is another thing... Only after 17 years in the industry have I been accepted as a leader, to be capable of leading other men". Her kitchen makes around 1000 macarons a day, plus numerous cakes and other pastries for the chain's five outlets across Hong Kong.

**Maymay Wan**從小就希望成為糕點師。她當時心想：「蛋糕又好吃、又好看，懂得做蛋糕的人就好像會變魔法一般。」所以長大後，她就決定要接受糕點製作的專業培訓。她的第一份工作是在連鎖店Italian Tomato擔任糕點廚師，其後她轉到酒店服務，如在五星級的香港酒店，最後甚至開始了自己的定制蛋糕業務。**Maymay Wan**這樣娓娓道來：「我的夢想就是能夠將心中所想化為現實。」但幾年後，她發現自己「在創意方面可以走得更前」。當時香港正受非典來襲，**Maymay Wan**亦結束了自己所開的蛋糕店，重投打工市場，希望在糕點製作方面更上一層樓。她加入了Le Gouter Bernadaud這間高級的糕點連鎖店，這間店舖以法國小甜餅聞名。她在那裡工作了大約8年，其中5年更領導糕點製作的業務。「許多餐飲業中的男性現時已經接受與女性合作的需要，但能否接受女性擔當管理層，則可能是另一回事.....我在餐飲這一行已經工作了17年，人們才接受我擔當領導，在店舖管理男下屬」。她的廚房每天製作約1000個法國小圓餅。Le Gouter Bernadaud在香港擁有五間店舖，除了小圓餅外，亦會製作蛋糕和其他甜品。

**Maymay Wan**在力爭上游的過程中確實遇到不少困難：「許多男人都太不願意相信女性可以做得和他們一樣好」。但她認為：



It's a bit of an uphill struggle at times, "many men have trouble trusting that women can be as good as them," but Wan believes that "in another decade, there will be many more women in management... at entry level, we're seeing many more girls, it's around half-half now."

**Phyllis Lam**, Product Manager at Pacific Coffee Company, sees a similar trend. Before joining Pacific Coffee, she spent more than a decade in the pastry kitchens of JW Marriott. Back then, "there were around 23 people on the team, and only two were women... there are more nowadays." She adds that many women are afraid to enter the industry because traditionally "kitchens consist of mostly men. As possibly the only woman, you'd feel quite lonely".

In addition to psychological barriers, physical constraints are also at play. **Bonnie Gokson**, creator of high-end bar and restaurant SEVVA, patisserie Ms B's CAKERY and C'est La B café-bar, says, "if it is a Cantonese kitchen, I doubt that women can handle the extreme heat and operating the weight of those heavy woks." Even in pastry, it's not all just dainty sugar art, "in our kitchens, there's a lot of heavy lifting, hauling around huge sacks of sugar, for example," says Wan. "It's true that women tend to struggle with heavy lifting," says Lam, "but that's just how it is, and you learn to work around it and take on tasks that the men might find difficult or are less willing to do".

Front of house, women tend to see the industry in a more a holistic light. To **Lindsay Jang**, the philosophy behind Yardbird, the wildly popular yakitori eatery that she and her partner chef Matt Abergel opened late last year, goes "beyond cauliflower and chicken," the dishes for which the restaurant is famous. "Of course the food is amazing, but it's more than that. The waiters remember your name, talk to you, it's the whole experience". Jang grew up working in her parents' restaurant in Canada, then moved to New York, making her way through different restaurants working front of house and in event coordination, eventually landing a job on the opening team of Nobu 57, the renowned chef's midtown establishment, in 2005. Three years later, she moved to Hong Kong with her partner, chef Matt Abergel. Her role has grown from front of house aspects like staff training and operations into catering for events outside the restaurant, such as the recent collaboration between luxury department store Lane Crawford and fashion boutique Liger, and consulting for the Pedder Group at Lane Crawford's new Library Café in Harbour City, Tsim Sha Tsui. The concept of lifestyle is also ingrained in Gokson's outlets, "it's just an extension of a lifestyle I have been shown as a small child and grown into... it's just like throwing a party and entertaining well at home everyday".

「在未來十年，我相信餐飲業的管理層中將會出現更多女性.....例如在初級管理職位，女性的人數的確增加了，男女的比例幾乎是一半一半」。

至於Pacific Coffee的產品經理**Phyllis Lam**也留意到類似的趨勢。在加入Pacific Coffee之前，她在JW Marriott酒店的糕點部服務了超過十年。當時，「在23人左右的團隊中，只有兩人是女性.....現時的情況當然大大不同了。」她補充說，許多女性都不太敢進入餐飲這個行業，原因是傳統上「廚房中看到的幾乎都是男人。如果你是唯一的女性，可能會覺得相當孤單」。



Bonnie Gokson

除了心理障礙外，也有一些實際問題會造成影響。**Bonnie Gokson**是高檔酒吧和餐廳SEVVA、Ms B's CAKERY及 C'est La B餐室酒吧的創辦人。她指出：「在粵菜廚房中，女性實在很難熬得過去，因為那裏非常熱、鑊又相當重。」即使是糕點製作，也不一定是輕鬆的工作。**Maymay Wan**這樣回應：「以我們的廚房為例，當中就有許多繁重的工作，例如要把盛載白糖的巨大麻布袋搬來搬去」。**Phyllis Lam**則指出：「不錯，女性需要學習應付在廚房中怎樣搬重物。但無論如何，你都需要學習適應，並主動發現有甚麼工作是男性覺得很難或不太願意做的，然後請纓幫忙」。





Lindsay Jang

至於在前台款待方面，女性的情況似乎較佳。Lindsay Jang與其身為廚師的夥伴Matt Abergel於去年底開設了Yardbird這間串燒餐館，他們最受歡迎的菜式是椰菜花及雞串燒。「我們的食物當然非常吸引，但我們餐廳的過人之處還包括侍應會記得你的名字，跟你聊天。因此整個進餐體驗總是令人非常難忘。」Lindsay Jang年少時在父母位於加拿大的餐廳工作，然後搬到紐約，她在不同的餐館擔當過款待的工作，並負責特別活動的統籌。她其後更有幸在2005年肩負起著名餐廳Nobu 57的開幕統籌工作。三年後，她與合作夥伴廚師 Matt Abergel移居香港。而她所擔任的角色自此變得更加全面，從原本的統籌員工培訓、管理餐廳營運擴展到安排餐廳以外的特別餐飲活動。舉例來說，最近她就為高級百貨商店連卡佛以及精品時裝店Liger 的合作出力，並為Pedder Group 於尖沙咀海港城連卡佛新開設的Library Café 提供諮詢服務。至於Gokson對生活的態度亦充份在其店鋪中體現出來：「這種生活態度是我從小一直培養的……就像每天在家裡開一場派對，總是快快樂樂的」。

"Sometimes I think it's easier when you're a girl, because it's a very social environment...  
Females grow up learning how to navigate social situations"

"我有時覺得身為女性反而更好，因為餐飲是一個涉及社交的行業…… 女性的人生經歷使她們更懂得處理社交場合"

- Lindsay Jang

Do women have their own place in the industry nowadays? In terms of gender perception, "not much has changed," says Lam, but women are finding their own niche and using to their advantage. Lam observes that "many female pastry chefs are now doing in fields such as custom wedding cake design, which is something (she thinks) men in general are less interested in." On the management front, for Gokson, "being the boss" means she "[does] not have power struggles". "I am given a lot of respect in which I am very thankful for," she adds. Jang says, "I have never, in my own experience, felt any (gender) divide... Sometimes I think it's easier when you're a girl, because it's a very social environment... Females grow up learning how to navigate social situations".

Without a doubt, food and beverage is, as Gokson says, "a very challenging business". What makes these women forge on? "With the opportunities that we're afforded right now, with all that's happening in Hong Kong," says Jang, "we want to take that energy we create (at Yardbird) and put it forward". The overall sentiment is neatly summed up by Lam, who says, "I love what I do". Gokson's advice is, "if one is serious and has the passion and dedication to be in the F&B business, then go for it." We can all take a leaf out of that book, whatever your chromosomes are.

女性現今在餐飲業中是否擁有自己的地位？在性別認知方面，Phyllis Lam認為「並無太大改變」，但女性逐漸找到自身的優勢並加以善用。她留意到「現在，有許多女性糕點師在做定制婚禮蛋糕設計，而她認為一般男性對這個領域一般不太感到興趣」。至於管理方面，Gokson認為如果自己當「老闆」，「就不會有權力鬥爭」。她補充說：「能獲得很多人的尊重，我心存感激」。Lindsay Jang則說：「我自己從來沒有感到任何的兩性鴻溝……有時我覺得身為女性反而更好，因為餐飲是一個涉及社交的行業……女性的人生經歷使她們更懂得處理社交場合」。

毫無疑問，如Gokson所言，餐飲業是「非常具挑戰性的行業」，女性可以怎樣迎頭趕上呢？Lindsay Jang這樣說：「香港餐飲業的發展提供了不少機會，以Yardbird為例，我們未來將會全力以赴」。至於Phyllis Lam則對整體情況作出了很好的概括：「我熱愛我的工作」。最後，Gokson的意見如下：「如果你願意認真投入餐飲業，並且對它充滿了熱情和專注，你就應該選擇這一行」。事實上，不論你的性別是什麼，我們都能在餐飲業創出一片天。



Phyllis Lam