Gender and Pay in Taiwan

Men’s Attitudes in 1963 and 1991

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ABSTRACT

In Taiwan as in the United States, even in the same industry and work status there is an earnings gap between men and women. The same question concerning attitudes toward “equal pay for equal work” was asked of two independently-drawn samples of male Taiwanese living in Taipei, the first time in 1963, and again in 1991. While 68% favored equal pay in 1963, this percent did not change significantly in the 1991 sample, despite 28 years of rapid and massive economic development and societal modernization. The respondents used a similar repertory of “reasons why” they supported or opposed equal pay for women in 1963 and 1991. To explain why the majority favored, but a minority opposed, equal pay, this attitude was regressed on three sets of hypothesized causal variables: a person’s objective status, subjective life chances, and involvement in the kinship system.

The logistic regression analysis shows that the variables with a significant impact on the log odds of a man’s favoring equal pay for women were largely different in 1991 as compared with 1963. We discuss the implications of the findings in the light of neoclassical economic theories of gender differences in human capital investment and statistical discrimination, sociological theories of job segregation and the structure of labor markets, and feminist theories of patriarchy.

ON MAY 22, 1994 more than a thousand university students and women’s rights advocates marched through the streets of Taipei. The protest sought to push the government into action against sexual harassment in schools, hospitals and the workplace, and to heighten awareness of male chauvinism in Taiwan. The protesters decried discrimination in the workplace and called for equal pay for equal work (Chan, 1994b: 4). The latter issue is the subject of this paper.

Some feminists argue that discrimination against women is a result of patriarchy (Hartmann, 1976). To sustain this claim, it is necessary to identify the specific elements of “patriarchy” that lead to specific aspects of discrimination. While many feminist studies focus exclusively on women, this paper deals with the attitudes of men. This makes sense given the theory of patriarchy: Hartmann’s (1976) classic

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IJCS XXXIX, 1
formulation argued that women are kept out of good jobs by a *collusion among men*—as husbands, employers, legislators and workers. Such a “cartel” or “gentlemen’s agreement” is seen as benefiting men as a group at the expense of women as a group.

The paper first reviews official government data from the Republic of China on women's earnings as a percentage of men's earnings in Taiwan. Hypotheses are then formulated to account for (1) stability or change in Taiwanese men's attitudes toward gender pay equality, as measured in two surveys in Taipei conducted 28 years apart, in 1963 and in 1991, and (2) why, in both the 1963 and the 1991 samples, some men favored, while others opposed, equal pay for equal work for men and women. Following the description of the methods and data we present the findings and discuss their implications.

**Gender Wage Differences in Taiwan**

The earliest data I have been able to find for Taiwan indicate that in 1973 women on average earned 54.5% of men's wages in manufacturing and 71.3% in service industry jobs (Cheng and Hsiung, 1993). Gannicott (1986) reported that women in Taiwan earned only 64% of men's earnings in 1982. When he decomposed these gross salary differentials, he found that “Even in the absence of any discrimination, women would still earn only about 85% of the male salary. This is because women as a group are far less endowed with productivity-enhancing characteristics” (Gannicott, 1986: 724). But he stressed that “men in Taiwan receive a constant premium over the female salary, even for approximately equal work for equal productivities” (Gannicott, 1986: 725; for a similar finding in the United States, see Treiman, Hartmann and Roos, 1984). The wage rate of women in Taiwan’s Export Processing Zones is set 10% to 20% lower than that of men employed in similar work (Fitting, 1982: 737). Cheng and Hsiung (1993: 48) found that the ratio of average wages for women compared to men in Taiwan in 1988 varied by occupational level—from only 48% of men's wages among production workers to 62% in clerical work and a high of 80% in managerial and administrative occupations.

For 1991, the data in Table 1 indicate that average monthly earnings of women as a percent of men's earnings in Taiwan varied from a low of 60.1% among salaried (i.e., white collar) employees in manufacturing to a high of 85.3% for non-supervisory personnel in financial and other business service industry jobs.

The focus of organizers of the women's movement in Taiwan, beginning in the 1980s, was mainly on equal pay and work opportunities and shared household responsibilities between men and women (Lec, 1991: 219). But the official data we have summarized show that the goal of equal pay for equal work for women and men is still far from realized in Taiwan. There is no law in the Republic of China as of 1994 that requires employers to give equal pay for equal work, but the Council of Labor Affairs has a draft law with provisions for equal pay for equal work and fines