INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how gender equality incorporated into the National legislations (NL) has been practiced in flower companies. It explores the extent to which gender issues have been mainstreamed in the industry with the guidance of the provisions in the China Constitution (1982) and Labor Act (1995). China economy maintains (Xinhua, 2009) steady growth and its labor force participation and income disparity are smaller than Japan, Russia and United States of America (Xing, 2007). The country gender empowerment measure is 0.533 ranking 72 out of 109 countries (HDR, 2009) and 81 out of 177 countries in gender development index (UNIFEM, 2007). The Chinese government having realized the inequality that prevails between men and women in the social and economic spheres and with an intention to close the gap in inequality, proclaimed in the 1982 constitution and 1995 Labor act equal rights for the sexes in all social and economic sectors of the society.

However the practical application of this proclamation at the formal sectors especially in corporations remains a challenge thus this needed mainstreaming gender in all productive sectors.

Gender mainstreaming (GM) is a new strategy to achieve gender equality at the work place. GM is a process of transformation beyond individual rights for equal treatments and positive actions to address group disadvantage, involves identifying low organizational systems and structures that cause indirect discrimination and changing them as appropriate (Rees, 2002). It has become a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (UND, 2006). Gm became popular during the Beijing conference on gender in 1995. It requires the involvement of women into existing system as active participants. It assesses the impact of policies on women and men (Grosser and Moon, 2005). GM focus is on the systems and structures that influence the development of special needs, responsibilities, roles
which lead to the establishment of a special disadvantage group. However, the available literature on Gm is very limited. In fact, present literature on Gm is limited at the policy level and the focus is on the UN agencies and member governments. The barriers to implement Gm in organizations are attributed to the limited knowledge of the concept gender equality (Tiessen, 2005; Rao et al., 1999) and culture (Mies, 1986; Walby, 1998). Gross and Moon (2005) divides Gm into two processes, one technical and the other political. The technical system involves tools to disaggregate gender statistics, assess gender impact, gender proofing, gender training and developing equality indicators. The political process includes power and participation of females in decision making and minimizing the gender barriers to the participation.

In China although Gm got its birth in Beijing in 1995, is not widely known by the populace nor has the extent of its application in corporate organizations or non-government organizations known. However, the China constitution (1982) and the Labor act (1995) contain provisions that require gender equality in all economic, political and social spheres. Some of the provisions affect the labor conditions of workers in the flower industry.

The authors used two approaches to study these issues. First they developed a theoretical framework and secondly carried an empirical research on twenty flower companies. To maintain anonymity the authors used alphabets to designate the companies’ names.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The convention theory provides a framework of analysis to understand standards in governance of international trade (Barrientos et al., 2003). The work of Raikes et al. (2000) suggests that convention theory is important to identify the role that standards and regulations play in value chain governance at the national or local level. This study seeks to address the issues of gender equality in the flower industry by investigating the extent the national legislations’ (Labor Act and the constitution) provisions on equality have been mainstreamed in the Chinese flower industry.

Whilst gender equality concept is recognized as essential for economic and social growth, many people find it as a secret revolution aiming at deconstructing society natural values (Kuby, 2008). As Grosser and Moon (2005), the authors adopted the conclusion of Dickens’ (1999) that legal opportunities for females in the work place will be advanced by factors such as; legal compliance and social policies. Therefore the conceptualization of gender equality involves social regulations and legal compliance to NL. Labor regulations are vehicles to achieve gender equality at the work place (Barrientos et al., 2003). However; the scope of application of national labor and constitutional regulations in the Chinese flower industry has not been studied.

This paper brings in Gm and considers its relationship with the NL in addressing gender inequalities. To do that, the authors investigated the extent to which the provisions for equality in the NL have been mainstreamed in the flower companies. They hypothesized the existence of significant discrimination in the industry in three areas; administrative structure; employment status and remuneration and related benefits. These areas are mapped on a gendered pyramid (Figure 1).

The pyramid in Figure 1 divides the major issues related to formal employment in flower Company into three connected levels; administrative structure (segment A); employment status (segment B) and remuneration (segment C). The segments are arranged according to the level of influence from A to C. This analytical framework helps us understand how inequality in one segment propels inequality in the next segment vertically. Segment A is the level where power relations play, planning and decisions about the operations, use of resources and tasks are conducted. It is the most important segment because it determines the growth prospects and directions of the business and how the benefits for participation are distributed to the employees.

Here, the proportional gender representation in management, board and workers’ committee is investigated. The involvement of males and females in performing tasks at segment A is imperative for gender equality. Decisions at segment A affect the productivity and status of every employee at segment B and in the company.

Segment B of the pyramid, covers the type of employment status that a worker holds. Segment B has two categories of workers:

1. Permanent worker: This type of worker is contracted for a longer period not less than a year, may have higher wage and enjoys wage and non-wage benefits like housing, medical insurance, leave pay, severance leave, social security and a host of others.

2. Casual worker: This type of worker is contracted on daily basis and will not have the same benefits and rights as permanent worker. The work of Dolan et al. (2002) found that permanent workers in Kenya had significantly a more secured jobs, opportunity and fringe benefits compared to seasonal/casual workers.

The employment security and status influence the economical and social status of an employee and is reported to be more important for female workers (Barrientos et al., 2000) because they combine productive and reproductive work. The employment status of a worker at segment B will determine the remuneration at segment C and take home pay.

Segment C of the pyramid covers the remuneration (wage and non-wage benefits) provided to workers. The amount of remuneration and the number of benefits
Figure 1. Pyramid of gendered inequality on employment in flower Company.

The regulations of wages and labor benefits are covered by article 48 of the 1982 constitution and sections 44, 45, 62 and 68 of the Labor act (1995). But, the value added industry is noted to be weak at policing regulations. Non-wage benefits are mostly important for women migrant workers with children with no relatives to help take care of their children while at work.

METHODOLOGY

Study approach

The gender analysis (GA) approach method (Peter, 2006) and the Harvard analytical framework were used to study the extent the NLs on gender equality had been mainstreamed in Chinese flower industry. Pre-tested structured questionnaires (SQs) were used as research tools for companies as suggested by Kumar (2005).

Selection of the study population

Twenty flower companies were purposively selected and contacted for the study. The criteria for selection included companies with established administrative structure, legally registered with the central or regional governments, applying codes and were willing to take part in the research. The study was conducted in four provinces: Yunnan, Zhejiang, Hubei and Sichuan. These provinces accounted for the largest proportion of cut flower in the country with Yunnan alone producing over 50% of the country cut flower (Junquan et al., 2008).

Data collection and analysis

All SQs had cover letter explaining the relevance of the study and seeking the consent of the participant. A team of enumerators conducted face to face interviews with the directors or managers of the companies. The enumerator and the interviewees clarified all the points and confirmed the recordings. Among many questions the key questions the participants were asked included:

Question 1: Rate your level of understanding of the provisions in the 1982 China constitution and 1995 Labor Act that relate to gender equality on employment. Please use the following guide. (1= very well, 2=average 0=not all)

Question 2: Do you understand the term gender mainstreaming? Please use the following guide for your answers (1=yes, 0=No)

Question 3: What is the daily wage by gender and employment status in your company?

Question 4: State the representation by gender on the board of trustees, management team and workers' committee of your company.
Question 5: What wage and non-wage benefits your company provides to workers?

RESULTS

Demographic and socio-economic features of the employees

In the twenty flower companies studied, 51 and 49% of the workers were males and females respectively but not significantly different (P<0.05). The percentage of married and single respondents was 99.1 and 0.9 respectively. All the males were 100% head of households and none of the females was head of household. None of the respondent belonged to an organized religion though over 50% believe in life hereafter. In terms of age composition, 30% was 50 years older, 32.5% of the respondents were between 40-49 years, 22.5% was between 29-39 years and 15% was between 18-28 years old. 0.3% of the respondents had no formal education, 1.5% had primary education, 9.3% had gone through middle school, 16.3% had high school education, and on average 26.3% had vocational education and 46.3% tertiary education. There was twice the number of male with tertiary education than female. In terms of income disparity, 43.5% of the respondents earn RMB 34.30 and 56.6% earn RMB 50.43 mean daily income.

In all the twenty companies, 90 and 10% of the managers and directors interviewed had an understanding rate of very well and average respectively of the provisions in the China constitution and Labor Act on employment conditions related to gender equality. Surprisingly 100% of the managers and directors had no understanding of the concept gender mainstreaming.

Employment status by gender

In Figure 3 the number of male permanent and casual workers was largely different but the number of female permanent and casual workers was almost equal. 32.4 and 24.1% of males and females respectively were permanently employed while 25.2 and 11.3% of females and males were respectively casual workers. The number of permanent and casual female workers was almost even.

Remuneration by gender and employment status

There was significant difference (P<0.05) between a permanent and casual worker irrespective of the gender. There were no significant differences between a male and female permanent worker or a male and female casual worker as shown in Table 1.

In Table 1, male worker mean wage was slightly higher
than female worker by RMB 6.26 daily but insignificantly different (P<0.05). The mean daily wage of a male and a female permanent worker was higher by RMB 17.35 and RMB 14.60 than a male and female casual worker respectively and differed significantly.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The total number of male and female workers was almost equal. This was different from the general trend in which cut flower companies are typically known to employ largely female labor (Meier, 1998) probably because the study sample consisted workers from both cut and pot flower companies. The study found 63% of the labor force in these companies was people aged above forty years, a common scenario in the floriculture and agriculture industries (Saghir et al., 2005).

The study identified three areas; administrative structure; employment status and remuneration as areas where inequalities prevailed and our hypothesis that inequalities existed in these three segments is accepted. At the administrative level such as Board of Trustees, management and workers’ committee, men significantly had 53% dominance (Figure 2). This was consistent with the conclusion of Lu (2009) who reported high discrimination in gender representation in management and supervisory levels in China corporations. Women were not actively involved in the planning and decision making of the companies. In one company all the board members and management team were men but the majority of the employees was women. This contravened article 48 of the China constitution (1982) which calls for equal gender representation in all levels and at all sectors in economic, social and political.

Furthermore, the authors found out that male workers wage was slightly higher than female workers by a mean of RMB 6.26 daily, a similar situation to coffee workers in Mesoamerica (Lyon et al., 2009). What was more interesting however, was the mean daily wage difference between the permanent and casual workers irrespective of gender. The mean daily wage of a male permanent worker was higher by RMB 17.35 than a male casual worker. Also a female permanent worker earned a mean daily wage of RMB 14.60 more than a female casual worker (Table 1). This suggested wage discrimination was not strongly rooted on gender but on the employment status of the worker. This was contrary to article 48 of the constitution which strongly demands equal numeration for the same job. The survey found that 32.4 and 24.1% of males and females respectively were permanently employed while 25.2 and 11.3% of females and males were respectively casual workers (Figure 3). This indicated that female workers provide twice the casual

**Table 1.** Mean daily wage by gender and employment status (RMB).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
<th>Nature of worker</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>53.55</td>
<td>47.30</td>
<td>0.251 (n.s)</td>
<td>50.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>32.60</td>
<td>0.471 (n.s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant level</td>
<td>0.003*</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.001*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant at P<0.05, n.s=not significant
labor force.

Also welfare conditions were largely provided to permanent workers. Casual workers provided a great share of the overtime labor but the remuneration in several cases was grossly low contrary to section 44 of the provision of the Labor Act (1995) which stipulates between 150-200% remuneration of the normal wage for any extra work done after the normal hours work. None of the companies provided paternity leave and child care facilities/allowance for workers. The concept of paternity leave was new and in Chinese culture child care was largely a feminine role.

Childcare facilities were especially essential for female migrant workers who had no relatives to take care of their children while at work. All casual workers were excluded from maternity leave. This suggested a discrimination against female workers and a breach on the Labor act provision which provides 90 days maternity leave for all female workers. Thus female workers were more deprived of the welfare benefits since they formed greater portion of the casual labor. The barrier to practical mainstreaming gender equality in the industry was supported by the evidence that 100% of the managers and directors of the companies did not understand the concept; this confirmed the conclusions of Tiessen (2005) and Rao et al. (1999) that limited knowledge to GM concept would be a barrier to its adoption.

The study provided evidence to support the hypothesis that despite the constitutional prescription and labor laws on gender equality, gender segregation in operational structure, employment status and wage gap exist in the flower industry. The findings of this research were indicative of what existed in the flower companies. Thus the findings necessitated the establishment of gender mainstreaming approaches such as; implementation of gender committees, inclusion of more females in workers’ committees, promoting women to decision making positions, building women capacity through training and creating gender-sensitive work environment in the industry through policies that will promote equal opportunities and improve gender roles and participation in the industry.

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REFERENCES


