

Book Review

Tracey Wilen-Daugenti: *China for Businesswomen: A Strategic Guide to Travel, Negotiating, and Cultural Differences*

Stone Bridge Press, 2007

Pamela Ellgen

Tracey Wilen-Daugenti's recent book, *China for Businesswomen*, offers a thorough analysis of the challenges faced by foreign women who wish to do business in the People's Republic of China, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In her section on women, culture, and history, Wilen-Daugenti gives a brief but detailed account of the Chinese woman's struggle to enter her own country's business world. This segment is foundational to understanding the business climate for foreign women, and should have received more prominence in the book instead of being left until the end. Nevertheless, it thoughtfully chronicles the rise of Chinese women from imperial patriarchal society through Communist rule and eventually to the present day. A full bibliography gives credence to this and other sections of *China for Businesswomen*.

Surprisingly, women's status in China has seen some setbacks more recently. "As a planned economy has given way to capitalism in recent times, China has become a man's world again," Wilen-Daugenti writes.

For example, she cites the decline in the number of women in the National People's Congress from 10 percent in 1973 to only 2.5 percent in 2002, the lowest in the party's history. In urban employment, managerial and official government positions go to men over women at a rate of more than two to one.

The author blames the decline on, among other factors, the weakening of "affirmative action" by the party, as well as blatant discrimination against women in businesses' hiring and firing practices. Consequently, this sets the stage for women to be viewed as merely playing a supporting role to their male counterparts in foreign business relations.

In the middle chapters, Wilen-Daugenti does an excellent job of not only exploring the intricacies of doing business with the Chinese (read: Chinese government), but also providing solutions for foreign women who do so.

“Doing business in China,” Wilen-Daugenti writes, “almost always involves doing business with the government.” Western businessswomen in particular will find greater success when understanding this element of China’s business landscape.

To that end, she provides a ready reference for both the structure of national and local governments and a who’s who of businesses, organizations, and governmental figures. This includes the contact information for regulatory agencies and websites for listings of current business and government personalities.

An enjoyable element of *China for Businesswomen* is the insight provided by former and current female business travellers to the country. A woman from Chicago, Illinois described travelling to China with an American male colleague. She writes, “There were some from the Chinese side who initially thought I was his interpreter.” Wilen-Daugenti spends many pages discussing this phenomenon and how it can be avoided. She recommends that women in senior roles gently reinforce their title and credentials when presenting business cards and leading negotiations. Men who are her inferior in rank can further mitigate confusion about hierarchy by deferring questions to her.

General travel information and advice on coping with culture shock and how to travel light were included at the beginning of the book. Perhaps this would have been more effective as an appendix. However, readers should consider beginning this book in its final chapters on the history of women in China, as it will provide a context for the rest of the book.

Dr. Tracey Wilen-Daugenti holds an MBA and a doctorate in international business. She travels regularly to China and has authored and coauthored several books on similar topics, including *Doing Business with Japanese Men* and *Asia for Women in Business*.