



REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR POLLUTION CONTROL IN THE  
TANNING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA - US/RAS/92/120

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# **STATUS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TANNING INDUSTRY IN CHINA**

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## **COUNTRY SURVEY**

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**ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS USED**

CLIA	CHINA LEATHER INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION
OSH	OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH
UNIDO	UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION

**ABSTRACT**

In China women's role and contribution in the nation's economy has increased significantly since the development of the China's economy in 1980, following the implementation of the "open-door policy" by Deng Xiao Ping. Women do not only support their families' needs, but also play an important role in contributing to economic development in their country.

The government has undertaken positive and active efforts to promote the status of women and their employment. The most notable initiatives concern the following:

- Establishment of the "equal pay for equal work" principle
- Effective implementation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act.

In 1992, women constitute 40% of the total labour workforce in China. Despite the great progress made in terms of women's employment, some new problems have arisen during recent years. In view of the on-going transition from the centralized to market based economy, the government system ("iron rice bowl" - life long job guarantee) which was once positive in promoting women's participation needs to undergo a modification too. Chinese women are now facing the new challenge of finding a job. The new competitive element in the job market requires women to continuously improve their skills.

Recognizing these problems, the UNIDO Regional Programme initiated a study which was to clarify on the current status of women's participation in the tanning industry. The report was to recommend specific action for increasing women's participation in the tanning industry.

*This country survey forms part of the expert's final report under her assignment US/RAS/92/120/17-03.*

## SUMMARY

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### STATUS OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Women's employment in the tanning industry is common and intensive. The goal of women's employment in all kind of industries has been achieved. Women employees represent about 50% of the total employees in the leather conversion industry and approximately 35% in the tanning industry.

While there are some Sino-foreign joint ventures, at the moment, tanning units owned by township and collectives constitute the majority of tanneries in China. Since recently, also private owned tanneries are rapidly coming up in China.

Most employers in tanneries are satisfied with women worker's performance finding them diligent, thorough and disciplined.

Most women working in tanneries undertake relatively less arduous work. In fact they are kept away from harsh and unfavorable occupations, and, if employed in these positions, they mainly do auxiliary work.

Men employees do not longer monopolize positions in technical and managerial fields. However, in comparison with the overall number of men occupying such positions, the number of women is still small.

Most tanneries, regardless of their ownership structure, have adequate sanitary and welfare facilities for women in place. A set of specific laws and rules are available to protect women's rights, benefits and health. Most of the existing regulations focus more on the protection of women than the promotion of increased women's participation in the industry.

### FACTORS EFFECTING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

China's social system significantly differs from other developing countries. The social, legal and economic system prepare and guarantee women's entry in economic activities for increased women's participation.

Most employers displayed a positive attitude towards women's employment in the tanning industry, since women were found to contribute positively to the company's productivity.

Most women presently working in the tannery, perceive their career prospects as very poor, feeling unable to compete in view of lacking skills.

Male colleagues do not oppose working together with women. There is no "feminisation" taking place, though doubts about

women's real ability in handling and practices could be noticed with supervisors and co-workers.

Many women perceive work in the tanning industry as dirty, harsh and fatiguing and, therefore, feel it unsuitable for women to work in.

Most process operations are still done manually, with certain degree of mechanisation. The general working conditions are still very poor, making work in tanneries generally unattractive.

Relevant laws and professional regulations are effective in their way to protect women's health and safety in the industry. This definitely contributes positively to the increased women's employment in the industry.

State owned tanneries were found to be very good employers for women, though problems in terms of promotion into higher level positions exist. However, all the models, regardless of their ownership structure, are paragons in this industry, each of them has something worthy to be learned from.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A. Provide women employees with training course, both on basic professional knowledge as well as for up-gradation of technical and managerial skills.
- B. Improve the work conditions and working environment through up-gradation and modernisation of the presently manual processes.
- C. Positively influence the image of the tanning industry.
- D. Apply an advocacy system, using employers with positive experience in women's employment to promote increased employment with other tanners.
- E. Further utilise government's support and influence in facilitating women's entry into the tanning industry.

## **SCOPE OF STUDY**

The survey, carried out in tanneries in different parts of China, covered 100 representative tanneries in more than ten provinces (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Guangdong, Henan, Sichuan, Xingjiang and Inner Mongolia), with a 50% return rate. This survey was conducted with emphasis on such items such as tannery scale, production capacity, efforts to upgrade industry, share of women in the total employees, share of women in different occupations.

## TANNING INDUSTRY IN CHINA

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Presently, there are around 2,000 tanning units in China. Most of these tanneries can be described as medium to large scale employing around five hundred employees on average.

There is no particular geographical concentration of tanneries in China. Tanneries can be found in almost every province, from coastal area to hinterland.

Private tanneries are recently emerging throughout the whole country. State owned tanneries are increasingly facing difficulties in competing with the private and foreign-funded tanneries.

All tanneries in China, with a few exceptions, produce from raw to finished leather stage. Generally, working conditions are arduous, harsh, unhygienic and, in many cases, hazardous. The work is mostly handled manually, while mechanical equipment to ease these tasks is not available.

At the same time, there are some tanneries which have their own effluent treatment plants and laboratories. Safety measures have been implemented and safety checks are conducted regularly. All employees are usually provided personal protective equipment such as gloves, shoes and working uniforms. In these tanneries clinics, bath halls, and even "kindergartens" for children of women employees are available as per the requirements of the relevant labor laws or regulations by the government and professional associations.

In contrast to many other developing countries, most tanning units in China were established, administrated and supervised by the government, instead of private parties. This is why much concerns has been given to issues such as safety and hygiene of work environment, workers' welfare system - particularly for women - as well as the modernization of the industry.

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TANNING INDUSTRY

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The survey revealed that, contrary to the traditional impression that women were not suitable for working in this industry, the participation of women in this field was impressive.

Women account for nearly 35% of the total employees in the tanning industry. In some cases, the number of women employees even exceeded that one of male employees. For example, in the "Ya'an" tannery 1,348 out of 2,487 employees are women. However, women are not equally represented in technical and managerial positions, though there are many



female engineers, assistant engineers and managerial executives working in this tannery.

The survey also showed that, when asked about the performance of female employees, more than 90 percent of all the managerial executives expressed their satisfaction with women's performance at work, especially highlighting their thoroughness, sincerity, diligence and discipline. In many cases, this impression has convinced them to actually consider women's employment.

Several male employees believed that jobs in the tanning industry require physical strength as well as professional skills. For these requirements, women workers obviously could not compete with them in these areas. At the same time, they agreed that women had undeniable advantages when it came to "fine work" such as required in finishing and quality control.

In most production processes, male and female employees work together on the same work. However, especially in case of harsh occupations, male employees usually took the responsibility for the arduous, dirty and sophisticated tasks, while female employees carried out auxiliary work. There was neither serious disparage from male employees upon women nor any trace of so-called "sense of feminisation." In most cases, the working relationship between women and men employees can be characterised as harmonious and cooperative.

With respect to remuneration the "equal work and equal payment" principle has become common in the tanning industry, since China had set up specific laws that grant men and women the same rights and responsibilities. At the same time, practical action had been taken to eliminate prejudice against women.

## **WOMEN IN THE TANNING INDUSTRY**

Work in beam house and tan yard was found to be most unfavorable to women's employment, due to the mostly arduous, dirty, and even noxious working conditions. Thus, mainly men were working in these areas. However, this employment structure differs depending on the ownership structure. Private and Sino-foreign joint ventures usually employed less women in these areas. Women were mostly confined to work of auxiliary nature only.

Taking into consideration the thoroughness, patience and diligence of women more than 70 percent of all women employees work in these processing stages.

As many Chinese tanneries have their own ETPs and laboratories, employment of women in such installations is fairly

common, although the total number of women employees is not as large as that of men. The main tasks of women employed in laboratories is to carry out tests and analysis of finished leather. Those women working in ETPs are engaged for supervisory positions and for testing of treated effluent for compliance with discharge standards.

The following table shows women's employment in this field in the "Hebei" tannery.

Table 1 - Distribution of women's employment in Hebei tannery

	Total number of employees	Number of women Employees	Work done by women
Beam house	34	2	Hair-removal
Tan yard	41	3	Distribution of material
Finishing sector	83	26	machine operation
Laboratories	13	3	testing chemicals
Effluent treatment plant	16	5	testing chemicals
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>39</b>	

## WOMEN IN TECHNICAL POSITIONS

With regard to occupations such as technical supervisor, senior engineer, engineer, engineer assistant, women employees occupy about 35% of these positions. The survey indicated that there was a large number of women engaged in this field of the tanning industry in China.

The entry of women into technical fields can be regarded as an important step in promoting women's status from low operational level to high managerial level. Successful women in these fields are the strongest proof that women are equally capable of mastering technical knowledge and managerial skills. However, the gap in terms of women engaged in technical fields is still wide.

As per practice in Chinese tanneries, vacant technical positions are mostly filled with internal candidates. Many women, subject to their experience and skills acquired, are promoted in the tannery from positions in the production line to technical positions. The selection is usually done on basis of merit.

Table 2 - Distribution of women's employment in technical positions

Position	Total number of positions	Women in these positions
Senior Engineer	4	none
Engineer	19	5
Assistant Engineer	21	4
Technician	11	3

The example of Tianjin tannery (see table 2) shows, that women technicians, though comparatively small in number, have managed to permeate into all technical occupations, gaining respect from both top and low levels while strengthening their self confidence. Most women occupying positions such as senior engineers, engineers or assistant engineers, have received certain higher education, holding university or post-graduates degrees.

However, the survey revealed differences in women reaching technical positions in respect to the ownership structure and geographical location of the tannery. It was found that tanneries in coastal area like Jiangsu, Tianjin absorbed more women in technical occupations than in the hinterland such as in Xinjiang. On the other hand state owned tanneries employed more women in the technical occupations than private ones.

## WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

With regard to managerial positions such as of senior executive, supervisor and other administrator, women had difficulties for a long time to enter the managerial level. An explanation can be found in the Chinese culture and ideology. In both western and eastern culture and traditional ideology, women have been perceived as weak, capricious and sentimental beings. Hence in the popular opinion had been that women were not reliable and capable of handling the policy-setting and decision-making jobs. Still many people, equally whether within or outside the tanning industry, and to a certain extent even women employees themselves, hold such view points that management is so important, complicated and profound that it goes far beyond women's handling capability.

However, the survey indicates that, contrary to the popular assumption, women's entry into the managerial field, even into the core decision-making position, has already taken place.

The following chart shows the employment of women in the managerial field of "Xinjei" tannery.

Table 3 - Distribution of women in managerial positions

Position	Total number of positions	Women in these positions
General Manager	6	1
Department Manager	24	2
Administrative Executives	16	4

Almost all women employees holding such managerial positions are university graduates and post graduates. It can be concluded that the up-gradation of women's education has been a prerequisite for uplifting women's participation in the tanning industry. As in the case of technical positions, all vacant positions are filled internally.

It has to be kept in mind that the ownership structure of the tannery has a considerable influence on women's entry into high level positions. As applicable for most state owned and township tanning units, the assignment of managerial positions is influenced and suggested, if not determined, by the government labour bureau. Under this system, gender quotas as prescribed by the Labour Bureau are taken into account by the local authorities in assigning managerial positions in such a way as to keep the proper gender balance.

### **FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

Several different factors contribute to the present situation of women's employment in Chinese tanning industry. These factors include the prevailing social system, attitudes within and outside tanning industry, working conditions, and relevant regulatory framework with regard to women's employment. A detailed analysis of these factors and how they affect women's participation, is provided below:

### **SOCIAL FRAMEWORK IN CHINA**

Among all of the influencing factors, the unique social system in China plays a key role in determining women's participation in the tanning industry.

Being a "socialistic" country, the government has been making efforts to improve women's status from the founding day of modern China. The Chinese constitution grants every citizen equal rights, benefits and responsibilities regardless of sex. No enterprise is allowed to discriminate against women and to refuse employment of women on any irrational grounds.

With respect to some professions - particularly those, which are seen to be hazardous and unfavorable for women, such as in the tanning industry, - considerable welfare and protective measures are to be provided to women employees. Meanwhile, efforts to improve the actual work environment and to ease the work pressure have been made under the guidance and direction of the government. These endeavors are geared to facilitate and guarantee increased entry by women into the tanning industry.

As mentioned earlier, one of the major tasks of official institutions is to select and assign suitable candidates to high level managerial and technical positions. As per official policy, the institutions are required to maintain a balanced gender ratio in these fields. A major drawback of this system is that, candidates for such positions are sometimes not selected on basis of their knowledge, experience and skills but on merit of their gender, simply to fulfill a prescribed gender quota.

Despite such rather discouraging practices, this official policy has significantly contributed to the uplift of women's status in the tanning industry.

## GENERAL PERCEPTIONS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE TANNING INDUSTRY

According to a survey conducted by China Leather Industry Association (CLIA), over 90 percent women employees (at all levels) in the tanning industry evaluated the present employment situation of women in the tanning industry as fairly improved but still below satisfaction. As per their opinion, aspects such as promotion opportunities, work load and condition, sanitation and welfare facilities, policies and actions needed further improvement.

Many women, employed in low level production positions, believed that, in view of the difficult working conditions and their own physical and skill limitations, they only were able to carry out auxiliary work.

Women, particularly those with higher education, expressed their discontent about the slow integration and acceptance of women into high level positions, both technical as well as managerial. They also pointed out obstacles, such as integrating roles of being professional and mother, they encountered in the career path.

The survey showed that most managers were satisfied with the work women did in all fields, admitting that, compared with male colleagues, women were more thorough, reliable and diligent. The success of some women employees in technical and managerial fields had convinced them that increased women's employment would be advantageous. At the same time, there is widespread doubt among many male managers and colleagues about women's actual capabilities, since - as per traditional perceptions - women are not expected to work in such dirty, arduous and hazardous conditions.

As per the public opinion, tanning is perceived as fatiguing, low and squalid work, which was particularly an unsuitable occupation for women. Due to this public perception, many women regard the tanning industry as an undesirable career option when seeking a job. In fact, tanning as such has a low social standing in the Chinese society. Therefore, with respect to worker's profile, basically farmers, having emigrated from rural areas, take up employment in particularly in wet production. The workforce in these area is characterized with a high turn-over rate.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

Without any doubt, especially in the beam house, the working conditions can be described as physically-demanding only, though many tanneries covered in this survey have initiated efforts to upgrade and modernize work to some extent. For example, in many operations, which used to be handled manually only - such as loading & unloading hides and skins, trimming, fleshing and hair-removal etc. - new machinery was installed to reduce the work load and to provide greater convenience.

With regard to workers' welfare, some tanneries have established child nursery houses, kindergartens, clinics, bath halls, which particularly benefit women workers. Such improvement measures, together with other hygienic and welfare facilities, have been a crucial step in facilitating women's participation in the tanning industry.

However, it has to be noted that working conditions vary significantly from tannery to tannery, depending on ownership structure and geographical locations. Tanneries located in the coastal areas like Jiaangsu, Tianjin have been found to have better work conditions than those in the hinterland like Sichuan and Xinjiang.

In terms of ownership, some of the joint venture tanneries, particularly those with American or European partners, are more satisfactory in terms of OSH and work condition in comparison with state and township tanneries, due to their higher investment in capital, technology and human resources.

Work conditions in private tanneries have been found to be relatively unsatisfactory when compared with some joint venture and state-owned tanneries.

## RELEVANT LAWS AND RULES

From its founding date, China has been endeavoring to increase women's status in all social aspects. The Chinese constitution grants and guarantees that women and men enjoy equal rights and privileges. There shall be no discrimination in all social aspects such as employment, education, payment, etc. Women federations, as semi-government organizations, were supported by the government in their activities to ensure that women's rights and privileges.

The "Protective Law For Women's Rights and Privileges" stipulates regulations on women's rights, privileges and health aspects. This law is applicable to **all** industries regardless of size or ownership. In line with the provisions of this law, the labor office under the local government, together with the respective industrial association or bureau in charge of

supervising the industry, issue additional rules which govern in detail safety and other relevant measures with regard to women's employment in the tanning industry.

In compliance with these rules, most tanneries have decided to keep women away from potentially squalid, difficult and harmful occupations in the production. At the same time, tanneries have set up comprehensive welfare facilities for women such as clinics, women's health care facilities and kindergartens.

However, all these laws and rules focus more on the aspect of protection and welfare of women, rather than on increasing women's participation in the industry. Though there are laws or rules available which should prevent particular cases of discrimination of women so far as their entry into managerial positions is concerned, in reality cases of gender discrimination exist.

## **EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN TANNERIES - CASE STUDIES**

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To explain the situation of women's employment in tanneries under different ownership structures, namely state-owned, joint venture and private, three short cases studies are presented below.

### **CASE 1 YA'AN TANNERY IN SICHUAN PROVINCE (STATE OWNED )**

Ya'an is a large-scale tannery with an annual production of 280,000 square meters of finished leather. The tannery also produces around one million pairs of leather shoes every year in the attached shoe factory.

Women account for about 54% of the total 2,487 employee, including tannery and shoe factory.

The production process ranges from beam house, tan yard to finishing production steps. Beam house and tan yard work is comparatively more difficult, both in terms of working conditions and physical requirements for women.

#### Beam house

Taking into account the dirty and rough working conditions as well as the heavy physical work load, only few women are assigned here. These women are mainly engaged in activities such as quantity and quality control. All workers, including women, are equipped with required safety equipment and clothing such as gloves and safety boots.

#### Tan yard

Women only represent 7% of the workforce in this production area. Four women workers are working on machines, mainly

assisting the male machine operators. During talks with them, they revealed that they would prefer some other jobs such as auxiliary works or bookkeeping, since this appears to be easier work. As in the beam house, all workers are provided with adequate work clothing and personal protective equipment.

### Finishing

Aside from the wet post-tanning processes, most production is dry and less dirty. Not surprisingly, more women were found to be engaged in these processes. At present around 120 women (out of totally 185 employees) work in production steps such as trimming, spraying and toggling. Besides doing auxiliary work, women are also operating various machines.

### Tannery laboratory

The tasks mainly comprise quality testing of finished leather. Out of 51 employees in this department 24 are women. There is no difference in jobs done by women and men.

### Effluent treatment plant

The tannery's own effluent treatment plant employs around ten women and nine men. As in the case of the laboratory, there is no difference between the women's and men's responsibilities.

Table 4 - Distribution of women in Ya'an tannery

Work area	Total number of employees	Number of women Employees	Type of job carried
beam house	151	4	auxiliary work
tanning yard	64	4	auxiliary work
finishing	185	120	trimming spraying
laboratory	51	24	
ETP	19	10	

In addition to the above areas, the tannery has a separate technical unit in charge of the technical control and quality improvements in the tannery. The unit's activities include improvement of technologies used throughout the production, maintenance, repair and up-gradation of equipment, operational training of workers and resolving any other technical problems. The unit employs a strong technical group of 140 technicians. The following table provides a detailed break-down in terms of position and gender.



Table 5 - Technical personnel at Ya'an according to gender

Position	Total number of positions	Number of women employees in these positions
Senior engineers	9	1
Engineers	33	17
Assistant engineers	55	10
Others	44	25

In terms of managerial positions, women occupy nearly one third of all managerial and administrative positions in the Ya'an tannery. The following table provides an overview of managerial positions occupied by women:

Table 6 - Women in managerial positions at Ya'an tannery

Managerial position	Total number of positions	Women in these positions
Executive managers	8	1
Dept. leaders	34	12
Others	175	62

## CASE 2 YANTAI TANNERY IN SHANDONG PROVINCE (TOWNSHIP TANNERY)

This tannery, producing from raw to finished, is to 50% owned by the local township and the central government. The tannery employs about 905 workers, of which 421 are women. The annual capacity of the pigskin leather production is 2 million pieces.

### Beamhouse

At the present, only one woman works in the beam house section of the tannery. Her responsibilities include the preparation of production related statistics only. Otherwise, women cannot be found in the beam house for the same reasons as mentioned in case 1.

### Tan yard

Currently, no women are working in the tan yard for same reasons as mentioned in case 1.

### Finishing

As in the case of Ya'an tannery, most women are engaged in activities in the finishing area including trimming, spraying, toggling, etc. both for auxiliary work and machine operation.

### Tannery laboratory

Presently, five women are working in the laboratory being in charge of quality control of finished leather and product research & development.

Effluent treatment plant

20% of the staff in the tannery's own effluent treatment plant are women.

Table 7 - Distribution of women in Yantai tannery

Work area	Total number of personnel	Total number of women	Type of work done by women
Beam house	19	1	auxiliary work
Tanning yard	88	0	
finishing	261	138	trimming, spraying, toggling, etc.
Laboratory	12	5	experiments
ETP	5	1	

With regard to technical personnel in the Yantai tannery, women constitute a third of all technicians employed, however they do not occupy any senior engineering.

In management and administration, significantly less women are employed than in Ya'an tannery. The below table shows a detailed break-down of women in managerial positions at Yantai tannery.

Table 8 - Women in managerial positions at Yantai tannery

Managerial position	Total number of positions	Number of women in these positions
Executive managers	9	0
Department Leaders	42	5
Administration	63	25

## CASE 3 - WENZHOU PRIVATE TANNERY IN ZHEJIANG PROVINCE

This private tannery, producing from raw to finished, differs from case 1 and 2 in terms of women employment. The number and ratio of women found in the various work areas as well as technical and managerial positions is significantly lower.

Table 9 - Distribution of women at Wenzhou tannery

Work area	Total number of personnel	Total number of women	Type of work done by women
Beam house	53	4	auxiliary work
Tanning yard	37	7	auxiliary work
finishing	87	26	trimming, spraying
Laboratory	3	1	
ETP	4	1	

At present, only two women are holding positions in the technical field, namely one female engineer and one female assistant engineer.

Table 10 - Women in technical positions at Wenzhou tannery

Technical position	Total number of positions	Number of women in these positions
Senior engineer	0	0
Engineer	5	1
Assistant engineer	8	1
Other technicians	0	0

Similarly, only few women occupy managerial positions. Women are basically engaged as regular department officers only.

Table 11 - Women in managerial positions at Wenzhou tannery

Managerial position	Total number of positions	Number of women in these positions
Executive managers	3	0
Dept. leaders	12	2
Others	9	0

## ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

The three case studies have been selected according their representative role for typical tanneries in China. As clearly visibly, state owned tanneries have been quite successful in their efforts of employing women. The Ya'an tannery actually is typical representative for all other state owned tanneries and reflects the mainstream of women employment in the Chinese tanning industry.

The Yantai tannery appears to be quite similar to the Ya'an tannery in terms of women's employment. As matter of fact, the ownership and management structure of these two tanneries resemble very much. This is important to highlight, since the significantly lower women ratio in the privately owned tannery is attributed to the totally different ownership structure.

### state-owned tanneries

As mentioned earlier, state owned tanneries occupy a large share of the tanning capacity in China (around 50%). Company internal policies - implemented in them - directly and indirectly reflect the official policy of the government with respect to women's employment.

According to the official policy in China, women, especially in urban areas, have equal access to education and enjoy equal career opportunities in the industry. They are guaranteed "equal pay for equal work". All these rights and privileges are protected by the according Chinese laws and are strictly enforced by the Chinese government, both at central and local level.

Thanks to equal access to higher education, women can acquire the necessary technical knowledge to apply for

technical and managerial jobs. In spite of this, top positions are still mostly occupied by men.

One disadvantage of such employment systems is, that women are hired for the sake of complying with the state-prescribed gender quota. Following this, underemployment of women in many state-owned tanneries is a common phenomena.

### township tanneries

The reasons why women are employed in a larger number in these type of tanneries, are similar to those in state-owned tanneries. However, more women can be found working in the production lines than in managerial or technical positions.

Despite a higher freedom of the management in terms of selection and recruitment of suitable candidates for such positions, the tanneries are not able to attract well-educated women to work for them in technical and managerial fields. This is, because these women prefer other industries for pursuing a professional career.

### private tanneries

In private tanneries, such as the Wenzhou tannery, significantly less women are employed. The production methods are simple and the level of mechanisation low, mainly relying on crude machines and equipment.

Though also here managers find women be diligent, patient and loyal and their efficiency matching the one of male colleagues, women are denied employment opportunities in these tanneries.

The reasons for this can be found with the tanners' personal attitudes vis-à-vis women's employment as such. As per their opinion, male technicians and workers can be burdened with more work. Furthermore, they feel that male employees are more eager to improve the production, which results in lower operating cost and, thus, higher competitiveness of the factory.

The staff in these tanneries earns comparatively more. Managers are keen on keeping the number of employees as low as possible, resulting in more competition within the workforce for vacant positions. The main consideration in these tanneries is the profitability of the tannery. Selection and recruitment of workers is done on basis of the best available candidate. Vacant positions at technical and managerial level are filled with candidates from outside. The government guidelines on equal job opportunity and equal are usually not followed by the private tanneries.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### IMPROVEMENT OF WORKING CONDITIONS

As mentioned earlier, in traditional tanneries, the working conditions, particularly in the wet sections, are dirty, wet and smelly. The machinery and equipment used is poorly maintained and of low efficiency.

Within the last ten years, most of the medium- and large-scale state-owned and township tanneries went through a process of gradual up-gradation and modernization of the production facilities. At the same time, increasingly joint venture tanneries started business in China, applying modern production management and technologies, using some imported equipment.

In both cases, the developments have resulted in considerable improvements of the working environment, reducing the amount of manual work. Safety conditions and facilities were also gradually improved. Special personal protective equipment and clothing such as gloves and boots were provided to all workers by the tanners. However, this was not the case in particularly private and small-scale tanneries.

Adequate regulatory and enforcement/monitoring mechanisms were put in place to bring the accident rate to a minimum level of around 0.15% per year. Large-scale tanneries, regardless of their ownership structure, have adequate facilities in place to ensure and control safe working conditions.

A such improvement of the working conditions in the tanneries will make work all sections of the tannery more suitable for women. At the same time, an occupation in the tanning industry will become a possible option for women.

### UP-GRADATION OF WOMEN'S SKILLS

One big hurdle for women workers at the lower employment end in the tanning industry is to get promoted into higher positions as they lack adequate skills, experience and self-confidence required for these positions. At present, no formal training is provided internally to workers of any gender.

For this group of women, special tannery-internal skill up-gradation programmes should be provided by the tannery, with the help of an external institute or sources (e.g. local women's federation and professional training institutes). Such training should be focused and work-oriented, covering subjects such as basic professional knowledge and operating skills.

On the other hand, women graduates from leather colleges or similar institutes, who are looking for employment in technical and managerial positions, are not found suitable, due to their lack of practical experience.

To overcome this lack of practical skills and experience, the syllabus of the leather colleges and institutes should provide for a link-up of theoretical and practical training. Based on collaboration agreements between the colleges and tanneries in the vicinity, students should attend compulsory practical internships in these tanneries. These internships should require at least one practical in the production lines as well as one practical in the tannery administration.

At the time of the graduation, these tanneries can be invited by the college to directly approach the graduates for recruitment in the tanneries. This will allow the tannery to choose the best candidate. At the same time, this will assist women students to gain necessary practical experience as well as to position themselves as suitable candidates for recruitment in such positions.

Some detailed training suggestions are compiled in the following table:

Table 12 - Suggested women oriented training programmes

Training	Trainee	Topics	Purpose
Basic professional training courses	Women workers employed in the production	Basic industrial knowledge and skills (such as hides selection, grading)	To familiarize women worker with the requirement of the industry
Advanced professional training courses	Women technicians such as production supervisors	Advanced technological theory and applications	To help women technicians to improve the quality control
Managerial training courses	Women executives at the management level	Managerial skills	Prepare women managers for further advanced decision-making positions
Practical internships in tanneries during the education	Students of leather colleges and institutes	Practical work experience in production and administration	Improve women's abilities to compete in the labour market

### **HIGHLIGHT ON WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE**

In many production operations, women have performed quite well. Women's patience and endurance as well as their professional skills have been adequately recognized by both supervisors and co-workers.

Similarly women have been found performing equally well in technical positions, thanks to equal access to the same education as received by men. Many women have been awarded for their outstanding contributions in technical fields.

So far as managerial positions are concerned, the entry of women in managerial decision-making positions (other than those of being in charge of human resource, day-to-day affairs, or political education) faces certain limitations.

As mentioned earlier, male managers of tanneries generally gave encouraging compliments to women employees in terms of their loyalty, diligence, thoroughness and discipline. On the other hand, despite this positive attitude, most managers were still hesitant to assign women employees to senior positions. One reason for this is a reluctance on the side of most managers to make the first try, with nobody else having tried this.

Keeping this in mind, model practitioners in terms of promoting women's participation, either from China or other countries, should be identified and convinced to act as "advocates" for the cause of women's employment in higher technical and managerial positions. This advocacy campaign should particularly target managers and government officials in charge of selecting and appointing senior technicians and managers.

### **AWARENESS RAISING AND IMPROVEMENT OF TANNERY'S IMAGE**

It was noticed that the public opinion often played an important role in influencing people's attitude and their career decisions. Despite the ongoing improvement of working conditions in the Chinese tanning industry, the industry so far has not been able to create a positive image with the public.

Failing so, many potential women candidates, interested to work in a tannery, are discouraged by the tanning industry's image of being unsuitable for women's employment.

Accompanying the other recommended measures - such as concerted efforts in improving the actual working conditions in the tanneries - the public needs to be informed about the ongoing changes and improvement in the tanning industry, with the aim of positively influencing the image of the industry and the public opinion.

In order to achieve an optimum impact in this respect, concerted action by the whole tanning industry in China or a specific geographical area is required. In view of this, such an image campaign should be executed by the respective tannery association and other organisations related to this issue.

### **INCREASE OF LEVEL OF INFORMATION ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

Special attention should be paid to private tanneries in China. During the survey, it was noticed that, though almost no employer opposed the idea of employing women acclaiming

women's sincerity, diligence and discipline, they hesitated to practically employ them.

One reason may be the subconscious belief that women by nature are not capable of taking up dirty and physically demanding jobs.

Secondly, as the relevant laws and rules prescribe special protective, welfare and other measures for women, such as maternity and baby-bearing leave, special sanitary and hygienic facilities, most employers shy away from employing women in their tanneries for simple cost reasons.

These tanneries should be particularly targeted with an information campaign, highlighting the unique advantages of employing women in terms of increased tannery production which will balance such additional costs for facilities as required by law.

### **INCREASED GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**

Considering the peculiarity of China's social system, the role of the government in improving women's employment in the tanning industry cannot be neglected, particularly in terms of creating a conducive environment and framework for increased participation of women.

Though laws and rules are in place, further improvement in terms of a consequent enforcement by the local relevant government bodies and workers unions is needed.

### **IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS**

In China, the government and its affiliated agencies such as Ministry of Labour and the Chinese Women's Federation are the main implementing agencies to reach out to the enterprise level.

For a successful implementation, the co-operation and support from the individual tanners and technical agencies is required. Since tanneries are spread all over China, the implementation of activities for the increase of women's participation has to involve local government offices such as labor bureaus, economic committees and local tannery associations.

The recommended activities should supplement other ongoing initiatives by international organizations such as UNIDO, which are working on the general improvement of the tanning industry e.g. in waste water treatment and occupational safety and health and a close collaboration between these agencies are needed.



Table 13 - Overview of recommended activities

Activity	Purpose	Implementing Agency
Training courses on technology	To help those women employees in the production to get familiar with the industry and master the basic operating skills	Professional associations like CLIA, supported by other technical institutions.
Training courses on entrepreneurial skills for women	To prepare women for further entry into the high managerial level and developing women employers	Women unions, institutions with managerial programs and experienced tannery employers
Up-gradation and modernization of tanning industry	To improve the working equipment and conditions, to decrease the dependency on manual work, as well as provide a more healthful environment.	Women union, Labour Bureau, with assistance from UNIDO and technical institutions.
Advocacy campaign	To encourage the employment of women by introduction of model practitioners	Women union, Ministry of Labour and CLIA
Public image campaign	To dispel off the prejudice and doubt on the industry that prevent women from volunteering into the industry	Women union, CLIA with assistance from the official labor bureau with collaboration from tanneries
Information campaign for private sector	To convince employers of the advantages of women's entry and stimulate them to employ more women	Ministry of Labour, Women Union, CLIA with cooperation from local agencies
Government support programme	To take the advantage of government influence on both policy and financial aids to improve women's employment.	Ministry of Labour, local labor bureaus, CLIA, local professional associations with cooperation of Women Union