



Bloomberg: Forex in Delivery Room Shows Asian Women Wealth Managers Top Men

2013-04-09 23:00:30.0 GMT

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-04-09/forex-in-delivery-room-shows-asian-women-wealth-managers-top-men.html>

By Sanat Vallikappen

April 10 (Bloomberg) -- Tan Su Shan felt her first pangs of labor while trading yen for a wealth-management client.

What to do? She took her laptop and mobile phone to a Singapore delivery room and set up a foreign-exchange operation lying flat on her back as doctors administered nitrous oxide to ease the pain of giving birth.

"I was taking gas, calling the client and trying to go, 'Haaaaah,'" recalled Tan, 45, who was working for Morgan Stanley at the time and now heads private and consumer banking at DBS Group Holdings Ltd. "I don't know whether it was the baby or the exchange rate" causing the heavy breathing.

Women like Tan are one reason why female private bankers outnumber men in Asia 3-to-2 when it comes to managing the money of the wealthy, according to executive-recruiting firm Korn Ferry International. By contrast, the female-to-male manager ratio in the U.S. is 1-to-4. In Switzerland, the world's largest wealth-management center, it's 1-to-9.

Whether clients are gender-specific in their banker preferences or not, more women are taking up the profession and excelling, said Shalini Malkani, an executive recruiter at EMA Partners International Ltd., a London-based firm that estimates as many as 6,000 private bankers work in Asia. She cites perceptiveness by women in dealing with couples as clients and a growing number of women making key decisions in family businesses or making money themselves.

"Because women often come across as sensitive and empathetic, even many men would rather speak to a woman about personal wealth matters than to another man," Malkani said.

Wealthiest People

Singapore is the biggest wealth-management center in Asia, which has the highest number of wealthy people in the world as defined by at least \$1 million in investable assets. Asian millionaires increased 1.6 percent in 2011 to 3.37 million, according to the World Wealth Report published by Royal Bank of Canada and Capgemini SA. North America had 3.35 million, and Europe 3.17 million. Still, North Americans had the most investable wealth, at \$11.4 trillion, compared with \$10.7 trillion in Asia.

Women control 29 percent of Asian wealth, higher than the global average of 27 percent, according to a 2010 study by the Boston Consulting Group.

Unlike investment banking or sales and trading, where being "on the markets, on the trade flows, on the deal flows and executing full-time, 24/7," said Tan, private banking is about long-term relationships with clients, which allows for better work-life balance and encourages greater participation by women.

DBS, based in Singapore, has 10 percent more female private bankers than men, she said.

Urgent Call

Lim Li Li, a 47-year-old managing director at Bank of Singapore Ltd., the private-banking unit of Singapore-based Oversea-Chinese Banking Corp., recalled an occasion six years ago while vacationing in Japan. She got an urgent call from a wealthy Thai client, cut short her break and flew to Bangkok, where she went directly to his house for a midnight meeting with

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20 family members. She said she felt privileged to be the only banker called in to solve a “major crisis” in the Thai industrialist’s family.

“It was maybe my woman’s intuition, the sixth sense, whatever, I don’t know,” Lim said, that led the Thai business magnate to call on her instead of any of his male bankers.

Some first- or second-generation Asian entrepreneurs who like control over and involvement in the management of their wealth may prefer female relationship managers because it’s easier to treat them as a friend or family member, Lim said.

Full Discretion

At Asia’s largest wealth-management firms, including Citigroup Inc. and UBS AG, bankers have full discretion over clients’ portfolios for just 4 percent of assets, according to a 2012 Boston Consulting Group report. That’s down from 7 percent in 2006. The figure for Europe is 23 percent, up from 18 percent six years earlier.

In Europe, where clients typically hold third- or fourth- generation wealth, the banker-client relationship is primarily professional, where portfolio performance rather than family matters are discussed at meetings.

“People recognize that if you’re in private banking in Asia, you need patience, you need to have a listening ear, and therefore it tends to attract women,” said Lim, whose team is 53 percent women. “I think men tend to go for the more macho things like investment banking or corporate banking.”

‘Soft Touch’

Some Asian clients also entrust female private bankers more than their male counterparts to educate young family members about investments, risks and family-wealth planning, she said.

“After a while they get close to you, so you have the relationship with the next generation as well,” said Lim, who started her private-banking career at UBS in 2000. “Men tend to be big picture, and they’re not very into details.”

The ability to employ the “soft touch,” such as sending flowers or a box of chocolates to a client, whether male or female, gives a woman an advantage over her male counterpart, said Lim. If male bankers do the same, “it may send a wrong message” of romantic interest or lack of manliness, she said.

“In general, Asian clients like to deal with female bankers because they’re perceived to be more caring,” she said.

When a client mentions his son is studying in Australia and is homesick, a female banker may be faster to pick up on that and think of something to do, she said, such as sending a care package with favorite foods.

Detecting Conflicts

Women can sometimes more easily detect conflicts between family members, figure out when the wife is in charge of finances even when the husband is doing all the talking and know how to ask the right questions without sounding intrusive, said DBS’s Tan.

“It’s more what’s not said,” she explained, adding that in numerous meetings with millionaire male clients there’s a “very silent, quiet lady next to them. No decision gets made without their go-ahead.”

A degree of flexibility in working hours and the ability to take time off for family draws women to the profession. Women in Asia’s major cities have access to more-affordable domestic help than in Europe or the U.S., as well as family assistance in providing child care, making it easier for women to have professional careers, said Tan.

“There are a lot of young women in Asia who before they get married choose to join private banking,” she said. “So if they decide to jump off the career ladder to have babies, they can jump right back on quickly because after the babies come, they’ve got a support system to help them.”

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Culturally Negative

In Europe, men dominate private banking because of cultural norms in some countries pressuring women to stay home to raise children, Zabeen Hirji, chief human resources officer at Royal Bank of Canada, said in an interview in Singapore.

“It’s not culturally seen as a negative thing for Asian women to be working,” she said.

Switzerland is the world’s largest offshore wealth- management center with \$2.1 trillion in assets, according to the Boston Consulting Group. Hong Kong and Singapore combined manage \$1 trillion, and the consulting firm predicts they’ll surpass Switzerland within 20 years.

Higher female participation in the labor force in Asia’s two private-banking hubs is reflected in the greater proportion of women bankers, said Dominique Boer, head of Southeast Asia relationship management at Standard Chartered Plc’s private bank. Three-fifths of women in Singapore and more than half in Hong Kong work outside the home, according to a McKinsey & Co. study last year, compared with 35 percent in India.

No Difference

Salaries of Singapore-based private bankers range from S\$90,000 (\$72,600) to S\$500,000, plus bonuses, depending on the amount of assets managed, said Pan Zaixian, a Singapore-based general manager at recruitment firm **Kerry Consulting Pte.**, who said he hasn’t observed “any difference between men and women in private-banking” compensation.

Standard Chartered’s private bank, which has its global headquarters in Singapore and ranks among the top 10 in Asia by assets under management, according to Private Banker International, said at least 60 percent of its relationship managers in the city-state are women.

Spokesmen for Citigroup and UBS didn’t provide male-female ratios. Kathryn Shih, UBS’s Asia-Pacific chief executive officer for wealth management and the only woman to head the business for the top five private banks in Asia as ranked by Private Banker, wasn’t made available for an interview.

About half of the private-banking relationship managers at JPMorgan Chase & Co., ranked fourth by size in Asia by Private Banker, are women, according to data provided by the bank, which declined to provide details or ratios for the U.S. HSBC Holdings Plc, the third-largest wealth manager, and Credit Suisse Group AG, at No. 5, didn’t provide any data.

RBC, Coutts

At Royal Bank of Canada’s Asia wealth-management unit, about 60 percent of relationship managers are women, according to the bank. In Canada, the figure is about 16 percent. It’s 12 percent in the U.S. and 37 percent in the U.K.

At Coutts & Co., bankers to the Queen of England and the private-banking division of Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc, 65 percent of relationship managers in Asia are women, while in Europe and the Middle East, it’s 37 percent, and in the U.K., 48 percent, data provided by the bank show.

In 2007 and 2008, when Singapore was expanding as a wealth- management hub and seeking to attract new clients, women were hired from the hotel and airline industries to become private bankers, Tan of DBS said.

“Those days are gone,” she said. “There are now gates that you have to go through that don’t allow just a pretty face,” she said, referring to exams instituted in September 2011 for private bankers in Singapore that are a requirement for providing financial advice.



Client Care

Amanda Chen, the Singapore head of Morgan Stanley's private wealth-management unit, said she doesn't think it matters if a relationship manager is a man or a woman.

"If you take care of a client, and you really care about the client's well-being, whether it's succession, family or managing investments, you can do all that whether you're a man or a woman," said Chen, who joined Morgan Stanley in Hong Kong in 2002 after meeting Charles Mak, who ran the bank's Asian wealth-management unit, at a dinner while she was employed selling equity derivatives at Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc.

Tan of DBS started at Morgan Stanley in the late 1990s, after working at ING Barings SA. When she had her first child in 1999, she said she assured all her clients they could still phone her anytime, while also introducing them to a temporary replacement to handle day-to-day matters. With her second child in 2000, she took juggling to a new level, she said, "feeding one baby on one" breast, attaching a breast pump to the other, all while watching scrolling business news headlines on TV.

"You kind of learn to multitask," Tan said, adding that balancing pregnancies and client responsibilities is a job requirement.

"Are there a lot of Sallie Krawchecks in the U.S.?" said Tan, referring to the former head of wealth management at Citigroup and Bank of America Corp. "No, whereas there are lots of Sallie Krawchecks in Asia."

--Editors: Sheridan Prasso, Robert Friedman

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