

Stay Easy with Your Gender: Pursuing Your Career Like This Optimist

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Unnaturally natural: more of what you see literally

“Who I am today seems to be natural all the way,” Chen You-Hua begins her story as if nothing could alter what has been

predestined in life. “I remembered when I was in elementary school, I was designated to participate in the county-wide art competition on representative of my school. After that, when my parents asked me what I want to be in the future, I did not hesitate a bit and answered ‘engineer.’ Since then I had set the



trajectory in a general way and followed it up thereafter.”

After receiving her bachelor degree from college, You-Hua had worked for an architectural firm as her first job, and was later referred to another engineering consulting corporation to continue her expertise in architecture. Taking her profession into practice, You-Hua started to make preliminary or structural designs for buildings, and Taipei Veterans General Hospital was one of them. Roughly the same era as You-Hua emerged, the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) also began its initial phase those years to relieve the traffic congestion in Taipei. “During the expansion of Taipei MRT, I was lucky enough to get involved with its design and construction, where I was also assigned to be the manager of particular metro projects.”

“In support of these projects,” You-Hua adds, “I’ve realized that construction engineering itself is more than putting up buildings, or merely for the sake of construction. More often than not, good construction engineers are not just designers, but coordinators that accelerate a problem-solving process.” To carry out a successful project, You-Hua says, construction engineers must know who the users are, what their issues are, and how these can be fully addressed to



individual needs. When the construction engineering extends to the executive level of construction management, as You-Hua shares her experience in the MRT projects, a combination of key factors behind a public infrastructure should also be considered, such as its aesthetics, durability, and be that as it may, the compromise made between ideal and reality--the cost and maintenance fee. Besides thinking out of the box, You-Hua thinks that construction engineers or even the project managers should also learn to savor the taste of life, and meanwhile develop extreme sensitivity to it.

Every coin has two sides: environmentally friendly or unfriendly?

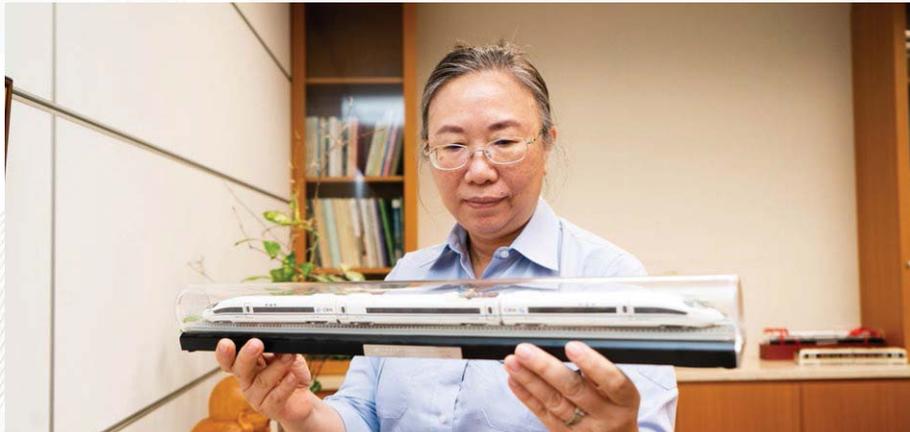
“Environmental sustainability itself can be self-contradictory,” You-Hua claims, for there are occasions that we may have wasted more to be “environmentally friendly” in our daily life. For instance, which ones are greener to

our nature, the receipts printed by wood-free thermal paper or the previous ones printed by regular paper that is biodegradable? Similar dilemma may occur in a public restroom when we choose paper towels over hand dryers after washing our hands.

As an architect before, You-Hua then cites two examples from the application of sunlight to architectures. Beside the commonly used thermal or nuclear power plants, we've been seeking alternatives for electricity generation, and solar power seems to be another way out. It is well known that the concept of converting energy from sunlight into electricity may seem clean and eco-friendly. Despite that, You-Hua argues, the disposal of used solar panels ends up in landfills, which can be costly and harmful to the environment for their toxic pollutants. To reduce the use

of electric lights, You-Hua describes, patios are cleverly designed with rain-protection roofs, which also allow natural lights to filter through. While sunlights are directed toward indoors and raise the room temperature to a degree that air-conditioning becomes a must, as far as You-Hua is concerned, the original green deeds turn out to be a double-edged sword that fights back against the climate.

"From these cases above, I would say, upon any implementation on the eco-friendly projects, it still requires a comprehensive assessment, for example, to calculate the overall carbon footprint or the overall impacts on the environment." After all, technological development is still occurring in its stage of process, which is still incomplete and left for further review even after our life ends.



Naturally born or socially mediated: what do you think?

From where she stands, You-Hua supposes that there are indeed innate differences between males and females, by which certain social expectations may have been built up on both genders or even culminated into a firm belief. When these imprinted into this society at all ages, You-Hua recalls, teenage girls had been infected by such beliefs and oriented towards liberal arts or relevant disciplines in the last few decades. On this basis, You-Hua reaches to a sub-conclusion that female engineers or architects have been fewer as a result, not to mention the senior-level or management positions held by women.

By the time of entering college or workforce after graduation, You-Hua states, it still depends on how individuals perceive such differences without self-limitation or too much focus on them. Whatever we believe may end up to be our reality, which is lurking in our backgrounds of thought. Rather than being socially determined, You-Hua reassures, most gender differences arise from the labels men and women apply by themselves. "In the context of construction engineering," You-Hua elaborates, "If you think yourself a woman and are unwilling to be wet with the slightest of sweat in the sun, you are actually attaching the gender stereotypical label and

confining yourself, not to mention any chances of promotion."

This issue of differences internalized within females should come up for discussion in the roles women have played in most families as well. "In most cases, males are the spoiled child raised by females themselves," You-Hua then illustrates with more anecdotes around her. "I have two classmates that marry each other, and you know what? The husband is the one who cooks in their family, as he is not quite satisfied with the wife's culinary skills." In this case, we can see how men share responsibilities to better their home lives, and women are not necessarily the only ones that agree on compromises by making their dishes more palatable.

Even in a traditional family, there are still chances to revert such "predetermined" roles. "I just cannot forget the harsh life my sister had been through when she got married." You-Hua recalls. "In her husband's family, my sister was merely the only one that carried out housechores; other family members would also randomly and strictly check if certain requirements were met. These did not seem to improve until her husband studied and learned to live alone in another city. After coming back from study, my brother-in-law started to split the daily chores, which also opened up an opportunity for my sister to temporarily shift the wife responsibilities and return to school again."

The art of stepping in and out: gender in mobility

As a graduate that majors in architecture, it seems not difficult to picture how You-Hua could have been virtually surrounded by males from study to work. “This could be an overstatement; I don’t really think it makes any difference in my life. Maybe it’s because of those I’ve met so far.” You-Hua confidently answers. “When I was still in college, there were more girls among my classmates who enrolled in the same year with me, compared with our juniors or seniors.” You-Hua proceeds, “I am no different from men. And I hadn’t shaken this faith until I worked part-time on the construction site during my long vacations. I was reminded not to crouch or kneel down on duty, because I was a young lady in skirt then. It was not a matter of gender differences, but of personal safety, as people there might be watching, be it intentionally or unintentionally.”

To put this incident aside, You-Hua keeps on taking her optimistic strides. “When I was employed, I was fortunate to have supervisors that provided me with plenty of opportunities regardless of my gender.” Given her promotion as a young female manager, You-Hua has ever wondered if she can make herself convincing to her fellows, especially the experienced males or those with a higher education. Without being caught in the binary oppositions between genders, namely, becoming more masculine by ridding herself of all female qualities, You-Hua resolves this self-doubt with self-understanding. By appealing to her natural instincts of soft power—being understanding, communicative, and negotiable, You-hua creates a more desired and cohesive atmosphere with her colleagues. For her, acting like other male managers is not the only way to compete, as it can eventually backfire. How to think outside the box and live together with our own gender features can be the lesson You-Hua teaches us at any moments of self-doubt.

