

The Evolution of Women in Hong Kong, Taiwan & Southeast Asia

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In Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia now, customers are more aware of the need for a gender balance of male and female in visual communications, as well as the more positive portrayal of senior men and women. This is a reflection of what is happening in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asian culture and society, with gender equality and age high on the agenda for many businesses across the region. In fact, over the past decade, the top selling images across Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia portray a similar evolution to what we are seeing globally: women were once visualised as youthful, beautiful, happy and within a family setting, but in the last several years, for the first time, we see women on an equal footing with men in a business environment (although they still look young and beautiful).

As of 2019, the top selling iStock image across Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia shows that women are now seen as true collaborators and decision makers within a business environment, and the focus is less on their looks and more about being part of a team. And this has not changed during the pandemic, searches on iStock in the last 8 months reveal that image searches are still trending in the same direction, with 'Businesswoman' increasing by 245%, 'cooperation' increasing by 525% and 'teamwork' increasing by 354%. However, as a direct result of our new reality, the most downloaded imagery has now shifted again, showing women working at home rather than in an office.

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Earlier this year, iStock by Getty Images released its global Visual GPS study, which revealed that 88% of consumers across the region believed it isn't enough to have people of various ethnicities, backgrounds and appearances in advertising—they expect companies to do a better job at capturing people's true lifestyles and cultures. And women in the region specifically are twice as likely to respond to imagery of real women with real body shapes who are confident and especially in a business setting. This points to the pandemic influencing a rise in the importance of relatability when it comes to imagery.

Going forward, consumers will want to see real women, with real body shapes, but more than that, empathy will be key to visual storytelling. Depictions of women (and men) do not necessarily need to look like us, but if we can relate to a genuine emotion or a human experience, it creates a strong connection to the image.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite massive changes in people's lives, the demand for broader representation as well as empathy in visual communications has only increased. The desire for realness and authenticity remains strong among people in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia which indicates that there is a clear appetite to want to tell, hear and see inclusive stories. Businesses must go beyond tokenistic inclusion to intentionally