Boss Lady: How Female Chinese Managers Succeed in China's *Guanxi* System

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies
Croft Institute for International Studies
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi
May 2015

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Abstract:

This project examines how female Chinese managers within China's traditionally male-dominated, *guanxi*-related private sector are coming into their own as leaders of the new Chinese economy. In this project, *guanxi* (关系) is defined as "interpersonal relations and connections" and research hinges around investigating how female Chinese managers use, or do not use, *guanxi* in their careers and personal lives. After establishing a background of preexisting scholarship, this project implements a Case Study Analysis chapter on three "self made" female entrepreneurs followed by an "Interview Analysis" chapter conducted with four female managers that took place in May, 2014. The goal of these two chapters is to find what common factors influenced three female entrepreneurs to achieve success and then apply these findings via four hypotheses to the Interview Analysis portion. In this way, research examines the personal stories of four female Chinese managers as well as a more traditional Case Study analysis of three wildly successful female entrepreneurs. The combination of a case study analysis combined with a series of interviews is rare in this field as preexisting scholarship pertaining to how women interact with China's traditional *guanxi*-dependent corporate culture is rare. This project discovers how female Chinese managers are building their own female-centric *guanxi* networks as well as implementing new managerial strategies to safeguard their newfound positions of power. At the conclusion of this project, a new trend of female-led *guanxi* networks emerges as well as how women are now becoming power-players within China's private sector.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Following Deng Xiaoping's 1978 "Reform and Openness" policy, the People's Republic of China has undergone over thirty years of unprecedented economic growth and development. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allowed for the previously state-controlled economy to become more market oriented; thus, greater numbers of Chinese citizens could freely join the workforce and begin participating in what came to be called a market economy with "socialist characteristics" (McNally, 2011). However, without omnipresent state control, this new economic system quickly saw a resurgence of an ancient Chinese social construct known as *guanxi* (关系), which translates to "interpersonal connections and relationships". *Guanxi* came to govern everything from who was promoted within a given firm to what company was selected for lucrative contracts. Therefore, while the Chinese economy took off, succeeding within it rapidly became a game of "who you know." Due to its roots in patriarchic Confucian ethics, the *guanxi* system emphasized the interpersonal social relationships among men exclusively. Therefore, in the first decades following the "Reform and Openness" policy, the upper echelons of China's economy truly became a billionaire boys club.

With that said, female managers and entrepreneurs are beginning to climb their way up China's economic ladder, several having become self-made billionaires in the last decade. Since before the "Reform and Openness" policy, women have consistently played an important role in the Chinese economy, particularly in low-wage manufacturing positions. They currently make up 48.7% of China's total population as well as 45% of China's workforce (Huang, 2013). Those figures indicate that, while Chinese women have long contributed to their county's economic growth, they are only

recently beginning to play a more managerial role. It is clear that in the decades following the reversal of a gender indiscriminant state-controlled employment allotment system, women are gradually coming into their own as leaders of the new Chinese economy. As this trend continues, women are finding themselves at loggerheads with traditional cultural values and phenomena such as male-dominated *guanxi*-reliant work environments, family responsibly, and China's traditionally male-centric corporate culture. This project seeks to examine women in positions of managerial authority within China's private sector with research hinging on the question: how do female Chinese managers achieve success within China's observably male-dominated *guanxi* system? Therefore, this project will hopefully shed light on how female Chinese managers are playing an increasingly important and visible role in a corporate and cultural system that traditionally discriminates against them.

Background and Literature Review:

As expected, most studies pertaining to this subject can be classified into two distinct camps: those that examine the role of women and those that explore the nature of *guanxi*. It was only very seldom that the words "women" and "*guanxi*" appeared on the same page. However, a select few articles managed to bridge the gap. The majority of scholarship pertaining to *guanxi* revolves around two key topics: the inherent nature of *guanxi* within Chinese society and how *guanxi*'s future role may shift as Chinese society becomes gradually more intertwined with the West. The basic academic understanding of *guanxi* as conducted by mostly non-Chinese researchers emphasizes *guanxi*'s ancient roots and embedded nature within Chinese society (Littlefield and Su, 2001). The

arguments presented by several researchers all contend that due to *guanxi*'s foundation within Confucian ethical teachings, it is unlikely to ever yield or diminish under growing societal influences from the West (Ballantyne et all, 2012). Even so, this school of thought pertaining to *guanxi*'s embedded nature is no longer held as foolproof. More and more literature is emerging which argues that *guanxi*'s role will shift in the coming years.

This second research camp has begun to argue for *guanxi*'s imminent decline, particularly within China's rapidly globalizing economy and private sector. Most projects that seek to examine *guanxi*'s future role have been written in the past several years, which dovetails nicely with the Chinese economy's recent growth and heightened degree of global interconnectivity. Research that argues for a diminishing role of *guanxi* points to how China will have to begin to conform to a more "global standard" of business practices as the Chinese economy continues to grow into its newfound global role (Brennan and Wilson, 2009). Additionally, some research takes a more psychological approach when examining modern-day *guanxi*, arguing that any practice which encourages individual gain at a greater societal cost will become stigmatized in a historically collectivist society like China (Fan, 2002). However, while research is being conducted to identify factors contributing to *guanxi*'s potential decline, most academic reports also tend to include caveats that further describe *guanxi* as a "sticky" social phenomenon, admitting that its role will prove slow to change. Therefore, it is easy to see how *guanxi* plays, and will continue to play, an important role within the Chinese economy and private sector.

Much like the existing scholarship on *guanxi*, literature pertaining to women is also diverse. Most research that examines women's role within the Chinese economy

tends to center around work force participation rates as well as the monumental migration of rural Chinese from their poor agriculturally dependent homes to more prosperous urban centers of low wage manufacturing (Leung, 2003). These studies emphasize the fact that women, even after the state-controlled employment allotment system was abolished following the "Reform and Openness" policy, still occupy an extremely important place within the Chinese economy. However, these positions were typically low wage, labor-intensive manufacturing jobs that catered to the relatively uneducated poor (Leung, 2003). As the Chinese economy continued to open up to further market-based strategies throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, more women began seeking jobs beyond menial manufacturing positions. The emergence of privately held corporations and the influence exerted by foreign firms slowly beginning to enter the Chinese market were also cited as crucial to the sharp increase in female managers, which began around the early to mid 1990s (Xiong et all, 2013).

As mentioned above, the observable shift from a strictly state controlled system to a more market oriented one has altered women's role in the new Chinese economy. During the era of Mao and more hardline communist rhetoric, women were systematically integrated into the Chinese economy. However, before the establishment of the communist regime, women's role in society could be summed up by the phrase "男主外，女主内"(*nan zhu wai nü zhu nei*), which translates to "men manage/have authority outside the home, and women manage/have authority inside the home. This phrase perfectly encapsulates how women in a traditional feudalistic Chinese society were confined to a domestic existence within the home and out of public view. This traditional understanding of the female role within society combined with the "Three

Obediences" of Confucian values (daughter to father, wife to husband, and mother to adult sons) meant that women were effectively prevented from assuming an active or productive role in Chinese society beyond the private authority a woman could exert within the confides of her own family unit (Leung, 2013). With the arrival of the communists in 1949, this role began to shift.

Within the general field of literature pertaining to the shaping of a modern female identity within Chinese society, the consensus seems to be that women were confined to a lowly feudal existence until the arrival of the communists in 1949. However, a portion of literature examined seeks to argue for an earlier start date for female advancement. While certainly not economic in nature, the role of women began to gradually shift under the Empress Dowager Cixi of the Qing Dynasty beginning in the late nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth centuries (Chang, 2013). Empress Cixi rose from the rank of a lowly concubine within the harem of the Forbidden City and used a combination of cunning and slight of hand to seize power from first her son, and then her stepson, effectively controlling China for the better part of forty years. During this period, China and the Qing Dynasty were subject to colossal military defeats and a general decline. However, existing scholarship argues that Empress Cixi laid the foundation for the rapid advancement of women in the decades to come. By prohibiting foot binding, allowing intermarriage between Han and Manchu ethnic groups, and hosting delegations of foreign ladies in the Forbidden City, a general trend towards the advancement of women was already underway long before 1949 (Chang, 2013). However, these imperial decrees took much longer to take root in a nation already on the brink of collapse, and it was not until the Mao era that women saw any degree of meaningful economic integration.

In accordance to Marxist thought and ideology, Mao sought to integrate women more holistically into Chinese society and, more importantly, agricultural and economic production. While the traditional "Three Obediences" of feudal society emphasized familial bonds as the key to a harmonious life and, in reality, domestic drudgery for women, Mao sought to build a society based on the intrinsic bond between the citizen and the state (Leung, 2013). By deemphasizing the individualistic family unit and replacing it with a more inclusive notion of a larger Chinese state, the Chinese Communist Party could draw upon the entire adult work force (both men and women) to labor in the name of the state and under a unifying Communist Flag. The government allotted jobs to both men and women along equal ratios and sought to advance individuals within organizations by merit and political zeal rather than by gender (Leung, 2013). By carrying out these policies and instituting limited maternity leave and work-day childcare services all provided by the state, women could finally begin to play a meaningful role outside the home. It is worth mentioning that while these newfound workforce opportunities saw the advancement of the role of women in society, the positions held by female workers were rarely considered to be that of a "manager" or any position with overarching authority. With the dawn of the Cultural Revolution, this process was further expedited when female workers were encouraged to become "Iron Women" and enthusiastically participate in class struggle, even assisting in the denouncement of members of their own families in the name of state advancement (Leung, 2013). This image of an "Iron Woman" of Maoist China shares some similarities to the United States' own "Rosie the Riveter" posters of World War II, which sought to entice women out of their houses and into military factories. However, instead of motivating women to attack

foreign enemies like Japan and Germany, China's "Iron Women" were used to encourage internal (often violent) class struggle within the Cultural Revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution, economic activity took a backseat to political causes, but following the death of Mao in 1976 Deng Xiaoping could resume a more economically centered agenda. However, by implementing the "Reform and Openness" policy, Deng Xiaoping largely repealed the state-controlled employment allotment system, which would prove to be an inadvertent step backward for women in regards to employment and intra-institutional advancement (Li et all. 2013). Scholarship tends to paint the employment allotment system in a positive light, especially for women. Within said system, an individual's choice of position was rarely taken into consideration, rather a combination of test scores, political background, and inherent ability to do the job all factored into where an individual was eventually placed. This system was relatively "blind" meaning that a set series of factors would determine each individual's allotted position regardless of gender. Additionally, within some state-controlled enterprises, quotas for women and minority groups were established to better ensure a well-rounded and diverse workplace (Leung, 2013). While this system saw the introduction of Chinese women to the greater workforce, many positions given to women via the employment allotment system did not carry many particular managerial responsibilities. With the repeal of this system, the male-centric *guanxi* dependent method of advancement saw a rapid resurgence. While the Chinese economy grew, there was no longer a government institution to give the final say as to who should be hired or not. With employment diversity quotas repealed and many female centric benefits, like free childcare, gone, women began to experience increased levels of gender bias. Therefore, the advancement

of meaningful female economic participation, particularly in managerial positions, appeared to be at loggerheads with Chinese economic growth (Xiong et all, 2013). Even so, following the introduction of the "Reform and Openness" Policy, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy saw more and more women begin to pour into the private sector regardless of the potential for discrimination.

It was only at this point, when women began to play a less marginal role in the Chinese economy, that they began to find themselves obstructed by China's male-dominated *guanxi* system with any observable frequency. While literature examining female interaction and managerial style within China's *guanxi* system remains scant, there are a few ethnographies and studies that illustrate the nature of female managers' problems. One such ethnography observed ways in which women navigate positions riddled with the necessity for business entertaining, called *yingchou* (应酬), and *guanxi* cultivation by attempting to drink and banquet "like one of the men" (Mason, 2013). When women in the observed work units began to complain about the excessive drinking and banqueting necessary to develop the *guanxi* they needed to succeed, they were often rebuked by male coworkers. Women in these positional also felt the added pressures involved in having children or balancing a family. Additional studies also focus on how *guanxi* has effectively become built in to China's financial system, discussing how female managers and even distinguished CEOs must often endure weeks of *guanxi* building banqueting and entertainment before being able to secure basic needs like bank loans and other financial services (Xiong et all, 2013).

The bulk of literature examined for this project views *guanxi* as a constant, an evolving yet self perpetuating facet of the Chinese economy and any and all social

dealings therein. This school of thought argues that women must come to "play by the rules" of men in order to advance or succeed within a given organization. However, while the very existence of *guanxi* is held as a constant, the implicit role *guanxi* plays is still up for debate (Brannen and Wilson, 2010). Due to increased levels of foreign trade and investment, *guanxi* within the private sector is, at the very least, currently evolving to better suit the general trends of internationalization within the Chinese economy. This indicates that while women are currently experiencing a largely negative impact of a male-dominated *guanxi* system, a new variety of female *guanxi* could also take root and become of equal or even greater importance than the current male oriented *guanxi* culture of today.

While literature looking ahead to the future of *guanxi* remains limited, there are a few key sources that seem to point the way. With women now making up a larger percentage of the workforce than ever before, the likelihood that *guanxi* and the benefits accrued from relying upon it for personal advancement will remain a male-dominated social structure appears low (Yu and Zhongdang, 1999). As the number of women holding managerial positions increases, researchers speculate that networks of female-centric *guanxi* circles could emerge in direct contrast to the current male-dominated system (Mason, 2013). While the particular nature of a wholly female-dominated *guanxi* system is examined later in this project, it is worth mentioning that many academics tend to view this trend as a natural reaction to the increased number of women entering into managerial positions and environments that have been traditionally male-dominated. In these traditionally male dominated positions, women are currently finding themselves

outnumbered and emerged in a corporate culture that may not always dovetail with their career goals or family responsibilities (Mason, 2013).

Katherine Mason's ethnography in the *China Journal*, "To Your Health! Toasting, Intoxication and Gendered Critique among Banqueting Women" sought to examine how women are overcoming the male-centric *guanxi*-developing banqueting circuit within a Public Health office. This project outlined how women, even in state managed industries such as healthcare, must still navigate the liquor-soaked labyrinth of *guanxi* building in order to achieve professional goals and advancement all while balancing their private family lives. However, due to increased numbers of women within these work units (where appointment and placement usually arise from purely objective test scores and collegiate performance), women are beginning to develop their own strategies and independent *guanxi* networks in order to promote their own interests and dodge the unhealthy lifestyle created by a constant need to entertain (应酬 *ying chou*)(Mason, 2013). Women began to lament the fact that their career advancement hinged upon the ability to drink and entertain clients and superiors. The lack of time spent with family was also viewed as a high price to pay for personal advancement, which within the *guanxi* network, typically took place after hours at late night banquets and KTV (karaoke) parlors.

As Mason's study shows, the women interviewed often expressed disdain towards other women who seemingly wantonly embraced the "drink like a man" mentality. Instead of following the example set by their drunken male superiors and coworkers, women began to protect each other by pouring out liquor or mixing in soft drinks behind the backs of their male tablemates in order to stomach the high amounts of toasting and

guanxi-driven overindulgences that accompany any Chinese banquet (Mason, 2013). In this way, women were constructing their own *guanxi* networks and utilizing them to outsmart male coworkers into thinking that they were indeed able to "keep up" with the boys. This may simply appear as a party trick or behind the back maneuvering, but by uniting together as women in a common work unit, these women were utilizing *guanxi* in a similar method to men. While men often used the excessive drinking and eating associated with banqueting as a way of engendering *guanxi* through mutual feelings of affection or camaraderie, called *ganqing* (感情), the women seated around the same table would use the avoidance of heavy drinking and overeating to engender similar feelings amongst themselves (Mason, 2013). Looking ahead, women in other industries may also create similar professional networks to achieve common goals or avoid commonly disliked activities that remain inherent within the male-oriented *guanxi* sphere. These new female *guanxi* networks could one day replace the current trends of banqueting and drinking, instead focusing more on family life and workplace competency rather than after hours drinking abilities. The interview portion of this research project will seek to examine to what extent these female-oriented *guanxi* networks already exist within managerial circles of the Chinese economy.

Based on the variety of sources presented above, this project will seek to utilize a wide array of English and Chinese language texts to gain a more complete understanding of the current state of female managers within the Chinese private sector. This new understanding will analyze how female Chinese managers balance family lives, start companies, create their own *guanxi* networks, and generally achieve success in modern China. With the above-mentioned background on the emerging role of women as well as

ways in which women in public sector jobs have come to form their own *guanxi*

networks, I hope to see how successful female managers in China's private sector have

rewritten the rules of the domestic economy's view of women as well as how female

managers will continue to exert a lasting influence on the global economic stage.

Data:

      As with any research project of this scale, data will be derived from a diverse

array of sources available to me from both the United States and China. Because English

language texts do not always do a given topic justice, this project will also rely on

Chinese language texts to make possible a more comprehensive understanding of

research topics. First, this project will rely on several academic studies made available

online as well as in print editions accessible via the J.D. Williams Library at the

University of Mississippi. This foundation will allow me to put my project into a modern

context and set the stage for the remainder of my research. The introduction of this

project will include brief summaries of the state of *guanxi* in Chinese society as well as

give a brief outline of the role women have played within the modern (post 1978

"Reform and Openness") Chinese economy.

      Following the review of the literature, the second chapter will consist of three

case studies to be conducted that examine preexisting English and Chinese language

materials. Each case study looks at a different female Chinese manager or entrepreneur

and her personal route to success, with emphasis placed on how she manages her

individual corporation or business as well as drawing comparisons between each

individual female selected. Female managers selected for said case study intentionally

hail from a diverse group of industries and geographic regions to better identify unifying traits or strategies particular to them. Case study analysis includes Zhang Yin, of Nine Dragons Paper Holdings Ltd. from Guangdong, Yang Lan, of Sun Media Group and "One on One with Yang Lan" from Beijing, as well as Lei Jufang, of Tiebet Cheezheng Tibetan medicine from Gansu. These three women are involved in manufacturing, media and broadcasting, and pharmaceutical industries respectively. While most of China's industry is concentrated along the eastern coast, I make an effort to include women from more remote and western provinces as well as more rural areas (such as Lei Jufang) to further ensure that comparisons between each case can be viewed as universal throughout China.

While some English language literature pertaining to Chinese female managers exists, most cited research derives from Chinese language articles and interviews collected in cooperation with Jizhe Zhang, a graduate student in the Department of Economics at the University of Mississippi. Mr. Zhang did not only assist in finding Chinese language source materials, but also engaged in discussions and helped with translation of difficult passages. The literature examined pertaining to the Case Study Chapter is diverse and, due to the nature of each manager's career and public image, may not always paint a "complete" picture of how each woman started or manages her firm. Therefore, I have occasionally had to made inferences based on each woman's background and entrepreneurial experience in order to properly examine the role of *guanxi* in each woman's life and career.

Most data pertaining to portions of this project dealing with *guanxi* has already been collected, but with the help of Mr. Zhang, I incorporated more up-to-date Chinese

language sources into this project. While critical to the nature of the research question,

an exhaustive examination of *guanxi* itself is not at the center of this project. Instead,

guanxi and its role within Chinese society are defined and thoroughly outlined in the

introduction and its influence further expounded upon in subsequent case studies and

interview chapters of this project. The introduction and case studies sections are

followed by an analysis of a series of interviews with female Chinese managers

conducted in China with the goal of seeing firsthand how they navigate the Chinese

business sphere. The interview process is discussed further in a later chapter. The goal of

this project's data collection process is to incorporate the above-mentioned preexisting

scholarship as well as data collected via the series of interviews and case studies to gain a

comprehensive understanding of the role female Chinese managers currently play in the

Chinese private sector and the *guanxi* system therein.

Chapter 2: Case Study Analysis

Introduction and Methodology

This chapter seeks to better understand how female Chinese managers succeed in China's *guanxi* system by examining three exemplary women: Zhang Yin, of Nine Dragons Paper Holdings Ltd. from Guangdong, Yang Lan, of Sun Media Group and "One on One with Yang Lan" from Beijing, as well as Lei Jufang, of Tibet Cheezheng Tibetan Medicine from Gansu. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role *guanxi* does or does not play in the careers of three extremely successful female Chinese entrepreneurs, as well as focus on the special strategies or managerial styles that helped these women achieve success. The role of *guanxi* in each woman's career is carefully considered and ultimately compared to the more traditional male-centric *guanxi*-dependent route to success adhered to by many of China's leading male entrepreneurs. By comparing and contrasting how all three women came to establish their own wildly successful firms across a wide variety of industries, patterns or trends for female managerial success may become more apparent and observable. The findings of this case study analysis are then wholly incorporated into a series of interview questions administered and further discussed in the subsequent "interviews/field work" chapter. However, before further analysis is conducted, the choice of these three women as case studies must first be properly explained.

As stated above, all three women have established extremely successful firms/corporations and all three women did so through their own unique process and managerial style. All told, Forbes pegs the current combined wealth of these three

entrepreneurs is in excess of ten billion USD. Therefore these women have far and away

risen above what would be considered a "typical" female Chinese manager. However,

the choice of these women, who are seen as superstars in their own industries, was not

merely motivated by a ranking in Forbes Magazine, but rather through the careful

consideration of each woman's road to success as well as industry of operation and place

of birth. To simply choose the three richest women in China entirely misses the point of

this case study. As stated above, this case study portion will examine the role of *guanxi*

in the careers of female Chinese managers, but that does not mean that I sought out three

women whose careers are directly involved with and/or dependent upon it. In reality, I

selected women who, on the surface of things, achieved success without a previously

established *guanxi* network.

For example, merely selecting a woman who inherited a successful real estate

firm from her father would fail to provide any insights into how female Chinese

managers achieve success independently. Therefore, the three women chosen for this

case study are indeed considered "self-made" as opposed to inheriting a successful firm

as is commonplace within China's rapidly emerging "rich second generation", *fu er dai* (

富二代). Therefore, the general lack of previously established *guanxi* ties contributed to

each woman's ultimate selection. By selecting three self-made, seemingly *guanxi*-

independent women for analysis, I am able to observe if and how the *guanxi* networks

established by each women during her career helped her achieve success. However, due

to the broad nature of professional *guanxi* as well as the interconnectivity and "grey area"

between familial ties and business contacts, each woman's background (particularly

pertaining to male relatives) will be assessed in order to better understand the potential

for pre-existing familial *guanxi* and to see if said *guanxi* may have played a larger role in each woman's success than previously thought.

As presented above, these three women hail from geographically distinct regions of Mainland China. Zhang Yin and Yang Lan (from Guangdong and Beijing respectively) simultaneously represent the north and south as well as the more developed eastern coast of China. While the vast majority of China's wealth lies along its eastern seaboard, the need to geographically balance this case study became apparent; therefore, I sought an entrepreneur from the less developed west. Lei Jufang, from rural Gansu, fits the bill. While these three women cannot be seen as true representatives of the nation as a whole, they do allow for certain levels of inter-regional comparison and rule out the potential for rural/urban or east/west biases. Therefore, the choice to select women from geographically distinct regions of China was made out of a desire to observe potentially universal trends across female Chinese managers throughout China.

The same reasoning applies to the industry in which each selected female Chinese manager established her firm. Zhang Yin's Nine Dragons Paper Holding Ltd. is involved in the recycling of scrap paper and production of new paper products, therefore she helps represent China's omnipresent manufacturing sector. Yang Lan's Sun Media Group as well as her television show, "One on One With Yang Lan", helps represent China's booming mass media industry. Finally, Lei Jufang's Tibet Cheezheng Tibetan Medicine Company represents the pharmaceutical industry. All three industries: manufacturing, mass media, and pharmaceuticals, are seen as pillar industries within the Chinese economy, therefore serving as good indicators to the overall corporate environment within China's private sector as a whole. In this way, the findings of this case study

analysis (regardless of the small sample examined) can better represent the entirety of the upper echelons of the Chinese managerial environment within the private sector.

While working in tandem with Mr. Zhang, I actively removed articles from my search criteria that seemed to "sugar coat" the careers of each woman, I managed to find series of Chinese language interviews and cross-examinations from business journals available online that were subsequently incorporated into this case study analysis. It is worth mentioning that each woman selected for case study analysis has achieved such high levels of success that they are personally almost considered a "brand" all their own. The way each woman is portrayed in the media can directly correlate to public perception of her firm. Therefore, interviews and articles in mainstream publications rarely portray them in a negative light. It was for that reason that several blogs and other online sources had to be scrutinized, particularly pertaining to each woman's familial background, which is often seldom mentioned or heavily censored by the entrepreneurs themselves. It is therefore a shortcoming of this chapter that some articles may only be presented as anecdotal evidence as opposed to concrete fact due to the relatively unconfirmed veracity of their authorship or content. However, it goes without saying that I made all possible attempts to avoid sources that were intentionally mud slinging or rumor mongering.

The basic content of each case study will include: a simple background section, education and early career, personal and professional hurdles and challenges, creation of current firm or corporation, as well as a final analysis of each woman's *guanxi* network and the role *guanxi* may or may not have played in their careers. Once all three women have been discussed, a final portion of this chapter will seek to compare and contrast each

woman, as well as seek out unifying features and managerial characteristics (*guanxi* dependent or not) that help explain each case study's current self-made empire.

Zhang Yin

Background and Early Career

Zhang Yin was born in Shaoguan, Guangdong province, in 1957. With family roots in northeastern Heilongjiang province, she was the eldest of eight children born into a military family (He, 2006). At that time, her father was a low-level commander in the Red Army. Despite a sterling reputation and no recorded offenses against the CCP, her father was later persecuted as a "capitalist roader" and a "counterrevolutionary" during Mao Zedong's ill-fated Cultural Revolution (He, 2009). While articles in business journals pertaining to Zhang Yin's humble beginnings are abundant, details of Zhang Yin's father's persecution and rehabilitation remain scant, but the process of seeing one's father criticized and rebuked by fellow party members and private citizens alike could not have been a comfortable experience for young Zhang Yin. Therefore, unlike many children of military or government officials today that make up the so-called "princeling party" *taizidang* (太子党), Zhang Yin's childhood was far from carefree or extravagant. While her Father made a career of serving in the Red Army, and was therefore privy to certain privileges and connections outside of what most citizens could access at that time, little evidence suggests that Zhang Yin would ever rely on her Father's Red Army *guanxi* to advance her studies or career (He, 2006).

In the early 1980s, the Chinese economy was beginning to reap the rewards of Deng Xiaoping's 1978 "Reform and Openness Policy", *gaige kaifang* (改革开放), which

Deng implemented as a way of spring boarding the Chinese economy onto the global stage after decades of state-induced stagnation under Maoist rule. During the early stages of the "Reform and Openness" policy, Shenzhen, a port city situated in southern China, was selected as one of the first to see widespread implementation of Deng's new market-oriented economic model. At that time, the establishment of state-regulated "Special Economic Zones" *jingji tequ* (经济特区) and other government incentives sought to draw domestic and foreign investment alike to the region. It was during this era, at the dawn of the "Reform and Openness" policy, that Zhang Yin moved to Shenzhen and along with her first husband invested 30,000 RMB (approximately $5,000) into the creation of a paper trading company (Barboza, 2007).

During the mid 1980s, China's fledgling manufacturing sector often fell victim to raw material shortages. Paper was considered a valuable raw material for a variety of products; demand therefore skyrocketed. Due to China's lack of trees suitable for the manufacturing of high quality paper products, low cost, low quality materials made from rice fibers and other agricultural materials dominated the market. Since the United States boasts abundant paper-producing trees and an agricultural supply chain to systematically and ecologically harvest them, high quality paper was readily available. Zhang Yin saw an opportunity in the US paper market. By importing dirt-cheap American scrap paper to China, she could recycle the imported scraps to domestically produce high quality paper goods at a fraction of the cost (He, 2009). By using her imagination and recognizing a key gap in the supply chain of paper products to China, Zhang Yin began importing scrap paper from the United States and Canada, thus kick starting an empire.

Firm Establishment and Career Synopsis

Once Zhang Yin realized that the desperate demand for cheap, high quality paper products in mainland China could be met via cheaply, often discarded, American scrap paper, her career took off at breakneck speed. After she met early success importing scrap paper from the United States into Shenzhen and Hong Kong, Zhang Yin decided to expand her marketplace and spent several years in the United States where she and her second husband formed America Cheng Nam in 1990, a slightly larger scale scrap paper exporting firm (Osnos, 2009). Early on, Zhang Yin and her husband Liu Ming Cheng spent afternoons driving all over California in their used Dodge Caravan minivan. Endlessly going from scrapyard to scrapyard in search of paper waste, Zhang Yin managed to find several suppliers who were more than happy for Zhang Yin to take bulky waste paper off their hands (Barboza, 2007). It was via this humble, rather grassroots start, that America Cheng Nam became one of the first firms directly involved in scrap paper export to China and quickly grew as demand in China began to increase exponentially. Eventually, Zhang Yin sought to streamline her means of production and in 1995 established a large scale manufacturing facility in the southern city of Dongguan known as Nine Dragons Paper Holdings (He, 2006).

Zhang Yin's business model worked. Within a decade, with her serving as Chairwoman, Nine Dragons Paper Holdings would come to own 11 massive paper machines that currently dwarf much of their manufacturing competitors in Europe and the United States. With the volume of paper manufactured increasing, Zhang Yin now has well over 5,000 employees spread across several manufacturing centers and over $1 billion USD in annual revenue. Last year alone, reported profits rose 349% and topped

out at $175 million (Forbes, 2013). As of last year, Zhang Yin's personal wealth was

calculated as having exceeded $5 billion. China's export based economy means that the

need for containerboard, such as cardboard and other packing materials, has only

increased in recent years.

Managerial Style and the potential role of *Guanxi*

Nine Dragons Paper Holding cannot attribute its success solely to entering the

market at the right place at the right time. Ultimately, Zhang Yin and her unique

managerial style and personal *guanxi* network proved critical to the exponential growth

of her firm. Under Zhang Yin's watchful eye, Nine Dragons Paper Holding has become

one of the world's largest paper producers; she is viewed by many as the world's richest

"self-made" woman. To transform an original investment of a mere $5000 into a global

empire with personal holdings in excess of $5 billion is nothing short of extraordinary. In

China and beyond, family ties and corrupt dealings often lubricate the wheels of progress,

particularly in nations undergoing periods of extremely rapid economic growth with

governmental systems potentially ill-equipped to ensure fair business practices. In Zhang

Yin's case, no evidence points to any under-table dealings when it came to the

establishment of Nine Dragons. However, while inheritance and pseudo-legal

government dealings may not have had anything to do with Zhang Yin's success, *guanxi*

certainly has. By leading Nine Dragons with her own unique managerial style and

mastering the art of cultivating and maintaining a highly functional *guanxi* network,

Zhang Yin all but ensured her own success (He, 2009).

Western observers often view *guanxi* as a preexisting and predetermined network of socially interconnected circles of family, friends, and coworkers. However, little attention is ever paid to the establishment of wholly new *guanxi* circles, and for a business and government outsider such as Zhang Yin, that is exactly what she did. In Chinese language interviews and a book entitled *China's Richest Woman: Zhang Yin* (He, 2009), Zhang Yin's managerial style is often described as *rouxing guanli* (柔性管理), meaning "flexible management" (He, 2009). That term is used to describe how Zhang Yin interacts with her employees and fellow managers and indicates the intricate ways in which Zhang Yin cultivates *guanxi* in her everyday social and business dealings. In this case, being "flexible" describes how Zhang Yin is effortlessly able to communicate with individuals working at all levels of Nine Dragons. She often eats lunch in simple cafeteria style dining halls with her lowest-wage employees at her paper manufacturing facilities and will stage movie nights and talent shows at her employees' dorms in order to engender a sense of teamwork and create a more harmonious workplace. She is even addressed as *Zhang dajie* (张大姐), meaning "Big Sister Zhang", by most of her 5,000 plus employees. While this could be interpreted merely as goodwill, this managerial style also serves the double purpose of developing *guanxi* at all levels of her firm, thereby affectively maintaining high levels of employee efficiency, satisfaction, as well as personal power over the firm as a whole (He, 2009).

Familial *guanxi* among China's ultra-rich has also made headlines in recent years. While Zhang Yin's childhood is largely free of scrutiny from having been on the receiving end of any unfair advantages resulting from family background, her children cannot say the same. A favorite saying of Zhang Yin that is also often quoted in articles

and blog posts about her pertains to her overall view of how to operate such a large and successful firm: *xiao jiating, da gongsi* (小家庭，大公司), meaning "little family, big company" (Osnos, 2009). Zhang Yin and her immediate family members hold a 72% stake in Nine Dragons Paper Holding, and they more than intend to keep it that way.

While Zhang Yin publicly denies any unfair or unethical behavior, one of her son's promotions to an executive position raised plenty of eyebrows among business observers. While Zhang Yin maintains that her son was more than qualified for his position, this promotion slightly tarnished Zhang Yin's maverick reputation within China's corporate elite (Barboza, 2007). In addition to the promotion of her son, any business venture in China must have a certain degree of interaction with the government, which inevitably relates to *guanxi*. While Zhang Yin's personal government connections are not public information, if she does have any particular government ties, they would most likely to have been made under her own accord and after establishing Nine Dragons. Therefore, while her own personal *guanxi* certainly helped pave the way to success, Zhang Yin's overall career can still be characterized in Chinese as having gone through the "front door", *qian men* (前门)，which implies fair practices, as opposed to the "back door", *hou men* (后门), which implies utilizing corruption or unfair *guanxi*. While still a business revolutionary in her own right, her son's promotion along with the huge stake in Nine Dragons still maintained by Zhang Yin's immediate family members seem to indicated that Zhang Yin is just as capable of maneuvering within China's traditional *guanxi*-based business culture as she is in the greater global economy.

Yang Lan

Background and Early Career

Yang Lan was born in Beijing in 1968; her mother was an engineer and her father was an English language interpreter and professor of English literature at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Her father was a lifelong scholar and even briefly served as a primary translator for Premier Zhou Enlai (Lu, 2006). However, Yang Lan's father was by no means a member of any "inner circle" of government translators or aids to the Premier. It could be said, though, that her father did have a profound influence on her future career, especially once Yang Lan selected English language and literature as her field of Study at Beijing Foreign Studies University. While in school, Yang Lan pursued a wide variety of activities and academic interests, including acting in plays and taking International Economics classes; but she also actively participated as a host for many a campus talent show or local access program, which may have peaked her interest to enter the field of broadcasting (Rabkin, 2010).

At the time of Yang Lan's graduation from university in 1990, to be a newsreader or television host required having spent years enrolled in special state controlled broadcasting universities. Broadcasting and news reading were considered major fields of study and they traditionally required students to spend countless hours rehearsing diction, pronunciation, interview skills, and television etiquette. Despite lacking the necessary background, Yang Lan was recommended by several of her professors and peers to audition for the Zheng Da Variety Show in the spring of her senior year at Beijing Foreign Studies University (Lü, 2008). Yang Lan was considered to be a strong candidate, yet many producers had their doubts that a young woman with no news reading experience could ever hope to be a moderator for a nationwide talk show, but her

critics were soon proven wrong. The Zheng Da Variety Show became a hit, and while serving next to a more experienced male host, Yang Lan was able to further hone her skills as an excellent orator and presenter.

After a few successful years of hosting the Zheng Da Variety Show, one of the senior executives of the broadcasting company responsible, Dhanin Chearavanont of Charoen Pokphand Inc., offered to pay to send Yang Lan abroad to further her studies (Lu, 2006). While hesitant at first to leave such a successful show, Yang Lan had never been criticized as being easily satisfied. Her success as moderator of the Zheng Da Variety Show had wetted her appetite for a bigger, independent show. Yang Lan felt that the only way to push herself to the next level of broadcasting was to quit Zheng Da and take Mr. Chearavanont up on his offer. She enrolled in a masters program at Columbia University in New York (Lu, 2006). Her decision to leave China and study abroad during the early 1990s was synonymous with *chu guo re* (出国热), meaning something like "study abroad fever" that spurred thousands of Chinese students to go abroad and acquire new skills that could then benefit their careers in Mainland China. While in New York, Yang Lan learned about American-style telecasts and interview-based talk shows; she also studied film and documentaries, which she would later rebroadcast in China to mixed reviews. It was also while in New York that Yang Lan married Bruno Wu in 1995, the son of an elite Shanghai family, who serves as her primary business partner to this day (Rothman, 2014).

Firm Establishment and Career Synopsis

Upon her return to China in 1996, Yang Lan returned to the field of broadcast journalism. She joined Phoenix Television in 1997 where she continued to host cultural and variety shows to much acclaim (Lu, 2006). After returning from New York, Yang Lan was viewed by many as a *nü qiang ren* (女强人), meaning "strong woman" or "successful career woman" due to her relentless drive and determination. Her 1998 show "Yang Lan Studio" drew from what she had learned at Columbia and saw the production of in-depth talk shows modeled on the precedent set by Barbra Walters and David Frost (Martin, 2010). By the turn of the millennium, Yang Lan was seen as "China's Oprah" and had one of the most recognizable faces in the country. Similar to her American counterpart, Yang Lan's lucrative contracts with Phoenix TV allowed her to spearhead several charitable organizations and her new found fame afforded her a chance to interact with celebrities and media moguls which allowed her organizations to generate substantial charitable donations (Rabkin, 2010). Her inherent fame and personal choice to involve herself in charitable organizations allowed her to make many famous friends as well as increase her personal clout within the media industry, in this way, Yang Lan was able to construct a *guanxi* network to better suit her career goals and personal aspirations. However, despite her nationwide fame and scrupulous broadcasting coverage, Yang Lan would soon face one of the biggest challenges of her career after establishing a new media company based in Hong Kong with her husband Bruno Wu in 2000.

Yang Lan had so far made a career out of taking chances and confronting risks. Up to 2000, her bold career moves had paid off handsomely and Yang Lan was a full-fledged celebrity in China and beyond. It was at this point at her career that Yang Lan

and her husband Bruno Wu decided to acquire an ailing Hong Kong based

telecommunications company and renamed it Sun Television Cybernetworks Holdings

Limited. Sun TV, as it came to be known, was first billed as a threat to Rupert

Murdoch's Asian market juggernaut Star TV, and subsequently saw an early influx of

foreign capital, included over $11 million from Yang Lan and Bruno Wu themselves (Lü,

2008). However, even with the ever-capable Yang Lan at the helm, the company quickly

began hemorrhaging money. This decline arose out of the fact that Yang Lan admittedly

had no previous business management experience and was relatively clueless as to how

to properly manage an international media company. Sun TV sought to broadcast high

quality documentaries and cultural pieces to the mainland, but state censorship and

fledgling advertisement revenue meant that by 2003 Yang Lan was forced to admit defeat

and sold Sun TV for a fraction of her original investment (Lü, 2008).

This business failure had a profound effect on Yang Lan. She had lost millions of

dollars and had seen a project that she had truly cared about fall apart at the seams. For

almost a year, Yang Lan failed to appear on any major networks. For such a self-

admitted control freak to see a media company go under while flailing at the helm had

truly unsettled her. However, following the collapse of Sun TV, Yang Lan began to

receive words of sympathy from her previously established contacts in her star-studded

extended *guanxi* network and she was eventually prompted into returning to television

with "Her Village," a show aimed at Chinese women roughly based on America's own

"The View" (Rothman, 2014). By choosing to tweak her audience and focus her new

show on Chinese women, Yang Lan was able to re-establish herself as a pillar of Chinese

television and expanded her fan base. Through her creative broadcasting abilities and

name-brand recognition, Yang Lan was easily able to step back into the spotlight. Her most recent return to interview-based programming, "One on One With Yang Lan" has been her biggest hit yet. She also stars in a new reality show called "New Girl in the Office" that has the overall feel of Donald Trump's "The Apprentice" (Rothman, 2014). In it, Yang Lan acts as a both a nurturing mother figure as well as an intimidating boss to a group of college-aged up and coming television stars. This final image of a woman both kind and gentle, but also forceful and stern perfectly epitomizes Yang Lan's career.

Managerial Style and the potential role of *Guanxi*

As stated above, Yang Lan has never been considered gentle or overly kind. However, she has also never been one to raise inflammatory comments or cause any sort of clash among her staffers or coworkers. She is, in short, a force to be reckoned with. How Yang Lan applies said force in tandem with her own *guanxi* network is what truly makes her stand out in a crowd. While some managers or famous celebrities may have self-inflated egos, Yang Lan's 2003 failure of her Sun TV venture seems to have kept her two feet firmly planted on the ground (Lü, 2008). Through her witty banter, excellent oration, and dogged ability to squeeze potentially sensitive information out of her talk show guests, Yang Lan has made a living by subtly and calculatingly influencing her guests, coworkers, and superiors. This inherent ability is what gave Yang Lan a certain edge in her studies and subsequent career as well as allowed her to hand craft a *guanxi* network from the ground up that could benefit her career. She is therefore a testament to female entrepreneurs in China who have had to make their own way and construct their own, oftentimes female-centric, *guanxi* networks in order to get ahead in the Chinese

private sector (Martin, 2010). By strong-arming her way onto TV and establishing her own sizable *guanxi* network in the rapidly expanding Chinese media industry, Yang Lan was able to generate enough of a fan base that, even after her network failed, she was never fully taken off the air.

The role of Yang Lan's producer at Phoenix TV, Dhanin Chearavanont, as well as her husband's many familial and social *guanxi* networks stemming from Shanghai all contributed to Yang Lan's success. Her husband's career and personal life are relatively well guarded, but it goes without saying that a stint in graduate school at Columbia on someone else's dime is anything but typical (Rothman, 2014). Mr. Chearavanont's decision to pay for Yang Lan's education stands as a testament to *guanxi*'s overall importance and relevance in Chinese culture. However, the true root of Yang Lan's current success lies her inherent abilities to continue to stay motivated in the face of personal failure as well as being adept at maneuvering within the often-complex and politically sensitive Chinese broadcasting industry. By never settling for second best or becoming satisfied with her current position, Yang Lan's career stands as a testament to how hard many women feel they must work in order to achieve certain levels of in the upper echelons of the broadcast industry and beyond.

Lei Jufang

Background and Early Career

Lei Jufang was born into a family of poor farmers in Lanzhou, Gansu province, in 1953. Gansu province was a largely underdeveloped sprawling province in the interior of mainland China and, especially at the time of Lei Jufang's birth, was a hardscrabble

agrarian backwater skirting the edge of the Tibetan Plateau (Zhu, 2014). Compared to Zhang Yin or Yang Lan, Lei Jufang was seemingly born into a world set back a century or more. However, during the nationwide Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Lei Jufang voluntarily worked at a rural commune and, due to her hard work and spotless agrarian familial background, was given an opportunity to attend university (Zhu, 2014). Due to her humble beginnings, Lei Jufang had almost no possibility of establishing her own beneficial *guanxi* ties in childhood. At the time of the Cultural Revolution, the poor and agrarian were exalted, and Lei Jufang was among the thousands of desperately poor and largely rural students who would be deemed suitably proletarian to attend university. Despite owing many of her early opportunities to the CCP, Lei Jufang would pursue a career in science that would ultimately bring her closer to her home province as well as the cultures and traditions of the surrounding areas and ethnic groups.

While enrolled at Xi'an Jiaotong University, Lei Jufang discovered the world of physics and applied sciences and was quickly hooked. At that time, the government was promoting the advancement of domestically trained specialists in fields like physics and engineering in an effort to spur the domestic economy. When Lei Jufang graduated with a degree in vacuum physics, she was offered a position at a state-managed laboratory where her job was to reverse engineer and make improvements upon imported vacuum sealing technologies that were not publicly exported to China at that time. In the lab, Lei Jufang could have easily settled into a lifelong pursuit of pseudo-legally copying and improving upon imported technologies (Vanburen, 2013). The state offered accommodations, childcare services, and pension plans that gave these government positions the nickname of a *tie fan wan* (铁饭碗), meaning "iron rice bowl", implying

that one's bowl could never be broken and one's family would therefore never go hungry. However, life in the lab soon grew too repetitive and unfulfilling for Lei Jufang.

In 1987, Lei Jufang founded the Lanzhou Industrial Pollution Research Institute and sought to research solutions to China's ballooning environmental pollution problems. This early concern for the environment and passion for preserving her home region in northwestern China would influence the rest of her career (Liu, 2008). In 1991 Lei Jufang entered into another firm focused on developing medical equipment. However, a lack of business experience and a certain amount of naivety ultimately forced the venture to fold after a few short months. The company collapsed largely due to the unreliable nature of her fellow investors and Lei Jufang would later learn from her previous mistakes with the establishment of her ultimately successful firm. However, immediately after the collapse of her second business venture, Lei Jufang took a soul searching trip to Tibet, where a two hundred year old medicinal chart pasted to a monastery wall would forever change her life and career (Liu, 2008).

Firm Establishment and Career Synopsis

As several Chinese language interviews attest, while in Tibet, Lei Jufang began to become interested in Tibetan Buddhism and was attracted to the ways in which the local people interacted with their natural surroundings (Zhu, 2014). Tibet is still a largely remote and underdeveloped region and at that time, much of the local population relied upon homemade herbal remedies and tonics in order to cure simple illnesses. While on a sightseeing tour of an ancient temple, Lei Jufang happened to notice an anatomical drawing of a human body pasted to the wall. When she inquired about the drawing, Lei

was shocked to discover that it was over two hundred years old, yet as accurate as any current anatomical medical chart (Zhu, 2014). The holistic nature of Tibetan medicine combined with the obviously scrupulous nature with which Tibetans had observed the human body left a deep impression on Lei Jufang. It was on this first trip to the region that Lei Jufang realized the potential to combine her research knowhow with Tibetan tradition.

In subsequent trips to Tibet in the early 1990s, Lei Jufang began to cultivate a *guanxi* network of monks, medicine men, and farmers that allowed her to better understand how Tibetan medicine was used and produced. It became obvious to Lei Jufang that Tibetan medicine rarely made it out of Tibet due to the fragile and perishable nature of the natural herbal remedies typically used. In 1993, Lei Jufang established the Tibet Cheezheng Tibetan Medicine Company with the goal of researching and developing mass-marketable Tibetan medicines for domestic consumers (Kan, 2009). Her research skills and laboratory expertise quickly gave rise to a line of products including plasters, creams, and powders with a wide variety of uses including pain relief and increased joint mobility. By the mid 1990s, Cheezheng remained a small-scale startup and lacked the necessary funds required to launch full-blown nationwide advertising campaigns. Instead, Lei devised a grassroots program that included giving away thousands of dollars in medication to her employees and a few professional athletes (Zhu, 2014). Word quickly spread, and within a few years several Chinese Olympic teams had incorporated Cheezheng's products into their training regiments (Vanburen, 2013). Lei Jufang reaped the rewards of her hard work and, by the early 2000s, Forbes Magazine estimated her personal wealth at just over $1 billion.

Managerial Style and the potential role of *Guanxi*

In regards to her new managerial role at Cheezheng, Lei Jufang learned from her earlier mistakes and therefore holds the majority shareholder position. To have seen one firm go up in smoke due to investor infighting meant that Lei would not cede power at Cheezheng so easily. However, she has maintained close relationships and business ties with a group of local farmers and officials that have allowed her to learn about Tibetan medicine and develop products, all without sacrificing her original managerial position (Liu, 2008). Much like Zhang Yin, Lei Jufang maintains absolute control while simultaneously instilling greater levels of interpersonal relationships among her employees. In the office, Lei Jufang is more likely to be referred to by employees as *lin jia da shenr* (邻家大婶儿), a phrase of endearment meaning "next door auntie," rather than "boss" or "madam." Her firm employs over 1,000 people, 98% of whom are ethnically Tibetan (Kan, 2009). This almost unprecedented decision to wholly incorporate ethnic minority groups into her labor force has been widely praised in China, where all too often ethnic minorities struggle to find work opportunities in a country that remains approximately 96% Han Chinese.

Similar to the other two women examined, Lei Jufang's career can attribute much of its success to her own personal cultivation of beneficial *guanxi* as well as her own hard work and specialized skill set. While source materials that directly analyze Lei Jufang, Yang Lan, or Zhang Yin's personal social network are scant, based on interviews and career synopsis conducted on all three women, it becomes observable that all three have managed to go from starting a career with little to no beneficial *guanxi,* to reaping the

rewards of having established their own personal social networks tailor made for their individual needs and goals. In Lei Jufang's case, it is most apparent that any and all beneficial *guanxi* was of her own making after establishing her firm rather than relying upon others' connections or preexisting business, social, or familial relationships. However, Lei Jufang is probably the one woman that deserves the title of "self made" more than the other two. This is based on her background in rural Gansu as well as the ways in which she continues to manage her firm. From her continuing lab work in R&D to her complete involvement in manufacturing and sales, Lei Jufang has come to know the ins and outs of every aspect of Cheezheng and, despite her slightly more advanced age, shows no signs of slowing down (Zhu, 2014). Her charisma, humble lifestyle and dress, as well as her commitment to natural ingredients and herbal remedies have earned her the nickname, "the spiritual billionaire." With sound business strategies, unique managerial style, and a public image akin to everyone's favorite "Auntie", the nickname "spiritual billionaire" just might stick.

Case Study Conclusions

From the forgoing it is clear that these three women's stories are exemplary within their chosen fields and positions. All three were intentionally selected to hail from distinct industries and geographic locations. Additionally, I paid special attention to how each woman made her fortune. All three are considered "self made" women, but as further analysis showed, the extent to which *guanxi* and other familial or business connections affected each woman varied. Managerial styles also showed commonalities as well as ways in which each woman personally controlled her firm. What follows is a

series of observations, similarities and differences, as well as general hypotheses to be further incorporated into subsequent interviews to be conducted in China.

A unifying trend among all three case studies was their comprehensive and scrupulous managerial style. Zhang Yin and Lei Jufang are both involved in the manufacturing sector and both employ over a thousand people. Both women knew their firms from top to bottom, having established each interdependent manufacturing process or managerial office themselves. While Yang Lan certainly does not employ nearly the same number of staff members, she is also intimately acquainted with how each of her programs is written, produced, and broadcast. This is a key distinction between these three women and other successful private sector managers. In other start ups, the original entrepreneur may have started small and been acquainted with his or her entire means of production, but as firms mushroom into multi-billion dollar corporations, outside managers are brought in to help the firm expand. While this type of firm development certainly is not novel, to have three women in three separate industries be so aware of any and all inter workings of their corporations' points to a key distinction between many male and female managers. By keeping themselves firmly involved in all aspects of their businesses, these three women not only maintained control and shareholder rights, but also established better *guanxi* ties with employees and fellow managers alike. Therefore, while this managerial style is rooted in close-knit interpersonal *guanxi* within a given firm or organization, it differs from traditional *guanxi* networks since it is more reliant on inter-firm relations as opposed to exogenous government or familial ties.

While *guanxi* is traditionally viewed as a gateway to business success in China's private sector, these three women seem to indicate ways in which one can achieve

success without relying on family connections and especially government-based *guanxi*

networks. That is not to say that each woman achieved success without her own *guanxi*

network, but rather that it was the lack of preexisting or familial *guanxi* ties that made

each woman's case stand out. Each entrepreneur had limited opportunities to "phone a

friend" when in need of a favor. Instead, all three women had to start their own *guanxi*

networks from scratch. Making social bonds in the workplace is nothing new, but due to

China's emphasis on close-knit personal relationships and *guanxi*, these women had to

exert considerable effort to create their own tailor-made social network. From an

American perspective, making social relationships for personal and career benefits is

commonplace, but in China the culture of getting to know people at a deeper level before

beginning to work with them is a comparatively slower and more labor intensive process.

For this reason, the fact that each woman started a company and ultimately achieved

success with effectively zero preexisting *guanxi* ties is remarkable and can also indicate a

trend within the private sector of firms adhering to a more international ethical standard

when it comes to promotions and organizational management. Once firms were

established, two of the three women (Zhang and Lei) took special pains to ensure that

they retained certain professional levels of personal relationships with all of their

employees, no matter the position. Yang Lan was a slight exception in her more

fearsome *nü qiang ren* (女强人), or "strong lady," managerial style that inspired more

fear than love.

　　All three women went about cultivating their own *guanxi* networks through

different means. Zhang Yin tried to appeal to all of her employees and managers by

appearing modest and approachable. Her strategies largely paid off and her personal

perception in the media is overall extremely positive. Lei Jufang attached herself to Tibetan culture and the preservation thereof. By employing Tibetans and showing a profound respect for their cultural traditions and medicinal practices, Lei was able to consolidate power within her company while simultaneously maintaining a contented workforce in an occasionally politically volatile region. Yang Lan's *guanxi* network was perhaps the most wide reaching. From celebrity interviewees to media company producers, Yang Lan was always direct and used her communication skill to win over fans, supporters, and investors alike. What all three women have in common is the necessity for consolidating their own power and authority via the overall management of their professional and social *guanxi* networks. This implies that each woman particularly excelled at uniting people around her common cause. Whether through confidence, cultural sensitivity, or selective calculations, all three women excelled in combining their own inherent abilities with highly functional and beneficial *guanxi* networks.

What follows are key hypotheses drawn from Case Study analysis, which will serve as the framework for the interview portion of this project:

1) Female Chinese managers are more familiar with many aspects of their firm/department/organization.

2) Female Chinese managers may be seeking solidarity among other women in the workplace and beyond. (Particularly in the case of Yang Lan)

3) Most female Chinese managers receive little to no exogenous *guanxi*-based assistance when starting a company; rather they must establish their own *guanxi* networks within the workplace to better suit their/their firm's goals or projects.

4) At points of failure in female careers, there tends to be a "bottoming out" that takes place, or a unique experience that tends to spark a new idea or career track.

Chapter 3: Interview Analysis

Introduction

This chapter is composed of a series of interviews conducted between May 16th and May 25th 2014 in Shanghai, and neighboring Kunshan, China. The purpose of this chapter is to test several hypotheses from the preceding Case Study Analysis chapter and apply them to the "real world," that is the current state of the private sector within the Chinese economy. This chapter consists of four in-person interviews with a diverse set of interviewees thought to be representative of female managers within the larger Chinese private sector economy. In addition to formal interview proceedings, other more informal discussions were held with a larger group of female foreign nationals living and working in Shanghai. Each formal interview was conducted in adherence with all University of Mississippi Internal Review Board (IRB) policies and all interview materials received IRB approval prior to beginning the interview process.

Diversity was a key consideration when approaching female Chinese managers to subsequently interview. While Shanghai remains one of the key economic and financial centers of Asia, I wanted to seek out an industrial city farther afield that could better represent industrial China as a whole. A mere half hour bullet train ride away, Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, fit the bill as a boomtown of domestically based manufacturing and foreign investment that provides an ideal environment within which to compare Western and Chinese business practices as well as the overall effect these practices have on female Chinese managers. Three of the four interviewees live and work in Kunshan full time, while the fourth lives in Shanghai and commutes to Kunshan daily. While limiting my interviews to one city or area appears restrictive, the sheer amount of diversity among the

businesses, factories, and offices of Kunshan was enough to ensure that my interviewees hailed from a wide variety of industries and positions representative of the larger Chinese private sector.

The goal of this series of interviews is to examine how these hypotheses hold up in the current Chinese private sector as well as uncover any new information that plays a significant or previously unmentioned role in the interviewees' careers. Therefore, while the four hypotheses presented above will serve as important indicators, ultimately the conclusion of this chapter may present ideas and concepts not necessarily presented in this introduction. Each interviewee will be introduced, their stories told, and any new findings will be presented and discussed at the conclusion of this chapter. More macroscopic analysis pertaining to any new information as well as how any new findings relate to the original four hypotheses of the Case Study Analysis chapter will be discussed in the overall Conclusion chapter of this research project.

Meet the Boss Ladies

The women interviewed for this chapter were extremely generous by providing me the opportunity to interview them and it goes without saying that without their help this project would not have been possible. Names were changed to ensure interviewee privacy but each interviewee's position, personal experiences, and opinions are presented without any intentional changes or editing. Interviews were conducted and recorded in Mandarin Chinese and subsequently translated into English. Therefore, original wordings or idiomatic phrases may not necessarily translate perfectly in English. However, when key Chinese terms or concepts are discussed, the original Chinese as well

as an English translation will be simultaneously presented as to enable a more

comprehensive understanding of terms and experiences that may appear overly foreign or

difficult to conceptualize to any non-Mandarin Chinese speaker. Without further ado,

allow me to introduce my interviewees.

Kate

Kate is in charge of the sales department of a small-scale foreign joint venture

operation in the paper industry. While her official title dictates that she should oversee

sales, and therefore the sales staff, in reality she acts as the de-facto manager of the entire

office. Her boss, a Canadian man, may technically outrank her, but when it comes to the

day-to-day functions of the firm, Kate is really the one in charge. The firm is small, with

the total number of employees under Kate totaling to eight office workers and a half

dozen factory assistants. She is relatively tall for a Chinese woman at around 5' 6'', and

carries herself with a gruff voice and ramrod straight posture not typical among women in

their mid thirties. Her personality borders on explosive and her Canadian boss jokes with

me that she is perfectly capable of managing the entire office under her "reign of terror."

She speaks bluntly, and is certainly unafraid of ruffling feathers amongst her staff, yet she

also tends to play an almost motherly role among them. While Kate is obviously revered,

and perhaps even slightly feared by her staff, she also takes great care to include

everyone in after-hours dinners and activities. The duality between her despotic versus

motherly love managerial style would prove make her unique among interviewees.

When I first sat down to meet with her, I waited for a few minutes while she quite

literally screamed into her sleek Chinese-made smartphone in the local Kunshan dialect.

With her designer reading glasses perched on the bridge of her nose, Kate truly seems to be enjoying tearing apart whichever unfortunate soul is on the other line. Upon returning her phone to her fluorescent pink American designer handbag, she turns to me and in equally gruff English curtly explains, "he owe us money." It is clear then, that Kate is not one to be pushed around. Despite the fact that she certainly appears neither overly intense nor quick tempered upon our first meeting, after spending several days with her it became clear that if anyone deserves the "boss lady" moniker of this project, it is Kate.

Of all the female Chinese managers I interviewed, Kate was the most outspoken. She reveled in the looks of bewilderment and surprise on my face as she recounted her colorful career. This is partially due to the fact that Kate and I have known each other for several years through a mutual family friend living in Shanghai. Kate's account of her time as a female Chinese manager shed light on how many women feel the need to become "one of the boys" when dealing with customers as well as how family life must often be compromised in the name of ones career. Issues of drinking, business entertainment, male-female relations, and of course *guanxi* were all topics of great interest to Kate. Kate's family situation was also unique compared to the other interviewees. She has a three year old son, but never had any interest in marriage, something other interviewees saw as cornerstones to their lives and careers. Kate explained that she felt no need for a husband. With her economic needs provided for and several apartments in her growing personal portfolio; she presents herself as a perfect example of how gender roles in the Chinese private sector have changed as well as how these changes affected society over the last thirty years.

Anne

At first glance, Anne is the exact opposite of Kate. She is tiny, barely cracking five feet, and speaks in a high-pitched sing-songy voice more readily applied to a cartoon character than a high-ranking entrepreneur in her mid-thirties. All of the intensity and inherent focus that pours out of Kate is utterly absent from Anne. She reminded me of a kindergarten teacher, kind, gentle, and patient throughout the interview process. However, if this interview series has proven anything, it is that looks can be deceiving. Like Kate, Anne also lives and works in Kunshan. Despite her gentle appearance, Anne has quite a repertoire of business ventures under her belt. She currently serves as general manager and CEO of a consulting firm specializing in accountancy and outsourcing for primarily foreign-owned or co-owned firms in the Kunshan area. Her consulting firm is particularly adept at negotiating China's corporate tax system as well as assisting foreign and domestic firms alike in their dealings with the local government. She also manages a successful string of coffee shops and bakeries in some of Kunshan's sparkling new shopping plazas and malls. At the time of our interview, Anne, who just barely cracks five feet in heels, has to practically jump from her brand new Lexus SUV and, much like Kate, she brandishes an American designer handbag.

Anne also differs from other interviewees in the fact that her husband is a high-ranking official within the provincial Jiangsu government. While Anne's resume appears jam-packed, she spends most of her days playing golf or tennis at several surrounding country clubs, which raises the question of how she may or may not be using her husband's influence to succeed. While diminutive in stature, the shadow of her husband's *guanxi* tends to follow Anne while we drive through a newly completed

industrial district of Kunshan. At the wheel of her Lexus, Anne runs stoplights ("it was the wrong color"), passes on the hard shoulder ("they're driving far too slow"), and ultimately double parks on the sidewalk outside a restaurant she'd chosen for lunch. All the while waving to every traffic cop, security guard, and meter maid we pass. Once the blood has fully returned to my knuckles, I ask her if she is afraid of getting a ticket for her, as I saw it, questionable parking job. As Anne nonchalantly explains, her husband is a good friend of the chief of police, so we needn't worry about tickets. Therefore, Anne, with her country club lifestyle and seemingly Jay Gatsby levels of *guanxi*, was an ideal candidate for this interview.

Lucy

Compared to Anne or Kate, Lucy comes from a different generation of female Chinese managers. Having graduated college in the mid 1980s, Lucy first entered the workforce when the Chinese government still employed a work allocation policy, 国家分配 *guojia fenpei*, which assigned the majority of college graduates to a work unit or position. The Chinese private sector of today bears little resemblance to the workforce Lucy first entered in the late 1980s, so she provided a wealth of information on how the nature of China's economy, and the social dealings therein, have changed over time. At the time of our interview, Lucy was head of human resources for a German manufacturing firm and was extremely proud to announce that she was the longest serving employee of the Chinese manufacturing operation. Lucy is in her late forties, short and slightly plump, and carries herself in a stern yet motherly manner. She dresses far more conservatively than either Kate or Anne, in a relatively plain pantsuit, yet carries

a European designer wallet from which she seemingly instinctually produces an immaculate business card.

Lucy's formalities seem to arise from deep-seated habits and understandings of how workplace interactions are supposed to occur. When we first meet on a sweltering May afternoon, I am ushered inside the expansive German factory and up a flight of stairs into a hushed white-tiled conference room. There I met Lucy, in lime green pant-suited glory, and find a seat along the impossibly long polished wood table. Lucy summons two cups of coffee with cream and sugar from an attendant and carried herself with all the "bless your heart" daintiness and niceties of a Mississippi grandmother. But I was not fooled, obviously this is not Lucy's first time dealing with someone like me asking her questions and she brandished a well practiced, yet not wholly genuine, service-industry smile. However, after a few minutes of polite banter and explaining the purpose of my interviewing her, Lucy genuinely takes an interest to my topic and would go on to provide insights into working for a Chinese state-owned-enterprise (SOE), which made her unique among the interviewees.

Marie

Marie is a tall, blonde, and lanky French-Canadian entrepreneur who owns a textile firm headquartered in Kunshan. While not ethnically Chinese, Marie speaks fluent Mandarin and has lived in Shanghai for nearly fourteen years while commuting to Kunshan daily. While this project obviously focuses on female *Chinese* managers, it was also important for the sake of comparison to interview someone who, for all intensive purposes, differs from the other interviewees solely when it comes to her ethnicity.

Marie lives in Shanghai full time and has a close circle of foreign and Chinese female friends who also contributed to portions of this chapter. By interviewing Marie, cultural differences, and a few universalities when it comes to being a female manager in China, emerged. However, cultural differences, particularly involving *guanxi* and overarching gender relations, became apparent after the interview and subsequent discussion of similar topics with several of her fellow professional expatriate friends. When we met at her home in the pleasantly shaded former French Concession of Shanghai, Marie was more than eager to share her experiences as well as discuss how she, even as a foreigner, must use *guanxi* on an almost daily basis.

Marie first moved to China from Singapore in 1999 with her husband and then-infant daughter. Rather than move to a gated compound in the Shanghai suburbs like many other expatriates, Marie and her husband chose to purchase and renovate an aging row house in the faded former French Concession neighborhood. Having grown up speaking English and French, Marie took to learning Chinese very quickly and enrolled her daughter in the local Chinese elementary school. This headfirst approach into a previously unknown culture that accompanied her first year or so in Shanghai would prove invaluable to her later career in textiles. After her daughter entered middle school, Marie recognized a need among several of her friends who had recently had children for durable and organic baby clothes and accessories. While the media was filled with reports of contaminated baby formula and tainted toys, Marie saw an opportunity to start a boutique textile firm. It would ultimately be through trial and error as well as the implementation of her language skills that she successfully navigated the Chinese private sector and grew her brand.

How is *Guanxi* Defined and Implemented?

Before discussing how *guanxi* influenced their careers, it was vital to understand how each interviewee understood the concept of *guanxi* itself. In the interview materials, *guanxi* was defined as "interpersonal relationships and connections"; some interviewees agreed with my definition while others added to it. All interviewees viewed *guanxi* as an implementable tool in their careers, meaning that they understood *guanxi* not only as a particular cultural trait, but also as a sort of secret weapon or concrete advantage that they could wield when circumstance allowed. The role of *guanxi* in the private sector was undisputed, but there were two distinct camps among the interviewees as to how the concept of *guanxi* was generally understood. One group viewed *guanxi* as a cultural trait inherent to the Chinese culture. The second group viewed *guanxi* in a similar fashion; only they also interestingly divided *guanxi* into two subheadings of "good" and "bad."

"Good" *guanxi* was what one shared with family members, classmates, and friends largely within one's private life, meanwhile "bad" *guanxi* consisted of unfair business practices and other illegal or unethical activities that are often splashed across headlines. When asked to describe how these two *guanxi*'s shape their careers, this second group felt that the "bad side" of *guanxi* had a largely negative influence due to several illegal or unfair business practices associated with it, while "good" *guanxi* can be a helpful business tool and resource. While this "good" *guanxi* was largely seen as something one has among close friends and family, interviewees felt that it still had a role to play in the workplace. By holding coworkers and business partners in the same esteem as family and friends, the interviewees who defined *guanxi* as either "good" or "bad" felt that they

could engender very close personal bonds with people in their workplace, and therefore

utilize this "good" *guanxi* in their careers. Regardless of overall understanding, all

interviewees felt that *guanxi* was currently indispensable to their personal success in

China and that without it much of their day-to-day workplace tasks would grind to a halt.

The sentiment that *guanxi* is a critical business tool largely arises from the fact that

many interviewees described having to use their personal *guanxi* on a day-to-day basis,

especially when dealing with the government. According to Kate, the first time she ever

had to encounter the concept of *guanxi* was through her dealings with the municipal

government of Kunshan. Every year, Kate must ensure that all equipment, office

conditions, and even company vehicles are all up the government's ever changing

standards. To Kate, to dive into this web of bureaucracy without *guanxi* would be

unthinkable. While not technically considered illegal or as a form of bribery, going out

to dinner and entertaining friends and colleagues who work for the municipal government

serves as a means to engender and maintain *guanxi.* By relying on her government

friends to "expedite" her inspection, each annual review proceeds smoothly and quickly,

typically regardless of stricter regulations or heightened standards. In order to maintain

her *guanxi*, Kate must spend several nights a month out on the town with local officials.

By buying them dinners, taking them to sing karaoke, and generally socializing with

them, she can ensure that her goodwill will be reciprocated the only way a bureaucrat

can: expediting paperwork. Without *guanxi*, Kate contends, she would be trapped under

mountains of paperwork and spending months to pass all her inspections via the typically

guanxi-free bureaucratic channels.

Like Kate, Anne first recalled encountering *guanxi* when she entered the workforce

and began having dealings with the government. Also like Kate, Anne felt that when navigating the sea of red tape and permits required to do business in China, it became essential to make friends in the local government. Therefore, Anne must also cultivate and maintain personal relationships with people that can expedite paperwork and enhance her own interests. Anne takes a somewhat softer approach when discussing her *guanxi* connections in the government and considers many of the high-ranking officials she knows as "close friends." It remained unclear if Anne's feelings towards her "close friends" in the government had anything to do with her husband's position; but it was clear that Anne was generally more connected amongst government officials compared to other interviewees. To Anne, while *guanxi* still lies at the heart of many of her social dealings, she does not feel as pressured to pursue *guanxi* to the extent of Kate. Anne succinctly describes her own *guanxi* network by saying, "knowing only a few people in the government is enough for me, since my business is more service-based, I don't have to go out all the time chasing contracts."

Lucy was in a rare position compared to other interviewees because she was working directly for the government via a state-owned-enterprise, or SOE. While Lucy declined to share the nature of the SOE where she worked, she was quick to explain why she left: "*guanxi* controlled absolutely everything, I couldn't stand how regimented everything was and how everyone's salary was essentially determined by rank or seniority. It can be very discouraging when you know that your salary is a lot less than some senior employees who rarely even come in for work." This is largely due in part to the fact that many SOE operations are managed and promotions allotted not via employee performance, but by 论资排辈 *lunzi paibei,* or order of rank and seniority within the

party itself. In this traditional pre-1978 work environment, men and women were held in

largely equal numbers, but their roles could be very different. Lucy concisely described

her time working at an SOE as "stifling." To Lucy, the constant battle between working

hard and aligning herself with special interest groups within her work unit itself, 利益集

团 *liyi jituan*, was ultimately what drove her to leave her position at the SOE and join the

rapidly growing private sector in the late 1990s. To Lucy, while her current job in HR

still requires certain amounts of *guanxi*, compared to her position at a SOE, it is

exponentially less. It was therefore easy to see how, depending on the industry, the

inherent levels of *guanxi* required tended to vary wildly.

It then comes as no surprise that even non-Chinese female managers must still

incorporate *guanxi* into their day-to-day business dealings. Marie first encountered

guanxi while her husband was negotiating the terms of a lease agreement for a new office

space in Kunshan. "As a foreigner, you would think that being the customer means that

you're the one who is entertained and courted prior to entering into negotiations and that

once you sign the contract things are over. But in China, the customer and salesman or

broker must enter into a more long-term bond built on mutual trust. This means, that

even for small transactions, dinners lead to parties which lead to more dinners and

banquets, so these social relationships are much more active and take longer to form.

You have to go out and spend time with people so they can really feel like they trust you

before completing anything. Quite frankly, it can be exhausting." While the banqueting

and gift giving associated with *guanxi* was certainly off putting at first, Marie quickly

learned that there were few options other than to adhere to ones' personal *guanxi* when

doing business in China. "Even as a foreigner, we have to play by their rules. It's their

cultural practice and we were left with very little choice but to adapt. If you try and do business here and succeed, you can't really rely on your Western moral compass."

As just seen, it goes without saying that all four interviewees felt they first encountered *guanxi* when dealing with some aspect of government bureaucracy. This is worth noting because all four interviewees were involved in different industries and all four held different positions within said industries. The universal nature of *guanxi* as something one must utilize when interacting with the government is evidence of potential failings within the current bureaucratic system. However, prior to concluding her largely negative description of the role *guanxi* still continues to play in her career, Lucy provided an example that at least offers a certain degree of hope that interactions with the government are slowly but surely taking on new levels of transparency. She described the son of one of her friends who recently applied to be a public school teacher in the metropolitan Kunshan area. The process was exhaustive and great pains were taken to ensure the process was transparent. After taking a standardized test, scores were publicly posted. Then, all teaching-candidates who passed were interviewed. The interview time and location was not released until the night before the interview was to take place and each interviewee had no way of knowing who would interview them. In this way, Lucy explained, people with connections in the education department or at any local schools had no way of using their *guanxi* to help them secure a teaching job. Lucy hoped that this added transparency to official employment or bureaucratic processes would gradually take root in the private sector and concluded by adding: "the process is slow but at least we're starting to see some actual changes, and that can only help China continue to growth and develop."

Another interesting aspect of *guanxi* is that, while interviewees largely discussed and emphasized the negative consequences of *guanxi*, all four women were also able to concede that *guanxi* had played a significantly beneficial role in their careers. While most interviewees felt that the overall nature of *guanxi* inherently has negative consequences to the overall private sector, it also became apparent that utilizing *guanxi* is often a solution to many problems faced by female Chinese managers. Since many of these managers often oversaw more than what their titles stated, their inherent knowledge of many additional aspects of their firm saw them implementing their own personal *guanxi* more often than previously expected. Kate, whose sales position makes no direct mention of dealing with the government as an inherent responsibility of her job, is a prime example. Therefore, when asked to elaborate on how *guanxi* came to play such a significant role in their careers, some interviewees attributed the phenomenon to particular work environment factors, such as working for an SOE, while most simply felt that it was a social constant within Chinese culture, and is therefore, regardless of job, title, or industry, perpetually influential.

Describing the Future of *Guanxi*

The idea that *guanxi* will remain perpetually influential goes against a sizable portion of Western scholarship that argues that, as China continues to grow, develop, and westernize, its overall role will rapidly decline. Many interviewees expressed concern when discussing the future of *guanxi.* By not interacting on a "level" playing field and using *guanxi* to continue to conduct important business, interviewees felt that foreign firms may become discouraged or exasperated while attempting to operate within China's

current system, thus slowing overall growth. To them, if China is unable to find a middle ground between its cultural traditions and modern business practices, economic growth and development will gradually peter out. However, it became clear that several interviewees had mixed feeling when it came to weaning themselves off their current reliance on personal connections. A fitting example came at the end of an interview when I asked Kate about *guanxi*'s future role in the private sector. After thinking for a moment she responded, "everyone, myself included, would like to see *guanxi* go away, but for now no one is willing to give up using it for themselves. We see it as unfair and a chore to deal with, but when I got a parking ticket last week the first thing I did was call my friend at the traffic control office and get it canceled."

While most interviewees, as just seen with Kate, seemed pessimistic about the future of *guanxi*, interviewees also expressed sentiments that were supportive of *guanxi* in China's future. However, these opinions were mostly expressed by interviewees who previously divided the concept of *guanxi* into both "good" and "bad" varieties as mentioned above. To them, the "good" *guanxi* that entails cooperation and mutual benefits for all parties involved will continue to help the Chinese economy to grow and develop while the "bad" *guanxi* associated with bribery, graft, and corruption will slowly become a thing of the past. According to Anne, "while some see *guanxi* as backwards and unfair, if you are out eating and drinking with people you like and choose to associate with it can also be great fun. This is the good *guanxi,* the *guanxi* that takes place among clients who become friends. We can better work together if we have strong social bonds, we can make businesses more efficient, we can continue to grow, so this type of *guanxi* will never go away." In any case, regardless of any distinction between

"good" and "bad" *guanxi*, all interviewees expressed a hope that China's private sector

will undergo gradual changes to ultimately and thoroughly embrace more international

business practices.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Being a Female Chinese Manager

The purpose of the majority of the interview questions administered to the four

interviewees was to determine what factors related to being a female Chinese manager

influenced ones career. Questions pertained to social relationships within the workplace,

after hours business entertaining, family life, gender-based discrimination, and more.

Ultimately it became clear that being a female Chinese manager in today's Chinese

private sector was still considered disadvantageous compared to male counterparts, but in

a few select areas women are slowly beginning to advance their own interests in many

creative ways. For the casual observer, to examine the inner workings of gender roles

within the Chinese private sector would appear to be an easy job. This is due in part to

the fact that China and Chinese culture have long been considered inherently

discriminatory towards women, 重男轻女 *zhongnan qingnü*. As seen in the introduction,

the role women played in society shifted dramatically over the course of the twentieth

century and when it comes to the upper managerial levels of the Chinese private sector, it

is easy to write the whole thing off as a boys club. However, as the interviewees

explained, while there are still many aspects of their careers that are indeed hindered by

their gender, there are also more and more areas within which women are implementing

their own personal contacts and *guanxi*, oftentimes amongst fellow women, in order to

achieve their goals.

When it came to overall gender relations within the workplace as well as how gender can help or hinder ones career, interviewees expressed a diverse range of opinions in regards to working in mixed gender environments as well as shed light on the fact that many industries are seeing female participation rates far outstrip male ones. In both Anne and Marie's current position, the entire staff of their office or factory is female. This is telling when discussing how more women are rising within the ranks of the Chinese workforce, particularly in managerial or executive positions traditionally held by men. This of course rendered certain aspects of the interview questions related to gender relations in the workplace obsolete. But many interviewees did discuss working in mixed gender environments as well as how they thought it affected their careers.

Several interviewees had no real opinion when it came to gender relations in the office. They simply saw an office as comprised of individuals rather than divided according to gender. The remaining two both rather surprisingly felt that men were often easier to work with due to their frankness and ability to focus. This indicated that perhaps women are finding it easier to become "one of the guys" in predominantly male work environments. All respondents felt that, while working with men was considered by some to be easier, the social bonds between women formed in the workplace were often closer than those made with men. Several interviewees felt that while men were easier to manage and collaborate with, women could more easily become personal friends beyond the workplace. This is largely tied to how many female managers, including several interviewees, tend to view their firms as large familial units, especially among the fellow women within them. Many interviewees told stories about female coworkers driving each other home, looking after each other's children, and attending each other's

family gatherings. These shared activities were rarely, if at all, attended by male coworkers. When discussing gender and managerial roles, the interviewees all felt that women often had better communication skills than their male counterparts, therefore, working for a man as opposed to a woman could often be more vexing. However, interviewees were also quick to point out that managerial style was typically tied more to an individual's personality rather than their inherent gender.

Lucy for one felt that being a woman at a firm and in an industry filled with mostly male competition has its advantages: "we women are viewed as friendlier and easier to deal with than men who can be arrogant or inflexible in their views, women come across as trustworthy as well as having the patience and fortitude, 忍耐力 *rennaili,* to deal with even the most troublesome clients". Rather interestingly, Lucy conceded that in her position as head of HR, being a woman also had its own disadvantages: "I don't discriminate, but when you run HR you have to think about factors that influence women more often than men. When young women come to interview with me I have to ask them when they think they'll get married, or have kids, and while it comes across as discrimination I have to know and be able to plan for these kinds of interruptions. In that sense, there is definitely still some gender discrimination, even if it is unintentional." On the whole, Lucy does not necessarily feel especially disadvantaged as a woman in her current position, much like other women interviewed, Lucy maintains a familial work environment and stresses the fact that she feels closer with her female coworkers than their male counterparts. As she put it, "I actually prefer working with men over working with women, men are more straightforward and can focus on projects, but I feel closer to my female employees. We women can bond over things like husbands and children that I

would never discuss with male coworkers."

When it comes to gender relations in her workplace, Marie took a much more western approach than her Chinese counterparts. Her current office employs around a dozen people, six office workers and six seamstresses, all of who are women. Therefore, Marie rarely feels discriminated against solely based on her gender, but she does perceive a gap between herself and her employees. "In China, to be the boss is to be above everyone else. In Canada or the US, the boss may be considered as a somewhat equal member of the team. Here, I'm constantly left dealing with people who treat me in a much colder and formal manner. It's strange at first but something that comes from Chinese culture. While I may view my company as one big family, it isn't in the Western sense. Even the office ladies don't choose to interact with the seamstresses. Everything is more stratified." This perspective on what it means to really be a manager in China was novel at first, but after thinking back on my other interviewees, it became apparent that this social pecking order existed within many industries. Each of my Chinese interviewees, while perfectly polite with their employees, also clearly understood themselves to be "above" them. So, while Chinese managers were quick to describe themselves as "like family" with their coworkers, it was clear from Marie's perspective that what that "familial bond" entails differs from culture to culture. Therefore, even when gender does not play a significant role in workplace social relations, the inherent position of being a manager can also influence how one goes about social interactions.

One cannot discuss any type of social relationships within Chinese society without discussing *guanxi*. As discussed above, *guanxi* was never described as a static bond between two people or groups, but rather as a liquid link or series of interconnected

favors and obligations. Therefore it must be established and, most importantly, maintained. The traditional way many Chinese managers establish and maintain *guanxi* with potential clients and personal friends alike is through the process of 应酬 *yingchou,* which simply means "entertainment" or "to have social intercourse with". For female Chinese managers, this is no exception. For most managers, the process of *yingchou*, which typically involves after-hours banqueting, karaoke, and especially drinking, would prove to be one of the most prominent disadvantages they faced, particularly when it came to female manager's family lives. Kate provided one such example.

By her own admission, Kate says that she spends most Monday through Friday nights out on the town with clients and friends who work in the government. According to Kate, *guanxi* is therefore not a static social bond that, once established, always remains, but rather a series of interconnected favors and obligations established over time and via constant maintenance. I ask Kate whether she feels forced into deciding between family life (she is unmarried but has a three year old son) and work, as well as how she balances the two. Her response was one of the more surprising of all my interviews when she quickly replied that she had no way to balance both, and so she simply chose work over family. "That's what my mom is for" was Kate's answer when I asked who took care of her young son. It was readily apparent that Kate valued her career more than her family life. While she clearly adored and doted on her young son during the interview, she was also quick to send him to her parents' house for them to watch over. "It's a hard choice but it's my choice," was how Kate described her family situation. "Anyways, can you see me as a stay-at-home mom? I didn't think so."

While participating in these after-hours banquets, China's "liquor culture", 酒文化

jiuwenhua, would often impede Kate's business dealings. In traditional Chinese corporate culture, banqueting not only involves consuming large amount of food, but also consuming inordinate amounts of alcohol, typically sorghum distilled firewater known as *baijiu* 白酒. The liquor is often consumed via small shots over a series of countless toasts that occur periodically throughout the evening. Kate detests *baijiu,* and refuses to participate in much of the traditional toasting rituals. As Kate explains, she feels at a distinct disadvantage to competitors capable of stomaching *baijiu*. Kate elaborated by saying, "when it comes to *yingchou* I feel that I am able to do 90% of what any man or woman could do, but because I don't drink *baijiu*, I have to make up that extra 10% somewhere else. I have to give gifts, call in favors, maybe even call prostitutes for male clients all because I won't toast *baijiu* with them."

Anne also described her own experiences with *yingchou*, but as she described it the levels with which one participates in time consuming *yingchou* activities largely varies from person to person and industry to industry. Due to the fact that her firm deals largely with foreign companies seeking to outsource certain financial services, Anne considers herself lucky since she can avoid many arduous *yingchou* activities. Once Anne finds clients, either through world of mouth or at industry trade shows she frequents, she often does not have to partake in lavish entertainment activities to engender personal relationships. By running a service-base firm and dealing almost exclusively with foreign-owned clients, Anne has to participate in minimal banqueting and entertaining in order to keep her clients happy. Therefore, it is easy to see how the overall importance of *guanxi* and the role of *yingchou* vary industry-to-industry and manager-to-manager. Anne concedes that she could be more aggressive in seeking out new clients, but after

seeing her consulting firm begin to turn steady profits, she is content. "If I wanted to be out every night talking to other accountants and government officials I could, but I'm happy with the scale of our operations so I don't have to go begging for clients with dinners and gifts."

Lucy was unique in her description of *yingchou* in that she viewed it largely as serving a positive role: "it's something that gives me an advantage, I can go out to eat with government officials and we become friends, then I can go to KTV (karaoke) with some of my closest competitors and get hints on their business strategies, it's all a part of *guanxi* and everyone complains about going out and spending money but it's really quite useful to me". On the other end of the spectrum was Marie. By choosing to commute from Shanghai every day, Marie could ensure that she would be home every night in order to be with her daughter and husband. The choice to value family over her career meant that Marie often missed out on *yingchou* opportunities after work, but for her small-scale textile operation, *yingchou* has yet to be a major priority. "At our current scale, we have buyers and regular customers who we already know. Sometimes my husband will go out and spend the night in Kunshan on my behalf, but I rarely feel the need to participate." By being able to avoid most *yingchou* activities, one would think that Marie is able to operate relatively independently from China's *guanxi* system and in accordance to a more or less international standard of business practices, but as Marie describes it, even the tinniest details of a small firm like hers can quickly involve *guanxi* and subsequent *yingchou.*

Marie discussed a visit to a textile factor she made with one of her business partners. At this textile factory, Marie was having 1000 meters of her personally designed prints

applied to fabric rolls. It became clear that there was an issue with the coloration process and Marie went to complain to the manager. At first, the male manager of the firm was extremely uncooperative, refusing to even meet them. After finally emerging and storming around the factory floor, Marie made the savvy decision to invite the manager to lunch. "At lunch, I asked him about his family, when his oldest son was getting married, how his university was, and this extremely rude man completely melted. We toasted each other as best friends and came back to the factory and watched while he personally climbed on the printing equipment and made things right." For Marie, being a foreigner, especially a female foreigner, comes with its own set of challenges, but after spending enough time in China, she is able to navigate the hurdles of social *guanxi* in ways extremely similar to other female Chinese managers. "Ultimately we gained his trust, we got off topic, forgot about work, and spent time relaxing with this man and he really opened up. This is how I use *guanxi* in tandem with *yingchou*. I'm sure next time I have to go to this factory we'll be treated very differently."

Dovetailing with the practice of *guanxi* building *yingchou*, many female Chinese managers face added difficulties when balancing their family lives around their careers. As Kate showed, familial stability can all too often be sacrificed in order to improve one's career, but this is not always the case. Family ties have long plagued female careers in my countries and cultures. While women in modern China are not universally pressured to be stay-at-home mothers due to the relatively recent cultural tradition of grandparents assisting in the upbringing of children while parents work, the preservation, or attempt at preservation, of a stable family life was at the heart of many female managers' complaints in regards to gender-based discrimination. Based on interviewee

responses, careers are seen as crucial to a successful family life. With school fees to pay, parents to financially support, and the basic costs of living continuing to rise, the push and pull between a strong career and an intact family was at the front of every interviewee's mind. Therefore, while still a chief concern among many female Chinese managers, the overall balancing act between ones family life and career was shown to vary from person to person and industry to industry.

As, discussed above, the influence of a given interviewee's career on her family life was still seen as a potential hindrance to career success, just not as big a hindrance as seen in many Western cultures. When it comes to her lifestyle, Anne is much more willing to balance work and family compared to Kate. To her, there is no need to choose one or the other, rather rely on her spouse and parents to take care of her son while she is out entertaining clients. "Understanding is key, my husband knows what I have to do and he supports me, so I can have a good family life while still working full time". Lucy, like Anne, attributes her own stable family life to a supportive husband and being able to pick and choose her own *guanxi* connections and *yingchou* opportunities to better suit her own interests while simultaneously spending more time with her family.

While most Chinese interviewees maintained that their families were extremely important to them, it became clear that the role each Chinese female manager allowed her career to play compared to her family life was far greater than most foreign female managers working in Shanghai. Therefore, the overall management of family life was one area in which Marie and several of her foreign friends differed significantly from their Chinese counterparts. Marie made it very clear that, for her, family life and maintaining family stability while her daughter completed high school was her top

priority. By choosing to commute from Shanghai to Kunshan every day, Marie could ensure that she would be home every night in order to be with her daughter and husband. Marie also expressed the least amount of interest in participating in any kind of business entertaining, or *yingchou*, compared to her Chinese counterparts. The conscious choice to value family over her career meant that Marie often missed out on potentially beneficial *yingchou* opportunities after work, but for her small scale textile operation, *yingchou* has yet to be a priority. To other foreign female managers in Shanghai, careers were obviously still very important, but perhaps due to the strains and adjustments made during the transition to a new lifestyle abroad, as a group they valued family life more than many female Chinese managers in similar positions. This trend appears to arise from the fact that many female Chinese managers appeared more eager, or "hungrier" to succeed than other foreign female managers in Shanghai. Any number of factors may have given rise to this trend, but hungry or not, female managers in China, regardless of ethnicity, must often make difficult decisions in regards to their traditionally family-oriented lifestyle.

Overcoming Obstacles

As seen above, in addition to the rigors any manager faces in the workplace, female Chinese managers must also overcome several culturally specific and gender-rooted obstacles. While some interviewees felt that, in many aspects, their gender could be advantageous to the advancement of their careers, most felt that being a woman in today's Chinese private sector still involves overcoming unique gender-based challenges. These challenges include: gender relations in the workplace, the establishment and

maintenance of *guanxi* through *yingchou* and heavy drinking, and the overall balance between work and family life. However, while it is easy to see how the cards are often stacked against female Chinese managers, every interviewee offered several key insights into how she has personally overcome many of the gender-rooted obstacles faced throughout her career. As the interviewees showed, while being a female Chinese manager still comes with its own set of disadvantages in China's *guanxi*-dependent private sector, many women are beginning to utilize the very tools and cultural practices that initially hindered them in order to advance their own interests as well as the interests of fellow female managers and employees around them.

When investigating female managers in any culture, the topic of a "bottleneck" or "glass ceiling" often arises. These terms imply that, as employees work their way up the corporate or managerial ladder, fewer and fewer women hold key positions. It must first be said that this phenomenon is widely observable in many countries and economies and is certainly not unique to China. However, perhaps due to China's rapidly growing economy, most interviewees expressed little patience in dealing with issues arising from a managerial bottleneck. The only concrete description of a bottleneck came from Anne, who described working for a Canadian company in China that refused to promote her because they felt that male employees should receive a higher salary and additional opportunities due to having families to support. After running into this "glass ceiling," she quickly left said firm and established her own.

The fact that the biggest example of bottleneck related gender-discrimination in my entire interview findings occurred at a Canadian company stands as testament to the universal nature of gender issues across multiple countries and cultures. Perhaps the

biggest reason many interviewees did not express encountering a bottleneck in their careers is due to the fact that several of the interviewees worked in industries and positions that consisted of primarily other women.   One or two interviewees did express encountering gender discrimination at other places of employment but they promptly left said positions.

After talking with several interviewees about this issue outside of the parameters set by the original interview question, I was surprised to find that many industries and positions in China have come to be dominated by women. Originally after the "Reform and Openness" policy of 1978, women poured into low-level low-pay manufacturing positions, while this remains true to some extent, several interviewees stressed how women are advancing within the ranks of industries that previously only saw women in low-level positions. One interviewee attributed this advancement of women into higher positions to greater levels of economic development and the increasingly globalized nature of the Chinese economy, particularly in the still fledgling domestic service industry. It is then no surprise that while issues involving a bottleneck phenomenon are common in many other cultures, the current Chinese private sector (and therefore most female Chinese managers) avoids these issues due to the presence of multiple opportunities for women at the managerial level. Ultimately, while several interviewees recalled encountering a bottleneck in the past, many did not view it as a large obstacle in the advancement of their careers as a whole. Once a bottleneck was encountered, many female Chinese managers simply moved on and sought positions elsewhere.

As discussed in the Advantages and Disadvantages section above, female Chinese managers often feel pressured to behave like "one of the boys" when it comes to the

practice of Chinese business entertaining, or *yingchou*. In the world of *yingchou*, managers, employees, and clients alike are usually lavishly entertained with banquets and chauvinistically male dominated alcohol-soaked late night revelry that can challenge even extremely experienced drinkers. Kate was adamant in her description of how *yingchou* practices often hinder her career due to the fact that Kate herself does not drink. Other interviewees also discussed feeling pressured or obligated to drink when attempting to attract new clients or maintain their ever-important *guanxi* ties with the local government. In every discussion of *yingchou*, interviewees tended to describe the practice, particularly when dealing with clients and not friends or coworkers, as a chore. The degree to which *yingchou* negatively influenced each interviewee's career and personal life varied considerably. Most interviewees agreed that, while *yingchou* certainly puts many women who are unwilling to drink at a disadvantage, the overall importance and necessity of *yingchou* in different positions and industries varied wildly, and therefore most interviewees were able to "pick and choose" who they entertained. By being able to selectively participate in *yingchou*, like Marie or Lucy described, female Chinese managers can reap partial benefits within a cultural practice seemingly designed to discriminate against them.

In addition to selectively participating in *yingchou*, relying on understanding spouses and parents to balance family life, and even changing careers upon encountering a bottleneck, perhaps the most interesting method in which many female managers continue to overcome obstacles related to China's male dominated *guanxi* system is via their own female-centric *guanxi* networks. As discussed in the Case Study Analysis chapter, many female managers tend to view their firms as large family units, thereby

grouping coworkers, fellow managers, and employees alike into a pseudo-familial units. This trend, particularly observable among fellow female coworkers and employees, also proved to carry over into other business dealings with other fellow female managers not necessarily employed at the same firm. All interviewees felt a certain degree of closeness to their fellow female employees and coworkers that was largely absent among male coworkers and employees. This can be attributed to several factors including family life, childrearing, similar workplace challenges, and other social bonds that are mutually shared among female employees. While men also face similar social issues, in China, topics pertaining to family life and childrearing are typically only discussed with members of one's own gender. Therefore, while several interviewees preferred working with men over fellow women, the social bonds formed between fellow women in the workplace often proved to be stronger and more social in nature than those between male coworkers, thus giving rise to female-centric *guanxi* networks. Thus, these female-centric *guanxi* networks have shown to be a veritable jack-of-all-trades for helping female managers overcome gender-based obstacles.

By definition, these new female-centric *guanxi* networks operate much in the same fashion as the traditionally male-dominated *guanxi* tradition; only instead of an elite group of exclusively male managers entertaining one another and advancing each other's interests, this group is exclusively female. Marie's weekly gathering of six to eight fellow expatriate female managers first alerted me to the potential of female-centric *guanxi* networks among exclusively ethnically Chinese female managers. This group of a half dozen or so expatriates living and working in and around Shanghai would meet every week in order to have a couple drinks, catch up about family life, and occasionally

assist in one another's business interests when an opportunity presented itself. Marie would rely on her friends to recommend anything from a certain government clerks to help process paperwork to that latest restaurant or bar opening in Shanghai. This casual, yet highly effective social network inspired me to see if other female Chinese managers participated in similar activities. As it turned out, while many Chinese female managers fail to meet with fellow female managers with such rigid regularity as Marie's expat group, female-centric *guanxi* networks are becoming an increasingly effective way to mitigate and overcome many of the obstacles faced by female Chinese managers today.

Kate, Lucy, and Anne all describe calling and relying on fellow female friends and acquaintances at certain firms or government offices when advancing her own interests. Lucy and Kate both meet semi-regularly with other female managers in their respective industries for many of the same reasons as Marie and her group of expats. Lucy uses her own *yingchou* opportunities to catch up with the competition and describe marketing strategies. Kate regularly plays mahjong with a group of women also involved in the manufacturing industry. Both women felt that these groups of well-connected friends frequently provided assistance in their careers. Even Anne, who was typically the most reserved when discussing her own personal *guanxi* ties, felt that while participating in late night *yingchou* activities, the other women at her table tended to have an unspoken bond that they would all refuse to participate in much of the over-zealous drinking habits of their male coworkers. As Anne described it, by having at least two women from both companies or positions refusing to participate in gut wrenching drinking and copious toasts, it does not appear impolite to refuse to drink, nor does either party feel shunted or "lose face" as the overused cultural saying goes. Therefore, even when female Chinese

managers fail to establish long-term bonds with one another, certain degrees of gender-based protectionism continues to help female managers overcome obstacles.

Looking back on the interview process as a whole the investigator realizes that, even at an extremely basic level, while female Chinese managers continue to face a litany of challenges, many are beginning to mutually protect one another and advance one another's interests, much in the same fashion as China's traditionally male-dominated *guanxi* system. It is observable that female Chinese managers are turning the tables on those who had previously discriminated against them and are gradually gaining ground within the upper echelons of executive management positions. If this interview process has taught me anything it is that a large number of female Chinese managers are workaholics and extremely hungry for success. With ever-increasing numbers of like-minded women and their encompassing female-centric *guanxi* networks behind them, the continued advancement of the role female Chinese managers play within China's private sector is all but guaranteed.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Now that the Case Study Analysis and Interview Chapters have both been presented and discussed, it is time to reflect upon what overarching conclusions this project has reached as well as what this research project can contribute to the expanding field of scholarship pertaining to *guanxi* and the role female Chinese managers play in the current Chinese private sector. This chapter seeks to synthesize the findings of both the Case Study Analysis chapter as well as the Interview chapter in a way that highlights new or seldom-mentioned aspects of how female Chinese managers are succeeding within China's *guanxi*-dependent private sector. This chapter will primarily focus on the four underlying hypotheses originally drawn from the Case Study Analysis portion of this project.

As previously discussed, the four hypotheses listed at the conclusion of the Case Study Analysis chapter were subsequently incorporated into the structure and content of several questions within the Interview Chapter which was designed to investigate whether several key societal trends previously observed in the Case Study Analysis chapter were indeed present in the "real world" among regular female Chinese managers. The methodology of conducting interviews according to a framework of conclusions derived from case study analysis is largely unseen in this particular field of study, which therefore renders the following conclusions all the more pertinent to bettering the overall understanding of the evolving role of female Chinese managers in today's *guanxi*-dependent Chinese private sector. While the sample size of the interview series is certainly too small to render statistically significant results, it does shed light on current societal trends. A hypothesis-by-hypothesis conclusion is presented as follows:

The first of the four hypotheses, "female Chinese managers are more familiar with many aspects of their firm/department/organization" was unanimously confirmed during the case study analysis and subsequent interview process. Much like Zhang Yin's case study, most female managers interviewed showed an almost familial approach in their managerial style. It is worth mentioning that this "familial approach" to managing a large firm is typically attributed to the inherent motherly tendencies of women in many Chinese language articles, but following the interview process it became clear that a familial style managerial approach could also be attributed to a given female Chinese manager's desire for control and was not necessarily directly correlated to wanting to be inherently "motherly." It can therefore be said that, while female Chinese managers are often more involved in a diverse array of activities within their position or firm, it should not be soley correlated to femininity, and should also rather be attributed to a desire to maintain control, and therefore power and influence, of their firm or position. It also must be said that this management style is not wholly unique to female Chinese managers, of course, male managers can also implement similar policies, but in this particular interview series all four participants exhibited similar managerial styles, which makes this managerial style particularly relevant to this study.

Regardless of inherent femininity or a larger desire for control, by viewing their firms as a large family unit, many female managers felt that they could better control their staff and more efficiently carry out any managerial decisions. Female Chinese managers were largely more familiar with their employees, often oversaw more aspects of their firm than their official title may suggest, and often interviewees themselves felt that they were more detail-oriented than many of their male counterparts. Instead of simply blaming

gender differences, this trend could instead be attributed to the overall lack of women in managerial roles in today's China. Once a female manager takes over a new position, it becomes her goal to manage her staff and other responsibilities to the best of her abilities. Thus, the "motherly-boss" familial approach to management can often be blindly considered as evidence of female manager's femininity, when in reality, it reflects a desire to safeguard themselves and their positions. Ultimately, while it is easy to jump to slightly sexist conclusion in regards to female Chinese managers' managerial style, it also reveals a potential key to more female managers succeeding in China by better understanding how female Chinese managers often take a more hands on approach in regards to the day-to-day operations of their firms. Instead of climbing the traditional Chinese corporate ladder via banqueting and *yingchou* to develop *guanxi* with male counterparts, female Chinese managers are beginning to build their own way. By monopolizing power through this pseudo-familial approach, female Chinese managers feel that they can better ensure their own success as well as the overall success of their firm.

The second hypothesis: "female Chinese managers may be seeking solidarity among other women in the workplace and beyond" was also originally derived in the Case Study Analysis chapter and later confirmed via the interview process. As mentioned above, several female entrepreneurs discussed how they managed their firms like a large family and they attributed much of their success to this management style. Therefore, the bond between female Chinese managers and their female employees or coworkers was obviously important and typically deeper than the inherent social pleasantries exchanged between two managers of the opposite sex. Once that was established, the further

examination of how female managers interact with other females in the workplace, especially in traditionally male-dominated industries, became one of the goals of the interview process. As several interviewees mentioned, in industries where women are squarely a minority, female managers often employ their own *guanxi* to look out for one another. Whether during *yingchou* activities or in the workplace itself, female managers often felt that it was their "duty" to look after fellow females in the office via their own female-centric *guanxi* networks. While not directly related to "watching out" for one another, the sheer fact that several interviewees worked in exclusively female office environments also illustrates how women are beginning to play a more powerful and independent role in the Chinese private sector.

While the Case Study Analysis portion of this research project did not necessarily see copious amounts of interaction between fellow female managers, the Interview Chapter did. Both Lucy and Kate discussed extensively how they meet semi-regularly with friends and competitors to talk strategy and maintain social relationships. Marie in particular utilized her own close-knit network of Shanghai-based expatriate women to accomplish many of her personal and professional goals as well as look out for one another. These female-centric *guanxi*-networks are important since they go largely unmentioned in other scholarship pertaining to the role of women in the Chinese private sector and provide a means to predict the future role of female Chinese managers in China's *guanxi*-dependent private sector. These female-centric *guanxi* networks serve to protect the member's personal interests as well as establish a series of social obligations and favors that are distributed evenly throughout the social group. In short, the girls have learned to play the *guanxi* "game" just like the boys. By copying their male counterparts

and forming exclusively female *guanxi* networks, female Chinese managers are not only

dodging the arduous liquor soaked world of *yingchou* as seen in the last chapter, but also

opening doors through which more female Chinese managers can emerge and play a

greater part in the Chinese private sector.

The third hypothesis: "most female Chinese managers receive little to no exogenous

guanxi-based assistance when starting a company, rather they must establish their own

guanxi networks within the workplace to better suit their/their firm's goals or projects"

did not perfectly dovetail with many of the interviewees' careers, but it was proven likely

following further discussion and comparison to the Case Study Analysis chapter. It goes

without saying that this hypothesis was originally derived through the analysis of three

prominent female entrepreneurs in the Case Study chapter; while these women are

obviously considered managers within their firms, the women examined via case study

analysis were also all "self made," which was not necessarily the case among female

manager interviewees. However, two of the four interviewees had indeed established

their own firms and, based on their personal experiences, this hypothesis is largely

proven true. Both interviewees discussed the establishment of their current firms as

emerging from a desire to be more independent and autonomous compared to their

previous positions as well as the tedious nature of *guanxi* building and *yingchou* that

helped to facilitate their eventual success. Interviewees complained about the arduous

nature of having to constantly participate in *yingchou* activities but these activities were

seen by many as vital to establishing their personal *guanxi* network, which they would

then implement throughout the establishment of their firms. Therefore, while the sample

size of this interview series was too small to infer much about the greater population of

female managers across China, this hypothesis does largely mirror the findings of the Case Study Analysis chapter, whereby women who establish firms in China must constantly facilitate the growth and development of their own *guanxi* network as opposed to relying on the *guanxi* of their family members or colleagues for support.

In the Case Study Analysis chapter, Zhang Yin and Yang Lan both had backgrounds that would have made it possible for them to implement their own personal exogenous *guanxi* during the establishment of their firms, but as the two case studies showed, that was unlikely to have been the case. It was determined that most female Chinese managers must build their firms, and therefore their *guanxi* networks, themselves from the ground up. This sentiment, while not directly tied to all four interviewees, was also observable in relation to interviewee discussions on the inherent nature of maintaining *guanxi* networks themselves. As mentioned previously, *guanxi* is often described as a relatively liquid social bond that must be maintained and perpetuated though a series of interconnected favors and social obligations. Since this is the case and most female Chinese managers enter the workforce with few to zero previously established, particularly industry-specific, *guanxi* ties, therefore the establishment and maintenance of beneficial *guanxi* networks falls directly upon the shoulders of each individual female Chinese manger. It can therefore be said that, while the overall role of *guanxi* in a given interviewee's career varied, the overall necessity of it and need to personally maintain it was proven to be largely universal.

The final hypothesis derived from the Case Study Analysis chapter: "at points of failure in female careers, there tends to be a "bottoming out" that takes place, or a unique experience that tends to spark a new idea or career track" was also not necessarily a

perfect fit for all interviewees. As seen in the previous chapter and more directly in the attached interview materials themselves, the interview questions did not implicitly prompt interviewees to elaborate on low points in their careers, but many interviewees did discuss how instances of discrimination or dissatisfaction within or towards previous positions had propelled them to their current job. Interviewees who previously worked for state owned enterprises, foreign joint venture firms, and domestic corporations all described instances when they felt stifled by bureaucracy, hindered by their gender, or limited in some way due to family constraints. These "low points" were not universal among interviewees, nor were they as "low" as some discussed within the Case Study Analysis chapter, but interviewees who found themselves in these situations almost always changed careers or positions.

While switching jobs can be a nerve-wracking process, all interviewees shared similar reasons why they chose to leave their previous positions as well as why they prefer their current one. An overall lack of independence, sense of achievement and freedom were all relatively universal reasons among interviewees for leaving. With the Chinese economy continuing to expand, these reasons serve as evidence to illustrate how more and more female managers are able to "shop around" for an ideal career that best suits their interests and goals. Ultimately, while not all interviewees experienced a "bottoming out" in their careers, those that did proved to be flexible and resourceful enough to land on their feet in a private sector more suited to their individual talents than ever before.

While the term "bottoming out" within one's career can describe a traumatic instance of personal failure or injustice, it can also be interpreted as ways in which female

Chinese managers overcome personal and professional obstacles. Bottlenecks, gender discrimination, family life, and business entertaining responsibilities were all described as hindrances to female Chinese manager success, but most of the challenges that arose from these issues were systematically dispensed via female-centric *guanxi* networks among other strategies. Therefore, it is clear that while not all female Chinese managers experience a personal "low point", most are continuing to actively establish and implement their own *guanxi* networks and social ties to overcome many of the gender-rooted issues that they face today.

An additional partial limitation of this project is the emphasis on largely successful female Chinese managers as a way of learning about the greater population of female managers in China as a whole. While the women I incorporated into the Case Study analysis chapter as well as Interview chapter had all faced gender-rooted challenges, were further research to be conducted in this field, additional analysis of less successful female managers or women who have experienced more direct gender-discrimination within the Chinese private sector would allow for a slightly more comprehensive understanding of female Chinese managers' status.

Ultimately, this project set out to bridge the gap between the two relatively distinct fields of scholarship pertaining to *guanxi* and the role of women in the Chinese economy and society at large. By focusing on a distinct group of female Chinese managers within the private sector, the ways in which women are coming to play and increasingly important and public role became easier to research and subsequently observe. By conducting case studies and structuring hypotheses that could then be further researched in the real world via in person interviews, this project attempts to

combine several research methods in a unique and comprehensive way that ultimately allows for greater levels of analysis and understanding than other less complex research methods. Other than the overall research methodology, perhaps the most important contribution to the current field of scholarship pertaining to female Chinese managers is coming to better understand how female Chinese managers are beginning to use their own *guanxi* networks to succeed alongside, and often surpass, their male coworkers and managers. However, it goes without saying that to a large degree, female Chinese managers are succeeding in China due to their own unshakeable drive and uncanny determination to do so; while their methods may vary, the Chinese private sector, and better still the global economy, will soon become increasingly influenced by these increasingly-powerful and increasingly visible female Chinese managers, in other words, boss ladies.

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Appendix: Interview Materials

Dear Interviewee,

      This interview will ask you several questions regarding the Chinese cultural concept of *guanxi*, translated as inter-personal relationships or connections, and how *guanxi* has affected your career or personal advancement as well as whether you think *guanxi* will continue to play a role in your professional life. This project seeks to understand how female Chinese managers (such as yourself) are succeeding within China's traditionally male-dominated *guanxi* system, therefore questions may pertain to workplace interactions and after-hours social functions, as well as attempt to better understand professional relationships within Chinese firms through the eyes of female Chinese managers. Questions have been written in such a way as to avoid making any given interviewee feel uncomfortable or at risk of any adverse effects. If a given question does make a given interviewee uncomfortable, the interviewee maintains the right to not answer it. While questions may pertain to workplace environments and social connections, they are inherently low-risk in nature and therefore do not pose any significant risk, to an interviewees career or other personal aspects. In addition to expressing your understanding of *guanxi,* you will also be asked a series of simpler questions to allow the researcher to better evaluate your cultural background and personal familiarity with the concept of *guanxi*.

      This interview will take roughly a half hour and is to be conducted either in person or via Skype (or via email as a last resort if a suitable time is unavailable). No compensation is being offered at this time, however your participation will become an invaluable aspect of this research project and is greatly appreciated. Your participation is entirely voluntary and your responses will be kept completely anonymous. Additionally, during citation within the research project, all identities will be concealed via pseudonyms. Upon completion of each interview, responses will be transcribed for further analysis. At the completion of this project, all relevant and collected interview materials will be destroyed to further ensure the protection of each interviewee's identity and personal privacy.

      Finally, this study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

Thank you for your participation,

Palmer Withers
cpwither@go.olemiss.edu

Interview Question Sample:

1. First of all, are you above the age of 18 and fully understand and agree to the above mentioned consent statement and confidentiality agreement? (If answer above is yes) Please begin by telling me a little bit about yourself. Where are you from? What industry would you describe your work involving? (if business practitioner, and can include broad topics such as manufacturing, telecommunications, personal relations etc…)

2. How would you define the concept of *guanxi*? Please give a basic example.

3. When was the first time you encountered the concept of *guanxi* in China? Additionally, do you feel that your career in China has been affected by *guanxi*? If so, how and why?   Please give a basic example.

4. At your workplace, do coworkers interact better with members of their own gender? Is there any tension between male and female employees or managers (including individuals in positions both above and below your own if applicable)? Please give a basic example.

5. As a female in a managerial role, what would you view as the benefits and weaknesses of being a woman in an upper level position in your workplace? Please give a basic example.

6. While advancing within your current firm or at a place of previous employment, did you ever encounter a gender "bottleneck"? Here "bottleneck" can be defined as the number of female employees decreasing as the importance of the position held increases. Where would you say this "bottleneck" effect comes from? Please give a basic example.

7. Do you often participate in after-hours business entertaining? Do these activities influence your family life? If so, how do you better balance your career and family? Please give a basic example.

8. In your workplace, do fellow female employees or managers look out for each others' interests or protect one another? Please give a basic example.

9. Do you believe that Chinese *guanxi* traditions helped or hindered economic development? Why? Please give a basic example

10. How do you think the *guanxi* system will evolve as the Chinese economy continues to develop? Please give a basic example.

采访材料：

尊敬的被采访者：

您好！

　　首先，谢谢您参加我的采访活动。这个采访是我本科毕业论文的一部分，论文的目的是想了解一下，在日益发达的中国经济中，关系（包括但是不限于家庭，同乡，上下级等类型）在女管理者生活和职业中可能扮演的角色。我想调查的是，中国的女管理者觉得中国社会中的关系在她们招聘，应酬，或者晋升的过程中有了什么样的影响。此外问题还会涉及到一些您对中国社会中的关系的看法。除此以外，采访也会包括几个很简单的关于您自己的问题。

　　您参加这个采访活动是完全自愿的。您的回答都会是匿名的。回答被翻译成英文以后，如果需要引用，都会用化名。写完论文以后，我收集的采访记录与笔记都会被销毁。确保每个被采访者的身份保密与采访者隐私权将会是我的首要目标之一。

谢谢您的合作，

魏佩模
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1. 首先，如果您的年龄高于十八岁而您对上面的采访活动介绍没有什么问题，请您写一个比较短的自我介绍：请您包括您的性别，年龄，收入情况，职业，与家乡等基本信息。

2. 您怎么定义"关系"？ 请举一个简单的例子。

3. 您第一次遇到中国社会中的关系是什么时候，如何影响到您的生活或者工作？请举一个简单的例子。

4. 在您的工作环境中，"同性相斥，异性相吸"还存在吗？请举一个简单的例子。

5. 作为一名女性，您认为在职场竞争中，女性有哪些优势和劣势？请举一个简单的例子。

6. 您在晋升过程当中，有没有遇到瓶颈？对您来说，这种瓶颈来自于哪？
请举一个简单的例子。

7. 您会去参加应酬吗？ 您认为应酬对您的家庭生活有什么样的影响？您是如何平衡应酬和家庭生活的？请举一个简单的例子。

8. 在您的工作环境中，女同事之间有没有互相帮助或者互相保护？请举一个简单的例子

9. 从您自己的经历来看，您认为"关系"阻碍了还是加快了中国的经济发展？为什么？请举一个简单的例子。

10. 您认为未来中国的"关系制度"的重要性会减少还是增加？ 为什么？请举一个简单的例子。

<div align="center">采访结束了</div>

＊＊如果您有什么关于这个采访活动的问题请您随时给我发电子邮件。谢谢！