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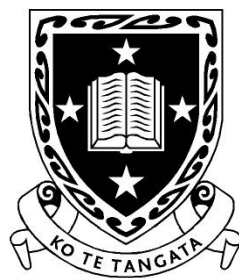
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**WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
NEW ZEALAND**

**Comparing the perspectives of New Zealand and Chinese women**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Social Science**  
at  
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By  
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## ABSTRACT

The perceptions of women and the nature of higher education have undergone dramatic changes since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women have gradually obtained the same rights and opportunities as men to pursue and participate in higher education. Today, women even outnumber men in higher education in many developed and developing countries. This study explores, from a qualitative point of view, some of the reasons why more and more women prefer to get higher qualifications and compares women's experiences and perspectives on their higher education, work and life choices in relation to two contexts – New Zealand and China.

This study began the investigation with a literature review to examine how women's positions have increased presence and rights in political, economic, cultural and educational areas through three waves of feminism. In particular the effect the three waves had on the structure and shape of higher education and gender roles. In addition, this study also considers the gradual shift of focus in lifelong learning and the application of human capital theory (HCT) from social democratic visions to the neo-liberal ideas. This shift being the movement away from the human potential for life fulfillment to education as the mechanism to develop economies by increasing productivity and incomes.

In order to examine contemporary motivations of women's participation in higher education, and the relationship between education, employment and personal life, this study used face-to-face interviews and answering questions via e-mail with seven participants to collect the data. The participants included three Chinese women and four New Zealand women who are or were enrolled in higher education in New Zealand at the University of Waikato.

Thematic analysis of interview data was combined with the review of existing

literature in order to argue that the most significant motivation of women participating in higher education is to gain increased career opportunities and higher incomes. Both of these external motivations are largely a production of neo-liberal understanding of lifelong learning theory and HCT. Women accepted the individualistic responsibility of education and employability without the debating of the authenticity of these two assumptions. They assumed that the government did not need to play a role. In addition, this thesis also argues that participating in higher education is viewed by the women to be positive normally because the benefits that higher education can bring include a sense of belonging, personal growth, and active citizenship. However, the women also expressed views reflecting the pressures of work-life balance, the challenges of combining study with relationships or children. Thus this thesis argues that the experiences from participating in higher education are more complex and can be negative. For modern women, the main challenge is to how to balance the different demands of work, life and education. Sometimes, women have to defer marrying and having children to solely focus on study. This deferment of life course in turn can have a potential negative impact on women's lives. Moreover, gender discrimination is still against women in relation to their educational levels, and decisions relating to family formation and age. The extent of this problem depends however on the context. While for the most part the women's views were incredibly similar regardless of country of origin in relation to discrimination, the New Zealand and Chinese women have different perspectives, experiences or understandings. Discrimination is more common and more tolerated in China. Despite legislative changes more work needs to be done to further the rights of women in China.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the precious memory of my previous supervisor

Dr. Paul Harris

I hope Paul will be happy for the completion of my thesis in paradise.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **MY STORY**

When I was a little girl in China, my parents told me that to study hard is the most important thing for me to do. At this time, I could not understand the purpose of learning; I only knew that good results always helped me gain praise from my parents. When I graduated from high school, for the first time in my life I was faced with making significant choices. I needed to decide on whether to continue my academic education at the university or go to the vocational education to obtain technical training. With the influence of societal views, I strongly believed that only a higher qualification could bring me an ideal job and high income in order to improve my life and support my family. Hence, I chose to study Law at university. However, increased competition in the workplace meant that I realized a Bachelor's degree was not enough for my career. So my parents provided financial support for me to study overseas. Studying overseas is important in Chinese society because of the popularly held belief that in you go overseas, you become special, that you are gilded (covered in gold) or have golden opportunities to gain jobs and extend your career. I came to New Zealand with great expectations for my future. I hoped to enrich my knowledge and skills, achieve personal development, and become more professional. Now, I am 30 years old, I am confused and panicked with my current situation. Because many of my peers have been working for nearly 10 years, I am worried whether my mere higher qualifications can compete with their rich work experiences when I try to find a job in China? Am I too old to find a first job? Moreover, I have faced a lot of stress from my personal life. Due to focusing on my study, I have deferred the timing of entry into marriage and parental roles until I complete my Master's study. Participating in higher education has delayed my work and life for 10 years. Therefore, after completing my Honours year I started to consider why have I participated in higher education, and what has it brought me? Was it worth the time and

sacrifice or not?

In addition, I saw that there were many more female university students in my classes than male students (whether local or international students). This phenomenon also created a series of questions in my mind. Do these women have similar feelings and concerns as me? Why do so many women pursue and participate in higher education? What do women wish to gain and what have they really gained from participating in higher education? Given all my worries I also wondered is education always positive for women, does it have any potential negative impacts on women's lives and decision-making? I also wondered if New Zealand and Chinese women had the same feelings as me or if cultural differences meant different motivations and impacts. In order to answer these questions, I made my Master's research topic about 'women's perspectives on and experiences of higher education' comparing the experiences of New Zealand and Chinese women who have participated in graduate and post-graduate programmes in New Zealand.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the scope and focus of this research. This chapter begins with an explanation of the research topic. It then provides a brief introduction to the theoretical framework. The chapter also outlines the purpose of and the five central arguments embedded in this thesis. This chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Feminism advocated the liberation of women from families into society; it aimed at defining, establishing and ensuring equality of opportunity and equal rights for women (Chodorow, 1989; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). Feminism argues that the traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers need to be changed and all kinds of discriminations against women

need to be eliminated in order for women to achieve full and active participation in political, economic, and educational areas. Specifically, women should have equal rights to access education, to select subjects and curriculum, and to complete qualifications (Hu, 2010; Hannam, 2007). This is because education and training increase personal growth and development, improve wide spread productivity, which can maximize women's income in order to enhance their quality of life in a variety of ways. Education can also increase women's confidence, social positions and achieve life fulfillment.

Lifelong learning theory and human capital theory (HCT) are the most influential theories of education, and are part of the framework of government education policies. Both theories have transitioned from a social democratic vision to a neo-liberal concept in how they are applied to education policy. The two theories are used to emphasise that education and training are the key determinants of productivity and economic performance. Strong education and training systems are viewed as a route to increased labour market participation that is a benefit for both society and individuals. For nations, education and training accumulate human capital in order to develop their domestic economy and enhance competitiveness in order to respond effectively to challenges of globalization and technology. For individuals, education and training can increase people's skills and capacities in order to augment productivity, and personal employability and therefore incomes. Moreover, human capital theory treats education and training as an investment and places the responsibility and risk of education investment on individuals. The state is no longer expected to finance and provide education, instead an individual as the primary beneficiary takes a larger proportion of investment in education. Feminism and these theoretical perspectives are explored and explained more specifically in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

## **THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY**

This study has two related purposes. Firstly, as indicated above, it seeks to find out what motivations lead women to pursue and participate in higher education. Secondly, it ascertains, in-depth, how women have experienced and dealt with the relationships between work, life and higher education. These relationships were explored in order to identify potential and actual benefits women gain from higher education. The study also asks questions to better understand the negative effects of participating in higher education that can happen to some women. These potential negative effects had a particular focus on the challenge of balancing work, life and study, as well as difficulties associated with gender discrimination in the workplace.

## **CENTRAL ARGUMENTS**

This thesis has been developed a series of formative arguments that emerge out of the combination of the literature review (Chapter Two and Chapter Three), and the interviews reported in Chapter Five. These arguments can be summarized in four clusters.

Firstly, increased work opportunities and high incomes emerged as the main motivation for women to pursue and participate in higher education. They expected higher qualifications can enable them to gain a high-status and high-income job. Given this emphasis on economic imperatives, this belief is more influenced by lifelong learning theory and HCT than women's movement emphasis on equality. However, there is no guarantee that higher education will ensure women can access good jobs and higher incomes. Moreover, the women reflected an individualistic understanding of employability, ignoring the nature of the labour market as it has been affected from the global economic recession. For example, the unemployment rate of University graduates in China is very high (Liu, 2010). Although women claimed there are many barriers to them to participate in higher education, they also accepted the responsibility of higher

education rather than seeing the government as also having a responsibility to perhaps not finance but at least support them more.

Secondly, even though the women had an economic or work related focus when asked about the benefits gained from and during their participation in higher education, they did not refer to these two elements. Instead the women commented on gains like extra knowledge and skills; increased personal confidence; and being in a better position to share educational experiences with children. This illustrates how the one-dimensional nature of HCT is faulty again. Higher education can contribute to women's personal development, active citizenship, and a sense of belonging, but it may not necessarily increase job and financial security. There is a gap between women's expectations and reality. Gender segregation at work and income gaps lead to women having to participate in or return to higher education in order to promote their positions on the labour market, but their qualifications may not be able to bring the same financial return on the labour market as they do for men.

Thirdly, participating in higher education is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can enhance women's knowledge and skills in relation to their family, career and desires. On the other hand, it may put more pressures on women and in turn interrupt women's life course choices. Modern women are doing what a traditional society expects of them such as raising a family; but they are also doing what is common these days, such as working to support family; as well as they are doing something that is going to benefit them, their family and society as a whole such as studying. All of these are big challenges for women to balance. Some of the women with individualistic neo-liberal stances believed that they just needed to work hard and manage time effectively and they would in turn achieve all their goals in work, life and study. But most women thought work, life and study balance is difficult. This is demonstrated by how often their decisions meant that life, work or family would need to be sacrificed to enable

participating in higher education. Unmarried and childless women indicated that they could decide to get married and have children after completing higher qualifications but this deferment of life course may lead to the women having less chance to find a suitable life partner and have a risk to their fertility. The women had different levels of awareness about the negative implications of these decisions.

Fourthly, with the influence of feminism, women's position and gender roles have changed in recent years. The women's movements have fought for eliminating all kinds of gender discrimination and stereotypes for women in workplace, family, school and society is backed up with legislation in New Zealand and China. However, gender discrimination still exists but the extent of the problem depends on the context. Hence, New Zealand and Chinese women have different perspectives and experiences on this social issue in relation to their different cultural and social backgrounds. The range of answers occurred from doubting that certain kinds of discrimination exist to claiming personal experience of it. For example, age and appearance are key criteria in recruiting employees in China, so the Chinese women were worried that spending too many years in higher education may lead to them losing the best time to find a job. New Zealand women believe that this kind of discrimination is unacceptable and that they should not have this experience. However, for both cultures the women spoke about how highly educated women were stereotyped negatively in other people's eyes, but New Zealand and Chinese women's reasons and explanations vary. Hence, discrimination is still against New Zealand and Chinese women, therefore both governments should do more work to protect women's rights.

## **THESIS STRUCTURE**

Chapter Two presents the theoretical literature review to provide a framework for this study. It outlines theoretical material on feminism, gender role, higher



education as well as lifelong learning, HCT, life course theory, and work-life balance. This is done in order to demonstrate the new perceptions of women and the current nature of higher education internationally.

Chapter Three surveys the background of New Zealand and China in order to explain their different cultures, values, women's movements and social expectations that may have different impacts on how women participate in higher education. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on China, while the second part focuses on the New Zealand. Each part provides a brief description of the country, the historical transformation of gender role, the development progress of women's higher education, and contemporary issues that women face in each society particularly in relation to work.

Chapter Four describes the methodology of this study. It explains how and why the interpretive perspective and feminist theory are important to this study. It also describes the two methods of collecting information used in this study which are face-to-face interviews and answering interview questions via e-mail (a form of questionnaire). In addition, the chapter explains how to make the interview guide, conduct a pilot interview, and select participants. Finally, it concludes by introducing the analyzing of data collected from interviews and questionnaires.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the interviews and e-mail questionnaires. The women's answers were categorized into four themes. These themes were identified and selected in accordance with the perspectives and personal experiences of the participants as well as literature in Chapter Two and Three. These themes revolved around the merging focus of this study, which is an in-depth understanding of women's motivations to participate in higher education, as well as how they experience the relationships between education, work and life.

Chapter Six draws on the theoretical framework and background from Chapters Two and Three, and the findings presented in Chapter Five to highlight and discuss some of the study's more significant findings. This chapter analysed the findings by exploring what role neo-liberal ideas have shaped women's motivations to participate in higher education. Examining the women's strategies and ideas about how to balance work, life and study. Finally comparing the kinds of positive and negative effects from participating in higher education has occurred in the women's lives in comparison to the literature.

Chapter Seven concludes by summarizing the key arguments that have been addressed through the research, and provides some recommendations on how women's participation in higher education in the future can be improved if the government is willing to take greater leadership role.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The nature of higher education and perceptions of women have undergone dramatic changes since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter traces these changes by defining key political ideologies, theories, concepts and arguments. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to explain the context within which this research takes place.

In order to fulfill this purpose, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on women's issues including feminist movements, gender roles and women's higher education. It briefly introduces the three waves of feminism and outlines the concept of gender roles, explaining how they are largely a product of society and culture. This part also describes the effects of these three waves on the education system. The chapter then concludes by highlighting the concepts of women, education, and employment in order to illustrate the important aspects of this framework.

The second part explores the intersection between economy, employment and education. This part begins by discussing the gradual shift of focus in lifelong learning from the full development of the individual to an emphasis on economic growth. It then describes human capital theory (HCT). This section traces the three phases of development in HCT's application in government education policy, and discusses the theory's impact on individuals' motivation to participate in higher education. Critiques of HCT and the concept of employability are also considered. This part of the chapter also discusses life course theory and work-life balance, focusing on challenges associated with these due to the remaining influence of traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers.

## **FEMINISM**

Since the nineteenth century, feminism has been one of the most important and influential political movements aimed at defining, establishing and ensuring equal political, economic, cultural and social rights and opportunities for women (Chodorow, 1989; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; Dicker, 2008). Watkins, Rueda and Rodriguez (1999) argue that the feminist movement is an independent campaign of women. It is a process of the transformation from traditional patriarchy of feudal society into liberal and democratic society. In social and political areas, the different feminist movements have strived to gain rights for women in relation to property, voting, bodily integrity and autonomy, and for protection from domestic violence, sexual discrimination and sexual harassment (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). In the economic area, the second wave feminists advocated for employment rights to improve the position of women in the labour market such as, equal pay, pay equity, and equal employment opportunities (Freedman, 2002).

No matter how many perspectives within feminism there are, the main goal of feminism is to deal with the problems or issues that women face when surmounting social barriers (Freedman, 2002). Some of the different perspectives within feminism are Conservative, Black, French, Marxist, Eco, and Post-feminism. Among them, Watkins, Rueda and Rodriguez (1999) argue that the more familiar and significant perspectives are: Socialist, Liberal and Radical feminism. Liberal feminism focuses on the problem as being inequality between men and women. It seeks more equal rights for women and more positive role models to enhance women's confidence (Watkins et al., 1999). Specifically, liberal feminists want to correct the given system rather than overturning the structure of society. Socialist feminism deems the problem as a combination of class exploitation and male control of women. For example, employers exploit women by paying lower wages in the labour market; men exploit women by receiving unpaid services at home, so socialist feminists fight

against both situations. In contrast, radical feminism believes male-dominated hierarchy is the root of women's oppression, and patriarchy leads to men's power over women throughout families, industries, politics and religion, therefore overturning and reconstructing the structure of society is necessary (Echols, 1989; Watkins et al., 1999).

Given these different perspectives, it is difficult to offer an appropriate and accurate definition of feminism; it is a term that involves a number of diverse meanings. However, one way of understanding the characteristics of feminism is by outlining the history of feminist thought. As Cudd and Andreasen (2005) state, "feminist thought is sometimes characterized as occurring in waves" (p.7). They argue that a focus on these waves initially can contribute to an in-depth understanding of feminism.

### **Waves of feminism**

Some feminists argue that the important symbol of the first feminist movement was the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). However, the first wave of feminism actually happened during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the United Kingdom and the United States. Influenced by nineteenth century liberal politics viewpoints, the first wave of feminism focused on gaining equal political and economic rights for women (Flexner & Fitzpatrick, 1975). The reason for these arguments was that during this period, men held property rights in the families as well as society, and women were still largely trapped within a patriarchal family system (Chodorow, 1989). Women were not permitted to vote, possess property, run businesses, enter colleges, or make decisions. The liberal feminists argued that women have the same capacity for reason as men, so they should be treated the same as men (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). The first wave of feminist activities generated many significant changes in the situation of women in relation to women's suffrage. These changes

included obtaining property rights, equal contract, more productive freedoms and access to education (Chodorow, 1989; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). Overall, the first wave of feminism made a crucial start for enhancing the status and improving the rights of women.

The second wave began in the 1940s with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, lasting until the late 1980s (Hannam, 2007). Cudd and Andreasen (2005) state that the second wave tried to make up for the inadequacy of the first wave. As such it was concerned with identifying the "sources" of political, economic, social and legal inequality. Second wave feminists maintain that, although important, political and legal equality is not sufficient to end women's oppression. This is because women's oppression is not merely involved in legal and political grounds, it is pervasive and deeply embedded in each facet of human social life including political, economic, social arrangements, as well as norms, habits, interaction and personal relationship (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). Moreover, second wave feminists claimed first wave feminism did not completely fulfill economic reforms. In other words, second wave feminists deemed that women require full economic equality instead of simple economic survival (Echols, 1989). Thus, the second wave was often described as a feminist movement that focused on transforming all aspects of personal life for women, such as fighting social and cultural inequalities as well as political inequalities.

The third wave, instigated in the late 1980s, rose as a response to accepted failures of the second wave as well as a response to feminists who wanted to recognise women's diversity (Freedman, 2002). Third wave feminism sought to challenge and overturn the second wave's narrow definitions of women, thereby more accurately expressing the core of feminism theory and politics. This is because second wave feminism was largely represented by middle-class white women who disregarded the different social status of women from different

ethnicities (Henry, 2004). For instance, black women stated that their experiences, feelings, perspectives, interests and concerns were not completely represented by second wave concerns (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). Gloria Anzaldua, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Maxine Hong Kingston and many other black feminists argued that women from different social groups suffered different types of oppression, so women should not be treated as a single unified category, and their oppression should not be perceived as a single unified experience (Faludi, 1991; Gillis, Howie & Munford, 2007). Therefore, they proposed that feminist thought should consider race-related subjectivities. They also advocated that feminism should accept women's diversity and permit a multiplicity of feminist objectives (Faludi, 1991; Gillis, Howie & Munford 2007). It is argued that only in this way, can feminism represent more roles in women's interests and perspectives.

Through these waves, women's roles, status and rights have gradually changed in western society. Women's rights have expanded in the spheres of politics, economy, and education. The experiences of women also are no longer limited to the perception of middle-class white women. These changes have been accompanied by changes in the western conception of gender roles. How the concepts of gender and gender roles associated with men and women have changed is outlined next.

### **Gender roles**

Crowley and Himmelweit (1992) claim women are described as passive, fragile, dependent, non-competitive, and supportive by their natures. In contrast, men are described as aggressive, innovative, active, rational, confident, and competent. Therefore, women are often told what they can and cannot do based on their biology which was historically used to justify existing social limitations on women.

In order to break away from such biologically determinist theories, and to distinguish the effects of society from those of nature or biology, feminists advocated that a distinction should be made between sex and gender (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992). According to this, feminists argue that gender, as a social and cultural category, refers to the differences between women and men, whereas sex refers to the biological distinction between females and males (Moi, 1999). The sex/gender distinction is a key foundation for feminist theory, and it is now widely accepted in many societies (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; Moi, 1999).

Since the beginning of the second wave, gender has been one of the most significant concepts of feminism. Cudd and Andreasen (2005) emphasize that most significant differences between men and women are largely a product of society and culture. For example, historically men and women were taught that their appropriate roles were: women as mother, child bearer and wife, and men as breadwinner, husband and leader (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; LeGates, 2001). On this basis, the second wave feminists criticized the social pattern of men as dominant and women as subordinate (Haslanger, 2005; Mill, 2005). They advocated that the full political, economic and legal equality between men and women could not be achieved if these gender roles were maintained.

Within the women's movement, women's positions have improved in many aspects. They have gradually increased participation levels in political activity, paid-work and education; reflecting changes in what women aspire to and how they perceive themselves in terms of gender roles. This has led to expectations that modern women need to play multiple roles in order to fulfill the different demands of their lives. This is demonstrated by concept of the "superwoman" which first emerged in the late 1970s, when British journalist Shirley Conran published a book by the same name (Conran, 1980; Hills, 2011; Robyn & Mary,



1992). Since then the concept has become part of pop-culture and advertising slogans to encourage women to combine marriage, motherhood and career. In the 1980s, if a woman had a job and a family, she was a superwoman (Conran, 1980; Hills, 2011). But today the boundary and definition of the superwoman's concept has expanded and changed. Hills (2011) states that now women are expected to be super mothers, attentive partners or spouses, caregivers, meal planners, competitive workers, and highly educated students in western society. On this basis, women have to have it all and do it all in their lives. Sackville (2011, cited in Hills, 2011) claims that the superwoman figure is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it builds women's self-confidence to believe they can acquire both children and a career. On the other hand, it creates totally unrealistic expectations of women, and can create pressure which leaves women exhausted (Hills, 2011; Robyn & Mary, 1992). As with life course theory, the concept of the superwoman gender role will be discussed again at the end of the chapter in the work-life balance.

The feminist social movements have challenged male and female gender roles and created change socially and economically. The education system has been a key part of these social and economic changes. The impact of feminism on education is explained next.

### **Three phases of women's access to and participation in education**

The first phase of women's participation in education occurred in the late nineteenth century, influenced by the first wave of feminism that sought legal gender equality (Acker, 1994; Dicker, 2008; Hu, 2010; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). The liberal feminist view was that women should have equal rights to access education. However, this view still embodied a traditional understanding of gender roles, and as such women's education still reflected women's different and subordinate social status (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). Hu (2010) explains that there were two arguments for this. The first is that women are different from

men so they should be educated differently. The second argument is that women should be allowed to develop their unique capacities only in order to facilitate the development of men. Emma Willard (1982, as cited in Hu, 2010) states, “the characteristics and responsibilities of women are different from men, so women’s education should be distinguished from men’s education” (p. 80). On this basis, the liberal feminist goal for women’s education had two aspects. Firstly, women, as mothers, need to be able to instill correct thought and give educational support to their children. Secondly, more trained teachers were seen as being more needed in society, because teaching is a flexible job for women, leaving them time to look after children and family (Acker, 1994; Dicker, 2008; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). Thus, there were two patterns of participation in higher education at this time. One was that women could enter women-only colleges or affiliated women’s institutions to study. Another was that women could only learn female-related courses to help them become educated mothers and teachers for their families and society.

The second wave of feminism shaped the second phase of women’s participation in education from the 1960s. Second-wave feminists believed that there was no intellectual gap between men and women, so women should receive the same education as men (Acker, 1994; Dicker, 2008; Hu, 2010; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). Middleton (1993) claims that women were seen as less intellectual by men because they did not have equal opportunities to study; if they have equal rights and chances to complete qualifications then they will have the same rights as men in the society. Moreover, feminists argued that women should not only gain equal rights in politics, economy and society, but also possess equality in education (Hannam, 2007). They particularly opposed the emphasis on gender differences and advocated the equality between men and women, so that men and women could study the same courses in the same colleges (Hannam, 2007). On this basis, some colleges offered the same curriculum to men and women, such as law, medicine, chemistry, mining industry, and metallurgy. However, it

is important to note that radical feminists challenged such arrangements by stating that these courses were still designed and arranged by men's interest and bias (Acker, 1994; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006; Middleton, 1993). Although this change to the education system somewhat reflected the progress of society, it also reflected another social limitation, that men were still the only measure to determine education's value (Hu, 2010).

Radical feminists recognized the limitation of the education system itself and tried to improve this situation by changing the system (Hu, 2010). Hence, the third phase of women's education was about challenging the patriarchal hegemony of knowledge (Acker, 1994; Hu 2010). Throughout the early twentieth century, women's education was always embedded in two alternatives: one was studying traditional female courses such as teaching, nursing and social work; another was studying the same courses together with men but by male standards (Hu, 2010; Middleton & Jones, 1997). Thus, male experiences, values, interests and perspectives were the single content to be described in all disciplines and as the only viewpoint to explain social history and development. Therefore, second and third wave feminists advocated breaking these cultural conventions and challenging patriarchal hegemony of knowledge in order to change women's subordinate status and correct female prejudices in the society constitutionally (Acker, 1994; Arnot & Weiler, 1993; Dicker, 2008; Hu, 2010). For example, higher education in the United States promoted a new academic field of woman's studies. In this area, women carry out research on women's issues (Hu, 2010). Thus, there were two goals of this third phase. The first, was the continual elimination of gender discrimination in order to increase women access to education, the second to establish a new academic subject to accumulate women's knowledge for women's studies. This subject was not only an academic study, but was also a process of changing women's thoughts and behaviour in society, in other words reshaping gender roles. (Dicker, 2008; Hu, 2010; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006).

### **Part one: Summary**

Throughout the three phases of women's movements and the impacts on education, feminists hoped to create a new social and cultural environment for women. Within these feminists' movements, women have gradually gained more equal rights and opportunities to pursue, access and participate in education. In addition, lifelong learning and HCT's policies have transferred from a social democratic vision to a neo-liberal concept by emphasizing the individual's responsibility and initiative of education in order to cope with social and economic changes. Hence, these two theories have also had impacts on women's participation in higher education. In the next part, the chapter describes the theory of lifelong learning and HCT, and their effects.

### **LIFELONG LEARNING**

Lifelong learning has become a central theory in education and community development since the 1970s (Chapman, Cartwright & McGilp, 2006). Lifelong learning can be defined as the continuous gaining and improving of skills and knowledge throughout an individual's lifetime. It can be formal (training, tutoring, apprenticeship, adult education, and higher education) and informal (experiences, custom, and norms) (Chapman, Cartwright & McGilp, 2006; Illeris, 2002; Rizvi, 2007). Chapman, Cartwright and McGilp (2006) claim that international and national agencies, governments and educational institutions realize that lifelong learning helps people to attain the goals of economic advancement, social emancipation and personal growth. A capacity to learn is part of human potential for survival, individual development and life fulfillment (Illeris, 2002).

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, lifelong learning focused on the full development of the individual in line with a more social democratic vision of this concept (Chapman, Cartwright & McGilp, 2006; Piercy, 2011; Rizvi, 2007). This vision was first articulated in the UNESCO's report *Learning to be: The*

*world of education today and tomorrow* which discusses how the emphasis should be on learning to learn and not on the demands of labour market (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnama & Ward, 1972). This social democratic sentiment is demonstrated by Burbules and Torres's claim that:

The report's perspective is that the love of learning creates a desire for lifelong learning and the maintenance of a learning society; and therefore the goal of lifelong learning is to give people the power to exercise democratic control over economic, scientific and technological development (2000, p.49).

However, during the 1990s, lifelong learning was influenced by the rhetoric of the knowledge economy and human capital theory. Thus, the broader social democratic<sup>1</sup> vision of lifelong learning was undermined by the growing dominance of neo-liberal ideas<sup>2</sup> (Piercy, 2011). The OECD's report *Lifelong learning for all* (1996) represents a main shift in the focus of lifelong learning. This report emphasizes economic imperatives such as building a highly-skilled and competitive workforce (OECD, 2001). Chapman, Cartwright and McGilp (2006) hold that public policy targets have now been directed towards technically advanced knowledge, technological proficiency, and workplace skills. Illeris (2002) argues that this has led to the historical goal of life fulfillment and self realization as a psychodynamic basis and energy for learning to be ignored.

As with lifelong learning, human capital theory also has experienced a transition from a social democratic vision to a neo-liberal concept in its application to education policy. The next part of this chapter describes this change along with

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<sup>1</sup> Social democracy is a political ideology advocating gradual and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism. It represents the interests of working class, and emphasizes social justice, human rights and welfare. Social democratic governments play an active role in regulating certain political and economic conditions. Social democrats believe in individual freedoms, but they also emphasize the need for the protection of minority groups (Sullivan, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Neo-liberalism is the contemporary pattern of economic liberalism. It emphasizes a competitive market economy and opposes an economic system planned and directed by the state. This is because neo-liberals contend that market-based economy is an essential bulwark of democracy by preventing the concentration of power in the hands of the few. Moreover, they argue that the powers of government should be limited by a high level of constitutional law (Green, 2003).

the main assumptions and critiques of human capital theory.

## **HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY**

Schultz (1961) argues that education should be treated as a form of economic investment, as the level of investment in human capital determines the level of economic success and when viewed at the level of society determines the rate of a country's economic growth. Another key aspect of human capital theory advanced by Gary Becker, is a set of economic equations that determined the rate of return on investment. For example, the higher the education individuals obtained, the higher return or income on their investment (Marginson, 1993).

In a more contemporary understanding, HCT emphasizes that “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (Keeley, 2007, p.29). These attributes are obtained by individuals through education and experience (Becker, 1993; Keeley, 2007; Marginson, 1993).

Marginson argues that HCT is important because it is the most influential economic theory of modern education (1993). He claims that there have been three discernable phases of human capital theory's application in government education policy. The first phase happened in the 1960s, where the application of the theory stressed public investment in human capital and was dominated by claims about the positive connection between education and economic growth at the level of the Nation State (Marginson, 1993; Schultz, 1961). Marginson holds that the assumption about the direct contribution of education to economic growth was attractive to economists, educationists, governments and the public. The benefit accruing to society was assumed to be greater than that to the individual, hence there was willingness to increase public expenditure in education. The first phase was therefore characterized by high public investment

consistent with the values of social democratic welfare state<sup>3</sup> (Law, 1994; Marginson, 1993; Piercy, 1999).

The second phase of human capital theory was characterized as “a period of eclipse (from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s) in which the earlier policy assumptions were abandoned” (Marginson, 1993, p.40). The international economic recession of the mid-1970s created the doubts about the education system’s capacity to achieve economic growth. The failure of the previous application of human capital theory to education policy lead to alternative explanations of the relationship between education and the economy being proposed (Marginson, 1993). For example:

The screening hypothesis focuses on the exchange value of educational qualifications (credentials), rather than the cognitive attributes of the educated worker. The screening theorists see education’s fundamental role as that of a selection system for employers. The content of education has little relevance to worker performance or wage levels. Rather, educational credentials act as a surrogate for qualities that employers want, such as willingness and the capacity to learn. (p. 44)

The screening hypothesis demonstrated that there were not direct economic benefits to productivity from specific education qualifications as put forward by Schultz, challenging HCT’s motivation for public investment in education (Marginson, 1993).

In the third phase, HCT was influenced by the rapid development of technology and the popularity of OECD-led thinking. This new form was more consistent with Friedman’s ideas with respect to a market approach (Marginson, 1993). In

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<sup>3</sup> Welfare state is where the government plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizen including a focus on providing measures that ensure “economic growth, full employment, a steady rise in the standards of living and the moderate reformation of work” (Law, 1996, p.161). The welfare state is funded through high taxation. It involves a transfer of funds from the state, to the services provide (such as healthcare, education), and directly to individuals (benefit). Specifically, the states funds lifelong learning as part of an education system operating from cradle to the grave based on the principles of equal opportunity, and equitable distribution of wealth (Johnson, 2003).

the free market climate<sup>4</sup> now prevailing in western society, the emphasis was on private rather than public investment. This shift in emphasis meant that the individual takes a larger proportion of the risk and the responsibility of investment on education and training (Marginson, 1993). Marginson (1993) states that transforming the responsibility of risk and initiative to individuals aimed to enable a market to develop between education and industry in order to deal with the changes in technology and international competition<sup>5</sup>. This assumption meant that the state could argue that it should no longer be expected to provide and finance education publicly. This is because the individual was seen as the largest beneficiary from participation in education based on future earnings, which it is argued more than pays for the initial investment in education over time. Thus in countries influenced by neo-liberalism like the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the governments began to charge students fees for enrolling in higher education (Piercy, 1999; 2011).

### **The critique of human capital**

Although human capital theory is popular in education policy and government decision making circles, there is debate about several aspects of HCT in academia. Early on, Maglen (1990, cited in Marginson, 1993) claims that in relation to private rates of return, human capital theory has failed to find empirical grounding to prove its main suppositions which are: education determines individual productivity, productivity determines income, and thus education determines income. Instead, Maglen argued that there are many other more relevant factors that have an impact on productivity and income such as the demand of labour market, economic environment and culture.

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<sup>4</sup> Many countries with welfare states collapsed from economic recession in 1970s. At this point in time, some former welfare state nations like New Zealand began to open up their economies to the developed world or implemented free market as advocated by neo classical economists. It differs from controlled market or monopoly, where prices are determined by supply and demand. The means of production is under private, and not state intervention. However, some critics assert that government intervention is necessary to remedy market failure such as unemployment, healthcare and education.

<sup>5</sup> Free market allow countries open the trade market to investment each other, and shift manufactured goods and services around the world that can lead to the state losing its domestic market and advantages of exports. Therefore, a free market increased the international competition for each country (Keeley, 2007).



Mark Blaug (1985, as cited in Marginson, 1993) argues that another problem is that productivity is not only determined by the education levels of workers, it can also be influenced by group work, physical capital investment, work organization and the state of the macro-economy. Further to this Blaug (1985) argues that as productivity stems from the collective efforts of workers, the different contributions of each worker are difficult to distinguish and therefore be assigned a value challenging Becker's attempt to formalise HCT. Earning is also affected by many factors including access to the best jobs, work performance, community norms, wage fixation system, and the role of unions, groups and employers (Marginson, 1993). Therefore, it can be argued that education levels do not necessarily have the strong connection with productivity and earnings that human capital theorists claim.

Blaug (1976) in an earlier critique also claims that "the model concentrates all its attention on the supply of human capital while virtually ignoring the nature of demand in labour markets" (p. 839). For example, highly skilled workers are not necessarily able to develop the domestic economy or, as individuals to obtain best jobs and high incomes. Instead, the supply of human capital depends on the nature of demand in the labour market. High demand can mean that there are many jobs that need to be filled by skilled workers. But if the labour market has low demand, the supply of human capital may cause an oversupply of skilled labour or skill mis-matches, which will in turn lift unemployment rates and under employment levels.

In a more contemporary critique relating to neo-liberal human capital theory in line with Marginson, Coffield (1999) holds that HCT transfers training to be an individual's responsibility to be completed in the employee's own time. The implications for women with young children or for low-income workers are difficult and serious because such people are more likely to be limited by time and money (Coffield, 1999). These women may need to look after children and

family, or work in low-paid work, and as such they are unable to pursue or support education and training. If education and training are seen as the key elements of productivity and employability in relation to promotion and incomes, these women will have no chance or less chance to get a good job and higher salary. Therefore, Coffield (1999) argues, based on this, that education and training should not only be an individual responsibility, they also need to be supported and financed by society and the government. Moreover, he also points out that human capital theory emphasizes the importance of education and training in terms of employability. Thus, education and training as an individual responsibility also means that the responsibility for remaining employable is transferred on to individuals from the state (Coffield, 1999).

Despite these critiques HCT remains a powerful rhetoric shaping government and individuals' decisions to invest and participate in higher education. Part of the reason for this is the strengthening belief in the link between education and employment. Education is now seen as the key method to gain and remain in employment. In the next section the chapter explains the related concept of employability.

### **Employability**

One international understanding of

[...] the term employability relates to portable competencies and qualifications that enhance individual's capacity to make use of the education and training opportunities available in order to secure and retain decent work, to progress within the enterprise and between jobs, and to cope with changing technology (ILO, 2005, p. 4).

However, employability is not an independent concept, but is influenced by political and social policies, national context, traditional culture, and labour market needs (Kraus & Vonken, 2009). Gazier (2003, as cited in Kraus & Vonken, 2009) identifies two strands in the employability discourse – an individualistic aspect and a collective aspect. The first strand sees employability

as an individual characteristic, where employability is embedded in social policy and qualifications for the labour market. This is where employability has a strong connection with higher education, where students expect employment as an outcome of their studies. In contrast, the second strand considers the ‘absorbing capacity of the economy’ as being collectively determined (Gazier, 1999). Therefore, this challenges the shift of risk to just the individual because it demonstrates that the economy and labour market demand play just as a big role. Kraus and Vonken (2009) argue that employability should not only be an individual responsibility challenging the neo-liberal concepts of human capital theory.

Kraus and Vonken (2009) argue that, like neo-liberal human capital theory employability is now more focused on the individual in most countries. This is because the international discourse of employability is mainly influenced by the neo-liberal aspect of individual responsibility. Secondly, the shift to knowledge and service-based economies and the globalization of markets means that there is a strong relationship between employability and international competitiveness. Individual’s employability is seen as core to and the foundation of companies’ and nations’ competitiveness (Kraus & Vonken, 2009). Hence, individuals are required to be able to cope with those social changes, and have the responsibility to remain employable throughout these changes.

One of the ways in which an individual copes with social and economic changes can be understood through the use of human development associated theories such as life course theory. This theory can explain when and how an individual will choose to pursue higher education. This is important because lifelong learning and human capital theory mostly focus on why individual should pursue higher education not what happens to them once they do.

## **LIFE COURSE**

Life course theory was developed in the 1960s to observe the lives of individuals from birth to death. It aims to understand an individual's life within a historic, social and cultural context (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003; Pollock & Greenspan, 1989). The life course can be defined as the sequence of positions of a particular person during the course of time (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003). The categories of positions are wide, including marital status, employment, motherhood, etc. The position can be changed in specific or unspecific timing and frequencies, and these changes are called transitions (Pallas, 2003). Every life course is characterized by a sequence and combination of transitions, such as becoming adult, finding work, getting married, and having children. Such sequences of roles or status are named trajectories, and the time between is known as duration (Pallas, 2003). Most people follow socially and culturally determined normative patterns in their life regarding what is seen as appropriate behavior at a given age and the proper sequence of transitions (Elder Jr, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003). For example, normally people complete their education, and then start their career path. After that they get married and become parents (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003).

Gecas (2003) states that the different periods of life need to meet certain developmental requirements that present the individual with challenges and competency demands. The motivations of human development in a life course are different in childhood, adolescence, adulthood and later life. Children's learning is capturing the world by which they see themselves surrounded and of which they are a part. In terms of learning, young people want to construct their own identities, and other learning is always related to this. For early adults, motivation of learning includes internal and external motives. Illeris (2002) explains that the internal motivations for learning are to attain life aims relating to people's family, career, interests, self-confidence, and self realization. The learning is "usually goal-directed on the basis of the individual's own aims and

strategies, which are typically based on a weighted interaction between desire and necessity” (Illeris, 2002, p. 226). The external motives are generated by social, economic and culture changes including technological progress, development of manufacturing techniques, emergence of new products and increase in knowledge. Due to these external pressures, people have to be able to cope with and adjust to those changes in the economy and society (Knapper & Cropley, 1985).

From a life course perspective, Pallas (2003) holds that education trajectories influence an individual’s work and family formation where prolonged time in school impacts on the timing of entry into work and family roles (Pallas, 2003). Furthermore, an individual’s position related to work and family roles are likely to influence education trajectories also. For example, the requirements of looking after young children may conflict with a parent’s desire to participate in some forms of adult education (Pallas, 2003). Thus, when in the role of a parent, an individual may give up the opportunity of career development in order to fulfill their family responsibility. Clearly, the timing and frequencies of personal transition and education trajectories are intertwined in complex ways; they are influenced by each other.

This idea will link to work-life balance. This is because environmental pressures (lifelong learning, HCT and employability), external desires (the purpose of human development) and the traditional gender role (superwoman) lead to women having to play multiple roles in their lives. They always face a dilemma when balancing the different demands of work, life and study. The next part of this chapter explores this challenge through discussing the work-life balance of contemporary women.

## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Work-life balance is emphasized and promoted in current western society

reflecting the changes in the economic, political as well as social climate (Houston, 2005; Molloy, 2004; Sigal, 2007). Work-life balance refers to the interaction between paid work and other activities, including unpaid work in families and the community, leisure, and personal development. Researchers have identified a growing tension between work commitments and family responsibilities as a key concern for both men and women (Houston, 2005; Molloy, 2004; Sigal, 2007). The policy of work-life balance aims to create a more symbiotic relationship or a balance between people's families and working lives.

Further to this, Drew and Emerek (1998, as cited in James and Charles, 2005), observe that

[...] there is a gendering of the work-life balance such that, for men, it involves being able to fulfill their provider responsibilities through engaging in paid work while, for women, it involves facilitating the reconciliation of paid work with domestic and caring commitments (p. 170).

Because of the influence of traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, women undertake more family responsibilities than men. Therefore women find it is more difficult to maintain balance due to competing pressures at work and demands at home (Houston, 2005; Sigal, 2007). This is connected to the superwomen gender role. Neidermeyer and Paludi (2007) claim that women identified their major source of stress as came from housework and caring for children. This created stress in their lives because they had no time to do community activities, study, hobbies, or participate in physical fitness. This demonstrates the difficulties in balancing the demands of domestic life with the demands of work and play.

Obviously, childcare and family responsibly have become a common and main issue for women to achieve work-life balance; hence they sometimes have to make a decision about how to balance the various demands of work and life.

(Houston, 2005; Molloy, 2004; Sigal, 2007). Generally, women have two methods to cope with the imbalance of work and life. For example, women can sacrifice their own career ambitions or jobs to be a stay-at-home mother in order to look after their young children. However, this creates a negative impact on women's lifetime earnings contributing to the gender pay gap (Houston, 2005). The other method is that women do not want to give up any demands of work and life; they try to juggle multiple roles, taking on the superwoman identity. However integrating work, child and family care impact on women's emotional and physical well-being (Paludi, Vaccariello, Grabam, Smith, Allen-Dicker, Kasprzak & White, 2007). Therefore, Paludi et al (2007) claim that women need to deal with the stress involved in juggling work and family lives through time management, physical exercise, and relaxation training.

### **Part Two: Summary**

From the influence of HCT and employability, discussed in previous sections, the responsibility of gaining educational qualifications and retaining employment has shifted to individuals. Women have a subordinated status and are present more often in low-paid work in society. As a result, they have more desire to gain employability and high incomes through higher education. However, achieving balance between the different demands of work, life and study is difficult for them, so they have to make changes in decision-making related to their development of life course. The changes of life course include marrying and having children later. This deferment of family formation can also have an impact on women's mentality and body. These changes and effects will be specifically illustrated in the Background chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: BACKGROUND**

### **INTRODUCTION**

New Zealand and China have different cultural histories shaping the development of gender roles in their respective societies. The different culture, values and social expectations are likely to influence New Zealand and Chinese women differently in relation to motivation, perception and experiences of participating in higher education. This chapter reviews both countries' contexts in order to explain the nature of these differences. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on China and Chinese culture, while the second part focuses on the New Zealand context. The chapter firstly provides a brief description of China and explains the principles and norms of the Confucian ideal. It then reviews the historical transformation of gender roles in China by discussing the contexts of politics, employment, economy and education. The chapter then introduces the progress of women's higher education in China through five key time periods including the 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1949-1965, 1966-1976, and 1990 till today. It finally outlines women's issues in China related to their employment, life and education in the contemporary life.

The second part provides a brief description of New Zealand and the ways in which women's positions have changed in economic, cultural and educational spheres. The chapter then introduces the process of development of women's positions in New Zealand. It also describes the progress of women's higher education in New Zealand through four phases including the first wave of feminism, the Second World War, the second wave of feminism and the third wave of feminism. The chapter finally examines current issues within the gender role of women in New Zealand also related to employment, life and education. The chapter concludes by comparing the similarities and differences between the Chinese and New Zealand contexts.



## **CHINA**

Chinese society has been shaped by its unique history, culture, economy and location. China is the world's third-largest country by land area located in East Asia (List of countries of the world, 2012). It is the most populous country in the world, with over 1.3 billion citizens, and nearly half of the total population are women (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2005). China is a multi-ethnic country including 56 distinct ethnic groups. It is single party state governed by the Communist Party (Waiton, 2001). The administrative divisions include 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four directly-controlled municipalities and two mostly self-governing special administrative regions.

China's political system was based on hereditary monarchies beginning in 2000 BC and ending with the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912 (Crossley, Siu & Sutton, 2005; Lovell, 2006; Zhang, 2008). After 1912, the Republic of China was established to replace the Qing Dynasty. In the phase of the Chinese Civil War (from 1946 to 1949), the Chinese Communists achieved the victory of the revolution and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. Beijing is the capital city. Since the establishment of new government in 1949, China's international status has gradually improved. It has now gained admission to United Nations and become a member of many formal and informal multilateral organizations such as the U.N Security Council, WTO and APEC (Zhang, 2008).

Historically Chinese culture has been heavily influenced by Confucianism which dominated "the formation of Chinese civilization from the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty (1122 BC-221 BC) and still plays an important role in present day Chinese culture" (Shao, 2011, p.10-11). Confucianism advocates filial piety, loyalty, humaneness and collectivism (Clark & Wang, 2004; Larson, 1998; Ling & Powell, 2001; Shao, 2011). These moral principles and norms shape people's perspectives, values and behaviour. However, the Cultural Revolution of the

1960s damaged many aspects of this traditional culture. With the rise and revival of culture at the end of the Cultural Revolution, today Chinese culture is pluralistic in that it includes values from both traditional and modern cultures. Traditional Chinese art, literature, music and film have been developed alongside modern interpretations of art, architecture and technology (Bush & Murck, 1983).

China's economic mode was a Soviet-style centrally-planned economy from 1949 until 1978 (Adler, 1957; Hsu, 1982). It restricted private businesses and other forms of capitalism. However, since market-based economic reforms in 1978, the government has encouraged free market and free trade, and promoted foreign investment (Bairam, 1995; Chow, 2012; Hsu, 1982; Liew, 1997). China's economy has dramatically developed over several decades. It is the second-largest economy by both GDP and PPP (purchasing power parity) in the world, and is also the largest exporter and second-largest importer of goods (Altucher, 2010; Economist, 2012). The main exports include vegetable, fruits, rice, steel, electronics, ceramics, and textiles.

The Chinese education system is divided into three categories including basic education, higher education, and adult education (China Education and Research Network, 2000). Basic education includes pre-school education (3-6 years old), primary education (6-12 years old), junior secondary education (12-15 years old), and senior secondary education (15-18 years old) or vocational secondary education (15-18 years old). Primary education and junior secondary education are compulsory for all Chinese students aged between six and sixteen. After that students can enter senior secondary education to continue their education by passing locally administered examinations or they can enter vocational secondary education to obtain technical and vocational training (Brandenburg & Zhu, 2007). Secondary education in China is different from New Zealand because New Zealand students only enter into vocational education after

secondary education by choosing to enrol in a private training establishment or polytechnic.

Chinese students need to pass the National Matriculation Entrance Test to gain access to higher education. Higher education at the undergraduate level includes two- and three-year junior colleges, four-year colleges, and universities that all offer three-year and four-year programs in academic and vocational subjects (China Education and Research Network, 2000). Since the 1990s, China has experienced unprecedented expansion in its higher education. The Ministry of Education stated that it would amend its annual recruitment plan to accept more students in 1999 (Wang & Liu, 2010; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, n.d.; Wang, 2010). With the reform of the education system, the gross enrollment rate increased from 9.8 percent in 1998 to 24.2 percent in 2009.

In contrast, there are no limitations in adult education in China. It provides educational opportunities for all people who want to obtain re-education, continuing education or re-training. It overlaps all three of the above categories including adult primary education, adult secondary education and adult higher education (China Education and Research Network, 2000). For example, adult higher education includes radio/TV universities, cadre institutes, workers' colleges, peasant colleges and correspondence colleges (Brandenburg & Zhu, 2007).

## **WOMEN IN CHINA**

Due to the Confucian tradition, women suffered prolonged oppression in the past in China. Confucian values prized female characteristics such as submission, passivity, and weakness, compared with male's characteristics of dominance, activity, and strength. Thus, in semi-feudal and semi-colonial old China, women forfeited what modern society sees as basic human rights in both society and

family that can still be seen in political, economic, social and family aspects. The following section outlines the central concepts of the Confucian ideal, specifically in terms of how it established gender roles.

### **Confucianism and gender roles in China**

Confucianism emphasizes social hierarchy and divides relationships into “Five Cardinal Relations” (known as Wu Lun) including sovereign and minister, father and son, husband and wife, old person and young person, as well as friend and friend (Leung, 2003; Shao, 2011; Yau, 1988). In this system, women “were subordinate to men, and young women occupied the lowest strata of the hierarchy” (Bauer, Wang, Riley, & Zhao, 1992, p. 333). Moreover, Confucianism sets a series of gender-related principles and norms to women in order to standardize their behaviour. Firstly, women should follow the “three obediences” and embody the “four virtues”. Three obediences mean that women obey their fathers when young, obey their husbands when married, and obey their adult sons when widowed (Yuan, 2005). Four virtues include fidelity, physical charm, good manners, and being good at needlework. Also it emphasizes that ignorance is a woman’s best virtue (Shao, 2011). Therefore, women in China did not traditionally have the rights and opportunities to pursue, gain access to and participate in education. Secondly, Larson (1998) and Shao (2011) state men were seen as breadwinners, responsible for the material well-being of the family, while women were seen as caregivers, who sacrifice everything for their family. For example, women must stay at home to fulfill their husbands and look after children and elders. These Confucian gender principles and norms formed social expectations for women and women’s behaviour, and still have an impact on both genders in China today (Shao, 2011).

### **The development of women’s positions in China**

In the last 100 years Chinese society has undergone dramatic changes which have influenced gender roles. This section focuses on four key time periods in

order to demonstrate how the female gender role has been shaped due to economic social and political changes. The four key phases are 1900 to 1948, 1949 to 1966, 1967 to 1976, and 1977 to 2000.

Shao (2011) states that, “the encroachment of western colonialism and imperialism through military incursions, business practices and religion, resulted in significant transformations in traditional Chinese culture” (p.17). In 1911, Chinese intellectuals started to have contact with western culture, and adopted a series of reforms in relation to the position of women, marriage, and family (Glosser, 2002; Shao, 2011; Thakur, 1998; Yip, 2010). In this period, women were gradually allowed in to school, and encouraged to participate in physical activities (Fan, 1997; Gaskell, Eichler, Pan, Xu & Zhang, 2004; Shao, 2011). In 1919, Li (1988, as cited in Shao, 2011) states the Democratic Revolution enhanced the position of women in China. Zheng, Tao and Shirley (2004) noted that “the rise of a bourgeois democratic revolution propelled the women’s liberation movement in China to new heights” (p. 55). At this time, with the influence of Western society, intellectuals argued that women should have access to education and be liberated from patriarchal society (Davin, 1975; Evans, 1992; Gilmartin, 1994; Glosser, 2002). From 1915 to 1923, the New Culture Movement generated a critique of Confucian beliefs (Glosser, 2002). Fan (1997) claims these changes led to the reconstruction of the role of women by challenging traditional Chinese culture values.

Gilmartin (1994), and Tu and Chang (2000) claim that from 1949 to 1966, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China represented significant progress in women’s position. With the influence of Marx and Mao, Chinese communist policies emphasized gender equality, and encouraged women to participate in the collective production and distribution (Bian, Logan & Shu, 2000; Gilmartin, 1994; Tu & Chang, 2000). Adams and Winston (1980) claim at this time women’s position was improved through their participation in paid work, the

implementation of land reforms, and the Marriage Law. The land reforms allowed land ownership to be held by both men and women which meant that women had the right to possess property. The Marriage Law passed in 1950 aimed to protect women's fundamental rights and release them from the feudal marriage structure which meant women could have freedom in marriage. (Croll, 1983; Shao 2011). Since the 1950s, women's employment rates in paid work have increased. In the new family structure, women and men were portrayed by the government as having equal rights and status, and sharing responsibility of family in daily life (Shao, 2011).

From 1967 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution happened in China. Gender equality was further emphasized in this period, and Confucian principles and norms continued to be discarded. Men and women had equal rights to participate in production and political activities. To express the equality between men and women, they even had the same hairstyles and wore the same suits (Shao, 2011). Women were expected to be as intelligent and capable as men (Andrews & Shen, 2002; Shao 2011). However, this gender revolution was not driven by the women themselves. Rowbotham (1992, as cited in Shao, 2011, p.21) states, this revolution did not "conceptualize women as active agents of their own liberation". Instead it was the government informing citizens of their correct roles and responsibilities. The Cultural Revolution was a very oppressive time with government policy prescribing social roles for all classes, suppressing the intellectuals who had led the women's movement in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From 1977 to 2000, the Chinese government faced dramatic changes in technology, the economy and the labour market (Shao, 2011). In relation to women, the government provided legal protection to ensure women enjoy equal status with men. The state depended on the Constitution to constitute and promulgate over 10 fundamental laws such as the Labour Law, Electoral Law,

Law of Inheritance, Civil Law and Criminal Law in order to protect the special rights and interests of women and eliminate discrimination, maltreatment and persecution for women (SCIO, 1994). This legislation aims to assist Chinese women to have opportunities to develop their careers and run their own business. Women's larger participation in paid work has led to dual-earner families becoming more prevalent in China (Ling & Powell, 2001). Furthermore, the government improved education to eliminate illiteracy among men and women in Chinese society (Shao, 2011). Today, most women not only complete basic education, they also pursue higher education. In the next section, the chapter specifically reviews the historical development of women's higher education in China.

### **The development of women's higher education in China**

Higher education has been emphasised in China since the 1980s because it has contributed to economic construction, technical progress and social development (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). However, the role and scope of higher education has been different in different time periods. Women's participation in higher education has also been different in these different historical stages. These historical periods include the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1949 to 1965, 1966 to 1976, and 1990 till recent.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's education was influenced by western church education. For example, from 1847 to 1860, Christian religious organizations established 11 women's colleges (Liu, 2001). Hayhoe (1999) argues that China's academic models were also influenced by western countries through a small number of European-style universities founded in China's East Coast region which were controlled by European powers. For example, Beiyang University (now Tianjin University) was established, followed by Qiushi Academy (now Zhejiang University) in 1887 and Jingshi University (now Peking University) (Wang, 2010). These changes reflected the liberal advocacy

of women's rights by Westerners referred to earlier in this chapter.

Liu (2001) argues that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, more and more people within China recognized the importance of education for women as it was seen as the method to develop society and liberate women. According to Education Statistics in 1907, there were 15,498 female students enrolled in 428 women's colleges. Although women's education had developed to unparalleled levels in this period, there was still inequality in the type of education received by men and women because the goal of women's education was to produce an educated wife and mother (Liu, 2001).

At the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were only 205 universities and a total of 116,504 students (Hayhoe, 1999). The new government sought to develop education according to the Soviet model. That meant the existing universities were split into smaller, specialized, vocationally-oriented institutions, and Soviet-style research academies were established (Altbach, 2009). The number of Chinese universities and colleges significantly increased from 229 in 1957, to 841 in 1958, and to 1,289 in 1960 (Wang, 2010). However, the number of female students did not increase sharply during this period; on the contrary it dropped in 1953 (Wang, 2005). This is because the state paid more attention to engineering and science to improve domestic economy and infrastructural construction (Wang, 2005). The reduction in the importance of humanities and social science immediately influenced the number of female students (Wang, 2005).

China's higher education was further disturbed by the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, which "closed the entire higher education system, sent many professors and students to rural areas to work, and destroyed a generation of academics" (Altbach, 2009, p. 14). Wang (2010) argues that in this decade, China's economy, education and society was stagnant, even moving backwards.



The number of universities reduced to 407 from 1963, so most male and female students lost the opportunity to receive higher education. After the Cultural Revolution, Xiaoping Deng decided to resume the national examination system for college admissions, and three national examinations were held from 1977 to 1979. Approximately 18 million high school graduates between 1966 and 1977 participated in those exams, and about 880,000 of them had the opportunity to enter higher education (Wang, 2010). At this time, the number of female students was restored to the gender ratio that existed before the Cultural Revolution (Wang, 2005; Wang 2010).

In the last 20 years, China has experienced unprecedented expansion in its higher education for two reasons. The first reason is that the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council allowed the establishment of private universities in 1993. This was an important reform in China's education because prior to this higher education was controlled and managed by the central government (Wang, 2010). The new colleges were founded by non-government organizations which influenced the growth of enrollments of both women in higher education. The second reason is that the central government decided to expand enrollments in higher education in order to stimulate economic growth in the short term and accumulate human capital for the long term (Wang & Liu, 2010; Wang, 2010). For example, the Ministry of Education stated that it would amend its annual recruitment plan to accept more students in 1999 in order to expand enrollment in higher education (Wang & Liu, 2010; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, n.d.; Wang, 2010). With these two reforms, the gross enrollment rate increased from 9.8 percent in 1998 to 24.2 percent in 2009. At this time of growth female students increased to make up over 40 percent of total enrollment (Wang & Liu, 2010; Wang, 2005; Wang, 2010). For example, the number of female students reached 47.9 percent of the total students in 2007, which was dramatically higher than the 23.4 percent in 1980 (National Bureau of Statistics of China,

2007). The number of students, and people's education levels have increased sharply, but the prospects of employment are still not positive in China. This is because the imbalanced structure of higher education expansion has led to millions of graduate students remaining unemployed (Wang & Liu, 2010; Wang, 2010). Although the expansion has increased job opportunities in infrastructure, construction and the third industry, those positions have been filled by those who may not be university graduates (Wang & Liu, 2010; Wang, 2010).

### **Women's positions and related issues in contemporary China**

Throughout Chinese history, women's gender role has been influenced by Confucian culture for several thousand years. Within the women's liberation movement and the economic opening of China, women's position has enhanced in many spheres such as economy, politics and education. However, Confucian values still shape female gender roles in China. Chinese women still face issues in relation to their work and family. In the following section, the chapter describes women's issues in contemporary China.

#### **Work**

The Chinese government has implemented a series of policies and measures to try to guarantee that women can equally participate in economic development, so they can have equal access to economic resources and efficient services (SCIO, 1994; SCIO, 2005). These policies and measures include equal employment opportunities and equal pay for women, and the sharing of economic resources (SCIO, 2005). Since 1949, the employment rates of women have increased constantly. For example, in 1994, female accounted for 44 percent of the total number of employees, which was higher than the world rate of employed women (SCIO, 1994). In 2004, the number of women workers reached 337 million, or 44.8 percent of the total employees (SCIO, 2005). Women are also employed in diverse occupations; nine branches of the national economy have over one million women workers including industry, agriculture,

construction, transport and communications, commerce, public health, education, and governmental and social organizations (SCIO, 1994).

Although the Chinese government has tried to enhance women's rights and positions in society, Chinese women and men have had different experiences demonstrated by the gender division of labour, promotion, and income (Cheng, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Pearson, 1996; Shao, 2011). Firstly, unequal employment opportunity is a serious concern in China. According to Huang a survey reported that in 2000, 30 percent of companies claimed that they preferred not to hire female employees because female employees cannot pay full attention to their work (2003). Moreover, when recruiting women, some firms have added unfair regulations in the labour contract, such as not being allowed to marry, and not being allowed to have children in a specific period of time (Li, 2007). Some women have experienced other unfair treatment. For example, in recruitment, age, weight, height, and appearance are the prime standards that are used to select suitable employees, instead of abilities, skills, knowledge, and capacities (Li, 2007).

Secondly, for a range of reasons, an income gap still exists between men and women (SCIO, 1994). Equal pay legislation is not fully implemented in Chinese society, and women who work in the private sector are paid much less because private companies do not have to and nor do they implement the law. According to a survey conducted in 1990, "the average monthly incomes for male and female workers in urban areas were 193.15 yuan and 149.60 yuan respectively, with women receiving only 77.4 percent of the pay given to men" (SCIO, 1994). The gap is not solely about pay rates. Shao (2011) states that the main expression of gender inequality is from "the assignment of women and men to different levels of professional positions" (p. 23). Women are more often assigned to low-paid work (Honig & Hershatter, 1988; Loscocco & Wang, 1992; Robinson, 1985), while men work in authoritative positions as managers and

supervisors (Adams & Winston, 1980; Li, 2007; Tao, 1990). For example, female workers accounted for 58 percent of public health, sports, and social services workers, 48 percent of workers in marketing and sales, and 46 percent of education, culture and media workers (Zhang & Gao, 2003). This situation could be seen as being connected to women's choices of qualification. Huang (2003) argues that the influence of traditional cultural ideals means that women's choices are limited to subjects deemed to be appropriate for women including education, teaching, humanities and social sciences which lead to lower paid work for women.

### **Social expectation and housework**

Evans (2002) states that “a wife's self-sacrificing support of her husband has been reinforced as a gender specific requirement of the ideal of happy conjugality” in China's society (p.36). A Chinese All Women's Federation's report (1990, as cited in Shao, 2011) claims that 72 percent of all participators agreed that “a husband's success is his wife's if she supports him” and 60 percent agreed that “women should avoid surpassing their husband in social status” (p. 24). Within the economic reforms, China has shifted towards a market-based economy. Competition has created growth in unemployment which has led to women returning to families in greater numbers (Shao, 2011). Therefore, China's social expectation to women is still influenced by the Confucian ideals that women should be obedient to their husbands and sacrifice their own interests to support their families. As such, even in modern China, once married, women are still in the subordinate status in relation to family and society.

On this basis, housework is mostly done by women in Chinese families. This seriously affects their work and education opportunities. For example, in 2000, the time women spent daily on housework was 4.01 hours, urban women 3.34 hours per day, compared with men's 26 minutes per day (Tang & Jiang, 2006).

Clearly, women have to spend 3.33- 3.08 hours more to raise families and look after children than men. Thus, there are enormous pressures on women as wives, mothers, employees, and students. Some women want to have more opportunities to enhance and promote their skills, knowledge and capacities through access to higher education, so they have to defer their opportunities to marry and have children. The average married age increased from 22.9 years in 1995 to 24.2 years in 2001 (Tang & Jiang, 2006). As Jin, Li and Feldman (2003) claim participation in higher education can lead to women marrying at a later age, but there does not appear to be a similar effect of education on the marriage age of men. They also state when women and men are both educated above a high level, women are less likely to marry downwards, and men are less likely to marry upwards. In China, people still believe that men with higher education and women with moderate education will marry earlier and easier (Jin, Li & Feldman, 2003). Thus, Chinese women have dilemmas in how they make decisions and balance their work, education and personal lives.

### **Part one: Summary**

The purpose of this first part of the chapter was to provide an overview of China's demography, political system, culture and education. It emphasised the impact of Confucian ideals on gender roles in China, and discussed the historical development of women's position. This part also described the development of women's higher education in different time periods in China. To some extent Chinese women's positions have gradually changed and improved in many aspects, but the traditional culture still shapes women's status and behavior. Today, gender inequality still occurs in the workplace. Women not only experience unequal employment opportunities, but also suffer from low-paid work. Additionally, women are expected to be super mothers and wives by sacrificing themselves for their families and husbands. In Chinese perceptions, a wife's status should not be above her husband's position and status, therefore, women's choice of partners is limited. Young Chinese women need to navigate

through these complex social and economic demands throughout their life course. This study focuses on how they attempt to reconcile these pressures in the context of continuing economic and social change.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

New Zealand (in Māori: Aotearoa) is a country made up of 3 islands located in the South Pacific (Brooking, 2004; King, 2003; McLauchlan, 2004; Rusden, 2006; Sinclair, 1991). It comprises two main land masses and many smaller islands. The total population is over four million; the majority of New Zealand's population is European (67.6 percent), followed by indigenous Māori (14.6 percent), Asians (9.2 percent) and Pacific people (6.9 percent) (Statistics New Zealand, 2011a). In 1840 the British and Māori signed the Treaty of Waitangi making New Zealand a colony of the British Empire (King, 2003). In 1907 New Zealand declared itself a Dominion within the British Empire, and in 1947 the state adopted the Statute of Westminster, becoming a Commonwealth realm (Wilson, 2011). Now the capital city is Wellington and the largest city is Auckland.

New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. Queen Elizabeth II is the Queen of New Zealand, and she appoints a Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister (Hardingham, 1954). The Parliament of New Zealand holds legislative power. Now the main political parties in New Zealand include the National Party, the Labour Party, the Green Party, Progressive, the Māori Party, United Future and Act New Zealand (Brooking, 2004; McLauchlan, 2004). The National Party is currently the ruling party, and John Key is Prime Minister of New Zealand, elected in 2011.

Early New Zealand's culture was based on east Polynesian culture, and combined with their own customs and habits, eventually becoming specific Māori culture (Brooking, 2004; McLauchlan, 2004). Social organization was

communal with families, sub-tribes and tribes (Kennedy, 2000; King, 2003). After that, the British and Irish immigrants brought their own traditional culture to New Zealand including the introduction of Christianity (Hearn, 2011; Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2011; Stenhouse, 2011). With the growth of immigration, more recently American, Australian, Asian and other European culture have influenced New Zealand culture (Hearn, 2011; Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2011). In many respects New Zealand is no different from the other former British colonies; its dominant culture is Western (Piercy, 2011).

New Zealand is a developed country with an economy that was historically dependent on the export of agricultural products. This industry helped New Zealand's people achieve higher living standards than both Australia and Western European nations in the 1950s and 1960s (Baker, 1966). However, New Zealand's export market was reduced when the United Kingdom entered into the European Economic Community in 1973. Moreover, the 1973 oil and 1979 energy crisis led to an economic recession (Nixon & Yeabsley, 2010). For those reasons, the state experienced major economic changes during the 1980s. Since 1984, New Zealand's economy transformed from a highly protectionist economy to a liberalized free-trade economy (Easton, 2011; Hazledine, 1998). Its economy is still driven by primary sector exports such as timber, milk powder, wool, lamb and beef, but now the service sector industries such as tourism are equally important (Piercy, 2011).

New Zealand's education system has three levels: early childhood education, schooling and tertiary education that is different from China. It provides compulsory 11-year education for children aged 5 to 16 including primary and secondary education. Normally, primary is six years, intermediate (junior high school) is 2 years and high school is five years (Y12 and Y13 are not compulsory) (Dench, 2010). Additionally, there are four types of tertiary institutions: universities, polytechnics, wānanga, and private training

establishments (Dench, 2010; New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011). Tertiary education in New Zealand is used to identify all aspects of post-school education and training. It includes vocational education, higher education, teacher education and industry training (Dench, 2010). The education level of population is high in New Zealand. For example, there were 469,107 enrolments in tertiary institutions which means over 10 percent of the total population was participating in higher education in 2009 (Dench, 2010).

## **WOMEN IN NEW ZEALAND**

New Zealand, like many countries, has tried to change and enhance women's political, economic and social position. The different women's movements and economic changes have led to changes in models of family formation and dissolution, changes in living arrangements, and rising participation in: education, politics and paid employment (Statistics New Zealand, 1999). New Zealand gender roles have also changed, and women often need to combine the role of mother, wife, worker and student now. Although men have tried to share the responsibility of housework, even in New Zealand, women still take the main duty of caring for children and family. In the following part, the chapter reviews these changes to women's positions in New Zealand.

### **The development of women's positions in New Zealand**

Macdonald (1993) claims that from the 1850s to the 1870s women could exercise only limited power within the economy, political and legal structures of colonial society. They did not have the right to vote in national elections, they were not allowed to be members of professions, and upon marriage, they relinquished most rights to possess property. Between 1885 to 1905, with the success of women's suffrage in 1893, women's rights and the position of women were widely debated in New Zealand society. Women's political rights were not only being advanced, their social emancipation (altering dress) and economic issues (equal pay for equal work, and economic independence of married



women) also came under consideration (Dann, 1985; Holt, 1985; Macdonald, 1993; Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

In spite of the strides made around reforms to legislation promoting women's rights regarding property ownership, dress and voting, from 1905 to the end of the First World War in 1918, women's position was rarely the subject of public discussion. This was the case even though during the First World War women were called to participate in patriotic service. For example, they collected, sorted and packed parcels for soldiers (Bunkle & Hughes, 1980; Macdonald, 1993). This also occurred during the Second World War where a relatively small number of women were directed into factories, farms and shops as members of the paid workforce. They were mostly young single women and married women without children. Although women returned to their homes and families after the Second World War, their involvement in the paid workforce increased through this period (Adams, 2000; Macdonald, 1993; The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA), 2005). The gender roles of both men and women were very stable at this time. Morris states:

Some thirty years ago, the common pattern in New Zealand was, the woman was regarded as the home-maker and she did not work unless she had no means of support economically, or occasionally if she maintained her professional job, although married. (1966, cited in Macdonald, 1993, p.145)

Men were still the main force participating in political and economic activities; they held the power and made decisions in the society and family. The gender role of men as breadwinners meant that men commonly did not take responsibilities to look after children or family (Macdonald, 1993). Thus, at this time the concepts of femininity and masculinity were still traditional but for some women the taste of paid work and economic independence raised questions.

In the 1960s, the role of women changed dramatically because at this time there

were a number of occupations that required women to enter employment due to the development of technology and the demands of the labour market (Bunkle & Hughes, 1980; Macdonald, 1993). This pattern developed further in the 1970s, where the second wave of feminism, called women's liberation, suddenly had an impact on New Zealand. In this period, women aimed to change the stereotyped version of the female gender role where the woman is forced to live vicariously through her husband and children (Dann, 1985; Holt, 1985; Macdonald, 1993). They aimed to do this by challenging the image of women in the media, and the structure of marriage. In the traditional gender role, women were seen as being a "passive, servile, submissive sex object existing mainly to make men happy" and look after children (Macdonald, 1993, p. 165). Women's liberation focused on liberating women from their narrow, limiting social role. This was to ensure women in New Zealand had the right to be free and to pursue their own development and fulfillment. Part of how this was to be achieved was through demands for free contraception, twenty-four-hour child care and equal pay and employment opportunities (Bunkle & Hughes, 1980; Dann, 1985; Macdonald, 1993; MWA, 2005).

In the 1980s the goals of women's liberation were given life by wide-ranging reforms of workplaces for women including the expansion of vocational education and introduction of trade-union education, child care, family and parental leave (Dann, 1985; Macdonald, 1993; Statistics New Zealand, 2005). Moreover, an attempt was made to try to close the earning gap between men and women by pursuing pay equity (Du Plessis & Alice, 1998; Holt, 1985; Macdonald, 1993). All of those efforts aimed to make secure and greater employment conditions for women, so they could be economically independent. The next section outlines how women's participation in higher education has changed over time in New Zealand.

### **The development of women's higher education in New Zealand**

1877 was a most significant moment in history, when Kate Milligan Edgar was the first woman in the British Empire to be granted a degree (Bunkle, Chick, Glass, Glass, Gordon, Penny, Penny, Perley, Perley & Wells, 1974; Knight & Hitchman, 1988). Due to the public interest that was created with Edgar's graduation, 219 women enrolled at the affiliated colleges of the University of New Zealand in 1898. Knight and Hitchman (1988) argue that women's entrance into universities in New Zealand was influenced by the first wave of feminism. However, as stated in the previous chapter, the type of education for women was restricted to enhancing traditional gender roles and gender appropriate professions like teaching (Knight & Hitchman, 1988).

During the Second World War, women were encouraged to move away from care giving in the home to greater participation in social and public life. Based on this, women demanded the right and opportunities to participate in higher education and enter the labour market. However, as Knight and Hitchman state "in the post-war years the increasing social pressure to conform to an ideal of full-time wife and mother emerged as an added problem for women planning a university education" (1988, p. 11). Therefore, the number of graduates continued to rise through the forties and fifties, but growth in the number of women was slower than men's growth. At this time, women also continued to study gender specific subjects such as teaching (Knight & Hitchman, 1988).

When the second wave of feminism began it set women's sights on being neither separate nor unequal in higher education (Brooks, 1997; Knight & Hitchman, 1988). The second wave of feminism advocated equality between men and women, so women should have equal rights and opportunities with men in all areas. By the mid 1970s the Women's Movement for Freedom and the Women's Liberation Front had been founded which led to universities giving women more opportunities to attend lectures, and thus female participation increased from

28.8 percent to 42.8 percent of the total enrolments from 1970 to 1981 (Knight & Hitchman, 1988).

With the influence of human capital theory and the changing nature of work, women's higher education entered a new era in New Zealand. In 1992, 48,687 female students attended university. This was higher than the number of male students (44,495). This pattern of participation remained until 1996, when female student number sharply increased to 56,429 while males only rose to 49,261 (Ministry of Education, 1996). From 1997 to 1998, the number of female students continued to increase to 57,291 and 58,889 respectively, while the number of male students declined to 49,048 in 1998 (Callister & Newell, 2008). In 2001, the number of female students reached 70,030 which was nearly 55.7 percent of the total university enrollment (Callister & Newell, 2008). From 2002 to 2009, the number of female students attending university increased further, and the government has forecasted that the number will continue to grow (Ministry of Education, 2010). Women are now participating in large numbers, and achieving higher qualifications than men. Reasons for this trend are diverse but belief that women's employment opportunities are improved when they completed higher qualification is a significant one (MWA, 2008).

## **Women's positions and related issues in contemporary New Zealand**

### **Work**

Increasing participation in paid work and changing patterns of employment have had the largest impact on women in recent times. Large proportions of women now enter the labour market in New Zealand, and increasing numbers occupy high positions and male-dominated jobs (Statistics New Zealand, 2005). For example, in 2006, 16.9 percent of university professors and associate professors were women, 17.2 percent of staff working in top legal partnerships were women, women made up 19.2 percent of editors of major newspapers, and 24.2 percent of judges were women (Human Rights Commission, 2006). In 2010,

these rates increased by between 2 and 6 percent, with only editors dropping by 7 percent.

Despite these statistics and although the gender pay gap reduced from 11.3 percent in 2009 to 9.6 percent in 2011, an income gap still exists between women and men. This is because the average hourly wage of women is still lower than men. For instance, the average hourly wage of women was \$18.55 in 2006, 86.4 percent of the average hourly wage of men (Department of Labour, 2007). In the public service, health and education, the hourly gender pay gap is almost 20 percent. In addition, women are more commonly employed in part-time work and do the majority of un-paid work (Briar, 2004). Even though women work in paid work, most occupations remain segregated by gender which means that half of women work in three of the ten occupational groups including clerks, service and sales workers and professionals (Else & Bishop, 2003). Therefore, women are over-represented in lower-status positions which is why women tend to be located in subordinate and lower paid work.

### **Social expectation and housework**

Traditional gender roles mean that the value of women's work can be seen as being to look after a family and raise children, while men's work is to earn money in paid employment (MWA, 2006). With the women's movement, New Zealand women have gradually gained equal rights and opportunities to participate in political activity, paid-work and education in recent times. However, a new issue has arisen in that New Zealand women face growing tension when trying to balance work commitments, education aspirations and family responsibilities. This is because they have to become superwomen to play multiple roles in order to fulfill the different demands of their lives.

On this basis, work-life balance is a key issue that women need to address as more and more households are classed as dual income with both partners

working full-time. Today, women still bear the major responsibility of raising families and looking after children (National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, 2008). There seems to be a lack of recognition that the family responsibilities should be more equally shared with men. Thus, women are under huge and increasing pressure as they access higher education and enter the paid workforce (NACEW, 2008). Furthermore, this growing tension is connected to major changes in the characteristics of families. Women are having children later in life, having fewer children than in the past, and fewer women are marrying (MWA, 2008). For example, women aged 30 to 34 years have the highest birth rate in current society, but birth rates of women under 30 years have generally decreased particularly among those aged 20 to 24 years (MWA, 2008). Moreover, the married rate of women dropped from 65 percent in 1971 to 48 percent in 2001. The median age of brides has changed from 26.5 years in 1991 to 29.5 years in 2001, and further increased to 30 years in 2011 (Statistics New Zealand, 2011b). Thus, it seems women hesitate or just do not act when they face choices – caring for families, or participating in work or higher education (MWA, 2008).

## **Part Two: Summary**

In the second part, the chapter provided the overview of New Zealand context introducing the state's population, geography, political system, culture, education and women's position. It specifically reviewed the development of women's higher education in different historical periods. Although the state and organizations have constituted and implemented legislation, policy and measures to enhance and protect women's rights and interests, gender discrimination and inequality still occurs in many aspects of women's life in relation to employment, education and family. Women are still less likely to be employed than men and gender segregation persists in many occupations (Statistics New Zealand, 2011c). In addition, due to the influence of traditional gender roles, women are required to play multiple roles. Thus, their participation

in paid employment and education is more affected than men by family responsibility and other forms of unpaid work.

### **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CHINA AND NEW ZEALAND CONTEXTS**

Due to the different history, politics and culture, China and New Zealand also have significantly different contexts reflected in the expression of the women's movement changes in gender role and participation rate in higher education. Women's positions have improved in both countries but the expression of the women's movements in each country is different. China's women's liberation was mainly influenced by the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The new government tried to protect the legal rights and interests of women and eliminate discrimination through formulation, revision and enforcement of relevant acts and regulations, as well as a series of mass movements including land reform, universal suffrage, employment rights and illiteracy eradication campaign. In contrast, New Zealand women's movement followed the three waves of feminism. In the first wave associated with western society. As such the legislative changes have had a great effect in the New Zealand context because while inequality persists in both countries, levels of inequality are much greater in China.

Gender roles are also different in the two countries. Confucian ideals still shape women's norms, values and behaviour in China. Therefore, women's positions can be seen to be more subordinated in Chinese society and family dynamics than in New Zealand. Women are not required to complete higher education or participate in paid-work in China. Instead they are expected to sacrifice these goals for their families and husbands. For example, if a man is successful in his business, his wife is expected to stay at home to be the housewife. When both partners work they will be unable to fulfill the demands of family and children. So they do not get married or have children until this situation changes. In New

Zealand, the gender roles are somewhat different from China. New Zealand women's positions are higher than most other countries. For example, Helen Clark was the 37<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of New Zealand, the second female leader of the country. However, these enhanced opportunities to participate mean that in New Zealand women are required to be a superwoman playing multiple roles fully in their lives. Therefore, the issues of work-life balance are serious for New Zealand women (MWA, 2004).

The similarity between China and New Zealand is that women's decision-making of family formation has changed in both countries over the past decade. This is because the growing tension between work, life and education led to both countries' women marrying and having children later. Modern women are exhausted to fulfill the diverse demands of children, family, career and education, so they defer the timing of entry to the role of wife and mother. Although the age at first marriage has increased in both countries, Chinese women are still likely to get married earlier than New Zealand women. For example, in 2001, the marrying age for women was 24.2 years in China compared with New Zealand's 29.5 years.

In addition, women's larger participation in paid work has led to dual-earner families becoming more common in both China and New Zealand. However, the traditional culture of gender roles still exists, and there is a lack of recognition of sharing family responsibilities by men. Therefore, both countries' women still take more un-paid work and housework. Should be noted that this issue is more serious in China. In an Oxford University study that researched how people become more attractive to the partner, New Zealand men ranked eighth-best husbands in the world out of 13 countries (Sevilla-Sanz, 2010). That meant New Zealand men have tried to help their partners by sharing household chores and looking after the children. In contrast, Chinese men do not recognize that they should also share family responsibility for their wives. That can be illustrated in



the previous section, in 2000, the amount of time Chinese women spent on housework was about 4 hours per day, compared with men's 26 minutes. This situation is more prominent in rural than urban China.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social science research includes quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Qualitative research is a common social science research strategy that usually emphasizes words, text and descriptions rather than numbers, tables and statistical measures in the information collection and analysis of data. Hence, qualitative researchers focus on investigating meaning in order to understand and interpret people's everyday life and experiences (Bryman, 2004). Given the purpose of this research is to focus on women's experiences and perspectives of participating in higher education, this study uses qualitative research to elicit detailed information with regards to the interviewee's ideas, feelings and views. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methods used, and steps taken in this study.

Firstly, the chapter explains how and why the interpretive perspective and feminist theory are important to this study. These two philosophies provide a framework that focuses the study on the participants' feelings, perceptions and experiences in order to understand the women's motivations, decision-making processes and identification of issues related to their participation in higher education. Secondly, the chapter describes the two methods of collecting information used in this study which are face-to-face interviews and answering interview questions via e-mail (a form of questionnaire). These two research methods were used because both the researcher and three of the participants have English as their second language. Thirdly, the chapter traces the development and implementation of the research instruments including making the interview guide and conducting a pilot interview. Fourthly, it also identifies potential ethical issues in the research related to gender and ethnicity and how the researcher will compensate for these issues. Fifthly, the chapter introduces how the selection of participants occurred and provides a brief background to

describe them. Sixthly, the chapter specifically portrays how the face-to-face interviews and questionnaires were conducted. The chapter concludes by describing how the collected data was analysed.

## **QUALITATIVE APPROACHES**

The research uses qualitative methodology because it refers to people's lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings, as well as their observations about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach allows the exploration and comparison of New Zealand and Chinese women's perspectives on and experiences of participating in higher education.

Qualitative research has several different paradigm positions, with the main alternative philosophies being positivist, critical, postmodernist, interpretive and feminist (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each philosophy has a different core goal of research reflecting a diverse understanding of truth and special research instruments. The differences can be seen through a comparison. For example, positivism's knowledge is politically and socially neutral; the main goal is trying to imitate the hard sciences. It seeks uniform rules, digs up simple relationships from a complicated world and examines them as if context did not matter (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In contrast, the knowledge of critical theory also includes a subjective dimension as it believes that research should rectify past oppression, explore exposure the problems and help social vulnerable groups such as minorities, the poor, the sidelined and the silenced (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Postmodernist theory believes that truth is impossible to define because the reality is not yet completely known (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, when using qualitative research approaches different researchers will have different and distinctive findings. In order to answer my research question, I will use the interpretive theory and feminist theory.

The interpretive theory was influenced by German sociologist Max Weber and philosopher Wilhem Dilthey in order to provide a contrasting epistemology to positivism. It can be seen as an intellectual heritage of *Verstehen*, the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, and symbolic interactionism (Bryman, 2004). Interpretive theory places emphasis on an empathetic understanding of the people's daily experiences in specific historical contexts (Neuman, 2003). As Weber (1981, as cited in Neuman, 2003) argues that social science needed to study meaningful social action, and also needed to learn the personal reasons or motives that form a person's internal feelings and influence his/her decisions to act in particular ways. Therefore, interpretive researchers usually use participant observation and interviews as their research methods. They spend many hours in direct personal contact with study objects to understand people's feelings, experiences and behavior (Neuman, 2003).

The interpretive approach also focuses on a practical orientation that contrasts with positivism's instrumental orientation; it is concerned with how people guide their practical action in everyday life and how people interact with each other (Neuman, 2003). Overall, Neuman has concluded that the interpretive approach is "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understanding and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (p. 137). In relation to this research's focus on the tendency of more women preferring to participate in higher education a positivism researcher will measure the number of women's enrollments, or the different percentages of women's and men's attendances. However, this study seeks understandings around the types of motivations that lead women to access higher education. Therefore, an interpretive stance is more suited to the focus of this research.

Secondly, feminist theory has made a vital contribution to social science research methods, and has played a particularly significant role in restructuring

qualitative research practices (Punch, 1998). As part of the critical approach, it was inspired by works like *Women's Ways of Knowing*, which argues that women study and express themselves differently than man (Neuman, 2003). Thus, feminist research is conducted mostly by women who use a more open and loosely structured research methodology to learn about women, to understand their words, concepts, feelings, concerns, and experiences in their world (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Feminist research opposes positivism because, as a male point of view, it is objective, logical, task oriented and instrumental. Further, positivism only focuses on men's problems and tends to over-generalize from men's experiences which ignore gender roles (Neuman, 2003). In contrast, feminist theory emphasizes the subjective, empathetic, process-oriented, and inclusive sides of social life. Feminist researchers acknowledge gender's influences in culture, beliefs and values, so the gender of researchers and the researched will shape how they experience and understand reality (Neuman, 2003). Moreover, feminist researchers try to build a positive relationship with interviewees, and share their own experiences and feelings when collecting an interviewee's experiences. This is because feminist researchers believe that researchers and interviewees have mutual responsibility for finding words, concepts, feelings and experiences in relation to women's issues (Neuman, 2003). Therefore, this study will also use feminist theory to shape the interview questions and prompt discussion around the types of positive and negative effects that can happen to women's employment, family formation and personal lives during or after women have participated in higher education, and how women deal with the different impacts of participating in higher education. Taking this stance is particularly important because in recent times women's unique experience of higher education particularly Chinese women has been a neglected area of study. Most contemporary research on higher education in China takes a positivist stance and does not include information on women's experiences, providing general statements only.

## **METHOD**

There are many ways of collecting data in qualitative research including interviews, observation, participant observation and documents. The interview is one of the important data collection tools in qualitative research, used to obtain people's perceptions, meanings, concepts and experiences. As Punch (1998) states, "interviewing has a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses" (p. 175). The main type of interviewing includes individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, focus groups, mailed or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys (Punch, 1998).

In this research, face-to-face interviewing was initially selected in order to give the interviewees more chance to expand and explain their answers and accounts of their experiences and feelings in detail during the conversation. In line with the feminist approach it was also important to have interaction with interviewees, and have opportunities to probe, asking "why" "how" and "could you please give me an example" through face-to-face interviewing. In addition, the interviews were semi-structured to ensure some consistency (Kvale, 2007). This allows the participants to have the chance to answer in their own terms without being restricted by a standardized questionnaire, while at the same time the interview guide can help to keep the answers linked to the main research questions.

Answering questions via e-mail is another tool of collecting information and data used in the research. This approach was used to collect information for two reasons. Firstly, some participants were really busy dealing with daily study, work or family activities which meant that they had no time to participate in an interview in person. For those participants, interview questions (in the form of questionnaires) were sent via e-mail. Although these participants were not spoken to directly, follow-up questions were asked via e-mail. Therefore, the e-mailed questionnaires also helped record the experiences and perspectives of

interviewees about participating in higher education. Secondly, some participants were Chinese women who were worried about having an academic conversation in English. English is a second language to them, and to immediately express their perspectives and feelings in short time is still difficult to them. Therefore, opportunities were also provided to answer questions via e-mail rather than face-to-face interviews, so that these participants would have more time to consider what they really want to say.

## **PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEWS**

### **Making the interview guide**

Although an interview is regarded as a certain form of conversation, it requires a rather different emphasis in terms of social interaction that takes place from those in ordinary conversation (Robson, 1993). Therefore, the interviewer plays a significant role in this special form of conversation, which will affect the quality and outcome of each interview. The task of the interviewer is to try and encourage interviewees to talk freely, openly, in detail and relevantly (Robson, 1993). This requires the researcher to compose an effective interview guide to ensure the interview can be completed successfully.

This research sought to identify how women understand the relationships between work, life and study, and to investigate whether they try to achieve a balance of these different demands. In addition, as education is optional for many people, this research also tried to identify what motivations lead to women pursuing and participating in higher education, as well as identifying both the benefits gained during and from participating in higher education, and the negative experiences in relation to participants gender roles, life, work and study. Based on these main research questions, six main interview questions were created:

1. How do you understand the relationship between work, life and study?

2. What are the motivations of and barriers to participating in higher education?
3. What are the positive impacts from participating in higher education?
4. What are the negative impacts from participating in higher education?
5. How do you deal with the negative impacts?
6. Who else should deal with the negative impacts?

### **A pilot interview**

After making the interview guide, a pilot interview was conducted to test out the interview questions and practice interview skills. The pilot interview provided very important and useful practice because it allowed for the testing of how to contact a potential interviewee, how to select the setting, how to control the time and tempo of the interview, how to understand the language and culture of the participants, how to establish trust, build rapport, collect data and analyse data.

The pilot interviewee was with a Chinese woman who had completed her Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) degree at the University of Waikato and who had been working in a library for nearly two years. She shared many significant and unique perspectives and experiences about the research that helped identify some important information regarding women participating in higher education which had not been considered previously. For example, what barriers challenge work, life and study balance? What types of support do women demand? These questions were added to the interview guide. In addition, the pilot interviewee pointed out some faults which arose during the pilot interview, for example, the meanings of some questions were possibly ambiguous and confused. With the help of the pilot interviewee, interview questions were revised and improved, and valuable experience was gained in administering a face-to-face interview.



After the pilot interview, the experience and collected information was discussed with my supervisor. It was discovered that some of the former interview questions were leading questions, for example, regarding the positive impacts and negative impacts from participating in higher education. These questions were changed to more general (non-leading) questions in order to provide opportunity for participants to talk about their general experiences and perspectives. Depending on their answers, probes or follow-up questions were used to ask about more specific positive and negative experiences. The supervisor also identified some words and sentences which were unclear and/or incorrect, and which needed to be further revised. Based on these recommendations, the interview guide was rewritten.

### **Finalised Interview guide**

The finalised interview guide involved the main themes of the research topic. Each theme had a range of questions that may or may not be asked, depending on the conversation. In the interviews, open-ended questions were used to collect information from participants. Please see Appendix A for a full list of the interview questions. These main questions provided a lot of opportunities for the interviewees to explain their perspectives and experiences about participating in higher education. The themes were:

1. The background of interviewee
2. The experiences of participating in higher education
  - 2.1 The expectations of work once qualification completed
  - 2.2 The expectation of life once qualification completed
  - 2.3 Negative effects or discrimination from study or work
3. How to deal with these negative effects
4. About the future

The first theme (background of interviewee) attempted to get a general understanding on the background and biographical information of each

interviewee, and to know how important higher education is in their life. An example question asked “During your period of study, which part is the most significant for you and why?” Interviewees’ answers provided an in-depth understanding as to whether the participants thought higher education was the most important part of their study and how useful it was for them. The last two questions asked about motivations and barriers of participating in higher education. These questions allowed exploration of the reasons why these women pursued higher education, and what barriers, if any, restricted them from accessing higher education.

The second theme (of experiences of participating in higher education) relates more directly to the research questions. Currently, the tendency is for more and more women to participate in higher education. This research wanted to know what these women think they will gain from pursuing higher or graduate qualifications when they graduate. The research also sought to learn what these women experienced when they participated in higher education. In both these areas of questioning the research also sought to understand the extent to which the participants thought positive and negative impacts have occurred or could occur in relation to these women’s study, work and life.

The third theme (of how to deal with these negative effects) asked for more information on how participation in higher education generated negative impacts in relation to the participants’ work and life. The research asked this in order to learn how the participants developed strategies to deal with the negative impacts now and in the future after graduation. In addition, the research asked participants about the types of help they think women who study need and what kinds of support (personal, family or government policy) can assist them in balancing the demands of work, study, and life<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Life means decision making relevant to partnerships, family, children and other aspects related to women’s personal life.

The last theme asked questions about the future. The research sought to know if participants have ideas and recommendations on the direction that government policy should take regarding women's participation in higher education. Furthermore, it sought to know whether or not the participants plan to continue studying when they finished their current studies in higher education. If participants had a plan, they were asked why they wanted to return to study when they already had a higher qualification. This was asked in order to see how important the drive to complete higher qualifications was to the women. The research also sought to investigate that if balancing the work, life and study is a difficult challenge, why are women keeping ongoing.

### **ETHICAL ISSUES**

In social research, ethical issues can arise that may create negative effects for participants. For example, in the research, issues related to gender (realization of disempowerment around how women learn and men earn) and ethnicity (the need to respect the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi but also understand different cultural perceptions) may occur during the interviews, so attention had to be paid to them in the interview process. Another important thing is the interviewee's privacy. For example, an interviewee may be embarrassed to talk about her own experiences. To avoid these issues and to honour the ethical guidelines on conducting research on humans, informed consent was gained from the participants. The consent form explained the nature of the research process and relevant information on the project, clarified the basic rights of the interviewees, and provided the opportunity to discuss the confidentiality of the research findings. Participants were given the right to decide whether they wanted to maintain anonymity or not before the interview. In addition, the interviewee could refuse to answer any particular questions at any time to protect her privacy. The interviewee also was given the opportunity to check or modify transcripts of her information collected from the interview. Other issues such as the interview location and techniques were also discussed with

interviewees before the interview in order to make sure the interviewees were comfortable and felt safe.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### **Recruitment of participants**

It was decided to conduct eight interviews that included four New Zealand women and three Chinese women who accessed higher education in New Zealand. Two different methods were used to find possible participants. For the New Zealand interviewees, a staff member from The University of Waikato was asked to send mass e-mails to all graduate students on the internal website, inviting women interested in this research to contact the researcher. Finding suitable Chinese interviewees was more difficult, so social networks were exploited via my supervisors, friends and family to locate possible participants. Using the snowball technique, graduate students were approached through e-mails and invited to participate in the interviews. Three Chinese participants were identified as being suitable for the research. One reason for the difficulty in finding Chinese participants might be that because most Chinese students return to China to find a job when they complete their qualification, thus the presence of suitable Chinese women in New Zealand is low. In addition, some women are not interested in this subject or not confident in their English, so they may not want to participate in the research. Thus, only three Chinese participants were included in my study.

The initial letter (please see Appendix B) was developed in order to explain the purpose of the study and the nature of the interview. Potential participants were approached via e-mail, and sent a copy of the Information sheet (please see Appendix C), so they could consider whether or not to participate in this research.

### **The background of participants**

Mary<sup>7</sup> is a Chinese 27-year old who is married and does not have children. She has lived in New Zealand for eight years, and completed a Masters in Social Sciences at the University of Waikato in 2011. Mary came to New Zealand to enrich her professional knowledge and life experiences. She thinks a higher qualification is an important way to help her get a senior position with a high-paying salary in China. Mary has not yet got a job in NZ, however, during her studies in New Zealand (5 years) she had an internship experience in a five-star hotel in China when she travelled home. As such, Mary is able to comment on both work and higher education experiences.

Elise, a Chinese 30-year old is engaged with no children. She completed a Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS) at the University of Waikato, and graduated in 2007. Elise came to New Zealand to study because she wanted to learn about a different culture and acquire more knowledge. In a more practical sense she wanted to apply English in flexible ways, to expand her own social network, and to possess more skills and experiences in order to have a competitive edge in her future workplace. Since graduating, she has worked in New Zealand in the hospitality sector.

Kelley, a Chinese 24-year old has a partner with no children. She was completing a Master's degree at the University of Waikato at the time of this study. Kelley's ambition is to be a math teacher in high school in China. However, a Bachelor's degree is not enough to get this job in China; she is required to have a Master's degree at least. Therefore, she decided to continue her studies even though she could be a teacher in a Primary School in China after gaining her bachelor degree. Kelly, like Mary and Elise, believes that participating in higher education can give her more choices in her future career.

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<sup>7</sup> The name has been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Ophelia is a 34-year old New Zealand Maori<sup>8</sup>. She is single with no children. She originally obtained a BMS in the 1990s. Ophelia worked after this, but got bored and frustrated with her previous career path in accounting and administration, and so she went back to study in order to expand her career options. She is currently doing a Masters in Social Sciences at the University of Waikato.

Ineke is a 37-year old Kiwi<sup>9</sup>. She is single with two children aged 9 and 4. Ineke is doing a PhD at the University of Waikato. She has 10 years' work experience in the film industry. However, Ineke was dejected by not being able to find a job in the film industry that she could balance easily with the demands of motherhood, so she decided to return to study. She hopes her research can allow her to learn more specific knowledge in order to have more work opportunities.

Genna is a 27-year old Kiwi. She is single with no children. She is a trained teacher and has worked for a few years, but in her view her job had become a dead-end in terms of her career. Genna tried to change her career path but the economic recession lessened her chances of getting a good job. Therefore, she decided to go back to study at the university because she thinks learning and up-skilling is better than working part-time and receiving the unemployment benefit. She started studying towards her Master's degree full-time in 2011 at the University of Waikato.

Ann is a 36-year old Kiwi. She is married with two primary school-aged children. Ann, like Ophelia, Ineke and Genna, already has a previous qualification. She and her partner decided to wait till their children were older before she went back to study. She has had jobs in her area of study in the past

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<sup>8</sup> Ophelia identified herself as being a New Zealand Maori and as such it is included here as a significant part of her identity.

<sup>9</sup> I use the word of Kiwi to express participants' nationality because I did not ask them to indicate their ethnicity.

but she felt that she did not know enough from her first qualification. She is currently studying a Post-Graduate Diploma in her area of work at the University of Waikato. She hopes completing the Diploma will bring her more work opportunities related to her career.

## **CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS**

### **Face-to-face interviews**

When all preparatory work was completed, a suitable time and comfortable place was discussed and arranged with interviewees respectively to do those interviews. All interviews were conducted in June 2011. Three face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded, and the length of each one was about 40-60 minutes.

In terms of the interview, no pre-meetings were held with the interviewees prior to the interview; hence, a brief introduction to each other was arranged so it could help in making a comfortable atmosphere to avoid embarrassment. The content of the introduction included a discussion on personal interests, habits, and study or work situation. The interviewee gradually became more at ease after this short informal introduction. In addition, the selection criteria (for participation) was explained to the interviewees, so that they were aware why they had been selected to participate, and how they could assist with the research. Also, detailed information about the study and the interview were provided for clarification, and the interviewees were reminded of their rights once more.

During the interview, the interviewees were allowed to speak without interruption in order to maintain the feeling of a conversation. Any follow-up questions were asked after the interviewee finished talking. Furthermore, probes and follow-up questions were also used to explore more details of answers. For example, one interviewee was asked “During the period of study, which part is the most significant for you”. She replied “Study in the university is the most

significant to me”, the probe “Could you please tell me why?” was then used. Through these techniques, more specific information regarding the interviewee could be uncovered. However, certain questions in the interview needed to be avoided, such as questions involving jargon, leading questions and biased questions. These questions could confuse the interviewee, and affect the quality of the research. In the end of the interview, some gentler questions were used to finish the interview, for example questions relating to the plan of future study. This is because, in the second and third parts, perhaps some questions led to women recalling some difficult experiences. However, the questions about future plans could let them relax and feel more comfortable, and also reveal whether those women wanted more study opportunities or not.

### **Answering questions via e-mail**

When conducting e-mail questionnaire, it was important to ensure all questions were simple and straightforward, in order to make sure the participants could easily understand the meaning of the questions. Research questions were sent to participants via e-mail, and they were encouraged to contact the researcher by phone, text message or e-mail in order to have any questions answered. All the participants were friendly and allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions, depending on their answers. The Chinese participants were allowed to answer the questions in either English or Chinese. The important part of this method is to remind participants return their responses. Thus, all participants were sent reminders to return their answers. If they could not complete the questionnaires by the deadline, they were given an extension to answer the questions.

Overall, face-to-face interviews and answering interview questions via e-mail both helped obtain first-hand, important and valuable information about the experiences and perspectives of the participants in relation to participating in higher education.



## **ANALYSING THE DATA**

After the interviews were completed, the information which had been collected from the interviewees was transcribed. This was done by listening to the digital-recording and writing a partial transcript of the interviews. This is because transcribing the whole interview is time consuming, and not every sentence of interviewee is useful and suitable for the thesis. Additionally, transcribing the interviews word-by-word presented difficulty for the researcher who has English as a second language. Thus the shift to e-mail questionnaire interview format was beneficial and ensured that there was still access to the women's point of view in their own 'electronic' voice without the same language barrier challenges.

Two copies of each transcript were printed, and one was sent to each interviewee so that she could check or correct any information from the interview. The other copy was used for data analysis. Regarding the e-mail questionnaires, two copies of each questionnaire were also printed. This information did not need to be transcribed, but the important and useful information of participants' answers were highlighted for analysis.

This research used thematic analysis which is a process for encoding qualitative information on the foundation of emergent themes. To begin the data analysis, all answers of interviews and questionnaires were cut and pasted into one document. This collected information was further divided into three separate parts (the main over-arching themes or categories). One related to statements containing information on the reasons why the women participated in higher education, two examined statements related to the positive experiences women had in relation to higher education, work and life, and three explored the negative experiences from higher education, work and life. Following this, considerable time was used to manually code the perspectives of each participant and on the basis of thematic key words (such as children, relationship,

career, financial security, personal development, challenges, stereotyping and discrimination) from the text further sub-groups of statements were created and grouped as a precursor to creating the findings. These sub-groups were then moved around into different categorisations using the participants points of view to determine which statements were the most alike and most different and which kinds of statement occurred more often. This allowed the researcher to determine what kinds of information occurred most often across the interviews creating the biggest sub-group categories. The size of the sub-groups led to the determination of new themes. Throughout this process the wording of the women's responses was not changed reflecting the interpretative stance of this research, rather their words shaped the direction of how the research progressed.

After this categorization was completed the main research questions were used to refine the newly created themes into four broad themes stemming from the data: (1) motivations, ambitions, expectations, dreams and goals of higher education, (2) benefits gained during and from participating in higher education, (3) the dilemma of work, life and study balance, and (4) perceptions and experiences of discrimination. Within each broad theme the sub-themes previously identified were maintained. Finally the thematic material was structured and used to create the findings chapter. Subsequently, literature from Chapter Two, background from Chapter Three, and the collected information were drawn on to discuss the implications of what women spoke about their experiences of participating in higher education in the discussion chapter. In line with the methodology specified in this chapter the feminist emphasis on preserving the women's voice was maintained throughout the findings chapter and critical feminist theory was used to generate the recommendations in the conclusion.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted, and e-mail questionnaires sent out, for this study. The participants included three Chinese women and four New Zealand women who were or are enrolled in higher education<sup>10</sup> in New Zealand at the University of Waikato. The aim of this chapter is to present the ideas, experiences and challenges that the women have expressed in relation to their participation in higher education. Thus, a collection of direct quotations from participants are provided in the body of this chapter. These quotations have been grouped into a number of themes and sub-themes that were taken from categorizing the participants' comments using the study's research questions and literature explored in Chapters Two and Three.

Originally the research questions focused on how women deal with the relationship of work, life and study in order to find out how studying influences women's life and work choices. For example, will they give up family responsibility or full-time work in order to prioritise studying? However, the answers given by the participants indicated that the term of "giving up" is incorrect. The women's experiences have demonstrated that reality is more complex. Instead the words "sacrificing and juggling demands" seem to illustrate more clearly what the women express. Women cannot easily drop any family activities, employment or education opportunities in their life; instead they have no choice but to balance the demands of work, life and study. This is important because most participants believe there are barriers that challenge the possibility of work, life and study being balanced easily. Therefore, the first theme in this chapter is "*The dilemma of work, life and study balance*".

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<sup>10</sup>The use of higher education is used to indicate that all the women have prior qualifications and are pursuing their second or third qualification at a post-graduate level.

Another important part of this research was to find out what motivations lead women to access higher education. Linked to this important question is the second theme “*Motivations, ambitions, expectations, dreams, and goals*”. These findings revealed that the most significant motivation for most of the women pursuing higher education was to gain increased work opportunities. This is because participants think after getting higher or post-graduate qualifications they can become more professional which they hope will make them more attractive to employers, and give them a better chance of gaining employment. This type of belief was linked to the idea that higher incomes would also result from gaining a higher qualification. Furthermore, some participants think that a higher qualification is a way to find the perfect job along with the benefit of a higher income. This is about their choices rather than an employer choosing them. Thus, high salaries can also be seen as a motivation of participating in higher education to participants.

In response to the questions the participants explained that there were both negative and positive impacts in their lives from studying. The third theme related to the positive aspects that the women identified. This is titled “*Benefits gained during and from participating in higher education*”. Please note that the negative impacts will be discussed under the next theme. The findings in this section focus on the types of positive impacts which happened in relation to women’s work and life. Participants said that one of the main benefits from studying is increased confidence and personal development. From what they reported this increase in confidence comes from increased self-belief as well as how other people treat them. Participants discussed that in addition to gaining specific knowledge; they acquired extra skills from studying. This included skills to think independently, and critically analyse, which is also useful and helpful in their life outside of study, a further beneficial aspect of participating in higher education. Finally, nearly all participants believe that they would be able to provide better educational support and sharing study experiences with their

children from their increased knowledge and skills.

Participants said that normally participating in higher education is viewed to be positive. However, some issues related to social gender role expectations mean that the women have also experienced negative reactions to their participation in higher education beyond an initial degree. The fourth theme relates to the negative aspects from stereotyping, generally and in relation to age and appearance. This theme is titled “*Perceptions and experiences of discrimination*”. Some participants outlined diverse views on the kinds of discrimination that exist in relation to women and the workplace, but also indicated that the extent of the problem depended on the context. For example, Chinese participants commented that some people do not understand why women need higher qualifications. Instead, people think that the women’s main role and duty is to raise children and look after their family. In contrast, New Zealand women have had an excessive number of expectations placed on them by society and their family, driving women to be super mothers, wives, workers and students. Chinese expectations around gender roles are different from New Zealand’s but they both have negative impacts on women’s lives.

The overall objective of this thesis is to compare the experiences of New Zealand and Chinese women. As such some themes also contain an additional section that compares the similarities and differences between participants’ perspectives and experiences based on their place of origin. This is because although the participants all study and live in New Zealand, they come from two different countries and have different cultural backgrounds. For example, in their responses, even though they have similar answers for one question (stereotyping of highly educated women) their reasons and explanations for such discrimination are varied, while for other questions (age), they have very different understandings and experiences based on each culture.

## **MAIN THEMES**

### **The dilemma of work, life and study balance**

All participants said they face a dilemma in balancing the different demands of work, life and study. Some participants believe that gaining a balance between work, study, and life is impossible because there are so many obstacles to achieving this balance including employment, children and relationships. Hence, they have to sacrifice the choice of having a full-time job, children or relationships in order to allow them to pursue study. This struggle to balance demands and making sacrifices to do so is explored through the sub-themes of *“Obstacles to achieving work, life and study balance”*, *“The logic for delaying marriage and children to pursue study and work”* and *“Consequences of pursuing higher education or career at the expense of relationships-Being like a man”*.

As negative as these views were, most participants also presented more pro-active problem-solving responses to the challenge of work, life, and study balance. For example, they indicated that the flexibility of study and family support enables women to balance or juggle work, life and study rather than having to sacrifice one or more. The comments in this area have been divided into three separate sub-themes. The first sub-theme is *“Making lifestyle choices to achieve work, life, and study balance”*, the second one is *“The flexibility of study enabling balance to life”*, and third is *“Family support as providing balance to study”*.

### **Obstacles to achieving work, life, and study balance**

Ineke in her responses highlighted the general impossibility of achieving balance and then went on to state how difficult this is to deal with:

Yeah, it's hard. Something has to give. I try to find a balance, work harder during the day, and sometimes after the kids are in bed, but it's hard. I feel pretty drained a lot of the time, trying to do everything and be everything.....Stress, exhaustion, frustration about how to get everything done in a day/week. I just keep going. What choice do I have? It's hard

though. I do sometimes wonder if I'll cope over the next 3 years.

At a more general level Ann commented on the balancing act in relation to how women are depicted in modern life, complementing Ineke's comment of "*trying to do everything and be everything*" and indicating that what is promoted in or by society is a deception:

I grew up when there were advertisements on TV saying women can do anything, be anything. I think it is a lie that we can be super women and be superb mothers, wives and run full time jobs. My friends and I are in a state of constant flux between expectations of our mothers, the government, friends and our own values and beliefs.

Some of the participants pointed to specific aspects of the balancing act as being more problematic than the others. For example, Genna pointed out that work is the main problem in achieving balance; therefore her work means that her ability to study is compromised.

I'm working part-time and my work affects my studies more so than the other way around.

Whereas Ophelia highlighted that life aspect (or more specifically pursuing and maintaining relationships) of the balancing act was the main problem, she simply dealt with it by just putting it off:

For me, I've put it off because I want to concentrate on completing my education. Having a relationship and participating in higher education can be quite stressful.

Most participants identified child care and family responsibility as the most challenging aspect of balancing work, study, and life. For example, Ineke stated:

I tried to get a job and with two kids it was impossible to find something in the film industry.

Ann and Ophelia also both commented that while it was not their experience, that looking after children in conjunction with full-time study would not really be possible and would entail sacrifice on the part of child-rearing.

My main barrier has been my children. I waited until my youngest child

reached school age before I continued studying. At the moment I am managing. I am studying part time, but if I was studying full time I would be struggling to look after my children. My sister in law is studying to be a teacher full time and it is very hard. (Ann)

Yes to some extent. I think children require constant 24 hour care and it depends on their ages. Under 5's would probably make it very difficult to manage education and family life. Higher education can be quite intense and requires a lot of concentration and time. (Ophelia)

### **The logic for delaying marriage and children to pursue study and work**

Participants were asked if participating in higher education meant that they may defer family formation, which includes decisions such as when to have children and get married. Most participants thought that participating in higher education meant that women will defer marrying and having babies till their study is complete. Some held this view because they believed that women have to pay more attention to their family and children which can be a distraction from their study, while those who were unmarried and childless agreed that they would prefer to marry and have children after completing higher qualifications. Mary provides a couple of quotes that illustrate this second position:

It depends, but it would make you to get married and having children later. Because I think if you have family you have spend more time to look after, so some women may choose getting married and having children later. For my experience, I think I can get married when I have done my master's degree.

Kelley also thinks studying will defer women's choice to marry because you have to pay more attention on the study.

Yes, it is true. Obviously, it must take you a few years to study at the school. In spite of time, you will also pay more attention on the study. Thus, from time to energy, you have to defer the marriage since it is hard to focus on not only one thing.

In relation to both marriage and children Ophelia, like Mary and Genna also said that deferment is necessary:

...because of the commitment required to pass.



However, Opehlia has a different perspective in that she said that an interesting hobby or activity can help her to be happy being single, so marriage is not so important and necessary for her. Hence, the deferment of marriage and having children is necessary but is not necessarily a sacrifice in her life.

Be happy being single by getting involved in a hobby or activities that bring happiness.

Mary goes on to make a point that demonstrates the tension reflected by the women taking this position, which is that deferment can also risk infertility or being an older less active parent sacrificing ideal parenting conditions:

But I think one important limitation is age, particularly. Because we have to have a family, and then have a baby, thus we have to complete our higher education before that.

From a more extreme point of view, Genna indicated that as a woman with higher education she may in fact never marry, and even if she did, it still would not happen till her study was completed.

I doubt I will marry or have children... At the moment, I have no plans on ever having children or marrying, however I will probably seriously consider having children and marrying only after I've completed my studies. I believe I need to get that out of the way before I consider having a family, so if I do have a family in future it won't be until I'm in my mid-thirties.

Ann is an exception as she had her babies first, and waited till her children were older before going back to study. Although Ann is different from other participants, she also sacrificed study's chance to have children first, and then she went back to study. Like Mary, Ann also emphasized women ignore their body clocks in order to pursue study and a career.

Many women I have met defer marriage because they want to have a career and then all of a sudden decide they need to get married and have children when they reach their 30s. Unfortunately also many of these women either can't have children or suffer miscarriages or IVF treatment to get children because their body clocks are running out. This is happening constantly around me. I got married young, I chose to wait to have children because I wanted a career and suffered miscarriages to get the two children I do have.

*Consequences of pursuing higher education or career at the expense of relationships - Being like a man*

The participants also identified how potential negative consequence of participating in higher education could be the slimmer chance of finding a potential life partner or spouse. This is because the women want to meet a man who has a similar educational level. This is also linked to the life path deferment issue because they also highlighted that even though there are some suitable men in terms of educational level at University, they are nearly always already married. So the women identify three problems: one, that the initial age of marrying is missed due to being in study, second, that when seeking a spouse the 'second time' around there are actually fewer men to pick from, and three, that intelligent women suffer from discrimination from potential partners when dating or they are more specific in their choices.

An example of a comment relating to these problems comes from Ineke. When asked if higher education led to less or more chances of getting married, she responded:

No, less. In part because I'm older and everyone my age is already married. In part because men are a little intimidated by intelligent women, it seems, but I don't want to be with someone like that anyway. But there's a very small pool of eligible men anyway.

In relation to the life path deferment issue Ann said (regarding other women she knew of participating in higher education):

I have watched very many women follow the other path and pursue career and miss out on getting married. There are many women who want to get married later and can't find a good man because they are married, so I do think higher education can get in the way.

Presenting a more balanced understanding of the situation Genna and Ophelia think that they will have more wisdom in their choice of potential spouse due to their participation in higher education. So while the decision is deferred when it is made, it will be a better decision when they were younger.

Yes because I know what I want and what I'm looking for.

However, at the same time Genna, like Ineke, also acknowledges that the time taken out of focusing on getting a relationship when studying leads to a consequence of finding fewer men being perceived as eligible. She concludes again, like Ineke, by hinting at the discrimination that educated women may also suffer from in relationships.

I may have more wisdom in whom I choose to marry due to my increase in confidence in my abilities, skills and self, however, I believe I will have very 'slim pickings' the longer I participate in higher education, as I already have 'slim pickings'. For example, the more educated I become and the more qualifications I hold, I think it will decrease the number of men I will be interested in. I'm unsure of how my being more educated than men will affect them, however, I don't believe this has necessarily affected any of my relationships in the past, however, if I look at things retrospectively, it may have made my ex partners feel insecure, although they never admitted it.

Even though New Zealanders Genna, Ophelia, Ineke and Ann all outline the potential sacrifice of a relationship due to participating in higher education, other participants disagree, one Chinese woman, Elise, believes that participating in higher education does not prevent marriage. This is because she thinks that marriage is marriage and the choice to get married is not related to whether or not she participates in higher education. To her higher education is not a factor that causes women to defer decisions, instead she states that it is a choice you make when you are ready to like any other lifestyle choice.

No, marriage is about choice of life...Free marriage no special reasons.

Another Chinese woman, Mary, also thinks participation in higher education does not prevent women from having relationships when studying and getting married. In fact she highlights that a partner or spouse can provide support improving the experience of studying:

When you participate in higher education you still can get married. You still can meet someone who supports and encourages you when you doing your higher education...I met my husband when I was doing my master's

thesis.

This is also something that Ann discussed. She identifies yet another benefit that stems from having a partner with similar educational levels in relation to decision-making:

My husband and I meet on an intellectual level and that allows me to make decisions in our marriage. I make informed choices and use my scientific background to apply cost benefit analysis to challenging issues. My husband relies on my research ability all the time for many things.

In this sub-theme, both Chinese and New Zealand participants thought participation in higher education interrupts or delays choice regarding marriage and children. On this basis, some New Zealand participants believed this deferment will generate a potential negative consequence to unmarried women because those women will have fewer choices of a partner or a spouse. In contrast, Chinese participants acknowledged that higher education has an impact on women's life course, but it will not reduce women's choices of when to get married or have a relationship. They also acknowledged the risk of infertility but added a further risk or sacrifice associated with age, suggesting that older parents could be viewed more negatively in China.

### ***Making lifestyle choices to achieve work, life and study balance***

In contrast to the first sub-theme that identified the impossibility of achieving balance, Elise commented that achieving balance relates more to personal choice.

It is about choice of lifestyle nothing to do with higher education or not. Women have no education at all still could spend no time to take care their children. Therefore, the key point is how to reasonable put work and study in your life.

This aspect of individual choice or prioritisation was echoed by Genna when she described her mother's ability to maintain work-life balance, despite her acknowledgment of study as a barrier to effectively juggling the demands of

work and life.

I suppose it could lead to women missing some family activities, however from what I've seen of most women in higher education with children, they have a wonderful ability to multi-task. My mother was great at multi-tasking while she was studying, working full-time and looking after children basically as a single parent, due to my father working overseas most of the time. My mother never missed an important event.

### **The flexibility of study enabling balance to life**

Some participants argued that depending on the context, the flexible nature of study can provide more time to spend on family-based activities. Genna, while agreeing with Ann and Ophelia about the challenges of childcare also explained that if care is taken, studying can allow women to have more time to look after their children than if they just worked full-time.

I think it can lead to women not having enough time to look after their children, however studying is just like any other job, however it can be done at home, so it may actually result in women having more time to look after their children compared to if they were working in a 9 to 5 job. (Genna)

Ophelia also highlighted that the flexible nature of higher education in particular can allow for greater participation in family events. For example, when asked if study prevented her from attending family events she stated:

Not necessarily. It depends on when the family activity is scheduled. I would say that higher education – esp. Masters or PHD is fairly flexible in terms of time. It's a matter of time management.

### **Family support as providing balance to study**

Mary highlighted that flexibility on the part of family members can mean that it is possible to balance work, life and study more effectively because they may be willing to make sacrifices to allow their 'wife' and 'mother' time away to study.

I think women may not have enough time to look after children, but I believe that if you have good family (your husband and your children) they will support your study; your husband may take more responsibilities to look after your children. And you children may know or understand when you spend more time on your study.

Ann and her husband are studying together. She thinks that they can help and encourage each other. For example, they share the responsibility of looking after children and give each other space, time and understanding:

My husband and I are both studying post graduate diplomas at the moment. We chose to study at the same time to help each other to be motivated. We are coping together with the children and giving each other space, time and understanding.

In this section, Elise and Mary as Chinese participants did not talk about the impossibility of achieving a work, life and study balance or the obstacles to work, life, and study balance. Instead, Elise believes that achieving balance is not related to higher education, but rather it relates to one's choice of lifestyle. Hence, the important thing is how women can reasonably allocate the time of work and study in their life. In addition, Mary deems that a family's understanding and support will allow women to have more opportunities and time to study in order to achieve work, life, study balance. Their perspectives are different from the New Zealand participants' answers.

### **Motivations, ambitions, expectations, dreams, and goals**

All of the participants identified that one of the most important reasons that they returned to or continued studying was because they wanted to get a good or better job. Their primary goal for getting the higher qualification was not to deepen their understanding of the world but rather to improve their career opportunities. The women spoke of their ambitions and plans in detail which are illustrated in various ways through the sub-themes "*Expected work opportunities*", "*Importance of becoming professional in the workplace*" and "*Increased income, increased financial security*".

#### ***Expected work opportunities***

The first sub-theme highlights the women's general expectations around work ambitions. They argue that higher qualifications can bring increased work opportunities in terms of their future career paths. Mary stated that:

I think it brings more work opportunities. If you want to increase your position in one multi-culture company in China, you have to get a higher qualification. Hence, you have higher qualification you will have more competitive skills (value) to compete with others in your company.

Ann felt she did not possess all the tools she needed to do her job, based on her previous study, and decided that further study would bring more work opportunities.

I did have jobs within planning in the past but did not feel I knew enough from my first qualification. I think completing the post graduate diploma will bring me more work opportunities.

Ophelia also highlighted this aspect of increasing your ability to progress upwardly through the labour market when you get a higher education qualification:

Doing my post-graduate study – Honours and now Masters degree because it is likely to have greater leverage in the work force as opposed to my undergraduate or high school qualifications, especially in the career path I wish to pursue.

### **Importance of becoming professional in the workplace**

The second sub-theme highlights that the participants believe that it is the more specific disciplinary content of higher education that ensures greater employability not just the qualification. For example, Ann argued that:

This latest qualification will show employers that I have completed a specific course on planning that will be attractive to them.

Also by studying a relatively unknown area, Ineke argues she will gain a competitive edge through specialisation:

I hope that it will allow me to specialize and do something that no one else knows how to do. I'll have knowledge and information to back up my ideas. I'll know a lot of things that most filmmakers don't know, or think about.

Genna states categorically that without the qualification, the employment would not be possible:

Definitely, if it were not for my participation in higher education, I

wouldn't have been able to work in the profession I'm in.

Ophelia builds on this, adding that when you are specialized in a particular field, you need to possess expert knowledge but you also ideally need leadership qualities to be qualified for which you are applying.

Because you are more likely to specialize in a particular field, hence, an expected level of expertise and leadership would be required of you. However, this depends on the job you apply for.

### **Increased income, increased financial security**

The participants see higher qualifications as a way to link the perfect job along with the benefit of a high salary.

...since I chose a better major and I have higher qualification to apply for a job, then I believe that I can hunt a better job with a not bad salary...In addition, as a single child in a family, when you face your parents will be retired within a few years, we have the responsibility to support our family ... (Kelley)

I think if I have good higher education and then I get one perfect job, I may have more purchasing power. I can be major force providing for my family's daily needs. Having higher education which is the condition for me to take higher salary job. (Mary)

Ophelia reinforces Mary's point but adds that higher education also taught her how to manage her income better in her life.

...the higher your education, the better your chances in attracting a good job with a reasonably good income. However, it's not just about getting a good income, but also knowing how to manage the income. E.g. bargaining for a better price because of doing your 'homework' beforehand.

### **Benefits gained during and from participating in higher education**

The participants outlined positive aspects from studying that were and are helpful experiences for them. The participants' experiences are presented in three separate sub-themes. The first one is "*Extra skills and knowledge*", the second is "*Confidence and Personal development*", and the last one is "*Sharing knowledge with children*".



### *Extra skills and knowledge*

The participants emphasized that they not only received specific knowledge from studying, but they also achieved skills to learn, think, and be critical in their work and life. The women explained how these abilities are valuable to them beyond the need to find a job. For instance, they are valuable in maintaining not just employment but as in Ann's case improving their life. Ann explains:

This year studying at post graduate level has been significant because it involves far more intensive critical awareness and application of my field of study. It also teaches me tools that I can put into place in the workplace.

She also said that:

The main benefit has been learning to assess and think critically. I don't allow myself to be swayed by advertising because I understand advertising companies mind play. I am also teaching my children to not pay attention. I make informed choices on what we do buy. Critical thinking improves all aspects of my quality of life because it has taught me how to make good choices in how we assess our lives and what we do and buy. I use my skills in researching and analysis to help improve health issues in my family instead of just letting things just happen to us. (Ann)

This aspect of critical awareness was also mentioned by Mary when she said that:

My internship experience in a five-star hotel, because I was doing my higher education, so it makes me to be a quick learner [sic] and critical thinker when I doing my job.

Elise also commented on benefits gained from learning, stating that:

Undergraduate studies allow me to expand my ability to learn. ... Yes, during higher education period, my systems to learn are getting improved, I only can say it makes me more academically professional in workplace but still need to practice all principles I learned.

Kelley provided specific examples to explain how women can learn more things than just academic knowledge from participating in higher education.

Moreover, during the higher education, you can definitely learn more things except [sic] knowledge. For example, the method of solving

problems, the ways of thinking and the courage of facing difficulties and so on.

The aspect of improvement in their lives was also commented on by others but not in connection with critical thinking. It was more in relation to improved self-esteem and confidence. This is dealt with in the following sub-theme.

### **Confidence and personal development**

Nearly all participants referred to how participating in higher education had made them more confident. The following quotes demonstrate that the professional knowledge they gained has developed the women's vision of themselves so they have a different outlook about themselves, other people and the world.

Advanced education has helped to build my self-confidence and understand myself and the 'social', 'economic' and 'political' world. It is also significant to me because I have a different outlook and maturity towards my education. (Ophelia)

I think many of my positive life experiences can be attributed to my participation in higher education. For example, it has provided me with a different outlook on life and the ability to see things from different perspectives which has contributed to my sense of empathy/sympathy. (Genna)

In contrast to how it feels to be a stay-at-home mum, Ann said higher education helps her believe that she can achieve in the workplace:

My current course is a great boost to my self esteem. Sometimes being an at home mum can be disheartening and can lead to struggling to believe in your abilities. Going back to study is showing me what I can achieve. I do believe that higher education has made me more confident because I know that I can achieve, I see the results and that enables me to believe I can achieve out in the workplace.

Mary demonstrates the same sense of increased self-recognition by playfully saying that she thinks she has more skills:

Haha, well, I think so. Participating in higher education makes me more confident. I know how to analyse the problem, and solving those problem by myself.

This quote demonstrates that Mary now trusts herself in that she has greater abilities to solve problems in life.

### **Sharing knowledge with children**

Another lifestyle-related benefit from participating in higher education that nearly all participants agreed with was the acknowledgment that studying meant that they would be able to provide better educational support for their children from their increased knowledge and skills.

Yes, I think I can give my children more educational support. I have knowledge and skills, and I can share my study experiences with them.  
(Mary)

Yes, I can start to teach my children when they are small during their everyday life. (Elise)

Definitely, through my education I will be able to better educate my children. (Genna)

I have no children yet. But I think I will be helpful. Obviously, I will be a mathematics teacher and mathematics is an important subject for students.  
(Kelley)

Definitely, I talk all the time to my children about science, economics, history, environmental matters etc. My son is 9 and is determined to be a scientist. My education allows me to examine the wider matters of this world and explain it to my kids. (Ann)

In this theme, Chinese and New Zealand participants have similar perceptions and experiences about the benefits gained during and from participating in higher education. In particular, the three Chinese participants (Mary, Elise and Kelley) all said that participation in higher education can help them to obtain extra skills, and provide better educational support to their children. In the two sub-themes, all three Chinese women had the same opinion. This is the first time consensus occurred that did not happen in previous themes or sub-themes.

### **Up against many walls: Perceptions and experiences of discrimination**

The previous quotes demonstrate that the participants think participating in

higher education enriches their lives and improves their capacities, skills and levels of specialized knowledge. However, the participants also outlined diverse views on discrimination in relation to higher education and women and work that are explored through three parts. The first one is “*Discriminatory stereotyping of highly educated women*”, the second is “*Motherhood discrimination against women*”, and the third one is “*Discrimination (age, gender roles, and appearance) against women: Depends on the context*”.

### **Discriminatory stereotyping of highly educated women**

When asked about gender stereotypes, a range of responses emerged from doubting discrimination exists, to claiming personal experience of discrimination. For example, Elise doubted that stereotyping exists in current New Zealand society because she has never experienced it.

Perhaps, not feel it myself.

Whereas, Genna believes people do stereotype, but she does not know much about it.

This is a difficult question for me, because I’ve never given it much thought. I’m sure people do stereotype, but I’m unsure of the stereotypes.

Ophelia and Ineke are different from Elise and Genna, in that they both think highly educated women are intimidating according to other people’s perceptions and may suffer negative consequences from such stereotyping.

...I think that other people may perceive higher-educated women as intimidating, independent, ambitious, sophisticated and career-focused; perhaps a little snobby or stuck-up too. (Ophelia)

I think men might be a little intimidated, initially. But if they are intimidated by intelligent strong minded women, a PhD isn’t necessarily going to make it worse. (Ineke)

Moreover, Mary, Ann and Ophelia claimed their own experiences of stereotyping. Ophelia has experienced stereotyping in the workplace; she was

doubted by employers as to why she had applied for an un-matched job or one of low position. Also, she reported that her colleagues felt threatened by her status as a highly educated woman.

Applying for any job just to get off the dole. I was asked in an interview the question: "Why are you applying for this job when you have a degree?" I also had 'hassles' from colleagues, especially from people who didn't have any experience with tertiary education, about the same thing. The main reason why I applied for the job was to get a foot in the door considering that the job market was quite tight at the time.

Ann also has experienced other people's misunderstanding of highly educated women:

I have been laughed at by people who don't think like me because I talk about world politics and el nino and la nina. I think many people look at us like we are a strange scary species that might bite them with intelligence. I think there is a perception that we are very driven and rigid and frightening. Some people struggle to communicate with you once they know you have degrees because they don't see you as the same as them.

Mary said, in Chinese tradition, some people do not understand why women pursue higher qualifications because they think women's duties should be to look after the children and husband. In addition, highly educated women are perceived as lacking in female qualities and are unapproachable in some people's perception in China.

When I go back to China, some people knew I am studying master degree, they would say "I do not think women need to study higher education, if so it is very hard to find a husband." Or they think some jobs do not need higher qualifications. Almost people think women do not need higher education, they believe women's responsibility is looking after their families and children. If some people know you are higher-educated women, they may think you may not want to get married, or having a baby. Some people may think you do not like women, or they do not know how to communicate with you.

### **Motherhood discrimination against women**

When discrimination was discussed more generally, some of the participants did identify specific examples of discrimination relating to gender roles. For

example, some of the women argued that there is discrimination against mothers stating employers do not want to recruit women with children because they are worried that women cannot focus on the job.

The participants think that this issue exists in both New Zealand and China. For instance, Mary and Ann both have similar comments of motherhood discrimination in the quotes below:

If you are in China, it would be a problem for women, because as I said that some employees do not want married women work for them, they believe those women do not have enough time focus on their job, they may spend more time for looking after their families. (Mary)

Many bosses are women. However, I think there is discrimination against mothers because of the need to look after children and there is still a lack of flexibility around that. (Ann)

But Elise also talked about the fact that if you did not have children, the employers also did not want to hire you especially when applying for high-position work, because they were concerned that you would have children soon and cannot prioritise work as an employer would want.

Reject by employer because I have not had child yet, so they presume I may want one soon. Yes, especially when I apply for managerial level jobs. It is not about the age itself, it is about whether or not want to have a child or need to spend more time to take care families.

### **Age discrimination against women: Depends on the context**

A few of the participants discussed age as another potential area of discrimination but also indicated that the extent of the problem depended on the context. They presented a range of views, from articulating how it is present due to legislation, (for example, as a consequence of China's superannuation laws), to denying that it would be a problem for them in their chosen profession.

Mary believes that age (over 30) is a problem for women when finding a job, because if you spend more time on a Master's or PhD study, you will miss the

‘golden time’<sup>11</sup> to look for a job.

Moreover, in China, we have compulsory retirement age, so age would be a problem for women when seeking a job.

Kelley stated that age (over 30) is not a big problem but is still an issue for women, especially when women are looking for a job without skills and qualifications, it will be very hard in China.

Not quite but a little bit, though...But I think if you do not have a special excellent skill and you just want to change or apply for a job after you are 30 years old, it is definitely hard in China, a country with the massive population and strictly competition.

However, as a New Zealander Genna deemed age is a not problem for women:

In my line of work, I don't think it will be a problem.

This different point of view is also reflected in the views of Ann, Ophelia and Ineke. They claim it depends more on the context. Women under 30 years old can focus on a job but they do not have much work experience, so they argued that they would be less likely to be employed than women over 30 years old who have gained work experience. But Ann and Ineke also acknowledged that often women over 30 years old have to look after children and family, which can count against them. Age is less relevant than family responsibility as a barrier to gain employment.

There are several issues here. Under 30 year olds are often seen as not experienced enough. I know I struggled with people seeing me as too young to really understand the issues. Over 30 year olds are seen as experienced and valuable, however, the problem turns more to the issue of whether you have children or not. (Ann)

Again, it depends on the job you're applying for. Experience counts in the workforce and most over 30 year old women have a better advantage than say someone with less experience. (Ophelia)

It is a little in some positions, but usually that's related to the age of the people they are working with, and for me, it's more because I have kids'

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<sup>11</sup>In China, normally the age from 22 to 25 years old is seen as the best timing to find a job.

schedules that I have to work around. (Ineke)

**Gender discrimination: Depends on the context**

As with age, the participants sometimes said very clearly that gender discrimination exists but also some said that while it existed they had not experienced it – suggesting a level of doubt in this form of gender-based discrimination. Others more specifically remarked about gender discrimination as being more prevalent with particular occupations or contexts, for example, in Japan.

Only Ineke said gender discrimination has happened to her in the workplace, stating that some people think men are more intelligent than women.

I've had people assume because I was a woman I wasn't as smart as men. I kind of set them straight though.

Kelley does not sense that gender discrimination is a general phenomenon in the workplace and has never experienced it, but she still believes it is a fact in the education field, as she narrated this example:

At the present, I do not think the gender discrimination occurs quite often when you are in the workplace. However it is a fact, before you got the job...for example, in the education field, especially in the primary school, the males become more and more popular since they are considered as more humorous and more vigorous than the females. (Kelley)

Genna believes gender discrimination still exists, but she has not experienced it.

I believe it must still occur, however, I don't believe I've experienced any gender discrimination.

Ophelia also has not experienced gender discrimination but she has noticed that women are usually in low or subordinate positions.

Unsure. I haven't really experienced it first-hand or recognized it as being gender discrimination in terms of climbing the ladder etc. However, I have noticed it generally e.g. women clean up the tea room/dishes etc. Also noticed that there were more women in some occupations than others. E.g. payroll or accounts administration was over-represented by women.



In addition, Ophelia indicated that gender discrimination was more visible in Japan than New Zealand when she was working there.

I felt gender discrimination was more prominent when I was working in Japan than NZ. However, I think this was more to do with society than work.

Elise thinks it depends on the type of job, as some work suits women and some better suits men. So it is not as simple as saying it is gender discrimination.

Reflecting a clear set of expectations is around different gender roles.

Depends on jobs, such as men are expected more than women in labour workplace. Or in some career, women are needed more because females are more patient than males.

### **Appearance discrimination to women: Depends on the context**

A few of the participants referred to the requirement of a certain type of appearance for women as being unfair when recruiting employees. This is because appearance cannot be a standard to judge a person's capability and productivity. Hence it is discrimination against women. However, some participants think that the requirement of appearance depends on the nature of demand in the work. Once again participants' answers showed a range of views from definitely disagreeing, to indicating that it would depend on the job.

Mary, Genna, and Ann strongly agree that the requirement of a certain type of appearance for women is unfair when recruiting employees. This is because employers never have this requirement for men when they apply for a job. Hence, that is discrimination for women.

No, definitely not. I think it is unfair for women. (Mary)

Definitely not, but I have to admit I'm sure I've had employers that have employed me for reasons related to those factors. (Genna)

No, I don't agree. Most women would not be chosen to work if we applied such standards and those standards are not applied to men so should not be applied to women. (Ann)

However, Ophelia and Elise think the requirement of appearance depends on the job. For some specific careers, it is an unwritten standard for applications.

It depends on the job and organization you are applying for. In reality, first impression counts. I think HR Recruitment type jobs, Real Estate type jobs, Professional type positions have an 'unwritten' appearance standard. (Ophelia)

Depend on the job. (Elise)

Kelley commented that unless the nature of the work required it, there was no reason for women to look and dress specially.

Except for those kinds of work which the appearance is helpful for, like the model, the army or the sportsman, otherwise I do not think there should be the requirements for the outside part of person, since there is no any relation between people's appearance and their abilities.

In this sub-theme, the understanding of age discrimination is the main difference between Chinese participants and New Zealand participants. With the influence of traditional culture, most Chinese participants claimed that age (over 30) is a problem when they are looking for a job because employers do not want to recruit women who are over 30 years old. Employers assume women's energy and concentration will degenerate after 30 years of age, so recruiting women aged over 30 years is a consumption of corporate resources. However, New Zealand participants did not worry about that, because they believe that being over 30 years old means you have more work experience which will give you an edge when seeking a job. Cultural differences may make New Zealand women and Chinese women have different points of view on this issue. Chinese women are concerned with their age, but New Zealand women think differently from the Chinese women because they see age as a positive when associated with work experience as something that makes them more employable.

## **Summary**

This chapter illustrated that when women participate in higher education, there

are many challenges leading to them being unable to balance work, life and study. So they have to sacrifice their desires for achieving work, life and study balance. In contrast, some participants believe if women rationally manage time, and gain support and understanding from their family, partner or spouse, studying can become a positive factor to achieve balance. In the second part, the chapter described how women hope higher qualifications can bring more work opportunities, and make them more specialized and professional in the workplace. The findings also demonstrate the various benefits women gained from participating in higher education, including extra knowledge and skills, confidence, and sharing knowledge with children. As participants said, normally participating in higher education is viewed to be positive. However, some issues related to gender role can lead to the outcomes from participation in higher education being more complicated and can therefore be negative. On this basis, the chapter concluded by outlining negative experiences in relation to women's work and life including discriminatory stereotyping of highly educated women, motherhood discrimination, age discrimination and appearance discrimination.

## **CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter draws on material from Chapters Two and Three, and the findings from the interviews presented in Chapter Five. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight and discuss some of the study's more significant findings, in order to analyse what the women spoke about in relation to the study's main research questions. These questions include: why women pursue higher education? How do these women understand and experience the relationships between work, life and study? What are the positive and negative effects from participating in higher education which have occurred in these women's lives? The findings will be analysed using insights from the theoretical framework in Chapter Two and background in Chapter Three.

The first section discusses how these women's points of view on pursuing higher education reflect the influence of HCT. The second section explores what these women have specified as being the benefits from participating in higher education. The third section focuses on the extent to which these women feel that they are able to achieve or not achieve some kind of balance between the complex and multiple demands of work, life and study. It also examines the decision-making that these women have either engaged in or have reflected on in relation to their life course and their participation in higher education. The fourth section deals with these women's perceptions around the concepts of equality and discrimination. This part of the study is used to consider the nature of discrimination which still persists despite government intervention in New Zealand and China. The fifth section highlights how, despite their cultural divide, a greater area of commonality than difference exist between the stories of the women who participated in this research.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION AND NEO-LIBERAL IDEAS**

The answers expressed by participants in this research in different ways stated that the most important motivations for them in pursuing higher education are the desire to gain increased work opportunities and higher incomes. Clearly, participants' beliefs that higher education ensures greater employability reflect aspects of HCT and lifelong learning. Because of the influence of these theories, participants believe absolutely that if they can show employers that they have completed a specific course with essential knowledge and skills, they can have a more competitive edge of gaining employment and high income. Thus, the participants' primary goal for getting a higher qualification was not to deepen their understanding of the world but rather to improve their career opportunities.

One of the key questions in this thesis is, why do so many women in the modern context of New Zealand and China choose to participate in higher education to the point of outnumbering men? The theoretical framework pointed to the impact of the women's movements over time and the influence of lifelong learning, human capital theory and employability as playing a role in increasing participation in general and that of women in particular in higher education. None of the participants referred to the women's movement when they spoke about their motivations. This raises questions around the lack of influence of the women's movement in the current context and the concern that women accept that they need to learn before they can earn. Instead, the majority of participants' statements reflected their acceptance and belief in the messages embedded in lifelong learning, human capital theory and employability. This was true even of the Chinese women who came from an ideological background that is not completely neo-liberal.

All the women wanted higher education to provide them with better job opportunities and higher wages. They assumed that the relationship between gaining qualifications and improving their career would be automatic. This

demonstrated their belief in the tenets of human capital theory even if they did not necessarily know that this is what they believed. They also assumed that they were right to be responsible for their education and career, demonstrating a neo-liberal conception of HCT and the more individualistic understanding of employability. New Zealand participants accepted their individual responsibility rather than perhaps seeing the government as also having a role to play. The Chinese women's responses in particular are different in that they do not see the government as being responsible for their employment at all. Given the communist context in China, people would assume the government would look after them, but they also have accepted sole responsibility for gaining and remaining in employment. Moreover, only one participant reflected on the labour market and the global economic recession as also playing a role in determining job opportunities. However, even this participant only mentioned this point as an increased motivation to return to study and gain more qualifications rather than a limitation that would exist regardless of how qualified or unqualified they were. The women seemed to assume that the higher qualification would make them immune from the current likelihood of unemployment or under-employment due to the long-term impact of the global economic recession.

This question also illustrates other social issues for women in relation to gender segregation at work and the income gap between men and women. There are men's and women's jobs at all levels of education, skills and experiences, and men's jobs usually seem to be at a higher status and also have higher incomes. It is this kind of gender segregation that also motivates women to participate in higher education in order to strengthen their positions in the labour market. Berggren (2006) states, women from low-status and low-income backgrounds are more likely to participate in higher education. Thus, there is a tendency for women to be more qualified than before, but their qualifications still do not bring the same return in the labour market as qualifications do for men, again

challenging the assumptions of HCT in relation to qualifications leading to increased earnings. This is not to say women's participation in higher education is not valuable, as the participants from this research outlined diverse kinds of benefits that they had gained from participating in higher education which were helpful experiences for them. This is discussed in the next section.

## **WOMEN'S POSITIVE EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Many of the participants' stated that their motivation to participate in higher education was to gain competitive advantage in the labour market. However, and somewhat ironically, the tangible benefits are different from their stated motivation. Some participants emphasised that they not only learnt specialized knowledge, but they also obtained the skills to learn, to think, and to be critical. This knowledge and skills allow women to achieve personal development and to a certain extent improve the standards of their live. The perspective of these participants is consistent with the literature of lifelong learning and life course (human development). The important benefits that learning provides are opening people's minds, bringing personal growth and development, and developing abilities. In addition, the learning also is about attaining life aims relating to people's interests, life fulfillment, career and personal development. Nevertheless, these enhancements in life are not necessarily related to the higher income and improved job opportunity as initially aimed for by the participants. This research therefore argues that it is of significance that studying in higher education expands women's critical awareness and helps them become critical thinkers, increasing their understanding of the world, and practicing their abilities. Thus, knowledge and skills gained in higher education are valuable to the participants beyond the need to find a job; instead, they are valuable as a means of on-going improvement to one's life, irrespective of its actual benefit to one's job hunting. This view is illustrated further in the following paragraphs.

Almost all the participants stated that participating in higher education provided them with more confidence. One reason is that higher education equips them with useful knowledge and thereby enhances their capability to participate in political, economic and social activities. The effect of this is that women feel they have built a sense of social belonging through active participation in those activities. Furthermore, women feel more confident after participating in higher education because they gain the abilities to achieve tasks and solve problems by themselves. This is consistent with the lifelong learning theory expressed in the previous theoretical framework, a capacity to learn is part of human potential for survival, individual development, life fulfillment, self-confidence, and self realization (Chapman, Cartwright & McGilp, 2006; Illeris, 2002; Rizvi, 2007). The feeling of belonging to the society one lives in is crucial to their sense of happiness and mental well-being. As can be seen, participation in higher education provides an on-going improvement in one's life and although it may be intangible it is significant and must not be overlooked.

A further interesting finding is that nearly all participants acknowledged that participating in higher education meant that they are or will be able to provide better educational support and share study experiences with their children if they have them. This ability is derived from their enhanced knowledge and skills learnt from their participation in higher education. This is another invaluable improvement in women's lives. For example, it is true happiness for women when they can use their own knowledge to teach their children and to effectively take part in their child's successful upbringing. This belief reflects the first wave notions of gender roles and higher education that women's participation in higher education was to be an educated mother or teacher for the family and society. Reflecting this notion, the higher education received by women does not only benefit the participant, but rather it is passed on directly to their children and the actual result is that the wider society benefits as well. As lifelong learning theory mentioned, learning contributes to making a civilized society,



develops spiritual side of people's lives, and promotes active citizenship. It strengthens the children, family, community and consequently nations (Burke & Jackson, 2007; Chapman, Cartwright & McGilp, 2006; Illeris, 2002; Rizvi, 2007). Therefore, if a mother possesses necessary knowledge, skill, passion, and wisdom to be a good teacher in the context of a family, then that is beneficial for the next generation and society as a whole. However, this reinforces rather than challenges traditional gender roles and demonstrates how the pressure to do it all and have it all is maintained beyond the time of study.

As we can see, direct pecuniary gain or enhanced employment opportunity does not appear to naturally form part of the equation of participating in higher education. The research reinforces what the literature states about benefits from participating in higher education. These benefits also reflect that the one dimensional nature of HCT is flawed because the theory merely emphasized that education and training can increase individual's employability and income. This flaw is demonstrated by the participants' views and beliefs outlined above. In contrast, Chinese and New Zealand participants both outline diverse outcomes from participating in higher education that include: obtaining extra valuable and useful skills; becoming more confident; and being able to provide better educational support for their children. These are gains that are very real, very practical and most valuable in terms of permanently improving one's life. The thesis argues that this can be said to be the guaranteed gain of receiving higher education rather than assumption of employability. Moreover, these gains are non-deprivable advantages to one's life, whereas the increase in employability of an individual depends on many other variables, for example the likelihood of being made redundant always exists. Furthermore, whether one is able to increase income level or obtain desired employment is largely influenced by the global economic crises as well as other issues related to gender. It cannot be said that the mere participation in higher education will result in pecuniary gain and improvement of life – in financial terms. Rather, the issue is one that is much

more complex, involving the historical role of women, the economic and social status of women, discrimination faced by women and the current state of the labour market at any one time. These challenges faced by women will be discussed in finer detail in the following sections.

### **WORK, LIFE AND STUDY BALANCE**

All participants referred to balancing the demands of work, life and study as being of significant importance in their lives, but they always face a dilemma in balancing the different demands of work, life and study. Participants held two different perspectives and methods to deal with this dilemma. Some participants believe that balancing the diverse demands of family, career and study is impossible. Therefore they have to sacrifice the choice of having a full-time job, children or relationships in order to allow them to pursue other desires and necessities. For example, most participants involved in this research have decided to defer marrying and having children in order to ensure completing higher qualification. However, this deferment could potentially have a negative impact on women's lives. In contrast, other participants do not want to give up on any one of employment, family and education, so they have tried to juggle the different demands to achieve a relative balance in their lives. Hence, in this section, the chapter specifically discusses these two situations: sacrifice versus juggling.

#### **Sacrifice**

As the representation of the impossibility of achieving balance, Ineke used negative words to describe her life such as 'stress', 'exhaustion', and 'frustration'. She wished there could be more time for her to be a super mother caring for her children, as well as being an excellent student working on her courses. This is connected to the superwoman gender role; society expects modern women to play multiple roles equally well in order to fulfill the different demands of their lives. But the reality is that they cannot do everything and be

everything. The unrealistic expectations on women create pressure which leaves women exhausted. Hence, modern women's timetables are full. They do not really get off work when it reaches 5 o'clock. Instead, they will go home and enter the other unpaid workplace; family life. Therefore reflecting the literature, the participants demonstrated how it is more difficult to maintain balance due to competing pressures at work, desires for education, and demands at home.

Even though women have tried to find a balance, often it is just too hard because there are many obstacles to achieve work, life and study balance. Most participants identified child care as the most challenging aspect of balancing work, life and study. This is consistent with literature pointing out that women's major source of stress comes from housework and caring for children, leaving them with no time to do community activities, study, hobbies, and physical fitness (Houston, 2005; Neidermeyer's & Paludi, 2007; Sigal, 2007). Children, especially under fives, need nearly 24-hour care, and either study or work can be quite intense, requiring a lot of concentration and time. Hence, women sometimes have to make decisions about how to fulfill the various demands of work and life that means sacrificing one or the other. Some of the participants demonstrated this kind of decision-making in their statements

From a life course perspective, Pallas (2003) holds that education trajectories influence an individual's work and family formation where prolonged time in school impacts on the timing of entry into family roles. Some unmarried and childless participants chose to marry and have children after completing higher education because they did not have the time and energy to plan for a family while studying. As such they sacrificed their ability to have a family at an earlier age. The married participants in turn made a different sacrifice, demonstrating the sacrifice element of balancing work and life, not study. Ann, as a mother and wife, had her babies first, and had to stay at home till her children were older

before going back to study. This is because women have to pay more attention and to take more responsibilities with their family and children which can be a distraction from their study. Therefore, for both the unmarried and married women, their life course choices have been interrupted in relation to participating in higher education.

This is of concern, as highlighted by some participants who believed that this life course deferment has generated other potentially negative consequences. One potential negative consequence of participating in higher education to the sacrifice of family formation could be the reduction in chances to find a suitable life partner or spouse. This is because women's participation in higher education means that they will spend more time in the university than other women, as such, the initial age of marrying is missed. Therefore, when seeking a spouse the 'second time' around there is actually fewer men to pick from. Furthermore, some participants thought that the more educated a woman becomes and the more qualifications she holds, the less likely that men will be interested in her. This is because those women want to find men with similar educational levels in order to have more in common with them, which omits a large group of men. Another potential consequence is that if women defer having children, that can also be a risk to their fertility levels. Women may ignore their body clocks in order to pursue study and a career which sadly leads to some women being unable to become pregnant easily.

### **Juggling**

In contrast to the impossibility of achieving balance expressed by some, Genna and Elise believe that they can juggle the different demands of work, life and study. They believe that through time management and changing their attitudes and expectations of life, they can do all that they wish to do. Because there is not an equal and perfect balance for various work and personal activities, women should not put so much pressure on themselves to successfully play

every role in their lives. Instead, these women argued they should find a relative balance between work, life and study in order to have a satisfactory level of involvement or fit between the multiple roles in their lives.

In addition, some participants advocated that women should be adept at planning and prioritizing, be effective time managers, and be able to multi-task. If women can reasonably manage their time so that they can study instead of demanding a sacrifice, this can be the key to gaining some flexibility to enable a balance between life and work with study. Although study may lead women to not having enough time to look after their children and join in family activities, the nature of study is still more flexible when compared to a full-time job (working from 9 am to 5 pm). The time of tutorials and lectures can be chosen, and the study can be done at home, so that women are able to arrange and balance their time for family and study.

In being blind to the critique and limitations of HCT it is also difficult to know how to convince women that they are entitled to and deserve the kind of support expressed in the social democratic notion of employability. Instead, both the Chinese and New Zealand women who were participated in this research positioned themselves with a very individualistic neo-liberal stance, claiming that they just needed to work hard and manage their time effectively and they would in turn achieve all their goals in work, life and study. The Chinese women in particular took a very individualistic line, seemingly unaware of the kinds of constraints that exist around them at home in China as well as in New Zealand. This was very curious because the culture that they come from, with the Communist political environment and Confucian beliefs, suggests that they will have far more limitations placed around their decision-making. It is difficult to know where their neo-liberal thinking came from. It could be part of being the younger Generation 80's which resulted from the single child policy, knowing nothing else than an individualistic existence, or it could stem from

studying in the neo-liberal environment of the New Zealand higher education system. What is clear, however, is that it shapes their thinking and this is of concern because, what will these young women do if they are not able to achieve the kinds of jobs and relationships that they desire? Who is responsible for them when they fail to achieve their work goals, as they may well do given the current economic environment in New Zealand and China? Should it just be left to themselves to sort out or should the state play a role? These questions will be returned to in the conclusion of this thesis.

Regardless of whether the women sacrifice or juggle, these women reinforced the literature review in that women continue to bear the major responsibility of raising families. This demonstrates that there is a lack of recognition for that role and the fact that this responsibility could be more equitably shared with men (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; LeGates, 2001; MWA, 2004; 2008). Children and family responsibilities are what women have constraints about when making choices about whether or not to participate in higher education. Therefore, if family members can understand and be willing to make sacrifices to allow women to have more time and space to study, it should be possible to achieve a greater work, life, and higher education balance. This is reflected in the claims of some participants that the understanding and support of family members can be a positive force in juggling the demands of work, life and study. But this kind of support is uncertain, and in situations of solo parenting it is difficult to see how women could ever balance the demands of work, life and study without sacrificing one. Thus, the question has to be asked: is it acceptable to lose the ability to get married or have children for the sake of a higher education?

## **EQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION**

The women's rights movements have undergone three waves of revolution in western countries. In the first wave, equality between women and men was

extensively debated. The objective of the second wave was to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women (Chodorow, 1989; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; Dicker, 2008). In the third wave, New Zealand and China have challenged the traditional ideologies of gender roles, and have implemented legislative changes to eliminate any direct and indirect discrimination in all aspects for women. Both countries have policy objectives which assert that women should have equal social and economic rights. This includes equal remuneration for work of a similar nature, equal opportunity of employment, equal access to education and training, and equal access to health services and government benefits and the like. Despite these legislative changes to protect women's rights and certain media publications' claims that gender discrimination no longer poses a significant problem for women, gender discrimination nevertheless exists. It can be said that the extent of discrimination is meaningfully reduced; however, the rights guaranteed in the literature are inconsistent to the findings in this research. The research argues that discrimination exists but the extent of it is also linked to contextual background where it is being seen or experienced.

As contended, gender discrimination is highly dependent on the context in which such discrimination occurs. For example, in this research the participants' answers regarding gender discrimination were very interesting, because a range of responses emerged, from doubting its existence at one extreme to others claiming personal experience of discrimination at the other. This range of responses was also formed by their remarks about gender discrimination being more linked with societal and economic contexts, meaning gender discrimination is more prevalent in some societies compared to others and more accentuated in certain professions. One of the participants, Ophelia, stated gender discrimination was more prominent in Japan than in New Zealand based on her observations while she was working there.

According to participants' answers, gender discrimination based on age is much more prevalent in the Chinese labour market compared to the New Zealand labour market. Consequently, many private companies in China do not implement the Labour Law to protect women's interests and equal rights. Instead they prefer to hire young workers who are prepared to work for lower salaries. To this effect, it harms Chinese women's equal employment opportunity and forces women to work in low-paid jobs. Age as a potential problem causing discrimination to highly educated women is dependent on the context, as New Zealand and Chinese women have different perspectives and understandings of this issue. Chinese women believe that if women spend more time on further education such as undertaking a Master's or PhD study, it would lead to them missing out on the best age to look for a job. It is believed in China that due to physiological and psychological factors, women's energy, and concentration will degenerate earlier than men. If placed in the context of the business world, the so-called middle age arrives earlier for women than for men and women are considered old at a younger age than men. Therefore, Chinese employers are generally reluctant to recruit women candidates who are over 30 years old in China. This type of employment discrimination is also caused by and reflected in the legislation where the compulsory retirement age for women is 55 years old but for men it is 60 years old in China. On this basis, women have less time to excel in their career and are forced to retire at a younger age than men, hence age is not only a discrimination but a significant concern to women in China. On the other hand, New Zealand women participants have stated that age will not be a negative factor for them, rather it is a positive. While they acknowledged women under 30 years old may have more time to focus on the job, women over 30 years old have more work experience which can be an edge for them in terms of employability.

Another example of the varying degree of gender discrimination found in different societies is that Chinese participants held the view that appearance for



women is an unwritten standard for employers when recruiting female employees. This issue is more common and serious in China. The literature shows that in recruitment, genetic factors such as age, weight, height and appearance are the paramount standards used to select suitable employees, instead of the usual standards of looking for abilities, skills, knowledge, and capacities (Li, 2007). While some participants think that the requirement of plausible appearance is acceptable as depending on the nature of the job (for example, of the role of a model or an actor can demand good appearance), the participants for the most part categorically disagreed with the requirement of attractive appearance for women in white-collar employment. Most participants raised argument that employers never have this requirement for men when they apply for a job. This is a clear example of discrimination which cannot be negated by obtaining a higher degree.

Thirdly, highly educated women are negatively stereotyped. Again, the severity of this type of discriminatory stereotyping is dependent on the society and culture in question, as New Zealand women and Chinese women have different experiences of these stereotypes. According to New Zealand participants, highly educated women are considered intimidating because they are seen as independent, ambitious, sophisticated, career-orientated, and strong minded, perhaps a little snobby or stuck-up, too. The research discusses that this stereotyping is relative to the traditional gender role, where women were expected to be passive, servile, glossy, flawless, and in certain cases almost as submissive sex objects existing mainly to make men happy, and women were forced to live vicariously through their husbands and children. Therefore if there is any attempt to strive for personal dream or advancement made in sacrificing family and children, women are seen to be breaking away from social expectations in a negative way. The characteristics of highly educated women are contrary to the traditional gender role, so some of the participants worried that they would not be attractive to men. It is certainly true that the right of

women to obtain higher education is without discrimination. However, the present norm, where bright women who wish to advance their career and be successful are being stereotyped as intimidating, cannot be said to be discrimination free.

In contrast to New Zealand women, the Chinese participants suffer from another type of stereotyping. In the Confucian ideals, women were limited in the opportunity to participate in both basic education and higher education. Instead ignorance was the best virtue a woman could possess. What was required of women was to obey their husbands and look after children. This culture has been passed down thousands of years and even in the contemporary Chinese society, women are still expected to sacrifice their own desires for the need of supporting their husband, and should avoid surpassing their husband in social status. The participants discussed that from the influence of Confucian values, Chinese people do not understand why women need to pursue higher qualifications because they think women's duties are to find a suitable husband and care for their family. This is a clear statement of gender discrimination, where women are not treated as equal to men. Some justified this discrimination by contending that according to the Confucian values a good husband will give you everything that you demand, therefore women do not need to have a higher degree. Although females are now given the right to obtain proper education and to participate in the work force, gender discrimination still exists and can influence women's decision-making. Thus, despite the effort to rectify discriminatory thought and cultural practice, women's rights cannot be said to be fully liberated from traditional gender roles in both New Zealand and China, as the traditional roles of men and women had been accepted by our ancestors a long time ago and the norms are deeply embedded in people's minds.

Lastly, there is one type of discrimination against women that is prevalent in both New Zealand and China, namely discrimination against motherhood. As

Gregory (2003) states, since women first entered the workplace, employers have treated women with children differently from other employees. Both countries' participants commented that employers do not want to recruit married women or women with children due to the fact that the employers are concerned that women will spend more time looking after their children and be less devoted to the company. Elise added that even women who did not have children can also be rejected by employers when applying for managerial position work because they are concerned that sooner or later they are bound to have children. This gender discrimination against women because of the restriction of employment of married women is not applied to married men. One must acknowledge that women's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place them at a significant disadvantage in the struggle for employment and career development. Although employment law in New Zealand has tried to address this problem by recognising parental right to maternity leave, the problem has not yet been eliminated.

Although most participants said they had not experienced gender discrimination in their work and life, they believed that highly educated women still suffer from disadvantages as previously outlined. This thesis acknowledges that discrimination has lessened through the greater efforts of society and organizations, and women's situations have become better than before. However, with the development of society, the patterns of discrimination have changed. The problems women now face have become more complex and must be viewed in context and in their own circumstances. The societies should redefine the concept and characteristics of gender roles, and recognise the benefits the community can receive as a result of women participating in higher education. Only in this way can gender discrimination be properly addressed and eliminated by educating the society about the new conception of equality in order to provide a real and reasonable equality between women and men.

## **THE MAIN SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND NEW ZEALAND WOMEN**

In relation to motivations of participating in higher education, there were no significant differences between New Zealand and Chinese women's perspectives. Participants had similar expectations and goals of higher education in which they hoped higher education could bring them more employment opportunities and higher incomes. However, it is worth mentioning that Mary and Kelley both used the word "have to" to explain why they have participated in higher education, suggesting that the decision to participate is experienced like a compulsion, indicating motivations beyond the level of the individual. In addition, both countries' women accepted that gaining education and employment was their own responsibility. They ignored the significance of labour market demands determining job opportunities.

New Zealand and Chinese women have different perspectives and experiences of work, life and study balance in relation to their different situations. Ann is the sole 'superwoman' in this study. She is married with two children. She sacrificed her study in order to support her husband and look after her children. But now she is back at university to complete a higher qualification with help from her husband. Through this support she is able to balance the different demands of family, work and study. Ineke is a single mother with two children. To her it is just not possible to balance work, life and study. She sacrifices parenthood in the short term, so she can have economic independence in the long term. In contrast, three Chinese women are married or have a partner without children, and did not have a job during the study period. Although 'superwoman' is not a common concept in China, perhaps with the influence of New Zealand's gender role all the Chinese participants believe they can and will be a superwoman able to balance work and family easily. They are confident in playing multiple roles in their lives through time management and the correct choice of lifestyle. It is not possible to judge whether they can be or not, but their beliefs are in contrast to

the literature.

For the discrimination, New Zealand and Chinese have more different types of understanding, perception and experiences. For example, although participants from both countries' believe age and appearance should not be a standard to recruit female employees, this kind of gender discrimination is more common and inescapable in China. Thus the New Zealand women did not have any concerns or experience in relation to this kind of discrimination. In addition, participants from both countries reported discriminatory stereotyping of highly educated women, but their reasons and explanations of this stereotype were different. That is linked to their respective cultures and gender roles. With the influences of a 'superwomen' idea, New Zealand women are expected to be as smart and excellent as men in all areas. However, if women are really successful in work and obtain a high level of education, they are seen as independent, ambitious, sophisticated and intimidating in other people's perceptions. In contrast, Chinese gender role is influenced by Confucian ideals. Women's participation in higher qualifications cannot be understood as being positive by some Chinese. For example, it is believed that for women it is easier to get married with a median level of education in China. Clearly, gender discrimination still exists for both New Zealand and Chinese women, but the participants did not challenge these societal values and the role that government could take in alleviating this problem. Instead, they thought the gender discrimination is created by employers and other people, and the extent of the problem depended on the context.

### **Summary**

Based on this discussion the key arguments of this thesis are:

- The motivations of women participating in higher education have been influenced by neo-liberal understandings of lifelong learning and HCT rather than the feminist movements. And with this, participants accepted

individual responsibility for gaining higher education in order to achieve greater employability.

- The benefits gained from participating in higher education are not always related to job opportunities or higher incomes. Instead benefits include extra knowledge and skills, personal development and better educational support to children. These benefits are more invaluable for enhancing women's lives.
- Work, life and study balance is a serious challenge for modern women. They sometimes have to sacrifice family formation (defer marrying and having children) to enable participation in higher education. However, this deferment of life course may create potential negative impacts on women's desires around marriage and their fertility levels.
- Gender discrimination still exists in New Zealand and China, but women's understanding, experiences, and concerns are different based on their different cultures. The participants did not challenge societal values and/or demand collective responsibility. Instead they assumed the extent of the problem depends on the context.

These arguments will be used to develop recommendations for change in the final chapter of this thesis.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The tendency of more and more women pursuing and participating in higher education is widespread through the developed and developing countries such as New Zealand and China, reflecting the changes in what women aspire to and how they perceive themselves in terms of gender roles. Modern women now have to play multiple roles in order to fulfil the different demands of their lives, so the work, life and study balance is becoming the main challenge that every woman has to face.

Chapters Two and Three presented the theoretical and contextual considerations related to women's movements, gender role, and higher education to illustrate how the perceptions of women and the nature of higher education have undergone dramatic changes since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The literature argues that three waves of feminism have gradually changed women's positions in political, economic, cultural and educational spheres. In the first wave, women gained the vote and women's rights and positions were widely debated in western society. In the second wave, feminism emphasized that most differences between men and women were mainly an outcome of society and culture. Thus, women fought to change the traditional gender roles to enable women to have the same rights and opportunities as men to participate in all aspects of life including paid-work and higher education. In the third wave, feminism advocated eliminating all kinds of gender discrimination in the workplace, family and society, acknowledging the different experiences of women in relation to their ethnicity as well as their economic position in society.

With the women's movement, the traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers changed in both New Zealand and China. In New Zealand, social expectation of women is influenced by the concept of superwoman. Women now have to cope with the demands in the workplace,

responsibility at home, and desires for education. The establishment of the new government improved Chinese women's positions; however, traditional Confucian ideals still influenced women's norms, behaviours and values. Even though women have more rights and opportunities to participate in social activities, women are still expected to sacrifice their own desires. Both of these situations create challenges that women need to negotiate in their pursuit of work through higher education.

The nature of higher education has also changed through the rise of neo-liberalism. Lifelong learning and human capital theory (HCT) have transitioned from a social democratic vision to a neo-liberal idea in education policy. Some literature argues that the broader social democratic vision of education has been undermined by the emphasis on economic imperatives. The aim of education is now to build a highly-skilled and competitive workforce in order to cope with dynamic changes of the knowledge economy. This emphasis is inconsistent with life course theory. The purpose of learning should be to attain life aims relating to people's family, career, interests, self-confidence, and self-realization rather than the demands of economy and work. HCT has shifted the responsibility and risk of education to individual because it emphasises that education can increase individuals' productivity, employability and future incomes. There are two other areas of tension that women need to negotiate in modern life. Their self-actualization is being sacrificed to the demands of the economy, while they are pushed to find jobs that may not exist.

The findings reported in Chapter Five illustrated that the most important motivations of women's participation in higher education are increased employment opportunities and high incomes. They believe higher qualifications can make them more attractive to employers and bring a good job and higher incomes to them. However, the benefits they stated that they gained from or during higher education are not related to these two elements. The benefits



instead included extra skills and knowledge, self-confidence and achieving the goal of sharing education experiences with their actual or potential children. Although education can improve women's personal development and may enhance future work opportunities, it also may generate the potential negative effects that can happen to some women. Modern women always face a dilemma when making decisions of participating in higher education. They need to fulfill and balance different demands of work, life and study in ways that mean sometimes they have to sacrifice one or the other. Most participants prefer to get married and have children after completing higher education. This is illustrated more broadly by the trend to get married later in life now. In relation to discrimination, the women expressed different perspectives and experiences. The range of answers was from doubting discrimination exists, to stating they had personal experience of it. They emphasized that the extent of gender discrimination is linked with society and context. For example, age discrimination in recruitment is more prevalent and serious in China than in New Zealand.

Connecting the literature and findings show that women's motivation of participating in higher education is largely influenced by the lifelong learning and HCT's assumptions. However, there is a big gap between the dream these theories encourage and reality. According to the participants, the benefits gained from participating in higher education were not related to their work and financial security. Thus, the research argues in line with the literature that education may not have a strong connection with higher education. Instead, this thesis argues employability and income is influenced by the changing nature of demands of the labour market, for example those caused by economic recession. Moreover, the responsibility of education and gaining employment should not be merely taken by an individual, as child-bearing or gender segregation in the labour market means that they will not have the same return on investment as men. But the women in this study accepted the sole responsibility, despite the

likelihood of discrimination.

The research also argues that participating in higher education not only produces benefits for women, but also generates difficulties for women when balancing work, life and study. Some statements by the New Zealand and Chinese women positioned themselves with a very individualistic neo-liberal stance which assumed that if they worked hard and managed their time effectively they would be able to achieve all their goals in work, life and study. Although these women all believe they are or can be superwomen, the participants who had faced these choices painted a different picture. The statements by these women reflected a belief that the work, life, and study balance is not easy or possible. They commented on exhaustion from household chores and childcare that led them to have no time to focus on study. Thus, they have to sacrifice one or the other to fulfill their competing goals. This strategy of sacrifice was also demonstrated by the unmarried and childless women's preference to marry and have children after completing their higher education. This life course deferment may have potential negative impacts on the women that could mean less chance of finding a suitable life partner or spouse, and a risk to their fertility levels. Either unmarried or married women, women's life course decisions have been interrupted in relation to participating in higher education.

Finally, the research discussed that although women's positions have been enhanced in New Zealand and China, gender discrimination has not yet been eliminated. Both countries stereotype highly educated women, but women's experiences are different in the two societies. In New Zealand highly educated women were concerned their characteristics of independence, career-oriented and ambition are contrary to the traditional gender roles leading them to be unattractive in men's eyes. Chinese women complained they cannot gain understanding and support from partners, friends and relatives when they pursue higher education. In addition, childcare is still an obstacle to women's study,

employment and promotion. For Chinese women, another issue is age discrimination because they believe that when they are over 30 years old they are likely to have less chance than men to find a good job. In contrast, New Zealand women did not have this concern, as they believe women over 30 years old have an edge in the workplace from having greater life experience. Lastly, most New Zealand and Chinese women thought that appearance, weight and height as the prime standards used to select female candidates was unacceptable gender discrimination against women. But some women claimed the requirement of appearance for women can depend on the nature of the job such as a modeling. While in New Zealand women can turn to the Human Rights Commission to fight such discrimination, in private sector companies in China such practices are commonplace and accepted as a social norm.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND SOCIETAL SUPPORTS**

Given the global economic crises and other issues related to gender, the motivations to and outcomes from participating in higher education are complex. By highlighting the issues that may occur when women participate in higher education, it is hoped that this thesis can motivate government and society to make changes in policy and practices in order to improve the outcomes and the circumstances for women, and to promote women's rights at an international level.

For women's higher education, this study recommends that the government or the University provide more flexible models of study for women. For example, online courses and flexible hours to allow women to study at home through the internet or other technological instruments. Furthermore, the government aims to help to finance women's study through the Student Loan Scheme, but the needs of women are different from men. Most women think student loans create financial barriers to the accessibility of higher education and have long-term impacts on women's financial security. This is because the income differential

between men and women leads to women being unable to pay back student loans. The government could provide student allowances universally and promote student scholarships on wider research aspects for women.

Work, life and study balance is not only a slogan, but to become a reality it needs the efforts of society, government and family. Firstly, society has high expectations of women, and does not recognize or value women's unpaid work, particularly in China. Within this context, society needs to overcome gender stereotyping where work, life and study balance could be an aspiration of the wider society, not just women. Secondly, the government should provide support and services to help women to achieve a greater work, life, and study balance. For example, following the New Zealand example, the Chinese government could provide more free hours of childcare and reduce childcare tax. Additionally, even though there is 20 hours of free weekly childcare in New Zealand, the government could extend those hours for mothers with multiple roles who have full-time work, who participate in higher education and who have children. Lastly, women still take the major responsibility for family life. Somehow family members need to be educated to understand and be willing to make sacrifices to allow women to have more time and space to study. Therefore, women would be more able to integrate study into their life and work, and could access support and services to allow them to pursue higher education.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research is deficient in the scope of interviewees. Due to some limitations, the number of New Zealand women (four) and Chinese women (three) was unmatched, and which limited how the data could be analysed. Moreover, the women's specific situations were not considered primarily by this research. For example, one woman was married with children, some women were married or engaged without children, some women were single and another woman was a solo parent. Therefore the women's understandings and experiences of work, life

and study that led to the findings were varied and not comprehensive or precise. In future studies, the interviewees could be divided into four groups; married women with children, married women without children, unmarried women, and single parents, and more interviews for each group could be completed. On this basis, the researcher could more effectively compare women's perspectives and experiences within each group and then compare all groups. This thesis has just provided a snapshot of what women experience. Given the lack of literature on women in relation to higher education, especially concerning Chinese women, much more research could be completed in this area.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

To conclude, this thesis has demonstrated women's motivations are influenced by lifelong learning and HCT rather than the women's movements. They take a very individualistic neo-liberal stance to understand the responsibility of education and employability without seeing the government also has a role to play. Although participating in higher education can achieve women's personal growth and development, it also can have a potentially negative impact on women's lives. Women face a dilemma in work, life and study balance, and gender discrimination is still against women in both New Zealand and China.

Returning to my story, I also have the same worries and concerns as these women. In relation to my original research purpose: "Why do so many women participate in higher education?", I found external pressure played a more significant role to push women into pursuing a higher qualification. Today, participation in higher education is to improve people's career opportunities rather than to deepen their understanding of the world. That makes me more scared because I and most women are moving away from the real purpose of learning, but we are unable to change this situation even if we are already aware of this problem. Because a higher qualification is required by employers and society, that gives us no choices. Although a Master's degree perhaps is useful

and helpful for me to find a good job today, I am still worried about my age and other problems and issues related to the perceptions of gender roles in China. I know these issues could not be solved in a short period, but it is hoped that this research may attract the attention of policy makers, social researchers, HR practitioners and the government in order to make them focus on issues related to “women participating in higher education”. By highlighting the difficulties that can occur for women, policy makers can use the information from this study to improve the situation for women participating in higher education.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### **The list of questions**

#### THEME ONE – Background of the interviewee

1. Could you please describe yourself to me? (like age, subjects of study, marital status and children)
2. From elementary (primary) school until now, how many years have you spent on your study?
3. During this period of study, which part is the most significant for you and why?
4. What motivations led you to access higher education and why?
5. Have any barriers limited your participation in higher education?

#### THEME TWO – The experiences of participating in higher education

1. Could you please tell me what were your experiences of work once you had completed a qualification?
  - 1.1 Are there positive effects from participating in higher education that have happened in relation to your work? (if you haven't worked yet, please assume for the future)
  - 1.2 Are there negative effects from participating in higher education that have happened in relation to your work?
2. Could you please tell me what were your experiences of life once you had completed a qualification?
  - 2.1 What types of positive effects have happened in your life from participating in higher education?
  - 2.2 What types of negative effects have happened in your life from participating in higher education?

#### THEME THREE – How to deal with these negative effects

1. If participating in higher education affects your work, how do you deal with the impacts?
2. If participating in higher education affects your life, how do you deal with the impacts?
3. Who do you think should pay attention to the issues of participating in higher education and how?

#### THEME FOUR – About the future

1. Do you think society should provide more flexible study opportunities for women and how?
2. Do you have any plans to study in the future?

## APPENDIX B:

### Initial letter for potential participants

Yuanyuan “Brenda” Wu  
Department of Societies and Cultures  
University of Waikato  
[yw278@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:yw278@students.waikato.ac.nz)  
021 0599 685

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am an international student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Waikato undertaking research on women participating in higher education for my Master-degree study. I would like to research and understand more clearly the relationships between women, education, life and work. I am interested in this topic because normally participating in higher education is viewed in a very positive light. However, given the global economic crises and other issues related to gender, the outcomes from participation in higher education are now more complex.

My research topic, ‘women’s experiences and understandings of higher education’ will compare New Zealand and Chinese women’s perspectives. This comparison is made in order to explore what types of motivations lead women to access higher education and how women deal with the impact of participating in higher education. I wish to interview female graduate students in person or via E-mail questions about their perspective and experiences on this topic. An interview will take about 40-60 minutes in length depending on answers, answering the E-mail questions should take around about the same amount of time.

If you have any questions about my research, or are willing to be either interviewed by me in person or answer the questions by E-mail, please contact me by E-mail ([yw278@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:yw278@students.waikato.ac.nz)) or mobile phone (021 0599 685). We can then discuss whether it is best to answer the questions via E-mail or participate in an interview. If you agree to an interview we can then agree to a convenient time and place for you to do the interview.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

I look forward your participation.

Regards

Yuanyuan “Brenda” Wu

## APPENDIX C:

**University of Waikato  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Department of Societies and Cultures  
Labour Studies**

LBST594-10C “Labour Studies Thesis”

Research Topic:

**“Women participating in higher education – comparing experiences  
and perspectives of New Zealand and Chinese women”**

Researcher: **Yuanyuan “Brenda” Wu** ([yw278@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:yw278@students.waikato.ac.nz))

Supervisor: **Gemma Piercy** ([gemma@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:gemma@waikato.ac.nz))

### INFORMATION SHEET

I wish to either interview you or ask the questions by E-mail about your experiences and perspectives in the field of higher education. My interest in this research stems from the current trend of more and more women enrolling in higher education. From this phenomenon, I really want to know what types of motivations lead women to access higher education more, and what types of positive and negative effects that can happen through this pursuit. This is in order to create a body of work that may help other women deal with the different impacts of participating in higher education.

The information from our interview or the answers in your E-mail will be used for my thesis and other publications. The completed thesis will be placed in the University Library, and an electronic copy will be placed on the internet that will be available for any other people. Your interview transcript or E-mail will not be seen by other people than my supervisor (IR&HRM Convenor Gemma Piercy). Unless you explicitly agree, your name will not be used in my thesis so you can be anonymous. I will carefully store either your E-mail or the audio-recording of the whole interview and a verbatim transcript of your interview in a safe place for 5 years; these are only available to my supervisor and me. After that, your E-mail, the audio-recording and transcript will be destroyed. If you wish, I am able to send the copy of the audio-recording and a partial transcript to you. You can check or correct any information from the interview. At the end of my thesis research, I will provide you with the web address for my thesis so you can read it.

If you agree to take part in this research by either answer the questions by E-mail or the interview, you have the following rights:



- a) To refuse to answer any particular questions in the E-mail or the interview.
- b) To terminate the interview at any time.
- c) To ask any further questions about the E-mail questions, the interview or research project that occurs to you, either during the interview or at any other time.
- d) To remain anonymous, if you wish.
- e) To withdraw your consent within three weeks after the interview taking place or responding the E-mail by contacting me.
- f) This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, E-mail [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz), postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3015, Hamilton 3240.

**Researcher's contact details:**

Yuanyuan "Brenda" Wu  
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0210599685

**Supervisor:**

Gemma Piercy  
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## APPENDIX D:

**University of Waikato  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Department of Societies and Cultures  
Labour Studies**

Interview for LBST594-10C “Labour Studies Thesis”

Research Topic:

**“Women participating in higher education – comparing experiences  
and perspectives of New Zealand and Chinese women”**

Researcher: **Yuanyuan “Brenda” Wu**

Supervisor: **Gemma Piercy**

### CONSENT FORM

*Please circle  
your choice*

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| ➤ I agree to either answer the questions by E-mail or participate in an interview as specified in the Information Sheet.   | Yes | No |
| ➤ I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which explains the topic of the interview, E-mail questions and the conditions under which they will be conducted. | Yes | No |
| ➤ I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions relating to my participation in the interview or E-mail questions.  | Yes | No |
| ➤ I agree to this interview being audio-recorded.  | Yes | No |
| ➤ I understand that I can withdraw from this research project within three weeks of the interview taking place or responding the E-mail by contacting Brenda.          | Yes | No |
| ➤ I agree that the interview or my answers of E-mail question may be used in the thesis.   | Yes | No |
| ➤ I am willing to be identified.   | Yes | No |
| ➤ I wish to see a copy of the interview transcript.  | Yes | No |
| ➤ I wish to receive the web address of the completed   | Yes | No |

thesis.(E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_ )

“I consent to be interviewed or to provide answers by E-mail for this research on the above conditions”

Signed: *Interviewee* \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

“I agree to abide by the above conditions”

Signed: *Interviewer* \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If completed this by E-mail, please print, sign and post this Consent Form to me. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this project may be made to the University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Science’s Human Research Ethics Committee (University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3420, or [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz)). This Committee has approved the researcher in this Course to go ahead.

**Researcher’s contact details:**

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