How Do Gender Relations and Culture Shape the Lived Experiences of Chinese Female Expatriates at Their Workplaces in Sydney?

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Yinghua Yu

(Signature)

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Abstract

Globalisation has dramatically accelerated flows of human capital for both long-term migrants and short-term expatriates around the world, making workplaces more culturally diverse than ever before. This poses new challenges regarding cultural differences in workplace communication and organisational values, including differences in practices surrounding gender roles. These challenges are particularly significant given the rise of Asian economies and the increasing presence of Chinese workers and business in places like Australia. This thesis, employing a qualitative approach, explores the experiences of Chinese female expatriates in Australian workplaces to see how these experiences have reshaped their perceptions about work, career, and their personal and professional identities.

Abbreviations

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

DIBP: Department of Immigration and Border Protection

Expat: Expatriate

OFDI: China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment

R: Researcher

PR: Permanent Residence

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Introduction

Globalisation has not only increased the trading between businesses and governments of different nations, but it has accelerated flows of human capital—for both long-term migrants and short-term expatriates—around the world, making workplaces more culturally diverse than ever before. Differences found within organisations reveal more than just issues relating to language and emerge in other ways, such as adapting to a new social environment in terms of organisational values, gender relations, and migration status. In addition, it involves negotiating one's newfound 'ethnic identity'. Expatriates, in particular, have to manage those differences in relation to the precarious nature of their status. As a result, they share multiple dimensions of identity, and are potentially required to make different choices when facing a variety of situations. Their experiences and accounts of these experiences, therefore, can be complicated and multi-layered.

This thesis intends to gain insights into the diversity of Chinese female expatriates' experiences at their workplaces, grappling with cultural and gender differences, through a focused investigation in Sydney. In doing so, this study will scrutinise key notions of 'culture' and 'gender', not just as theoretical ideas, but as frameworks through which female expatriate workers make sense of their experiences in culturally diverse workplaces.

The primary question that this thesis explores is:

> How do gender relations and culture shape the lived experiences of Chinese female expatriates in their workplaces in Sydney?

To better inform this study, I have also asked the following questions:

- How does gender influence other factors that affect cross-cultural communication, such as the specifics of organisational cultures or the broader national cultures?
- How do Chinese female employees experience being an expatriate in a culturally diverse workplace?

Why Expatriates?

My interest in expatriates' experiences emerged from my previous occupation as a Migration Agent in Shanghai, where I used to assist non-Chinese[1] with relocation and migration to China. During that time, numerous issues were raised by expatriates and personnel in human resources management that intrigued me, beyond my profession at the time. As such, communication at the intercultural and cross-cultural levels seemed to be much more complicated than text books had explained.

My curiosity deepened due to my experiences following relocation to Australia where my husband accepted a job opportunity in 2015. His Australian employer treated us as their family and always sent us gifts on our birthdays. I was, however, shocked after receiving the first gift in 2015—a beautiful bouquet of rare white and green chrysanthemums, which were given for ancestors or in memory of lost loved ones in China. I accepted their good intentions without knowing my cultural practice. Upon further enquiry, a florist assured me that those flowers were meant for respect and love for a mother in Australia. After confirming this cultural difference existed, I still felt uncomfortable.

I started to talk with ethnic Chinese women in Western Sydney about their general working and living conditions. Some talked about situations of sticking to Chinese employers with low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions—complaining, yet continuing. Negative comments were made about issues at work, such as miscommunication at different levels. Indeed, proficient English language skills were the key for effective communication, yet sometimes this did not matter because misunderstandings occurred even when speaking the same language, in these cases, was Mandarin. Furthermore, differences were also observed in terms of gender. The Chinese population in Sydney seemed to maintain some cultural stereotypes towards working females in Australia. Chinese females, therefore, experienced cultural diversity

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[1] Non-Chinese refers to anyone without a Chinese passport. Anyone without an official Chinese passport is defined politically and legally as a "foreigner" in China. Therefore, the division between Chinese and Non-Chinese is not based on ethnicity, but in the sense of a broader nation-state.

and cultural shock from within their own community. Many difficulties lie in such situations, such as fighting linguistic obstacles, cultural boundaries, gender stereotypes, and the work and life conflict. These were experienced through multiple aspects, such as their ethnic identity, their migration process, their family and work, as well as the ways to approach others and make sense of their behaviours in a specific organisational culture and in a broader, culturally diverse Australia.

I started researching literature on cross-cultural communication, especially in relation to Chinese identity and expatriate management, and realised that:

- Literature in cross-cultural communication is largely oriented from perspectives of non-Chinese, exploring how they struggle while residing and working in China; yet limited studies are explored from the perspective of Chinese, nor examined in relation to their experiences;
- Research tends to see Chinese as a homogenous culture without acknowledging that it represents a great variety of categories within.

This thesis, therefore, aims to explore the experiences of Chinese expatriate women in an Australian context to see how the changes from their migration process shape their perceptions, in the hope of employing several ideas to explore its complexity.

Why Chinese Female Expatriates?

'Expatriate' is a problematic term (Cassiday 2005; Mao and Shen 2015). It originally means a person who moves away from one's native country and adopts a new residence abroad. Being an expatriate (or an 'expat' as it is referred to colloquially), however, indicates a more complicated process than simply the physical movement across national borders, as it also refers to adapting to new social settings. Due to gender differences, female expatriates represent this complexity in terms of their ontological sense of cultural belonging and social status. As residents in a new social and cultural environment, they are the "betweeners", bringing their own cultural frameworks, but consequently being professionally reshaped at their workplaces. There is a sense of orientation and disorientation in that Chinese expatriates are at the frontiers of experiencing differences, yet meanwhile, they also represent "differences". Therefore, it

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is crucial to look at the ways in which female expatriates describe those differences when grappling with various accounts of their own experiences.

Chinese female expatriates, as a rapidly growing demographic in Australia, are the primary focus of this study because of the increasing role of Chinese businesses, both in the Australian and global economy (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2016). Australia is home for migrants and expatriates from all over the world, and females becoming proportionately noticeable in the past decade (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2016). The DIBP (2016) on *Work in Australia* reported that, Chinese citizens were among the top fifteen citizenships that visa 457 (temporary working visa) was granted, which increased dramatically from 3.8% in 2011 to 6.3% in 2016. This fact, together with my previous experience working in China, is the key reason for the focus of this study. Despite the significant growth in the number of female workers in Australia over the past three decades (Pocock 1988, 2006) and growing interest in cross-cultural study of the effects of migration on labour forces, the experiences of expatriates in the workplace are underrepresented in academic research.

The ways in which Chinese female expatriates describe their experiences will prove valuable in understanding their views of the role of ethnicity and ethnic impacts on their professional careers. Furthermore, through discussing their experiences within the workplace, this group will shed light on how their ideas of culture and gender shape their behaviours, as well as their perceptions of others.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of relevant literature from multiple disciplinary perspectives ranging from cultural studies, linguistics, sociology, and gender relations, to business and expatriate management. Due to the complexities in examining the experiences of Chinese female expatriates, such approaches are reasonable to draw rich discussions around several relevant concepts, as well as to examine their intersections. The choice of a qualitative methodological approach is provided in Chapter 2 with the research process described, including research design, data collection and analysis, as well as an outline of the interviewing process and its rationale. Data analysis generated

from semi-structured interviews is presented in Chapter 3, 4, and 5. Chapter 3 opens discussion around the diversity of workplaces, looking at issues such as communication and language, all of which are important aspects of Chinese female expatriates' accounts of experiences at work. Chapter 4 examines the intersection of gender relations and culture in Chinese female expatriates' workplaces in the ways that shape their experiences towards deeper thinking about their multiple dimensions of identity. Chapter 5 discusses the differences in organisational cultures, as well as the impacts on Chinese female expatriates' choices with regard to their work and life balance, and professional career planning. The conclusion summarises the central ideas from empirical data, offering an example of current ethnic identity through reviewing the experiences of Chinese female expatriates. It also lists implications and limitations of this project, and future research directions on expatriate research.

Chapter 1 – Exploring Expatriates

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature in multiple disciplines that focuses on expatriates. It starts with an overview of diversity in the workplace, in particular its impacts upon women's experiences. Drawing from the field of feminist literature, I further explore the underrepresentation of the category of the women I am researching. In this chapter, I will identify the gap in the field of expatriates, by ways of examining ideas around gender relations, culture, and intercultural communication, as well as their intersection, to understand the complexity of their experiences. I then argue that the intersection of all factors shapes how Chinese female expatriates make sense of their experiences and how these underpin the complexity of multiple dimensions of their identity depending on the contexts.

Unpacking gender relations allows a valuable way of seeing differences in the workplace, particularly helpful in examining the ways of professional roles and multiple aspects of professional women's identity. Workplaces are typically gendered in terms of the roles of leadership and power (Liu 2017). Moreover, sometimes, gender interplays with culture, which further complicates the lived experiences of expatriates.

The idea of culture requires attention as well because it entails expatriates' references as to how they see the differences in their workplaces and how they make sense of their behaviours. This thesis will mainly utilise a broader sense of "culture" to understand ethnicity, as well as the specifics of organisational culture to see the differences in the former.

Expatriates, as a group, reflect how those different factors intersect and influence their lives. Research suggests that the ways they see cultural differences consequently shape their behaviours within the workplace and their approaches in communicating with others. Consequently, their understandings lead to choices between work and life, as well as professional career planning. Indeed, existing literature about expatriate management is still largely formed and developed with the ideas of "race" and "ethnicity" from a certain degree of "white" and "western" approaches (Li 2017), with little attention paid to the "rise of Asia", particularly Chinese who are among the rapidly

increasing groups in professional roles. With the dramatic increase of Chinese professional women both within China and all over the world (Kamp 2013; Goodman and Chen 2013), there is a need for acknowledging their experiences.

Diverse Workplaces

Because of globalisation, human mobility is more frequent than ever before. As a result, enterprises have opportunities to engage more freely in transnational activities and recruit employees from multiple backgrounds. This leads to a higher degree of diversity in the workplace. It may seem easy to picture the diversity in terms of cultural differences, yet the reality of culturally diverse workplaces is rather complex and in need of further examination (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2007; Roberts et al. 2014). This has become increasingly pressing both within business and as a focus for academic research, not simply as a "cultural" difference, but in terms of the richness and complexity of individuals' lived experiences within its space.

Approaches to the diversity of workplaces and related issues draw on insights from a variety of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, cultural studies, sociology, and communication. Several critical issues emerge, however, when investigating the increasing cultural diversity of workplaces. "Going global" seems to be one of the most pressing agendas for transnational organisations (Adler and Gundersen 2007). As a consequence, an array of issues follow, such as managing culturally diverse workplaces (Adler and Gundersen 2007; Jackson and Ruderman 1995), leading globally, and customising operational conducts in different branches (Adler and Gundersen 2007). Other studies focus on employees and organisations, and their interrelation (Harley 1999). As Butcher (2011) suggests, workplaces are becoming more global in the sense that multiple factors have increased the diversity, and these are the spaces to share different roles because of the mobility process.

A growth in literature regarding expatriates has already identified the importance of understanding differences in the workplace with particular attention paid to linguistic and religious differences, yet little has been given to the diversity within each culture. China, for example, may appear to many as a homogenous culture, which is not in fact the case. Indeed, there exists a great variety of categories within itself (Selmer 2002). In

saying this, it helps to understand the diversity of individual experiences and their accounts.

Expatriates: Positioning in the Jungle

The term "expatriate" needs some unpacking as it can be interpreted in multiple ways. It has been referred to as a human's physical mobility across boundaries of nation and state (Shaffer et al. 2012), or stated that the human is seen as an "agent" that outlines social and cultural exchanges that expatriates engage in (Janssens et al. 2006). The latter indicates a broader presence of migration, identity, and community (Adams and Van de Vijver 2015), in particular, the "identity re-evaluation" alongside the transnational migration (Butcher 2006). These notions suggest that the essence of the expatriate experience lies in its dynamics and complexity (Adams and Van de Vijver 2015). The majority of literature on expatriates largely draws on perspectives of business and management with a focus on cross-cultural adjustment (Haslberger et al. 2013), and more recently some emphasis on acculturation (Lineberry 2012) and expatriate identities (Kohonen 2008). As Kohonen (2008, p. 327) argues, "the international assignment is a more profound experience" that shapes expatriates' identities, particularly forming its multiplicity and malleability.

Traditional approaches to expatriates are from "two basic and independent perspectives" (Brewster et al. 2014), being the organisation and the individual. These are related to the stream of human resources management by looking at the processing of organisational frameworks and the problems and the outcomes of expatriation. Psychosocial theories come into place here and explore deeper concerns of the expatriate group (Anderson 2005). More studies have begun to raise the awareness of the complexity of expatriation (Bennett et al. 2000) and examine its multi-faceted process, involving perspectives ranging not only from reviews of different assignments and organisational settings, but also moving beyond "the expatriate/organisation perspective" (Brewster et al. 2014), with "attention paid to the expatriate family" (Brewster et al. 2014; Lauring and Selmer 2010). These studies, however, tend to categorise expatriates as groups or representatives of a certain community (Sam and Berry 2010), where individual experiences are not the primary focus.

The social and cultural differences between the host country and the home country in a broad sense are another aspect of expatriate studies that attempt to capture the disparity between "eastern" and "western" senses in cross-cultural management within the workplace (Smith et al. 2008). Some studies are formed from a human resources point of view, that is, looking at how to manage relationships with local staff (Adler and Gundersen 2007). Sometimes, the importance of cultural differences seems to be downplayed by organisational conducts and overlooks the complexity within the culturally diverse workplaces, where situations could be more sophisticated due to the interrelation between multiple factors, such as ethnicity, gender relations, and migration status (Roberts et al. 2014; Plaut et al. 2014).

There is also a shift in terms of the ethnic backgrounds of expatriates. Earlier expatriates were largely initiated from developed countries (such as America and France) to developing countries (such as China and India). A large proportion of existing research on expatriates is formed from "western" points of view (Li 2017), which often strengthens the dominant "western" culture, consisting of mainly Anglo-Saxon, or "white" people (Owen et al. 2007; Selmer, 2002). With recent trends of "Asian success", more enterprises from developing countries have been setting up branches in developed countries (such as Australia and America), and therefore come with their own personnel. However, perceptions from this aspect are underexplored in the academic or business spheres.

Particularly with the "rise of China" (Ang, 2016; Rogers et al. 2017), the net flows of China's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) reached $145.67 billion in 2015, which were outlined as the fluctuated growth in the past ten years and "ranked second in the world" (Li 2017). Integrating with the growth of Chinese international enterprises, the number of Chinese staff engaging in the overseas corporations increased dramatically from "1 million to 1.5 million" (Li 2017). Australia, as one of the favoured countries in which Chinese enterprises have been investing, has witnessed the increase of ethnic Chinese who have gained the attention of the academic field and the business practitioner (Kamp 2013). There are a small number of researchers, such as Christina Ho and Jock Collins, that have begun to look at Chinese migrants (Collins 2002; Ho, 2008; Ho and Alcorso 2004), with a new focus on gender identity (Hartl 2003,

2004), and also its intersection with ethnicity (Collins and Low 2010; Ho 2008). Both Collins and Ho have studied Chinese professional women, but with a different focus respectively. Collins looks at Chinese businesswomen to understand what the underlying Chinese diaspora is about, whereas Ho (2008) looks at the professional women in terms of their gender roles with different priorities and identity shifts within their family during the migration process. This suggests an array of discussions around Chinese expatriates that is not only about themselves, but resides under the grand frameworks of the Asia-Pacific political and economic relationships involving temporary and permanent migration (Robertson 2013).

Some of the discussions go beyond the traditional sense of expatriates by acknowledging the diversity of categories within their culture and the complexity of issues drawing upon them (Brewster et al. 2014). Apart from organisational differences as discussed earlier, individual experience becomes more significant to explore the degree of differences among expatriates, which is also crucial to demonstrate the interrelations of several factors, such as culture, gender, ethnicity, and migration. Selmer (2002, p. 20) argues that the values of Confucianism, such as "authoritarian, hierarchical principles and status differences" are still influential among Chinese ethnic expatriates, indicating the importance of understanding ethnic Chinese organisations and their interpersonal relationships (Yang 1986; Bond 1991).

Unpacking Gender

One tendency in studying expatriates is to utilise the lens of "gender", an important factor when researching and understanding their experiences (Westwood and Leung 1994; Volpp 1996). This is because societies have different value systems and customs around gender, and because gender itself is a source of difference, often highlighted in the battle of equality within cultures. Gender is a multifaceted and problematic term existing within diverse contexts (Connell 2003, 2014). This thesis will not attempt to unpack the complex debates around gender, but will draw upon several approaches to examine the significant impacts of gender within the workplace. Gender is, of course, socially and culturally conditioned (Butler 1990), and forms the basis of designating certain roles for people. Gender is also seen as a social identity and an independent

agent (Kashima et al. 1995). The concept of gender is cultivated with definitions relating to sexuality in the social context with certain behaviours attributed to the associated roles (Holt and DeVore 2005). Pocock (1988, p. 3) also suggests that "sexual division of labour is a product of both cultural factors, such as sexist ideologies and patriarchal traditions, and of complex economic relations between male and female workers and between employers and workers". Other studies argue that gender is linked to the social identity that individuals and groups perceive (Volpp 1996; Clark et al. 1991), and it is examined with certain role expectations (Connell 2003, 2014). Wajcman (2013) believes that women bear more pressure in the workplace to act like men and exhibit masculine characteristics, such as assertiveness, power, or even aggression. These studies provide the solid foundation for this research in examining how gender is understood to the extent that it orientates females' perspectives and categorises them with social expectations of behaviours in their professions.

Although gender equality in terms of equal pay and equal rights is commonly understood worldwide as the promotion of women's rights, females are still being stereotyped in different ways, particularly in the workplace (Connell 2014; WHO 2002). The major stereotypes exist in male-dominated industries and/or occupations, with a greater proportion of males in management positions, giving rise to the terms "glass ceiling", "accent ceiling" (Connell 2014; Wajcman 1983, 2013) and "bamboo ceiling" (Hyun 2012). In some situations, gender is the only factor that impacts upon women's career progressions (Shaffer et al. 2012), however gender is only one aspect in some contexts that determines the whole situation (Selmer and Leung 2003; Westwood and Leung 1994). As a democratic and open-minded society that is Australia, females seem to attain more freedom of choice that could be considered fair between men and women, yet sometimes gender inequality appears in more nuanced ways in the context of the workplace (Pocock 1988, 2006). Statistically speaking, even with the rising number of female managers in the public and private sectors, the percentage of women in the overall population is largely under-represented (ABS 2015). According to the *Workplace Gender Equality Agency* Report 2016, women are under-represented in management positions and are paid 24 percent less than men (AHRC 2010). Though more females are pursuing higher education, they still have difficulties in entering

certain fields, such as Information Technology (IT), construction and finance, where more men are expected to fill roles in these industries.

Current studies in leadership and business management emphasise statistics on gender representation (Connerley et al. 2008; Rajasekar et al. 2013), yet few studies look at why the roles of females are underexplored. Managerial roles are associated with supposed masculine traits such as a strong presence of power, aggressiveness, and results-orientation. Though there are trends in modern human resources management which suggest the "soft" approach of managing people (Jenkins and Delbridge 2013), women are still less engaged with managerial roles, particularly above middle ranks within organisations because they are associated with stereotypes that deem them to be less motivated due to their household-related responsibilities and their time management skills (Pocock 2006).

There are other studies, however, that fall into the feminist perspectives that highlight so-called females' skills in multi-tasking, mothering, and interpersonal and communication are actually advantages that keep the team running efficiently within the workplace (Janssens et al. 2006; Nina and Yvonne 2011). Some researchers present females as easier to adapt to cultural changes and prove statistically to be more successful than males during international assignments (Nina and Yvonne 2011; Janssens et al. 2006). However, these studies do not change the reality that female expatriates are still a minority group.

Interestingly, within the context of expatriates in Australia, more females choose to fulfil their family duties instead of pursuing their professional career during their migration process (Collins and Low 2010; Kamp 2013). The psychological transformation significantly changes their perceptions. Perhaps the question of multiple dimensions of identity requires further examination due to the multifaceted roles that expatriate professional women perform. They are subjected to a whole set of issues, indicating the intersection of gender with other factors, such as culture and migration.

In the intersection between gender and ethnicity, Asian females are among the rarely represented groups (Collins and Low 2010) and Chinese professional women are even rarer among Asians. With limited research about Chinese expatriates, little attention is given to professional women and their experiences (Collins and Low 2010), particularly

the discourse between the commonality shared among them, such as conflicts between work and life, and the issues that they experience as migrants in their adopted country. The fact that a small number of Chinese female expatriates are in top management roles is due to multiple reasons, which could be attributed to deeply embedded cultural family traditions and values, social stereotypes both in Australia and China (Tahir and Azhar 2013), and migration status (Varma et al. 2006). Chinese professional women, therefore, may have to make choices between pursuing their individual career and reprioritising their family responsibilities to enable work opportunities.

Though it is not new to outline the intersection of gender and race in the labour market, my intention here is to provide a deeper perspective to better understand the challenges that Chinese female professionals face as expatriates in the workplace. Yuan (2011) has studied the choices of Chinese migrants from rural areas to urban cities in China that are at times not made out of their free will, which transnational migrant Chinese women may also share regarding their positions as Chinese women. There are cases, however, where Chinese women do seem to choose their preferred career freely, yet due to their migration status among other factors, are forced to pursue different routines in order to achieve the ultimate purpose of committing to the family as a whole (Ho 2006).

Minding Cultural Differences

One way of acknowledging the diversity of workplaces is to closely examine the idea of culture, which is in itself complex, dynamic, and constantly changing (Williams 2011). The complexity of culture is widely recognised in academic literature (Ang 2011), but is difficult to constrain due to the developing nature of human beings and their activities. Williams looks at culture as a way of life or a group of ideas or beliefs, which often rests on its entities of fixture (Williams 1976). More frequent usage of culture is to describe the differences within nations, in the sense of "ethnic" communities or lifestyles (Breidenbach, 2009), such as "consumer cultures" and "Shanghainese culture". Yet the term "culture" is more often used in culturally diverse societies to refer to national or "ethnic" backgrounds rather than a whole "way of life". It is thus also used to construct others as different from the dominant population (Watkins and Noble 2016; Watkins et

al. 2013). Ang (2011) suggests the complexity of culture particularly lies within the culturally diverse environment, such as Australia (Ang 2011; Ang et al. 2007). The concept of culture seems to be an everyday idea in Australia and it is often deployed without any clarification of its intended meanings. However, it is important to grapple with its multifarious and complex meanings to understand what challenges expatriates face in a different cultural environment.

Although culture has been and still is widely explored in social sciences, it has been developed differently in the context of business and the workplace. Six dimensions that Hofstede (1994) raises to examine culture are influential in business and management. Yet his approach, together with the GLOBAL project, is problematic in that he fails to acknowledge the categories within the cultural community and discards the changing and complex essence of culture (Hurn 2013), which statistics cannot measure. Within one cultural community, there are many factors that exist to facilitate differences, such as ethnicity. Studies in ethnicity and migration have identified some characteristics of Asians, as "Chinese success" (Ang 2016), and "Asian fails" (Noble 2017). The notion of "ethnicity" is often captured and therefore attached to certain stereotypes. The Chinese, for example, are known to be good at maths and studies (Noble 2017), yet ways in which to review Chinese identity is crucial to fully understand their lived experiences. Liu (2017) outlines "the fluid, shifting ways in which identities were constructed" and the "double consciousness" of "the white gaze" in terms of examining Chinese Australian professionals, demonstrating that their identities were "tactically asserted within highly constrained organizational and socio-political environments" (p. 801). This poses the question regarding the positioning of ethnicity as an expatriate within the workplace: how does one negotiate one's ethnic identity within these organisational expectations in Australia? According to Adams and Van de Vijver (2015), this negotiation exists on the next level of understanding of the Chinese female professionals' experiences. The ethnic identity provides the cultural references for those Chinese people, yet, are reshaped by organisational cultures (Ho 2008). The process of identity negotiation and reconstruction is, therefore, unique for expatriates (Kohonen 2008).

Organisational culture is another dimension of facilitating differences. Hofstede (1994; 2001) uses the examples of the multinational organisation, IBM, to demonstrate the

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importance of corporate culture and its impacts on employees in terms of professional behaviours (McSweeney 2002), but he fails to acknowledge the intersection between organisational culture and the broader national culture, that is, how each branch in different locations may vary on its practices according to work culture. Though his "organisational culture" is still widely cited, his description of the organisational setting is superficial by categorising "eastern" and "western" without acknowledging their complexities. Other researchers in management also study the influences of organisational doctrines, as well as comparative studies of multinational corporations in terms of localisation (Schein 1985), to fit into the broader national economic, political, and social culture. It is, therefore, important to be mindful of the organisational culture of the workplace when investigating Chinese female expatriates' experiences. Furthermore, human mobility actually draws attention to the personal agency in explaining those differences (Janssens et al. 2006).

Speaking a Second Language

Speaking a second language is a common practice for Chinese expatriates, because they are moving to English-speaking countries like Australia and therefore need to speak English in the workplace. Language can certainly be identified as a way of discerning cultural differences, but it indicates more than that (Hodge and Louie 1998). The significance of sharing a common language is increasing with the growth of global workplaces, regardless of geographic location, and is becoming explicitly crucial for effective communication, but also implicitly important for exchanging information relating to values or understanding ways of living.

Language could also reflect more in other ways. As Selmer (2006) suggests, language is a reflection of thinking and living. Speaking a second language is not simply a tool to convey meanings but also to exchange views and values (Hall 1973). According to Selmer (2006), there is an association between language ability and socio-cultural adoption. In some situations, speaking the same language is the gesture of recognition from one person to another (Watkins and Noble 2016). Sharing the lingua franca could indicate the commonality of ways of living (Piekkari et al. 2014; Huff 2013), and it immediately creates a close relationship between the communicators, in particular

among others who are not sharing the same language (Burbidge 1982). It, therefore, creates common space for certain groups and even forms a sense of community, which is particularly important for expatriates. Meanwhile, the impact of sharing a language is context-based, that is, it may serve as a tool for recognition for its insiders, but appear as a threat for outsiders (Hodge and Louie 1998; Chun 1996).

Language also reflects ethnic identity, such as Chineseness (Chun 1996), often seen as consisting of characteristics of being conservative and less outspoken. The "Confucius values", others have concluded, suggest that Chinese language reflects moderation of ethnic Chinese, who often respect others but reserve their own opinions (Bond and Hofstede 1989). This was confirmed by other linguistics studies (Giles and Byrne 1982; Burbidge 1982; Block 2009). Furthermore, some second language acquisition research suggests a close correlation between language and ethnicity recognition (Giles and Byrne 1982). In terms of negotiating one's identity during the migration process, Noble (2013) indicates the link between language and community recognition. This is important to acknowledge in situations where Chinese female expatriates prefer speaking Mandarin so that they can achieve some degree of recognition.

Expatriates: Making Choices

Given all those rationales discussed above, female expatriates have to make choices as to how to balance their work and life, as well as plan their long-term professional careers. The duality of expatriates lies in their reality of facing similar situations with local women, and meanwhile, minding the temporality of their stay.

The work-and-life conflict has been discussed frequently in mainstream literature (Pocock et al. 2013; Overbaugh 2011), and it has gained more attention in expatriate communities more recently (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010; Ho 2008). Orientating from the broader perspectives of "race" and "ethnicity", this topic is largely seen through the lens of "white" people (Pocock 2006; Hartl 2003), but not much attention has been given to Asians, who are on the rise in numbers within the contemporary world.

Some researchers have begun to investigate Chinese females and all the different reasons for moving to Australia. The big difference between Chinese professional

women in China and those in Australia lies in the role of their extended family play. In urban cities like Shanghai, white-collar females often have their extended family or exterior helpers (called *Ayi*) to share the responsibilities of attending to the child(ren) and organising household responsibilities (Goodman and Chen 2013). Their perceptions have a direct impact on their decisions of attaining a work and life balance, whether work–oriented or family-oriented.

Conclusion

Through reviewing relevant literature on expatriates, this chapter has identified the underrepresentation of female expatriates' lived experiences, particularly in the workplace. A multiple disciplinary approach is needed in order to address the complexity of their experiences, with attention paid to issues relating to gender, culture, language and communication, and their intersections. This chapter, therefore, argues that Chinese female expatriates have to take account of several ideas in describing their experiences, and sometimes, their interpretation of certain situations may vary in outlining one aspect or several. How they illustrate the differences reflect their negotiation of their ideas with practices. This is particularly valuable to guide the research design, research process, and data analysis of this study.

Chapter 2 – A Qualitative Approach

This chapter discusses the methodological approach of the research, as well as research design, recruitment of participants, and data analysis. A qualitative approach is employed to examine the lived experiences of Chinese female expatriates at the workplace. Qualitative studies are useful to capture the subjective perspectives of participants (Bryman 2015; Boyatzis 1998), and they are "especially effective for studying subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviors" (Babbie 2017, p. 326).

In examining the complexity of lived experiences, an in-depth qualitative approach was used to explore the ways Chinese female expatriates understand and describe their diverse experiences. Within the limited time of a small project, rich data was generated through this approach. Insights about their accounts of complex experiences at work, such as being Chinese, or being female, or being an expatriate and a professional, are explored, which other quantitative methodologies that prior research utilised in the area of intercultural communication in business and management have not been able to withdraw. Rather, existing literature from the quantitative approach is useful to identify broad issues regarding workplaces and organisational cultures from general views (Hofstede 1994, 2001) , as well as being valuable for studies in large sampling processes for comparative studies in terms of coping mechanisms in cross-cultural management (Antal and Izraeli 1993).

Criticism arises when evaluating studies employing quantitative methodologies to investigate issues in different cultures and gender relations at work, suggesting that they lack well-grounded theories or adequate conceptual sophistication (Bryman 2011, 2016). Moreover, questionnaires and formal interviews may fail to capture the complexities of culture. As Breidenbach (2009, p. 278) argues, "sampling problems aside, questionnaires and formal interviews reflect how people see themselves and want to be seen by others, not their complex, often contradictory behaviors". As such, they fail to capture the participants' subjectivities. Breidenbach (2009, p. 278) additionally observes, "surveys also fail to capture the influence of politics and the historical moment on both what people say and what they do". In considering these critiques, I decided that qualitative methodology would be a more insightful approach

to capture the complexity of experiences, and, at times, contradictory phenomena, presented by Chinese female expatriates.

As a key aspect of experiences at the workplace, I investigate examples of cultural differences in order to identify how those Chinese female expatriates describe and position their experiences, as well as situations where their multiple dimensions of identity conflict to picture their hidden strategies. This is one of the main aspects of female expatriates' lived experiences that emerged anecdotally from my previous professional experience. This research thus seeks to provide insights into understanding cross-cultural obstacles, particularly stereotypes and gendered issues faced by Chinese female professionals. Such a shift of identities might arise because of a clash between a sense of Chinese ethnic identity and other factors, such as being a woman and a migrant in dealing with complicated situations. The conflicts may also emerge around different understandings of gender values and occupational roles, or different protocols regarding people of the opposite sex (Rajasekar et al. 2013).

Interviewing is a powerful method to gain insights of participants' accounts of their experiences. As Babbie (2017) suggests, "Being there" is a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs in all their rich complexity. Yet as Pickering (2008, p. 19) argues, experience cannot be simply presented as data, but "involves an interpretation of what happens in life". Silverman (2013) also criticises that the purpose of qualitative interviewing is not to "get inside the heads" of a particular group and to tell things from their "point of view" (p. 201), because "you cannot magically assume the position and perspective from within which their own lives are lived" (Pickering and Lealand 2008, p. 20). What matters is the "duality of structure" in experiences, including the process of "self-interpreting" and "attending to others' experience in the various accounts given of it" (Pickering and Lealand 2008, p. 20). In doing so, interviewing is a valuable process for interviewees to reflect on themselves in various situations at work. It is another way to see through their experiences with semi-structured questions around complicated ideas, such as ethnicity, gender, and migrant status, in making sense of their own situated experiences.

Kvale's metaphor for the qualitative researcher is to be a "miner", which "assumes the objects possess specific information that the interview's job is to dig it out" (Babbie

2017, p. 319). Yet, according to Pickering (2008), those subjectivities cannot simply be explored, but are in need of method or analytical examination. Perhaps, because qualitative interviewing could be viewed as "flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance" (Herbert and Irene 1995, p. 43), it allows the researcher to grapple with the distance between the speaker and listener, particularly the cultural meanings and the nuanced notions behind them (Neuman 2011). As Herbert and Irene (1995, pp. 46–47) suggest:

> Design in qualitative interviewing is iterative. That means that each time you repeat the basic process of gathering information, analyzing it, winnowing it, and testing it, you come closer to a clear and convincing model of the phenomenon you are studying… the continuous nature of qualitative interviewing means that the questioning is redesigned throughout the project.

Semi-structured interviews, therefore, allow the researcher to be in close proximity with participants, in which meticulous facial expressions, subconscious behaviours, and long pausing thinking moments can be observed and captured. Those hints could imply complex psychological struggles within the interviewees' inner world. The significance of listening to them is invaluable later to take their accounts of their experiences into the analysis process.

The Research Process

This study is about Chinese female expatriates and their experiences at work. It is an exploration of how culture interplays with gender relations and other factors, such as intercultural communication, ethnic identity, and professional career planning in culturally diverse workplaces in Australia. It looks at the ways in which Chinese female expatriates describe their experiences in facing multiple issues in their organisations, in particular through communicating with others. Whilst the degree of diversity at the workplace varies, issues happen at multiple levels, some of which can be simply categorised as language differences, whereas others cannot be taken for granted, but are in need of a dedicated approach. Complex cultural differences ranging from interpersonal to professional levels and gendered issues require closer examination.

Collecting consistent data from females allows for some degree of comparative studies with similar preoccupied references, such as facing similar stereotypes culturally and socially. Due to restricted time, I chose to explore their experiences through semi-

structured interviews with ten women across Sydney, Australia. Because of the limited number of Chinese females holding professional positions, I used snowball sampling. The technique was based on chain referral, a procedure ideal for rare population sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Bryman 2015). In this project, I firstly contacted a number of expatriate forums from my previous working experience in China. Advertisements 'calling for volunteers' were posted on public discussion forums in those expatriates' communities, such as Expat Women, Sydney Women's International Club, Sydney Expats, and InterNations. I also asked organisers of some communities in Sydney (such as AnZConnecT, Chinese Social Corners, Asian Professional Meetup, and Sydney Expatriate Community) for their assistance in recruiting participants. There were only a few respondents in the first round, so I then put advertisements on my personal social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and WeChat. Due to the openness of those websites and influences of expatriates' communities, they were widely seen and spread.

Upon expressions of interest, individuals were contacted with a brief description of the study and consent forms via email. There was also a short survey to understand their background in order to determine if they qualified for the research. One-page surveys included requests for personal information, such as age, gender, occupation, nationality, ethnicity, family status, and professional background in terms of length of working experience and residence in Australia, and cultural environment at work. The primary purpose of the survey was to achieve a wide range of participants. However, it was determined that organisational structural differences across industries were not the main aspect of this study, as it was not reasonable to make comparative studies within such restricted samples.

Due to the nature of my study, I defined qualified participants as follows:

- They need to identify as Chinese, either by nationality or by ethnicity. This helps to clarify if they could bring their own frames of cultural references;

- They need to be over 25 years old, and be able to engage in different working environments, ideally both in China and in Australia, so that they could have a good understanding of organisational cultural differences;

- They need to work in culturally diverse workplaces in Australia.

Through screening via those three criteria, I hoped that their responses could provide insights into their lived experiences. Once I had established the first contacts with a few expatriates, they referred other colleagues and/or friends.

Ten participants were Chinese female expatriates: five held Chinese citizenships and the other five held Australian citizenships. Their ages varied from 25–50. They fulfilled different positions in their organisations, such as accountants, nurses, designers, and small business owners. The organisations in which they worked operated in industries, such as aged care, international trade, digital photographing, and IT. At the time of the study, they had different types of employment, including full-time, part-time, and causal. Their family status varied from being single, in a partnership, married, or married with one or two children.

Interviews were conducted in March 2017. They took place at a café or a library close to the participants' home or work, as arranged in accordance with their convenience and preference. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two were conducted through FaceTime because their remote locations and busy working schedules meant that an interview in person was not possible. However, the location did not affect the lengths of interviews, which were between 35 and 75 minutes. The mean interview time was 55 minutes. I used a semi-structured format in asking interviewees about the following categories:

- Their workplaces, infrastructure, and population as to their specific department in terms of cultural background and proportions of gender;

- Whether they encountered communication issues and why they think those issues happened;

- Their understanding towards culture and gender relations at work;

- Their professional career planning and their attitudes towards work-life balance.

Questions were referred to their personal understandings and pursued further at an individual level. At the end of interviews, participants were asked to add any

information by commenting on their personal experiences that they considered relevant at work. Questions were asked in different orders or rephrased slightly to generate data that would be more interesting. All interviews were tap-recorded and fully transcribed. Because participants' English competency was one aspect to consider, all the transcriptions were kept as they were without correction of grammatical mistakes during transcribing.

Data analysis was arranged according to themes, which emerged in and across interviews. Each interview was analysed individually and identified with a series of themes linked to the purpose of this research. Consequently, I listed all the major themes that emerged from the preliminary examination, including intercultural understanding, culture, and gender relations at work, professional career planning and attitudes towards work-life balance. I then selected both themes that were commonly acknowledged in existing literature, and those that were unexpected. Each theme was then classified separately in terms of different ways that they were interpreted. Following that, I referred to the full interview texts for discussions and comparisons of different experiences.

Starting with diverse descriptions of workplaces, I used those differences to interpret cultural differences and attempted to understand what the main issues were. A further inspection of their understanding of "culture" was conducted, and I noticed a link between participants' experiences and their awareness towards culture. However, ethnic identity was not the only idea that affected participants' communication, apart from linguistic difficulties. Issues around gender relations arose during conversations. Finally, I analysed those themes in depth, and selected themes with rich data that helped me to examine female expatriates' experiences at their workplaces. In the next three chapters, I will provide an overview of the main emergent themes and present the analysis of the selected extracts.

Chapter 3 – Chinese Female Expatriates: Seeing Culture at Work

Introduction

This chapter examines the diversity of workplaces in which Chinese female expatriates operate every day, where differences are experienced and described in multiple aspects, in terms of physical working space and co-workers' backgrounds. Issues have emerged at multiple levels ranging from "small talk" to "official presentations" and "public speeches" at work. Language is obviously one factor that hindered effective communication. Yet deeper concerns underneath linguistic distinctions, such as cultural differences (Hall 1973), gender relations (Connell 2003) and migration status (Ho 2006), were commonly raised by participants. Some Chinese professional women gave primacy to cultural differences, but sometimes their expressions shifted because of their different understandings towards culture, which could suggest that their experiences were situated or context-specific (Jenkins and Delbridge 2013; Needle 2004).

There are two main categories of workplaces as per those participants' accounts. Some described their workplaces as "Chinese community-dominated", which meant their organisations were either founded by ethnic Chinese[2] or consisted of ethnic Chinese as a majority, and they often shared the similar "Chinese" business values and ways of conduct. In stark contrast, other participants described their organisations as "western" style, where ethnic Chinese were the minority and their workplaces employed staff from culturally diverse backgrounds. Discussions around workplaces were rich and influential for other conversations related to their experiences.

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[2] Ethnic Chinese, if not commented specifically, refers to those with ethnicity, including Chinese nationals and Chinese Australians. Ethnic Chinese-dominated organisations in Sydney tend to have a similar focus on relationship management and strict hierarchical leadership, rather than leaning on personal competency.

This chapter argues that those Chinese female expatriates' workplaces entail their everyday practices, where their lived experiences are generally situated within and beyond, and as a result, their accounts of ideas such as culture and gender relations vary. Their presence in the organisation, meanwhile, reflect their ethnic background and other factors to the extent that they could make sense of their behaviours and negotiate among multiple dimensions of identity.

Workplaces

Interviewees' accounts of their workplaces vary considerably. Differences are expressed in multiple ways as to the cultural environment and overall organisational physical working space. The great variety of co-workers' backgrounds make expatriates' organisations culturally diverse, and also indicate how comfortable interviewees could be in their workplaces. Julie, a nurse, indicates the diversity of ethnicities at work. Her perception is associated with her professional practice, by minding cultural differences in attending to her residents. She also raises the diversity issue within ethnic Chinese, which is not one homogenous culture, but a great category within.

> …The background of the nursing home, they are German, most of them… so here is multi-cultural, Germany and Scotland a lot, I can say a lot of different cultures in here. So we need to, when we're working with them, everyone's different. So for us, we need to understand Germany culture as well, so it's better to communicate with them, understand their rules, their beliefs, and then also like for the Scottish and Filipino and Indian and Maori, so a lot of different cultures… last week we got one day training, so they got 15 staff together, so the trainer just calculate how many cultures in 15 staff. He got at least 9 cultures… It's hard because everyone's different. With other cultures, even in China, you know we come from China; we come from different part of China, so also the view and beliefs are totally different. I mean it's not totally different; I mean some of them are different…

Tara, a Business Analyst, emphasises "race" at her workplace and her perception about daily practice is that: "there is not much you can do about it, but to embrace it". The reality of ethnicity-classified occupations seems to be within her expectations and she simply accepts it:

> …the finance department's very Asian…basically there is one or two Caucasian only. Our department has 30 people, so there's one or two Caucasian only, they're all Asians. But that's like that in any company, mostly the accounting teams are mostly Asian, like my industry is like that, that's what I see. Whereas marketing and sales they are all Aussie.

Physical working conditions reflect another level of diversity at the workplace. Lucy, an Assistant Accountant, works for an ethnic Chinese-dominated organisation and describes her working environment as a restricted and confined space that affects negatively on her accounts of her working experience:

> … My boss just rented a big warehouse… and the office is part of the warehouse. I think we don't have windows at all… So, we must use the air conditioner every day, 'cause there is no fresh air… the first few days… I never seen the sunshine during the day, 'cause you can't. You have to go out. We cannot go out, 'cause we are, yeah, our jobs is not going out. We just stay at the office.

A limited physical working environment leads her to experience anxiety at work. It also indicates that she has higher expectations about her host organisation. Lucy says, "…'cause it is in western countries. I thought the working environment should be like… the western people [they] did. Actually, they did everything traditionally Chinese." She assumes that organisations should be different to those in China in terms of organisational culture and infrastructure, and subjected to Australian government regulations, yet they are the same as China to some extent. The clash between her expectations and the reality makes her unsettled in her current professional role, as she describes, "…I think the job… it make me unhappy…You have to put more time, to calm down after work…"

Confined working office spaces seem to be a common cost-saving practice for ethnic Chinese-dominated organisations in Sydney. Some participants even categorise these conditions as indicative of the cultural differences between "Chinese" and "western" corporations. In line with emerging global trends, this practice is probably not appropriate in culturally diverse Australia, as it potentially leads to some issues at the workplace. Jessie, an Education Agent, works for an ethnic Chinese-dominated organisation and shares similar concerns about her working space:

> … We work in a very small office here — boardrooms in the company and all the staff just work in one room, and another room for meeting and two [another] rooms for teachers who teach students for some language lesson …Small space with no good air qualities…Sometimes just after a long day at work I feel my eyes not feel so comfortable and sometimes hard for me to breathe.

In stark contrast, interviewees who work for culturally diverse organisations describe their office environment differently. These organisations generally provide its employees with more space. Amy, a nurse, feels "very lucky" that:

> ... work environment is so good. Like the place is a five-star hotel... our management is very good and organised. We have rooms, have not too many residents ... we have a lot of book in the AV space when we finish here showering... And bathroom blinds and not let the staff or the residents have a fall."

Physical working conditions are seen by interviewees in terms of "Chinese" and "western" experiences. Spatial working environments can be seen as a gesture of respecting the space for expatriates, which is beneficial in settling them into their professional agendas. Furthermore, it is valuable to acknowledge different organisational practices in Sydney.

Challenges at Work

Interviewees raise a number of key issues at the workplace, and these challenges seem to be fairly common across their diverse contexts. Several issues are addressed here. The first obvious factor is communication, with a lack of competent English language skills (largely in oral expression[3]) being a primary issue because the host country, Australia, is an English-speaking environment. The second related point is that communication is not only about language capacity, but indicates more complex realities, such as issues associated with cultural understanding, gender relations, and power at the workplace. The problem is that interviewees do not have the same linguistic strengths in English as they do in their native Mandarin, so they have less confidence in expressing themselves, particularly in exchanging sophisticated ideas or engaging in profound conversation.

> ... I think also it hard to communicate sometimes... Maybe his [her former Korean Manager] pronunciation. Once we just said we should reset our Wi-Fi but I told him many times those things. He don't really understand me but he still keep his smile on his face. So, I don't think he really ignored me, he just don't understand...
>
> ... I remember that we are going to design an advertisement post and the colleague from Bangladesh to do this job. And the manager called me, said, "We don't need to do it anymore so we should cancel it." And I call him but I can tell he don't really understand me, what I say and he just kept doing his job... Maybe language and maybe he just said if he should give up the job,

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[3] Second language education in China tends to focus on reading and writing, and it neglects training in English speaking, which results in a great number of ethnic Chinese being good at taking English tests, but remain poor in oral English.

maybe manager should have called him directly, not me… I don't think he listened me, he came under my manager.

Jessie's examples indicate that language is the key to effective communication between her and her colleagues from other cultural backgrounds, where English is the only way to exchange ideas. Equally important, as raised by other interviewees, is that there is not a strong link in place between language skills and effective communication, which affects the transfer of exchanges of values. Lucy, whose colleagues "at the office are Chinese", explains that her new manager[4] wants to introduce the idea of "tea break" as an occasion for socialisation with other staff, and she "tried to schedule some morning tea or afternoon tea, some of my colleagues refused, they said it is a waste of time and a waste of money." Lucy thinks it is a good idea but her other colleagues do not share the same values and therefore, their communication is not at the same level.

Thirdly, other forms of communication sometimes require more than competent language skills, but need competency in cultural understanding. These interviewees, although possessing proficient English skills, give some examples that demonstrate how they fail to capture the full picture of certain conversations. This indicates that there is potentially a gap of background knowledge that prevents them from perceiving the connotative meaning of some messages. Certain words are associated with cultural meanings that cannot be ignored or understood without acknowledging their origins. Jokes, for example, are difficult to interpret if interlocutors do not know their contexts.

> Laura: … The culture thing, sometime, our Chinese people joke at each other, we know our points but if we, we tease others, the same things happened to the western people, they cannot understand them… If they joke with their cultural jokes, we cannot understand them… like, er, Chinese familiar like, for example, we joke about Green Tea Bitch, er, we don't like the girls who want to just in… just some familiarities, like Xiaoshen Yang, and some others… I, always get along with my church family, even in church maybe things [some members] are very young, like children. So they always use stories or bibles, that's I don't understand.

> June: … He [her male manager] made a joke actually, because I really didn't focus on that part… I guess maybe it's because I'm a bit new at the moment…I guess for him, there's easy [to

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[4] Lucy's manager was also a Chinese female professional, but she migrated to Australia around twenty years ago and worked in several multinational corporations before she took some time off to attend to her children. Lucy's company was her first job after a long break. Lucy believed that her manager had already adopted the "western" way of managing her team.

understand this kind of talk among] the guys, [it's] easier to talk and they both have a case, they talk some stuff.

Finally, there are also other forms of communication in need of experiences in context to understand related information. Judy, a Cashier and Assistant Accountant, demonstrates small talk in her office about parking fines in Australia, which is beyond her experience. She says:

> ...I remember one time when we had a company gathering ... people were there chatting, I don't really understand what they're talking about to be honest... because I don't drive and they were talking about times when they get fines, and it's unreasonable fines, and talk about that... And they talk about things like that, and talk about how their car broke down mid-way, as very inconvenient. But I don't drive, so I don't really get what they're talking about. And when people laugh, I don't really know. But I don't really care, to be honest. So I don't really understand, so what?

Such small talk can often provide the glue for office teamwork (Coupland 2003; Holmes 2008). Lacking these related experiences prevents Julie from engaging in this kind of small talk, which disables her from effectively networking with others. This, therefore, could lead to a negative experience for her at her workplace.

Interestingly, some participants talk about how they navigate the fact that they do not have appropriate English skills. Amy, for example, explains the importance of body language that helps convey the meaning during the process of communicating with her co-workers when she first arrived in Australia.

> We have used the body language... And also I don't understand other staff who just hold my hand to point something to tell me what is this thing, like the mop, bucket...

In facing different forms of communicating with others at work, interviewees have experienced situations differently. Sometimes language is the key aspect, whereas in other situations, it requires further examination. The next section will discuss whether language is the key to seeing differences at work or not.

Language at Work

Language has emerged as a vital part of Chinese female expatriates' accounts of their experiences at work, particularly significant in dealing with issues at work. It is valuable not only to grapple with the linguistic differences, but also to articulate nuanced cultural meanings in both Mandarin and English. Language skills are a double-edged sword, because these are always situated and context-based. Sometimes, it is a useful vehicle to

bring people of similar backgrounds together, but in other conditions, it may be the key that leads to misunderstandings and miscommunication. Lisa demonstrates the link between her employability and her language skills:

> ...I was lucky, I found jobs quite easily, and so, maybe my English was slightly better at the time, better than other people. It is easy for me to get a job.

Other participants consider sharing the same Mandarin language as "an advantage" and articulate a sense of belonging to a certain group at work, as some forms of recognition are being expressed. However, sometimes it can be quite problematic by delimiting the great variety of Chinese cultures into the singular form of Mandarin language.

> ... Actually being Chinese, being the minority, there's a very good side of it... Chinese we eat our lunch together, and four people doesn't seem like a lot of people, but compared to only a 22 people firm, and all the other people just eat alone, so we always have our lunch together. And so everyone passing by just say, oh Chinese group...We speak Chinese, we speak Mandarin. That's our natural connection. When I say being a minority, sometimes it actually can give you an advantage...do you speak Chinese, do you speak Mandarin, and naturally very spontaneously you will have a group of people who is welcoming you, just because [of] who you are. And then you will have someone there to help you out, just because you're Chinese. You don't need to feel so hard blending.

Judy expresses the bond formed by sharing the same language. Consequently, this leads to the practice of having lunch together. Mandarin represents more than a tool that they use to communicate on a regular basis; it also suggests a way of living and sharing. It creates the space of common interests, where for insiders, it is an advantage; yet for non-Chinese, it may present as a threat or deemed as offensive behaviour.

> ... Yes I got complaint when I was working at the supermarket. Because I was talking to my colleague in Chinese and the customer heard it... I actually say the price, we need to check the price... he thinks we are talking about him, we are talking something bad about him, and he made a complaint because he thinks it's very rude for us to because you are supposed to speak English and I only understand English, so why are you speaking in front of me in Chinese. You're either talking behind my back or something, but anyway, it's very rude.

Moreover, the form and the practice of language do not necessarily determine the boundaries. In Judy's case, she experiences completely different feedback at two workplaces. This perhaps indicates the space and the boundaries that Mandarin sets up for her.

Language is also another vehicle for participants to see through cultural differences at work and to make sense of others' behaviours. Chinese itself is high context and indirect, in that it requires others to read between lines (Ng and Ngai 2015). As a consequence, most expatriate participants lack confidence in expressing themselves in another

language, and are consequently considered as being not "good at public speeches", or "conservative" and "not outspoken" (phrased by Tara). As a result, some participants encounter communication issues or some barriers for further progressions in managerial roles.

> Tara: ...So my foundation – I'm more fluent in Cantonese. So if I have to say the same thing—let's say if I was to do a presentation—if I do it in Cantonese I am a lot more confident. Whereas if I have to do it in English, I was like... I have to prepare. I still feel the difference. So I think because I'm not as fluent, it probably has some impact on my job progression, I feel that.

> Judy: ...Back then my English was not very good and I couldn't explain very well... because [of] the language I think they might take advantage of you because of that... For the current company, because our team is for international deal with the international freight and I think more than half is from China, then for me, as a Chinese, I've got an advantage. I can speak their language and also I worked in China before.... I'm also very confident to deal with the company requirement, and also I have been working in this area over ten years... I feel it's easy for me. I'm very confident in this area...

> Kelsey: ... sometimes maybe you're feeling like in Australia [you] still cannot get in the white people life, the social side to life. Still the English is a part of the problem for communicate.

Language is a featured tool that expatriates utilise daily, a form of recognition within themselves and by others. The ways of speaking some languages is a significant part of their experiences and sometimes the choices of using it can be complex.

> These days more Chinese actually work in the freight forwarding, because we need that service. So sometimes "Oh there are Chinese" making you feel like "Oh, are we in China or what?" Yeah, it's so easy. It doesn't make it, I think these things are very comfortable if they are Chinese as well. I'm confident of what they would do than if there's a western people it seems they might do something or see something I didn't know. Yeah, there's something a bit weird about it. I don't know why. I should be more confident, I guess. Yeah, again if there are Chinese people working in a different company I feel, "I know that." I feel much more confident. Even to talk about the same thing, you know, if this is Chinese the other western people - just realising with the Chinese I feel much more confident. But we do try to speak in English because it makes it more formal. I know a guy sometimes we talk in Chinese and I said, "No, maybe people in the office they might feel weird about that," you know, we both are working in Australia should speak in English if we're able to do that.

June is more comfortable in expressing herself in Chinese, yet she employs English to fit into the professional working environment. Her choice indicates her awareness of cultural differences and organisational expectations from others in a culturally diverse workplace, and the space that the communicative language creates for her. Speaking English with her clients not only makes herself understood by the listeners, but also by her co-workers. The shift in this process demonstrates the orientation of her thoughts on several issues at the workplace, in which she manages to accommodate them in such

a subtle way by reconciliation of the language she utilises. In doing so, June acts as a messenger in delivering the culture and its practice that she is engaged in at the time. This leads to the next question: what are the cultural differences in the workplace, other than its working language?

Cultural Differences in Other Forms

The choice of language indicates the linguistic and cultural differences at expatriates' workplaces, but it does not set up parameters of what those differences could be. The data generated from interviews, on the one hand, suggest some degree of differences in the ways those interviewees describe their experiences at work. On the other, there is a correlation between diversity of workplaces and the outcome of their experiences and approaches to issues at work. Cultural differences are illustrated in accordance with the degree of diversity. Themes are incorporated ranging from everyday practices from food and customs, to professional behaviours, such as reactions to presentation, and abstract senses of beliefs and related practices. The ways they talk about culture reflect the practices they carry out within their organisations.

> … When it's lunchtime, they heat up all these different kind of food, so then you can smell like – if it's Indian, they eat curry. Chinese eat Chinese food. That kind of culture I suppose.

Tara suggests food can bind people from the same ethnicity together. Food is one part of cultural differences that could be easily spotted at a glance, and it can also indicate a way of life, just as Judy said, "we eat and we chat". Having lunch together is a sign of embracing their culture and separating them from others.

> … My second job was a smaller company, 10 people only. So, the mix was more—Caucasian—so, I find that the topic that they talk about is different. So, they'll talk more about footy and cricket on the weekend. Whereas, if you talk about people who are not born in…raised up in Australia, they tend to talk more about…other stuff…not cricket and footy. Yeah, so I guess that's the difference. Oh, and I guess that they're less outspoken. So, let's say, if there's a whole group of people at presentation, then at the end of the presentation it would be like 'any questions?' so that's what happens…the finance department…nobody will ask anything. But you know, if it's Caucasian, they would all ask. So, I guess that's all. Just people, they are all the same…we're in a meeting, and people want to say their ideas…different cultured people would say it differently. Like some people will wait until everyone speaks first and then finally they would say their opinion, whereas the others they will say it first…

Tara suggests that differences at her work can happen in small talk and in situations such as a presentation or a meeting. Those cultural differences are in line with their

ethnicities, but presented in different forms. Tara says her way of approaching those differences are still "very Chinese", and she explains, "I'm still not very outspoken. I don't watch footy, I don't watch cricket, that type of thing. So, I don't go to the beach!" She characterises her lifestyle as deeply influenced by ethnic Chinese culture. Laura, in another direction, indicates that the sense of ethnicity can be blurred by the overall social multiculturalism in Australia.

> I think there are a lot of Chinese here. So, they don't think you are different. It is an international country, they can combine a lot of things, a lot of culture, I think it is a good of Australia… in Australia, it is not a big deal. They have lots of Indian, American, from anywhere in the world, so it is not a big deal.

Cultural difference, on the other hand, could be justification for some unexpected behaviours at work, such as clipping fingernails. Tara is not comfortable with that and considers it unprofessional, but she accepts it by seeing this as a cultural difference. Her strategy is to find a way to "accept it". She also expresses that those cultural differences are more obvious to new migrants, whom likely can get away with this "cultural difference". It also indicates that cultural difference could be significantly tracked to the status of migration as well as the degree of adoption.

> … They have their own beliefs, their own food, their way of gesture and things. Like for example, there is a cultural difference, for example, sometimes I hear people clipping their nails at work. It's considered to be quite not okay at work. But because of cultural difference, they don't know…they do it at work. So sometimes these kinds of things, but then you just know… 'cause it's a different culture… Just accept… Just brought up like that. We don't embrace it. We don't find it too different; I don't notice it to be honest. Unless the person is really, they have just arrived from overseas. But otherwise I don't…

Lucy, on the other hand, struggles to make sense of some behaviour in her organisation, such as the ways some young girls "shout to each other". She believes that it is "a unique thing" in ethnic Chinese-dominated workplaces, and the main practice is "loud". Politeness may be a gesture of respecting each other, particularly in such open yet confined personal space. Her experience indicates that Chinese culture presents not in a singular form, but as a category full of great varieties.

> … The working atmosphere is very important. Everyone, we go to work for…everyone should be happy at their workplaces. But in my office, it is not, Yeah, it is different. Some colleagues, maybe the young girls, they are not very polite to the other person…the first days during my work, I was very surprise. To someone, they never talk, they just shout, maybe they want to ask others, they would shout loudly, I was so surprised. In China, many of the companies are the same as well. I think it is the, it is unique thing, yeah, in western countries for the Chinese people. Maybe in many Chinese companies are the same, or just similar…

Religion is a theme that was overlooked during previous studies, but it also impacts on expatriates' experiences at work. Laura, a Bookkeeper in a Church, describes that local Australians in her organisation are "friendly" probably "because they are Christian". She makes the connection between others' beliefs and their behaviours. Two nurses, Amy and Julie, do not specify their religions, but clearly express that they believe in "kindness" and that their behaviours directly affect how everything goes in their lives. They turn their beliefs into their practice at work by treating their residents well. They also think their presence could make a difference on how other people see Chinese and understand Chinese culture.

> Amy: ... I believe in myself. You do the right thing to another person, when you get older, another person will do the right thing to you... I don't have any religion. They say and when you not in China you don't have any religion, I said they have some relation for me, maybe not. For me, my relation is my parents. My parents teach me to become a good person, to children, good person. For me, I just pick the kind of goodness from my heart. So that's [why] I work here, how to be kind to another people. If we are kind to another people then another people will come from work.

> Julie: ...I just treat them [residents] like my parents, because in here, my parents far away from me...because here I got my own family and I need to look after my family. I can't go there and visit my parents every year, so... I just treat them like my parents. In our beliefs, so we do the good things, can bring the good thing to our relatives, so we believe that, so that's why in my life don't do the bad thing; do all the good things.

There are choices that are layered and complicated when discussing diversity and the degree of diversity those expatriates' workplaces entail, the challenges they face, and the perceptions of language and culture they bring to their organisations and their everyday life. Seeing through those phenomena, a deeper theme emerges. On the one hand, interviewees seem to construct and move between multiple dimensions of identity at work and, on the other, draw on ideas of ethnic Chinese to help explain their experiences. The question of ethnic identity, whether to blend into multiculturalism in Sydney or to stand out in their ethnicity, is a tough one.

> R: ...Because you just mentioned that you can swing between Chinese culture and Australian culture. Is there any situation like Chinese people don't see you as Chinese because you are very Aussie and Australian people don't see you?

> Tara: Oh yeah, all the time... But then I just have to find someone who's like me...who have grown up here.

> R: So you choose a different way to approach this?

> Tara: Oh, they're different...like for example, if they are more...the Olympics, the Chinese are very patriotic. But I've lost that! So, then they're all like, "Oh you're not us!" So, they're all supporting for China. I am like... So, then that's when they distinguish...but otherwise...yeah... otherwise, I

don't feel it. I remember it's the Olympics, it was so obvious. 'Cause they were like 'oh go China, go China' and I'm like…no particular feeling.

R: Do you say, "Go Australia?"

Tara: Not as well. So that's the thing. That's when I feel "oh I don't exactly…".

It is rather a more complicated process of personal choice for what Tara describes here. The Olympic Games are a competition where individual support is nationally bound. There is a discourse in Tara's situation: whether to be a Chinese or not to be. Her residence in Australia is long enough to blur her sense of the nation-state. She would not offer support for the country where she comes from, nor for where she currently resides. She is "a bridge". For this situation, it may be a disadvantage here, but for other scenarios, she could make the best out of it by swaying between two different cultures. In her workplace, she finds that she could grasp a sense of both and cooperate with colleagues very well.

> … I guess what you say, because in my workplace I am not that Aussie, not as much as I noticed. Most of the people they only came within the last ten years. I have kind of grown up there for a long time. But yeah, so I bring that…I understand how…people that just came are like…but I also understand how the Aussies are like. So, it's kind of a bridge to working. So, I can sway either way, I can work with them or I can work with them.

The importance of seeing what is not said by interviewees here demonstrates the multiple forms of issues at work: the nuanced complications beneath linguistic differences, and the shift of identities facing different situations. All are complicated choices that those Chinese expatriates are facing frequently at the workplace. How they behave goes beyond their individual agenda, but represents being a messenger or being a cultural mediator and practitioner.

Conclusion

Differences at the workplace augment the degree of diversity. How those Chinese female expatriates see those differences and describe them implies the ways that they approach others, as well as how they make sense of their experiences. They suggest that effective communication is more than simply grasping with the linguistic differences but lies in reading what is not said. Their perceptions of issues at work and cultural differences directly impact on their behaviours and their practices, and in return, enrich their organisational cultures. Seeing differences between ethnic Chinese-dominated workplaces and culturally diverse organisations help interviewees grapple with their

working space and beyond, where they are sometimes required to negotiate multiple aspects of identity depending on situations they encounter. Seeing culture at work is important for them, but there are other layered complexities that are in need of further exploration.

Chapter 4 – Chinese Female Expatriates: Experiencing Gender and Culture at Work

Introduction

Expatriate Chinese perceive certain social expectations around professional women, in particular, their occupational roles at the Australian workplace. Meanwhile, female workers carry on some cultural views and practices that are closely bonded with their ethnicity, class, and migration. There is a debate around the ways that Chinese female expatriates perform at work, to the extent in which others see them, that is, being an ethnic Chinese or a female. The significance lies in how those participants describe their experiences at the workplace, which ultimately reflects their accounts of culture and gender relations, or other factors within their organisations, such as the proportion of the staff's gender, ethnic background, and professional roles.

Generated from rich discussions around gender, interviewees present contradictory accounts of others' behaviours of the same and opposite sex. The overview of Australian workplaces, especially around gender equality, provides those participants with some comfort, but not to the same degree of satisfaction. My intention is not to discuss their dissatisfaction around gender equality in their workplaces, but their perceptions of it.

Interviewees illustrate their gender experiences in different ways with a diversity of focus. In this chapter, I will explore findings relating to gender relations at their Australian workplaces, such as issues emerging around masculine managers, gendered workplaces, the notion of the glass ceiling, and relations deeply influenced by Chinese female expatriates' ethnic identity and their organisational culture. I also examine the transformation occurring for Chinese female expatriates who are shifting among multiple aspects of their identity of being female, ethnic Chinese, and an expatriate. This chapter argues that those Chinese female expatriates experience situations where they have to "prioritise" one aspect of their identity to articulate intersections of many factors in other scenarios. In particular, their approaches to gender relations are situated.

Gender: On Being a Female at Work

On the topic of gender relations, interviewees suggest that Australia is more respectful towards females in general, particularly in the workplace. Such respect is represented in multiple ways: male colleagues are seen as more polite and more egalitarian in communicating with the opposite gender. This has involved the exploration of their experiences in terms of occupational roles, promotional opportunities, and the overall organisational environment towards women. However, it seems their responses towards gender relations in Australia are in immediate comparison with that in their homeland through later discussions. Some participants describe their experiences in ways that reflect how inequality happens in subtle ways.

At the question of equal professional promotion opportunities and equal pay across gender, interviewees seem to be quite confident that Australian workplaces are much better than in China. Even though the general claim seems reasonable, given the advanced political and legal context, gender equality is accepted and widely applied in Australian workplaces (Selmer 2002). When asked about whether she receives equal treatment from her management, Julie says, "… equally, of course. They can't do, they need to be equal otherwise they get into trouble." Amy expresses similar views: "… equal for everyone, because in this country, if you treat your staff not equally, your staff will complain to the higher management". It is the legal system that provides sound support for equal rights, but this is not necessarily the actual practice that organisations are carrying out (Greene and Smith 2015). In fact, there is still enormous gender inequality in Australian workplaces (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2010; Glick et al. 2004). Jessie suggests that respecting females is already incorporated into Australian "culture".

> I think it's a kind of culture, because in Australian society, people know how to respect people more. Respect women. But in China, in our traditional culture, it's not.

In some situations, equal rights between males and females may be associated with certain conditions. Lisa thinks her workplace is fairly equal because her employer mainly focuses on characteristics, such as loyalty, and offers potential for internal promotion opportunities based on those characteristics, rather than gender.

> … He doesn't judge people by their gender… if you got the talent, he will chance, he will prepare them to do… if you are loyal, have the talent, he will treat you well, it doesn't matter what age or what gender you are. I think that's pretty good.

While equality is commonly acknowledged and accepted, inequality exists in different forms. Participants who describe their workplaces having preference over men, indicates some degree of negative experiences. Aside from gendered issues, those women are also facing social stereotypes coming from the opposite gender, both in China and Australia (sometimes even from their same gender), and quite often issues arise because of the ethnic background those females perceive.

There are, however, some participants that describe situations where they feel that inequality is "a good thing". Lisa believes that she has "more opportunities in social life", such as more possibilities of social networks because of her gender. Judy describes some "privileges", such as receiving free training programs in the male-dominated industry.

> …I don't really feel discriminated to be honest. Because there's so little women, you don't get discriminated, and actually if you get into it, I would even say the privilege. But you do have a lot of things, for instance you never need to wait for the toilet because most of the toilets for women are always very busy, but the whole firm only has two or three women, so you never have to wait, you just go. If we have dinner… you always get to go first because you're ladies… I don't feel anything… It's a programming company…sometimes they even have sessions for free…and they offer to girls. And no one will offer to guys because guys just think if you don't know how to program…

It is not my intention to accept unquestioningly their suggestion that Australian society is more equal in terms of women's rights, but rather to see their perceptions in terms of capturing the experiences of gender relations at workplace in Australia in comparison to those in their homelands, and the reasons behind those different behaviours. In doing so, it is helpful to understand the nuanced notions behind those Chinese expatriate women's multiple dimensions of identities at work. Consequently, this study articulates how interviewees negotiate their occupational roles at the workplace with other factors among cultural differences and gender relations.

It is of equal significance to acknowledge that "gender" cannot be separated with any other factors that influence those expatriates' experiences, especially the cultural environment.

> Jessie: …Maybe just because personality and education. Some people just grew up in the environment that nobody tells them how to respect people from different…who are in different gender. And maybe some people just think they are stronger than people from different gender.

It is intersected with other factors such as culture, migration, power, class, and leadership and management. In particular, gender relations are culturally oriented in those participants' descriptions, as well as entailed by their complicated situations, such as migration status.

Gendered Workplaces and Occupational Differences

As discussed in Chapter 3, workplaces are more diverse than ever before, and those expatriate women's accounts express the sense of downplaying the role of gender. Despite their views that Australian workplaces are more respectful of them as women, they still recount gendering of occupational hierarchies. Females are expected to be caring and considerate. This leads to a trend in occupations that females generally occupy junior jobs with no particular technical skills; while males take up more sophisticated positions (Wajcman 1999). The majority of participants have operational roles, for example Registered Nurse, Accountant, Cashier, and Insurance Coordinator. Furthermore, interviewees suggest that occupations in demand of more interpersonal skills, such as sales and marketing, are usually employed by local Australians, most of whom are male within their organisations.

> June: I think that's why there's some jobs that couldn't do that well, like sales and…because you might have to target that deeper, have to explain that more. It's not just a standard process; I think that would be a problem… I don't have these issues, I guess because I always work in the operation area...

> Laura: …for my job hunting experience, if they want to hire some people to write something, or things very carefully, they may hire gender; but if they want to hire some technical things, or they need someone to work overtime, they may hire like man… If you want to apply for some car washing jobs, they only hire man…

Laura expresses differences in terms of expectations and job duties around gender, suggesting females cannot have the same characteristics as males.

> … He think that female staff are more friendly and students are more easy to trust in a female more than a male so he just asks for us to do more communicate with our customers and find more customers. It really (pausing), occupies my individual time.

It is obvious that Jessie's employer, a male ethnic Chinese, thinks women are expected to have characteristics of kindness and sincerity, which are generally requested in the field of customer service. He has brought his Chinese stereotypes towards females into

Australian workplace and applied them to his female subordinates. Even though the location has changed, the space is still similarly constrained.

> It is male dominated… In the Finance team, it's all women, the Finance team, including me and my boss only…there used to be two females in the sales team, but now only one, because one is leaving. All the others are male. Because it's a software company, all those Programmers, they are all male.

Judy suggests that men centralise occupations in the IT industry. This kind of occupational difference is an important aspect of those Chinese professionals' experiences at work, and consequently, it shapes their perceptions towards others within their organisations.

Because of limited sample, as well as wide categories of industries and occupations that participants were recruited from, it is difficult to make a generalised claim that those participants' workplaces are gendered. However, it is still valuable to acknowledge this difference and its outcome. June finds that it is difficult to "fit in the male-dominated department", where she is often left out of conversations. Sometimes she could not get into the men's "small talk" circle, which potentially hinders her career progression.

> June: **…**I think in some area they are more male than women. So, for example, at the current company I'm working for, I will see always men. Then our department has got around 30 people. There are four, five different teams. So, our team currently there are four people including myself and three of them are men… Actually, today I notice, it seems it is easy if they are all men and easy to talk to each other. For my manager…I do not get much chance to talk to him and he is also quite busy. But I noticed after work we were waiting for the bus. I tried to talk to him about some stuff. But I think he was nice. He was smiling, but towards the end, it seemed he did not want to talk.

In stark contrast, Judy actually enjoys the position of being among the female minority in her corporation and she sees her account of gender in her workplace as a positive one.

> Judy: …For instance, in the finance sector girls are really minorities, and so there will be people who do volunteer jobs, like they will volunteer to teach girls how to program. It's a programming company and even those girls in this company, mostly from the sales team or from the finance team, but if you do want to learn programming we are here to help. Or sometimes they even have sessions for free, if you want to drop in, feel free to join, and they offer to girls. And no one will offer to guys because guys just think if you don't know how to program, why you are here. You don't even get in here in the first place.

It is valuable to look at different attitudes towards gendered workplaces between June and Judy, both of whom work in industries where females are the minority. Perhaps

their perceptions could originate from differences in their ages and the length of their working experiences. Judy, in her 20s, recently started to work, whereas June is in her 40s and has over 15 years of working experience. Other males' attitudes towards them at workplace probably depend on participants' ages, whether to marginalise them or not. Thus, interviewees will adopt different strategies in how they interpret gendered differences, the extent of how comfortable they are within the organisation, and how they cope with those differences.

Another perspective of gender roles within the workplace is about exploring "privileges" that Judy describes, some of which may be associated with certain purposes or conditions, such as "making friends" or "having a relationship". Lisa explains:

> I think…female [from] oversea, when they came to this country, they adjust better than guys. Maybe…females are naturally better at languages, maybe because when you try to communicate with local people, for guys they may respect ladies; and also they maybe they would talk to you, or maybe they just want to make friends with you or have a relationship with you…

China seems to have the similar "thing" of gendered workplaces and occupations. Even though some females manage to get into male-dominated sales and marketing teams, they are not seen as the major influencers. In some situations, gendering issues could be viewed as discrimination. Laura describes herself as a "decoration" in China among her male-dominated team.

> I think…in China, I can feel more gender discrimination, I did marketing, my job is about marketing… some clients are male…not that respect female, they just think you are pretty, it is good, you just sat there. You are pretty, if a table has a pretty woman it is good, but when we talk, it is, it is man's talk, they don't talk, just sit there.

June sees the gendered roles as performing some particular function, because the practice of drinking is an important way of socialising and is easier for men.

> … I guess some roles seem easy for men to do it, like sales people, because in China you always need to drink, to socialise with your clients or customers…

There are two different accounts towards similar issues in the male-dominated sales team, but Laura takes it as gender discrimination, while June justifies the practice of the role. Though both Australia and China have some occupations dominated by men, interviewees have strategies to adjust to their organisational culture.

Social Stereotypes towards Chinese Female Expatriates

There are certain social stereotypes towards Chinese female expatriates at the workplace in China and Australia. Chinese female professionals are expected by their male colleagues to be "hard-working", "considerate", and "client-friendly" (Hibbins 2005; Ho 2006). Some ethnic Chinese-dominated employers bring their Chinese cultural reference and practice into their Australian workplaces. Jessie's Chinese male manager reserves the right to overrule any disagreement, "Because he has a higher level and he comes and chooses another staff". In some situations, he "does not really have a good temper" and expresses himself by "shouting at" her. She also experiences similar stereotyping at home as well. Her father remains the main authority and "he doesn't listen to my mum because she's a female, and me, maybe just because I'm too young". This kind of gendered stereotyping is embedded in the social and cultural environment. The difficulty Jessie faces is how to deal with her parents in a more open society, such as Australia. She thinks she has more freedom, yet experiences stereotyping from her ethnic Chinese male superiors.

Lucy has similar experiences as Jessie. Her management has the undisputable power in internal matters.

> … They don't know the law; [no one] knows in the company, they just did everything as they want. Cause they don't know the law…

Sometimes, interviewees even face some stereotypes from both genders in life. They are expected to be in a relationship in their 20s and have a family. For instance, Laura, Jessie, Lisa, and Judy (who are all in their mid-20s), all mention a high level of stress related to this topic.

> … Because female have to raise children and, most Chinese women have their traditional thinking, maybe they are very, very, at wonderful woman, may be they have very great jobs, they can live alone, live very well, but in their deep hearts, they want to have husbands to take care of her. Most of Chinese women think of that. Of course, they have some exceptions. Er, that's why a lot of Chinese women prefer to did so job which is lower than her ability to keep balance between her life and her job. So, I think because of that reason, female may have some low position than male.

According to Laura, females are bound with household duties, sometimes they have to prioritise family over career. Women are "measured" with ethnic-based stereotyping towards "success".

Jessie: …it's more equal in Australia. That's because in China when you're nearly 13 [she actually meant 30], about that kind of age, your families or relatives all think you should get married. So, at that time they think family is much more important than your work and they push you to get married, to have children. I don't really think it's the same in Australia.

Judy: …I'm at this critical age, in China a lot of people would give you pressure… 'Why do you need to pursue a Master degree, you should get married'. 'Why do you have so many dreams' … And people will be judgmental. But in Sydney people don't really care. If you don't get married until you're 29, good girl. People wouldn't judge you… in Europe, you're still considered a youngster. You are 26, you still get discounts. But in China, no, you reach 22 people are like 'why you still not have a boyfriend? You should start thinking about that'. No. You can do things you want; people wouldn't really have a lot of things what you should be doing. Really like everyone mind your own business here in Sydney… You actually have more freedom I think.

Jessie and Judy are facing similar situations in that their age places them at the threshold of having a family. This perhaps can be linked to the predominance of cultural values that expects females to set their life purpose of having a family and bearing a child. Because more women have opportunities to pursue a higher education and a professional career, the ethnic Chinese culture is changing, but some cultural expectations still remain. This may connect with legal age for marriage in China, which is 20 for females and 22 for males.

… It is definitely the environment… I feel that I can actually do things without being judged, oh, they don't judge people. So, I, this is one thing I really like about this country, that's what changed me… In China…when I came here when I was 17, when I was in high school, people judged a lot…

Lisa suggests that there is a degree of difference in facing similar pressures in China and in Australia. It seems that Australian society is more respectful for personal choices regarding relationships. She generally does not experience being "judged" by her family status. Perhaps it is because of a comparatively casual environment here, and her extended family and main social networks are mainly based in China.

… That's super gender. If you are a woman you are basically can't progress. 'Cause there, women are expected to stay at home. But here I don't think…they don't really care about that. So, I think it's culture… I'm married when I went there [Japan]…and I understood Japanese at that time, they were like "What is she doing here? Isn't she supposed to be at home?" They all think like that. I think it is easier here [in Australia].

Tara went to Japan for a one-year assignment and she experienced a deeper social stereotype towards women, particularly from Japanese men in her workplace there. Japan perhaps has similar social expectations as that in China, whereby women, in particular married women, are expected to focus on their household duties and to bear a child rather than pursue a career.

44

Women, together with the elderly, the disabled, and children, are seen as weak groups in China. Others are expected to mind them. Some companies incorporate those values into the organisational culture.

> Laura: ... I don't think man should take care of female. But some females, some Chinese females, may think the male should be the gentleman and they should take care of female. Maybe that's why they, they think, they didn't treat them well. But if you are, you are totally different, you will not think that way.

All those social stereotypes constantly shape others' attitudes towards Chinese women in Australia. They are useful references in understanding females' identity and their professional roles within their workplace as well as in the broader society.

Masculine Managers

Within my sample, four participants currently have female mangers and six have male managers, which also indicates the reality of the higher proportion of males in managerial positions. It is important to note this difference in numbers. Moreover, even though some interviewees describe female managers at their workplaces, they show masculine characteristics, such as having "shortcut hairstyle" and strong presence of power. June describes her female manager as such:

> ... She also got her hair cut very short. She's a little bit tall and very strong. She seems to sometimes also doesn't want to talk... She acts a bit different, because she had a short cut sort of like a man, a strong and her personality seems to be strong as well... I guess especially if it's a top manager's man then it seems, you know, the management it seems more men than women in top management. Otherwise in the middle there are also a few female managers and also they seem to look very...they look quite tough. They make quick decision... I think in Australia... If they're female, you can tell whether they are managers or not or a supervisor... but just by observing ...

This prompts the question of the success of being a female manager in the Australian workplace and it is confirmed by Wajcman's (2013) claim that a female manager, to be successful, has to manage like a man. Female managers are still rarely represented both in public services and private organisations. Australian Bureau of Statistics (Aug 2015) reported that only "26% of the Key Management Personnel, 24% of Board Directors and 17% of CEOs were women". Though some feminist managers' "soft" approach is recommended in modern human resources management (Jenkins and Delbridge 2013), the traditional masculine "hard" approach is still prevalent at the workplace.

"Glass Ceiling" or Not?

Although Australia shows more respect for women, it has a "glass ceiling" practice at the workplace, which prevents female professionals from reaching top managerial positions (Wajcman 2013). Participants describe reasonable equal rights for payment and promotional opportunities. There are, however, still significant findings in practice that suggest few females are above middle managerial positions and restricted in some occupations.

> June: … it seems more men than women in top management. Otherwise in the middle there are also a few female managers and also they seem to look very…they look quite tough.
>
> Tara: This is always the case. 'Cause higher up people is always more…there are more males. If there is more senior. But that could be because the female became a mother and they don't want to work as hard, that kind of thing?
>
> Judy: … in the finance sector every single night is Men in Finance night. Because in the finance sector, 99 per cent are men. That's just the way it is… There's not a lot of women can do. Most people who study Accounting are girls. So in my study place, I would say 70 per cent are girls, and 30 per cent are guys. And in the workplace, it's the reverse, it's extremely reversed because there's not really a lot of girls…

There are distinctive perspectives towards female career progression, expressed in association with age and working experience in Sydney. Participants in their 20s believe that they do not experience restrictions in entering any occupations or roles in Australia. It probably indicates the fact that they haven't experienced the "glass ceiling" because of their limited work experience and their entry level in professions. On the contrary, participants in age groups above their 20s, who have generally had longer working experience (suggesting longer than eight years) could have experienced the "glass ceiling". Having longer working experience allows them to pursue a higher position, such as middle range managerial positions or even higher. Among all my interviewees, there are no managerial ranks, even for those in their 40s and 50s, who have over twenty years working experiences. This may be due to the nature of their professions or their individual intentions for not pursuing managerial positions, such as nurses Amy and Julie. However, June, who has over ten years of work experience and an ambition for a managerial role, suggests that she could not rank as a manager. It is difficult to identify whether it is "glass ceiling" or other factors that prevent her from progressing.

Associated with the "glass ceiling" is the "accent ceiling" (Collins and Low 2010) and the "bamboo ceiling" (Hyun 2012), suggesting that migrant characteristics of interviewees prevent them from achieving their desired roles. It is, therefore, difficult to speculate whether June did not reach the managerial role because of the "glass ceiling" or due to the nature of her migrant status. Or it may indicate the reality of intersections among gender relations, ethnicity, and migration, resulting in the complexity of participants' experiences.

> Tara: ...because this is my home country, therefore it's easier for me. Whereas, I see that in everyone as well, my colleagues, they came from...in their home countries they could be a manager or something. But in here you're just an accountant.

> June: I think in China I would be much more confident and I think I can be a manager easily. But here I dream of that. It might be a little bit [that] women has less competitive [natures] than men. I think in China I wouldn't worry about this. I can manage people whether they're female or male, but here I don't think I can do it.

Another finding is that participants' family status affects their perspectives towards gender relations at work. Participants who are single do not experience gender related issues, but participants with family experience issues at the professional level.

> Tara: This is always the case. 'Cause higher up people...there are more males. If there is more senior. But that could be because the female became a mother and they don't want to work as hard, that kind of thing?

This finding is in accordance with the literature that some female professionals shift their attention from work to home after bearing a child (Ho 2006). This will be discussed in Chapter 5 when exploring how Chinese female expatriates make choices between work and life, as well as how they plan their professional careers.

Gender and Culture: On Being a Female and an Expatriate

Researchers have been giving more attention to gender relations and culture, both in business and academia, over the past three decades, partially because of increasing global workplaces (Antal and Izraeli 1993; Caligiuri and Tung 1999; Butcher 2011). However, limited attention has been paid to their intersection, and rarely through perspectives of female expatriates. This thesis intends to investigate how Chinese female expatriates see their gender identity, gendered roles, and their behaviour at

their workplaces, and to what extend that their multiple dimensions of identity are understood in various situations.

> Judy: We speak Chinese, we speak Mandarin. That's our natural connection…I think my identity as a Chinese overcome my identity as a girl… But my identity as a Chinese, I think currently overcome me being… But I think being a minority is not really like being taken care, but you do feel taken care of sometimes, a little bit. For instance, if I think of myself as a white male, people will think I am in power and stuff, they don't really feel like they need to respect me. So, you need to put in some effort to find a group of people, and to blend in. But as a Chinese, as a lady, as a girl, I myself, my identity reflects who I am. I already have a group naturally, when I try to join this company. When I joined this company I naturally have a group of people just right there to welcome me. I think it's not a bad thing, I think maybe when one day I am in the management team, I think maybe I will encounter some difficulty, but at least for newcomer, new joiner, I didn't face that, I didn't feel that, I didn't sense that.

Judy indicates the complexity of multiple dimensions of her identity at work, in that she enjoys being a female and being looked after, being Chinese and categorised in a minority group. However, she also explains the differences that it may be a good thing at the entry level of her profession, the situation may change with the length of her working experience. Her description also suggests that gender relations interplay with culture.

> …I just think I am there trying to finish the job…but I am not skill enough to call myself a professional yet, and I am just working.

Lisa emphasises her professional role without highlighting other aspects of her identity, although she is not confident about her level of expertise. Nevertheless, it suggests that those Chinese expatriate women acknowledge their identity with multiple aspects, but they may outline one dominated aspect depending on the context.

Differences are commonly shared in understanding towards intersection of ethnic identity with gender relations in the context of organisational culture. Five interviewees who work in ethnic Chinese-dominated organisations mention their ethnicity outweighs others, such as being a female professional or being a migrant. Because of their Mandarin competency, they have the advantage to deal with Chinese clients and have a say about the Chinese market. Furthermore, some of them still preserve certain "Chinese" ways of doing business, such as focusing on relationships (*Guanxi* in Chinese), and therefore it is not surprising that those Chinese female expatriates set their ethnic identity as a norm and advance it. Another way of interpreting this is their strategy to

create a close relationship within the Chinese community and better satisfy their interests.

> Jessie: First as a Chinese, I have more communicate with my (Chinese) colleagues and my managers. And then, because I come from China, so I know more about what does Chinese student need, and how to connect with students, and their needs with our service we provided... As a female, I think it's a kind of stress.

Interviewees who work for culturally diverse organisations are focused more firmly on their professional roles at the workplace. Presumably, this is because the multicultural environment blurs ethnic differences by means of their organisational culture driven by the same corporate values that emphasises its employees' occupational roles. This blurring of ethnic differences consequently minimises employees' sense of ethnic identity, gender, or migrant status, which may assist them in feeling a stronger sense of belonging.

> June: ...I think sometimes I might not think I'm Chinese, but I may not really think I'm a part of that. When I'm at work doing what I'm doing, then I want to think, "Yeah, I'm a professional... I'm confident." ...if I've got a meeting, especially I'm new now...because I don't know very well about the company, I might be careful, you know, might try to observe what the other people say, what the other people do, before I take action... I think I'm a bit cautious. I'm not really think I'm just a part of them maybe...I want to minimise the difference...I guess I'd be the more reserve instead of just do it... Especially I'll be here like 13, 14 years, then you should know this culture very well.

Interviewees often face a diverse array of situations that reflect multiple aspects of their identity, but they tend to prioritise their strategies to support them in their directions. It may not matter whether they experience any gender issues or cultural conflicts at the workplace, but it matters which notions are hidden behind the nuanced everyday communication, as well as what strategies they choose and how they make sense of those issues. In saying this, the strategical shift impacts their professional career planning, which is to be discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

How Chinese female expatriates evaluate their status at work and negotiate their ethnic identity within their professional roles is sophisticated. Their experiences at the interpersonal and professional levels have suggested issues across gender relations and cultural differences. Ethnic Chinese practices of undervaluing females are embedded in

their consciousness, and, as such, Chinese women may refuse to express any disagreements with others, particularly at the workplace and in their country of residence. Another level may exist in the political and social impacts of free speech in China, resulting in Chinese women being used to reserving their negative thoughts about cultural differences instead of sharing them.

The complexity of the global workplace results in participants' multiple dimensions of identity. Most of them, interestingly, see themselves as a professional first at the workplace, and other identities follow, such as migrant, female, and Chinese, while in others' perspectives, they may be a migrant who happens to be a woman, or a professional who happens to be an ethnic Chinese, rather than the other way around. The ways interviewees describe their experiences in dealing with diverse situations suggest their strategic approaches to diverse situations, often in directions that favour them. It seems that Alder (2008) may have been right when she concludes that female expatriates are seen as professionals who happen to be women and other identities, rather than the other way around. If those women project an image of competency that is in consistent with their organisational cultures and perceptions, rather than Chinese ethnic identities alone, they are demonstrating an example of negotiating cultural identities in action.

Chapter 5 – Chinese Female Expatriates: Moving Beyond

Introduction

In earlier discussions, interviewees demonstrated experiences related to their ethnic identity and gender relations at the workplace, and they also reflected different views in terms of organisational culture, categorising these as either ethnic Chinese-dominated or culturally diverse workplaces. The former is embedded with "Chinese" business values with an emphasis on hierarchical leadership and power (Earley 1993). In contrast, the latter has other focuses, such as teamwork. The differences in the organisational culture directly impact on expatriates' lived experiences, as it may negatively or positively shape their attitudes towards working duties (Schein 1985). How they behave, in return, reshapes their organisational culture. In saying this, interviewees could be viewed as cultural mediators and practitioners, where they make sense of their presence among challenges at work.

Apart from cultural issues, interviewees face the same difficulties as other Australian women, such as household responsibilities and career planning. Because of migration, they may not have the same resources as locals and may need to make choices that are more difficult. Emerging themes reflect the reasons behind these tough choices. This chapter, therefore, argues that organisational culture entails the space that interviewees perform their professional roles, but also shapes their choices beyond those roles, particularly between work and life, and their career planning. The differences that participants described in organisational cultures reinforce their perceptions about culture, gender relations, and migration.

Experiences of Organisational Culture

As mentioned in Chapter 3, participants describe their organisational culture differently, particularly among those who have had working experiences in both Chinese-dominated organisations and culturally diverse corporations, with distinctive organisational values. Interviewees, with working experiences in Chinese-dominated workplaces, share common feelings towards organisational values, such as strict

hierarchical leadership and power, an emphasis on "relationship" management, as well as flexibilities towards family emergencies.

Julie describes, "…in China sometimes, the boss is number one, you need to listen to them every minute, it doesn't matter if they are correct or not." In her experience, the management has the power that cannot be questioned by subordinates, even when their behaviour is wrong. However, she does not explicitly state the gender of her management. It is difficult to speculate if this is a matter of gender or to take it as one aspect of her organisational culture.

Closely associated with power in ethnic Chinese-dominated organisations is "relationship" management. Amy mentions, "…if you have good relationships with the management, they will look after you very good and they treat you good." Kelsey also indicates that her work is related to the manager's "emotion" in the way that "… today if I happy, you are selling 20 things, that will be fine. But today I am not happy, then if you are selling 20 things, not enough." Their key performance indicators depend on how they network with their management. This kind of leadership at the workplace creates an intense environment that is stressful for interviewees, and sometimes for their colleagues (non-Chinese) as well. This could result in psychological stresses on top of their job responsibilities.

> June: I think the difference is because the typical Chinese company…so for the people on the top level, they're definitely Chinese. So, for the other…we do have western people in the company as well or in a certain level, especially in the marketing department and product managers, they are western people. I know for the western people, they know that the way they talk should be careful, because it's a typical Chinese company, they actually know they should keep in mind that they should either (be) close to the Chinese manager or they're cautious, so they know there's a difference.

While some interviewees comment negatively about ethnic Chinese-dominated workplaces, others outline the flexibility towards early leave due to their family emergencies. Nevertheless, it indicates another reason for stressing the importance of networking with their superiors.

> …In the western company, because they are very straight so you cannot go anytime you want. But I find in the Chinese company if you've got some problem, like kids have some problem, you can go… They are more understanding of your situation… Some of my friends, they working in the western company…. I don't know, when they have asked the boss. First, they think about calling the friends to pick up the kids, not themselves. Because I've got one experience is my friend, she's working in the Bank A. She asked me to pick up her kids because she can't leave as soon as possible. Actually, I don't know why. Yes, I pick up the kids for her then she said she might have early leave, but I think she more focused on what the boss [is] thinking about that.

Kelsey describes differences in her workplace compared with her friends' workplaces. However, my intention is not to investigate whether the "western" company has a similar practice to Chinese-dominated organisations, but to examine from another perspective regarding her friend's behaviour, that is, "focusing on what the boss is thinking about", which may be her personal choice to focus on her work first.

Though most of the Chinese-dominated workplaces participants described seem to share common values and practices, the studio Lisa works in is not in line with them. Lisa praises her Chinese male employer for his leadership: "He is ok to creativity. He is not like other boss…if you have an idea, he will push you to go, to go directly… if you are loyal, have the talent, he will treat you well". Lisa is not required to work on the "relationship" management, and her account is a positive one.

On the other hand, interviewees describe their culturally diverse workplaces differently with emphasis on factors, such as working overtime and good teamwork support.

> ….In my last job, the manager actually said our job is not a click in and click off. It sounds terrible. They got a different policy for the new people…they work from 8:30 to 5:00, but for the newly-joined people we started from 8:30 to 5:30…that's a different policy… And I know the other colleague, she used to work overtime quite often, but after that she thought she couldn't handle that…for that company it seemed quite normal. The manager even said, "Oh, I work an even longer time." For the current company is pretty good… if necessary to me it's okay I can be half an hour longer and it's fine. And especially if I feel relaxed then I can be more productive… I'm actually happy if I need to work overtime half an hour… I see some people work a bit of longer time, but I think that they volunteered…

In June's situation, it seems working overtime is a common phenomenon in both her former and current organisations, but the difference lies in her attitudes towards them. She volunteers to work overtime in her current organisation because of its "open" organisational culture.

> I think in any accounting jobs you work overtime… the Australian law doesn't give you any overtime…for overtime worker, that's how it is. I think, a lot of people do…there is no timing for that, unless you work on a public holiday. If you just stay back for a couple of hours, not as flexible. That's accounting. I think it's common.

Tara suggests working overtime is commonly known and accepted in her occupation. June and Tara work in different industries and functional departments, but working overtime seems to be their common practice. This is not to conclude that working overtime is the practice for culturally diverse organisations, but to emphasise its influence on both participants, in particular towards their time management between work and life.

Teamwork is another theme that emerges in culturally diverse workplaces. Amy's workplace encourages teamwork and provides support in fulfilling employees' job responsibilities. Its organisational culture impacts on interviewees' lived experiences at work positively, and in return, they are willing to dedicate more effort to their work.

> Amy: We work with each other, we always help each other.
>
> Julie: ....they provide very good support for us. The management… are very good. So, any problem, you can deal with your manager and they can give to you the very good support, so that's why I'm very happy to work in this facility. Before I was working here for almost two years; before I was working in other Chinese cultures, community service, but compared with that, here is number one, because Chinese community, we working in different environment… So here got a lot of support, so that's why I find it different.

Equally significant is to understand where those organisational differences come from. Some participants mention that they do not picture those differences in terms of leadership and management across gender, but are due to two different national locations and due to organisational size. Lucy says, "I think the difference is [between] the big company and the small company".

Although participants have contradictory comments towards ethnic Chinese-dominated organisations, they prefer to work in culturally diverse environments because they generally dislike the organisational values embedded in Chinese-dominated workplaces, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Meanwhile, they tend to categorise culturally diverse organisations into a "western" style of management, and how their experiences reflect their ethnic identity. Consequently, those perceptions can affect their experiences and their choices in their professional roles.

Making Choices

In terms of being a female, those interviewees have to evaluate their multiple roles, such as managing professional duties, fulfilling household responsibilities, minding the migration process, and they are often pulled in different directions by the demands of each role and are required to make tough choices. Their experiences of dealing with those issues results in reflecting multiple dimensions of their identity. The difficulty is whether to emphasise one aspect or to consider all dimensions. The overall aim, however, is to attempt to grasp a picture of their experiences regarding their choices at work and in everyday life.

Balancing Work and Life

Mounting literature in the past thirty years outlines research on the work-and-life balance, particularly with the increasing number of female workers (Caligiuri and Tung 1999; Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010; Butcher 2011). Due to their multiple roles at work and home, the importance of balance is stressed in the literature (Mayrhofer and Scullion 2002). In practice, there are still issues regarding how female workers shift between their professional and family roles. Female expatriates bear more responsibilities in another cultural environment, as they often play the main role of easing the entire family into the host culture (Cole and McNulty 2011). Their role in this transition has an interesting link to the success of their international assignments (Varma et al. 2006; Tahir and Azhar 2013; Shen and Jiang 2015).

Participants have difficulties in balancing their work and life but in different ways, mainly due to their family status. Single participants tend to prioritise their work over life and often work overtime, however those with family, particularly with a child, describe a shift from pursuing their professional work to dedicating their time to their family. Being single, however, does not mean that they do not have a life. Jessie spends her time working, studying, and trying to "have fun with her friend", occasionally also working on weekends.

> … It's like I always rush out of my time, my study, my work… We have a meeting on the weekend so I just work on a weekend…

June, on the other hand, points out the importance of having a healthy life style, to find a balance between working hard and looking after herself. She had no choice in her previous job, but she worked overtime in order to fit into organisational expectations, however, she volunteers to work more in her current organisation because she enjoys the freedom there. Personal agency seems to overcome other factors. She consequently adds that because she is "free from family responsibilities", she could manage her time much better. Meanwhile, she emphasises "balance" and her exercises after work as "a big part of her life". She also mentions that being a single woman, she does not "have many opportunities to go out or meet people often". The transformation from compulsory overtime work to volunteering is interesting because it indicates the change in her choices.

> **...** I try to be active...after work I can go to the gym...exercise is very important for me. I go to yoga classes and body balance as well... I still make sure I don't get stressed out at work, especially when you start a new job, you need to learn quite a lot of new stuff. So I make sure I have enough sleep... I feel energetic and then do my job properly... In my last job, the manager actually said our job is not a click in and click off...the newly-joined people we started from 8:30 to 5:30... at the beginning when I finish work... at 5:30, I tried to leave the company office and the manager actually try to get some work for me at 5:30...The manager even said, "Oh, I work an even longer time." ... For the current company, I'm actually happy if I need to work overtime half an hour, but not too long, you still need a balance.

In contrast, interviewees with children describe their focus on family. Tara, a new mum, mentions that her attention definitely shifted from her work to her family. She used to work overtime on a regular basis but she expects to "get back to her family" due to motherhood responsibilities. This shift reflects her choice between being a female and a professional.

> Of course...life! Yes, life is first. I don't know how it's going to because I do... even when I was pregnant I can work until late. I am often the second last to leave my work, so I don't know what it's going to be like when I go back. I probably will have to leave at 5pm, which is going to look weird, 'cause usually I leave at 8 or 9pm... My workplace doesn't really encourage that (flexible working hours) unfortunately. I would like to, but they don't want to.

There are other tough choices, however, that cannot be easily seen as a woman shifts between work and life. Choices exist in negotiating their migration status. Kelsey shares her friends' situations where they send their children to China and remain in Australia to focus on work.

> For me, if I can earn more money that would be good, but if not then I will save the time with my kids... I think some of the parents, they might be studying in Australia or working in Australia, but the kids still stay in China with the grandparents...I got many friends, they always do this after the kid's born then they send them back to China... They always say oh it's for the kids, it's good for the kids because I can earn more money then they can have a good life...

Kelsey raises the issue of the practice of some expatriate Chinese who give up their family and pursue a career, which may be similar to other migrants. This choice is supported by the Chinese philosophy that "work must come first", and they believe that working hard is the only way to assure a better future for the next generation. Without the support of the extended family, they have to make these tough decisions.

Lucy has adopted the strategy of shifting from her professional mindset to focusing her family responsibilities once she returns home. This switch between roles also indicates the conflict between work and life and its impacts on her choices. She says:

> ... When I went home, I will tell myself, it is just a job, and I left it out of the door and don't think about it, and now I enjoy my life here...

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Chinese female professionals in contemporary cities in China, usually keep work as their focus because their responsibilities of bearing a child are often shared with extended family or outsourced by domestic helpers. Those exterior supports spare the family duties, which also ease the tensions between work and life. Expatriate Chinese however, do not usually have this kind of support, either because of the migration process or other factors. Sometimes they need the support of daycare, but it rests financially on their family income.

As Ho (2006) suggests, Chinese professional women are in the process of shifting from being a professional to attending to their family, and their gendered roles in the family are consequently outlined, especially related to motherhood. With limited help from extended family and high expenses of children's daycare services in Australia, some expatriate women choose to step down from their career and fulfil family duties as a priority. In fact, some quite satisfy with this choice, as they get back to connecting with their families and spend more time with their children. Four interviewees mentioned in their Chinese language, outside of the interviewing process, that they are happier in Australia because they can watch their children's progressions, which is seen as a luxury in China if they are still working. This shift from work to home also contributes to the phenomena of the "glass ceiling" at the workplace, in that single female expatriates who are willing to proceed with their professional careers still have to fight to reach the managerial level. It indicates that issues at work are more complicated than they appear. Their choices between work and life directly affect their professional career planning.

Professional Career Planning

Significant findings show that there is a strong correlation between interviewees' migration status and their professional career planning. Those with unstable visa status tend to mind their migration, and some even sacrifice their interests for their migration.

Lucy, at the time of the interview, mentions she is unhappy about her work, but she chooses to stay for a stable visa for her family, "because I think the most important thing is the PR". She thinks getting the permanent residence outweighs any long-term career plan.

> Because I'm a Chinese and I don't have a stable working visa... it's kind of hard... I just wait and see whether can I find a good job in Australia after I graduate... I will make the decision at that time.

Jessie also outlines the importance of her migration. She cannot have a long-term professional planning without a stable visa. The "accent ceiling", therefore, significantly amounts to the complexity of her choice.

Lisa gave up her studies in design, which she was enjoying, and transferred to accounting because she "needed the PR". Though she knew it was "a waste of her time for this degree", she linked it to a promising migration in the future.

> ... So after I graduate I will immediately start working, but will spend around half a year trying to get my permanent residency, and then I will start my juris doctor degree, and then by the time I already have my juris doctor degree, I think I will already have my Chartered Accountant, and then I will try to switch it up. I was trying to find a job like PPB Advisory accounting and consulting firm, or in a place like that. I will work for one and a half years, around there. That's pretty much how I see myself in five years.

Judy also emphasises the importance of the permanent residence, and considers it as part of her long-term career planning. Without it, she will not be able to fulfil her professional career planning.

Interviewees demonstrate a shift from simply pursuing career progression, but remain in line with their migration status. To some degree this "accent ceiling" could be seen as "racism" towards Chinese female expatriates in fulfilling their professional career planning. Though no interviewees specifically suggested they experienced "discrimination" because of their cultural backgrounds, they implicitly described difficulties of securing a position without the permanent residence. Because of their unstable visa status, interviewees do not have the security to maintain their primary focus on professional career planning. Even if those interviews do not use the word "racism", we know it continues to be an issue in Australian workplaces (Still 2006), the women interviewed here did not raise it as a problem.

The discourse between their expectations and reality is another complicated layer. To look at interviewees' choices, they are not individual choices, but difficult ones that affect their entire family. At times, they have to downplay professional career in order to fulfil their family responsibilities. In their perceptions, a stable migration status assures a happy life that entails the natural environment and well-developed infrastructures in Australia.

> Lucy: … I think Sydney is easier to live as a female… facilities, and instructions… it is very good for the females with kids, but in China it is not… So if I don't have work, I don't have to work, I can really enjoy the life here, it is very happy and it is very you know, the sunshine, the air, the sea, the beach and everything…

Some interviewees raised another important point that in practice they see their professional career as a step-down in Australia compared with that in their home country. June and Tara, for example, believe that they should be at the managerial positions if they were in China. When asked about the reasons behind this claim, they believe China would be more equal in terms of competency for managerial positions, and they would have more opportunities to progress to middle level management. Moreover, because of their migrant identity in Australia, it supports the notion that they are naturally less competitive than local residents, and consequently it prevents them from achieving higher positions, even with similar skills and efforts. This is reflected in Ho's (2006) findings that some Hong Kong female professionals have to step down from their professional roles in Australia. However, on the other hand, both June and Tara enjoy their lives more in Australia, which also suggests that their life goals are more than achieving successful professional careers.

Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, interviewees' experiences and their accounts vary, and this reflects the complicated underlying ideas, such as the intersection of culture, gender relations, and migration. All can be more intensive within the specific spheres of organisational culture. Interviewees' discussions around differences at the workplace further reflect multiple dimensions of their identity, and provide justifications as to which aspects they choose to outline. Sometimes their accounts of experiences at the workplace affect their choices more significantly regarding work and life, and their professional careers.

Making choices between work and life is not easy for the women I have interviewed. In terms of career planning, they not only face common barriers that other female professionals encounter, such as "masculine managers", and gendered positions within the workplace, they also have to cope with the "accent ceiling", even "racism". How they progress at work is worth investigating to understand how their identity shifts from one aspect to another. It is more complex than looking through different experiences, but

seeing each individual as a personal agent in fulfilling their life-long goals. Personal choices are not simply for professional career planning, but may directly link to their family's mindsets and expectations.

Conclusion

Chinese female expatriates' experiences are constantly shaped by culture and gender at their workplaces (Westwood and Leung 1994). Insights drawn from this qualitative study about Chinese expatriate women raise discussions regarding issues and challenges that they are facing within their organisations and beyond, in terms of their everyday experiences.

Dual identities of being a professional and a female can be even more challenging in another cultural environment (Ho 2008), where ethnic background can be blurred by the social and cultural atmosphere. Other issues, such as self-embedded gendered values towards certain professions, managerial roles, and the realities of migration processes could become more pressing. This research project has allowed for an in-depth discussion with ten participants regarding their experiences, and it is, therefore, valuable to acknowledge the individual differences of the participants and to further interrogate what has been found.

Empirical data confirm the complexity of their experiences. Liu (2013 p. 89) argues, "the local, social and cultural context is crucial to understanding micro-level organizational experiences" and "the wider sociocultural understanding of gender and work closely influences the organizational logic among management". This study, therefore, sheds light on how the divergence of business practices and organisational values between ethnic Chinese-dominated and culturally diverse organisations in Australia affects the experiences of Chinese female expatriates. Their views towards those differences largely determine their attitudes towards work, and their choices in life and their professional careers.

In discussing "culture", interviewees described their accounts differently. Empirical data indicated that parts of ethnic cultural values are brought into expatriates' lives in Australia, which was discussed in Chapter 3. The contradictory comments drawn from interviews about culture are another way of proving that Chinese experiences are complex, constantly changing, and not part of a homogenous culture, but a great variety within.

Investigating Chinese female expatriates' experiences from the perspective of gender and its intersection with other factors, such as migration, is an insightful approach. Just as Butcher (2006 p. 180) suggests that "mobility is a key factor contributing to the strain expatriate life can have on relationships", gender has added another level of sophistication to expatriates' experiences. The stereotypes towards Chinese females within China and Australia are similar to some degree, because they are gendered with appearances of sexuality and social expectations of certain occupations and roles (Liu 2013). Data from this study have confirmed the phenomena in the mainstream literature that workplaces are still largely masculine, and that women are still under-represented in positions of leadership (Snaebjornsson et al. 2015; Collins and Low 2010).

The issues and challenges that interviewees shared at their workplaces indicate that Chinese female expatriates have multiple dimensions of identity, and that their identity may shift from one aspect to another depending on context. They form strategies to cope with cultural and gender differences to better negotiate their presence at their workplaces. In addition, their individual experiences also shape others' perceptions of ethnic Chinese identity.

A more direct implication lies in the self-reflection of participants. The research design of semi-structured interviews allowed them to reflect upon their workplaces, and discussions went beyond my expectations. Soon after my interview, one participant informed me of her resignation. She indicated that her organisation was oriented by "Chinese" values, such as internal promotion based on "relationship" management rather than individual competency. When we switched to Mandarin, she revealed more issues other than organisational culture, such as hierarchal leadership, which she saw as strict and narrow-minded to her disappointment. She stated that her experience at her workplace was "...not good enough to compensate what I had to suffer". Moreover, her work duties were not clear. She was asked to do work that was not a part of her job description, such as booking flight tickets and filing in monthly expenses for her employer's sister who happened to be her friend. In the end, she added, "actually it wasn't a moment of urge to quit", but due to more deeper consideration of the fact that

she was paid minimum wages and spending over 60% of her salary on her child's daycare. She said:

> I would rather spend more time with my son rather than suffering weeks after weeks in a work environment I hated… I just want to be happier in Australia. At the beginning, I had no other options but stay on my student visa in order to stay here. But now, I have more freedoms as to what kind of life I want. I didn't want to come to Australia but still work for ethnic Chinese for a job I disliked.

Currently, she is focused on preparing for English tests and the permanent residence application, stating, "You can have more choices once you have PR". The shift in her attitudes and depth of discussions when speaking in two different languages was significant.

This participant was not the only one who reflected on their situations after our conversations, and some mentioned that they would reconsider their current situation and "try to work out other ways to be happier in Australia". "Happiness" seems to be an important factor in transforming their focus on career and life, with emphasis on the long-term status of their family as a whole, and considerations of giving up their careers temporarily in order to fulfil their family duties. These direct self-reflections of the participants also suggest the powerful effects of carrying out this research.

In a broader sense, this project offers an insightful way to acknowledge challenges that Chinese female expatriates are facing in Australia. The ethnic Chinese in Australia are a community with great diversity, and each individual experience varies to some extent. It can also shed light on Asian female migrants in general, as to the influence of culture, gender, and other factors on their choices. Furthermore, this study offers a qualitative approach in grappling with nuanced concepts of culture and gender, and their intersection with other factors, which has not been widely employed in the mainstream literature of expatriate studies. The significance of in-depth interviews lies in the rich insights they provide into participants' complex experiences.

Future Directions for Expatriates Studies

This study is constrained by the time and scope of a Master of Research thesis and the sample is limited. Due to quick responses from potential participants, this project was able to recruit ten participants within the scheduled timeframe, but participants were

from various backgrounds in terms of age, family status, and occupations, which led to the fact that no comparative studies across one or two specific groups was possible. However, it is useful in identifying the diversity of the backgrounds they came from. The degree of diversity is interesting and important to note. If drawn from in-depth interviews and application of theories with large statistics, future studies with such mixed methods could be a valuable approach to explore further. Issues around culture and gender can be measured; in doing so, the research could be more beneficial for policy makers, in particular for the human resources management to help expatriates successfully transition from their home culture to the host culture.

Class is one aspect that I neglected in my research design, but it may be significant in identifying participants' educational background, which is largely influenced by family members, as are perspectives towards gender related issues. It would be valuable to consider those aspects for future studies. Due to the one-child-only policy in China from 1981 to 2016, the political and social environment of this age group is different from others, where the entire family's resources rested on the only child for a better education, and this consequently could change the perspectives of some participants (Liu 2013). This age group could be a valuable demographic to investigate regarding the roles of class and gender in expatriates' experiences.

Due to the cross-disciplinary design, this study draws literature from business and human resources management to explore where problems can occur for female expatriates, but it cannot provide practical solutions. This study offers more from the perspective of sociology and cultural studies to interpret issues from workplaces in the hope of grappling those "management issues" from its origins.

In terms of research questions, this study intended to understand female employees' perceptions primarily, rather than explicitly explore other relationships involved, such as those between them and their male co-workers. Further studies could include the diversity from other perspectives (such as the managerial roles) of coping with those issues, as well as male participants and how they evaluate the presence of female professionals at the workplace. Comparative studies from diverse angles can potentially enrich the complexity of everyday experience.

Place-making is another level of complexity. Sydney is "the hub" for professional migrants (Butcher 2006), where the identity of migrants may outweigh the numbers of Chinese female expatriates. Narratives from participants often stated "there are so many Chinese here, people won't notice the difference" (quoted from Laura). The sense of identity and belonging to the city will be another important aspect to look at in the future, and the degree of shifts in Chineseness during their settlement in Sydney is another interesting aspect to investigate. Ethnographical approaches among ethnic Chinese communities would be beneficial to gain rich insights.

Despite the above limitations, this study was able to make the best use of restricted sample to generate rich data and explore the complexity of Chinese female expatriates' lived experiences, and to see how this experience has reshaped their perceptions about work, career and their personal and professional identities. It directly affects individual participants' self-reflections and is useful to Chinese migrants as a community. It has also shed light on new approaches in examining expatriates.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

Interviewees were questioned across a range of issues around the relation between gender and cross-cultural communication in the workplace. These include, for example:

- Tell me about your job, your main job responsibilities at work and how you are managing them.

- Tell me about your organisation, and what is like working there.

- Have you encountered any "cultural difference" at work? Can you give me an example? How you understand "culture" and how you see it in your workplace. How did you manage those cultural differences?

- Have you encountered any communication issues in your workplace? Please give me an example. Why do you think these issues arise? Is it because you are Chinese or because you are an expatriate? Alternatively, any other factors you may think of?

- Do you think gender differences play any role in these issues? Have you found they are more likely to be involved men or women, for example?

- Tell me a story of how being a Chinese female shapes your work experiences.

- How are you balancing your work and life as a female expatriate in Sydney? Have you ever requested flexible work arrangements?

Questions were asked in slightly different orders and descriptions depending on each participant's answers, and sometimes, further questions were pursued individually.

Appendix 2- Table of Participants

Participant Name	Nationality	Ethnicity	Participant age	Participant occupation	Length of residence in Sydney (months)	Type of employment	Size of the employer (total number of employees)	Family status	Percentage of females at workplace (100%)	Significance of cultural diversity at workplace (100%)
Lucy	Chinese	Chinese	34	Assistant Accountant	32	Full-time	above 100	Married with one child	Females more (60%) in general but mainly females in her department	overall multicultural, 60% Chinese in general, 100% Chinese in her department
Laura	Chinese	Chinese	27	Book Keeper	36	Casual	between 20-100	Single	About equal percentage (50%) both in general and in her department	overall multicultural, 2% Chinese in general, 2% Chinese in her department
Jessie	Chinese	Chinese	25	Education Agent	15	Part-time	below 20	In a partnership	Females more (60%) both in general and in her department	overall multicultural, 80% Chinese in general, 100% Chinese in her department
Amy	Australian	Chinese	55	Registered Nurse	120	Part-time	above 100	Married with one child, Australian husband	Females more (60%-70%)both in general and in her department	overall multicultural, 2% Chinese in general, 1% Chinese in her department
Julie	Australian	Chinese	50	Registered Nurse	240	Full-time	above 100	Married with two children	Females more (60%-70%)both in general and in her department	overall multicultural, 2% Chinese in general, 1% Chinese in her department

Kelsey	Australian	Chinese	33	Small Business Owner	240	Full-time	below 20	Married with two children	Females more (70%) both in general and in her department	overall multicultural, 90% Chinese in general, 100% Chinese in her department
June	Australian	Chinese	40	Pet Insurance Coordinator	96	Full-time	above 100	Single	About equal percentage in general (50%) but male dominated in her department (20%)	overall multicultural, 20% Chinese in general, 20% Chinese in her department
Tara	Australian	Chinese	31	Accountant	254	Full-time	above 100	Married with one child	About equal percentage in general (50%) but male dominated in her department (20%)	overall multicultural, 20% Chinese in general, 10% Chinese in her department
Lisa	Chinese	Chinese	27	Assistant Designer	120	Part-time	below 20	Single	Male dominated in general (80%) and in her department (10%)	overall multicultural, 80% Chinese in general, 100% Chinese in her department
Judy	Chinese	Chinese	25	Cashier and Assistant Accountant	13	Part-time	between 20-100	Single	Male dominated in general (80%) and in her department (10%)	overall multicultural, 90% Chinese in general, 100% Chinese in her department