

# **A Critical Examination of Women's Work-Family Conflict and Career Aspirations in the Chinese Airline Industry**

by

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*A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Cardiff University*

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*To my Dad and Mum*  
献给我的爸爸妈妈

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## **Abstract**

Work demands and family responsibilities are often seen to be incompatible and, in the light of increasing female participation in paid employment, there is a growing concern about work-family conflict for women worldwide. Western literature suggests that both work and family-related factors give rise to women's work-family conflict. Also, the persistence of a gendered division of domestic labour – mainly arising from the role of women as the principle child-rearers and carers – have provided explanations for the continued disadvantage that women experience in the workplace. This study examines the extent to which these Western experiences prevail in modern China and considers the full range of factors within the Chinese context in order to develop an understanding of how work and family conflict for Chinese women.

The empirical evidence reported was collected from case studies conducted in three Chinese airlines. Through the use of a multi-method approach – including questionnaires, qualitative interviews and documentary analysis – rich data has enabled insights to be gained into the issue of work-family conflict in the Chinese airline industry in particular and the Chinese context more broadly. The research shows that Western findings are not wholly applicable in the Chinese context because of a unique mix of traditional Chinese values alongside contemporary social, political and economic changes which enable women to participate more freely in the labour market. While it is found that family to work conflict is diminishing, significant work to family conflict is experienced mainly as a consequence of negative gendered organisational attitudes. This research builds upon Venter's (2002) three-level model of women's work-family experiences by developing a six-factor analytical model which enables a fuller understanding of women's work-family conflict and other relevant issues. The six-factor model also provides a framework for enhancing current knowledge about the lives of Chinese working women more generally.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BS: Back-office staff

CAAC: Civil Aviation Administration of China

CEO: Chief executive officer

DPE: Domestic private enterprises

EO: Equal opportunities

EU: European Commission

FA: Flight attendants

GS: Ground staff

HR: Human resource

HRM: Human resource management

MNC: Multi-national corporations

SOE: State-owned enterprises



# Chapter I Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and objectives

This thesis has two central aims: one is to explore Chinese women's experiences of work-family conflict and its impact on their career aspirations, and the other is to attempt to fill a perceived gap in existing literature.

Firstly, this study focuses on the experiences of Chinese female employees when negotiating their dual work and family roles. I aimed to gather data from both questionnaires and in-depth interviews to detail the experiences of female employees. I also aimed to compare the implications of women fulfilling these dual roles in different job types and organisations in the Chinese airline industry. In my research I sought to examine the causes and consequences of work-family conflict for women, the impact that this role conflict had on their career development. Detailed research questions were developed in Chapter IV by focusing on these purposes. In addition, the thesis is concerned to uncover other key issues which are related to women's employment and careers in the Chinese airline industry, as well as their family roles (such as occupational segregation, gendered organisational culture, aesthetic and emotional labour, and gendered division of domestic labour). I adopted a six-factor analytical model for the analysis of women's work-family conflict and other relevant issues (see Chapter IV) in which six factors (i.e., industrialisation and concurrent economic reform, socio-political context, cultural values, industrial features, organisational context, and family issues) play a key role in generating specific sets of circumstances that predispose women to various levels and types of work-family conflict.

Secondly, this study focuses on filling a gap to remedy the shortcomings of the existing literature of Chinese women's employment, career and family life. As can be seen in Chapters III and IV, although Western literature abounds on the topic of women's experiences in both work and family there is a considerable research gap due to the lack of detailed studies in the Eastern literature (which is sometimes under-theorised). In particular, there is a lack of industry-based studies of gender relations in China, including an absence of previous work on the Chinese airline industry. My research has aimed to fill this gap by presenting an empirically grounded study of the experiences of Chinese female airline staff. In addition, our understanding of the

issues that Eastern women face when performing both work and family roles is limited. Western researchers have completed numerous universal and cross-cultural studies of working women worldwide (Omar and Davidson, 2001), but actually much of what we know about women today is drawn from studies conducted on women in developed countries, especially in the West (Yukongdi and Benson, 2006). Can these Western findings be applicable to the East, and particularly Chinese cultural contexts? In order to address this question, I sought to examine these Western experiences and their relevance to women's experiences of work-family conflict in modern China by exploring both the similarities and the differences between the existing literature (mainly Western) and the findings of this research.

Underpinning these aims, the objectives of the research are: firstly, to provide new insights into Chinese women's lives and careers and facilitate understanding of the issues surrounding work-family conflict in the under-researched Chinese context; secondly, to provide some empirical support for the need to compare and contrast between Eastern and Western samples; thirdly, to identify the significant role of the advanced six-factor analytical model in providing adequate explanations of experiences of Chinese women, as well as to provide a thorough analysis of ways in which women's dual roles interact with and influence each other; and fourthly, to set out managerial implications for developing more effective HRM strategies for airline companies in China (particularly the provision of family-friendly or women-friendly policies and the creation of family-supportive workplaces).

## **1.2 Introduction to research subject and context**

### **1.2.1 Towards an understanding of work-family conflict**

Substantial changes in both family composition and workforce demographics have occurred worldwide over the past decades and they have been the primary impetus for the increased attention which has been paid to work and family issues (Poelmans and Caligiuri, 2008; Premeaux et al., 2007; Stockman et al., 1995). Meanwhile, women's labour force participation rates have risen considerably (Hakim, 2004; Halford et al., 1997; Yukongdi and Benson, 2006; Yukongdi and Rowley, 2009) and consequently double income families and working mothers have become increasingly common (Winslow, 2003). However, changes at work often have consequences beyond the

workplace: 'working life eats into leisure and family life' (Bradley, 1999: 13). As both men and women are working, family time is coming under pressure (Poelmans & Caligiuri, 2008). Consequently, it has been assumed that demographic changes in the family and the workplace have made integrating these two domains difficult (Premeaux et al., 2007), and there are an increased number of employees struggling to balance these multiple roles.

My research draws on a tradition of established literature that has examined work-family conflict. Since the 1970s 'work and family' researchers have assumed that what happened at work affected what happened at home and vice versa (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Cambell-Clark, 2000). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define this inter-role conflict as a situation in which a person is expected to play two incompatible roles. Thus, work-family conflict occurs when an individual's two life roles, one within the workplace and one within the family, are mutually incompatible so that participation in one role makes participation difficult in the other (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994). It has long been suggested that work-family conflict would be intensified when either work or family roles are salient and central to the person's self-concept, and the more important a role is to an individual then the more time and energy that person will invest in it, which will allow less time and energy for other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Much work-family research has examined gender differences in relation to work-family conflict and suggests that women are more likely to experience work-family conflict than men (e.g. Lewis & Cooper, 1999, Newell, 2000, Wilson 2003, Wirth, 2001).<sup>1</sup> The international literature of work-family conflict generally supports the idea that the level of employee participation in the job and their involvement in family responsibilities are highly relevant to role conflict (see for example, Aryee, 1992; Kim & Ling, 2001; Ngo & Lau, 1998; Jacobs, 2003; Pleck et al., 1980; Premeaux et al., 2007; Venter, 2002; Wiersma, 1994; Wilson, 2003). This is particularly true for modern women because their domestic identity continues to prevail and families sometime create barriers to the career progression of women but not of men (Burke, 1997). Furthermore, it is easy to 'find counter examples that testify to the persistence of gender segregation and inequality' (Halford et al., 1997: vi). Evidence shows that globally, women are still over-represented in the lower levels

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed in Chapter III.

of organisations and the 'glass ceiling' which prevents advancement into higher organisational roles has not yet been cracked due to the persistence of sexist stereotypes (Hakim, 2004; Wilson, 2003). Under these circumstances career women need to over-perform to counter negative assumptions and break these barriers to achieving a managerial position, which can in turn add to women's dual burdens and possibly entail work-family conflict (Venter, 2002). Nevertheless, there is no agreement on whether or not women experience more 'family-to-work' conflict than 'work-to-family' conflict since women in different situations (in terms of marital status, childcare, family support, job positions, and organisations) might be expected to experience different types of work-family conflict. In this thesis I will focus mainly on the interaction between work and family and any of the consequences it generates, I will also examine whether or not this conflict is equally derived from both directions.

As will be illustrated in Chapter III, most research on work-family conflict has been primarily conducted in the Western developed countries, and consequently, the Western findings have dominated in this field. However, economic and business globalisation, which has seen more women entering professional jobs in the labour market, has made work-family issues increasingly notable in the developing economies of Asia (Yang et al., 2000). Therefore, it is necessary to study the conflict experienced by women in the East and to identify relevant cross-national differences and similarities as and where they emerge.

### **1.2.2 Choice of the research context and focus**

Due to the rapid growth of Asian economies, and women's rising educational level, there has been a substantial increase in the number of working women in many Asian countries (Yukongdi & Benson, 2006). China, in particular, has experienced an increasing level of gender equality with considerably more women participating in education and in professional and managerial occupations over the last two decades (Yukongdi & Rowley, 2009). Since the 1980s China has carried out all-around reforms in social, political, legal and economic aspects. These reforms have provided a bright prospect for women's equal participation in the labour market. The introduction of the socialist market economy in China has meant that there are more opportunities for women to be selected and promoted, or to start their own businesses (Cooke, 2006). Despite the progress which Chinese women have achieved, these

opportunities may be hindered by some centuries-old Chinese conventions (e.g., ‘men deal with the external affairs and women look after the internal affairs’) which prevail in modern society. Discrimination in employment regulations and policies and a range of organisational factors are just some of the barriers which Chinese career women continue to face (Yukongdi & Benson, 2006).

Much has been written on Chinese women’s career development and its barriers (Cooke, 2006). Nevertheless, there is insufficient research on how Chinese women manage to balance their career and family life, and the impact that this has on their career aspirations; an absence which is in contrast to the in-depth research on this specific issue which has been completed in the West. Although there has been some limited research in China which has examined occupational groups (such as accountants and teachers) it is not influential nationally given that these research articles were published in college or local journals only. Little if any research has been conducted in a single specific industrial sector in China (such as the airline industry). This research project will pay detailed attention to the female employees’ experiences of work-family conflict in the Chinese airline industry.

I chose the airline industry as an area of study not only because of the importance of airlines within national economies, foreign policy, and the growth of international trade (Hudson, 1972; Sampson, 1984; Stevenson, 1987) but also because of its influence on popular culture (including supporting enduring images of idealised masculinity and femininity) (Corn, 1983; Nielsen, 1982). China’s transport industry is one of the largest components of the Chinese economy, and aviation has been the fastest growing sector of the transport industry. The airline industry is seen to be a symbol of modernisation and globalisation. In particular, the increasing demand to travel by air is due to rapid economic growth of China. China’s prosperity has increased the importance of the airline sector, which in turn has recruited a large number of employees in recent years. The airline industry has traditionally recruited a core of female employees to specific roles, but despite the increase in the number of female employees being employed it still exhibits an occupational structure that is heavily segregated by gender, with men dominating piloting and engineering work and women concentrated in front-line service work. I have discovered that although women are now entering previously characteristically masculine occupations, many women have been, and still are, concentrated in support roles within the industry (for example cabin crew and ground staff) and these are roles which draw on so-called

feminine attributes (such as female 'emotional labour' or 'sexualised glamour'). Another feature of the airline industry suggests that female air staff are more likely to experience work-family conflict, due in part to the demands of emotional labour as well as the shift-work system. Despite expansion in the industry few women are represented in technical roles that are high status and better paid. I assume that the issue of dual role conflict that female employees in Chinese airline companies are experiencing, to some extent, mirrors the general condition of women in the service sector. However, so far there is only one case study which has been conducted in the airline industry within the region that specifically focuses on the impact of work-family conflict on women's ambitions, and this focuses on Hong Kong rather than Mainland China (Ng. et al., 2002).

Initially, I wanted to explore the lives and careers of modern Chinese women by taking female staff in the airline industry as an example, and was most interested in their experiences of reconciling work commitments and family obligations. This interest still lies at the heart of my thesis. However, the study of women's work-family conflict, narrowly defined, is only one aspect of a much broader analysis. From the outset, I was also interested in: social, political and economic changes, organisational human resource (HR) practices, and particularly the ways in which organisational cultures affect women's careers as well as their family life. As my research progressed, it became clear that in order to thoroughly understand women's experiences of work-family conflict it is not sufficient just to look at individual women and compare them in different job types and organisations, it is also vital to consider the pervasive gendering of organisational practices and cultures that define the domain in which women's work-family conflict takes place. Consequently, the analysis of sources and effects of women's work-family conflict which I elaborate in this thesis is embedded within a much broader inquiry into the dynamics of political, economic, and social changes and the gendering of contemporary organisations.

The rest of this chapter provides an historical and institutional background for China as a whole and in the Chinese airline industry in particular. It starts with a detailed account of how the old personnel system has been transformed into a new HR system and how the HR managerial approach with Chinese characteristics has developed at different stages. I will also ask to what extent this new Chinese HR system has been influenced by Western ideas of HR. It will then discuss the development of the

Chinese airline industry and its changing HR system alongside the changing context of Chinese economic, political, and legal framework. The emphasis here will be on the important implications of an evolving HR management in China for women's experiences, specifically in the airline industry. Finally, this chapter will explain the structure of this thesis.

### **1.3 Background to the study: Human Resource Management (HRM) in China**

HRM can provide a framework for the terms and conditions to which employees are subjected in the organisations or places in which they work. This macro-environmental factor has directly or indirectly influenced the working life of women.

The HR management system in China has changed in a number of ways as the economy has gone through different stages of development. During the pre-reform period (i.e., before 1978), the Chinese system valued 'socialist superiority' (Zhu & Warner, 2000: 8) and political interests instead of economic interests dominated influences in the industrial relations system. In 1978, however, Deng Xiaoping launched the reforming and 'open door' policy, and China has since moved from a 'command-economy' to a new 'socialist market-economy'. In response, the main task for management has been reforming the existing personnel system and transforming it into one which focuses on the employer-employee relationship.

Before the reforms there was no labour market and workers were assigned to job positions in specified enterprises. Since the mid-1980s Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have begun to abandon the 'iron rice bowl' which ensures 'jobs-for-life' and 'cradle-to-the-grave' welfare coverage for their employees (Ding, et al., 2000: 218). Chinese employers have had greater autonomy to hire employees on fixed-term labour contracts and downsize problematic employees (Ding & Warner, 1999). This has been further strengthened by the Labour Law of China which came into effect in 1995 and which has regulated a labour system compatible with a social market-economy and requires all organisations, no matter what ownership, to hire their employees based on labour contracts (White, 1996). The rapid development of employment agencies has created job opportunities for, and promoted the mobility of the labour force. As part of this process, China's employment system has changed the nature of its rewards systems. Previously, there was an 'egalitarian wage payment

system involving a flat reward structure' (Warner, 1997: 6). However, since the mid-1980s, especially following the reforms in state-owned enterprises in 1992, the importance of providing material rewards in return for labour has become predominant. Nationally, the old wage grade systems gave way to the new 'post plus skills' system, which made it easier to 'quantify the workers' performance and link such performance to pay' (Zhao & Nichols, 1996: 14).

The term 'HRM' had not been influential in China until the turn of the twenty-first century. Three major HRM models have since prevailed in Chinese organisations (Benson & Zhu, 1999): traditional industrial relations and personnel management systems where organisations have made little effort in adopting a HRM approach to the management of labour; the more internationally oriented HRM system where employers have endeavored to adopt a Japanese or Western HRM model; and, the transitional model between the old and the new models where organisations under transition have realised that human resources are crucial to their future success and have begun to undertake substantial managerial reforms. Zhu and Warner (2000: 18) conclude that 'at this time, so far there is not a homogeneous model of HRM in Chinese enterprises', and 'individual enterprises are reforming their HRM systems differently on the basis of existing conditions and the impact of the economic reform.' Large joint-ventures and wholly foreign owned corporations in China are among the main organisations implementing HR practices borrowed from the West (Nolan, 2001). As long ago as 1995, Warner (1995:145) suggested that HRM 'with Chinese characteristics' may be more useful. Thus, many multinational companies (MNCs) have modified their in-house HRM practices to best fit the local environment and cultural conditions. Chinese managers in MNCs have begun to utilise best practices of management that have proven successful in the West for decades, including: encouraging training, performance-based evaluation systems, and focusing on outcomes (Warner, 2004). The sound and professional HRM policies and practices have attracted more Chinese to work in the MNCs, which, in turn, has brought pressure on state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and domestic private enterprises (DPEs), which have been pushed to attempt to adopt a Western HRM approach. However, some argue that factors such as China's historical development and cultural traditions can act as a barrier to the development of a Western model of HRM (Benson & Zhu, 1999). Besides, issues such as a lack of effective managerial skills and an inability to motivate have hindered the effectiveness of HRM in Chinese organisations



(Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

China's accession to the WTO in 2001 was a trigger for the country to adopt more effective HRM strategies to sustain its economic and social development. In all factors of economic and social development, human resource is set as the most important by the Chinese government (Li, 2003). Chinese President Hu Jintao stated 'the nation's revitalisation strategy based on human resources development should be taken as a major and pressing task of the State and the Communist Party of China' (China Daily, 2003). The Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development has a whole chapter devoted to the purposes and major tasks of the talents strategy, 'for the first time, giving top priority to the strategy of strengthening China with talents in national development' (Li, 2003: 4). Clearly, an effective human resources development strategy is vital for upgrading China's competitiveness and improving comprehensive national strength, and for the ambitious plan of building a prosperous society in China.

The new Labour Contract Law of the People's Republic of China has come into effect since 1 January 2008. This new Labour Contracts Law establishes standards for labour contracts, probationary periods, severance, mass layoffs, non-competition rules, and sets penalties on officials in cases of abuse of authority (Laodong, 2007). It is more encouraging that the legislation emphasises the protection of employee's interests (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007), for example: employees will be given the right to terminate the employment relationship if their employers fail to purchase social insurance for them in compliance with the law; employers are forbidden to force employees to work overtime; employers can not terminate labour contracts with female employees during pregnancy, maternity, or lactation leave (Laodong, 2007). Undoubtedly, this new legislation is the most significant change in the country's labour rules in more than a decade and will play a key role in bolstering more appropriate HRM strategies in China.

Economic globalisation in the twenty-first century has had a profound impact on the development of HRM in China and the old 'iron rice bowl' personnel system has been dismantled by significant changes in both the domestic and global economies (Li, 2003). The degree to which HRM has taken root in MNCs, SOEs, and DPEs has been diverse but equally noteworthy (Warner, 2004). Competition in the Chinese market for qualified workers is becoming more intense. Regardless of ownership, only those who adopt the best or most attractive HRM policies can recruit and retain

competent employees so as to succeed in business.

#### **1.4 Background to the study: HRM development in the Chinese airline industry**

The experience of work-family conflict by female air staff is closely linked to the dynamics of the Chinese airline industry. It is, therefore, essential to look at how the rapid growth of the Chinese airline industry has given shape to the industry-specific personnel or HRM system.

The development of the airline industry in China has undergone four stages. In the first stage, before the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, airplanes were often used for military purposes and civil aviation did not develop significantly. Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) was established. CAAC was responsible for planning, building, and operating air transport and airlines as a whole. Serving only government officials and military VIPs, the air transport system was primarily built to link the capital city Beijing with China's other cities. Before 1978, the number of ordinary air passengers was very limited and 'the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) further damaged the system with the minimum air passenger and freight transport activity' (Jin et al., 2004: 472).

China has undergone dramatic changes since the reforms of 1976, including the civil aviation sector. In 1980 Deng Xiaoping announced that 'civil aviation should be commercialised by all means', CAAC subsequently became independent from military control and accommodated its new and long-term promotion of commercial civil aviation in China (CAAC, 2004). It carried out several drastic reforms, including: separating the management of airlines and airports from the CAAC central office thereby allowing local governments to operate their own airlines, encouraging competition, and transforming airlines into profit-driven business entities. However, prior to 2002 the airlines seldom made profits and were heavily in debt. In order to remedy this unsatisfactory situation CAAC began to take advantage of economies of scale and improved services by consolidating all of the state-owned airlines in 2002. Thus, three big airline groups were officially established (CAAC, 2004). The post-2002 era has been characterised by market deregulation and fast growth in the numbers of air passengers, although the airline industry is still controlled by the

central government or the local authorities in terms of resource allocation and personnel quota. The rapid development of the Chinese economy has brought about the prosperity of the aviation industry in China (CAAC, 2007). Since 1980, air passenger travel has grown at an impressive annual rate (Jin et al., 2004). For example, in 2007 a 10.8% GDP expansion stimulated a 16% rise in the number of air passengers (CAAC, 2007). The accumulated revenue realised from the principal business of the airline industry was 227.56 billion RMB with a total profit of 6.86 billion RMB (ibid). Moreover, according to the forecast by the Aviation Industry Development Research Center of China, the passenger airplanes of Chinese airlines will grow from 832 units to 3366 units by the end of 2025 (ibid).

Increasing global economic integration and the trend towards airline alliances have also impacted on the Chinese airline industry which is actively engaged in merging and re-organising nationally, aiming to upgrade its services and resources to internationally recognised standards. Accordingly, the HRM system of the industry is being adjusted and aligned with the long-term strategic goals of this booming twenty-first century industry. Globally the commercial airline industry is ‘increasingly competitive, safety-sensitive and highly technological’ (Appelbaum & Fewster, 2004: 70). Chinese airlines, like others across the world, are faced with increased concerns for safety (especially after ‘9/11’) and ever-increasing customer expectations of broad service choice and excellence. Research has shown that accidents and poor service quality are dependent primarily on ‘socio-technical human factors, not technology’ (Appelbaum & Fewster, 2004: 70); therefore, to prosper the industry depends on developing human resources in which people should be the focus of any airline’s core competence.

Before China’s entry into the WTO the Chinese airline industry as a whole was traditional, top-down, and used a highly centralised industrial model of operations and governance. The government exerted authority and influence on arrangements of human, material, and capital resources (Huang, 2002). Following China’s membership of the WTO the industry has been pushed into more intense international competition. The traditional, product-centered, industrial model of corporate structures and industrial relations is inappropriate in such a highly knowledge-based service market as the airline industry. In particular, the inflexible personnel management (characterised by ‘people can be hired but not fired; their job positions can be upgraded but not degraded; benefits can be increased but not decreased; priority is

assigned based on seniority; and egalitarianism’) resulted in over-staffing and a high turnover of talent, and seriously inhibited the strategic development of the industry (Huang, 2002). China’s accession to the WTO has brought lots of opportunities for the development of HRM in the airline industry. First and foremost, ever-increasing market competition has forced the airlines to strengthen their sense of competition and crisis, pay more attention to technology and service innovation, and attach greater priority to developing and cultivating talents so as to create a customer-centric and learning-oriented environment in the industry (Appelbaum & Fewster, 2004).

Since 2002, the Chinese civil aviation industry has been undergoing an unprecedented system reform, which has torn down the old military-style command and control system and established a real split between the government and enterprise. The new employment system of competition has been widely adopted in all airlines, which are implementing a recruitment system based on labour contracts. The new wage payment system is performance-based and a sound welfare system is being established by the airlines. The widely recognised idea of the ‘survival of the fittest’ has stimulated the air workforce to be more dynamic and committed. Furthermore, the Chinese airlines have attached more importance to advancing their employees’ knowledge and skills by providing a wide range of training and encouraging further education. A report by the China Academy of Personnel Science shows that the national ratio between air staff and airplanes is 100: 1, while the international ratio is 200: 1, which means that 200,000 additional skilled workers will need to be pursued by China’s civil aviation industry over the next 20 years (MOP, 2007); the required personnel include: cockpit crew, maintenance staff, cabin crew, ground staff, and air transport security administrators.

How to attract and retain skilled personnel remains an urgent question. Successful worldwide airlines such as South-west Airlines (SWA) and Duncan Aviation (the largest aircraft support facility in North America) have advocated an employee-centered organisational culture (Appelbaum & Fewster, 2004). SWA ‘constantly surveys its employees and unions to identify their perceptions and solicit ideas about how to run the company’ (Milliman, et al., 1999: 226). Duncan Aviation’s managers commented ‘if our employees aren’t happy, our customers won’t be either. We keep our employees happy through strong, caring and consistent leadership...’(Falter, 2000). The Chinese airline industry has been learning from other successful airlines in order to create an employee-oriented environment in which employee empowerment,

two-way communication, and teamwork are emphasised (Huang, 2002). CAAC has been formulating airline-specific HRM practices that can be readily adapted and used by individual airlines. Meanwhile, the HR managers of the individual airlines are also striving to establish a company-specific HRM system to achieve their own competitive advantages in the marketplace (CAAC, 2004).

Therefore, it is important to examine whether the HR policies and practices which are offered by the airlines I aim to study are appropriate not only to improve female air staff's efficiency and commitment, but also to stimulate their career aspiration and help them balance their work and family needs.

## **1.5 Overview of the thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis falls into eight further chapters.

Chapter II critically evaluates several mainstream, largely Western, feminist theories from the macro-level viewpoint and discusses any initial possibility of completely or partially adopting any of these perspectives in the research area of work-family conflict in China. Then from the micro-level viewpoint, it outlines three major approaches to studying relationships between gender and organisation. An extended introduction to the 'embedded perspective' as well as a 'rules approach', which contributes to my analysis of women's experience working in the Chinese airlines, is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter III reviews the existing Western and Eastern literature on women in employment and management as a whole, and working women's work-family conflict in particular. Gaps and limitations in this literature are identified. In particular, the application of these predominantly Western, and even Western-influenced Hong Kong findings, to the Chinese context is questioned. Meanwhile, both the achievements of, and challenges facing, Chinese women in the changing context are discussed, and the limited literature on women's work in the airline industry, mainly in the West, is reviewed. Some existing Western examples on how to help women deal with work-family conflict are given at the end.

Chapter IV explains how my six-factor analytical model is formed by learning from Venter's three-level analytical model which suggests examining factors at three levels (including pace of industrialisation process and concomitant economic changes, social-political context, and cultural values). The six-factor model is an advanced

approach to a fuller understanding of women's experiences of work-family conflict and how this impacts on their career ambitions and other relevant issues. Arising from this discussion, five main research questions that the thesis seeks to answer are finally outlined.

Chapter V explains the ways in which the research was carried out in these airlines and why a multi-strategy case study approach was employed. The merits and limitations of each of the sampling techniques and research methods applied, and their various effects on my research, are detailed. A basic introduction to each of the fieldwork organisations used in this study is provided. Moreover, the significance of a comparative research design to this study is explored. I will also illustrate how I utilised a reflexive approach at the qualitative interview stages to achieve a balance between describing the issue authentically in all its complexity and being self-analytical and reflexive. Examples of how I handled research ethics issues (such as the privacy of the participants, their consent, the confidentiality of data provided by individuals, and their anonymity) and avoided ethical problems throughout all of the research processes are also given.

The following chapters put empirical meat on these abstract bones:

Chapter VI presents the primary data from a questionnaire distributed to female employees in Phoenix, Panda, and Dragon airlines with three job types (i.e., flight attendants, ground staff, and back office staff) and from qualitative interviews of both female employees and managers. The individual case analysis of women's experiences in both career and family life will be elaborated based on the findings from the two primary sources. The questionnaires will be analysed and the findings presented in the form of descriptive tables. They reveal broad patterns of response across a range of areas. These findings are in need of further explanation and a greater focus is going to be placed on analysing individual accounts of employee experiences in areas such as: coping with the relationship between job demands and family obligations; their perceptions of why these occur; and their reflections on their positions in both the workplace and home. During this interview process, most of the key factors which are correlated to work-family conflict in the questionnaire findings are further verified. More notably a couple of unexpected but important issues have emerged from my analysis of the interview quotes, which adds to the complexity and richness of this research.

Chapter VII aims to make an overall analysis by comparing the three case study airlines with each other and exploring both the commonalities and differences between them in terms of differences within and among job types. The findings from the questionnaires provide a common pattern and also identify some key differences between the three cases. More importantly, the qualitative interviews with both female employees and their management enable an in-depth discussion and comparison across the three cases. Particularly, the perceptions of the female employees studied are compared with the explanations of their managers with regard to: antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict, women's career opportunities, and HR policies and practices. The supplementary interviews (which were conducted via networking sites) are drawn upon to help clarify some important issues arising from the face-to-face interviews. In addition, some uniquely cultural factors (such as the 'One Child Policy' and 'guan xi') which have influenced and shaped women's experiences are also discussed.

Chapter VIII moves into a wider dimension of comparison. Both differences and similarities between my research findings and the existing literature (mainly the Western samples) are identified and discussed in relation to four major aspects: firstly, experiences of women's work-family conflict; secondly, barriers to women's career progression and ambitions; thirdly, women's job roles and status in the airline industry; and finally, the role of modern women in society.

Finally, Chapter IX summarises the data presented in response to the research questions. More importantly, the contribution of this study and implications of the key findings for further theoretical and analytical development in the field of women's studies are explored, including the implications for existing feminist theories reviewed in Chapter II, the six-factor analytical model of work-family conflict outlined in Chapter IV, and managerial practices and policies on what family-friendly practices to implement and how to promote gender equality and establish a real equality in the workplace. In addition, the limitations (such as the possible inadequacy of the three case studies in providing generalisable conclusions that can be applied in the whole airline industry) and their implications for future research (such as an opportunity to research employees' work-family issues in other industries) close the discussion.

## **Chapter II      Theoretical Review of Gender Research**

As I explained in the introduction section, my study of women's work-family conflict is only one aspect of a much broader analysis, so a full understanding of this specific topic requires an analysis situated within broader theoretical debates on women, gender and organisations. Thus, this chapter aims to outline the different feminist perspectives found in studies of women and work, and explores theoretical approaches to gender relations within organisations. Traditionally, the literature has neglected women as a group within organisations, but in the contemporary literature this has been 'replaced by a situation where several perspectives compete and where few assumptions can be taken for granted or be left unchallenged' (Alvesson & Billing, 1997: 18). It is, therefore, important to understand these perspectives, which is actually a process of advanced thinking and reflection about gender, society, culture, organisations and women's working life in general. It is also important in discussing them to ascertain whether these theoretical approaches are appropriate to my own research topic and context.

This chapter, therefore, proceeds as follows. First, from the macro-level viewpoint, I will describe the mainstream feminist theories, which provides a good foundation upon which to base my research. Second, at the micro level, I will critically evaluate three major approaches in assisting our understanding of the relationships between gender and organisation that also form a fundamental understanding of how women's experiences are related to, shaped and developed, within organisations. Then, I will pay special attention to a rules approach. This approach has been used to understand the gendering of organisational culture in the airline industry, which directly links to my research topic. I also take the view that theoretical elaboration takes place alongside social research. Thus the arguments that I develop here would be clarified through my empirical research rather than simply being illustrated by the research.

### **2.1 Study of women and gender: feminist theories**

Feminism of all types can be seen to share some common ground and I take the definition of feminism from Weedon (1987):



*Feminism is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become (1987: 1).*

Feminist theory is thus aiming to understand gender inequalities and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Since the 1960s the study of women in employment and management has been one of the major topics in academia (See example, Mincer, 1962; Becker, 1965). Feminist authors have contributed to the research on gender and organisations and to the formation of a variety of feminist theories. Feminists have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings. They have criticized 'modern foundationalist epistemologies and moral and political theories, and called into question the dominant philosophical project of seeking objectivity in the guise of a "God's eye view" which transcends any situation or perspective' (Nicholson et al., 1990: 26). Most feminist theories share some assumptions, notably the recognition of male dominance in social arrangements, and a desire for changes from this form of domination (Calas & Smircich, 1996). However, different perspectives in feminist theories address issues on women and organisations in different ways and propose different solutions ranging from reforming organisations, to transforming organisations and society, and to transforming our prior understanding of what constitutes knowledge and practice (Calas & Smircich, 2006). These will be explored in greater depth below.

### **2.1.1 Women's rights: liberal feminism**

It has for a long time seemed to me that women are regarded as subordinate to men, which stimulates me to explore the phenomenon. During the course of exploration, my thinking on gender issues has been enlightened by liberal feminism.

Being very popular in the 1950s and 1960s when many civil rights movements were taking place, the main belief of liberal feminism is that 'all people are created equal by God and deserve equal rights' (Stewart, 2003). Liberal feminists, therefore, argue that women and men possess the same capacities for rationality, and should, therefore, be equal and that organisations can deliver this gender equality (Halford

and Leonard, 2001). Meanwhile, they also realize that ‘oppression exists because of the way in which men and women are socialized, which supports patriarchy and keeps men in power positions’ (Stewart, 2003). According to liberal feminists, all women are capable of affirming their ability to achieve equality; therefore, it is possible to make a change without radically altering the structure of society. They hold that creating laws on gender equality including equal access to jobs and equal pay can remove barriers for women. Liberal feminists believe that taking these barriers out can directly challenge the ideologies of patriarchy, as well as liberate women (Stewart, 2003). In a society ‘where law and processes of political representation formally govern social relations’ (Cockburn, 1991: 19), equality of rights for women is a necessary step in advancing women’s interests. It is not, however, sufficient in itself.

Since the 1960s, much of the literature concerned with gender and organisations that falls under the category of ‘women in employment and management’, has been consistent with liberal political theory’s assumptions about human nature (Calas and Smircich, 1996). Liberal feminist research favours positivist epistemologies, which they assume are gender-neutral (Jaggar, 1983) because a liberal perspective sees organisations as fundamentally gender-neutral (Halford and Leonard, 2001). A large amount of this research has demonstrated gender inequities in the workplace in terms of segregated jobs, salary inequalities and short career ladders, and has emphasised that cultural norms, traditions and attitudes were the major barriers to women’s access to higher positions in the workplace (Adler and Izraeli, 1994; Blau and Ferber, 1986; Fagenson, 1993; Freedman and Philips, 1988; Larwood and Gutek, 1984; Terborg, 1977; Nieva and Gutek, 1981). This type of research, using a positivist approach of investigation, aims to produce ‘the truth’ or ‘general knowledge’ that gender inequity and stereotypes, old-fashioned prejudice and discrimination in organisations block women’s entrance to management positions.

One example of the liberal feminist approach is research on the ‘*glass ceiling*’ (Morrison et al., 1987; Morrison et al., 1990). This research tested the proposition that there might be a glass ceiling that kept women out of higher level positions. The authors used a positivist approach to generate empirical proof that worked for and against those trying to break the sexist barrier of ‘the glass ceiling’. Their research findings are buttressed by statistics, and by using methods of verification they analysed those statistical findings as facts, alongside psychological and behavioral evaluations of men and women candidates who were seeking promotion in

organisations. Such studies documented women's experiences and asserted it to be valid knowledge in its own right. The central aim of these studies was a focus on the gendered structuring of organisations and its consequences for traditional activities and expectations (Calas and Smircich, 1996).

In general, almost all of the research within the liberal perspectives on women in employment and management is on the 'glass ceiling' (Calas and Smircich, 1996). It focuses on women's issues, separated from men's issues. The majority of the research conceives 'gender' as a variable instead of an analytical framework (Balsamo, 1985). It demonstrates that sex segregation continues to thrive in modern organisations and tries to clarify the causes of women's lack of organisational opportunities through measurable constructs. The ultimate aim of this research is to establish a fair and just organisation in which women get equal access to managerial positions. Moreover, 'its epistemological premises show a marked positivist orientation, favouring quantitative methodologies but sometimes also using qualitative research' (Ely, 1995).

Liberal feminists have contributed to promoting positive changes on women's status that have taken place in the past several decades by implementing equal laws that demand equal opportunities and rights for women. Unfortunately, liberal feminism makes it difficult to see the ways in which underlying social structures and values also disadvantage women. In reality, for instance, in China, the state's anti-discrimination legislation and the workplace equal opportunities policies have neither abolished patriarchy nor removed real barriers to women's career advancement (Cooke, 2006). The foundation stone of classical and systemic patriarchy is, therefore, ignored by liberal feminism (Cockburn, 1991), which has been criticized for not breaking down the deeper ideologies of society and patriarchy (Stewart, 2003). Also, it has been criticized for ignoring race and class issues. Black feminists and postcolonial feminists assert that mainstream liberal feminism reflects only the values of middle-class white women and has largely ignored women of different races, cultures or classes (Mills, 1998). In my research context, it is more important to explore whether the ideal of full equality in the workplace that the liberal feminists advocate can be achieved by legislation and whether such equality can represent a satisfactory solution to the issue of work-family conflict that many modern career women are experiencing (Williams, 2000). I will discuss this further in Chapter III.

### **2.1.2 Sexuality and difference: radical feminism**

Cockburn (1991) argues that women's struggle for rights and equality needs to be more than liberal. Thus, radical feminists advocate that there has to be a movement which can recognize 'the highly personal issues of procreation and sexuality, bodies and identity as political' (Cockburn, 1991: 25). This is the insight most centrally located in radical feminism, which contrasts sharply with liberal feminism in certain of their fundamental views. Comparing these two forms, although not every feminist agrees, Bromberg (1997) concludes that the liberal feminist perspective is reasoned, intellectual, while the radical feminist position tends to be both emotional and political.

Radical feminists claim that a male-based authority and power structure leads to women's oppression and inequality in organisations and the whole society. As long as the patriarchal system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way. Most radical feminists see no alternative other than transforming the existing male-dominated society radically in order to achieve their goals (Echols, 1990). The women's liberation movement that developed in the late 1960s and continues today has developed in a number of different directions. Some women were struggling for a politics of women's rights, some demanding the end to discrimination, and others questioning the possibility of equality with men. By the 1990s, an alternative theme was emerging in the West, which is women's 'difference' viewed by some as having a biological or natural basis, by others as historical and cultural (Cockburn, 1991). This has led to a greater emphasis on differences between men and women and on celebrating the positive aspects of the values and characteristics traditionally associated with women. In whatever forms, 'women's equal standing must be accepted as an expression of the freedom of women as women, and not treated as an indication that women can be just like men' (Pateman, 1988: 231).

The value of radical feminism was that in 'identifying not only woman but womanhood as a source of strength, which clearly embodied women' it enables us to discuss 'the politics of bodies' in organisations (Cockburn, 1991: 27). This is important because one of the ways in which women's employment can be seen to be gender-specific is that 'women's bodies are often involved in the deal between women workers and their employers', and women's sexuality, not men's, is seen as a potential threat to organisational discipline (Cockburn, 1991: 27). However, middle-class and white women were predominant in the movement, which ignored black women's

experience of oppression (Carby, 1982). Thus, radical feminism was, being criticized for being culturally blind (Saulnier, 1996). Furthermore, radical feminism does not aim at competing with men on equal terms or to share the benefits like top jobs, higher salaries, and access to power on a half/half basis, but wants to 'change the basic structure of society and its organisations and make competition a less central notion' (Alvesson & Billing, 1997: 23). It seems that this would involve creating societal and organisational structures in which men and women would be segregated to allow women to function autonomously or separately for various purposes. The radical perspective that aims to change gender relations fundamentally by eliminating male power or values is unrealistic. It leaves out men and the possibility of reconciliation with them on a truly human and egalitarian basis, so it doesn't go any further (Ehrenreich, 1976).

Many radical feminists see capitalism as one of the most important barriers to ending women's oppression, which is problematic when this approach is applied to China. Moreover, radical feminism leaves out an awful lot about women. For example, 'to discount a socialist country such as China as a "patriarchy" which has been done by radical feminists, is to ignore the real struggles and achievements of millions of women' (Ehrenreich, 1976).

### **2.1.3 Women's labour and social status: socialist feminism**

Partly inspired by Marxist theory, socialist feminism appears to adopt some of the same tenets of Marxism, for example, highlighting the oppressive features of capitalism. But instead of focusing exclusively on economic determinism as the primary source of oppression, the socialist feminist also sees the oppression as having psychological and social roots (Bromberg, 1997). Thus, socialist feminism can be seen as a dualist theory that broadens Marxist feminism's argument for the role of capitalism in the oppression of women and radical feminism's theory of the role of gender and patriarchy. Nevertheless, socialist feminists have been critical of the radical feminist analysis of patriarchy, noting radicalism is a-historical, universalistic (bordering on the biological), and has idealistic tendencies (Eisenstein, 1979). From a socialist feminist point of view, the biggest problem with radical feminism is that 'it remains transfixed with the universality of male supremacy-things which have never really changed' (Ehrenreich, 1976).

Socialist feminists see women as being held down as a result of their unequal

standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere. Contrary to theories that argue that biological differences between the sexes have oppressed women, socialist feminists claim that society and culture dictate much more how the world works than any natural reasons. They look specifically at the system of social relations that ensure male domination over women. Many argue that the gendered division of labour at home, where women today also seem to take on most of the domestic work, contributes to women's inferior situation in the labour market (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Indeed, as we will see in Chapter III, with the necessity of women in the economic labour force, women are expected not only to be modern working women, but they must also continue to run the household and are expected to become super-mums who manage career and home. According to socialist feminism, domestic work, childcare, marriage, and even prostitution are all seen as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system which devalues women and their unpaid domestic labour.

Coulson et al. (1975), therefore, suggests that the interaction between women's family status and their engagement in paid labour seemed to be an important mechanism in perpetuating both their low pay and their subordination to men. This approach has motivated me to explore the relationship between Chinese women's status in the home and in the workplace and the relevant findings and analyses are given in Chapters VI and VII. Pateman (1988: 142) also confirms the close relationship between women's lack of rights in society and their inequality in employment, 'women have not been incorporated into the patriarchal structure of capitalist employment as workers; they have been incorporated as women'. In other words, when women are employed it is precisely because they are women: employers are never sex-blind, which also explains how occupations are sharply segregated into male jobs and female jobs (Cockburn, 1991). Such occupational gender segregation is not decreasing in modern times, and the low-paid and low-status jobs continue to be female-dominated as shown in Chapter III. Thus, socialist feminists believe that the cause of women's subordination is in the structuring of society, and that is where the solution will reside (Bromberg, 1997). However, they do not support the idea of radical social transformation. In stead, they suggest establishing a new society in which sexism and racism cease to exist.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, socialist feminism encouraged analyses of women's subordination 'in which exploitations of gender divisions of labour across

the spectrum of work undertaken by men and women were central' (Jacka, 1997: 13). Living in a socialist country, Chinese women as well as their experiences had attracted some attention of Western socialist feminists who 'looked in particular to communist China as that model society in which women had achieved true liberation' (Farris et al., 2004: 326) just like Chairman Mao said 'women hold up half the sky'. Socialist feminists tended to use Chinese women's status as an experimental case to examine the practicality of socialism for women's liberation. During that period three studies on Chinese women turned out to be representative: *'Women-work, women and the Party in revolutionary China'* by Delia Davin (1976); *'Feminism and socialism in China'* by Elisabeth Croll (1978); and *'The unfinished liberation of Chinese women 1949-1980'* by Phyllis Andors (1983). All of them demonstrated that Chinese socialism had promoted substantial improvements in the position of women, but the Chinese communist revolution did neither eradicate gender inequality nor completely liberate Chinese women. They were aware that what women had achieved is more in material aspects than within the power structure and addressed the inconsistencies and the limitations of the Chinese Communist Party's practical approach to gender issues, but they seemed to avoid questioning the theoretical principles guiding that approach. In particular, the authors failed to explain 'the importance of women's domestic work in their subordination, the exact reasons of women's entry into the labour market, the relationships between this change in gender division of labour and changes in women's participation in politics, their education, their decision-making power in the family, and values and beliefs concerning the proper place of women in the family and society' (Jacka, 1997: 14). Their socialist feminism position remains in a Western sense. Moreover, their findings on the Chinese political system, economic practices and women's social status only reflect the situation of the era before the 1980s which was a historical and crucial turning point for China. Since then substantial economic, political and social changes have occurred, which have had a profound impact on women's perceptions and values on their work and life. For instance, more tension between work and family has occurred to people due to the absence of consistent representations of the roles of mother and wife (Wang, 1999).

In the same period, the empirical work on women in other countries was also limited in depth as many saw the relations between men and women from either economic or social perspectives only. The exception is the valuable work done by two American feminists, Michelle Rosaldo (1974) and Sherry Ortner (1974), who were

concerned with understanding cultural perceptions of women and men in addition to material aspects of their relations. Both of them claim that universal devaluation of women is due to the fact that women are regarded as closer to nature and men are seen as being associated with culture (Rosaldo, 1974; Ortner, 1974). They further suggested a framework for analysing gender relations with which the complexity of the links between gender ideologies and stereotypes, broader cultural systems, social institutions and behaviours, and personal experiences could be explored (Jacka, 1997). This suggestion has thrown light on important issues beyond capitalism and patriarchy and contributed to the development of an embedded but broader analytical framework in my own study.

Among the limited Chinese gender studies conducted by Chinese academics and feminists, from a socialist feminism perspective, Wang's study (1999) on Chinese women's experiences under the current economic reform has challenged the Euro-American feminist representation of Chinese women as victims of the socialist system. Her findings show that Chinese socialism did indeed significantly challenge and even reverse the oppression experienced by Chinese women in the past (see Chapter III) although patriarchal privilege does not thoroughly disappear in their lives. More importantly, her research indicates that 'the continuity of patriarchal power in a socialist setting is highly uneven and should not be reduced to one single consequence for Chinese women' (Wang, 1999: 27). Thus, within the category of Chinese women, individual differences must be accounted for (Beaver et al., 1995). Similarly to what Rosaldo (1974) and Ortner (1974) suggested, the diversity and complexity of Chinese women's experiences in both work and family should be taken into consideration as one important micro-level analytical framework in my study. Further, the social change, along with new forms of patriarchy in a modern socialist setting has allowed women to perceive their new cultural value to society and to see themselves as meaningful persons, which has laid a foundation for some degree of gender equality (Wang, 1999). Therefore, in my analysis of causes of women's work-family conflict, women's own perceptions can never be ignored.

#### **2.1.4 Language and discourse: poststructuralist feminism**

In sharp contrast to the above three forms of feminism, poststructuralism holds that the world is a fragmented place, and analytical notions of gender, woman and man are therefore also fragmented. Thus, the poststructuralist perspective denies any



possibility of defining 'woman' or 'man'. Instead, poststructuralists attempt to deconstruct these categories into highly specific creations without fixity or stability (Halford & Lenoard, 2001). They contend that language, in the form of discourse, constructs both our 'subject positions' and 'subjectivity' and an analysis that starts to enable an articulation of how these are constructed, and/or may be resisted, is needed (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Thus, discourses about men and women become central in poststructuralism.

Since the late 1980s, poststructuralism has been very influential within social studies. 'The understandings of language, individuals, how science works are expressed in post-structuralism' and some relevant writings have had a significant influence on gender research (Alvesson & Billing, 1997: 39). Some feminists have drawn on these ideas to argue against the fixed and finite analyses (for example, Barrett & Phillips 1992; Hollway 1984; Weedon, 1987). For poststructuralist feminism, neither the liberal-feminist attempt 'to redefine the truth of women's nature within the terms of existing social relations and to establish women's full equality with men', nor the radical-feminist emphasis 'on fixed difference, realized in a separate context, is politically adequate' (Weedon, 1987: 135).

Unlike other forms of feminism which view notions like men and women as fundamental, valid points of departure, poststructuralist feminism considers them to be unstable, ambiguous and attributing a false unity (Calas & Smircich, 1992b; Flax, 1987; Nicholson, 1990). They claim that both gender and organisation are 'indeterminate, every-changing, subject to continuous reconstitution by particular individuals, in specific times and places' (Halford & Leonard, 2001: 20). The purpose of their research, therefore, is to explore how such individuals or locales may differ from each other and how they interpret 'gender' and 'organisation'. This is one major contribution of poststructuralist feminism to the understanding of gender and organisation. To sum up, they stress that 'organisation' is one set of discourses and 'gender' is constructed differently in different types of organisation and with different parts of organisations (Halford & Leonard, 2001).

Some notable feminist research on women and organisations favours poststructuralist perspectives. Calas and Smircich are two influential authors among poststructuralist writers. Their work has played an important role in encouraging feminist poststructuralist analysis and has attracted the wider attention of feminist organisational analysts since the 1980s. More significantly, a 1989 Academy of

Management conference paper by Calas and Smircich enabled them to win the Dorothy Harlow 'Best Paper Award' at the conference. The conference paper '*Using the F word: Feminist Theories and the Social Consequences of Organisational Research*' critically reviews the women in management literature and questions 'the ultimate value of challenging organisational barriers to women's entry while leaving unquestioned the "genderedness" of organisational management practices and conditions' (Mills & Tancred, 1992). They question the stability of such cultural categories as gender and argue that by considering women's experiences when analyzing organisations actually helps remind us of the gendered nature of standards in the production of knowledge – 'exposing the ways in which organisational science has come to reflect male experience and male realities' (Calas & Smircich, 1992b). They claim that poststructuralist feminism can help unmask imaginary social constructions that devalue and silence women's voices. Other literature by them includes Calas's (1993) deconstruction of charismatic leadership from the 'other' viewpoint and Calas and Smircich's (1991, 1992a, 1993) feminist deconstructions of traditional leadership writings as well as their feminist rewritings of organisation studies and organisational globalization. These works not only focus on the construction and precarious nature of gender in organisation, but also reveal the involvement of organisation studies in the constitution of gendered arrangements.

Poststructuralist feminism does not offer a general theory for explaining all experiences of women within organisations. Instead, it suggests a new approach to understanding the relationship between gender and organisations, which is a method of understanding the way in which time and space will constitute gender and organisation, and the relationship between the two in distinctive forms (Halford & Leonard, 2001). This approach provides more complex views of social location and structures of oppression, which enables us to accommodate the diversity that we see. In addition, it focuses more on documenting the experiences of women from their own perspective or reality and therefore provides insights into their world view. The value of poststructuralist feminism is that it has taught us a lot about the mechanisms of sexist oppression, the construction of specific gender categories by relating these to social discourse and by conceiving of the subject as a cultural product, and the need to theorize the category "woman" through an exploration of the experience of subjectivity, as opposed to the mere description of many feminist perspectives (Alcoff, 1988).

In China, since the mid 1990s, one of the major directions in women's studies and writing is adopting a poststructuralist perspective to explore gender relations 'through personalized narratives that investigate psychological, aesthetic and experiential forms of female subjectivity' (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 21). The representative poststructuralist female writings are *One Person's War* (Lin, 1994) and *A Private Life* (Chen, 1996/2004), which 'discursively connect the personal to social, political, historical and economic dimensions of Chinese society, while disengaging from the male-centered world' (Zheng, 2004: 49, cited in Schaffer & Song, 2007), and 'can be understood as an attempt at aesthetic otherness, against both the inherited but still dominant male-centered literary standards and the all-consuming post-socialist cultural market' (Zheng, 2004: 62, cited in Schaffer & Song, 2007). Challenging Chinese traditions and contemporary patriarchal discourses as well as the male literary establishment, this kind of personalized writing offers the most radical departure for feminism in China, and therefore, has been often misunderstood and particularly criticized by males who know little of feminist philosophies (Schaffer & Song, 2007). It is concluded that women's poststructuralist-style resistance writings may be 'on the rise but male dominance still permeates every corner of Chinese society' (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 28).

Globally, poststructuralist perspectives have attracted lots of critics. 'It is subject to the critiques of elitism and lack of accessibility leveled at poststructuralist approaches' (Calas and Smircich, 1996). Another criticism is that the importance of language is often overestimated at the expense of empirical studies (Alvesson & Billing, 1997), which is also my major concern. Alcoff (1988) argues that the poststructuralist perspective is a kind of nominalism in which abstract concepts, general terms, or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names. If gender is considered as nothing and all terms can be destabilized as poststructuralist feminism advocates, everything such as women's subordination and discrimination will be in danger of becoming linguistic expressions only. If "women" do not exist, what can we demand in the name of women? Thus, its focus on language and discourse has often been criticized as 'untenable for feminist politics' (Calas and Smircich, 1996). Furthermore, it could actually eliminate feminism altogether since poststructuralist feminism considers the category "woman" a mere fiction; threatening even "to wipe out feminism itself" (Alcoff, 1988: 420). Besides, poststructuralist analyses are full of various jargon, and the jargon and focus on minute detail is

limiting. Alvesson & Billing (1997) argue that those who are more inclined towards empirical research have been more skeptical and found the orientation unhelpful.

### **Summary**

The mainstream feminist theories have provided me with a wide understanding of women's issues at the macro level. As we can see the above feminist perspectives are not simply a unified body of thought, but they do share several beliefs (May, 2001). First, their research practices all indicate that women and their fundamental contributions to social and cultural life have been marginalized. Second, they all criticize the norms of science that perpetuate and disguise the myth of the superiority of men over women and argue that women's subordinate position in the family is not a natural phenomenon. Third, they all claim that as a significant social category, gender has been absent from people's understandings and explanations of social phenomena in favour of categories such as social class. Clearly, these different feminist perspectives contribute more or less to our understanding of gender and organisations and each offers insights into particular issues and aspects of women in employment and management.

From a theoretical point of view these perspectives are easy to distinguish, but there is a tendency that researchers often make use of a mixture of two or maybe more of them, or work with other ideas and points of departure (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Although the extent to which these different perspectives are compatible is still in dispute, in some cases, the differences between these perspectives can be viewed as different aspects that could all contribute to the same research programme (Cockburn, 1991).

## **2.2 Conceptualizing the relationship between gender and organisations: three major approaches**

There have been feminist critiques of the absence of gender as a significant social category in social research, feminist analyses of the root causes of women's subordination and proposals for pursuing gender equality and the liberation of women in both public and private spheres. Collectively, these demonstrate the importance of understanding the relationship between women's role and the social world in general,

and the relationship between gender and organisations in particular.

Before the 1980s, gender was given little recognition in mainstream organisational theory, while feminist theory tended to ignore organisation (Halford et al., 1997). Ferguson (1984: 4) has argued that ‘feminism and organisational theory need each other’ in order to better understand male domination and female subordination in modern society. Until the mid 1990s, many researchers realized that organisations are not just composed of gender-neutral components, but populated by men and women, and organisations are featured by gender-related practices, values, goals, logics, languages (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Meanwhile, studies of gender suggest that notions of womanhood and manhood are outcomes of a large number of factors that constitute the cultural environment of society (Ginsburg & Tsing, 1990; Ryan, 1979). These factors include language, attitudes, behaviour patterns, symbolism, beliefs, values, and physical artefacts in some combination (Mills, 2006). Some argue that these are not simply reproduced, maintained and changed at a societal level but develop from specific social groupings including organisations (Gherardi, 1995; Maddock, 1999).

Thus, the increasing interest in exploring the relationship between gender and organisations has generated a range of theoretical positions and encouraged a widening focus that draws new and exciting issues into the debate (Halford et al., 1997). Generally, there are three theoretical approaches to the study of gender and organisations. Halford et al. (1997: 1) labels these main perspectives as ‘contingent, essentialist, and embedded’.

### **2.2.1 The contingent approach**

The contingent approach suggests it is the contingent outcome of specific historical processes that leads to a gendered organisation. In other words, gender inequalities within organisations are not due to organisational processes themselves but to other factors such as the imperfect application of gender-neutral bureaucratic procedures or the result of the different situations of men and women external to the organisation (Halford et al., 1997). As a pioneer in the analysis of gender and organisation, holding a liberal perspective, Kanter (1977) rejected socio-biological explanations for the gender inequalities apparent in the modern American corporation, and claimed that it was the dynamics of bureaucracy rather than gender relations that acted to reinforce and perpetuate the gendered reality of women in clerical posts and men in managerial

posts at the time when bureaucratic organisations expanded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She argued that it was that the job made the person, not the person who made the job, and that it is power differences, rather than gender differences, that provide the key to understanding the different fates of men and women within organisations. Based on her claims, bureaucracy is gendered by chance, and power can be gender neutral. Kanter (1977) believed that women could possess power by gaining access to those senior posts while leaving bureaucracies themselves largely intact. This suggestion has been adopted by many liberal feminists as previously discussed. Her idea, however, is overoptimistic. It is doubtful that the gender inequalities will really be 'bureaucratized out in the way she suggests' (Halford et al., 1997: 9). She also failed to explain where sex stereotyping was initially from. Halford et al. (1997) argue that the key weakness in the contingent approach is the unquestioning acceptance of Weberian notions of bureaucracy. Weber (1964) conceptualized bureaucracy as gender neutral in essence. However, Witz and Savage (1992:3) claim that 'the modern Western bureaucracy, as dissected by Weber, is only one way of organizing social relations and it depends upon particular configurations of gender relations...'

### **2.2.2 The essentialist approach**

In opposition to the contingent perspective, the essentialist approach, mainly embraced by radical feminists, claims that bureaucracy is inherently male and it reflects a specifically male way of organizing. If women want to move into senior management, they have no choice but to embrace male cultures: 'they will be still marked out from men and their organisational power will be undermined' (Halford et al., 1997:10). The most influential author who holds the view is Ferguson and her book *The feminist case against bureaucracy* stands out 'in her radical critics of women's relationship to state bureaucracy' (Fox, 1987). Unlike Kanter's view that the rational form of bureaucratic organisation has little relation to gender, Ferguson (1984) employs radical feminist critique of the male-dominated society and breaks down all forms of bureaucratic activity into the gender of its agents. For example, she claims that women, who are socialized into feminine ways of behaving and relating to others, are necessarily muted within this masculinist setting. Her view is that feminine ways of organizing, based upon a special feminine capacity for friendship, contrast with male bureaucratic forms of organisation. 'Nothing less than elimination' of

bureaucracies can enable women to get out from under the yoke and lead authentic lives' (Fox, 1987: 436). Ferguson's perspective has actually been adopted by some radical feminists who have attempted to create a vision of a future society based on non-hierarchical, non-bureaucratic and non-exclusionary structures, as described in the previous section on radical feminism of this chapter. Ferguson also argues that it is social processes that have attached fixed and coherent characteristics to the categories of 'man' and 'woman' and resulted in gender-specific modes of behaviour, action and organisation (Halford et al, 1997). However, Ferguson failed to consider the diverse experiences of different women. Her claim has been criticized by black feminists, poststructuralist and postmodern feminists (See example, Callas, 1992; Hill-Collins, 1990), who argue that the dominant representations of 'woman' within feminist theory are actually based on the experiences of middle class and academic white women 'whose universalizing of their own experience effectively silences other experiences, constituting in itself another form of oppression' (Halford et al., 1997:11).

### **2.2.3 The embedded approach**

Criticism of the essentialist perspective gave rise to an alternative approach to the study of gender and organisations, which suggests that 'organisational designs, practices and cultures are constructed within economic, social and cultural processes that are always already gendered' (Halford et al., 1997: 13). In fact, many feminists hold the view that gender is embedded in the constitution of all these processes (Acker, 1990, 1992; Adkins & Lury, 1996; Connell, 1987). This embedded perspective emphasises how organisations are not depersonalized systems and exist in a field of dynamic socio-political, economic and cultural relations, which has also indicated a socialist feminist perspective. In particular, Acker's work provides an excellent account of how gendered relations are embedded in contemporary bureaucratic organisations (Acker, 1990; 1992). She suggests a new concept 'gendered substructure' which bureaucratic organisation has, and defines it as 'the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, in the rules prescribing workplace behaviour, and in the relations linking work places to living places' (Acker, 1992: 255). She argues that organisational designs and established norms are far closer to men's lives and assumptions about men than to women's lives and the assumptions made about women (Acker, 1992). However, the gendered substructure is rarely recognized and hidden under a shell of rationality and neutrality (Halford et al, 1997).

Another feminist who holds the embedded perspective is Davies, who points out that gender is 'built into the very design and functioning of organisations' (Davies, 1992: 230). She argues that it is not enough to look at women's experiences of gender relations outside the workplace, but the more appropriate way is to look at their experiences of the gendering of organisation (Davies, 1992).

In recent years, such an embedded perspective has been embraced by some authors in studying the gendering of airline organisations (for examples see Mills, 1988; Mills, 2006; Mills & Mills, 2000; Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991). Moreover, they have proposed a more specific approach - a rules approach to the study of gender and organisation, particularly 'the interface between societal understandings of gender and the role of organisational culture' in the airline industry (Mills, 2006: 2). This has aroused my special interest because of the similar study area and focus. It is, therefore, worth a close look at how the approach can be used to make sense of various gendered aspects of organisational realities. The detailed account of the rules approach will be given in the following section.

### **2.3 Studying gendered organisational culture: a rules approach**

Numerous feminist studies have addressed the relationship between cultural milieu and gendered outcomes (Ginsburg & Tsing, 1990). Feminist scholars claim that although there are physiological differences between women and men, it is not those differences themselves that determine our understandings of 'man' and 'woman' but the way that cultural factors shape our understanding of the differences (Mills & Mills, 2000). In particular, feminist studies of organisation have drawn attention to discriminatory practices and processes at work such as structure, organisational discourse, symbols and images, and addressed important aspects of the gendering of organisations (Acker, 1992; Burrell, 1992; Witz & Savage, 1992;).

Each organisation has its own history and its wider social and political context, within which particular organisational forms and cultures are developed (Halford et al., 1997). Organisational culture is defined as an established set of practices, beliefs and symbols shared by the members of a collective, which have taken time to develop and as such should be studied over time and in social context (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Dellheim, 1986; Kieser, 1989). Meanwhile, gender is also understood, developed and changes in different cultural contexts and times (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). In this way, organisational culture can be viewed as a root metaphor that



provides a useful framework for making sense of gender at work (Mills, 2006). In other words, organisational culture can be used to explain the ways in which people experience gendered realities at work such as sex discrimination, sexual harassment and privileging of particular forms of masculinity. Gender can be seen as a cultural phenomenon and organisations are best understood as 'miniature cultures provide compelling support for an organisational culture approach to gendering organisations' (Mills & Mills, 2000: 57). Thus, an extra focus on the organisational culture of the airline companies I am studying might be helpful in exploring women's conflict experiences in this research.

The gendering of organisational culture in the airline industry has been explored by Mills et al. using a rules approach (Mills & Mills, 2000; Mills, 1998; Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991). As organisational control can only be achieved by rules that 'formulate the structure underlying the apparent surface of organisational life' (Clegg, 1981: 545), it is the configuration of a series of rules that define organisations, 'provide the basis for patterns of behaviour that appear as the way things are done', and shape the culture of an organisation (Mills, 2006: 5). Therefore, it is important to explore gendered practices through the dynamic configuration of organisational rules. In Mills' book on the gendering of airlines, Mills (2006) provides an excellent example of how rules, particularly configurations of rules, contribute to the gendering of organisations.

Generally, rules exist in written and unwritten, formal and informal, legalistic, normative, and moralistic forms. Formal rules dominate organisational activities, especially the 'manner in which groups and individuals combine to get things done' (Eldridge & Crombie, 1974: 89). They are, therefore, routinely associated with the pursuit of organisational purposes and goals, which are perceived as legitimate or normal (Mills & Mills, 2000). Such formal and written rules establish an important aspect of the organisational life through things like job design, job division, recruitment and selection, promotion processes, wage and bonus, holiday entitlement, reward and punishment, dress code and other HR practices, all of which can have an impact on gender (Mills, 2006). Formal rules that arise out of the practice of managing and organisation may appear gender neutral in intent, but, as feminist studies reveal, they are often heavily gendered not only in their outcomes but in the assumptions underlying them (Ferguson, 1984; Schein, 1994; Witz & Savage, 1992). In some cases, formal rules of an organisation deliberately or effectively exclude

women from part of the organisation such as commercial airline piloting before 1965 (Mills, 1998). For example, when British commercial aviation was established in 1919, it was a new industry without existing gendered practices. However, women were excluded from all but clerical positions although women flyers and Women's Royal Air Force existed. It took many years before it employed women in the positions of manager, engineer, pilot and flight attendant (Mills, 1997).

In the process of the establishment and development of formal rules, a series of informal rules develop as well, 'sometimes in contradiction to formal rules' (Mills & Mills, 2000: 60). Informal rules arise within the context of workplace associations but which are free of formal organisational structure or goal orientation, such as friendships which owe more to personality and group dynamics and contribute to a sense of corporate belonging and identity (Wicks, 1998), or some informal groups of workers which might clash with formal rules (Rose, 1978). For example, the Hawthorn studies show the existence and importance of informal groups which could 'evolve unwritten and more informal rules of behaviours or norms' (Brooks, 2006: 96). Those norms were established regarding output, piece-rate change, reciprocity and other interpersonal relations, and more importantly, by having group cohesions workers could restrict outputs and resist changes. Thus, informal rules are also an important influence on the organisational life either positively or negatively. Mills and Mills (2000) argue that informal rules are more directly influenced by gender dynamics than many types of formal rules, because 'doing gender' (Rakow, 1989) is a constant aspect of organisational life (Hearn & Parkin, 1987). For example, Acker (1992) claims that gendered structures and practices can develop through people's interactions at work, which may be influenced by preexisting experiences of gender roles – husband/father, mother/daughter, and so on (Collinson, 1988; Pollert, 1981). In this case, female subordinates and co-workers are routinely treated as surrogate wives, daughters, or lovers, leading to some office romances or even a climate of sexual harassment (Gutek, 1985).

Thus, such a rules approach is necessary to examine to what extent the organisational culture in airlines is gendered. However, it is also important to look at who are key actors involved in enacting, maintaining and changing those rules. Senior managers can influence the gendering of cultures in numerous ways (Mills & Mills, 2000). A representative case is when Jan Carlzon became CEO of Scandinavian Airlines in 1980, he completely revamped the organisation and profoundly influenced

the airline's culture, which led to 'improvements' in service provision that some claim degraded women, who were trained to 'call all the men sir, look them between the eyes, keep your mouth half open' (Sampson, 1984: 216).

Moreover, the organisational culture can be thought of as existing within a broader socio-political context (Eldridge & Crombie, 1974; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981). Mills & Murgatroyd (1991: 26) argue that 'the social values and institutions of a given country influence the rule formation within organisations in that country'. For instance, following World War I, the dominant view that 'woman's place was in the home' in Britain (Pugh, 1992) influenced the hiring practices of British airlines, leading to gendered rules and institutional practices. Mills & Mills (2000: 69) further suggest that it is necessary to focus on 'different areas of dominant social, institutional, and local practices in the maintenance of a particular set of gendered rules and the role of conflict and ambiguities in how these rules change or might be changed'.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Several mainstream feminist theories have been reviewed at the macro level in this chapter. Liberal feminism has formed the starting point and the basic framework of my research. At the beginning of the following chapter, an overview of equality legislation – which is framed by the liberal feminist agenda – will be given. I also acknowledge that other feminist perspectives can be useful to various degrees. For instance, the work of poststructuralists provides suggestive insights into the construction of female subjectivity through the exploration of individual women's experiences. The socialist feminist perspective provides insights into how structures of power operate in society and meanwhile suggest many practical ideas and approaches in assisting my analyses – such as examining links between women's family role and their status in the workplace; observing the impact of political and economic systems, societal structures and cultural values on women's experiences – which have informed the construction of an advanced analytical model set out in Chapter IV. In fact, after completing my research I found that many elements of this perspective were more relevant to my research than originally anticipated, which will be further discussed in Chapter IX.

This chapter has also examined three major approaches to studying the relationship between gender and organisations at the micro level. The embedded

approach is particularly important to my research because it enables me to examine and acknowledge some subtle practices within the airlines that sustain discriminatory practices and to identify in what ways those practices affect female air staff and their perceptions of their work and life. But this needs to be done in context. The embedded perspective, along with a closer examination of the formal and informal rules that needs to take account of a wide range of contexts – including nation, industry, culture, organisation and family, will be useful for me to assess how the airline industry changed in the course of Chinese economic reform and socio-political transformation, how the appearance of new cultural values in a new socialist setting with market orientation influences organisational practices and culture, and how the gendered organisational culture affects female employees both in the workplace and the social life.

Research of women's experiences of work and family life, therefore, requires analyses which are embedded within the context of the gendering of modern organisations, family structural changes, social dynamics and other elements at the macro-level. In the following two chapters, I will review the existing studies on women's experiences in both their working life and family life at national, regional and international levels, and more importantly, I will build upon and challenge existing findings by proposing a new multi-level analytical framework for a better understanding of women's work-family conflict experiences in the Chinese context.

## **Chapter III      Review of the Literature on Working Women in the West and in the East**

This chapter will critically examine the existing Western and Eastern literature on women's experiences of work and family life in both the West and the East. It will start with a brief but important overview of the issues associated with women at work in a global context, which will also cover the development of equality legislation in both Western and Asian countries. This chapter will then present the findings of several major Western and Eastern studies of working women; on the basis of which, a general comparison between the West and East will be made. Following this I will then analyse the literature which has been produced specifically on Chinese women at work, which is the topic and focus of this thesis. In this section the achievements and challenges experienced by Chinese women in the workplace and household are going to be discussed and a brief account of women's studies carried out by Chinese scholars is given. A review of the literature on women's work in the airline industry (of which more comes from the West than the East) is then going to be pursued and from this I will identify a number of the key characteristics of airline service work, specifically: aesthetic labour and emotional labour. Following my review and discussion of work-family conflict in the Western and in the Chinese cultural context I have come to question the applicability of Western findings to other cultural contexts, and particularly in the Chinese context. The final section of this chapter will present some Western examples of family-friendly and women-friendly policies which have been developed in response to work-family conflict. More importantly, this chapter identifies a gap in the existing research which has in part provided the impetus for me to write this thesis on the work-family conflict experienced by the female employees of the Chinese airline industry.

### **3.1 Overview of women at work in the global context: a mixed picture**

Levels of female employment have been rising steadily globally since the 1950s, and women have been gaining a new found economic equality with men (ILO, 2004). Currently over 40 percent of the global workforce are women (Yukongdi and Benson, 2006). In the West this change could be said to be due to the decline of the traditional

heavy and manufacturing industries and the subsequent rise of service sector industries. This trend towards the service sector tended to offer 'more congenial work environments to women' (Hakim, 2004: 1). Meanwhile, in the East higher educational levels, falling fertility rates, and economic sector changes have contributed to women's increased participation in the labour force (Yukongdi and Rowley, 2009). Many women appear to be 'shattering the glass ceilings and making it to the very top, taking over high-profile positions within organisations of all types' (Halford and Leonard, 2001: 1). These are all good reasons for optimism but my review of these recent developments has uncovered a paradox between the growth in the female labour force and an increased segregation of women into low-grade and low-paid occupations. It has also been shown that equal opportunities legislation and discrimination laws have not yet eliminated the real barriers to women's career advancement and cannot solve all these problems in practice due to their inherent limitations (Cooke, 2005; Hakim, 2004).

### **3.1.1 Equality legislation in the West and the East**

The past decades have created a beneficial social and economic situation for many women, and the women in many Western countries enjoyed these benefits earlier than those in the East. Equal opportunities legislation was introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain and America, and they produced a 10% increase in women's earnings when compared with men's (Hakim, 2004). In America the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was enacted with the sole purpose of guaranteeing women equal pay for equal work (Bellace, 1987). In the UK, the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 were introduced principally to govern sex discrimination in the workplace, they have attempted to eliminate 'unjustifiable differences between the treatment of men and women in terms of their pay and other conditions of employment' and to protect 'people from unfair discrimination on the grounds that they are married'. (Torrington et al., 2008: 549). In 1975 the EU passed its first equality law, and a series of other laws have followed which prohibit discrimination between women and men in education, employment, and working conditions (EUROPA, 2007). As a result of this legislation Western women have become better-educated and more competent, and they have increased their share of employment in professional and managerial occupations (Halford et al., 1997; ILO, 1998).

Asia was relatively slower in terms of establishing a formal legal system to

protect the rights and interests of working women. In China the first formal guideline for women was the 'Announcement on Female Workers' Production Leave by the State Council' in 1955 (Cooke, 2009). The announcement was influential in the era of Chairman Mao, but was very limited in scope and not a formal law. It took over thirty years before the first legislation outside of the constitution for working women in China was enacted; the 'Female Employees Labour Protection Regulations' came into force in 1988. Quite a few Asian countries and regions have since enacted relevant legislation for protecting women, which has enabled Asian women to move into some occupations and managerial positions which were previously dominated by men (Horton, 1999). For instance, Hong Kong launched the 'Sex Discrimination Ordinance' in 1995 and established the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996 (Cooke, 2005). In 2000, the 'Basic Law for Gender Equal Society' was enacted in Japan, and 'the discourse of gender equality slowly came into mainstream politics (Yuasa, 2009:72). The Gender Equality Law (2001) was seen as an important milestone in the development of women workers' rights in Taiwan (Chou et al., 2009). This recent move towards the development of legal rights for women in Asian countries indicates a resolution as well as an effort to improve the status of women in the labour market.

### **3.1.2 Western literature on gender and work: A real equality in the labour market?**

The enactment of equality legislation together with the modern movement towards service sector industries has given rise to growing female employment in both the East and in the West. The gap in labour participation between male and female employees is shortening and there is a tendency towards gender equality in the workplace (Halford and Leonard, 2001). Hakim (2004: 2) concludes that 'women's gains have been men's losses as women steal men's jobs and feminise them'. Feminising jobs, however, does not necessarily lead to better pay or better conditions, and can often in practice lead to worse pay and conditions.

With the exception of the Scandinavian countries, the proportion of women in full-time employment has overall remained lower than that of men in all industrialised Western societies (Hakim, 2004). Despite the implementation of equal opportunities legislation in the majority of these industrialised Western countries, and despite activities by organisations to improve gender equality, 'women are still clustered in

certain sectors of the economy and at the base of organisational hierarchies' (Wilson, 2003:16). More women than men take up part-time jobs, but most part-time workers are secondary earners rather than primary earners (Hakim, 1997), and married women are the most important group of secondary earners. Some feminists argue that part-time work is 'an unwilling choice forced on women by the need to reconcile employment with family responsibilities such as childcare and eldercare' (OECD, 2001; 2002:69).

Another notable phenomenon is occupational segregation, which is considered to be the largest barrier that women face and which exists in almost every industry (Wilson, 2003). The European Commission (EC) has long considered occupational segregation as a fundamental source of gender inequality as well as the main cause of a pay gap between men and women (EC, 2002). Women are found in larger numbers in particular types of work which are perceived to have a caring function and which represent an extension of their roles in the family, such as health and social services (Blackburn et al., 2003; Davidson and Cooper, 1993, Dex, 1987, Shipley, 1990). They are actually allied to the traditional tasks perceived as 'women's work' and as such they are occupations which are often less valued and are consequently less well-paid. Thus, the early traditional division of labour still influences the present sex-typing of jobs or gendering of work (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Moreover, women tend to be employed in support functions rather than general management (Wajcman, 1996) and are still under-represented in senior-grade jobs. In the world's largest corporations women hold only three percent of the top management positions (Wirth, 2001). One recent report from Financial Times reveals that despite the fact that more than half of professional school graduates in the USA are female, women still represent only eight percent of the top earners at Fortune 500 companies (Hewlett, 2007). A study of 1,200 executives in eight countries (including the U.S., Australia, Austria and the Philippines) shows that about 70% of women and 57% of men believe an invisible barrier prevents women from getting ahead in business (Clark, 2006).

Women workers around the world are paid roughly 16% less than men, while better educated women face an even bigger pay gap. A recent international study shows that despite nearly forty years of legislation the difference in pay between full-time working women and men in the UK is even bigger than before, British women were paid 17% less than men in 2007 (The Guardian, March 07 2008: 33). Women managers worldwide are paid significantly less than their male counterparts and



receive less in the way of fringe benefits (Venter, 2002). International competition due to globalisation has helped to narrow the gap somewhat, but Sharan Burrow (2008: 33), the ITUC president, argues that ‘despite decades of anti-discrimination legislation and changes in company rhetoric, the pay pockets of women, whether they are in New York or Shanghai, are still significantly thinner than those of men.’

There are a number of explanations why women tend to work for lower status organisations, take less valuable jobs, get lower pay, and are under-represented in management positions. Based on a comparative study of women in Britain and Hong Kong, Venter (2002: 18) concluded that a primary reason for this gap is that the career path that women follow is different from that of men, which can be understood ‘as resulting from the social norms governing women’s roles in the family as compared to those of men’. Hewlett surveyed 2,400 women in the USA and concludes that the career-track structure does not give women a chance (Hewlett, 2007). This career path pattern has been very common in Western societies and is the most popular career path for women in the UK (Ward and Silverstone, 1980, cited in Venter, 2002). Even though the periods which women spend out of the labour market are gradually reducing, women still tend to take some time out around the times of having children (Dex, 1987; Martin and Roberts, 1984, cited in Venter, 2002). Furthermore, the longer out of employment a woman is then the more possibility there is for her to return to a lower-ranking job (Martin and Roberts, 1984, cited in Venter, 2002). In addition, Coe (1992) found that women are unwilling to accept promotion which involves relocation as a consequence of having caring responsibilities, and so women need to work locally, while women often have to quit their jobs to move with their relocated spouse - which has been found to cause a significant break in women’s careers (Dex, 1987, cited in Venter, 2002). Women are, therefore, ‘less upwardly mobile than men, but change their employers more often than their male counterparts’ (Metcalf and Nicolson, 1984, cited in Venter, 2002).

Metcalf (1985) explains that socialisation may lead not just to a set of expectations for particular kinds of work on the part of the woman seeking employment, but will also create a set of expectations on the part of those considering employing her. Stereotyping of men and women is one of the social processes taking place of which we seem to have little awareness, so women are perceived as different and are often evaluated less favourably than men (Wilson, 2003). There is a general consensus amongst feminist researchers that occupational segregation and the pay gap

are imposed by employers (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Employers may see women as inappropriate for particular jobs because of their feminine natures and their family responsibilities, which may lead women to be perceived as lacking commitment to their career. Thus, many employers are likely to hold the generally accepted attitude that their different natures make men and women suitable for different types of jobs (Perry et al., 1994). Women may not have equal chances of getting the job as would a similarly qualified man due to gender bias at the recruitment stage and in promotion decisions (Venter, 2002).

Even in jobs dominated by women, vertical occupational segregation often exists where men are more likely to hold the more senior and better-remunerated jobs (ILO, 2004); as Hakim concludes, 'it is mainly in the higher grades of professional and managerial occupations that women lose out' (2004: 182). Schein (1976) argues that socialisation processes transmit stereotyped gender roles which breed the perception that management is a more suitable occupation for men because of the nature of the job, for which masculine features are perceived to be more readily compatible. Hessebier and Carter (2005) argue that there is an unacknowledged discriminatory barrier (i.e., a 'glass ceiling') that prevents women from obtaining and securing higher positions in the workplace because they are women. This barrier, which is often recognised by liberal feminists, also makes many women feel as if they are not worthy to have these high-ranking positions, and consequently they generally show less ambition than men (Hakim, 2004). As a result, the labour market tends to be gendered and male-dominated. It follows from this that one reason for the gendered pay gap is women's lesser participation in some high-pay professions (e.g. doctor, lawyer, chartered accountant, and pilot) and low ambitions for managerial positions. Another reason is that women are kept out which is often argued by radical feminists.

### **3.1.3 Eastern studies on women: An improvement in their employment?**

Western researchers have completed numerous universal and cross-cultural studies on working women worldwide (Omar and Davidson, 2001), but actually much of what we know about women today is drawn from studies conducted on women in developed countries (predominantly in the West) (Yukongdi and Benson, 2006). Since the 1990s a number of Asian researchers have carried out research studies on Asian women in the workplace (see, Adler, 1993-94; Appold et al., 1998; Budhwar et al., 2006; Chou et al., 2005; Chow, 2005; Chui and Ng, 1999; Cooke, 2001, 2003, 2005,

2009; Hildebrandt and Liu, 1988; Lee, 1991; O'Shea, 1997; Sheehan, 1995; Yuasa, 2009, etc.). Their studies have presented a mixed picture of women's employment and management, which is somewhat similar to Western findings.

Much Eastern evidence suggests that women in Asia, like their counterparts in the West, face considerable barriers to greater participation and access to higher positions in organisations (see, Yukongdi and Benson, 2006). The existence of occupational segregation and a glass ceiling has inhibited the progress of women's entry into managerial positions. For example, women in India have remained segregated in predominantly female occupations, in lower ranks of organisations and they are barred from moving up the hierarchy 'because they do not meet the promotion criteria' (Budhwar et al., 2006: 45). Taiwanese women experience difficulties in entering certain industries, such as transport, where the jobs are labeled as 'male' (Chen, 2000). These barriers have also resulted in a pay gap between men and women. In Hong Kong, for example, the ratio of women's median earnings to men's varies greatly across industries and occupations, but the former is never higher than the latter (Hong Kong Government, 2006:77-8).

Like Western researchers, Eastern researchers have summarised why women are still under-paid and under-represented in the upper levels of most organisations. Most of the reasons discussed in the Western literature are similar to those found in the East; for example, women's families determine their career paths. This phenomenon is even more evident as women's perceived primary role in most Asian societies is as a major domestic provider for their families. For example, Japanese women do almost 95% of non-paid housework and the heavy burden of domestic labour prevents them from working continuously and competing against men in the labour market (Yuasa, 2005). As in the British experience, many Asian women (especially in Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea) leave the labour market on marriage, and for childbirth and child-rearing (Kang and Rowley, 2005; Ng and Chakrabarty, 2005; Venter, 2002; Yuasa, 2005). This high rate of departure from the workplace indicates that 'there is a clear relationship between female labour force participation and being married' (Venter, 2002: 33), although this is not exactly true in Mainland China (which will be discussed further in 3.2). Korean women's career drop-out is even more noticeable: Kang and Rowley (2005) found that Korean women left work in their late 20s to spend 7-8 years in domestic affairs and then returned to work in their late 30s, which resulted not only in employment discrimination but also

fewer chances of advancement in the workplace.

It has been suggested that women may be disadvantaged by the HRM practices which exist in some Asian countries (Hildebrandt and Liu, 1988, Chui and Ng, 1999). Discriminatory practices have been found to exist in HRM recruitment, job allocation, training, promotion, redundancy, and retirement policies in China (Cooke, 2003). Chen (2000) found that both public sector organisations and private companies in Taiwan have adopted more restrictive practices against women in their recruitment and promotion procedures. Others argue that the influence of Asian cultures and religious traditions has contributed to the under-utilisation and under-representation of Asian women in management (Adler, 1993-94).

Women's major role as homemakers has been closely linked to the culture and custom of Asia. Aryee (1992) argues that the religious and cultural influences of Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and traditional Christianity in Singapore have collectively defined a set of expectations about men and women and their appropriate role within the domain of work and family. Similar influences have permeated the society of almost all Asian countries. No matter whether they are developed (such as Japan) or less developed (such as Vietnam), traditional patriarchal familial concepts and persisting gender roles continue to affect women's labour participation rate, career development, and earnings (see, Yukongdi and Rowley, 2009).

Recently evidence has shown that an increasing number of Asian women are moving into managerial positions which were previously dominated by men (Horton, 1999). For instance, Appold et al. (1998) found a greater proportion of women in top management positions in Thailand than in either Japan or the USA. Lee (2005) argues that in Singapore there is an increasing representation of female owners in a few traditionally male-dominated industries (such as shipping, publishing, and computer systems). Chow (2005) suggests that there are encouraging signs for women aiming for top management positions in Hong Kong. The proportion of Japanese women managers increased from 4.1 percent in 1992 to 6.7 percent in 2005 (Yuasa, 2009). There are some Asian women officials in the upper echelons of government (e.g., China, Indonesia, Philippines). This indicates that women in some Asian countries may be less marginalised than their Western counterparts in their advancement into managerial positions (Luke, 1998; Sheehan, 1995). Research also shows that many women in Hong Kong do not feel that they face serious sexual discrimination (Lee, 2003; Ng and Chakrabarty, 2005; Venter, 2002). Recent research on Chinese

government and civil service institutions shows that the job promotion process seems 'more stringent and fair than it used to be' (Cooke, 2009: 30). More interestingly, recent cross-national comparative studies have shown that the country with the lowest level of occupational segregation in the world is China (Hakim, 2004).

These findings suggest that (along with the growing participation of women in the labour force) the enhanced implementation of legislation for protecting women, increasing access to education, and the rapid economic transformation and sector shifts have meant that the representation of Asian women in management positions is slowly improving. However, a number of barriers to gaining full-time employment and management positions have been persistently experienced by women, barriers which have been erected by the contribution of social factors and organisational practices. The Eastern findings on working women are, therefore, generally consistent with the Western results. However, the persistent influence of Asian cultural and religious traditions has led to greater challenges for women in Asia. The impact of culture (which will be elaborated in Chapter IV and discussed through the data analysis chapters) plays a crucial role in making sense of women's experiences as well as in explaining the differences which have emerged from the Eastern and the Western findings.

It is important to note that significant variation exists between Asian countries, although the degree of change is smaller than that between the West and the East. Because each country has its own unique cultural, social, legal, and economic environment the experiences of working women vary based on locality (Yukongdi and Rowley, 2009). Thus, the following section will look particularly at China, my research context, and examine the opportunities and challenges for working women in China at different stages.

### **3.2 Chinese women in the changing context: Achievements and challenges**

In recent years a number of notable empirical studies of working women in Asia have been completed, reflecting the growing economic importance of the region (see, Yukongdi and Benson, 2006; Yukongdi and Rowley, 2009). Amongst these studies China has drawn the most attention, which is perhaps understandable given the size of its land mass, its vast population, and the important global and regional economic role

that it plays.

Over the past three decades the introduction of gender equality legislation, the changing nature of the labour market, the marketisation of the Chinese economy, and the adoption of modern HRM practices in China have increased the job and managerial opportunities which are available to women and has provide them with incentives to improve their livelihood (Yukongdi and Benson, 2006). However, despite this progress these changes have paradoxically generated poor incentives, uncertain income, and a stronger attachment to domestic roles among women (Zou, 2007). Cooke (2005, 2009) argues that the opportunities for women may be undermined by Chinese social and cultural norms, organisational practices, personal attitudes, and family conditions. Therefore, a key question remains: Have these changes affected Chinese women more positively than negatively?

### **3.2.1 A rosy picture**

As early as the 1950s the Chinese 'Marriage Law' laid down the principles of equality between the sexes (Stockman et al, 1995). Since then women have gained the right to choose marital partners, sue for divorce, and, as Chairman Mao said, 'hold up half the sky'. During Mao's era the social engineering policy succeeded in 'eradicating centuries-old perceptions of sex differences in ability and in the practice of male dominance in the household' (Hakim, 2004: 93). As a socialist country China has long taken the full participation in employment as an important indicator of women's liberation and independence (Cooke, 2009) and the full-time employment policy has made it necessary for all adults to work, and thus for couples to share domestic work.

Since the 1980s, China has transformed from an old command style economy towards a socialist market-economy, has moved from a workplace-based welfare system to a social welfare system, and has introduced modern human resource management practices. By so doing China has created more opportunities for women to be employed and promoted through their own competence. In part as a result of the political and legal intervention, China has one of the highest rates of female employment in the world (Cooke, 2005, 2009). According to the State Council Information Office of China, there are more than 500 million women in China, of whom over 300 million are in full-time employment; by the end of 2004 Chinese women made up 44.8 percent of the total workforce in the country (SCIO, 2005). Those who have young children also work full-time because of 'the accessibility to

extended family support networks and the low cost of paid services for childcare and domestic work' (Cooke, 2009: 22). Policies and legislation on gender equality have been launched by the government with the aim of providing protection as well as ensuring equal opportunities for women in the workplace (Cooke, 2001); such as: Regulations of Prohibited Types of Occupational Posts for Female Employees (1990) and the PRC Law on Protecting Women's Rights and Interests (1992). Many urban women (myself included) feel that there have been huge changes in sex-role attitudes in recent years, with fewer now insisting that women are defined entirely by their family role. Furthermore, the restructuring of China's industry, urbanisation, and the development of the West of the country have all provided opportunities for women entrepreneurs, especially following the emergence of new service industries such as community work, tourism, health care, and insurance (People's Daily, 2004). Another outstanding achievement in gender equality is that the educational levels of employed women have been getting closer to those of men (Cooke, 2005), with increases at the higher education level being more dramatic than those in primary and secondary education (Cooke, 2009).

The picture is even more encouraging when taking into account that a recent survey reports that women hold senior management positions in 91% of companies on the Chinese mainland (China ranked second in the world for the number of women in senior management, beaten only by the Philippines); the research was conducted by Grant Thornton, an accounting firm based in Hong Kong (SD, 2007). Covering thirty-two economies, the findings suggest that Chinese businesses focus on capability and performance when appointing senior management, and not on gender. The survey further shows that, on average, only 65 percent of the companies in the world have women in senior management positions. China in many ways is already ahead of many Western countries (including the USA, the UK, and Canada). As a result, Chinese institutions are seen to have a higher level of gender equality than Japan, the UK, and the USA; with permanent full-time work being the norm for all adults irrespective of sex; and a high degree of egalitarianism in family roles (Stockman et al., 1995). In addition, China and Russian have been found to have the least occupational gender segregation compared to other countries (Davidson & Burke, 2004). China Statistics of 2003 shows that there is a relatively high proportion of women working as technical personnel in different sectors (Cooke, 2005). In short, when compared to other countries (including many wealthy Western countries)

Chinese women enjoy higher rates of employment, better jobs, and a higher ratio of female to male income earned. Even the female to male income ratio in China is higher than that in the US (Peerenboom, 2007).

### **3.2.2 Difficult realities**

When it comes to exercising political power in China today, however, women do not seem to be advancing. From the top down there is a strong reluctance to place women in positions of authority over men. Although women representatives on the National People's Congress have averaged 20 percent since the 1970s, only 20 percent of parliamentary seats were occupied by women and 6 percent of ministerial positions were filled by women (World Bank Group, 2006). In addition, women only account for less than 6 percent of city mayors, township leaders, county heads, and provincial governors (Morton & Lewis, 2004). The number of female leaders is even fewer at the lower levels of townships and small towns, 'women hold only 1 to 2% of the top positions and almost never hold positions on local village councils' (Morton & Lewis, 2004: 276).

The Chinese economy in transition has significantly improved women's lives; however, it has rendered others into poverty including a disproportionate number of women. In the past, they enjoyed lifelong employment in state-owned enterprises, which gave them maternity leave and childcare. However, since the 'iron rice bowl' was broken and many firms collapsed in the 1990s, it is women 'who are the first to be laid off and the last to be reemployed at a rate of 19% lower than for men.' (Morton & Lewis, 2004: 276). In the course of market reform, the Chinese central government has promulgated numerous laws to push SOEs to stand on their own in competition with emerging private firms (e.g. Enterprise Bankruptcy Law (1986), The Company Law (1993)) (Guthrie 2006). One major impact of these policies has been massive lay-offs of SOE workers who have lost their wages, health benefits, pensions, and bankruptcy compensation (Lee, 2007). Between 1998 and 2004, 21.6 million SOEs workers were laid-off (Liu et al., 2006). Of all the laid-off workers, it was estimated that over 60% were women (Shi, 2003; Tong, 2003: cited in Zou, 2007). Although close to 90% of all the laid-off workers have since been reemployed, they tend to take temporary jobs in different industries and in non-SOEs which pay lower wages without benefits (Liu et al., 2006); this is especially true for women (Shi, 2003; Tong, 2003: cited in Zou, 2007). The massive unemployment of female, as well as



male, SOE workers has generated much anxiety and a loss of sense of belonging (Lee, 2007; Tong, 2003; Shi, 2003: cited in Zou, 2007).

Despite Chinese women having gradually moved into previously male-dominated occupations, the greatest disparity between male and female occupational patterns has been in government organisations where women have the lowest participation rate (China Statistical Yearbook, 2003; Cooke, 2005; Stockman et al., 1995). Gender discrimination and stereotypical attitudes towards women remain an inescapable issue both in the family and in the workplace. Cooke (2005) suggested that male managers in China were more likely to perceive men as more capable. Male employees are willing to accept females as their colleagues rather than their supervisors or managers. 'Progress on promoting women's rights is hindered by deeply embedded traditional views about the proper role of women in the family, in society, and in relation to men' (Peerenboom, 2007: 144).

Women's perception of what their role should be influences the degree of motivation in their career development. In a recent nationwide online survey on 'University Girls in Job-hunting and Marital Choice' which was conducted by the China Higher Education Department, over 70% of the Chinese female graduates held the view that 'Even if you could do well in your career, it cannot compare with having an ideal married life' (China Education Online, 2007). This has resulted in an interesting phenomenon in that many female graduates are busy dating potential husbands instead of looking for jobs, and they have been criticised for being afraid to face difficulties and challenges in society. However, this behaviour was argued by many respondents to be the result partly of increasing pressure from intensified competition in the labour market and employer's discrimination towards women in recruitment and selection. A recent survey of 430 Shanghai female graduates which was conducted by Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, shows that women in Shanghai prefer a happy family to a successful career, while only 24 percent said that they wanted greater success at work (China Daily, 2008). Recently a new trend has developed for some women to withdraw from wage work on the condition that their partners or husbands are financially secure. Thus, Zou (2007) argues that one notable phenomenon invoked by Chinese market reform is that urban married women orientate towards the home. Chinese women were 'often compelled to work more at the expense of their domestic and personal needs... when they were forced into employment or moonlighting, they tended to find their work more burdensome than

fulfilling, and therefore preferred more the domestic role to the provider role' (Zou, 2007: 7). However, this factor was more likely to be reported among low-pay workers than well-paid female professionals because the employment of the women workers provides them with little intrinsic or extrinsic benefits, while well-paid female professionals generally enjoyed their paid work and can leave domestic chores to hired hands.

Schaffer and Song (2007: 28) argue that the market-driven reforms have had more negative effects, both materially and symbolically, for women who 'have suffered a diminution in status', and the achievements in gender equality tend to be superficial because more Chinese women than men are facing the dual burden of work and family life (Lu & Zhao, 2002). Zou (2007) concludes that it is the reform policies, which embrace decentralisation and privatisation but abandon egalitarian principles, which have created mounting work-family conflicts and pushed married women to reprioritise their work and family commitments. In addition, men propose that women should return to work or have staged employment – dropping out of the labour market during their childcare period and reentering employment once their child is at school (Lu & Zhao, 2002). This employment strategy, they argue, would relieve the growing pressure of increasing unemployment and make men's and their family's lives easier (Xu, 1999).

It is striking that the modern positions of Chinese working women are diverse and contrasting. Economic reforms and their associated changes have had ambiguous results for women, creating new opportunities but also new constraints on their ability to participate as equal partners with men in society, politics, and the economy. The diversity of women's experiences and perceptions at work has prompted Chinese scholars and researchers to study Chinese women in this changing context.

### **3.2.3 Women's studies in the academic field of China**

The changing role of Chinese women, both in society and at work, has been of interest to the Chinese academia since the 1990s. A significant milestone was the 1995 Fourth International Women's Conference which was held in Beijing, and which not only brought feminists from around the world to China but also enabled female Chinese scholars to join the global tide of feminism (Schaffer & Song, 2007). This conference offered unprecedented new directions and strategies for Chinese women's liberation. Particularly, the Beijing Declaration secured the commitment of

governments to 'promote women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women...ensuring equal access for all women... achieve the empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought...' (Division for the Advancement of Women, 1995).

After this conference, the Chinese government drafted two five-year programmes for women's development, 'making, not women's rights, but *equality* between men and women a national policy aligned with national progress' (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 17). In the past, there was neither an identifiable independent women's movement, nor venues in which women could explore their equal development (Li & Zhang, 1994: cited in Schaffer & Song, 2007). The All-China Women's Federation, a top-down governmental organisation governed by National Congress of Chinese, now has NGO-status, which enables it to better support women's equality in keeping with governmental directives (Schaffer & Song, 2007). After the Beijing Women's Conference, the government supported the publication of women's literature both within and outside of China as a way of demonstrating its commitment to women's equality (Huang, 2004).

Meanwhile, many Chinese scholars have conducted research and published academic papers on women's issues from a number of different perspectives (Liu & Xie, 1999). There are three stages in the development of research into Chinese women's issues: the initial stage (1979 to 1984) focused only on the One Child Policy and maternity with little investigation into the experiences of working women; in the second stage (1985 to 1994) the research began to touch upon the overall status of Chinese women from different approaches (in this stage women's research centres were established in several Chinese cities); the third stage (1994 to 1999) emphasised the issues of equality and rights for women in society and at work (in this stage international organisations (including the United Nations Population Fund and the Ford Fund) were invited to help China undertake studies on women's issues). Since 1999 more Chinese organisations (including the Commission on the Status of Women and Chinese Academy of Social Science) have undertaken research on Chinese female employees.

The third stage of research on women in China marks an important development because it explores the theoretical and practical issues of women's lives which, perhaps for the first time in Chinese history, dominate the academic field (Schaffer &

Song, 2007). The true revolution in women's research had begun and this period opened up new spaces for the exploration of women's identities, with the potential to both expand and curtail women's agency. Consequently, 'an unprecedented number of women's voices, literary and critical, entered the academy and impacted upon the public sphere' (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 19). In particular, reconstructing women in history has been a major element of Chinese academic feminism, during which the representative women biographers such as Zhao Mei wrote against 'a male dominated revisionist history movement that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s' and challenged long-held masculine tradition and prejudice throughout Chinese history (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 23). Zhao Mei has written several influential biographies, such as on Wu Zetian (1994) who was a first-century concubine to the Emperor Tang Taizong and who later became a Chinese Empress. In contrast to other male historians and biographers who typically describe Wu Zetian as an evil, lustful, crazy, and power-hungry woman, Zhao represents the Empress as a 'beautiful, sensual, competent, intelligent and commanding figure', and introduces the book as 'the exciting history of the heart of a great woman' (Zhao, 1994). Moreover, having been influenced by Western women's study and feminist ideology, contemporary Chinese feminist philosophers (such as Li Xiaojiang and Meng Yue) have begun to criticise Chinese masculinity in a manner that is aligned to the modernist equality principals of Simone de Beauvoir, but with an increasing emphasis on feminine difference (Barlow, 2004).

Women's equality has become a signifier of Chinese modernity and the support for women's writing has been seen as a way of signaling the nation's progress in the world of the twenty-first century. Thus, women's literature, whether in the form of oral narratives collected in collaborative contexts, historical biographies, academic reports, or semi-autobiographical fictions, has mushroomed and become regarded as critically important for its 'potential to undermine dominant social demands and ideologies and to articulate alternative and gendered historical subjects' (Wang, 2004: 22). In recent years, feminist debates and critiques of gender relations have been very much enabled in China, although they are 'circumscribed by the government's strict controls on the public expression of opinions that might be construed as political' (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 17).

The literature of women's issues has flourished in China during the past two decades, however, there has been little attempt to undertake studies on women's experiences in specific industries. Given that the findings on Chinese working women

are strikingly different (as shown above) I believe that in modern times urban working women's experiences vary with different occupations and in different industries. Thus it is better for a work of empirical study to focus mainly on women in a particular industry in order to gain in-depth insights.

### **3.3 Women and their job roles in the airline industry**

As my research is based on the airline industry, the literature on women's work in this industry is of a particular interest to me. Given that the relevant studies in the West have strongly outnumbered and been more profound than those so far conducted in the East or China, at this stage I have to depend mainly on Western findings to inform my understanding of how women's job roles have been constructed and changed in the airline industry. However, the findings from my fieldwork will be able to contribute to the research in this sector.

#### **3.3.1 Brief history of female employees in the Western airline industry**

Women were often excluded from working in the early Western civil aviation industry (i.e., prior to and following the WWII). Until 1942 in the UK more than 90% of all airline jobs were held by men (Mills, 1997). The requirement of the British government that 75% of all pilots, ground personnel, and administrative staff be recruited from the Royal Air Force in affect meant that the majority of women were excluded from much airline work (Penrose, 1980: cited in Mills, 1997). In 1930 United Airlines hired female nurses as flight attendants (the first time in American airline history that female aircrew had been hired) which established a practice that was copied by almost all other US airlines until the late 1950s. The first union of flight attendants, the Air Line Stewardesses Association (ALSA), was officially established in America in 1945, 30 years later the union evolved into the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) (Nielson, 1982). The AFA is currently the world's largest flight attendants' union and represents over 50,000 flight attendants at 22 airlines within the US. Following this, specialised flight attendant unions were established in airlines elsewhere in order to negotiate improvements in pay, benefits, and working conditions (Nielson, 1982). These unions have actively challenged sexist stereotypes and unfair work practices.

Historically, across all Western airlines, standardised recruitment practices have

contributed to gendered outcomes (Mills & Mills, 2000). Female positions have been limited to stewarding, clerical work, or customer service positions. In their ethnographic research in the British airline industry, Taylor and Tyler (2000) found that both the work of telephone sales and flight attendants can be defined as women's work because the overwhelming majority of those employed in these two sectors are women. These job roles involve skills 'which women are seen to possess simply by virtue of being women' (Taylor & Tyler, 2000: 86). Moreover, Nielsen found in his investigation of pervasive discriminatory practices that the most damaging rule to the stability of the flight attendant group was the no marriage rule; other discriminatory practices which Nielsen found included policies dealing with age, pregnancy, and appearance (Nielsen, 1982). Since the 1980s changes in gendered airline practices have been achieved through legal challenges by women activists inside the industry (Hochschild, 1983; Nielsen, 1982). For instance, discriminatory policies came under attack in the U.S. after passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Flight attendant unions like the Association of Flight Attendants used Title VII in the courts and at the bargaining table to bring an end to discriminatory practices and recognise the professionalism of the flight attendant as a career (New York Times, 1986). As a result, by the 1980s the no-marriage rule was eliminated throughout the U.S. airline industry. Today, women have started to undertake active roles in the commercial aviation industry, however, 'the long association of flight attending with women and of piloting with men has created a powerful set of rules that has proven difficult to erode' (Mills & Mills, 2000: 63). This presentation of women in a caring or sexual role has consistently downplayed the intelligence of female employees in the airline industry (Mills, 2002).

### **3.3.2 Aesthetics and sexuality**

Since the first stewardesses took flight in 1930, they have become glamorous icons of femininity. For decades Western airlines hired only young, attractive, unmarried white women. They marketed passenger service aloft as an essentially feminine exercise in exuding charm, looking fabulous, and providing comfort (Barry, 2007). Lessor (cited in Spiess and Waring, 2005: 197) suggests that this 'stewardess-as-sex-object' advertising peaked in the early 1970s after provocative slogans such as 'I'm Cheryl, Fly Me'. Linstead (cited in Spiess and Waring, 2005: 197) attests that through this type of advertising airlines 'make no secret of their wish to entice a predominantly

male clientele on board in the lucrative first and business sectors with gently erotic evocations'. A study on employment practices and the gendering of Air Canada's culture by Mills (2002) revealed that the role of women in airlines 'historically has been used to sell airlines, whereas employment for women was seen as a temporary goal, even a stepping-stone, to marriage' (Mills, 2002). However, the actual work that flight attendants do (ensuring passenger safety, assuaging fears, serving food and drinks, while all the while conforming to airlines' strict rules about appearance) was supposed to appear effortless. Today many Western airlines have altered the criteria for selecting and recruiting cabin crew candidates. Flight attendants should be acknowledged safety experts instead of beautiful stewards, and their first and foremost task is to 'carry out safety measures and only secondarily as employees providing a type of service to passengers' (Williams, 2003: 515).

In contrast to this there is evidence to show that Asian airlines still encourage their cabin crew to make full use of their sexual appearance and feminised gender performance to gain customer loyalty (Spiess and Warning, 2005); this is probably because the way in which airline employees deliver services is very important to achieve competitive advantage in the competitive Asia Pacific airline market. It is this 'service image' or 'organisational aesthetic' (Witz et al., 2003) that 'heavily relies on the use of aesthetic labour and which tends to be sexualised' (Spiess and Warning, 2005: 195). Witz et al. (2003: 37) defines aesthetic labour as the 'mobilisation, development and commodification of embodied dispositions' and claims that 'it recuperates the embodied character of service work'. This deployment of employee's physical characteristics occurs through corporate production and control of the selection and training processes (Spiess and Warning, 2005), an affect which is emphasised in Asian airlines. For instance, Singapore Airlines has its world-known Singapore Girl icon, and Thai and Vietnam Airlines are associated with an image of doting, attractive female flight attendants. These airlines have mobilised the physical dispositions of their cabin crew to embody the organisational aesthetic and strengthen the appeal of their brands (see Heng, 1997). As a result, the selection procedure of flight attendants is long and rigorous in many Asian airlines.

The preference for young and good-looking cabin crew is also found in China and Chinese flight attendants face sexist hiring practices. Each year the major airlines in China conduct a high profile recruitment and selection campaign to identify suitable candidates for the role of flight attendant. In the summer of 2007 one of

China's biggest airline companies was hoping to recruit 61 flight attendants through this mass selection, which was scheduled to be held in five Chinese cities (China Economic Net, 2007). The selection event was competitive and thousands of pretty girls applied and vied to be air stewardesses. The selection criteria which were used advised that: candidates must be aged below 25, slim and attractive with a good skin, with a height between 165 and 175 meters, with a pleasant personality and smile. Thus, just as Ching-Ching Ni (2007) a journalist of Los Angeles Times commented, 'fly on a Chinese airline and you will be pampered by flight attendants who look eerily alike. They are young, beautiful and practically the same height.' As many Chinese passengers judge the quality of airlines based on the quality of their flight attendants, good looks are becoming a commodity these days (Ni, 2007).

### **3.3.3 Emotional labour**

The flight attendant job role is, however, not necessarily what the girls dreamed it would be. 'The job was a cross between a barman and a lavatory attendant – loos and booze, as a new executive of Virgin Airlines later described it, recalling with particular distaste, the Sisyphean task of keeping the outdated toilets presentable for eight hours at a stretch' (Jackson, 1995:150). Furthermore, as Hochschild (1983) has suggested, the demands of emotional labour can negatively impact on air service staff.

The term emotional labour was coined by Hochschild (1983) after her study of American flight attendants and was defined as the 'management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display'. Recent research has begun to examine the role of emotions in the workplace (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Following Hochschild's original conceptualisation of emotional labour, several other researchers have advanced its meaning suggesting that: emotional labour involves managing emotions and emotional expression in compliance with organisational or occupational "display rules" (Glomb & Tews, 2004); and that, emotional labour is 'the act of displaying appropriate emotion (i.e., conforming with a display rule) regardless of whether the emotion is discrepant with internal feelings' (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), which may pose a greater challenge to one's emotional capacity. Hochschild stressed the problematic features of emotional labour for female flight attendants (Williams, 2003): emotional labour is seen to stimulate pressures for people to identify with their service roles and may kindle emotive dissonance, self-alienation, and emotional exhaustion (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).



Emotional labour in practice is not a gender-neutral phenomenon, empirical research while demonstrates that those jobs which demand significant amounts of emotional labour are dominated by women (Hochschild 1983, Smith 1992, James 1992).

Since the 1950s airline service work has been characterised by gendered emotional labour and the production of sexual difference (Mills, 1998). The global airline industry has been struggling in an increasingly competitive business environment as a consequence of: increased competition for passengers, the participation of new entrants (especially low-cost carriers), and of the increasing demand of passengers to be treated as an individual (Taylor & Tyler, 2000). The airlines often emphasise the importance of delivering a high quality service and achieving 100% customer satisfaction, which demands the emotional management of employees. The nature of the interaction between air staff and the customer has always been seen by airline management as central to customer perceptions of the quality of service (Hochschild 1983; Mills 1998). For example, airline telephone sales agents are expected to naturally deliver a high quality service and be able to chat to and interact with customers in their own natural manner, 'regardless of the emotional stance which customers may adopt towards them' (Taylor & Tyler, 2000: 83). Hochschild adds that it is important that flight attendants are skilled at coping with passenger stress and anxiety, but the rules of standardisation of airline companies mean that the attendants 'learn to act' (Eaten, 2001); or, in other words, the attendants have to be capable of a 'natural' performance. Stewarding trainees are mainly taught to be skilled at dealing 'naturally' with customers, or 'developing a rapport with passengers, responding to emergencies, coping with sick, nervous or intoxicated passengers and using appropriate body language' (Eaten, 2001: 131). A study by Tyler and Abbott (1998) tends to support the view of Hochschild, they argue that 'to secure employment as a flight attendant, a woman must achieve and maintain a particular state of embodiment, prescribed primarily according to an instrumentally imposed concept of a feminine aesthetic and practiced largely according to constraint, containment and concealment.' (Tyler & Abbott, 1998: 433). In short, flight attendants are required to perform not only physically demanding manual labour but also emotional labour.

The gendered emotional labour required by airlines is seen by many as a 'double-edged sword' (Filby, 1992). On the one hand it may lead to the airline securing the repeat business of their customers: cabin crew or front-line service staff give the

airline a 'human face' by personifying the care of the airline, leading the passenger to choose to use the same airline in the future. Some airline employees have used this training as a means to improve their capabilities and confidence, like one chief stewardess who reported 'being more confident, better groomed and more poised' (Bellos, 1989). There are some people who have argued that emotional labour can be satisfying and enjoyable for service employees (Wharton, 1993; Williams, 2003; Wouters, 1989). However, when emotional labour becomes over-delivered under managerial prescription then the tensions of emotional labour can become significant (Korczynski, 2002, cited in Taylor & Tyler, 2000). There is some evidence to show that 'the more management attempt to prescribe the performance of emotional labour, the stronger resistance and contestation from female employees' (Taylor & Tyler, 2000: 94).

Emotional labour, therefore, is one part of a complex and sometimes health-threatening job (Boyd & Bain, 1998). Hochschild's (1983) interviews with American flight attendants showed that they had a hard time recovering their true feelings once their shifts were over, and even then they could hardly figure out when they were acting and when they were not. Eventually the staff became aware that the hidden cost of managing their emotions for pay is the impoverishment of their emotional lives. Furthermore, Hochschild (1983) found that male flight attendants were more likely to have their authority respected and were less likely to be subjected to emotional outbursts from passengers. Williams's (2003) survey of three thousand Australian flight attendants revealed that the display behaviours Hochschild described are still required by modern airline management. The results of the survey suggests that more than half of the flight attendants felt that supplying emotional labour is a source of stress rather than satisfaction (Williams, 2003). When they analysed their interview and survey data from UK airline cabin crews, Bolton and Boyd (2003) observed the considerable skill which was required of flight attendants in managing a variety of projected emotions. The consequence of emotional labour by airline staff may be said to be that, 'they have sold their hearts, and do not know how to buy them back' (as suggested by Hochschild (1983)).

My intention in this research project in part is to determine whether or not Chinese female air staff have encountered a similar experience and if the demands of emotional labour have resulted in work-family conflict.

### **3.4 Work-family conflict in the Western and the Chinese cultural context**

The entrance of women into employment and management in significant numbers has brought work and family issues to the centre stage, shifting the spotlight from issues of entry and equality of access and on to the consideration of work-family conflicts and the difficulties posed to career women (Poelmans, 2005).

The importance of studying work-family conflict has ‘grown as the structure of families deviated from that of the traditional single breadwinner template’ (Premeaux et al., 2007: 705); this change has resulted from workforce demographic shifts, some of which have the potential to negatively influence work-life balance (see Poelmans and Caligiuri, 2008). For example, since the 1970s the percentage of dual-career couples has increased in almost all developed countries (Bond et al., 2003; Jacobs, 2003), and work-family conflict increases among men and women as the couple’s joint hours of paid-labour rises (Winslow, 2003). Having conducted research on dual-career couples, Wiersma (1994) argued that work-family conflict is derived from two sources: role overload and role quality. When employees are unable to balance their work roles with family roles, role overload occurs; when reality is at odds with a person’s self concept of how things would be, a reduction of role quality occurs (Wiersma, 1994). Meanwhile, in many Western countries single parent households have increased (Bianchi & Raley, 2003), and they are seen to have at least similar levels of overload and interference between family and work as dual-earner families (Duxbury et al., 1994). While in the West the number of one-person households has increased more than any other type of households (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002), those living alone may still experience work-family conflict in some form; for example, they may have to shoulder elder-care and home-care responsibilities and ‘can be assumed to make tradeoffs between work and leisure time’ (Premeaux et al., 2007: 706). In addition to the increasing numbers of working women, dual-earner couples, and single parents in the workplace, technological advancement and the need to be globally competitive has increased pressure on organisations and employees alike (Ahmad & Omar, 2008). The workforce has become more productive but competing demands (often between work and home) have resulted in conflict for employees. Siegel et al. (2005: 13) further state that, ‘work-life conflict has been growing for the past 20 years and is probably at an all-time high’. Thus, role conflict has been an

important area of study for researchers and is also central to my own research.

Researchers have also examined the bi-directionality of work-family conflict (i.e., from work to family or from family to work) and have recognised that it is often to be found in multiple forms (i.e., time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based) (Carlson, 1999; Greenhaus, 2003; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Gutek et al., 1991; Kmec, 1999; Premeaux et al., 2007; Small and Riley, 1990). Work-family conflict can also be specific to multiple life roles such as spouse, parent, leisure and so on (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Thus, work-family conflict is seen as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon (Premeaux et al., 2007).

A considerable body of Western literature exists on the topic of work-family conflict and these findings have been influential, and sometimes dominant. Therefore, a thorough review of Western literature on this topic is helpful. Yet it is striking how little work and family research has been conducted outside of the United States and other Western nations (see Poelmans, 2005). It is often assumed that the findings from this literature are universally applicable and easily transferable to other cultural contexts. However, this thesis questions this Anglo-centric assumption and argues that the historical legacy of traditional gendered Chinese culture, combined with the rapid social and economic transformation that China is currently experiencing, has shaped very specific gendered family and labour market relations.

#### **3.4.1 Western studies on women's work-family conflict: antecedents and outcomes**

Gender differences in work and family have been a consistently important theme in work-family research, as women have moved into paid labour and families have been confronted by a speeding-up work life (Lewis & Cooper, 1999).

Much research reports that women suffer higher levels of overload and interference than men (Brough & Kelling, 2002; Duxbury et al., 1994; Hill, 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1993; Rothbard, 2001). Statistics also show that it is easier for men than for women to have both a career and a family (ILO, 2003). The recent research on female employees in Hotels in Australia and New Zealand by Mooney (2008) concludes that it is difficult for females to combine family life and career in the same manner as their male colleagues. The dilemma of dividing time between work and family (day to day as well as over a lifetime) has been identified as a key gender issue because the pressure to make difficult choices between career and family is often

much greater for women than for men (Wirth, 2001). It is also suggested that both society and family 'saddle the working woman with conflicting expectations and role-set', but this same conflict is not be found among working men (Wilson, 2003: 26). Despite claims that marriages are becoming more symmetrical and domestic tasks are being shared more equally, surveys persistently reveal that women still take the major share of domestic responsibilities, even where both parents work (Bianchi et al., 1999; Martin & Roberts, 1984; Mihill, 1997; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996). Evidence suggests that few men are expanding their roles at home to encompass the childcare and domestic responsibilities which were traditionally undertaken by women, and so women have to assume two roles, 'which to some extent are incompatible' (Newell, 2000: 97). Although fathers' involvement in housework and childrearing has increased, it remains limited, and women still do about two-thirds of the housework, even though most people espouse egalitarian views about sharing domestic labour (Hochschild, 1989; Robinson & Godbey, 1999). Furthermore, working mothers are more likely to experience tensions between work and family than their male colleagues (Winslow, 2005). In women's early years of working, occupational preferences have priority; however, 'during the family formation period women often trade off their preferred occupation in order to obtain a job with fewer hours' (Dex, 1987). For women, their careers cannot be separated from their life events and responsibilities (in particular becoming a mother) while for men, the distinctions between 'work' and 'home' are clear (Halford et al., 1997). Moreover, women's roles in families, and the degree to which that family life exists in isolation from or as part of other social structures, are 'fundamental in moulding the way women move into and out of the labour market' (Venter, 2002: 13). Cockburn (1991:86) argues that this means for most women, at some time in their lives, 'the truth is that combining of childcare, husband-care and housework with a demanding paid job is very difficult indeed'. Halford and Leonard (2001) suggest that working women are more likely to have to find time during their business hours to deal with family issues, such as taking a sick member of the family to the doctor or visiting the school.

#### *Antecedents of women's work-family conflict*

Western research often shows that children are at the heart of role conflict (see Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Carlson, 1999; Hewlett, 2007; Pleck et al., 1980; Poelmans, 2005; Premeaux et al. 2007). Lack of time in childcare is a major problem

for many career and working women. In her research, Hewlett (2007) found that 45% of American women who were surveyed desired to spend more time with children, which is the main reason why women left a career or engaged in a reduced-hour job. In Britain, childcare is, sometimes, not subsidised by the state (Cohen, 1988: cited in Newell, 2000), and many women themselves have to look after children. A study of Swedish female civil engineers and MBAs by Alvesson & Billing (1997) revealed that childcare was seen as the most important thing in life, and that it often led many respondents to give up the idea of becoming a manager. Either the number or the age of children, or both, have been shown to have a significant relationship with work-family conflict (Carlson, 1999; Pleck et al., 1980). More recent research has indicated that 'children influenced work-family conflict and the more children one had, the greater the conflict between the work and family domain' (Premeaux et al., 2007: 722).

Children are not, however, the only trigger. In American population demographics, the elderly (specifically, those 80 years old and older) represents the fastest growing segment of the population (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, 2000). As women in America continue to have a dominant presence in the workforce and as the number of older people increases, the number of female caregivers balancing work and family responsibilities will inevitably increase (Barrah, et al., 2004). Women have traditionally taken on the role of primary caregiver within the family infrastructure, as evidenced by the statistic that 75% of all informal caregivers are women (Ettner, 1995). Thus, caring for the elderly has led to women's work-family conflict and work opt out (Hewlett, 2007; Premeaux et al., 2007). Moreover, evidence suggests that wage-earning Western middle- and upper-class women still take care of most of the housework (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Therefore, many women have multiple responsibilities and are more than just wives and mothers, they are also workers who are keen to develop their careers (Granrose and Kaplan, 1996).

Voydanoff's (1988) findings indicate that not only the presence of children or elderly at home but also the amount and scheduling of work-time and job-demands are significantly related to work-family conflict for employees. Excessive working time has long been seen as a major culprit affecting work-family balance (Pleck et al., 1980). The longer that individuals work then the greater the likelihood is that they will report work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1992). Moreover, evidence from American

studies has consistently demonstrated that work demands, work-related stressors and strain are predictive of work-to-family interference, while family responsibilities and stressors (such as conflict within the family) appear to contribute more directly to family-to-work interference (Frone, 2003).

Lack of social support can also lead to work-family conflict (Carlson and Perrewe, 1999). Ling and Powell (2001) argue that the dynamics of work-family conflict is influenced by the level of social support received from work and family. The supportive behaviour of family members can at least buffer the work-family conflict experienced by working women (Kim & Ling, 2001). In the work environment, support from one's supervisor and colleagues is associated with reduced work-to-family conflict (see Poelmans, 2005), and a supportive culture developed by employers or managers can lower the levels of work-family conflict (Premeaux et al., 2007). A large U.S. study conducted by Grzywacz and Marks in 2000 found that social support from work and one's spouse was negatively associated with levels of work-family conflict (see Poelmans, 2005).

#### *Outcomes of women's work-family conflict*

Studies have shown that work-family conflict has a negative influence not only on work outcomes (which is related to lower workplace productivity, increased tardiness and absenteeism, higher levels of turnover, and greater job dissatisfaction) but also on family outcomes (which is associated with reducing marital and family satisfaction) (Allen, et al., 2000; Eby et al., 2005; Frone, 2003; Greenhaus et al., 2006).

First of all, physical and psychological health issues caused by work-family conflict are not negligible. Many married women and working mothers often feel exhausted, stressful, and guilty owing to the conflict inherent in their attempts to fulfil the roles of both homemaker and worker simultaneously (Parasuraman & Greehaus, 1993). Evidence shows that high levels of work-family conflict decrease mental and physical well-being (see Poelmans, 2005) and may lead to burnout, especially for career women (Aryee, 1993). Research on stress also shows that female managers react with more stress symptoms than male managers as women are more sensitive than men to experiences in the workplace which affect their long-term career orientations (partly due to their responsibilities at home) (Alvesson & Billing, 1997).

Secondly, extensive work-family conflict reduces the quality of employees' lives and the quality of their relationships with family members (MacDermid, 2005). More

female managers than male managers choose to be single and childless. They have to make sacrifices in their personal lives and put their career first, which 'requires that they remain single or at least childless or, if they do have children, they be satisfied to have others raise them' (Schwartz, 1989: 69).

Furthermore, researchers have pointed to the significance of the work-family connection as disadvantaging women (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Sometimes the conflict between family obligations and male-normative managerial jobs is seen as the major problem which prevents women from advancing (Martin, 1993). Juggling work and family needs means that women find it difficult to devote sufficient time to 'a continuous professional or managerial career' (Venter, 2002: 19). When women make career decisions they normally reflect on their family roles and the need to reconcile this with workplace considerations (ibid).

In addition to work-family conflict, stereotyped views of employers towards women or an underlying gendered organisational culture make the situation tougher for working women (Davidson & Burke, 2004). During the processes of recruitment and promotion, women may be judged in terms of their private and domestic lives rather than their work performance and capabilities. For example, young women may be asked whether they are likely to get married or have children in near future, while older women may be assessed on their childcare arrangements (Halford & Leonard, 2001). If organisations have cultures that deny that men and women participate in home life under different conditions, then it has been shown that they seldom provide on-site day care and work hours are usually not restructured to allow family members' needs to be met (ibid). However, if organisations recognise that their female employees undertake more responsibility at home then 'it is common for these facts to be turned around and used as the basis for prejudice against them' (Halford & Leonard, 2001: 77). Evidence also suggests that 'the time away from the workplace makes women appear less employable in the eyes of many employers, who often perceive them to have lost skills rather than gained new ones or developed ones' (Allen, 1988). Even if a woman is celibate or childless, she is still seen and represented in terms of her maternal sex (Cockburn, 1991). Although globally prejudices and biases against women in managerial positions have decreased or have even disappeared superficially, the research conducted by Halford et al. (1997) in the UK still shows that it is rare for women with children to move into senior posts as childbearing has a fundamental impact on the way in which women are perceived, and



women saw themselves as having to make a stark choice between their children and their careers. Thus, Granrose and Kaplan (1996) argue that combining employment and family roles is one of the crucial challenges most women face in the twenty-first century.

### **3.4.2 Women's work-family conflict experiences in the Chinese cultural context**

As shown above, there has been much Western research which has examined women's experiences of work-family conflict. While Eastern researchers have also drawn their attention to this topic, their pace has been slower and the number of Asian studies remains limited.

#### *Similarities and differences*

There are some similarities between Western and Eastern findings. For example, the latest analysis by gender which was based on a large Malaysian sample has revealed that female employees experience greater work-to-family conflict than their husbands (Ahmad & Omar, 2008). Eastern literature also shows that having children and childcare responsibilities may lead to work-family conflict (Aryee, 1992; Kim & Ling, 2001; Ngo & Lau, 1998).

Some contemporary authors have explored the differences between Western and Eastern experiences, for example: Ling and Powell (2001: 357) compared an American based model of work-family research with work-family conflict in Chinese society and concluded that 'Chinese workers experience work-family conflict in a manner not fully captured by an American perspective'. A comparative study conducted by Yang et al. (2000), using samples from America and China, reveals that working hours are significantly related to work-family conflict for Americans, but not for the Chinese. Venter (2002: 196) has also acknowledged that much of our understanding and beliefs about these women's lives are based on issues that 'concern women in the West, such as subordination and the struggle for equal rights'. Meanwhile, a small number of studies pertaining to work-family conflict and its impact on women's career development have been done in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Mainland China (see Aryee, 1992; Chou et al., 2005; Kim & Ling, 1992; Lee, 1991; Lo et al., 2003; Ng et al., 2005; Ng & Chiu, 1997, 2001; Ngo & Lau, 1998). This research has demonstrated the existence of work-family conflict and its adverse affects on women, and they have particularly pointed out the unique role that

Chinese culture plays in distinguishing work-family conflict in the East from that of the West (Chou et al., 2005).

#### *Causes and results of Chinese women's work-family conflict*

Aryee et al. (1999) indicates that both parental and work overloads are related to work-family conflict for Chinese female employees. Although working and financially independent women are not seen to contradict traditional feminine values in modern China, women still shoulder major family responsibilities in addition to their roles at work. In comparison with Japanese women, Sheng et al. (1995) reported that Chinese women experienced a greater degree of daily stress in combining their employment and domestic obligations, partly due to their full-time employment. Li (2003) has detailed how overtime work, shift systems, childcare, and insufficient support from work were the major factors leading to women's role conflict. In his study, Cong (2001) concluded that modern Chinese female professionals were under increased pressure when trying to balance their work with their family life, which mainly results from: deeply embedded Chinese social conventions, traditional family systems, weak social awareness of gender equality, and a perfectionist tendency among working women. Wei (2002) also argues that traditional Chinese cultural values (such as the conventional family unit where the husband is responsible for external affairs and the wife looks after the internal) have a profound impact on modern Chinese society and are playing a key role in determining women's experiences of work-family conflict and their career aspirations.

Recently, a small number of occupationally based studies have explored the work-family role conflict of female employees (including accountants, teachers, and nurses) (Ju & Pan, 2005; Li & Xu, 2006; Lin, 2005; Wu & Yao, 2002). Some of these studies have shown that work-family conflict is influenced by role ambiguity, job demands, role expectations, and dual-career family pressure. Most have identified the main outcomes of work-family conflict (such as low work efficiency, feelings of fatigue, low job satisfaction and even job burnout). The researchers have also suggested some counter-measures (such as social support, organisational support, and self adjustment).

#### *Impact of work-family conflict on women's career*

In line with Western research (which consistently shows that balancing work and

family affects women's career, marriage, and pregnancy) it has been found that balancing work and family life means that there are fewer opportunities for Chinese women to get promoted and dual roles of female staff add to the difficulties of career development (Ng and Chakrabarty, 2005). The family has been seen to play a crucial part in helping Chinese women decide their career paths. Venter (2002) suggests that family and family relationships are of considerable importance to the Chinese, which could influence how far women progress in work. For example, in Hong Kong it was found that because of their heavier domestic burdens, 'married women are less likely than single women to be in paid employment and also are less likely to reach management positions' (Venter, 2002: 35).

Traditional perceptions of femininity pervade working life and the gender segregation within it (Lee, 1991). The Confucian ideology that men are superior to women is still embedded into the Chinese society as a whole (and organisational practices in particular) leading to negative attitudes and insufficient trust of female employees (Cooke, 2005, 2009; Venter, 2002). Gender discrimination within organisations (as Shaffer et al. (2000) argues) continues to be an issue that is encountered by women in Mainland China and Hong Kong. Ng et al. (2005) revealed that the female employees in Hong Kong were more disadvantaged than their male counterparts in climbing up the organisational hierarchy. Sexual harassment could also be another form of gender discrimination that has had a negative impact on job satisfaction and commitment of working women and puts female professionals under greater stress. Therefore, Cooke (2005) concludes that barriers to managerial careers for Chinese women come from both the top and the bottom (from the public domain and in the family life) which can in turn moderate their desire for higher positions. 'This is especially the case in the state sector' (Cooke, 2005: 22), because many government organisations are unwilling to recruit women and tend to specify gender when advertising for posts, although the employment regulations stipulate clearly that no employers should do so (Cooke, 2001; Jiang, 2003). Although modern career women are challenging this stereotype, any attempts to remove this discrimination may 'be undermined by the deeply embedded Chinese social convention in which women are widely expected to play a supporting role to men' (Cooke, 2005:11).

Under these circumstances many Chinese women are now re-embracing the ideology of gendered separation of labour, identifying more with their activities at home than at work, and are now devoting a greater portion of their time to household

tasks than to paid work when compared with the past (Jiang, 2003; Zou, 2007). Since the 1990s the Chinese central government's withdrawal as a public welfare provider has pushed women in low-income families to work more, but at the same time it has pulled women in some middle-income or upper-income families out of the labour force in order to strengthen their motherhood role (Zou, 2007). Consequently the gender-based division of domestic work has continued to prevail, and this has left women with few choices but to 'downshift their career ambitions to fit with their family needs' (Chou et al., 2005).

There is some research on work-family conflict for women in the Chinese cultural contexts. Ngo & Lau (1998) suggest that the work-family issues found in Hong Kong could have implications in Mainland China given that Hong Kong is predominately Chinese and shares much in common with the mainland. However, whether or not the Hong Kong findings are able to be reproduced in Mainland China is highly questionable given that a unique combination of Chinese regional ethnicity, colonial history, and economic system has impacted Hong Kong and its career women (Ng and Ng, 2009). I would suggest that instead of translating research done in other contexts into China, that more exploratory in-depth research is needed in Mainland China given that it has the highest rate of female employment in the world. Having identified these significant gaps in the current literature (e.g., the domination of the West in the field of work and family research, the lack of in-depth analysis on work-family conflict as experienced by Chinese women, and the lack of research conducted on women in the Chinese airline industry) my thesis will closely analyse the under-researched experiences of work-family conflict of female employees in the rapidly expanding Chinese airline industry.

### **3.4.3 Responses to work-family conflict: some Western examples**

As a result of the changing demographics of today's workforce and a growing awareness of the negative impact of work-family conflict on employees and their performance, family-friendly or women-friendly policies have been adopted by many Western organisations as part of their HR policies (see Poelmans, 2005; Poelmans and Caligiuri, 2008). Failure in assisting employees to achieve work-life balance can result in: employee absenteeism, low commitment and motivation, lack of creativity, poor quality of customer services, and even unethical behaviour (Clutterbuck, 2003).

Modern China can learn from a number of these measures. Western countries

have long realised the importance of resolving work-family conflict. In the EU, family-friendly policies are seen as a means to promote two aims: increasing gender equality and increasing women's employment rates, especially for mothers with children aged under five (OECD, 2001). In the UK, family-friendly policies have been promoted as a way of making modern businesses more competitive on the grounds that helping employees combine work and family life will encourage recruitment and retention (DTI, 1998). The UK government has for some time promoted the concept of work-life balance (Clutterbuck, 2003). For example, the Employment Act 2002 has done much to legitimise flexible working arrangements (especially for working parents). Under this legislation, since April 2003 parents with young and disabled children have had more options for leave (including paid paternity leave and leave for adoptive parents), new arrangements for financial support, and a right to request flexible work to facilitate childcare. Scandinavia has long been known for its family-friendly policies, including the 11-month maternity leave for both the mother and the father that can be prolonged to three years without fear of losing one's job (Clutterbuck, 2003). In the majority of European countries leave arrangements for parents are regulated by national law, which mostly aims at helping employed women to fulfill family roles, increase the low birth rates, and encourage mothers to return to paid work (Poelmans and Beham, 2008). In the US the only federal law which gives employees a right to job-protected leave is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which entitles eligible employees, who have worked for one employer for one year, 12 weeks of unpaid leave in a 12-month period (Poelmans and Beham, 2008). Recently the launch of new policies, such as The Family Building Act of 2007, is enabling American women to take time out of work and then return (Hewlett, 2007). According to the Families and Work Institute (1998), family-friendly policies or programmes exist in modern organisations in various forms, but the most prevalent are: flexible working time, childcare assistance, flexible work arrangements, and elder care services.

Studies which have focused on the impact of these policies on work-family conflict have largely assumed that family-friendly policies help employees balance work and family responsibilities (e.g., Grover & Crooker, 1995; Lambert, 2000; Thomas & Ganster, 1995) and raise employment rates among young women (OECD, 2001). They have suggested that family-friendly policies have a beneficial effect on job attitudes and productivity (Premeaux et al., 2007). In particular, good quality and

affordable childcare services have been shown to help working women to reconcile family work with paid jobs (Hakim, 2004). More firms are strategically offering work-life benefits. For example, Verizon Wireless (the America-based telecom company) has offered extensive work-life balance options to employees, such as generous tuition assistance, emergency back-up dependent care, a 24-hour resource and referral center, flexible work arrangements, etc. (Caligiuri and Givlekian, 2008). Tesco offers flexible working arrangements such as job sharing, shift swapping and part-time working, which has an emphasis on helping employees work the way they wish to work (Caligiuri and Givlekian, 2008).

The main challenge for modern organisations is to put these policies into practice. Some have argued that these policies have either not necessarily been implemented effectively, or have lessened but not diminished the problem (Clutterbuck, 2003:15). In some organisations, it is women who have pushed for family-friendly policies as they are usually the primary care-givers and are either major contributors to family income or they are the primary family breadwinner (HRSDC, 2005).

Many scholars have linked standard (i.e., family-unfriendly) workplace policies and practices to gender inequality, but it has been difficult in practice to determine whether corporate work-family friendly policies actually benefit women's careers (Kelly et al., 2007). While flexible working can tackle the problem of work-life balance, it has also contributed to women being 'left out of the loop' at work. Thus, the concept of women-friendliness has been promoted; which refers to 'how easy it is for women to work and have a career within the organisation', and the degree to which 'the policy provides women the opportunity to integrate personal, work, marital and family roles successfully' (Cattaneo et al., 1994: 23). Zeitz and Dusky (1988) (authors of *The Best Companies for Women*) judge an organisation's degree of women-friendliness according to: their recruitment and hiring procedures, their programmes to promote women, how they handle sex discrimination and sexual harassment, flexitime policies, maternity and paternity leave, sick leave, childcare facilities or subsidies, their policies on dual-career couples, the percentage of female employees, and the number of women in management. For example, BT in the UK provides a positive environment for women who leave their career temporarily while they give birth or take care of their children, consequently they have found that 99% subsequently return to work (Allen, 2008: 83). Some Western companies have successfully put in place further incentives for women such as training and

development programmes, and mentoring (an important organisational initiative for advancing managerial women) (see Ng & Chiu, 1997). For instance, Ernst & Young have developed mentoring programmes designed to foster employee career development, including those that provide mentoring for key women leaders by executive board members; P&G has started 'mentor-up' programmes in which junior women coach senior executives to increase understanding of women's experiences, which can also be 'used to provide feedback system for finding out how successful career and work-family policies are' (Allen, 2008: 85). These policies aim to help working women by offering equal opportunities to female and male job applicants as well as to incumbent members of staff of both sexes; removing the hurdles placed in the way of women's entry into and progression within organisations, and relieving their dual-role stress (Ng & Chiu, 1997). Although there is increasing acceptance of women-friendly policies within organisations, these policies have yet to be implemented fully.

Some surveys of women-friendly companies have focused on certain aspects in isolation (e.g. maternity and paternity leave, childcare facilities, and benefits) (Moskowitz & Townsend, 1987); however, this type of research actually only addresses the family needs, and not the career opportunities of women. Ng (2004) finds that married women professionals tend to be reluctant to negotiate for family-friendly related policies, and companies in Hong Kong have extended little support to working mothers to help them manage their work-family interface. Moreover, very few organisations in Hong Kong have practiced women-friendly policies, while Western firms 'are more women-friendly than Hong Kong firms, but they differ in the dimensions on which they put their women-friendly HRM policies emphasis' (Ng & Chiu, 1997: 657).

Most of the research on family-friendly or women-friendly policies has been done in developed countries like the UK and the USA, and only limited attention has been given to the topic in developing countries (Wang & Walumbwa, 2007). Furthermore, we have little idea of the availability and effectiveness of family-friendly and/or women-friendly policies in developing economies such as China. Therefore, my research will also examine whether these policies are available and effective in the Chinese airline industry.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined the existing literature on women's experiences of work and family, in both the West and the East, and this has included: an overview of the development of equality legislation and its implications on working women, a thorough discussion of the achievements and challenges experienced by Chinese women at work and at home a brief account of women's studies conducted by Chinese scholars, a review of the literature on women's work in the airline industry, a review and discussion of work-family conflict (in the West and in China), and an analysis of some Western examples of family-friendly and women-friendly policies as responses to work-family conflict. Furthermore, I have identified a gap in the existing research in that the work-family conflict of female employees in the Chinese airline industry and its impact on their career is under-explored. Both the empirical and the theoretical literature has demonstrated that issues in work and family influence each other, and this has provided a basis for the establishment of my own analytical framework. However, due to the complexity and uniqueness of the Chinese context (as shown in this chapter), Chinese women may not experience work-family conflict in the same ways as their Western counterparts. Therefore, in the next chapter I am going to address this issue in greater depth by discussing both the merits and limitations of Venter's (2002) three-level analytical model before establishing a new comprehensive analytical model to fit my own research context.



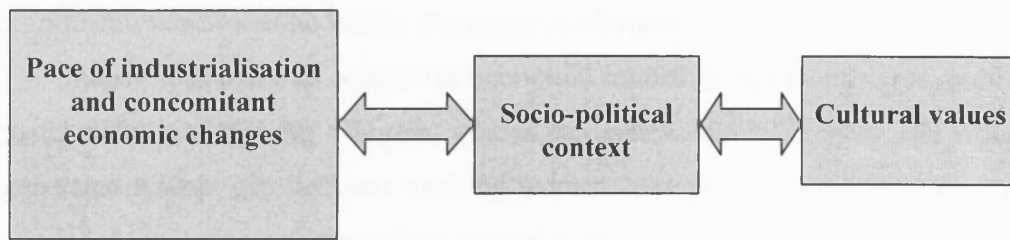
## **Chapter IV An Analytical Model of Work-Family Conflict in the Chinese Context**

In this chapter, an advanced analytical model of women's work-family conflict that I will use in my research will be developed in order to thoroughly explore experiences of work-family conflict and other relevant issues for working women in the Chinese airline industry. Encompassing an embedded perspective – as elaborated in Chapter 2, Venter's (2002) three-level analytical model serves to illuminate the direction I wish to follow, and on the basis of which a more comprehensive framework has been developed to suit my research objectives. Based on the six-factor analytical model developed, along with the review of literature on women in both the workplace and family, my five research questions are formed and outlined in the end of this chapter.

### **4.1 A multi-factor analytical model**

Organisations exist within a field of dynamic social, economic and cultural relationships (Halford et al., 1997), which is emphasised by those who adopt the embedded approach to gender and organisation (see 2.2.3). I also suggest that gender relations within organisations should be seen as embedded in a dynamic and broader context. Venter (2002) uses an analytical framework and employs an embedded approach to explain the differences between women managers' career paths and experiences in Hong Kong and the UK. She argues that neither a macro- nor a micro-level analysis is sufficient to explain the way in which women organise their working lives vis-a-vis their family lives and how they manage to 'reconcile these two spheres of life' (Venter, 2002: 211). Instead, she posits a three-level analysis as the best way to understand women's career experiences and their circumstances: *pace of industrialisation and concomitant economic changes; social-political context; and cultural values*. This three-level analytical framework, as shown in Table 4.1, has significant relevance to my own study.

**Table 4.1 Venter's Three-Level Framework**



However, the context of my research is mainland China, which is different from Hong Kong in many respects. Therefore, the content covered in each of the three levels is altered accordingly although there are commonalities as discussed below.

#### **4.1.1 Industrialisation processes and concurrent economic reform**

The pace of industrialisation is a significant factor, which generates the particular set of conditions in which women participate in the labour force and pursue their careers. Industrialisation transforms a society from agricultural to non-agricultural modes of production, creates employment opportunities and new occupations, and facilitates individuals', especially women's ability to earn wages (Tu & Chang, 2000). Women, who were generally dependent on men in the past, have become increasingly independent in earning a living. Along with industrialisation, the economic reform which has undergone for 30 years, has, for example, resulted in a movement away from 'reliance on ideological commitment and a totally planned economy towards material incentives and market forces' (Tang & Ward, 2003: 1). In the course of this transformation, life chances and life experiences have been radically altered (Venter, 2002). Because of China's rapid industrialisation and economic development women have more job opportunities and career varieties than their mothers. Moreover, since the 1980's economic reform, there has been a sector shift of employed women from the manufacturing and other secondary industries towards the service industries, which are becoming a new focus in China's economic development (Cooke, 2001). As discussed in Chapter III, the educational opportunities for women have also been rapidly increasing, and consequently educational levels of employed women have been getting closer to those of men (Cooke, 2006). These rapid changes have also meant a huge decline in the number of children being born to a family for the convenience of women's career pursuits (Venter, 2002). Just as my parents, their parents might be one of perhaps five or more children, women in my generation are often one of two or three children, and we tend to have only one child because of the

One Child Policy. The impact of this policy on women's work-family conflict can be significant, which will be further discussed in Chapter VIII.

Industrialisation and concurrent economic reform have, nevertheless, produced a paradoxical situation for Chinese women, as elaborated in Chapter III, which has generated a wide gap between working women, and even resulted in two extremes: one is low-income women workers generally doing manual jobs as well as numerous domestic chores, and the second is high-income female professionals who enjoy high-status jobs and seldom suffer the burden of housework which is usually undertaken by paid labour (see 3.2.2). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter III, more women than men have been laid off since the nationwide state-owned enterprise reform started in the mid 1990s, which is one of the industrialisation processes. What is worse, 75 percent of laid-off women are still unemployed after one year, compared with far fewer than 50 percent of the men who are laid off at the same time (Revolutionary Worker Online, 1999). Therefore, this broad level, industrialisation processes and concurrent economic reform, can be seen to largely influence women's socio-political conditions which include social divisions, social relationships and the orientation of women's role in both public and private spheres.

#### **4.1.2 Social-political context**

At the level of the socio-political context, the development of political and legislative frameworks in China has impacted on women in both public and private spheres. As elaborated in Chapter III, the high level of Chinese women's participation in employment is due to the effort of the state, which has introduced a succession of progressive regulations and official policies, ranging from *the Marriage Law* to *Family Planning Policy*, from *Female Employees Labour Protection Regulations* to *Law on Protecting Women's Rights and Interests* (see 3.2), aimed at promoting equal opportunity and protecting women's rights and interests in their working, family and social life (Cooke, 2001). In addition, the All-China Women's Federation has long mobilized women for economic development and social reform. As a result of the introduction of new *Labour Contract Law* (LCL) at the beginning of 2008, major changes have taken place in the employment environment, which aims to provide more protection for employees and strong implications for working women and their career prospects. For example, companies need written contracts with all full-time employees, and anyone who works for more than 24 hours a week is likely to be

considered a full-time employee; companies are forbidden to extend working hours or arrange night shifts for female employees who have been pregnant for 7 months, and female employees are entitled to at least 90 days of maternity leave (Laodong, 2007). Moreover, the new national *Employment Promotion Law* (EPL), which came into effect on the same day which was the first day of 2008 as the LCL, is designed to force the government and employers to provide equal employment opportunities to all of their employees and prohibit job discrimination. Under the EPL, job seekers are entitled to sue employers who practice discrimination. The law also helps create opportunities for more than 13 million new job seekers entering the market each year, particularly for laid-off workers, university graduates, ex-servicemen and migrant workers in urban areas, which are vulnerable groups of people in the labour market (People's Daily, 2007). In particular, it stresses that organisations are not allowed to refuse to recruit females or purposefully raise up requirements of admission for women.

At the socio-political level, the state is a significant actor. In China, the Communist Party-dominated state formulates developmental policies that affect the structure of economic and social relations. However, despite its evident strength, the Party-state's institutional capacity for policy implementation should not be assumed (Tsai, 1996). Peter et al. (1985) argue that state autonomy is neither a zero-sum function of power relative to society nor is it an isolated determinant of capacity (cited in Tsai, 1996). In short, the state is a relatively effective power, but not fully capable in implementing legislation. The socialist state has played a significant role in defining gender roles in the economy and society in general and promoting positive attitudes towards women in particular. Under both socialism and market-oriented reform, however, the participation of women in paid employment has not eradicated gender inequalities in China because of the state's limited ability to command equality and the commitment to gender equality (Tsai, 1996). The state's limited success in liberating women resonates in part with the paradoxical effects of state policy in other areas, particularly the economy, as discussed in 4.1.1. Despite the above mentioned legislations in place, however, gender discrimination and inequality still exist, ranging from 'inadequate social security for childbearing, to ineffective legislative monitoring mechanisms for gender bias in the employment legislation itself' (Cooke, 2001: 334). Undoubtedly, this has affected women's career aspirations and their capability of dealing with work and family tensions. Despite their ideological commitment to the emancipation of women, 'state and policies alone cannot account for gender

differentiation' (Tsai, 1996: 495). So, it is also important to go beyond fundamentally state-centered perspectives and consider the role of informal factors such as cultural and familial values, and industrial and organisational factors relative to that of formal institutions and ideology in policy implementation.

### **4.1.3 Cultural value**

At the third level, culture makes sense of women's experiences in both public and private life. Culture may refer to an entire society or other entities such as an organisation or an occupation (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). It is necessary, therefore, to look at both broader cultural phenomena and organisational cultural issues. Cultural values in terms of perceptions of the family, of gender differences and gender roles, play a part in helping to understand the different patterns and experiences in women's working life (Venter, 2002). It is culture that 'subordinates people to dominating ideas, beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions' (Alvesson & Billing, 1997: 105).

For many years, Chinese society has been classified by Hofstede (1991: cited in Venter, 2002) and other researchers as 'collectivist'. It is also the prevailing view that collective social orientation is the key nature of Chinese culture in which people have learnt to respect the group – usually the family - to which they belong, and are loyal to their group throughout life. In the course of the rapid economic and social modernisation as well as a consequence of the influence of modern Western culture, people's values are also changing. Chinese collectivism has been facing new challenges and a growing Chinese-style individualism is becoming popular if far from being prominent (Ralston et al., 1995). More people, especially the young generation, have attempted to pursue the fulfillment of individual needs and interests. Meanwhile, modern Chinese women have got the spirit of independence and strived for personal excellence and status outside of the home environment. With jobs in offices, their own cars, maybe even a flat and a mortgage, life for millions of Chinese women has changed dramatically from two generations ago, when foot-binding from the age of four was common, followed by marriage at 15 and then decades of successive pregnancies (McElroy, 2001). In addition, the One Child Policy has also impacted on Chinese cultural values and women. The traditional Chinese idea of 'more children for more blessings' is losing appeal among working women. More Chinese women are working full time, marrying later, and many feel that a child takes too much time and commitment. In a survey of 20 Chinese females, all agreed that more than one

child would be a great burden on themselves and their families (Sartor, 2007). As a result, financial issues and work opportunities have made Chinese families to feel content with just one, or even no child.

The changing face of Chinese society, nevertheless, is more demanding of women who are not merely housewives but also often share the economic burden with men by participating in the labour market and working even harder in many instances. Although having entered the professional work force and gained economic prosperity and job fulfillment, Chinese mothers have to struggle, like Western mums, to find the time and money to raise and educate their only child (Sartor, 2007). The One Child Policy, therefore, has brought Chinese women both prosperity and pain. Furthermore, some traditional Chinese cultural values like ‘men are breadwinners and women are mainly homemakers’ have been passed on from generation to generation, so they are unlikely to be eradicated. As a consequence of this, many working women have to experience and suffer the conflict between work and family.

#### **4.1.4 Industrial, organisational and family factors**

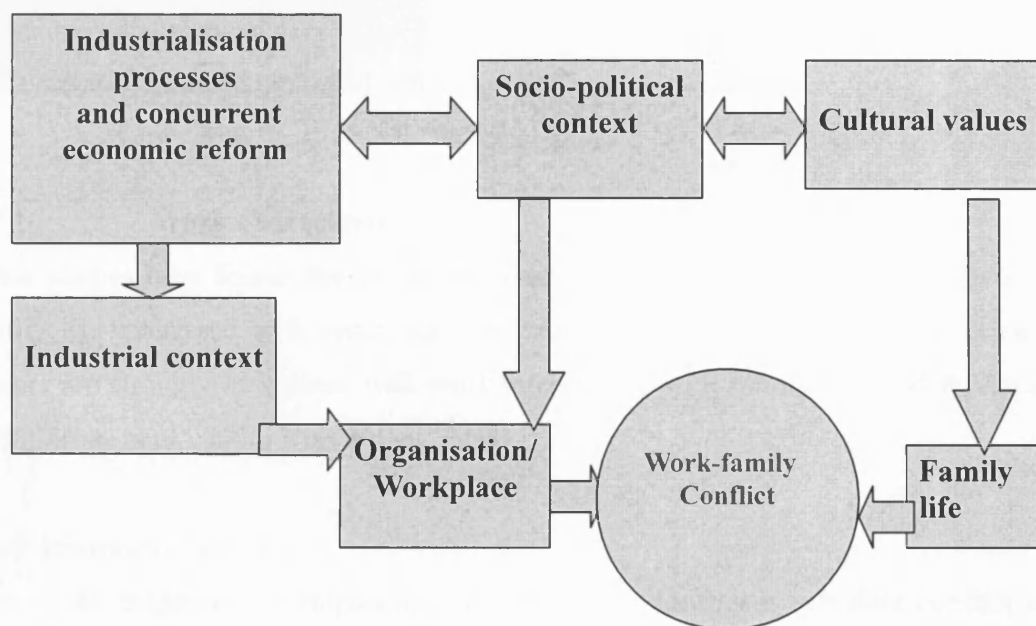
Venter’s three-factor framework does not cover the industrial, organisational and family factors, which are, however, intimately linked to women’s working lives. Therefore, these must be included to fully comprehend antecedents of work-family conflict and its impact on women’s career development.

As discussed in Chapter II, the embedded approach applied in both Acker’s (1992) and Davies’s (1992) work has extended my horizons in pointing towards a couple of key issues, such as how women’s jobs are constructed within both industry and organisational contexts, how their career ambitions are affected by industrial practices, organisational HR policies, how the sexuality of female employees are related to the ideas and values of their work, and how women’s experiences of work-family conflict are linked to management’s gendered views and specific gendered organisational culture. Therefore, I add three further levels to Venter’s framework: *industrial context*, *organisation/workplace context* and *family life*. The industrial context includes: industrial work conditions such as shift system, unsocial hours, work-related travel, aesthetic and emotional labour; industrial policies and practices such as labour relations, maximum of working hours, customer service standards, dress code and safety and security regulations.

Since work-family conflict directly arises from the workplace and family

domain (Kim & Ling, 2001), both work and family characteristics will be mainly considered and analysed for their relationships with work-family conflict as the combination of the two characteristics may have a direct influence on it (Premeaux et al., 2007). Work characteristics may influence work-family conflict through job types and patterns of work, job demands, leave system and a supportive culture including adoption of family friendly provision for employees to better balance their work and family needs. Family characteristics may also impact work-family conflict through marital status, childcare, elder care and housework, and support from family members. Thus, a self-designed new framework, a six-factor analytical model was developed as shown in Table 4.2 below:

**Table 4.2 Six-Factor Analytical Model for Work-Family Conflict**

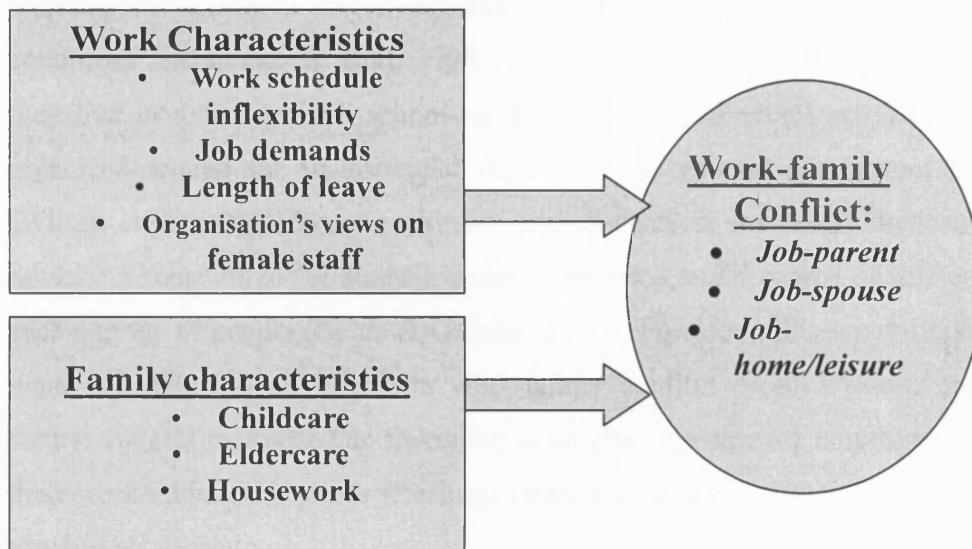


## 4.2 Work and family characteristics

As noted, career women, especially married ones, often assume multiple life roles (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). To better understand the roots of work-family conflict, it might be helpful to subcategorize it into three types: job-parent conflict, job-spouse

conflict and job-home/leisure conflict (Aryee, 1992; Kim & Ling, 2001). Below, at the micro-level, I explore several key work and family characteristics thought to effect work-family conflict, as shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3**      **Micro-level Analytical Model for Work-Family Conflict**



#### 4.2.1      **Work characteristics**

Some studies have found that work interfered with family life more frequently than family life interfered with work, and job-related factors rather than family-related factors are strongly associated with work interference with family (Ahmad & Omar, 2008; Frone et al., 2006; Ngo & Lau, 1998).

##### *Work schedule inflexibility*

One of the major factors impacting on work-family conflict is schedule conflict or inflexibility, which is positively correlated to work-family conflict (Arora et al., 1990; Aryee, 1992; Kim & Ling, 2001; Lo et al., 2003). Schedule inflexibility includes an inability to alter one's work schedule to meet work and non-work pursuits including the family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Non-standard working hours and shift work are features of the airline industry and affect those who have to work on nights or weekends or/and split shifts. The conventional 8/5 Monday to Friday working arrangement seems not flexible enough, but it seldom leads to difficulties in structuring family and social interactions. By



contrast, a non-standard work pattern can result in inflexibility and inconvenience for the individual. Research shows that employees who follow a non-conventional work schedule frequently grow apart from the society around them and can experience social marginalization (Colligan & Rosa, 1990). They often find it hard to participate in social events since normal social patterns still tend to operate around the traditional workday cycle, which effectively excludes those under some kind of shift work conditions (Henderson & Burt, 1998). This is especially true for married women 'if they live in a family with school-aged children as the social activities tend to be organized around the day-oriented rhythm of the general and school population' (Wilson et al., 2007:163). An inability to participate in social and domestic life can produce a sense of social alienation and represent a major source of role conflict for such a group of people (Bohle & Quinlan, 2000). Therefore, this type of non-standard work schedule has an effect on work-family conflict. Both Western and Eastern studies suggest that schedule flexibility is an effective way for employees to balance their work and family needs (Barling, 1990; Kim & Ling, 2001; Ngo & Lau, 1998; Pleck et al., 1980).

### *Job demands*

Job demands are a further source of work-family conflict and can be defined as 'those physical, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort on the part of the employee' (Demerouti et al., 2005: 268). So they can either be workload or emotional demands. Although job demands are not necessarily negative, they may create job stress when meeting those demands requires high effort from which employees have not adequately recovered (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). The pressure of work on people's lives is felt strongly by working parents, and it is particularly the case to career women. For instance, Alimo-Metcalfe (1987) found in her research on women managers that women feel considerably less relaxed at work than do men and feel torn between work and home. Further, the increasing participation rates and labour market attachment of women, together with the growing number of dual-earners have resulted in increased pressures on parents combining work and family responsibilities (Bolle, 1997). Thus, job demands and associated pressure are seen related to work-family conflict. Research also suggests that excessive work demands in term of long hours and heavy work loads are stressful conditions of work that contribute to mental

strain and reduced well-being of employees, which would negatively influence their personal life and lead to an inability in balancing work and life (Brockman, 1992; Coser, 1974; Hagan and Kay, 1995; Lu et al., 2005; Wallace, 2005; Westman, 2001).

Rutherford (2001) suggests that an airline's culture is influenced by its airport location, so employees are constantly reminded of their business which involves responsibility for many people's lives, which makes work life more intense and urgent. The job demands experienced by female employees are expected to increase as the Chinese airline industry rapidly expands to meet increases in demand and competition. Raised expectations amongst Chinese consumers, who are becoming more assertive and who expect higher individualized standards, is a relatively new phenomenon in China, but means airlines are placing a greater emphasis on achieving customer satisfaction, which draws upon employee capacities of delivering quality services. The quality of service provision is intimately related to personal qualities and social skills of those service staff (Halford et al., 1997). Thus, such 'emotional labour', as elaborated previously (see 3.3.3), which is embedded in the production of services, has put pressure on air staff especially front-line staff to be more devoted to their work both physically and emotionally, which in turn may exhaust them, sacrifice their leisure time and interfere with their family life. These factors all contribute to the higher level of work-family conflict.

### *Length of leave*

Length of leave is another factor influencing work and family, but it is an under-researched area. Organisational leave can vary including annual paid leave, maternity leave, leave to take care of sick or disabled children, unpaid holidays, and short breaks.

A family-friendly policy including proper leave arrangements can reduce work-family conflict (Poelmans et al., 2003: cited in Poelmans & Caligiuri, 2008). Glass and Riley (1998) found that the length of leave available for women to give birth or raise young children is significant in preventing turnover and balancing work and home roles. Moreover, research on leave among Japanese manufacturing workers has shown that workers have an expectation to take a leave regardless of job type, but the vast majority of workers found it nearly impossible, despite the fact that their desired length is relatively short (Fujimoto, 2006). It is suggested that 'some structural conditions in their workplaces are making it difficult for them to speak up for their

right to take a leave' despite the existence of the Japanese Parental Leave Act (Fujimoto, 2006: 211).

Recent legislation in China is exerting pressure on employers to provide family assistance for employees, especially working parents. Since the Labour Law of People's Republic of China came into effect in 1995, employees have been entitled to enjoy both statutory holidays and annual paid leave (Chinalawinfo, 1995). Pregnant women are also entitled to maternity leave of no less than 90 days. The most recent Labour Contract Law, as mentioned before, has been designed to ensure that workers get an annual paid vacation. Employees are entitled to 10 days of paid vacation after working 10 years in total, and 15 days after working 20 years. However, whether or not employees will be able to fully enjoy the rights remains a question.

A recent report on work-family balance issues in China indicates that insufficient vacation is one of the major factors leading to imbalance between work and life for working women (Iris, 2007). Some employers are reluctant to provide statutory length of leave or even maternity leave to employees. A recent investigation taking place in a big furniture factory in China shows that workers are not given the legally mandated rest time and holiday vacation, forced to work overtime without being compensated adequately, and forbidden to ask for leave during the peak season (China Labour Watch, 2007). It has been the practice therefore, that the number of the days of annual paid leave is sometimes determined by employers rather than by state policy and the length of leave that employees actually take is shorter than what is specified in their contracts. Because of fierce competition for good jobs and an over-supply of labour, many employees are afraid to take annual leave entitlements for fear of losing their jobs or jeopardizing their chances of promotion, although leave can help employees integrate work and family lives. Thus, it is necessary to understand the impact of leave on female staff, which is possibly related to their experience of work-family conflict.

#### *The organisation's views on female employees*

In general, the organisation's views on female staff are to do with the views it has on whether women can or should do the same jobs as men, whether it thinks women are as competent as men of being promoted into senior positions etc. In a recent survey of men and women executives from Fortune 1000 companies, more than 46 percent reported organisational stereotypes about women's roles and abilities, a lack of role

models, a lack of mentoring, and an inhospitable corporate culture as explanations for the career advancement inequity between men and women (Wellington et al., 2003). Negative stereotypical assessments of women can only hinder their development (Wilson, 2003).

Organisational perceptions of female employees in China, have to some extent, always been influenced partly by traditional divisions of labour whereby 'gender segregation and subordination seems to have been deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the women and men of all sectors of Chinese society' (Stockman et al., 1995: 142). Nevertheless, one might also expect that in contemporary China organisational views of female employees have also been modified by on-going social, political and economic transformations since the comprehensive reform policy began at the end of the 1970s, which have legally and constitutionally boosted gender equality to some extent. China has one of the highest rates of female employment in the world (Cooke, 2006), however, this does not necessarily mean women are treated equal to men in the workplace. As discussed in Chapter III, gendered organisational practices, such as the use of gender as a criterion for recruitment, promotion and work allocation, persist (Cooke, 2006, 2009; Shaffer et al., 2000; Simeon et al., 2001;).

The way the organisation views female colleagues can affect the level of work-family conflict experienced by them as well as their career ambitions. However, the relationship between the organisation's views on women and work-family conflict experienced by women is under-researched although some have shown the close links between organisational culture and attitudes and women's career advancement (see Adler, 1993; Cross, 2008; Wajcman, 1996; Wirth, 2001; etc. ). If a company holds less favourable views on female staff, opportunities of being selected and promoted will be limited to them. Studies comparing men and women with the same background and qualifications, age, experience and time devoted to work suggest that women's success rates are lower than those of their male colleagues (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). In her research, Alimo-Metcalfe (1987) found that women felt that they were regarded with suspicion by male colleagues or management, and 'there was a strong sense of women feeling that they were highly visible and thus having to prove to others that they are as good as man' (Halford & Leonard, 2001: 118). For a woman to be considered competent, she must exhibit more evidence of skill than a man must (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). Similarly, in China increasingly modern women are pursuing their career goals which means they have to make greater efforts and devote

more time in their work than men to achieve the same level as men. That will also lead to less time dealing with family issues while their family needs their input as usual. Thus, the interference between work and family is very likely to occur. I expect that the higher the perceived negative views on women, the greater the level of women's work-family conflict.

#### **4.2.2 Family characteristics**

The importance of the family 'as the basic unit of social identity and loyalty' is a significant feature of Chinese society, which is different from western societies whereby 'the individual has become the basic social unit' (Whitley, 1992:219). In Hong Kong, married women bear major home responsibilities even when they are gainfully employed in the labour market since their husbands have limited participation in child care and household chores (Pearson, 1990). In modern Mainland China, the traditional form of the concepts of marriage and family has been carried on, but some striking changes have taken place. Modern females continue to be influenced by the traditional concept of 'a good wife and kind mother'; while they are also embracing the idea of valuing a career (People's Daily, 2005). The combination of embedded cultural values and transforming social characteristics of Mainland China may provide a different approach to understanding how family related factors influence role conflict.

#### *Childcare, eldercare and housework*

A great number of studies conducted in developed countries and regions such as the USA, Finland, Singapore and Hong Kong have found that age or number of children in a family is a contributor to work-family conflict (Aryee, 1992; Bedeian et al., 1988; Kim & Ling, 2001; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Ngo & Lau, 1998; Pleck et al., 1980; Voydanoff, 1988). Both Kim & Ling (2001) and Pleck et al. (1980) note that parents tend to experience more work-family conflict than non-parents. Moreover, mothers have the major responsibility for the domestic labour of caring for and bringing up children (Stockman et al., 1995). Voydanoff (1988) also reported that working mothers with more children were likely to experience greater work-family conflict. Particularly, rearing young children demands more input from their parents and this process often creates role strain and time shortage for women, accompanied by relatively high level of work-family conflict (Keith & Schafer, 1980; Voydanoff &

Kelly, 1984). Nevertheless, in China, it is a cultural norm for grandparents to provide care on a consistent basis for their grandchildren (Chen, et al. 2000; Hermalin, et al. 1998). This should reduce working mothers' burden largely. Furthermore, the research conducted by Stockman et al. (1995) shows that the husband's role in domestic-based childcare is greatest in China compared with that in Japan, UK and USA. The evidence, however, is limited. The involvement of grandparents as well as husbands in childcare will be further explored by studying the airline women's experiences in the home.

Eldercare is also associated with work-family conflict 'due to the additional time needed for this added care taking role and to the stress often associated with caring for the elderly, and to the loss of resources expected when caring for the elderly' (Premeaux et al., 2007: 710). It has been an important cultural expectation in China that adult children should look after their parents in old age. In oriental societies like China, where the Confucian ideology prescribes a strong tie between parents and their children throughout life, parental co-residence with adult children is common. In China, elder care has long been provided by adult children at home (Chow, 1998; Streib, 1997). Employees who are single may neither experience job-spouse conflict nor undertake childcare responsibility, but they may assume eldercare responsibility (Premeaux et al., 2007).

Regardless of family structure, many people have to deal with house chores and 'can be assumed to make tradeoffs between work and leisure time' (Premeaux et al., 2007: 706). Evidence shows that China is the most egalitarian, having the lowest proportions of wives exclusively or mainly responsible for these domestic tasks and the most substantial degree of sharing (Stockman et al., 1995). Stockman et al. (1995) further add that the elderly who have already retired from paid work usually assist their married children with household tasks because they want the younger generation to have a comfortable life and advance their careers as a sign of the prosperity of the whole family. However, Shelton (1992) argues that the increased number of women in the workforce and the general efforts to equalise women and men tends to reduce women's available time for housework, but nevertheless, women continues to spend more time on housework than did men. Thus, it is interesting to discover whether or not women remain a major housework undertaker in the following case analysis presented in Chapters VI and VII.

Since much evidence suggests that the traditional gender role entails main domestic obligations to women (Ngo & Lau, 1998), family-related variables including childcare, eldercare and housework are likely to have significant impact on work-family conflict.

#### **4.2.3 Sources of support**

The support available to employees is important in coping with work-family conflict. There are two types of support: tangible support and intangible support (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994). The former means giving advice, assistance, time and money, and the latter means making people feel good and giving people an opportunity to talk things over. Plenty of supportive behaviours from both work and home domains can ameliorate employees' work-family conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Ng et al., 2002; Premeaux et al., 2007). Low levels of support from work are strongly correlated with negative spillover from work to family, especially for women (see Poelmans, 2005). Premeaux et al. (2007) further identified that perceived managerial support as significantly associated with work-family conflict and a supportive work-family culture, including adoption of family friendly provision for employees, could help alleviate this. Support from family members such as one's spouse, children and parents can negate work-family conflict to some degree (Adams et al., 1996; Burke, 1997; Kim & Ling, 2001; Ng, et al. 2002; Premeaux et al., 2007). Moreover, women have been found to be much more likely to request support and they find social support more helpful and available than do men (Bulter et al., 1985). In particular, some research has shown that spouse support is a major asset for career women (Hisrich, 1989; Carter & Cannon, 1992; Teo, 1996; Buttner & Moore, 1997). If a husband has a positive attitude towards his wife's career, it can help reduce work-family conflict (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979). Therefore, the study will also examine if the presence of various support brings down the level of work-family conflict or at least make it bearable to female air staff in China.

### **4.3 Research questions**

Both the literature review in Chapter III and the above new six-factor analytical model have further strengthened my understanding of women's work-family conflict and laid a good foundation for the creation of my own research questions. Within the context of the Chinese airline industry and with reference to female air staff, the

following key research questions have been formed:

1. To what extent do female employees in the Chinese airline industry experience work-family conflict?
2. Is the level of work-family conflict for female staff in the Chinese airline industry influenced by the job role performed and/or the company by which they are employed?
3. What are the causes and consequences of work-family conflict for female staff in the Chinese airline industry?
4. Is work-family conflict a main factor influencing women's career development in the Chinese airline industry and are there any other factors?
5. What organisational changes could be made to help achieve work-life balance and improve women's career prospect in the Chinese airline industry?



## **Chapter V Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter seeks to examine how my research design has been formed by explaining my research strategy and the specific research methods I have employed in the fieldwork in order to achieve both reliability and validity. Meanwhile, the background to the case study material presented in subsequent chapters is drawn upon, which involves both unique features and commonalities between organisations. These are examined to achieve a cross-case comparison. This chapter also explains the rationale for applying those data collection methods in order to address my research questions and some of the challenges that I encountered when using them are discussed. I conclude by arguing that the ideal approach is to utilise a multi-method case study strategy to achieve my research aims. Following this, several specific issues, including the ethical issues arising across the stages of my research and reflexivity in the qualitative research, are discussed.

### **5.1 Principles of research design**

Research is not a neutral process of observation or an objective test of theoretical issues (Halford et al., 1997). Like many other social scientists, I believe in the usefulness and importance of empirical research. When conducting social research, both positivist and empiricist approaches have been adopted widely but critically evaluated and contrasted by scholars. Positivism has been used extensively to characterize approaches to social science which have made use of large data sets, quantitative measurement and statistical methods of analysis (Benton & Craib, 2001). Put simply, positivism emphasises objectivity. In terms of ontology and epistemology, it relies on the physical world as reality and believes there is no bias in findings since the researcher and the researched are two independent identities. In doing so, positivists claim that their research is reliable, so it is scientific. I agree that it is essential for any research to achieve reliability, which refers to the fact that if the research is repeated, it should produce the same results. However, a positivist approach, directly corresponding knowledge with truth, is inadequate to study complex social phenomena. Positivist methods in the social sciences try to mimic methods in the natural sciences, but social phenomena are not as predictable as people are very unpredictable. So positivism is not very useful for social research in which

social scientists deal with 'open systems' and people are constantly monitoring their activities and changing them, rather than with 'closed systems' where patterns and processes are invariant (Halford et al., 1997: 55). Thus, it is more useful and important to consider in what way we can better understand what is happening in reality, which actually refers to the question of 'validity', meaning that to what extent our findings truly represent the phenomenon we are claiming to measure. 'Any research can be affected by different kinds of factors which, while extraneous to the concerns of the research, can invalidate the findings' (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989: 95). Therefore, a common way to establish validity is through triangulation, whereby a variety of methods is used (Halford et al., 1997).

## **5.2 Multi-strategy case study research**

My research questions, as stated in Chapter IV, are generally built upon two philosophical positions. One is the ontological position: what is existence, and the other is the epistemological position: why it happens and how. Given the ontological and epistemological positions of my research questions, I decided to do a case study research, which is defined as 'the development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single case, or a small number of related cases' (Robson, 1993). It is a popular method of conducting social science research and may help researchers gain a rich understanding of the context of the research area. Also, Yin (1994:1) suggests that 'in general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when this focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context.'

I utilised a case study approach in common with recent research in the field of gender, especially on issues of women's employment and management in Asia (see, Yukongdi and Benson '*Women in Asian Management*', 2006), in which case studies of countries are a feature of this book. There is, however, a popular criticism to the use of case studies - the issue of representativeness, referring to 'the extent to which the research findings can be generalised to a wider population beyond the case study' (Burton, 2000: 224). Ng et al. (2002) who conducted one case study, which explored the experience of work-family conflict for female staff in the Airlines in Hong Kong, admitted that the study had limitations. 'It was of only one company, and within that company, we were able to survey only one section of its staff. We were also unable to

undertake any longitudinal comparisons of EAA (East Asian Airlines)'(Ng. et al., 2002: 99). My approach is studying more than one case in the airline industry in China since 'evidence from multiple case studies is often more compelling and more robust than single case studies and also enable the results of the studies to be compared and contrasted'(Burton, 2000: 224).

Because case study research can be based on 'any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence'(Yin, 2003: 15), my research strategy is both quantitative and qualitative since using both methods alongside each other helps to reduce problems that might be encountered by using one method alone (Halford et al., 1997). In other words, my choice of research instruments permits triangulation, which emphasises 'the use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or vice versa' (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 482). In particular, triangulation allows the application and combination of several methods in a study to 'give a more detailed and balanced picture of a situation' (Altrichter et al., 1996: 117), and 'cross check data from multiple sources to search for regularities of the research data' (O'Donoghue and Punch, 2003: 78).

In my study, the data collection methods employed mainly included a questionnaire survey followed by in-depth interviews. Apart from them, I also conducted a documentary analysis of the airline industry to achieve a contextual understanding. The questionnaire was designed to generalize a context for the phenomenon under study, which allowed me to gain a basic understanding and preliminary assessment on the phenomena. While, the interviewing was supposed to verify and detail what, why and how things happened, which allowed me to gain a better understanding of the research situation and uncover hidden issues. Nevertheless, previous research on women's work and work-family conflict has been primarily based on one single data collection method such as questionnaire survey, many of which depended heavily on quantitative data (for example, Anderson et al., 2002; Aryee, 1992; Kim & Ling, 2001; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Ngo & Lau, 1998; Premeaux et al., 2007; Voydanoff, 1988). The quantitative approach itself has some limitations. It can only deal with issues known at the beginning of the research as this is when the questions are decided and documented (McCullough, 1995). The quantitative data provides numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative, which is 'difficult to get the real meaning of an issue by looking at numbers' (Kruger, 2003). Though providing useful and reliable data, surveys can often give a misleading

impression in terms of the complexities and variations which they cover up (Bradley, 1999; Siltanen, 1994). In addition, there is no facility to probe or seek clarification from respondents on self-administered questionnaires, which can be a serious limitation in exploratory research (Burton, 2000). Some researchers have realized these weaknesses and suggested adopting more qualitative approaches although 'survey-based correlational research is important to the development and refinement of theory' (Ling & Powell, 2001: 370). A qualitative study can provide additional or deeper insights for understanding work-family conflict since quantitative data only 'provides a good test of basic constructs and relationships among different variables' (Ngo & Lau, 1998: 32). Moreover, qualitative research is more appropriate in studying under-represented groups, e.g. women in management, and in uncovering the meanings that women attach to their work and life situation.

The attractiveness of the case study method lies in its flexibility and richness in data, but it is not an easy job. 'The demands of a case study on a person's intellect, ego, and emotions are far greater than those of any other research strategy' (Yin, 1994: 55). The case studies required me to secure access to people, organisations and data which are crucial for the successful completion of my research project. These involved interviewing those power holders and professionals required a great deal of preparation as well as much confidence in interviewing individuals of a higher status than me, such as General Managers and HR specialists of the case-study organisations. My experience of conducting these case studies – including problems and lessons – will be explored later in this chapter.

### **5.3 Case-study organisations**

Before proceeding to the detailed explanation on the data collection methods adopted to cope with the three cases, I think it necessary to introduce some contextual information on each of airlines studied in order to paint a full picture of their particular histories and features. In order to protect the identity of participants and the confidentiality of the statements they offered me, the level of detail provided has been constrained and the real names of these organisations have been replaced by Phoenix, Panda and Dragon respectively.

#### *Phoenix Airlines*

As a medium-sized airline company, Phoenix Airlines, established in a southern major city in the 1990s, is famous for its several 'first' activities in the Chinese civil aviation sector. It was China's first joint stock air transport enterprise (or as some air staff described it, it is a 'semi-private'). Both the local government and a foreign firm own its share. It was the first Chinese air carrier to own shares in an airport and it was also one of the first listed air companies. It was the first and the only air company in China's Civil Aviation Industry whose logo was evaluated as the 'Famous Brand' by the State Industrial and Commerce Bureau in 2006.

The area where Phoenix Airlines is located has experienced rapid economic growth due to some preferential policies such as special tax incentives for foreign investments and greater dependence on international trade activities for the Special Economic Zone in China. Tourism has also become a backbone industry, which has created many new career opportunities for both local people and others all over the nation. Under such circumstances, the airline has maintained a continuous, fast and healthy development with a steady profit increase, and the excellent performance has helped it to be among the top five airlines in China. So far Phoenix airline has served both domestic and international schedule flights with 500 flight routes to more than 90 destinations. In January of 2008, Phoenix Airlines had around 9000 employees, of whom 1770 were flight attendants, over 1500 pilots, and more than 4000 ground and back office staff members. The organisation, however, has only one female pilot and one female senior manager.

Phoenix Airlines is well-known for high punctuality rates and its top quality customer service among all Chinese airlines. It has also achieved an excellent safety operation with zero incidents rate per 10,000 hours. It has changed the traditional concept that airline service is only restricted to the cabin by introducing a brand-new concept "Air Products" for customers, and took the lead in introducing the new service principle of "Products and customized services for a whole flight course" with the promise to offer customers a "seamless" service. It is aiming to become the first choice of airline passengers and one of the world's most famous brands as a Chinese company.

#### *Panda Airlines*

The small-sized airline company, based in the southwest of China, was established and started operations in the late 1980s. In 2002 it was reorganised and the local

government became the major shareholder. Other shareholders include other airlines and private-owned enterprises. It remains state controlled, but with the multi-sources of investment, the corporation has expanded into different business fields in various forms of trade and partnership.

Panda Airlines is a regional airline operating scheduled domestic services. The region that the company is located in is a much larger area with a traditional transportation and manufacturing base and rich historical and cultural sites, which has been hit by restructuring and transformation of state-owned enterprises but continues to be an important economic, communication and leisure centre in China. As the domestic air transportation market becomes increasingly competitive, it is continuously exploiting new markets and seeking every possibility both inside and outside China. So far, it has opened more than 130 domestic routes that link some 40 cities forming an air transport network with a spread over 200,000 kilometers, and has consistently made profits for eight years. Until January of 2008, Panda Airlines had a total of more than 3000 employees, among whom there are around 700 flight attendants and nearly 90% of them are female, over 1000 ground staff and about half of them are female. In addition, the airline company has two female pilots.

In recent years, Panda Airlines has been strongly advocating its “Beautiful Enterprise Culture” with the principle of “Sincerity, Kindness, Beauty and Love”. It is striving to establish integrity of value, benefit and beauty with mutual liaison among its staff, the passengers and the individuals in society, aiming to accomplish its social responsibility and obtaining the economic benefits. This has earned the organisation two top rankings: Satisfaction of Regular Customers and Favourite Airlines of Passengers in 2007. Currently, it is aiming to base itself firmly upon the southwestern region and be the leader providing quality services in the commercial aviation field.

### *Dragon Airlines*

Established in the mid 1980s, this large-sized state-owned airline is head quartered in the same region where Panda Airlines is situated. It is the first major national airline of the CAAC as well as the largest airline in this region. Dragon Airlines had 190 international, regional and domestic routes, connecting over 60 cities both in China and Asia with an annual passenger volume of over six million. Due to the restructuring policy of CAAC in 2002 it merged with A Airlines, the largest Airline and became the biggest branch of this national flag carrier in China in 2004. Its

number of accessible domestic and international destinations has increased up to 300 including many influential international metropolitans. The merger has created a 'Big Mac' airline, which is currently the world's largest carrier, based on market capitalisation. Accordingly, Dragon Airlines itself has expanded its marketing and sales network substantially, and it has also gained a reputation and position of national importance. The logo of Dragon Airlines has been replaced by the one of A Airlines and its name has become Dragon Branch of A Airlines, but in practice the company still operates autonomously to a large extent in the region it is based and the majority of the workforce comprises of previously employed staff. I therefore decided it was better to regard Dragon Airlines as an independent identity and it is also appropriate to take it as an independent case given that I completed the fieldwork only in the headquarters and the region governed by Dragon Airlines, while I failed to get access to the headquarters of A Airlines.

Dragon Airlines has paid much attention to the quality service, so both the cabin and ground services are a good standard. Many of the flight attendants were trained in a famous foreign airline, and their international standard on-board service has gained them the top prize of 'Excellent Women Group' awarded by China's Women's Committee in 2005. Similarly, maintaining a high quality service, the ground section was awarded the prize of 'Excellent Customer Service' by CAAC. By the end of 2007, Dragon Airlines had more than 10,000 staff members in total, among which over 1000 are stewardesses and nearly 700 are ground staff members.

The above three airline companies allow empirically pertinent comparisons to be made. These airline companies were chosen because they shared a number of similarities in that they are all well-established airlines and have attracted lots of attention in specific aspects. For instance, Phoenix Airlines has an excellent reputation for efficient customer services and the highest rate of punctuality in the Chinese airline industry; Panda Airlines is well known for its beautiful flight attendants with good service delivery; Dragon Airlines is famous for its long history and enhanced financial and marketing capability. All these airlines are considered good employers whose jobs are often sought after. More importantly, all employ substantial proportions of women workers at jobs such as stewarding, ground handling services, and administrative work, and a majority of women continue to work on a full-time basis which is a typical pattern of employment not only significant to the airline

industry but also to the Chinese economy. These commonalities have made them ideal organisations in which to pursue my research.

Alongside these broad similarities, however, there are important differences among the case studies. They are diversified in history, ownership, size, flight routes, HR practices, and organisational culture. In addition, the three airlines are different in economic and social geography: one is located in a prosperous and rapidly developing Special Economic Zone where there are a large number of migrant workers, and the other two are situated in a less developed but vast region where local people dominate the labour market. This diversity has made my sampling more meaningful and interesting. The second comparative dimension of my research is that I compared the work-family conflict for female staff in three different job types – as shown in Chapter VII – including one traditionally female-dominated occupation: stewarding; one section with many females: ground services; and back office jobs where women account for less than half or a very small percentage of the total number such as flight training management, logistics, finance, HR and so on. Through this selection, I have uncovered any horizontal or vertical gendered occupational segregation and the effects of which on women's experiences. Therefore, these three organisations fitted my specifications and, moreover, agreed to participate in the research which is obviously important. To some extent, my sample represents a typical type of company in the Chinese airline industry because of the importance and influence of the three airlines and the forms of employment they represent. I contend that studying gender as a whole, and women's work-family conflict phenomena in particular, within them, can trace out the consequences of general trends in the airline industry.

Apart from the above cross-case comparisons, I examined the relevance of the findings from these three case studies to the evidence based on findings emerging from other studies - mainly the Western research - although this comparison is not purely occupationally based. As shown in Chapter III, Western findings and analyses of women's work-family conflict and other relevant issues have dominated this research area, so the extent to which those findings can be applied in the Chinese context remains a key question. Thus, my secondary objective in this thesis is looking at both similarities and differences between work-family experiences of Chinese women and those in Western societies, as elaborated in Chapter VIII which has made the comparison more significant.



## **5.4 Sampling and data collection methods**

Having provided the general background to each case study organisation, now I turn to describe the samples and examine the research techniques employed to collect the data.

### **5.4.1 Sampling techniques**

In each of the airlines, I conducted a questionnaire survey by distributing 105 questionnaires to female employees of each airline in three job categories: cabin crew, ground staff and back-office staff. The same questionnaire was used in all cases, and the samples were chosen from each of the three job categories. Sampling was necessary because the population of each case-study organisation was too large for me to attempt to survey all employees. It was difficult to access some of the population because my contacts could only reach some areas of these organizations where they had influence or 'guan xi' (personal connections). Guan xi is one of the important elements of Chinese business culture, which will be explained in the data analysis chapter. However, a small but carefully chosen sample can be used to represent the population when the sample can reflect the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn (Saunders et al., 2000). Generally, I adopted non-probability sampling instead of probability sampling for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the probability sampling techniques are based on the assumption that the researcher's sample will be statistically chosen at random and therefore 'it is possible to specify the probability that any case will be included in the sample' (Saunders et al., 2000: 170). However, within business research, such as case study research, this is often not possible. Secondly, non-probability sampling is based on the researcher's subjective judgement and it is practical in the exploratory stages of one research project (Saunders et al., 2000). This was important because to answer my research questions and address my objectives I needed to undertake an in-depth study focusing on a small sample selected purposively.

I utilised purposive sampling, one of the non-probability sampling techniques, to select the respondents among the three job categories. The purposive sampling technique is often used when working with small samples such as in case study research and when the researcher wishes to select samples that are particularly informative (Neuman, 1997). Given that women's experiences would be diverse in

terms of their marital status, age, number of children, domestic arrangement, job role, job position, etc. - which were also important variables in my questionnaire - I identified some diverse characteristics prior to selecting my sample. For example, I planned to include a number of women with children and a number of those who had to work night shifts in my sample, so I requested the relevant managers or supervisors to recommend these two sub-groups to me which enabled me to study these particular sub-groups in great depth. In addition, I was interested in special or unusual cases because the data collected from these special cases would be relevant in understanding or explaining more typical cases (Patton, 2002) and would enable me to document uniqueness. For instance, the dual-flying family - in which both partners work on flights (e.g. one is a flight attendant, and the other is a pilot or an air policeman) - was a unique phenomenon to the airline industry. The women who were part of such dual-flying families were important because they could highlight some critical issues. Another example is those who changed their job roles, e.g. from stewardess to ground staff within the organisations, which was of particular interest to me because their experience in work and family could be different when they were undertaking different jobs. So I also requested a number of those who were in these situations to take part in the survey.

Although I applied a purposive sampling technique when selecting the sample of cabin crew, because of the nature of their job role, I had to use the convenience sampling technique firstly. So I could only target those flight attendants who were off duty on the days when the survey was undertaken, and, therefore much easier to access. This technique of sampling is prone to bias and influences that are beyond the researcher's control 'as the cases only appear in the sample because of the ease of obtaining them', but often 'the sample is intended to represent the total population' (Saunders et al., 2000: 177). Although the samples were chosen because they were convenient, the purposive sampling technique was used to ensure heterogeneous cases within the samples. Just as Patton (1990) argues, 'this is in fact a strength' (cited in Saunders et al., 2000: 174), for 'any patterns that do emerge are likely to be of particular interest and value and represent the key themes' (Saunders et al., 2000: 174).

Because gender segregation in employment remains strong in the airlines industry, and women in cabin service sectors largely outnumbered those doing office work, achieving an even distribution among three job types was not possible. Thus, the percentage of back-office staff was much lower than the other two categories in each

case study. One more thing should be emphasised that, the definition of ground staff in the Chinese airlines is different from that in the Western context and the latter refers to 'aircraft cleaning staff and baggage handling staff' and 'least likely to be perceived as skilled' (Eaton, 2001: 102). While, this category of Chinese airline employees is defined in a broad and flexible way, covering from check-in and security check staff to those who do service and administrative work on the ground. There is neither fixed or rigorous definition to ground staff. In practice, different airlines vary in defining and employing ground staff. For instance, the ground staff members of Phoenix Airlines in my sample were actually administrative workers who worked closely with cabin crew, and they were better-educated than those traditional ground staff defined in the West. A majority of those who were working in check-in counters and security check points of the local airport were not the regular staff of Phoenix Airlines, which sub-contracted this section to the airport authority. Therefore, they were not included in my sample. On the other hand, Dragon Airlines owns the majority share of the local airport so its ground staff in my survey covered both those serving at the airport and doing administrative work in offices. Although the ground service work meant somewhat different job responsibilities to ground staff in different airlines, a meaningful comparison could still be made within each case-study organisation. When I realized this would possibly cause a problem of comparison between three cases, I decided to compare the degree of work-family conflict for female air staff who worked on flights with those who worked on the ground (see 5.4.2 for Hypothesis I). This also indicates that in-depth interviews are very useful in further clarifying their job roles and in making more meaningful comparisons between them.

After the completion of the questionnaire survey and initial analysis, the interview stage was carried out in the three airlines, which took nearly three months to complete. Interviews were conducted within the workplaces, sometimes in offices and sometimes in private rooms. Because these airlines gave their approval to my research, heads of relevant departments were instructed to allow their staff to spend some time with me, but requested that I had better not occupy them for too long. Similarly, based on the purposive sampling technique, I identified characteristics that would be appropriate to the interview session, and requested my contacts to recommend some female colleagues from each airline who also participated in the questionnaire survey to attend the interview sessions. Finally, around 15 females of each airline were

interviewed face-to-face and interviews lasted from 20 minutes to 50 minutes. I also interviewed their leaders who were senior management, HR managers and line managers in these organisations. Because of time pressure as I was conducting interviews in their work time, the interviews with management were conducted in a quicker manner, but I did obtain sufficient information. Further details on the two major research methods as well as other supplementary techniques I adopted are given below, and both the questionnaire and the interview schedule can be found in the Appendix I and II.

#### 5.4.2 Preliminary stage: questionnaire survey

The first stage of my fieldwork involved carrying out the questionnaire survey, which is the prominent technique for collecting data in quantitative research and in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order (deVaus, 1991). On the basis of the literature review on women, work and family, as well as the analytical model of work-family conflict, the following hypotheses (see Table 5.1) were generated formulating the first three research questions:

**Table 5.1 Hypotheses**

<b>H1</b>	Female air staff who work on flights encounter higher level of work-family conflict than those who only work on the ground.
<b>H2</b>	Work schedule inflexibility is positively associated with at least one type of work-family conflict.
<b>H3</b>	Job demands are positively associated with at least one type of work-family conflict.
<b>H4</b>	Length of leave is negatively associated with at least one type of work-family conflict.
<b>H5</b>	The organisation's negative views on women are positively associated with at least one type of work-family conflict.
<b>H6</b>	Responsibilities on childcare, eldercare and housework are positively associated with at least one type of work-family conflict.

In order to test the above hypotheses, a questionnaire was designed (in Appendix 1),

which was sent to the female employees in the three job types of each of the airlines. Generally, the questionnaire consists of five parts.

Part one and two cover demographic questions such as age, marital status, number of children, hours for doing housework, and basic job-related information such as job type, pattern of work, number of days for leave. The two parts are composed of multiple choices. Examples of response options are: 'What kind of childcare arrangements do you have?' and 'how many days leave per year on average do you actually take?'

Part three, four and five are the main parts of the survey. In these parts, a combination of standard scales and items have been used by referring to the scales developed by Carlson et al. (2000), Frone et al. (1992) and Ng. et al. (2002).

Part three seeks the respondents' opinions on their work, organisation and family life. Those items are measured using a 5-point response format (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree, etc.). Respondents were instructed to ignore some items related to spouse or children in case the items are not applicable to them. The scale question on work-family conflict consisted of 12 items, which not only measured the overall level of experienced conflict of female employees but also examines different dimensions of work-family conflict, namely job-spouse conflict, job-parent conflict and job-home/leisure conflict. Sample items include: 'My job keeps me from spending time with my spouse'; 'My working hours interfere with the amount of time I spend with my child(ren)'; 'Worrying about my job makes it hard for me to enjoy myself outside of work'; and 'I find it hard to balance my time between my work needs and family needs'. A higher scale implies a higher level of conflict and vice versa. The scale question on job demands consisted of 5 items, which assess the degree of efforts that the respondents' jobs have required them to make. Sample items include: 'My job requires that I work very fast' and 'my job requires that I work very hard'. The lower the scale is, the fewer demands the work has so that the fewer efforts the employees have to make. The scale question on organisational views on female colleagues consists of 8 items, which assessed the females' opinions on how the organisation looks at them. Sample items include: 'In my organisation, married women are seen as less committed to work than married men'; 'In my organisation, childcare responsibilities significantly reduce women's opportunities'; and 'In my organisation, men consider it difficult to work for women managers'. Generally, the higher the scaled number is, the more likely the organisation is to hold less favourable views on

female employees.

Part four represents the level of different sources of support and the questions are centred on how much tangible and intangible support that the respondents get from other people in managing their work and home life. In this part, the items are also measured using a 5-point response format (1= not support at all, 5= a great deal of support). Each item is a source of support such as managers, supervisors, spouse and parents.

Part five measures how important the respondents consider equal opportunity policies and work-family benefits, as well as the level of overall satisfaction with the organisations practices. All items are measured using a 5-point response scale (1= not at all important/ not at all satisfied, 5= very important/ very satisfied). Examples of the items on equal opportunity practices and work-family benefits are: 'Equal opportunity committee – representatives of managers and workers meet to discuss equal opportunity issues'; 'Setting gender targets – e.g. aiming for a 10% increase in women managers over five years'; 'opportunity to job share'; and 'on-site childcare'.

Data gathered from the questionnaire was used to elicit information on respondents' employment histories and their domestic circumstances; to describe the general situation that Chinese women working in different airlines and in various job types encounter work-family conflict; to gain some indication of attitudes towards their organisations, careers and lives; and, more significantly, to examine relationships between each work or family factor and the dual role conflict. The findings were then analysed and comparisons drawn with existing literature, which had stimulated the research and my hypotheses.

The strengths of the questionnaire survey include speed, economy and relatively easy access to a large number of respondents who are geographically dispersed. In reality, however, this approach has limitations. The quality of responses was a concern in case some responses were given without a moment's thought. In addition, it was difficult for me to probe or seek clarification from respondents on self-administered questionnaires, which can be a serious limitation in exploratory research (Burton, 2000). As Yin says, 'surveys can deal with phenomenon and context, but their ability to investigate the context is extremely limited'(Yin, 2003: 13). Also, Siltanen (1994) argues that data from surveys or governmental statistical resources show outcomes but not processes. Consequently, it is often better to combine a questionnaire approach

with other methods. With reference to my research topic, the questionnaire described broad patterns of responses across a range of areas in women's work and home life and the in-depth interviews further explored the causes and effects of their role conflict and other relevant experiences, as well as management's attitudes towards women's career development. In reality, I have found the information provided by in-depth interviews much more revealing and appealing. I will elaborate this below.

### **5.4.3 Main stage: semi-structured and in-depth interviews**

The aim of interviews is to engage respondents in a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1991: 102). Semi-structured interviews are attractive because they can allow the interviewees to lead the discussion and set their own agenda (Halford et al., 1997). In an exploratory study, in-depth interviews can be very helpful to find out not only what is happening but also discover new insights (Robson, 1993). Sayer (1989: 245) also argues that 'with a less formal, less standardized, and more interactive type of interview, the researcher has a much better chance of learning from the respondents what the different significances of circumstances are for them'. Thus, qualitative interviews can gain depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness in data (Mason, 2002). My understanding is that qualitative interviewing aims to explore issues with interviewees rather than to test knowledge or simply categorize.

I chose the interviewing approach because my ontological position suggests that the respondents' knowledge, views, and experiences are meaningful properties (Mason, 2002) which my research questions are designed to explore. More importantly, I was very interested in the female employees' perceptions. Meanwhile, the epistemological position of this approach allowed me to generate data on these ontological properties by talking interactively with interviewees, asking them questions, listening to them, gaining access to their accounts and articulations or analyzing their use of language and construction of discourse (Mason, 2002). In other words, the interviews have provided answers to the 'why' questions rather than just 'how many' or 'how long' questions (Burton, 2000).

In my fieldwork, the interview stage consists of two steps. Firstly, I conducted semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the selected female staff who were from the three job types within each of the three airlines and who had participated in the questionnaire survey. As elaborated previously, these female colleagues were chosen purposively and the interviews with them provided me with information-rich case

studies in which I explored my research questions. Nevertheless, it was difficult to achieve equal numbers of interviewees across the three types of work because women made up a very small percentage of some office work like flight training management and logistics where there were only 4 or 5 females. Thus, about 80 per cent of the interviewees in my study consist of cabin crew and ground staff, while nearly 20 per cent of them were back office staff. But this did not affect much representativeness of the total female population working in the back office, e.g. finance. The validity and understanding that I gained from the interviews with this small number of interviewees enabled logical generalizations (Saunders et al., 2000). For instance, I was once told that what happened to these interviewees in the workplace was also experienced by other women working in the same department, but it might bring about different results. This is further discussed in the data analysis chapter. The interview questions, containing a mix of closed and open-ended questions, were mainly concerned about their perceptions on work-family conflict, its impact on their career development and their experiences of work and family support.

Then I arranged a small number of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with management from each of the three airlines. I interviewed 2 to 4 managers including senior managers, HR managers or specialists and line managers in each airline individually. The interview questions with this group of people mainly centered on the effectiveness of organisational policies – particularly EO policy – applied in the processes of recruitment, promotion, etc., and their awareness of difficulties that female colleagues encountered and measures taken to help women cope with them. With their particular knowledge and understanding, they provided a picture of important issues on job descriptions and specifications, HRM policies and organisational practices, and shift systems adopted by the airline industry. Moreover, those managers expressed their views on the female colleagues' work-family conflict experiences in their own organisations. I was also given a general breakdown of employees by sex, marital status, age, tenure and job types, which, however, can not be presented in my thesis because of the confidentiality issue, but can be used to assist the finding discussions. The ethical issues involved will be discussed in detail at the end of this chapter. In practice, the results from the interviews with both female colleagues and management have either buttressed the findings from the questionnaire survey or explored new hypotheses concerning the topics under investigation, thereby going beyond the original formulation of the problem (Corbetta, 2003).



Semi-structured qualitative interviewing is not without its problems. The lack of standardization in interviews often leads to concerns about reliability (Robson, 1993). As an interviewer, I might create bias in the way that my interviewees responded to questions being asked or the way that I interpreted their responses. Indeed, the task of linguistic translation is a concern in my case. Marsh (1967) comments that language differences, even if researchers have a proficient understanding of a language, require a cultural understanding of words to allow for the equivalence of meaning. Since all the conversations between respondents and me were in Chinese, I had to translate them into English, which turned out to be a tough and ambiguous process. In particular, some specialized or subtle Chinese expressions could not be interpreted exactly in English, which might have secured insufficient authentic responses from the interviewees. Thus, the use of English translations can lead to issues of selectivity and thus bias (May, 2001). In addition, a couple of interviewees appeared to be reluctant to take part in such a relatively lengthy interview process so that they tended to respond passively or shortly, not allowing for further exploration, which may bias my sample from whom data were collected. It is also suggested that when employees are sensitive to the in-depth exploration of certain topics, they will choose not to reveal the 'confidential' information that the researcher wishes to gain as they may be afraid that the information they reveal might go back to the organisation (Halford et al., 1997). In reality, it did not seem to be a problem when I was interviewing female colleagues. At the beginning of the interviews, I provided them with verbal assurances that this would not happen to them. Given the tight schedules and rigid work style of air staff, I felt that the interviews were a good way to help them release pressure from their work. The majority of the interviewees showed their willingness to attend such interviews, and particularly took this opportunity to comment on, or even criticize particular policies, practices and phenomena in their organisations. The interviewees were given more freedom to express their feelings and ideas on issues in semi-structured interview situation than other structured approaches and they turned out to be more responsive. By the end of the interviews, they were informed they could request a manuscript of their interview if they were interested. Some interviewees also showed their trust towards me and became friends of mine later, which in turn has benefited my research. Thus, the interviews with those female air staff were of great interest and importance to me and provided some fascinating findings. In total, the use of interviewing has enabled me to see below the surface and achieve depth and

complexity of understanding in my research area.

The interviewing process with management was not, however, as smooth as those with the working women. Firstly, it was challenging to contact and arrange interviews with these managers, as most of them had tight schedules and some senior managers were hard to reach. However, with my friends' help, I completed interviews with some of the management whom I previously aimed to interview. In addition, some refused to be interviewed because they were either suspicious of the purpose of my research or very sensitive and cautious to any interviews due to their higher job positions and influence on their organisations. Under such circumstances, I had to adjust my original interview plan by finding a replacement or reducing the number of management interviewees. I sensed that some managers tended to be reserved and selective in answering questions, and also found that the majority of them mentioned few problems or limitations on existing policies and practices although they revealed detailed information.

The further problem of qualitative interviewing is that 'the interview material was constructed in a particular setting and may not reflect people's feelings and attitudes in other arenas' (Halford et al., 1997: 61). To avoid this condition, I informed all the interviewees of my contact details including my email address and telephone number and stressed that they were welcome to contact me in case they would like to share new ideas and provide new evidence related to the topic. I was also helped by being able to return to some interviewees by phoning them or meeting them personally.

Meanwhile, I came to recognise that a supplementary interview stage was necessary to further clarify anything confusing from the first stage of interviewing or explore any new phenomena arising from my analysis of the interview data. For overcoming barriers of time limit and geographical difference between my interviewees and me, I decided to adopt online interviewing, which is increasingly becoming a viable option for research. Therefore, popular online real-time chat tools such as MSN and Skype were used to undertake textual interactive interviews with some of the previous interviewees who have established friendships with me. In practice, it was a cost-effective and quick way to get responses. It was especially helpful for me when I was in the UK while my interviewees were in China. However, Clarke (2000) lists sensory cues that are present in face-to-face interviews are missing when conducting online interviews, such as speed, loudness and pitch, appearance and

facial expressions. As a matter of fact, I only used this approach after I had already established a face-to-face relationship with the interviewees, so the online interviewing did not bring about these limitations to my case.

#### **5.4.4 Documentary analysis**

The analysis of documentary sources is another major method of social research and often takes place alongside other methods in the practice of social research, and therefore, a meaningful and appropriate way to supplement my research. Documents, which include primary and secondary sources, public and private documents, unsolicited and solicited sources, and even photographs, have been used to provide me with 'hard' data for grounding some of my research questions. My search and analysis of a variety of documentary sources continued through the whole research process.

At the literature review stage I had read widely. A wide variety of books and references were relevant to my research topic in libraries. In addition, academic journals such as *Journal of Women in Management Review*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, *Gender, Work and Organisation*, *Asia Pacific Business Review*, etc. were quite useful in providing in-depth insights on different aspects of my research, as well as a good opportunity to learn how other researchers approached similar questions. Meanwhile, in my specific research context, the official website of CAAC (Civil Aviation Administration of China), the top authority of the aviation industry in China, was used to search for the latest industrial policies, regulations, and official statistics that I needed.

At the fieldwork stage, with the help of my contacts in the airline sector, I accessed some company reports and in-house publications to gain a better understanding of the nature of airlines and organisational culture and obtain concrete information on management practices and HR policies. At this level, this was a good means of enhancing understanding of case studies through the ability to situate contemporary accounts within an historical context, which could 'allow comparisons to be made between the observer's interpretations of events and those recorded in documents relating to those events' (May, 2001: 175). Thus, I analysed and interpreted data or 'stories' derived from the interviews with female staff and compared them with what companies' reports talked about. That is because one certainly cannot assume that documentary accounts are accurate portrayals in that

sense (Thomas, 2004). The issue of a document's authenticity and credibility is essential to the conduct of documentary research. I therefore needed to check the consistency of their contents. In the information era researchers are offered possibilities in the use of the Internet for conducting documentary research, but this has also raised some problems on reliability and validity (May, 2001), as modern organisations have established websites for publicizing their good images by only providing favourable presentations online. Therefore, it is hard to say all the information is reliable. In my case, I found that those airlines were reluctant to reveal any negative events or something unfavourable to them on their websites, which to some extent obscured a true picture of an organisation. Besides, some of the data I got from online documents seemed outdated and eventually turned out to be irrelevant, therefore, a careful check of the information which would be used as evidence in my thesis was always necessary. Moreover, I also needed to keep an eye on the latest development in my research topic, so it was essential to obtain more recent and detailed information, but such information was sometimes not available either because 'gatekeepers' did not grant access to it or because online documents were not regularly updated.

To sum up, documentary analysis is useful in telling us a great deal about the way in which events are constructed, the reasons employed, as well as providing materials upon which to base further research investigations (May, 2001). It is equally important not to simply regard a document as a reflection of reality, and we had better exercise critical reflexivity in analyses of any documents.

## **5.5 Specific issues**

### **5.5.1 Application of a reflexive approach at the interview stage**

Throughout all of the research processes - particularly at the qualitative interview data collecting, analyzing and reporting stages - questions of reflexivity must be asked 'as part of a process of engaging with the data and extracting findings' (Patton, 2002: 495). The term 'reflexivity' has been used to 'describe the way in which an account is not merely something that is said by an informant, but is also a means of accomplishing certain purposes in the course of the interaction with a researcher' (Sim and Wright, 2000: 148). However, there is recently greater awareness and acknowledgement of the role of the researcher as part and parcel of the construction

of knowledge (Bryman, 2004). Thus, nowadays reflexivity often pertains more to the researcher's role – 'the way in which the researcher's subjective self and consciousness of the social situation in which research occurs should bear upon the way in which an investigation is conducted' (Sim and Wright, 2000: 148). In other words, reflexivity entails sensitivity to the researcher's cultural, political and social context, and 'knowledge from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher's location in time and social space' (Bryman, 2004: 500). It is especially elicited at my interview stage.

Reconsidering the semi-structured interview stage, I was interested in following my participants' dialogue as it developed and consequently produced themes unanticipated by the questions I had prepared. Indeed, at the outset of each interview, I emphasised their active participation, with the following phrase typically deployed: "I have a few questions I would like to pursue, but I don't want to restrict the conversation unnaturally so if any other relevant topics or questions come to your mind, we can talk about them - OK?" But this still implied an initial intention on my part of a traditional relationship between me and my participants, with me remaining fairly detached - apart from asking questions and allowing some deviation from script and the interviewees treated as separate and reactive data givers. Such a relationship was structured by me asking specific questions, such as "Who is doing or did childcare?", "What's your formal pattern of work?", "Have you experienced any work-family conflict?", "Would you consider yourself to be ambitious?", etc. However, when I re-read the transcripts from these interviews, it became apparent that I adopted a variety of positions beyond this questioning role at different points. I seemed to switch back and forth between being detached from, and involved in, the conversation with my participants. When I had entered the conversation, I did so in a variety of ways. I was not only asking questions, but also making comments on particular statements, presenting criticisms of some views, attempting humorous remarks, and responding to their prompt questions to me. For example, when one participant mentioned hiring paid labour to clean her flat regularly, I soon commented: "then, it's now very popular to do this... it's cheap and efficient...we are very much released from this burden..." When hearing that one female colleague mentioned her husband persuaded her not to work as cabin crew because the job involved face-to-face contacting male passengers, I was very surprised because none of my family members would say this to me, and I then criticized the view as being very

conservative and it should be discarded. Also, one interviewee mentioned she gave up a promotion opportunity because it involved re-location but she was somewhat regretful. I asked whether it would influence her family life negatively, she did not answer the question, but asked me: "What would be your choice if you were in my situation?" This enabled me to reflect on my own position, and I realised that I could not give a proper response, but her question aroused my interest in understanding more about how these female employees chose between work and family and in discovering any possible solutions for this problem. Moreover, many of the participants were curious about my own experience as well as my viewpoints on relevant topics. Instead of merely collecting data, therefore, I was involved in contributing to the conversation as a co-participant as well as engaged in diverse conversations with my interviewees. I felt it was relatively easy to interact with the participants and relate to them because we were common in nationality, sex, the cultural and social environment we dwell in, and therefore many life experiences.

During the interview data analysis and reporting stage, I recognised that I also used a reflexive approach. I had direct contact with and got close to the participants, situation, and phenomenon under study so I gained lots of rich and valuable information from them. Moreover, my personal experiences and insights were an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). When I was reading the participants' stories and analysing the interview transcripts, admittedly, my subjectivity was included - but on the basis of my authentic understanding of their experiences and our shared understanding of the Chinese context including society, culture, organisation, family, gender, etc. upon which the research was built and from which my perspective has been shaped. Given that I have lived in the Chinese environment for more than 30 years, I have developed a deep understanding about why things happen in the way they do. Thus, I worked back and forth between the data or story and my own perspective and understandings to make sense of the evidence which involved giving possible explanations for how the relevant issues took the form and had the effects they did.

Complete objectivity is impossible and pure subjectivity undermines credibility, as Patton (2002: 494-495) argues, so 'the researcher's focus becomes balanced – understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness.'

### **5.5.2 Research ethics and ethical considerations**

Ethical issues need considering throughout the period of any research including seeking access to organizations and to individuals, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting its findings. In the context of research, ethics refer to the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of the researcher's work, or are affected by it (Saunders et al., 2000). The nature of business and management research means that the researcher will be dependent on other people for access. 'In general, the closer the research is to actual individuals in real-world settings, the more likely are ethical questions to be raised' (Wells, 1994: 290). It is especially true in my study.

Irrespective of research method, a number of general ethical issues often arise across the stages and duration of a research project. Saunders et al. (2000) summarized several key ethical issues, covering privacy of participants, voluntary nature of participation, consent of participants, confidentiality of data provided by individuals and their anonymity, behaviour and objectivity of the researcher, etc. During the initial access stage, the researcher should not attempt to apply any pressure on intended participants to grant access (Robson, 1993; Sekaran, 1992). This was unlikely to be the case where I was approaching several personal contacts who were members of these case-study organisations' management to request access. Access to secondary data may also raise ethical problems in relation to privacy of organizations and individuals (Saunders et al., 2000). It did happen in the search for relevant information to my topic, but I treated this in the strictest confidence and not to abuse it in any way.

The use of qualitative interviews as a data generation method means there will be greater scope for ethical issues to arise in relation to this approach to research (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Mason, 2002). Some of the interview questions were related to privacies. Privacy is seen as the cornerstone of the ethical issues that confront researchers (Saunders et al., 2000). Respecting privacy in the conduct of a research project means the right of participants 'to determine, within reason, when they will participate in the data collection process... but not to be subjected to questions that create stress or discomfort' (Saunders et al., 2000: 132). For instance, in my study, the female interviewees were asked about the tangible and emotional support they received from their husbands to cope with their heavy burden of work and family responsibilities. Due to the reserved personality of Chinese people, some

of the interviewees - particularly middle-aged women - felt somewhat embarrassed to reveal detailed information on these matters. When this happened, I stopped to ask another question. One of my interviewees told me that she was widowed with a child, and therefore had a very tough time when her child had been very young. She suddenly became very upset when I asked her to give me some examples of how she could manage both work and life during that period. This indicates that recalling the past experience was very difficult for her, and I realised immediately that I had intruded upon her privacy. In this situation, I apologised for upsetting her, and then paused until it was clear that she had recovered. As a result, the tense atmosphere was overcome and the interview continued.

The nature of questions to be asked also requires consideration. Sekaran (1992) argues that researchers should avoid asking questions which in any way demean their participants - a question such as "Why did the average female staff get much fewer chances of being promoted in your company?" This may hurt female interviewees' feelings or depress their dignity and therefore should be avoided. In practice, however, my participants did not appear to be offended by this question, and instead, they detailed the reasons. In addition, I was cautious that as a researcher I should avoid overzealous questioning and pressing participants for a response, doing so may make the situation stressful for participants (ibid).

The ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity raise particular difficulties for qualitative research. In quantitative research, it is relatively easy 'to anonymize records and to report findings in a way that does not allow individuals to be identified' (Bryman, 2004: 510). However, it is often less easy with qualitative research, for researchers have to be careful with regard to the possible identification of individuals and organisations (ibid). Thus, the ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity are especially important when collecting and analyzing the data collected from interviews. The use of some information gained from one interviewee, whose openness allowed me to identify a sensitive point, such as highlighting a flaw in current HR policy, might have a negative influence on this interviewee. 'Great care therefore needs to be exercised in maintaining each participant's right of anonymity' (Saunders et al., 2000: 137). When I wished other interviewees to discuss such a potentially sensitive point, I attempted to steer the discussion to see if they could raise this sensitive issue without my reminding that one of the other interviewees had already referred to it. During the reporting stage of my research, the ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity



also came to the fore. ‘Allowing a participating organisation to be identified by those who can piece together the characteristics which you reveal may result in embarrassment’ (Saunders et al., 2000: 140). I first asked permission from the organizations to use their name, but their response was no. So I suggested using fake names to replace, and then they agreed. As mentioned in the background introduction of these three case-study organisations (see 5.3), the level of detail provided by them has been constrained so as to protect the identity of participants and the confidentiality of the statements they offered. For instance, one HR manager of one airline provided me with a detailed table on employees by sex, marital status, age, tenure and job types, but he stressed that it was only for my reference and not allowed to be present in my research report. I avoided this situation by only revealing these airlines’ background information collected from their websites and Chinese airline publications.

All in all, I managed to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of my interviewees and the case-study organisations in a couple of ways, e.g. signing the Consent Form before conducting the questionnaire survey and interviews; expressing my understanding of the importance of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of each participating organization and each individual who participated in my research; asking for permission and giving participants fake names in my writing; promising to let them to read my work if they requested it.

## **5.6 Concluding comments: strengths and constraints**

Given the shortcomings of each of the research methods, the multi-strategy case study approach adopted in my research offset the weaknesses of each method by integrating unique strengths of each, which has provided multi-dimensional accounts of the interplay between female air staff’s work and life and their career experiences. To some extent, this approach has overcome the limitations of research on my subject area, which relies heavily on a single research method (see 5.2). Much of the existing study of Asian women’s experience has tended to use solely quantitative methodologies (Venter, 2002). Meanwhile, the multi-strategy case study approach has enhanced my confidence in my own findings.

However, the multi-strategy research approach is neither flawless nor indisputable. Given that the case studies I carried out in the three airlines are

geographically different from each other, the research consumed considerably more time and financial resources than mono-method research. My comparative research design made it more complicated and difficult in the process of conducting and comparing the case studies. Furthermore, there has been the argument against multi-strategy research based on the idea that 'quantitative and qualitative research are separate paradigms' (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 480) and each research strategy has 'different and incompatible epistemological implications' (Smith, 1983: cited in Bryman & Bell, 2003: 481) and, therefore, such integration is seen to be impossible. I do recognise that these two research strategies are grounded in distinctive epistemological and ontological assumptions. However, as data collection methods, quantitative and qualitative research are each associated and capable of being fused, which has been confirmed in my study. Bryman and Bell (2003) clearly support multi-strategy research, but have a concern that applying it may dilute the research effort in any area, since resources would need to be spread. It is a reasonable observation, but it seems not to be a major difficulty in my case. At the outset of my fieldwork, I decided my preference in employment of the research methods: more qualitative than quantitative. In other words, I used quantitative research to facilitate qualitative research, which is one of the chief ways in undertaking multi-strategy research (Bryman & Bell, 2003). This preference led to the fact that I put more effort and energy in the interview stage than the questionnaire survey. It turned out that the data collected from the interviews was richer and more valuable than that from the questionnaire survey, although the questionnaire stage, acting like a 'pilot' study, did allow me to identify key areas of interest for the interview stage. In addition, the multi-strategy method requires any researcher to have the skills and training to undertake both quantitative and qualitative research, as I would suggest my research skills and capacities were further improved and I learned a lot from the process of the research. Furthermore, my experience taught me that it is more important to competently design and conduct research on an ongoing basis and to be sensitive to the changing contexts and situations in which the research takes place.

The following three chapters, which put empirical materials on the above theoretical and methodological bones, present individual case analyses, comparative analysis of three cases and the relevance of my findings to existing Western literature.

## **Chapter VI Findings and Preliminary Analysis of the Three Cases**

In this chapter I will begin the primary data analysis. I will mainly present my findings of the questionnaire and interviews case by case and meanwhile make preliminary analyses and comparisons based on these findings. My aim is to discover the major causes and effects of female air staff's work-family conflict, record how this relates to their career experiences and explore their management's attitudes towards them. When analysing the data from both the questionnaire survey and the face-to-face interviews (see Chapter V), I came across some confusing and complex issues. Thus, I conducted a number of supplementary interviews. Data from the supplementary interviews was mainly used to further discuss and clarify some important issues which arose at this stage, so it is more logical to present this data in Chapter VII where an in-depth multi-dimension comparison across three cases will be provided along with a more detailed discussion of the major findings of this chapter.

### **6.1 Case 1: Phoenix Airlines**

#### **6.1.1 Preliminary stage: questionnaire survey**

My first case study was conducted in Phoenix Airlines (see Chapter 5.3 for the organisation background). A total of 105 self-administrated questionnaires were distributed to female employees from three sections, including: cabin crew, ground staff and flight training staff in the headquarters of Phoenix Airlines. The response rate was 100 per cent due to a good access to the company and strong support from my contacts.

##### **6.1.1.1 Descriptive statistics**

All of the female respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey were no more than 40 years old and most were in their 20s. More than half of were married, but less than 30 per cent of married women had children and nearly 80 per cent of these working mothers had children under 7. Most of the women had a college

diploma or equivalent, but only 30 per cent of them held a bachelor's degree or above. All but four of the female respondents worked full-time. Most of them were non-managerial staff members and only one was in a senior position (the only one female senior manager in Phoenix Airlines to date). Over 90 per cent of have worked for no more than ten years.

**Table 6.1 Questionnaire Respondent Profile**

Respondents		
	n	percent
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20	1	1.0
20 - 29	78	74.3
30 - 39	26	24.8
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	51	48.6
Married	54	51.4
<b>Number of children</b>		
0	74	70.5
1	31	29.5
<b>Age of children</b>		
No children	74	71.4
Under 7	24	22.9
7-15	6	5.7
16 or over still in education	1	1.0
<b>Childcare arrangement (Select as many as apply)</b>		
No children	74	71.4
Spouse	3	2.9
Nursery/kindergarten	4	3.8
Babysitter	2	1.9
Parents	28	26.7
Others	3	2.9
<b>Number of elders or disabled who need caring</b>		
0	25	23.8
1	4	3.8
2	36	34.3

3 or above	40	38.1
<b>Main home responsibility taker</b>		
Me	37	35.2
My spouse	1	1
My apartment sharer	5	4.8
My parents/parents-in-law	31	29.5
We share equally	31	29.5
<b>Weekly hours of house work</b>		
Less than 2	46	43.8
2-5	33	31.4
5-10	20	19
More than 10	6	5.7
<b>Educational background</b>		
High school	2	1.9
College diploma	70	66.7
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	31	29.5
Master's degree or equivalent	1	1.0
PhD or equivalent	1	1.0
<b>Job title</b>		
Cabin crew	48	45.7
Ground staff	53	50.5
Flight training staff	4	3.8
<b>Job position</b>		
Senior management	1	1.0
Middle management	1	1.0
Junior management	12	11.4
Entry-level staff	91	86.7
<b>Work mode</b>		
Full-time	101	96.2
Part-time	4	3.8
<b>Years in business</b>		
Less than 1	7	6.7
1-5	60	57.1
5-10	30	28.6
More than 10	8	7.6

<b>Weekly working hours by contract</b>		
Less than 40	77	73.3
40-45	26	24.8
45-50	2	1.9
<b>Actual weekly working hours</b>		
Less than 40	39	37.1
40-45	48	45.7
45-50	16	15.2
More than 50	2	1.9
<b>Formal pattern of work (Select as many as apply)</b>		
Work on conventional hours (from 8 am to 5 pm, etc.)	37	35.2
Work shifts mostly	42	40.0
Work split-shifts mostly	26	24.8
Regularly work in the evening	5	4.8
Regularly work on Saturdays and Sundays	5	4.8
<b>Number of annual leave by contract</b>		
Less than 3	4	3.8
3-8	7	6.7
8-15	38	36.2
More than 15	56	53.3
<b>Number of actual annual leave</b>		
Less than 3	4	3.8
3-8	22	21.0
8-15	59	56.2
More than 15	20	19.0

### 6.1.1.2 Reliability test

A reliability analysis was used to test whether the scales in the questionnaire survey were reliable. The most common internal consistency measure is the Cronbach alpha, and an alpha coefficient of 0.6 and above is considered good for research in social

sciences (Cronbach, 1990). Based on Table 6.2, the reliability of the scales is satisfactory as all have alpha coefficients above 0.6, and most were above 0.7.

**Table 6.2 Reliability of Scales**

<b>Scales</b>	<b>Alpha coefficient</b>
<b>Job demands</b>	0.666
<b>Work-family conflict</b>	0.833
<b>Organizational views on female colleagues</b>	0.614
<b>Tangible support</b>	0.808
<b>Emotional support</b>	0.745
<b>Importance of equal opportunity policies</b>	0.769
<b>Importance of organizational practices in balancing work-family needs</b>	0.911
<b>Satisfaction on equal opportunity policies and family-friendly provisions</b>	0.761

### 6.1.1.3 Level of work-family conflict

The level of work-family conflict experienced by the females from Phoenix Airlines can be assessed from averaging a set of 5-point scale questions on ‘Your experiences of work-family conflict’. According to Table 6.3 the mean for the respondents as a whole is 3.1092 and the median is 3.000, which indicates that there is a tendency for the overall respondents to agree that they experienced some degree of work-family conflict; however, they did not express a strong feeling on the issue. The detail shows that work-family conflict tends to be higher for married females than single, and for cabin crew than for ground staff and flight training staff. Furthermore, among all of the job types the cabin crew experienced the highest degree of work-family conflict as it has the highest mean of 3.3393. Thus, H1, which states that female air staff who work on flights encounter higher levels of work-family conflict than those who only work on the ground, is supported.

Among all the patterns of work the respondents who have to work on evenings experienced the highest degree of work-family conflict, they had the highest mean of

3.415. Those who work shifts tended to experience more conflict than those whose work does not involve shifts. It can be inferred that work schedule inflexibility influences work-family conflict (a conclusion which will be corroborated in the correlation analysis which follows).

**Table 6.3 Level of Work-Family Conflict by Marital Status, Job Type and Work Pattern**

<b>Work-family conflict</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>all the respondents</b>	3.1092	3.000
<b>Single females</b>	3.0756	3.000
<b>Married females</b>	3.1470	3.050
<b>Cabin crew</b>	3.3393	3.100
<b>Ground staff</b>	2.9266	3.000
<b>Flight training staff</b>	2.9388	2.765
<b>Those working on set office hours</b>	2.8396	2.700
<b>Those working on shifts (including split-shifts)</b>	3.2600	3.160
<b>Those regularly working on evenings</b>	3.4150	3.415

**6.1.1.4 Degree of support from different sources**

Table 6.4 shows that the respondents received varying degrees of tangible support from six types of people, including: management, colleagues, spouses, parents/parents-in-law, other family members, and friends. It is clear that the respondents' parents or parents-in-law are considered to be the biggest support as they earn the highest mean of 4.13. They are followed closely by their spouses with a high mean of 4.06. The tangible support from their friends and other family members is also seen as being considerable, here the average scales are 3.88 and 3.84 respectively. Both their managers and colleagues provided some degree of tangible support, but it is relatively low when compared with the other sources of support as



they got the lowest two average scales of 3.33 and 3.08. It can be inferred from these results that the respondents received much more tangible support from those outside the work relationship but who had close personal relationships (such as their family members), while those who worked with them provided less tangible support.

**Table 6.4 Degree of Tangible Support from Various Sources**

<b>Tangible support</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Supervisors/managers</b>	3.08	3.00
<b>Colleagues/co-workers</b>	3.33	3.00
<b>Spouses</b>	4.06	4.00
<b>Parents/parents-in-law</b>	4.13	4.00
<b>Other family members</b>	3.84	4.00
<b>Friends</b>	3.88	4.00

Table 6.5 shows that the respondents received intangible support from all the sources, but to various degrees. Support from the respondents' management was considered much less than that from the other sources as it got the lowest mean of 2.87. Spouses and parents, or parents-in-law have been considered to support them most as both earn the highest mean of 4.14. The level of intangible support from their friends is almost the same as their spouses and parents, with a mean of 4.11. Other family members also gave much support to the respondents. Again, this demonstrates that the respondents received their major support from their family members.

**Table 6.5 Degree of Intangible Support from Various Sources**

<b>Intangible support</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Supervisors/managers</b>	2.87	3.00
<b>Colleagues/co-workers</b>	3.35	3.00
<b>Spouses</b>	4.14	4.00
<b>Parents/parents-in-law</b>	4.14	4.00
<b>Other family members</b>	3.84	4.00
<b>Friends</b>	4.11	4.00

In summary, it was obvious that the respondents received more tangible and intangible support from home than work. Further, the fact that the respondents received considerable support from their main family members can be a primary antecedent to a moderate conflict level that they experienced.

#### **6.1.1.5 The importance of EO policies and organisational practices in balancing work and family needs**

As discussed in Chapter 3, HR policies (including EO policies and family-friendly provisions adopted by organisations) can increase gender equality, improve work efficiency, and assist employees to achieve work-life balance. Thus, it is necessary to look at whether the female colleagues are content with the airline's EO, and family-friendly policies and practices. It is more important to see what specific policies or practices are more acceptable and desirable for Chinese female air staff.

The importance placed on EO policies and practices by female respondents is shown in Table 6.6. On average this table shows that the respondents realised the importance of having EO policies and practices but that there was not a very strong awareness of their importance, given that the mean for all the respondents is less than 4. Initiating and implementing EO policies was regarded as being most important, while setting gender targets and gender ratio auditing (which aims to increase the representation of women at all ranks and ensuring a gender balanced workplace) was considered to be least important.

**Table 6.6 Importance of EO Polices and Practices**

<b>Importance of equal opportunity polices</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>All the respondents</b>	3.7667	3.6667
<b>Equal opportunity policy</b>	4.2857	5.0000
<b>Equal opportunity committee</b>	3.9524	4.0000
<b>Equal opportunity training for</b>	3.9619	4.0000

<b>managers and supervisors</b>		
<b>Gender ratio auditing</b>	3.3905	3.0000
<b>Setting gender target</b>	3.2762	3.0000
<b>Separate sexual harassment complaints procedures</b>	3.7333	4.0000

In terms of what the organisation can do to help them balance work and family, the female respondents considered maternity leave, pay, and childcare subsidies more important than other practices (as shown in Table 6.7) while opportunity to work part-time was seen as least important.

**Table 6.7 Importance of Different Organisational Practices in Balancing Work-Family Needs**

<b>Importance of the following work-family benefits</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Opportunity to work flextime</b>	3.97	4.00
<b>Opportunity to job share</b>	4.02	4.00
<b>Opportunity to work part-time</b>	3.35	3.00
<b>Flexibility to take compassionate leave</b>	3.98	4.00
<b>Flexibility to take extended no pay-leave</b>	3.95	4.00
<b>Maternity leave and pay</b>	4.30	5.00
<b>Paternity leave and pay</b>	4.06	4.00
<b>On-site childcare</b>	4.26	4.00
<b>Childcare subsidies</b>	4.29	5.00
<b>Eldercare counseling</b>	3.99	4.00
<b>Eldercare subsidies</b>	4.06	4.00
<b>Work-family counseling</b>	4.07	4.00
<b>Women-only training courses</b>	4.19	4.00

Generally, the female employees of Phoenix Airlines were not very satisfied with the

EO policies and family friendly practices which they were offered. The mean for all the respondents was less than 3 (as shown in Table 6.8) which implies that on average women were not satisfied with HR policies as a whole, and they were particularly dissatisfied with the EO and family-friendly policies.

**Table 6.8 Level of Satisfaction on EO policies and Family-friendly Provisions**

Level of satisfaction	Mean	Median
All the respondents	2.8143	3.0000
Equal opportunity policies	2.9714	3.0000
Family-friendly benefits	2.6571	3.0000

**6.1.1.6 Correlations between work / family characteristics and work-family conflict**

Table 6.9 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables (see Appendix III). With regard to the variables from the work domain, it is clear that job type is correlated to overall work-family conflict ( $p=0.004$ ), especially job-spouse conflict ( $p=0.003$ ) and job-home/leisure conflict ( $p=0.024$ ), which has been confirmed by comparing means of level of work-family conflict experienced by cabin crew, ground staff, and flight training staff (see Table 6.3). Work schedule inflexibility is positively correlated to job-spouse conflict ( $p=0.021$ ) and job-home/leisure conflict ( $p=0.043$ ). Thus, H2, which states that work schedule inflexibility is positively associated with work-family conflict, is supported. Job demands are positively correlated to overall work-family conflict ( $p=0.025$ ). Hence, H3, which states that job demand is positively associated with work-family conflict, is supported. Length of leave has a negative correlation with job-parent conflict ( $p=0.034$ ); hence, H4, which states that length of leave is negatively associated with work-family conflict, is supported. There is a significantly positive correlation between the organisation's negative views of female staff and all types of work-family conflict ( $p=0.004$ ,  $p=0.007$ ,  $p=0.005$ ). Thus, H5, which states that the organisation's negative views on women are positively associated with work-family conflict, is supported. Generally

speaking, work characteristics are significantly associated with most dimensions of work-family conflict.

Family characteristics (including marital status, number of children, age of children, number of elders cared, and domestic work time) were found to have little association with any type of work-family conflict with all the correlations having a p-value of more than 0.05. That means H6, which states that responsibilities for childcare, eldercare, and housework are positively associated with work-family conflict, is not supported. In other words, responsibilities for childcare, eldercare, and domestic work do not seem to be a major factor leading to work-family conflict for female air staff. Does this result reflect the reality for female employees in Phoenix Airlines? The interview quotes which follow will reveal more detail. Furthermore, these results are inherently different from those based on samples in other cultural contexts (mainly Western) which have found that age and number of children, and/or eldercare in a family affects work-family conflict significantly (e.g. Aryee, 1992; Bedeian et al., 1988; King & Ling, 2001; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Premeaux et al., 2007; Voydanoff, 1988). There are a number of possible explanations for these differences between China and other cultural contexts, which will be further explored in Chapters VII and VIII.

### **6.1.2 Main stage: interviews**

As previously discussed, it is often better to combine a questionnaire approach with other methods. Therefore, following the questionnaire I conducted a series of in-depth follow up interviews. The descriptive statistics and correlation analysis have provided initial findings of the experience of work-family conflict by female air staff, these initial results were further examined and compared with in-depth interviews. More importantly, during the interviews I discovered some new insights and uncovered the attitudes of management towards the female employees and their career development. The interview stage consisted of two steps: the first step involved face-to-face semi-structured and in-depth interviews with female colleagues, and the second step

involved face-to-face interviews with the management of Phoenix Airlines.

### 6.1.2.1 Step 1: Female staff interviews

Under the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with sixteen female staff from the three sections who had responded to the questionnaire survey (see Table 6.10). The semi-structured interviews, which used broad topic areas, stimulated in-depth conversations. The interview questions were grounded on the interviewees perceptions of work-family conflict, its impact on their career development, and their experiences of work and family support. They were prompted by questions, such as: ‘Who in your home has the biggest responsibility for domestic work, childcare, and/or eldercare?’; ‘Can you tell me about your experience of balancing work-family demands?’; and, ‘Do you think balancing work-family demands will limit your opportunities to advance in your work? And, are there any other factors in the pursuit of your career development that will be in the way?’ All sixteen of the staff who were interviewed were aged between 20 and 35 and were full-time workers; nine were married and eight had children; half of them belonged to cabin crew, seven were ground staff and one was employed in flight training. The majority of the interviewees had no more than 10 years work experience, the minimum was one year experience and the maximum was 11 years. Half of them followed 8 to 5 conventional working hours and the other half mainly worked shifts; four of them were front-line managers and the rest were non-management staff members. The detailed interview quotations and associated analysis are presented below.

**Table 6.10 Brief Interviewee Profile**

Interviewee (Pseudo name)	Job Role		
	Flight Attendant	Ground Staff	Back Office Staff
Yan		√	
Yao		√	
Jing	√		
Lucy			√ Flight Training

			Management Dept
Lei	√		
Qiu	√		
Jane	√		
Hua		√	
Rui	√		
Jennifer		√	
Xu	√		
Elva		√	
Hong		√	
Xiang	√		
Yuan	√		
Vivian		√	

### *Family responsibilities*

Of the nine married respondents, only three claimed they were mainly responsible for housework and three hired cleaners regularly. None of them mentioned that their husbands did any housework. All of the seven respondents who were single reported that they did little housework, or that their parents did the chores in cases where they lived with their parents. All eight married interviewees with children said that their parents/parents-in-law, or relatives were looking after their children. Only one reported that her husband did the childcare together with her parents and herself. None of them indicated that they cared for the elderly.

It is apparent that grandparents' input is the most frequent childcare arrangement. Chinese families have a tradition that parents or parents-in-law look after their grandchildren voluntarily, which reduces the outstanding burden for their children who have to do full-time work. For example:

My parents look after my baby when I work, which puts my mind at rest. (Yuan)

Another phenomenon is that an increasing number of dual-income households in China employ domestic help, including some of the interviewees in this study. Domestic helpers do all kinds of house chores from cleaning to ironing, which can relieve some of the pressures of balancing a working and a home life.

My parents are looking after my child and a cleaner comes to do housework regularly. I don't want to engage my parents too much, so with a domestic helper they are freed from doing chores and can focus on childcare. (Jing)

These interview responses on family responsibilities are similar to those gathered from the questionnaire survey.

#### *Degree of work-family conflict*

Of the sixteen interviewees, ten reported that they had encountered or were experiencing work-family conflict to various degrees (split equally between the cabin crew and the ground staff). Eight of the ten interviewees were married and seven had children.

Seven interviewees measured their level of work-family conflict described work-family conflict as either 'intense' or 'very intense', five are or were flight attendants. Only one member of the ground staff said that she had suffered an intense conflict since she undertook this job, this woman worked in the flight training department and reported that she had experienced intense conflict when she was working in the air-transport control-center. Three interviewees rated work-family conflict as either 'mild' or 'a little', all three were engaged in ground service work. Six interviewees claimed that they had never experienced any conflict, five of whom were single. Only one of the eight interviewees who were married with a child thought she had little work-family conflict experience.

It can be concluded from this that both flight attendants and ground staff have experienced some degree of work-family conflict, but the former have encountered higher levels of conflict than the latter. Married women with children experienced



more work-family conflict than single ones. These interview results were very similar to the results from the questionnaire survey.

### *Experience of work-family conflict*

The interviewees were invited to talk about their own experience of balancing their work and family needs, and confronting the dual role conflict (if any). Their experience of work-family conflict varied, but such conflict mainly derived from three sources.

The first, and foremost, cause of work-family conflict was irregular and tight work schedules, which was deeply experienced and realised by those who were working or used to work as cabin crew, such as Lei and Jing, who encountered outstanding job-spouse and job-parent conflicts:

My husband is a policeman and busy with his work. Sometimes I have to work over 40 hours per week and only have one day (at most two days) off per week. To me, there is an intense work-family conflict. I wish I could spend more time with my husband and child, but I find it difficult to take vacations. We are entitled to enjoy 21 days' leave per year, but actually I have never been able to spend 21 days on vacation because of the tight schedule of my work. (Lei)

I once spent 14 days out of the city because of my work need. The Spring Festival is the time when families get reunion, but it is our busiest time and we can hardly meet our family members. Furthermore, my husband is a pilot. It is a pity that we seldom work on the same flight. That means we can not often meet each other and communicate face-to-face, which results in a very intense work-family conflict. (Jing)

Lucy was not a flight attendant, but she also experienced intense work-family conflict, particularly job-parent conflict:

In the past, I worked in the air transport control centre and often had night shifts. My husband was even busier with his work on weekends and holidays, which resulted in a very intense work-family conflict. The main problem is that my timetable was opposite to my son's. When I was working, he was home. When I was home, he was sleeping. (Lucy)

The second source of worries and complaints comes from their family members. Lucy said that her parents were very concerned about her health because night shifts exhausted her and she often looked pale. Moreover, her son was dissatisfied with her because he could hardly have a chance to talk to her about his schooling. Despite the better pay, Lucy decided to change from working night shifts in the air-transport control-centre to a job in the flight training section which had a conventional 8 to 5 work pattern.

Yao made a similar decision. She used to be a flight attendant, but due to her family's strong suggestions she changed her job and became a member of ground service staff. She reflected,

When the flights I served were delayed because of the bad weather or I had to wait for an unusually long time in the other city, my parents began to worry about me. They couldn't fall asleep until I went back home. I felt guilty because I disturbed them a lot. My husband (he was my boyfriend at that time) complained that he could only meet me four or five times per month. (Yao)

Thirdly, pressure from women's own career expectations had increased their experience of work-family conflict. Hua was in charge of administration work in the ground-service section. Her work did not involve shifts, but she still encountered much work-family conflict, particularly job-spouse conflict because,

I often throw myself into my work and aim high in my career development. My husband has complained a lot, which has produced my mental distress and caused some conflict in my family life. (Hua)

Rui was a responsible and capable chief attendant. Very frankly, she said she was a perfectionist and intended to arrange everything well in her work. However, the job role of chief attendant was not that easy and she often struggled. She elaborated:

Since I became a chief attendant, the pressure from my work has increased. I have to manage about 100 flight attendants in my team. My mobile phone must be switched on at any time. If there is any emergency, I must cope with it right away no matter where I

am and when it is. In cases where things don't run well at work I feel frustrated and even lose my temper at home, which influences my family life. (Rui)

Note that those interviewees whose husbands/boyfriends are pilots or air policemen all experienced considerable job-spouse and job-parent conflicts, and the majority related these to spending less or little time with their partners or children. It can be concluded from this that a tight and irregular work schedule directly leads to a lack of family time and a difficulty in taking vacations. This was the single most important source of the work-family conflict which female airline staff experienced in China.

More than 60% of the respondents of the questionnaire survey, by selecting 4 or above, showed their agreement with statements like: 'My job keeps me from spending time with my spouse'; 'My working hours interfere with the amount of time I spend with my child(ren)'; 'The amount of time I spend working interferes with how much free time I have'; and, 'Problems at work follow me home and disrupt my family life and leisure.' This indicates that these respondents found it difficult to fit both work and family into their daily life. Thus, the tested hypotheses that both the non-conventional work schedule and job demands are closely related to work-family conflict are further verified.

A couple of interviewees who rated their work-family conflict as 'mild' or 'a little' attributed this to the support of their families as one of them put it:

Generally, I only encounter mild work-family conflict because of the effective help and support from my parents who take care of my child. (Yuan)

This result is almost identical to the initial finding that in modern China the family remains the biggest support provider which moderates work-family conflict. Jennifer was the only interviewee who stressed the importance of managerial support as a reason for her low level of work-family conflict. This low reported level of support from management is not entirely surprising as managerial support was rated as the lowest result in the questionnaire findings.

### *Causes of little work-family conflict*

Six of the interviewees reported little or no experience of work-family conflict. This can be attributed to their single status and support from their families. For example:

So far I have experienced little work-family conflict. A single woman's life is much easier, I think. (Elva)

My parents and parents-in-law are looking after my baby and a domestic helper comes to clean my apartment regularly. Besides, my husband supports my work. Therefore, I haven't found it hard to balance my work and my family responsibilities. (Hong)

Again, family support is seen as very helpful when balancing their two roles, a finding that supports the questionnaire findings. Those who are single and have no boyfriend suffer little conflict, whatever their job type.

It is also interesting to know that many of the interviewees predicted that they would probably become more family-orientated and experience some work-family conflict when they got married and had a baby. Xu, for example, encountered little work-family conflict even though she was cabin crew, however, she assumed that she would experience more conflict when she married and had children.

### *Outcomes of work-family conflict*

Having talked about their experiences of work-family conflict, the interviewees were asked to identify the implications of such conflict. Such work-family conflict brought about negative results, but in various forms. Generally, their responses fall into three categories: negative feelings (guilt, upset etc.); negative influences on relationships with spouses; and reluctant changes to work or career expectations.

Rui was struggling very much and easily felt tired these days. She explained she was in a dilemma:

On the one hand, I want to stay home and have a long and good rest before I give birth. On the other hand, I think I have to continue to work for the future development. If I ask for leave at this moment, it will be difficult for me to be promoted since my

performance rate won't be high enough. (Rui)

Jing felt very guilty of spending insufficient time with her child because she thought a mother should take good care of her child. Even so, Jing continued her cabin crew job because her parents helped her with childcare. Yao, however, was not as lucky as Jing. She almost split up with her husband because her job in the cabin crew meant that she was unable to undertake much domestic work. She shrugged her shoulders, and said, "I finally compromised and joined the ground staff, although I enjoyed being a flight attendant."

Like Yao, several other female colleagues also changed their attitudes toward their jobs and even altered their career paths in response to this conflict. For example:

I think I have made a big change after I got married. I used to be very much devoted to my work, but since I had a baby, I have been family-oriented and it is hard for me to work wholeheartedly. (Lei)

I gave up a good chance of job promotion because that job involved relocation. If I accepted, I had to move to Beijing! (Hua)

As a mother, I had better feed and educate my son in person, which is beneficial to his future. Consequently, I switched to my current post and now I don't need to work at night any more. I have sufficient time to stay with my son. (Lucy)

It is notable that the women made adjustments to their work because this dual role conflict influenced wife-mother job satisfaction. Several finally changed their jobs after experiencing intense work-family conflict, the rest have not made such a big decision but have started to think about making possible future changes.

### *Career ambitions*

When the interviewees were encouraged to talk about their long-term career goals, some of them stated that they were ambitious and wouldn't give up their career for family responsibilities:

I enjoy working and I think I won't quit job for the sake of my family... but I haven't married, so I have little experience of balancing work and personal life. (Xiang)

The rest, however, were not as confident and optimistic. Yuan directly described herself as 'not ambitious':

When my work and my family needs are incompatible, I will consider more about my family. If I'm promoted at the cost of family responsibilities, I will definitely give it up. I need to take good care of and educate my child.

Jane had a similar idea. She was satisfied with the status quo, although she hoped to be promoted one more level, to chief attendant, which is her long-term goal. However, she did not worry much about the promotion if she failed. Jing was a chief attendant, but she seemed fed up with being a leader and did not think it necessary to get further promotion:

I will give up any job promotion at the cost of family responsibilities... and I think I will have a tendency to go back to my family life in the long run.

Vivian's expectations of her future career were high when she entered Phoenix Airlines, however, she was now very disappointed because:

Generally, I don't think I have made much progress in my career. My work is just like a routine and I have not learned anything valuable and useful from it. Instead, I feel I'm lagging behind. I'm losing confidence.

Lucy was in a similar situation. She felt aimless. She laughed as she said that the only thing she seemed to do in her daily life was trying to balance work and family needs, which she said has influenced her work efficiency to some extent. Qiu was undecided about her future career path, so she adopted a 'wait and see' policy. She said, "I have not decided what I'm going to do in future. I will cross that bridge when I come to it."

Over the course of my interviews with these women in Phoenix Airlines, the one

impression I received was that most of them were not motivated by their jobs and their career ambitions were still held back. Some seemed to derive satisfaction from their role as homemakers and, therefore, placed less emphasis on job promotion. However, there was no simple common reason to explain why they were less ambitious or de-motivated. There are, however, a number of different factors which negatively affected their career ambitions, these will be explored below.

#### *Factors limiting career opportunities and advancement*

These interview quotes clearly indicate that many of the interviewees thought balancing work and family needs would limit their career development because they agreed that 'family is the most important' and described themselves as 'family-oriented'. Only three expressed the view that the family was not a problem and that they could balance both roles well.

Nevertheless, work-family conflict is not the only factor which affects these women and there are some other factors which were found to affect career ambitions. One significant factor cited or implied by more than half of interviewees as influencing their career aspirations is the male-dominated environment in Phoenix Airlines. The majority of ground staff perceived a bias in favour of men or single women in terms of recruitment and promotion.

Yuan felt that generally the company hired more men than women. Both Vivian and Elva felt that the company paid more attention to male employees, while it offered fewer opportunities to female employees due to its management system and corporate culture (which was directly described as 'male-dominated' by Hua). Hong also sensed that married women like her were seen to be only suitable to do administration related work in the company. This was further illustrated by Jennifer:

But the more important tasks are usually given to males or single females. It is true that women have fewer opportunities to develop because the nature of our job. Most senior managers are men with a science or engineering related background...the overall situation is male-dominated.

Lucy agreed that married women were less valued in the company, but she had a different explanation:

Married women with children always put family the first, so we are easily distracted by family issues.

Although a couple of flight attendants also mentioned that there were fewer chances for cabin crew to be promoted, they did not seem to link this to the male-dominated corporate culture, as Qiu explained, “the competition for job promotion is very intense due to the large number of flight attendants.”

Training, as well as long-term development plans for individuals, were also important issues which were mentioned by some of the interviewees, who complained that the company failed to offer them adequate training courses or develop long-term plans for individuals. Vivian personally always sought to attend as many training programmes as possible to learn new things and improve her job-related skills, but she gradually realised that there were fewer chances for training available to the ground staff. She gave an example to illustrate her point.

I once applied for one training course, but my application was rejected. I intended to change the job, but I was not allowed because my manager said nobody could replace me to do the job. So far I cannot see that there is any individual long-term development plan for us, although we were told the company would do this for us at the beginning of my career in the company.

Elva admitted that the company had provided some training courses, but she stressed:

There are many more short-term training programmes than long-term. It is necessary for the company to scheme more practical long-term plans for employees.

Both Hong and Hua pointed out this problem and expressed their wish that the company would provide more useful and job-related training programmes so that they could improve their working practices and so benefit their long-term career



development and increase their promotion opportunities.

Some women also reported problems with the rigid leave system:

If I ask for leave, I will lose some marks, which may not only stop me to progress to the higher level but also degrade me. (Jing)

A couple of the interviewees also felt that an outmoded view on women was held by their husbands or families and that this served as an obstacle to the realisation of their personal career goals:

Moreover, he [my husband] has a very traditional family and his parents suggested for me to give up stewarding because they thought that my job involved contacting lots of men! My husband held a traditional view that 'Men are breadwinners and women are homemakers.' He persuaded me to stop being a flight attendant. (Yao)

Only Yuan thought that an individual's capability could affect one's career progress. She admitted,

Besides, I'm not capable enough, which is a factor which stands in the way of my career development.

In summary, apart from balancing work and family needs it was found that the corporate informal culture, the training schemes, the leave system, and traditional views of women were also primary sources of limited career opportunities and progress for the women who were interviewed in Phoenix Airlines. In particular, the masculine culture in Phoenix Airlines which was perceived by the interviewees was closely linked to the organisation's negative views on women, which was positively associated with women's work-family conflict based on the correlation analysis. It can be inferred that this informal but influential company culture has not only contributed to work-family conflict which was experienced by some women but has also meant that they modified and moderated their career aspirations.

It was also notable that the ground staff seemed much more sensitive to the corporate culture than those who are flight attendants. Most of the ground staff had a greater feeling of the male-dominated culture in the company, which implies that the ground service department was built upon a typical masculine power structure given that all the senior managers and the majority of middle managers in this department were male (this will be further discussed in Chapter VII). Only the ground staff pointed out that training was an issue while none of the flight attendants mentioned it as a problem. This is partly due to the difference between their jobs. Flight attendant training takes place on the first day of their job and continues throughout their career. Flight attendants must be well-trained in all aspects (including understanding emergency procedures and handling any situation calmly) as they are responsible for the lives of dozens of passengers. Meanwhile, ground staff are also provided with job-related training programmes, but training for them is neither as comprehensive or frequent as that for flight attendants. Ground staff members are responsible for various administrative, but still important, work (such as handling performance appraisals for cabin crew) which needs more professional and complex training courses. However, it is obvious that they were not offered sufficient training to help them enhance their job skills and their long-term career development.

#### *Perceptions of the company's HRM policies and practices*

Most of the interviewees described the HRM system as 'fine' or 'okay'. However, Vivian revealed evident disappointment towards the company:

Compared with the other companies where my college mates work, I don't think the benefits our company offers us are good enough. Our salaries are not high.

In terms of an EO policy, seven of the interviewees claimed that the company carried out their EO policy by offering both males and females equal opportunities in recruitment and promotion while four reported that job promotion depends on one's capability or competency. For example:

The company has implemented a 'backup cadres' scheme in order to select talents. All the candidates have to sit in one comprehensive exam and those who get high marks will be approved. All in all, if one has abilities, he/she can be promoted. (Rui)

Exams are often seen as objective and scientific, and, more importantly, gender neutral. They are therefore seen to be an ideal way to select real talent no matter what gender the candidates are. Nevertheless, at least five interviewees felt that the company prefers men over women and they perceived that women were given fewer opportunities. This bias was considered to be a major factor which limited women's career aspirations and progress. Some women called for a fair chance:

I hope the senior management can select and promote more female employees as long as they are as capable as their male counterparts. (Hong)

Interestingly, some of the interviewees showed 'self-knowledge' as to why female colleagues in general and married women in particular, were less valued:

At the beginning, I did not understand why the company paid more attention to male staff. However, I got to know it after I had a baby. When women have children, they can hardly concentrate on their work fully. (Hua)

This self-knowledge can also be traced from one questionnaire finding which showed that more than half of the respondents perceived that 'Childcare responsibility significantly reduces women's opportunities at work' in the company. But Yao was an exception. She insisted that women were given equal chances with regard to selection and promotion, because: "Both the chief attendants and deputy director of the cabin crew department are female." It is true that lots of supervisors in cabin crew are women because the majority of employees in this section are female, but it also implies that the vertically gendered occupational segregation still exists and that there is a 'glass ceiling' between the junior and middle management levels.

When asked about family-friendly policies or relevant provisions for women which were adopted by the company, six interviewees reported that there were no special policies for female employees, while most of the interviewees agreed that the company cared for them. For example:

Its treatment towards the female employees is not bad. For example, we've got a half-day leave on International Women's Day and we're paid extra on that day. We've also got one-day leave on our period. (Yuan)

The company has done many good things for women, such as finding proper kindergartens and schools for our children, establishing links with Obstetric and Gynecology Hospital, contacting a few gyms for us to keep fit, and encouraging us to carry on further education. (Hua)

Overall, the company's HRM system was perceived as acceptable. However, while management has taken some measures to support female employees which have greatly been appreciated by them it is apparent that the company tends to care more about women's health and family than their career development. Moreover, some interviewees revealed that the family-friendly policies offered by the company are limited in scope and that there are inadequate formal and written preferential policies. Lei pointed out the problem of implementation of those policies. She explained,

However, it is easier said than done. So far it has not been implemented in an all-round way. In general, the company has worked out some positive policies for women, but they need fulfilling in a proper way. (Lei)

Jane and Jing were cabin crew, so they were often required to meet high job demands within schedules, which sometimes exhausted them. They wished the company did not put too much pressure on flight attendants, and suggested the company to consider humanising some policies and pay more attention to female needs, especially for women who have special physical requirements. Having experienced difficulties in feeding a baby, Jing and Hong wished that the leave for women who are lactating could be extended. Jennifer and Lucy thought it necessary to

provide on-site childcare facilities (such as a nursery or kindergarten) so as to help working mothers who are either breastfeeding or who wish to pay a short visit to their children. In addition, a couple of women whose partners were pilots or air policemen called for a special family-friendly policy to fit into their situation:

I hope the company can take our situation into consideration and work out a family-friendly policy for a couple who both work on planes so that we can start and finish shifts at the same time. (Qiu)

The suggestions of the women who were interviewed for this research project with regard to the company's family-friendly policies mainly focused on how to better cope with their needs as a woman and as a parent. This is almost identical to the questionnaire findings on the significance of various organisational practices in balancing work and family needs, where the women rated maternity leave and pay as of the most importance, followed by childcare subsidies, on-site childcare, and work-family counseling services.

### *Concluding comments*

The interviews with the sample of women in Phoenix Airlines suggested that work-family conflict existed and that over half experienced tensions between their working and family life. In particular, job-spouse and job-parent conflicts tended to be outstanding. Among the three job types, flight attendants encountered the highest degree of conflict. The majority of married women with children suffered work-family conflict, although the responsibility of childcare was mainly undertaken by their parents or hired babysitters and they did not have the burden of eldercare. These women spent much less time dealing with housework due to the popularity of domestic cleaners and parental involvement, but it is these women who were still responsible for arranging domestic issues. The interview quotes set out above demonstrate that the work-family conflict mainly resulted from three aspects: irregular and tight work schedules; worries and complaints from their family

members; and pressure from their own career expectations. However, those who were single and/or who received sufficient support from their families had significantly reduced or diminished conflict between work and home. The work-family conflict in existence generated three major outcomes: negative feelings; negative influence on relationships with spouses; and reluctant changes to work or career expectations. I noted during the interviews that most of the women were not ambitious or motivated. Their career aspirations were hindered by several factors, including balancing work and family needs, the male-dominated corporate culture, the lack of long-term training and clear career plans, the rigid leave system, and the old-fashioned views of some of the women themselves. It is apparent that these factors had a greater impact on the ground staff. The company's HRM system was generally acceptable to the interviewees, but the implementation and effectiveness of various HR policies and practices were questioned. These women believed that the company paid attention to women's health and family, but not their career development. Moreover, the family-friendly policies were seen as limited in scope, and they thought that these should be improved by extending lactation leave for women with infants and providing on-site childcare facilities to enable them to better cope with their needs as a woman and a parent.

#### **6.1.2.2 Step 2: management interviews**

In order to further explore female employees' experience of work-family conflict and to evaluate whether their concerns were recognised by the company, I interviewed several members of top and middle management, including: Mr. Wang, Deputy Director of Phoenix Airlines; Mr. Zhang, General Manager of the Cabin Service and Ground Handling Department; Mr. Chen, Vice General Manager of HR Department; and, Ms Wang, Manager of Social Security and Benefits for Employees. Sample questions included: 'Have you been aware that female employees have difficulties in dealing with work and family responsibilities?' and 'Has the organisation taken any steps to support females to resolve the pressure and difficulties of undertaking

different roles? If so, what are they?' More importantly, I took this opportunity to explore their attitudes towards female employees and their career opportunities.

### *Female employees' experience of work-family conflict*

Having been in charge of both cabin service and ground service for more than ten years, Mr. Zhang has been very closely acquainted with the conditions of his female subordinates. He made it clear that they experienced different levels of work-family conflict.

Generally, single female employees seldom experience work-family conflict. Nevertheless, girls with boyfriends, or married women with or without children are more likely to experience it. If a female flight attendant's husband is a pilot, both of them encounter more work-family conflict. We often call it a 'dual-flying family'.

This perception bears out the findings from both the questionnaire and the interviews with the female employees. He then attributed their experience of work-family conflict to the significant pressure of work and further explained that it was the nature of their work (e.g. emotional labour), the company's management system, and the CAAC's policies that brought this pressure to bear on them.

I feel that they have had more pressure than their counterpart in other airlines, which has resulted from three factors...Both cabin service and ground service are actually emotional labour. They are front-line staff... must be devoted, patient, responsive, friendly and smiling all the time...Our company always adheres to the rule that customers are up-most and emphasises that each member of our staff must deliver high quality services to customers. Comments from customers are directly linked with their performance assessment... aiming to build a perfect image of the airline industry and create a harmonious atmosphere for passengers, CAAC calls for all air service staff who must try every means to cater to customers as they are increasingly demanding.

In terms of the management system, Mr. Wang, as the second head of the company, shared Zhang's ideas:

Phoenix Airlines is famous for its corporate culture, which features a modern but strict

management system. We are proud that the case of Phoenix Airlines has been seen as an excellent example and was used in the MBA programs of Chinese business schools. Referring to the advanced Western management practices and our own characteristics, we have worked out more than 1,000 regulations and rules which are scientific and professional ...each employee has to attend the annual examination related to their jobs and they will lose the chance of job promotion if they fail... the purpose of the strict management system is to maintain our excellent reputation and quality service brand.

Heavy job demands leading to high work pressure were again highlighted as major determinants to work-family conflict.

#### *Support for female employees' work and family*

All of the managers interviewed claimed that they had taken sufficient measures to aid female employees to deal with their work and family needs. Mr. Zhang was confident that the company had launched some preferential policies for women, especially for dual-flying families and women with children. He gave some examples to illustrate his point:

We have tried to help a couple who are a flight attendant (wife) and a pilot (husband) work on same flights so that they can take the chance to meet and communicate with each other, and finish work at the same time. If a female flight attendant has a child who is no more than 2 years old, she does not need to stay over out of the city. Flight attendants are not allowed to steward on board consecutively for six days. If they steward on planes overtime, they will be compensated. Recently, aiming to lead all of the employees to a healthy brand-new life, we've worked out a new concept – compulsory leave. The company does not encourage staff to work overtime.

Mr. Chen confirmed the implementation of compulsory leave, which was an unwritten rule in Phoenix Airlines that aimed to discourage employees from working overtime. According to Chen, the company cared for female health and safety and tried not to arrange night duty for them (especially on public holidays, when they mainly arranged for men to be on duty). He mentioned that flight attendants were paid more attention:



We are more concerned about our flight attendants because the nature of their work means that they have to face more difficulties and pressure, so they are entitled to enjoy more benefits. For example, flight attendants can take maternity leave from the day they are pregnant until they finish lactation. For other female employees, apart from the 4-month leave regulated by the state, we allow them to extend their maternity leave if they do not feel well during the period of pregnancy. In cases where the mother-to-be is over 28 years old or she has had a cesarean operation, she has the right to increase her maternity leave to some extent.

Being responsible for social security and benefits for employees, Ms Wang was very familiar with both the state laws and participated in designing some of the company policies for female colleagues. Apart from the flexible implementation of the state policies and laws such as the Labour Contract Law, National Family Planning Policy, and Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, she explained, the company also worked out some preferential terms for its staff (especially for female flight attendants). During the period of pregnancy, the female employees were freed from night shifts or overtime work. During the 4-month maternity leave the flight attendants were paid full salaries. If they extended the leave, which was regarded as sick leave, they were still paid basic salaries and standing salaries (50 RMB/1 year of work experience), which was actually beyond the state policy. She stressed the uniqueness of such a preferential policy for women and also compared this with other Airlines.

As far as I know, the flight attendants of X Airlines in Hong Kong are paid nothing when they take maternity leave. Besides, for the convenience of our female employees, we allow them to take maternity leave and lactation leave (34 days) together, while according to the relevant state policy, female workers can only take lactation leave separate from their maternity leave. Other airlines do not have such a preferential policy for women.

Having described the company's management system as modernised, professional, and rigorous, Mr. Wang, however, mentioned that the company did consider women's needs, so it was not as strict with them as with male employees. He could hardly understand why some females still felt the company gave them a tough time:

Honestly, we treat female staff quite well and make some rules less strict for them... In terms of solutions to work pressure, we have organised seminars and invited psychological professors or doctors to explain how to cope with pressure.

Some of the preferential policies and treatment (such as extended maternity leave and free physical examinations) have been confirmed by the female interviewees. It is possible that the flight attendants of Phoenix Airlines enjoyed more benefits than their counterparts in Hong Kong; however, the questionnaire results show that the managerial support was considered least among the various sources of support. It is also doubtful if the measures for supporting dual-flying families have been implemented effectively as some of the flight attendants have implied that problems persisted. Moreover, it would appear that the 'compulsory leave' offered by the company was not being taken up by employees, given that half of those responding to the questionnaire were entitled to enjoy more than fifteen days leave per year specified in their contracts but less than 20% reported that they actually took this (see Chapter VII).

#### *Job recruitment and promotion for females*

Both Mr. Wang and Mr. Chen stressed that the company was well-known for its equal opportunity policies in terms of recruitment and promotion.

We have provided equal opportunities to both males and females. Any job recruitment and promotion just depends on one's capability and experience. We also pay attention to our selection of talented female employees. For example, over 90% of team leaders and nearly all of chief attendants in the cabin crew section are female. We have more women in the middle management level. (Chen)

Both managers, nonetheless, acknowledged that there were fewer women in non-front line sections and at senior management levels. They explained:

However, inevitably, there is only small percentage of female staff in some departments

such as the department of flight control and safety management. Due to the nature of the work, the majority of our pilots and maintenance engineers are male. That does not mean we intend to ignore females. (Wang)

Both the managers and the female interviewees mentioned that fewer women were represented at senior management levels and that while women were represented at supervisory levels amongst cabin crew, the managers seemed to ignore the fact that there are fewer female leaders in the ground service section (where females still account for a larger percentage of the workforce).

I can sense that the management was proud of what they had achieved with the company's equal opportunity policies and family-friendly practices within the company. However, this contrasts with the less optimistic perceptions expressed by female participants in the questionnaire. Less than 30% of the total questionnaire respondents chose 'satisfactory' or 'very satisfactory' when asked about the company's equal opportunities policies, and less than 20% of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the family-friendly provisions provided by the company.

#### *Support for women's career development*

The interview with Chen indicates that the company has thought about future work arrangements for the flight attendants:

When our flight attendants get older, they usually ask to stop stewarding on planes. We are now considering arranging appropriate job positions within H Group for them. Generally, they can work in the ground services section of Phoenix Airlines or the hotels affiliated to H Group. Some of them are eligible to work as a salesperson in Hainan Airlines. They also can choose occupations out of Hainan Airlines. Anyway, it is the dual-way choice.

Obviously, the flight attendants were given more attention than the female employees in other sections. Furthermore, Mr. Wang's suggestion reveals that the company encourages more commitment from their young female employees.

We also suggest that female employees should get married only after working for 3 years in order to avoid a premature development of work-family conflict. I think it is reasonable for them to concentrate on their work at the early stage of their career. They are in the peak of energy when they are young. (Wang)

In terms of the company's support for women's career development, this also appears to be limited. Although the company has implemented a 'backup cadres' scheme to select talented individuals there was no systematic long-term development plan for female staff, an issue which was raised by some of the female interviewees.

#### *Concluding comments*

It is evident through the interviews with the managers that they were aware of the existence of work-family conflict for female employees and that increasing work pressure and job demands was perceived as a major source of such conflict. They were sure that sufficient measures had been taken to help female employees deal with their work and family needs, and spoke highly of the company's equal opportunity policies and family-friendly practices. This to a large extent contrasts with the findings from both the questionnaires and interviews with their female staff who were neither satisfied with, nor optimistic about, the effectiveness of those policies and managerial support for their career and family needs. The management of Phoenix Airlines seemed to focus on biological differences and health care but not on women's promotion opportunities and career development.

## 6.2 Case 2: Panda Airlines

### 6.2.1 Preliminary stage: questionnaire survey

My second case study was conducted in Panda Airlines (see Chapter 5.3 for the organisational background). A total of 105 self-administrated questionnaires were distributed to female employees in Panda Airlines who came mainly from three sections: cabin crew, ground staff, and back office staff. 92 completed questionnaires were received, a response rate of 88 percent. A small number of the female respondents from Panda Airlines worked as ‘back office staff’, which is a part of the organisation where tasks dedicated to running the company itself take place (e.g., human resources, accounting and finance, and IT).

#### 6.2.1.1 Descriptive statistics

All but 3 female respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey were less than 40 years old, most were in their 20s. More than one third were married, around 64 percent of the married women had children and 65 percent of these had children under 7. The large majority had a college diploma or equivalent, but only 30 percent of held a bachelor’s degree or above. All of the female respondents work full-time. Most of the female respondents were entry level staff and none was in a senior position. The majority had at least 5 years work experience in Panda Airlines, but only 18 percent had worked for the airline for more than 10 years. More personal details of the respondents can be found in Table 6.11 below.

**Table 6.11 Questionnaire Respondent Profile**

Respondents		
	n	percent
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20	4	4.2
20 - 29	69	71.9
30 - 39	20	20.8
40-49	2	2.1
50 or above	1	1.0

<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	58	60.4
Married	36	37.5
Widowed or Divorced	2	2.1
<b>Number of children</b>		
0	73	76
1	23	24
<b>Age of children</b>		
No children	73	76
Under 7	15	15.6
7-15	7	7.3
16 or over still in education	1	1.0
<b>Childcare arrangement (Select as many as apply)</b>		
No children	73	76
Spouse	1	1.0
Nursery/kindergarten	2	2.1
Babysitter	7	7.3
Parents	18	18.8
Others	7	7.3
<b>Number of elders or disabled who need caring</b>		
0	49	51
1	5	5.2
2	17	17.7
3 or above	25	26
<b>Main home responsibility taker</b>		
Me	29	30.2
My spouse	1	1
My apartment sharer	10	10.4
My parents/parents-in-law	37	38.5
We share equally	19	19.8
<b>Weekly hours of house work</b>		
Less than 2	58	60.4
2-5	27	28.1

5-10	9	9.4
More than 10	2	2.1
<b>Educational background</b>		
High school	2	2.1
College diploma	64	66.7
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	28	29.2
Master's degree or equivalent	2	2.1
<b>Job title</b>		
Cabin crew	57	59.4
Ground staff	26	28.3
Back office staff	13	14.1
<b>Job position</b>		
Senior management	0	0
Middle management	7	7.3
Junior management	25	26
Entry-level staff	64	66.7
<b>Work mode</b>		
Full-time	96	100
Part-time	0	0
<b>Years in business</b>		
Less than 1	8	8.3
1-5	54	56.3
5-10	16	16.7
More than 10	18	18.8
<b>Weekly working hours by contract</b>		
Less than 40	53	55.2
40-45	24	25
45-50	6	6.3
Over 50	13	13.5
<b>Actual weekly working hours</b>		
Less than 40	27	28.1
40-45	35	36.5
45-50	12	12.5
More than 50	22	22.9

<b>Formal pattern of work (Select as many as apply)</b>		
Work on conventional hours (from 8 am to 5 pm, etc.)	20	20.8
Work shifts mostly	40	41.7
Work split-shifts mostly	39	40.6
Regularly work in the evening	6	6.3
Regularly work on Saturdays and Sundays	4	4.2
<b>Number of annual leave by contract</b>		
Less than 3	22	22.9
3-8	18	18.8
8-15	40	41.7
More than 15	16	16.7
<b>Number of actual annual leave</b>		
Less than 3	24	25
3-8	29	30.2
8-15	31	32.3
More than 15	12	12.5

### 6.2.1.2 Reliability test

A reliability analysis was used to test whether the scales in the questionnaire survey were reliable. Based on Table 6.12 below, the reliability of the scales is found to be satisfactory as all have alpha coefficients above 0.6 and the majority were above 0.7.

**Table 6.12 Reliability of scales**

<b>Scales</b>	<b>Alpha coefficient</b>
<b>Job demands</b>	0.686
<b>Work-family conflict</b>	0.849
<b>Organisational views on female colleagues</b>	0.721
<b>Tangible support</b>	0.822
<b>Emotional support</b>	0.836
<b>Importance of equal opportunity policies</b>	0.925



<b>Importance of organisational practices in balancing work-family needs</b>	0.919
<b>Satisfaction on equal opportunity policies and family-friendly provisions</b>	0.854

### 6.2.1.3 Level of work-family conflict

The degree of work-family conflict that the female respondents of Panda Airlines experienced can be assessed from averaging a set of 5-point scale questions on 'Your experiences of work-family conflict'. According to Table 6.13 below, the mean for the respondents as a whole is 3.2018 and the median is 3.1700, which indicates that on average the women agreed that they had experienced some degree of work-family conflict.

**Table 6.13 Level of Work-Family Conflict by Marital Status, Job Type and Work Pattern**

<b>Work-family conflict</b>	<b>Mean (Trimmed)</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>all the respondents</b>	3.2018	3.1700
<b>Single females</b>	3.0920	3.0500
<b>Married females</b>	3.2733	3.2500
<b>Widowed or Divorced females</b>	3.2000	3.2000
<b>Cabin crew</b>	3.3190	3.2500
<b>Ground staff</b>	3.0769	3.1250
<b>Back-office staff</b>	2.6250	2.6250
<b>Those working on set office hours</b>	2.8257	3.0000
<b>Those working on shifts (including split-shifts)</b>	3.3479	3.3150

Table 6.13 shows similar findings to those of Phoenix Airlines: the married women in Panda Airlines encountered more work-family conflict than single, and flight attendants experienced a considerably higher level of conflict than ground and

back-office staff.

It is notable that on average, women in Panda Airlines experienced a higher level of role conflict than their counterparts in Phoenix Airlines. This finding is opposite to my initial expectation that females in Panda Airlines would experience much less conflict (at least less than that in Phoenix Airlines) because the area of China where Panda Airlines is located is well-known for its leisure culture and notably relaxed and easy-going lifestyle, which made me assume that employees in local organisations would not experience an evident work-family tension. This unexpected result may be due to recent organisational changes and the women’s own perceptions of how much conflict they have suffered. Detailed reasons for this issue were explored through interviews with both female employees and management, and a deeper analysis will be made when a comparison will be made between the three cases in Chapter VII.

**6.2.1.4 Degree of support from different sources**

Table 6.14 shows that the respondents received varying degrees of tangible support from six types of people, including: management, colleagues, spouses, parents/parents-in-law and other family members, and friends. The respondents’ parents or parents-in-law were considered to provide the most support as they earned the highest mean of 4.25. With a mean of 3.94 it can be seen that both their spouses and other family members also offered considerable support, followed closely by their friends with an average scale of 3.86. Both their managers and colleagues provided some degree of tangible support, but with average scores of 3.41 and 3.59 respectively this is relatively low when compared with other sources of support. The respondents received much more tangible support from those who they were close to outside of the workplace (e.g., family members), while those they work with provided far less tangible support.

**Table 6.14 Degree of Tangible Support from Various Sources**

Tangible support	Mean	Median
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<b>Supervisors/managers</b>	3.4100	3.0000
<b>Colleagues/co-workers</b>	3.5900	3.0000
<b>Spouses</b>	3.9400	4.0000
<b>Parents/parents-in-law</b>	4.2500	5.0000
<b>Other family members</b>	3.9400	4.0000
<b>Friends</b>	3.8600	4.0000

Table 6.15 shows the extent to which the respondents received intangible support from all sources. Once more, with the highest mean of 4.10 support from the respondents' parents or parents-in-law ranks at the top while support from the respondents' management remained as the lowest with a mean of 3.11, support from their colleagues ranked second lowest with a mean of 3.53. Their spouses and friends were considered as the second and the third biggest support providers as they earned a mean of 3.96 and 3.94 respectively. With a mean of 3.86, other family members also gave much support to the respondents. It can be inferred from this that the respondents received more support from their family members than those they work with.

**Table 6.15 Degree of Intangible Support from Various Sources**

<b>Intangible support</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Supervisors/managers</b>	3.1100	3.0000
<b>Colleagues/co-workers</b>	3.5300	3.0000
<b>Spouses</b>	3.9600	4.0000
<b>Parents/parents-in-law</b>	4.1000	4.0000
<b>Other family members</b>	3.8600	4.0000
<b>Friends</b>	3.9400	4.0000

All in all, the respondents have received more tangible and intangible support from home than work; however, when compared with Phoenix Airlines, the female staff of Panda Airlines received more support from the workplace.

**6.2.1.5 Importance of EO policies and organisational practices in balancing work and family needs**

How important EO policies and practices were to female respondents is shown in Table 6.16, which indicates, on average, that the respondents regarded EO policies and practices as important to some degree; however, with an average score of below 4 there seemed to be no strong awareness of the importance of EO. Launching EO policies, sexual harassment complaints procedures, and the EO training programme for management had the highest mean scores, while setting gender targets and gender ratio auditing was viewed as least important.

**Table 6.16 Importance of EO Policies and Practices**

<b>Importance of equal opportunity policies</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>All the respondents</b>	3.7188	3.6667
<b>Equal opportunity policy</b>	3.88	4.00
<b>Equal opportunity committee</b>	3.72	4.00
<b>Equal opportunity training for managers and supervisors</b>	3.83	4.00
<b>Gender ratio auditing</b>	3.45	3.00
<b>Setting gender target</b>	3.57	3.00
<b>Separate sexual harassment complaints procedures</b>	3.86	4.00

In terms of what the organisation can do to help balance work and family life, the female respondents rated maternity/paternity leave and pay, on-site childcare, childcare subsidies, and women-only training courses highly (as shown in Table 6.17) while the opportunity to work part-time was considered to be least important.

**Table 6.17 Importance of Different Organisational Practices in Balancing Work-Family Needs**

<b>Importance of the following work-family benefits</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Opportunity to work flextime</b>	3.71	4.00
<b>Opportunity to job share</b>	3.81	4.00
<b>Opportunity to work part-time</b>	3.06	3.00
<b>Flexibility to take compassionate leave</b>	4.14	4.00
<b>Flexibility to take extended no pay-leave</b>	3.87	4.00
<b>Maternity leave and pay</b>	4.39	5.00
<b>Paternity leave and pay</b>	4.25	5.00
<b>On-site childcare</b>	4.36	5.00
<b>Childcare subsidies</b>	4.28	5.00
<b>Eldercare counseling</b>	4.13	4.00
<b>Eldercare subsidies</b>	4.17	4.00
<b>Work-family counseling</b>	4.10	4.00
<b>Women-only training courses</b>	4.23	5.00

Overall, the female air staff of Panda Airlines were disappointed with the EO policies and family friendly practices which were offered to them. The mean score for all the respondents was less than 3 (as shown in Table 6.18), which implies that on average women were not that satisfied with HR policies as a whole, and were in particular dissatisfied with their family-friendly policies for working women.

**Table 6.18 Level of Satisfaction on EO policies and Family-friendly Provisions**

<b>Level of satisfaction</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>All the respondents</b>	2.9792	3.00
<b>Equal opportunity policies</b>	3.03	3.00
<b>Family-friendly benefits</b>	2.93	3.00

#### **6.2.1.6 Correlations between work/family characteristics and work-family conflict**

The correlation analysis (see Table 6.19, Appendix III) shows that none of the family-related factors (including marital status, age of children, number of children, number of elders cared and domestic work time) are associated with any type of work-family conflict ( $p > 0.05$ ); which means that H6 (which states that responsibilities for childcare, eldercare, and housework are positively associated with work-family conflict) is not supported. This is identical to the findings of Phoenix Airlines and will be further analysed and explored in Chapters VII and VIII.

From the variables of the work domain, it is clear that job type is correlated to overall work-family conflict ( $p = 0.014$ ) and this has been confirmed by comparing means of level of work-family conflict experienced by cabin crew, ground staff, and back-office staff (seen Table 6.12). Work schedule inflexibility was positively correlated to job-spouse conflict ( $p = 0.039$ ). Thus, H2 (which states that work schedule inflexibility is positively associated with work-family conflict) is supported. Job demands were positively correlated to job-spouse conflict ( $p = 0.042$ ). Hence, H3 (which states that job demand is positively associated with work-family conflict) is supported. There was a positive correlation between the organisation's negative views on female staff and job-home/leisure conflict ( $p = 0.031$ ). Thus, H5 (which states that the organisation's negative views on women are positively associated with work-family conflict) is supported. However, length of leave had little association with any type of conflict ( $p > 0.05$ ). Hence, H4 (which states that length of leave is negatively associated with work-family conflict) is not supported. Generally speaking, most of the work characteristics were associated with one or more dimensions of the work-family conflict, while length of leave seems not to be a factor leading to work-family conflict in the case of Panda Airlines. Nevertheless, in the case of Phoenix Airlines, all the job-related factors are related to work-family conflict. By comparing the actual days' leave and that specified in the employees' contracts, it is found that around 77% of respondents of Panda Airlines succeeded in taking the specified annual length of vacation. Moreover, approximately 70% of those

respondents who were entitled to take 15 days' annual leave based on their contract actually made it, whereas this figure is less than 20% in the case of Phoenix Airlines. It can be seen that Phoenix and Panda Airlines differentiate considerably in this regard (this will be further discussed in Chapter VII).

## 6.2.2 Main stage: Interviews

### 6.2.2.1 Step 1: Female staff interviews

Under the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity for the interviewees, I conducted face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews with fourteen female staff from the three sections (see Table 6.20), all of whom had completed the questionnaire survey. The interview questions were the same as those used in the case of Phoenix Airlines. All the female interviewees were aged between 24 and 50 and were full-time workers. Eight were married, six had children and one was pregnant. Seven were cabin crew; four were ground staff and one used to be a ground staff member; three were back office staff and one used to be a ground staff member. Nine interviewees have had more than 10 years work experience and two have stayed with the company for around 20 years. Half of them followed the 8 to 5 conventional working hours and the other half worked mainly on shifts. Two were in middle management positions; five were front-line managers or supervisors; and the rest were entry-level staff. The detailed interview quotations and associated analysis are presented below:

**Table 6.20 Brief Interviewee Profile (Panda Airlines)**

Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Job Role		
	Flight Attendant	Ground Staff	Back Office Staff
Chen		√	
Violet	√		
Yang		√	
Jenny	√		
Juan	√		

Min	√		
Jing			√ HR Dept
Cheng			√ HR Dept
Ke	√		
Tao	√		
Sherly			√ Corporate Culture Dept
Zhang		√	
Shi	√		
Cindy		√	

*Family responsibilities*

Only two claimed that they were mainly responsible for housework while two shared this responsibility with other family members, eight reported that their parents were mainly responsible for housework, and four regularly hired a cleaner to help with house cleaning. None of the women of Panda Airlines mentioned that their husbands assumed any housework. All of the six single respondents reported that they did not have much housework to do or that their parents aided chores because they lived with their parents. The majority of those who had children said their parents were mainly in charge of childcare and only one said that she hired a babysitter to look after her child as her parents were taking care of her brother's child. None indicated that they did eldercare.

Apparently, the respondents' parents have contributed a great deal to both childcare and housework responsibilities, which is similar to the finding from the questionnaire where nearly 80 percent of the females admitted that their parents or parents-in-law were mainly in charge of childcare. As in Phoenix Airlines, it was reported that the Chinese tradition of grandparents voluntarily taking care of their grandchildren has reduced the burden for their children who are in full-time work:

My work has engaged much of my spare time...fortunately, my parents always stay with



me and they not only look after my son but also do housework for me. (Chen)

It is also notable that more households in China are employing domestic help. Domestic labour is particularly cheap in the region where Panda Airlines is located, which has reduced some of the domestic responsibilities for parents who need to do childcare, as in Violet's example:

My parents are mainly responsible for childcare, which is both time and energy consuming. I don't want my parents to do the cleaning themselves, so a cleaner has been hired to tidy up my house once a week.

#### *Degree of work-family conflict*

Of the fourteen interviewees, nine reported that they had encountered or were experiencing work-family conflict to various degrees. Seven were flight attendants and two had been flight attendants in the past. Four of those who had conflicting experiences were single but had boyfriends.

When asked to measure their level of work-family conflict, five interviewees described work-family conflict as either 'intense' or 'considerable', all of whom were married and three also had children. Three of the five are currently flight attendants and the other two admitted that they suffered from work-family conflict when they worked as a flight attendant; four interviewees rated this as either 'mild' or 'a little' and three were flight attendants. Meanwhile, five interviewees (including four married employees) claimed that they experienced little conflict; of whom four are either ground staff or back office staff. Only one married flight attendant, who was pregnant, thought she had little experience of a conflict between work and home.

Many of the interviewees experienced some degree of work-family conflict but it was noticeable that the cabin crew encountered more considerable and higher levels of conflict than the ground and back office staff, a result which is identical to that of the questionnaire survey. Nevertheless, the level of work-family conflict for married females tends to be mixed: on the one hand some married respondents suffered strong work-family conflict while on the other hand others seldom experienced role conflict.

It may be concluded that in this case it is one's job type rather than marital status that directly leads to work-family conflict.

### *Experience of work-family conflict*

The interviewees were invited to talk about their own experience of balancing their work and family needs, and confronting any dual role conflict. Those who experienced work and family tensions indicated that their work-family conflict was mainly caused by three factors: shift work and tight schedules, work pressure, and attitudes of family members. Of these three the shift work system was the most frequently reported. Yang, who had been a flight attendant in the past, had suffered from frequent shift work which resulted in severe job-spouse and job-parent conflicts:

When I was a flight attendant, I had to work on shifts, which indicates my daily schedule was quite different from that of my other family members. As you know the company often accommodates stewardesses at the airport if they work on early flights the very next day. Sometimes I couldn't stay home at night which resulted in lack of communication with my husband and my daughter. Besides, I had to work on weekends and take more shifts on national holidays such as the Spring Festival. So I was unable to take my child to parks or tourist attractions, which upset her a lot. I felt guilty, while stressful. During that period, I sensed that there were many tensions between my working life and my family life.

As a chief attendant, Jenny was even busier and her work schedule was not regular at all. She claimed that she was a multi-functional woman because

I have to lead cabin crew to serve passengers on flights. In addition, I give lectures on health and safety for flight attendants in a certain time slot from Monday to Saturday. As a class advisor, I need to inspect self-learning classes and attendants' dorms in the evening.

What was the worse was that Jenny's husband, who was a pilot and had a very tight work schedule as well, did neither understand nor support her, which gave rise to a strong job-spouse conflict. She stated:

My husband is a pilot in our company. However, we seldom work on a same flight. I seldom complain when he is busy and can not do housework. However, he has got andocentric viewpoints that I should give up the job for childcare and housework because he's not willing to shoulder some family responsibilities. Obviously, he doesn't support me. Especially when I have to steward on flights consecutively, I have to stay over outside, he complains more...

Juan was lucky because her parents supported her a lot, but her family's attitudes toward her job made her struggle. She explained that 'my mother wants me to be a trainer only because she thinks the job of a flight attendant is tiring and unsecured', and 'He (my boyfriend) wishes I were not a flight attendant!' Like Jenny, she also needed to take on several different duties including stewarding, coaching, and lecturing. Min had a similar dilemma. She described how she changed her understanding of being a flight attendant and why she was more and more concerned about the issue of work-family conflict.

Initially, I got the sense of superiority. However, with the increasing pressure from my work and life, the superiority complex has faded away. Because of the irregular shifts, it is not easy to meet with my boyfriend. He understands my situation, but hopes we will have more time to stay together. Honestly, I'm worried whether or not the relationship between us will be able to last longer. You know, I'm 33 years old but still single and I'm eager to have a stable and peaceful marriage life... I have to smile to my passengers even if I feel very frustrated especially after I quarreled with my boyfriend.

Jing was a single girl and working in the HR department. Surprisingly, she said she also encountered such conflict although she had only worked for one year since her graduation. She explained that it was the increasing work pressure that stimulated her to spend more time on working and learning:

My parents would complain if my overtime work is frequent because they don't think it's a good idea for a girl to work so hard which might influences my health and appearance. I often explain to them that I'm still a new entrant and need to learn many new things by doing extra time so that I can catch up with other colleagues.

The interviews revealed that the women's experiences of work-family conflict vary

while at the same time they still share many similarities. For many of the interviewees the most important source of their experienced work-family conflict came from their parents and husbands who have less favourable attitudes towards the job of being a flight attendant, mostly due to the demands on their time which the job requires. Some flight attendants undertook multiple-duties (such as stewarding, coaching, and lecturing) which added to their pressure and workload, and which consequently generated a great deal of tension between their work and family life. There was a new phenomenon which was expressed by the women who worked for Panda Airlines in that they perceived their work as much busier and tighter when placed into the local context. In comparison with their friends they thought that their jobs required them to input more, try harder, and even work in their spare time and this brought about a job-leisure conflict. For example:

My friends were jealous of me when I got this job successfully. But after I described what we usually did as flight attendants, none of them thought it was a pleasant job. Instead, I began to admire them because their work doesn't involve shifts and they've got plenty of personal time. They are doing what are local girls' favorite things: chatting at tea houses or coffee shops and shopping. However, I don't have much time for these.  
(Juan)

Generally, the interview results were in tune with those of the questionnaire survey. For instance, nearly 70% of the respondents were inclined to agree with the statements such as 'The amount of time I spend working interferes with how much free time I have' and 'Problems at work follow me home and disrupt my family life and leisure', while over 60% felt that 'My job keeps me from spending time with my spouse' and 'My working hours interfere with the amount of time I spend with my child(ren)'. This implies that issues emerging from the workplace made it difficult for respondents to fully meet their daily needs (e.g., spending time with their spouses and children, and enjoying their leisure time). Thus, the hypotheses which indicate that both non-conventional work schedules and job demands are highly related to women's work-family conflict in Panda Airlines are further verified.

A couple of the interviewees who rated their work-family conflict as 'mild' or 'a little', attributed this to the support of their family as well as to their age, for example:

Just as other flight attendants, I work on shifts and the working time is irregular. The maximum time for being on duty I've ever had is 18 hours in one day. My husband wishes I could quit the job because he thinks I'm often exhausted after work. Even so, he always supports me emotionally. I haven't experienced any major work-family conflict probably because I don't have a child and I'm still young and energetic. (Tao)

### *Causes of little work-family conflict*

Five of the interviewees reported little or no experience of work-family conflict, this was mainly due to their regular work schedules and support from their families. Sherly was a deputy director of Corporate Culture Department in Panda Airlines and was one of several women who were in a middle management position. She was proud of her high work efficiency, which resulted in a fact that she seldom worked overtime and had plenty of time to accompany her child. She added, "My working time is quite regular from 8 am to 5 pm... so there is little conflict between my work and my family life." Without doubt there is a close correlation between irregular schedules and shifts and the flight attendants experience of work-family conflict. However, this is not always the case. Shi, for example, was an exception and admired by the other women. She told me that she seldom encountered work-family conflict because both her parents and husband support her whole-heartedly.

It can be concluded that family support plays a key role in women's work-life balance. It was notable that managerial support was rarely mentioned, showing that the management seemed to have offered little significant help in this aspect. This result matches the questionnaire finding that support from the workplace was considerably less than that from the family. Regular work schedules also helped to prevent these women from suffering dual role conflict. It is also notable that, as in Phoenix Airlines, some of the interviewees predicted they would experience increased work-family conflict in the future. For example, Ke assumed that,

Probably I will encounter much conflict when I'm married and have a baby in the future.

### *Outcomes of work-family conflict*

Having talked about their experiences of work-family conflict, the interviewees were asked to identify the outcomes of work-family conflict. Based on the following interview quotations, their responses fall into three categories: negative feelings (stress, guilt, upset etc.); reduced family and social time; and reluctant changes on work or career expectations.

The most common feeling for those who found difficult to balance work and family needs is guilt for their family. Violet often felt guilty when she was unable to take on some domestic responsibilities she thought she should have, especially when her child was ill and she could not take her to see a doctor; she added,

My husband supports my work, but sometimes he complains because I can not stay home often and my work schedule conflicts with my child's sleeping time. The job has influenced my personal life and I feel homesick if I have to stay over outside of the city.

Having a dual-flying family, Jenney experienced more intense work-family conflict than other female colleagues; she was often exhausted. Moreover, she felt very guilty because,

I can hardly accompany my child and have little chance to chat with my husband. Gradually, I understand him less and less... I suppose it is very likely for a dual career couples with children to encounter work-family conflict.

Work-family conflict reduced both the time and quality of women's family life, so some had to submit themselves to their circumstances by lowering their career ambitions and switching to another job role that did not involve shifts or irregular schedules but they might not be keen on. A couple of employees had changed their job as a result of work-family conflict; for example, Cheng had been a flight attendant but

she decided to give up the flying job she loved and instead became a clerk in the HR section, she explained:

Being a flight attendant means that you will neither have regular working schedule nor have enough chances to stay home. When my kid was a little baby, I seldom accompanied her as I was often on flights, which didn't enable me to balance my work and family needs. Therefore, I opted for a different job position although I was keen on flying.

Although many had not made such a big decision, but they were aware of the potential job changes which might be needed in future. Tao did not choose to resign her job, but she felt her work sometimes affected her social life, particularly the relationship with her close friends.

I've gradually been growing apart from my previous friends. In the past I met my good friends regularly. But with the increasing stewarding duties during these two years, I can hardly socialize with them. When I'm working, all of my friends are free. When I'm off duty, they are at work. I'm often too tired to go out because I have to work on flights for 4 or 5 days consecutively. It is a shame that we are not able to do what we did before.

### *Career ambitions*

When the interviewees were encouraged to talk about their long-term career goals, only three were confident about their future with clear career goals. For example, Jing was an ambitious and confident woman and she knew clearly what she wanted in the long run even though she has only recently graduated:

I've got a strong interest in my current work and I've learned a lot from it. I feel I'm growing and improving. However, I'm not easily satisfied. You know, I've made out a long-term career development for myself. I aim at the position of HR manager, but it's not easy to attain it. I plan to do a postgraduate course in my spare time.

Most of the interviewees, particularly cabin crew and ground staff, were less ambitious. Some just hoped to switch to another job role at the same level:

Frankly speaking, I've been fed up with being a flight attendant for a long time. Indeed, I prefer to do regular work such as ground service related office work. (Violet)

Some directly described themselves as 'not ambitious' and did not have any long-term career goals, they placed their career in a less important position:

Honestly, I have not got any ambitious career plan. I think to complete my current work on time and enjoy my personal time everyday is important. (Zhang)

My current work is nothing exciting, but it is safe and stable. I'm not an ambitious person and not sure what else I can do because of my limited knowledge and skills. My friends often tell me not to think too much about the future but just enjoy the present! (Cindy)

A couple seemed aimless and had lost confidence in their future development, Min's response was typical:

Now I'm in charge of first-class cabins on flights, which is an appealing job many new flight attendants want because it's decent and better paid. However, I have no idea for how long I will be able to remain in the same job as I do not think it promising. Honestly, I don't know what to do in future, but I wish I could do anything I really enjoy and it couldn't make me that tired. I also hope I will be able to dominate my working time easily.

It can be concluded that women in different job roles have diverse attitudes towards their career development. It is worth noting that the three ambitious interviewees were all back office staff members, which seems to indicate that the back office working environment is more conducive to their career development. The cabin crew seemed to plan to undertake a different job role instead of pursuing long-term career progression in their current job position. Whereas, the ground staff members seemed be content with their present work.

#### *Factors limiting career opportunities and advancement*

While four of the interviewees did not think that balancing work and family roles



would negatively influence their career, believing that they could balance them well, the rest of the women who were interviewed thought that balancing work and family needs would limit their career development. For example, Jenny tried every means to balance the demands of her work and family, but it still negatively impacted on her career to some extent:

I find it hard to work whole-heartedly. In my opinion, my family is the most important. If I fail in leading a happy family life, I will never be able to work well.

Despite only being in her early 20's, Ke had a long-term perspective of her future. She enjoyed her current job and dealt with it quite well because she was young and energetic, but she assumed that balancing work and family responsibilities would be very likely to influence her career aspirations in a negative way:

If my future husband is financially good and calls for my resignation, I will do so. I'm not willing to sacrifice my family life for my job. I don't think I will be able to work well when there is work-family conflict.

Over the course of the interviews it became clear to me that the women of Panda Airlines felt that finding balancing work and family roles would limit their career opportunities and development because they believed that family responsibilities should be mainly undertaken by women and that a well-developed career would necessarily contradict with a happy family life. Nevertheless, these were not the only factors negatively influencing women's career and other influential factors were also identified. One of the most influential factors identified relates to people's ability to learn (e.g., learning language skills). Cheng and Ke reflected on their own situation and explained:

However, I don't have any university degree and I'm not that well-educated, honestly. I think this can be either an obstacle to my career development or a motivation to further study. (Cheng)

Besides, one's comprehensive capability including higher education degrees and language skills will impact on one's career development. My English is poor, which will be an obstacle for me if I hope to work on international flights one day. Therefore, I've managed to learn English in my spare time. (Ke)

Having worked for Panda Airlines for more than 10 years, Yang and Zhang had gradually realized the importance of constant learning in their work, and at the same time felt stressful because of the increasing competition in the labour market.

It is not entirely surprising that many interviewees were concerned about their limited knowledge and skills. The questionnaire survey showed that 66.7% of the respondents only had a college diploma, which is not a symbol of being educated in China where possessing a Bachelor's degree or above is regarded as knowledgeable or well-educated.

A number of interviewees also felt that some traditional views (such as 'men are breadwinners and women are homemakers') which were perpetuated in modern society had lowered women's career expectations. Female employees have to sacrifice more for their family than male employees. In addition, a couple of interviewees stressed that job promotions depended partially on 'guan xi'. In other words, without good personal relationships with superiors, a promotion could not be fully guaranteed (this issue will be further discussed Chapter VII).

In summary, the interviewees raised a number of issues which they felt were primary sources of limited career progression in addition to balancing work and family needs, they were: an individual's ability and capacity to learn, traditional views of women's role in society, and the existence of 'guan xi'.

#### *Perceptions on the company's HRM policies and practices*

Some interviewees spoke highly of the company's HRM system, describing it as 'fine', 'realistic', or 'employee-oriented'. Jing asserted that through dealing with Panda Airlines HR on a daily basis that she was very familiar with their HRM policies and practices, she said that in her opinion:

The HRM system has inclined to be realistic and employee-oriented. Benefits and salaries are more competitive in order to attract more talent to join the company.

Sherly had benefited a lot from the company's HR system and she attributed her success in work to some flexible HR policies and effective practices.

I feel that the HR policies of our company tend to be employee-oriented. Due to the rapid development of the Chinese aviation industry, our company needs to attract more talents, which has in turn has improved HR management strategies.

On the other hand, others illustrated some negative aspects of the company's HRM. Although Jenny rated the HR system as 'okay', she summarised three major problems:

Firstly, there is no clear division between our break time and working time. Secondly, obviously our department (cabin crew) is short of hands, but the need hasn't been met so far. Thirdly, the company seldom gives overtime pay for people who work overtime.

Violet pointed out that the company worked out some inflexible policies or even ruthless rules, which made her colleagues and her uncomfortable. She elaborated,

When we are off duty, we can not go anywhere beyond 50 kilometres. And we have to report to our leaders in advance before we travel. Recently, the company began to allocate some flight attendants and chief attendants to Q City, which is a base of Panda Airlines. Unmarried females have to stay there for one month and married females stay for half a month. But for those who have children, the policy is not appropriate. Most chief attendants including me have married and got children. We feel uneasy of being unable to see our children for such a long time.

Tao had an unpleasant experience because the company adhered to the principle of 'Customer is always right'. Without much investigation, her manager once criticized her and deducted her performance mark when the company received a

complaint about her from a passenger. She was annoyed with the way the company handled this sort of issue:

This will possibly reduce my opportunities of being promoted and then influence my long-term development. What's more, customer is not always right!

Generally, the interviewees acknowledged the HR policies and practices which were implemented in the company, although some unpleasant issues were raised. When asked to what extent equal opportunity practices were applied to the procedures of recruitment and promotion, many of the interviewees said that people's capability, work experience, and performance were highly valued. For example, Jing was always willing to talk about the company's HRM, mostly its bright side:

The process of recruitment and selection is fair and transparent, which depends on one's capability, education and attitudes. We have quite a few female managers in our company.

However, as previously discussed, 'guan xi' was also a determinant. Those who have worked for a long time seemed to be more familiar with this unwritten rule.

In terms of selection and promotion, I think both guan xi and capability are important. If you are very capable but have not established sort of links with superiors, you will not be appreciated seriously. (Peng)

In addition, a few of the women also mentioned a male-dominated phenomenon at the management level, although they did not seem to see it as significant. Chen had noticed that there were more male cadres than female in the company, however, she told me, 'I do not think it unusual. It is due to the attributes and natures of women'. Her explanation implied that the company saw women's feminine attributes as being less suitable for a managerial role.

The male culture which was perceived by the interviewees, although not taken seriously, is actually linked to the organisation's views of female colleagues, which

has been proved to be positively associated with women's work-family conflict (based on the correlation analysis). This infers that the masculine management not only contributed partly to women's work-family conflict but also meant that this glass ceiling was not easy for women to crack in order to secure a managerial position in the organisation.

When talking about the family-friendly policies or relevant provisions for women adopted by the company, most reported that there were no specialised written policies for female employees; just as Cindy said,

I do not think there is any preferential policy for female employees. We work as much as men!

Whereas, many interviewees agreed that the company cared for them and had done something good for them:

The company respects female employees and considers our needs. Each year we are provided with a free gynaecologic examination done by gynaecologists from the first-class hospital in the city. Besides, female employees are often given sanitary articles. (Tao)

Meanwhile, most flight attendants showed stronger concern about the current policies and practices. They pointed out that some policies were not flexible enough and that the company should improve or change them. In particular, forbidding shift swap as well as the rigid leave system upset many flight attendants. The following is a typical example:

There is one thing I hope the company will change. The company doesn't permit attendants to swap shifts, which I think is rather rigid. I wish we could be allowed to exchange our shifts for some emergencies. Besides, the accumulation deduction system is not flexible enough. Our performance mark will be deducted if we ask for leave. (Ke)

Min complained that the company took little consideration on the feminine nature when working on any policies or rules for flight attendants. She gave an example and

made suggestions at this point:

For example, the company has regulated that married females, no matter whether or not they have children, have to be on duty outside of the city for half a month. I don't think it can be endurable. The company should arrange those who have children on fewer flights which require them to stay over in other places or arrange more office work for them. If we are short of hands, the company should recruit new flight attendants.

Some women suggested that the company could provide childcare services and on-site childcare facilities for married employees. Juan said that, 'it will be better if a flexible work schedule can be adopted in our company'. While others suggested the company arrange psychology courses or even psychotherapy to help them release pressure and stress. When being asked if the Woman's Committee of Panda Airlines had helped female colleagues deal with work-family conflict, some interviewees were disappointed at the Committee because it had done few practical things for them. Violet said, 'it is distant from us', she expected the Committee to stick up for the flight attendants.

It can be summarised that Panda Airlines' HRM system as a whole is acceptable and reflects some degree of employee orientation. The EO policy was seen to be implemented in the company, at least on the surface. In terms of selection and promotion, employees' comprehensive capabilities (including qualifications, skills and experience) outweigh other factors, but guan xi is also important. Undoubtedly, the management has taken some measures to support female employees which have been appreciated by them, but the company tends to care more about women's health and family than their career development. Moreover, some of the interviewees revealed that some HR policies and practices (such as disallowing shift swap, allocating stay-over duties for those who have children and paying little for overtime work) have actually given rise to some difficulties in juggling their work and family life. They also said that they felt that the family-friendly policies offered by the company are limited in scope and there are inadequate formal and written preferential policies. Meanwhile, their suggestions with regard to the company's family-friendly

policies mainly focus on how to improve their ability to cope with their needs as a woman and as a parent. This corroborates the questionnaire findings on the significance of various organisational practices in balancing work and family needs. The respondents of the questionnaire rated maternity leave and pay as the most important issue, followed by on-site childcare, childcare subsidies, paternity leave and pay, and work-family counseling.

### *Concluding comments*

An analysis of the data gathered from the interviews with the female staff of Panda Airlines has demonstrated that work-family conflict existed and its degree was even higher than that of Phoenix Airlines. Many of the interviewees experienced a strong imbalance between their working life and family life, and all three types of work-family conflict were perceived and encountered by the individual women. Among the three job types, flight attendants encountered the highest degree of conflict. Unlike Phoenix Airlines, the level of work-family conflict for married females in Panda Airlines tended to be mixed: some married females reported intense work-family conflict (which was intimately associated with their job roles) while the others experienced little conflict (which was largely due to the availability of cheap local domestic labour and their parents' voluntary involvement in childcare). Therefore, in Panda Airlines, job type rather than marital status has been shown to directly lead to work-family conflict. Moreover, the follow-up interviews demonstrated that the work-family conflict originated mainly from three aspects: shift work with long and sometimes unpredictable schedules, high work pressure, and the negative attitudes of family members. However, working conventional schedules and receiving sufficient support from families lessened or even eliminated this conflict. Such work-family conflict generated three major outcomes: negative feelings; reduced family and social time; and reluctant changes to work or career expectations. Such conflict affected their career aspirations negatively, and other factors (including their limited education and learning abilities, old-fashioned views of women, guan xi,

and the gendered corporate culture) also hindered their career progress. The overall impression given is that cabin crew and ground staff were less ambitious and/or motivated than back office staff. The company's HRM system was seen to be generally fine, but the women questioned some policies and practices (especially the rigid leave system and the rule of disallowing shift swap in the company). They appreciated that the company cared for their health and family (such as providing free gynaecologic examinations and organising summer camps for their children) but the family-friendly practices were seen to be insufficient. They suggested improving them by making appropriate schedule arrangements for dual-flying family members and working mothers, providing childcare services, and enhancing interaction with the Women's Committee. However, they barely mentioned that the organisation should help enhance their career development.

#### **6.2.2.2 Step 2: senior and middle management interviews**

Several top and middle managers were interviewed in order to further explore the female employees' experience of work-family conflict and the relevant HR policies and practices which were adopted by the company, they were: Mr. Yong (Vice President, Mr Zai, Director of Cabin Crew Training Center) and Mr Lee (an HR Specialist). The interview questions used in Phoenix Airlines were adopted in this case. The interviews also revealed the attitudes of management towards female employees and their career opportunities.

##### *Female employees' experience of work-family conflict*

Being very familiar with work arrangements and conditions for flight attendants, Zai (the Head of Cabin Crew Training Center) agreed that work-family conflict existed among his staff members and he also suggested that married women with children experienced more work-family conflict than single ones. He added that the newly adopted shift system would possibly make it harder for flight attendants to reconcile their family responsibilities and work commitments. He elaborated:



Recently, for the convenience of shift arrangements for each cabin team, the shift system has been changed. Previously, our flight attendants worked on a 1 day on 1 day off model which means they worked one day and rested one day. Now, they have to work four days or even five days consecutively and then have two-day leave. Some flight attendants fail to understand the work arrangements and complain they can not meet their family or look after their children or deal with their personal business as often as before.

As an HR specialist, Lee also believed that flight attendants were more likely to suffer work-family conflict than ground staff. He indicated that job type played a key role in deciding the degree of workload and pay:

The nature of the job type decides the income level of this job. The ground staff can only get half of the salary of the cabin crew, but their work is not as arduous as the latter. Serving on flights involves more possibilities of suffering health hazard or even encountering a risky situation. Being a flight attendant also means having less normal leisure time. Consequently, flight attendants experience more conflict than others.

The managers' explanations conformed to the relevant questionnaire findings as well as to what the female interviewees indicated.

Both Yong and Zai stressed that the recent structural changes in the organisation and intensified market competition had made the working environment more stressful than before. As the Vice President of Panda Airlines, Yong stated the major challenges that the organisation had encountered since the 21<sup>st</sup> century and some of the strategies which were adopted to cope with those challenges. He said that the challenges were due to strong competition from emerging private-owned airlines in the domestic flight routes and the recent merge between a couple of giant carriers such as A Airlines and Dragon Airlines. He admitted,

As a small-sized airline company, we can hardly compete with large-sized airlines in those popular long-haul routes.

He was also concerned about the increasing competition from low cost carriers and foreign airlines:

Meanwhile, the low cost carriers try to beat us in the domestic air passenger market by offering competitive airfares. Moreover, foreign airlines often choose to work in partnerships with some large-scaled and more influential airlines such as A and E Airlines.

Facing such fierce competition in the air passenger market, Panda Airlines had to make organisational changes to effectively adapt to the changing environment, and to try hard to catch up. This is revealed in Yong's statement:

You see, even if our company is generally state-owned, we have been experiencing hardships, and employees don't have iron rice bowls any longer. Through structural and managerial changes, and a complement of new shares, we have managed to hold a firm foot in the airline market. However, it's far from satisfactory. I think the key is to improve quality and business morale of our employees, especially front-line workers so as to provide better quality customer services.

At this point, Zai gave an example of the type of strategy the cabin crew section had adopted to cope with the tough situation. He also expressed his sympathy for flight attendants who were experiencing work-family conflict resulting from the new shift system, but he emphasised that this was what they should expect:

Under severe competition, we have to break a new path. As you know, recently we have operated on new scheduled routes, so our staff members need to undertake more duties or more shifts. I understand the new shift system will possibly make some flight attendants exhausted and reduce some chances to spend with their family, but I think since they have chosen to be flight attendants and they are well paid, they have to endure it and do their work well.

Yong further explained what changes had been done to HR managerial practices especially the standard performance appraisal system used in each department:

Since 2004, we have carried out an approach of management by objective, a star rating

and a quantified appraisal system in each department. Employees' better performance can gain them more stars and then a higher bonus at the end of each year. In case, an employee loses 20 stars, his or her bonus will be deducted by 20%; and if he/she loses 60 stars, no bonus is given.

He also expressed his understanding of the great pressure that employees, especially working mothers had to cope with, but it was 'the survival of the fittest' in the market economy.

The market competition is stronger than ever. We cannot stay easy and follow a generous management approach like we did before. The system is tough, but it's very effective. Our employees have got sense of crisis and competitiveness because of this stricter appraisal system. I understand they are more stressful on account of higher level of job demands. Especially those working mothers have to achieve a balance between their work commitment and family responsibilities.

Their accounts indicate that the employees in Panda Airlines used to be provided with a relatively comfortable working environment, whereas now they have to adapt to a series of tough changes by undertaking busy work schedules at a fast-paced speed and obeying a strict managerial system. It was agreed that these changes made it harder for female employees to balance their work and family life. This again conforms to some of the findings from the questionnaire and the interviews with female colleagues. Their current job demands and work patterns led to higher work pressure, which was intimately related to their work-family conflict.

#### *Support for female employees' work and family*

All three managers asserted that they sensed some women had difficulty in reconciling their work and family needs. They also elaborated what they had done to benefit the female colleagues in terms of their mental and physical health. According to Lee, the Woman's Committee of Panda Airlines (which was designed to represent the interests of all the female employees) had done a good job in this regard. The Committee often communicated with the HR department regarding the current situation of the female staff, and sometimes reported to the senior management when

urgent issues needed solving in a short time. In order to demonstrate that female workers were treated well and even preferentially, he illustrated his point by taking the maternity leave offered by the company as an example.

Our flight attendants are permitted to stop stewarding on board since the first day of their pregnancy. They can either stay home or handle office work. They are still given basic salaries. Although the ground staff can hardly enjoy such a long maternity leave, at least they are entitled to have 4-month maternity leave in accordance with the national policy.

Zai had a deep understanding of the high pressure and intensification of both cabin and ground service work, and he also knew its negative influence on female staff:

We have invited psychologists and legal experts to give lectures on customer service psychology, measures to reduce work stress, legal common sense, etc. Each year, the company arranges free physical examinations for female staff. I think most of them enjoy their work due to the decent social status that it brings them and attractive remuneration and welfare they are entitled to obtain, although the work itself is laborious.

In order to better understand female employees and work out effective solutions to their problems, Panda Airlines holds regular psychological seminars for staff and symposiums especially for flight attendants who have children. Yong asserted that the organisation had conducted quite a few beneficial activities for female employees and implemented family-friendly practices:

For example, we have purchased a series of medical and health insurance for all the women in our company. The Women's Committee has organised some activities which also involve female employees' family members, such as security knowledge competitions and summer camps for our employees' children. These family-friendly practices have stimulated their passion and commitment for their work.

Many of the preferential practices reported above (such as extended maternity leave and free physical examinations) correspond with those that the female interviewees reported. The questionnaire findings also reveal that the female employees received

some support from the management. Nevertheless, the support which these women received from the work domain was insufficient, not only because management was reported to be the least helpful among all of the various sources of support in the questionnaire survey but also because the female interviewees complained about some of the inflexible work practices (such as forbidding shift swapping). Moreover, only 33% of the total questionnaire respondents chose 'satisfactory' or 'very satisfactory' with regard to the companies EO policies and practices. Less than 30% of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the family-friendly benefits which were provided by the company.

The Women's Committee, which was praised by the management for its efforts in helping the female colleagues, was, however, less mentioned by the female interviewees, except for one interviewee who felt the Women's Committee was on the whole not close to the female staff.

#### *Job recruitment and promotion for females*

As a HR specialist, Lee elaborated how the company's recruitment, selection, and promotion worked. Panda Airlines adopted two methods of recruitment: self-recruitment and outsourcing services. Some employees were recruited formally based on a fixed-term labour contract (all the experienced employees and flight attendants were in this category) while others were hired through outsourcing (currently most of the ground staff are employed from a labour agency which works in partnership with the company). In Lee's opinion, outsourcing could transform an organisation's HR department from a cost centre to a strategic resource, in other words, to reduce costs for the organisation. In particular, he talked about the selection of candidates for cabin crew, which was strict and complex although not so rigid as that of pilot candidates. Very frankly, he noted,

Chinese passengers, especially male, often judge the quality of air services based on the quality of flight attendants, meaning that whether or not they are pretty! So we pay more attention to girls' appearance and figure. Their education background and foreign

language skills are not the most important as long as they hold high school diplomas or diplomas with the cabin attendant speciality and they can speak good mandarin (not Sichuan dialect). It will also be a bonus if they are specialised in singing and dancing! So you can see all of our flight attendants are pretty and versatile girls, which to some extent represents the company's Beautiful Enterprise Culture.

When talking about equal opportunities in the workplace, Zai insisted that both men and women were treated equally in selection and promotion. He added,

As a matter of fact, we attach much importance to the development of female employees all the time. Take the Cabin Crew Training Centre as an example, the majority of instructors are female and all chief attendants are female. Moreover, we have begun to recruit and train female pilot candidates. Now we have two female pilots.

It is interesting that the selection of flight attendant candidates depends heavily on one's appearance and hobbies rather than one's education and capability, which were the main categories that the current female employees were worried about most. I feel that there seems a contradiction between the criteria on which company recruits and the skills that female employees need for their future career development. Many of the female interviewees were afraid of lagging behind or losing jobs because of their limited and narrow capabilities. Moreover, jobs like stewarding have long been recognised as professions which are available only to the young in China. Once they get older, after their 30s, such a profession will no longer be suitable for them. They then hope to take some other job with a similar pay level, which may require more skills and more complex knowledge. The company seemed to ignore this after-effect and failed to consider any long-term career prospects or effective work rearrangements for flight attendants.

The HR specialist claimed that the equal opportunities policy and practices were implemented in the processes of selection and promotion, and this too was generally agreed by most of the female employees. However, guan xi as one of determinants to one's career opportunities and progress, mentioned by some female interviewees, was neglected by these managers. In addition, the underlying male-dominated

phenomenon at the middle and senior management level was little mentioned by the managers, but the female interviewees did not seem too concerned about the fact.

### *Support for women's career development*

The Vice President indicates that the company had provided trainings for the job improvement of female staff:

To improve the employees' work productivity and service quality, we have provided various training courses for different job positions. Regularly, we organise campaigns and competitions for female employees from different sections to show and practice their job-related skills. We also organise training on etiquette for front-line staff so that they can deliver good quality customer services in a proper manner.

This view was confirmed by some of the female interviewees; however, those training courses were rather short-term and none of the management mentioned any specific or long-term plans for helping develop the women's career.

### *Concluding comments*

The interviews with the senior and middle managers clearly indicate that they were aware of the existence of work-family conflict for female employees (particularly working mothers). They acknowledged that the recent structural changes, the increasingly intense competition in the labour market, and the newly adopted shift system within the company made it harder for female workers (particularly front-line staff) to reconcile their family responsibilities and work commitments. The loss of an 'iron rice bowl' induced a strong sense of job insecurity for women. The managers were confident that sufficient measures had been taken to aid female employees to handle pressure and conflict, but some of the managerial rules and practices adopted by the company (such as the harsh rating and appraisal systems and the rigorous leave system) made female colleagues more stressed. The managers' comments on the company's HR policies in general, and women-friendly practices in particular, were not in tune with the findings from both the questionnaire survey and the interviews with their female staff, which suggested that the organisation has failed to consider

much about women's needs and made insufficient effort to support them in balancing work and family life.



## 6.3 Case 3: Dragon Airlines

### 6.3.1 Preliminary stage: questionnaire survey

My third case study was conducted in Dragon Airlines (see Chapter 5.3 for the organisation background). A total of 105 questionnaires were distributed to female employees of Dragon Airlines. Eighty one completed questionnaires were collected, and the response rate was approximately 77%. The respondents came mainly from three sections (i.e., cabin crew, ground staff, and back office staff) but it is noteworthy that some back office staff were also categorised into ground staff within Dragon Airlines (as discussed in Chapter 5.4.1). Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, Table 6.21 features the female flight attendants and ground staff, while the interviewee profile in Table 6.30 will clearly show all of the different job roles.

#### 6.3.1.1 Descriptive statistics

Half of the female respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey were in their 30s and around one third were in their 20s. More than 60 percent were married and the majority had children, approximately 30 percent of these working mothers have children under 7. Most of the women had a college diploma or equivalent, but less than 40 percent of them held a bachelor's degree or above. All but two of the female respondents worked full-time. More than 30 percent of the female respondents are in a junior position or above, but only one was in a senior position. I was told that to date there were no more than five female senior managers in Dragon Airlines. Nearly 60 percent have worked for Dragon Airlines for more than ten years. More personal details of the respondents can be found in Table 6.21.

**Table 6.21 Questionnaire Respondent Profile (Dragon Airlines)**

Respondents		
	n	percent
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20	1	1.4
20 - 29	28	34.6
30 - 39	40	49.4

40-49	11	13.6
50 or above	1	1.2
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	22	27.2
Married	53	65.4
Widowed or Divorced	6	7.4
<b>Number of children</b>		
0	31	38.3
1	49	60.5
2	1	1.2
<b>Age of children</b>		
No children	31	38.3
Under 7	24	29.6
7-15	18	22.2
16 or over still in education	6	7.4
1 or more independent children	2	2.5
<b>Childcare arrangement (Select as many as apply)</b>		
No children	31	38.3
Spouse	4	4.9
Nursery/kindergarten	6	8.1
Babysitter	11	14.9
Parents	24	28.4
Others	24	28.4
<b>Number of elders or disabled who need care</b>		
0	25	30.9
1	7	8.6
2	23	28.4
3 or above	26	32.1
<b>Main home responsibility taker</b>		
Me	31	38.3
My spouse	4	4.9
My apartment sharer	11	13.6
My parents/parents-in-law	28	34.6
We share equally	15	18.5
<b>Weekly hours of house</b>		

<b>work</b>		
Less than 2	22	27.2
2-5	28	34.6
5-10	22	27.2
More than 10	9	11.1
<b>Educational background</b>		
High school	2	2.5
College diploma	50	61.7
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	28	34.6
Master's degree or equivalent	1	1.2
<b>Job title</b>		
Cabin crew	36	44.4
Ground staff (including back office staff)	45	55.6
Others	0	0
<b>Job position</b>		
Senior management	1	1.2
Middle management	8	9.9
Junior management	26	32.1
Entry-level staff	46	56.8
<b>Work mode</b>		
Full-time	79	97.5
Part-time	2	2.5
<b>Years in business</b>		
Less than 1	2	2.5
1-5	20	24.7
5-10	12	14.8
More than 10	47	58
<b>Weekly working hours by contract</b>		
Less than 40	33	40.7
40-45	40	49.4
45-50	6	7.4
Over 50	2	2.5
<b>Actual weekly working hours</b>		
Less than 40	21	25.9

40-45	30	37
45-50	19	23.5
More than 50	11	13.6
<b>Formal pattern of work (Select as many as apply)</b>		
Work on conventional hours (from 8 am to 5 pm, etc.)	36	44.4
Work shifts mostly	33	40.7
Work split-shifts mostly	15	18.5
Regularly work in the evening	9	11.1
Regularly work on Saturdays and Sundays	9	11.1
<b>Number of annual leave by contract</b>		
Less than 3	4	4.9
3-8	24	29.6
8-15	25	30.9
More than 15	28	34.6
<b>Number of actual annual leave</b>		
Less than 3	6	7.4
3-8	34	42
8-15	25	30.9
More than 15	16	19.8

### 6.3.1.2 Reliability test

A reliability analysis was used to test whether the scales in the questionnaire survey were indeed reliable. Based on Table 6.22, the reliability of the scales is found to be satisfactory as all have alpha coefficients above 0.6 and most were over 0.7.

**Table 6.22 Reliability of Scales**

Scales	Alpha coefficient
Job demands	0.653
Work-family conflict	0.821
Organisational views on female colleagues	0.684
Tangible support	0.796

<b>Emotional support</b>	0.802
<b>Importance of equal opportunity policies</b>	0.887
<b>Importance of organisational practices in balancing work-family needs</b>	0.910
<b>Satisfaction with equal opportunity policies and family-friendly provisions</b>	0.836

### 6.3.1.3 Level of work-family conflict

Table 6.23 shows that the mean of the level of work-family conflict experienced by all the respondents is 2.9239 and the median is 2.9500, which indicates that overall the respondents did not encounter much conflict. In other words, the issue is not salient for the female air staff in Dragon Airlines whose reported conflict level was found to be the least among all three airlines. It is very surprising to obtain such a result as more than 60% of these female respondents had children, a much bigger percentage than other two airlines, but this resulted in less conflict. This unusual phenomenon will be further explored later. Even so, such conflict tends to be slightly higher for married females (with a mean of 2.9310) than single (with a mean of 2.9276). Among the two job types, cabin crew (with the highest mean of 3.2699) experienced a much higher degree of work-family conflict than ground staff (with a mean of 2.7000). Thus, H1 (which states that female air staff who work on flights encounter higher level of work-family conflict than those who only work on the ground) is supported.

Among all the patterns of work, the respondents who have to regularly work on evenings encountered the highest level of work-family conflict (with the highest mean of 3.7750). Generally, those who work on shifts tended to suffer more role conflict than those whose work does not involve shifts. It may be concluded that work schedule inflexibility influences work-family conflict (which will be further verified in the correlation analysis which follows).

**Table 6.23 Level of Work-Family Conflict by Marital Status, Job Type and Work Pattern**

<b>All the respondents</b>	2.9667	3.0000
<b>Single females</b>	2.9355	2.9000
<b>Married females</b>	3.0827	3.2100
<b>Widowed or Divorced females</b>	2.9020	2.9400
<b>Cabin crew</b>	3.3060	3.3550
<b>Ground staff</b>	2.7000	2.6300
<b>Those working on set office hours</b>	2.8328	2.8000
<b>Those working on shifts (including split-shifts)</b>	3.1188	3.2375
<b>Those regularly working in the evening</b>	3.7750	3.7750

Above all the findings suggests that the women in Dragon Airlines were in the best situation as on average they experienced the least work-family conflict among the three airlines studied; while the women in Panda Airlines, which is located in the same city as Dragon Airlines, suffered the highest level of work-family conflict. I assume that the low levels of conflict may be linked to the merger between Dragon Airlines and A Airlines (the largest state-owned airline in China in 2002) which might have improved the job security and welfare benefits of the employees of Dragon Airlines. Another possible reason may be that the launch of the 2008 National Labour Law entitles many employees who have been employed for 10 years or more a permanent contract with their organisations. This is good news for the women employees of Dragon Airlines as many have been employed by the company for more than ten years. More details of these results will be revealed at the interview stage and a thorough analysis will be made when a comparison of the three case studies of airlines is made in Chapter VII.

#### **6.3.1.4 Degree of support from different sources**

Table 6.24 shows that the respondents received varying degrees of tangible support from six types of people: management, colleagues, spouses, parents/parents-in-law,

other family members, and friends. In particular, the respondents' parents or parents-in-law were considered as the most reliable tangible support providers as they earned the highest mean of 4.43. With a mean of 4.21, their spouses also offered strong support. With an average scale of 3.89 and 3.85 respectively, other family members and friends also provided them with much support. Both their managers and colleagues provided some degree of tangible support, but this was relatively low when compared with the other sources of support (receiving the last two low average scales of 3.35 and 3.49). It was found that, as in the other two airlines, the women of Dragon Airlines received much more tangible support from those who have little work relationship but have close personable relationships with them (such as their family members) while those they work with provided less tangible support.

**Table 6.24 Degree of Tangible Support from Various Sources**

<b>Tangible support</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Supervisors/managers</b>	3.3500	3.0000
<b>Colleagues/co-workers</b>	3.4900	3.0000
<b>Spouses</b>	4.2100	4.0000
<b>Parents/parents-in-law</b>	4.4300	5.0000
<b>Other family members</b>	3.8900	4.0000
<b>Friends</b>	3.8500	4.0000

Table 6.25 shows the extent to which the respondents received intangible support from all the sources. The intangible support from the respondents' spouses ranked highest with the top mean of 4.23. Their parents or parents-in-law and friends were considered to be the second and the third biggest support providers with a mean of 4.09 and 3.82 respectively. With a mean of 3.75, other family members also gave some support to the respondents. However, the support from the respondents' management remained the lowest with a mean of 2.95 and the support from their colleagues ranks second lowest with a mean of 3.34. It can again be inferred that the respondents received more support from their family members than the people that

they worked with.

**Table 6.25 Degree of Intangible Support from Various Sources**

<b>Intangible support</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Supervisors/managers</b>	2.9500	3.0000
<b>Colleagues/co-workers</b>	3.3400	3.0000
<b>Spouses</b>	4.2300	4.0000
<b>Parents/parents-in-law</b>	4.0900	4.0000
<b>Other family members</b>	3.7500	4.0000
<b>Friends</b>	3.8200	4.0000

All in all, respondents received more tangible and intangible support from home than from work.

### **6.3.1.5 Importance of EO policies and organisational practices in balancing work and family needs**

The degree of importance given to EO policies and practices by female respondents is shown in Table 6.26, which indicates that on average the respondents realised the significant impact of EO policies and practices with a mean of nearly 4. Launching EO policies and sexual harassment complaints procedures were regarded as most important, while setting gender targets and gender ratio auditing was considered to be least important.

**Table 6.26 Importance of EO Polices and Practices**

<b>Importance of equal opportunity polices</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>All the respondents</b>	3.9054	4.0000
<b>Equal opportunity policy</b>	4.1500	4.0000
<b>Equal opportunity committee</b>	3.9700	4.0000
<b>Equal opportunity training for managers and supervisors</b>	4.0700	4.0000



<b>Gender ratio auditing</b>	3.4700	3.0000
<b>Setting gender target</b>	3.5900	4.0000
<b>Separate sexual harassment complaints procedures</b>	4.1800	4.0000

The women considered maternity/paternity leave and pay, on-site childcare, childcare subsidies, and women-only training courses as the most important help that the airline could provide to help them balance work and family life. Table 6.27 shows that the opportunity to work part-time was seen as least important.

**Table 6.27 Importance of Different Organisational Practices in Balancing work-family needs**

<b>Importance of the following work-family benefits</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Opportunity to work flextime</b>	4.0100	4.0000
<b>Opportunity to job share</b>	4.0800	4.0000
<b>Opportunity to work part-time</b>	3.3900	3.0000
<b>Flexibility to take compassionate leave</b>	4.1200	4.0000
<b>Flexibility to take extended no pay-leave</b>	4.0400	4.0000
<b>Maternity leave and pay</b>	4.5500	5.0000
<b>Paternity leave and pay</b>	4.3000	5.0000
<b>On-site childcare</b>	4.4200	5.0000
<b>Childcare subsidies</b>	4.3600	5.0000
<b>Eldercare counseling</b>	4.1400	4.0000
<b>Eldercare subsidies</b>	4.1800	4.0000
<b>Work-family counseling</b>	4.2300	4.0000
<b>Women-only training courses</b>	4.2600	5.0000

Overall, the female air staff of Dragon Airlines showed a moderate level of satisfaction with the EO policies and family friendly practices offered by the

organisation (as shown in Table 6.28). However, the mean for all the respondents is only a little higher than 3, which implies that HR policies as a whole, and family-friendly policies in particular, did not meet the full expectations of the women.

**Table 6.28 Level of Satisfaction on EO policies and Family-friendly Provisions**

<b>Level of satisfaction</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>All the respondents</b>	3.1081	3.0000
<b>Equal opportunity policies</b>	3.1800	3.0000
<b>Family-friendly benefits</b>	3.0400	3.0000

### **6.3.1.6 Correlations between work / family characteristics and work-family conflict**

Table 6.29 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables (see Appendix III). It is clear from these work domain variables that job type is significantly correlated to all types of work-family conflict, including: job-spouse conflict, job-parent, and job-home/leisure conflict ( $p=0.016$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). This result has been confirmed by comparing the means of the work-family conflict which was experienced by cabin crew and ground staff (see Table 6.21). Work schedule inflexibility was positively correlated to overall work-family conflict ( $p=0.022$ ), especially job-spouse conflict (0.049) and job-parent conflict ( $p=0.001$ ). Thus, H2 (which states that work schedule inflexibility is positively associated with work-family conflict) is supported. However, job demands were not correlated to any type of work-family conflict ( $p>0.05$ ). Hence, H3 (which states that job demand is positively associated with work-family conflict) was not supported. This contrasts with my expectations that job demand would closely link to, or result in, work-family conflict in all of the cases. While job demands seemed not to be a factor leading to work-family conflict in this case, it was a significant factor in both Phoenix Airlines and Panda Airlines. I assume that this might be the result of the positive influence of the recent merger of Dragon Airlines with a national carrier. The interview findings which follow will be used to explore this issue further. Length of leave had a negative

correlation with overall work-family conflict ( $p=0.021$ ). Hence, H4 (which states that length of leave is negatively associated with work-family conflict) was supported. There was a positive correlation between the organisation's negative views on female staff and overall work-family conflict ( $p=0.014$ ), especially job-parent conflict ( $p=0.048$ ) and job-home/leisure conflict ( $p=0.042$ ). Thus, H5 (which states that the organisation's negative views on women are positively associated with work-family conflict) was supported. Generally speaking, all work characteristics, except for job demands, are significantly associated with most dimensions of work-family conflict.

Similarly, none of the family related characteristics (including marital status, number of children, age of children, number of elders cared for, and domestic work time) were strongly associated with any type of work-family conflict, with all of the correlations having a p-value of more than 0.05. That means that H6 (which states that responsibilities for childcare, eldercare and housework are positively associated with work-family conflict) was not supported. In other words, responsibilities for childcare, eldercare, and domestic work did not seem to be a major factor leading to work-family conflict for female air staff, which is remarkable and similar among the three cases. Relevant explanations will be explored in the following interviews, and detailed discussions and comparisons will be made in Chapters VII and VIII.

## **6.3.2 Main stage: interviews**

### **6.3.2.1 Step 1: female staff interviews**

The face-to-face semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with sixteen of the female staff who had completed the questionnaire survey (see Table 6.29). The same interview questions were asked as before. All of the sixteen interviewees were aged between 20 and 50, and all were full-time workers. Eleven were married and one was widowed. Eleven of have children. Five were cabin crew; seven were ground staff working at the airport (including one who used to be a flight attendant); four were back office staff dealing with general administration, and finance and accounting. The four interviewees had been employed with the company for over 20

years, six had more than 10 years work experience, three had worked for more than 5 years, and the rest had served with the company for less than 3 years. Half of the interviewees generally followed 8 to 5 conventional working hours (four of whom used to work shift duties), the other half of the interviewees worked mainly on shifts. One was in middle management, five were front-line managers or supervisors, and the rest were entry-level staff. The detailed interview quotations and associated analysis are presented below:

**Table 6.30 Brief Interviewee Profile**

Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Job Role		
	Flight Attendant	Ground Staff	Back Office Staff
Lily	√		
Ai		√	
Huang	√		
Liang			√ Finance Dept
Sally		√	
Ge			√ Logistics Dept
Xiao		√	
Tao		√	
Mei			√ Finance Dept
Ning		√	
Yan		√	
Yu	√		
Song	√ (quit later)		
Zhi	√		
Di		√	
Xia			√ Finance Dept

*Family responsibilities*

Of the eleven married respondents with children only one claimed that she looked

after her child alone because both sets of parents lived in a different city, while ten respondents reported that they did not do much childcare because their parents or parents-in-law, or babysitters were looking after their children or only undertook this responsibility when their children were very young.

Five respondents claimed that they were the main person responsible for housework and two shared the responsibility with their parents. Five reported that their parents, especially mothers, were mainly responsible for household chores and two had hired a cleaner to help with regular house cleaning. None mentioned that their husbands assumed any housework. It is worth noting that all of the single respondents said that there was little housework to do since they lived alone or with their parents. None of the respondents reported they took responsibility for eldercare. One typical explanation is as below:

I don't need to assume any eldercare responsibility and my parents and parents-in-law are fit enough. Instead, they used to look after my child. (Lily)

Without doubt the respondents' parents or parents-in-law had made a major effort in taking childcare and housework responsibilities, results which were similar to the findings from the questionnaire survey which showed that nearly half of the respondents' parents were in charge of childcare and one third of whom also undertook housework. In addition, affordable babysitters and domestic labour were hired to reduce domestic burdens on the working mothers and their parents. It also suggests that men do few, if any, house chores, while women (mother, domestic helper, babysitter, etc.) remain the major provider of housework.

#### *Degree of work-family conflict*

Of the sixteen female interviewees, twelve reported that they had had problems when juggling their work responsibilities and family demands at some stage of their lives. Nevertheless, eight of the twelve also admitted that they were currently experiencing less, or little, work-family conflict, either because their children had grown up or they

had changed their jobs. Those who had once suffered or were still experiencing work-family conflict included all of the flight attendants, most of the ground staff, and two back office staff. Except for one single woman all of the staff who reported work-family conflict were married women with children.

The level of work-family conflict experienced by the interviewees varied. Eight interviewees (including two back office staff, one ground staff (who used to be a flight attendant) and five flight attendants) described the work-family conflict which they had previously encountered as 'intense'; however, as mentioned above, most of these now experience 'less' or 'little' level of conflict. Only one single flight attendant viewed her current level of conflict as intense. Four interviewees rated this conflict as 'mild', all of whom were ground staff. Meanwhile, the remaining four interviewees claimed that they had never experienced work-family conflict (two of which were married).

It is notable, therefore, that nearly none of the interviewees were currently experiencing intense work-family conflict; although some had experienced such problems in the past when their children were very young or their jobs involved tight schedules. At present, less than half were still struggling to balance work and family life. We may conclude from this that the average level of work-family conflict for the female air staff in Dragon Airlines tends to be mild, which corroborates the questionnaire finding that the mean for females' conflict level is lower than the medium point. Among the job types, the cabin crew suffered higher levels of conflict than the ground staff and back office staff, which was also reflected in the results from the questionnaire survey. Nevertheless, the degree of work-family conflict for married females tended to be dispersed. Some married respondents suffered very strong work-family conflict, while others only encountered a moderate level of such conflict, or they even experienced little role conflict. However, the level of work-family conflict for those who had children, particularly young children, was much higher than for those married without children or for those who were single. In Dragon Airlines, apart from job type and work schedule, children had a strong impact on the

female staff's work-family conflict level.

### *Experience of work-family conflict*

The interviewees were invited to give an account of their experiences reconciling their work and family needs and confronting the dual-role conflict (if they had experienced any). Those who were experiencing or had experienced, work and family tensions indicated that their work-family conflict was caused largely by work, predominantly: shift patterns, irregular work schedules, and an inflexible leave system. Ai was the oldest woman among all the interviewees, but her rich work and life experiences gave us an excellent example of how the degree of work-family conflict fluctuated at the different stages of her life. Her first job was in aircraft maintenance and did not involve any shift work, life was easy for her at this point because she did not have any children and did not experience any conflict. However, when she started to work in the ground service department in 1991 the shift work pattern was compulsory and this brought her a busy and tiring life. Her situation deteriorated and job-parent and job-home/leisure conflicts were frequent during the period when she gave birth, when her husband also started shift work:

Those days were tough, but fortunately I could hold on... I tried my best to bring up my daughter, sort out housework, and at the same time manage to work effectively. Can you imagine I had to be responsible for all of these things at that time? Certainly, my mum often offered help, but I had to at least arrange family responsibilities well. My husband is a nice man, but he seldom participates in domestic work. Well, it is not because of his unwillingness; actually he is not capable of dealing with house chores, and he often messes things up... Now my child has grown up and recently started to work, and I do not need to work on shifts any longer. I feel very much released.

Liang experienced more severe job-parent conflict when her husband died many years ago while her daughter was still a little baby. She had been a receptionist in the company-owned hotel and had to work on night shifts. When her husband was alive, she felt released after work no matter how tired she was. However, her life was totally changed when her husband died of an accident. The shift work seemed more

exhausting, and she was depressed, and sometimes desperate. Her mother could come to help in childcare and housework, but she could not totally relax. Recently she has moved to a job in the financial section, which involves little shift work and more open schedules. Nowadays, she seemed relaxed, chatting away in a brisk tone of voice. However, the mere mention of those tough days made her look anxious:

It was really stressful! I could hardly spend much time with my family members especially my daughter, and I could hardly focus on anything because I was so gloomy... resulted in an intense work-family conflict. The situation lasted 10 years. Besides, asking for leave is a difficult thing. Our bonus would be deducted if we do so.

Sally was a flight attendant in the past, but she finally gave up this job and became a ground staff now. Like Liang, she found it hard to take any days' leave. Difficulty in asking for leave caused work-family conflict not only for married women but also single women:

I'm single... but I feel I also encounter work-family conflict. It is very difficult to ask for leave. In case my family has any emergencies, I can hardly put my work aside and go back to deal with it. (Xiao)

These interviews revealed that the women's experiences of work-family conflict had many things in common. Clearly, people who had to work on shifts or irregular schedules often found it hard to balance their work commitments and family obligations. It is especially tough for those who have young children. Their maternal role conflicts with their work, which leads to feelings of guilt and anxiety for these working mothers. The single mother had more difficulties when her child was young and the rigid leave system made this situation worse. It was notable that those interviewees who were coping well indicated that their jobs were not the source of increased pressure (except for the flight attendants whose work is more pressured). For example:

Honestly, there is less pressure from my work and I'm a family-orientated person.



Therefore, I have only experienced little conflict. Our company has been state-owned for ages and the management system determines we are not under the pressure of work. Instead, we feel somewhat relaxed. (Mei)

The ground workers did not think of their work as a burden although they often followed busy schedules, their job demands did not generate much pressure on them. Apparently, this attitude was closely related to the culture of Dragon Airlines who, by maintaining some of its traditional approaches (such as emphasising collectivism and consensus, seniority rule, and networking in the workplace), this giant but fast-developing state-owned airline company still provided a sense of security for its employees. This may partly explain one of the key findings from the questionnaire survey which showed that there was little correlation between job demand and work-family conflict in Dragon Airlines.

#### *Causes of little work-family conflict*

Many of the interviewees who had once experienced severe conflict between work and family needs were currently experiencing 'mild' or 'little' conflict. Also, a few interviewees have never encountered work-family conflict. A number of important factors were shown to help employees within this company achieve a good work-life balance. Two of the most significant factors were non-shift work and family support. Xia was a single young girl and worked in the Financial Department. She told me that she neither experienced work-family conflict to date 'because I usually work on a set office hour from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm', nor considered the question of how to achieve a work-life balance 'because family life is still far from me'. However, she agreed that standard work schedules, as well as a supportive family, were important to help balance the two roles. Lily struggled a lot when she was a single junior attendant; however, her work-family conflict has been reduced since she got married:

My husband understood and supported me. My parents moved to co-reside with us and undertook responsibilities of childcare and housework voluntarily after I was back to my work from the childbirth. Thus, I could continue to take non-standard and tight work

schedules until three years ago when I was promoted as a chief trainer in the cabin crew training center. Since then my working hours have been back to conventional and stable. Normally, I work from 8:30am to 5pm and I am off duty on weekends. Now I'm leading a balanced life.

Great benefits from working on conventional office hours were also reported by Liang.

Ten years later, thankfully, I managed to switch to the office work related to finance, which is my current job. I don't need to work on shifts any more, which is much better. I have sufficient time to stay with my daughter, which makes her happy. Moreover, I can provide more aids in her studies and discuss with her about her future development. She's a talented girl and I must make greater efforts to cultivate her, which is time and energy consuming. Fortunately, I can make it happen now.

The female colleagues attributed decreasing or diminishing work-family conflict mainly to the strong family support they received, standard work schedules, and independent children. It can be concluded from this that in Dragon Airlines the shift work pattern was considered as a key source of work-family conflict. On the other hand, strong family support could alleviate the degree of conflict experienced. Nevertheless, the female colleagues seldom mentioned support from the workplace (particularly the management), which implies that managerial support was much less significant than family support; this result was identical to the findings of the questionnaire.

#### *Outcomes of work-family conflict*

During the interviews the women also identified some of the major consequences of work-family conflict. As discussed previously, the difficulty in reconciling work and family demands often resulted in employees switching from shift work to conventional office work, other main outcomes include: negative feelings (stress, guilt, upset etc.); less ability in family responsibilities; reduced social time; and altered career choices. It is found that almost every woman who had experienced such conflict was affected psychologically. Working mothers often felt guilty because of

being unable to spend enough time with their children or spouses. Liang had deep feelings about this:

Lack of time to stay with my child was really a bad thing because she (my daughter) couldn't recognise me and she thought the babysitter was her mum!

Juggling work and family needs also reduced social time. Yan switched to a regular work pattern, except for one night shift per week, at the airport in 2005. Initially, she was not accustomed to the office work and had to work overtime or even take some work back home. Her husband was a pilot and could hardly assume family responsibilities, including childcare. Because of an increasing number of flights he could only be home two or three times per week. She was forced to attempt to fulfill the demands from both work and family and so she had less time to socialise with her friends. In order to solve this problem, she said, 'later on I changed the way of work and managed to complete it during the conventional working hours'. As a junior flight attendant Yu felt her personal leisure time was almost gone. In the past she had enjoyed socialising with friends and spending time developing her personal interests (such as learning yoga and watching movies). 'But now...', she laughed, 'when I get home, I want do nothing but go to sleep! I don't have much time and energy to socialize. I'm not a superwoman!' Then in a serious manner, she added:

I don't intend to be single but the job type makes it harder to maintain a stable relationship with my partner. I understand why many colleagues give up the job after they get married or become mothers.

As Yu suggested, work-family conflict affected women's career negatively. Some female employees altered their job roles, mainly by lowering their career aspirations, and some even left paid employment permanently and became a housewife. Sally was a flight attendant but she gave up the job voluntarily and chose to do ground service work which created less conflict because she could go back home everyday. Song had quit her job role of cabin crew two years before when she gave birth. She then did not

go back to work because:

My husband has a decent job with good payment, so he wanted me to stop stewarding to look after our child. He also thought my work was dangerous as I encountered several emergencies on planes... I liked my job, but if I did not quit the job, there would have been an intense work-family conflict.

There is a modern tendency for the increased awareness of the difficulty balancing work and family life, or in socialising to decrease the willingness of women to enter into marriage; in practice, some had delayed marriage and child-rearing.

### *Career ambitions*

When the interviewees were encouraged to talk about their career plans, only three appeared to be optimistic about their future development. Ning had a young child, but childrearing did not reduce her commitment to her work. On the contrary, she said,

Having a child has spurred me to strive for a better life for him. I want to progress in my career and accumulate more wealth so that my child will be able to receive the best education in the future.

Yu was ambitious and confident. Very frankly, she questioned the stereotyping that the job of being a flight attendant depended heavily on her youth and appearance and that she would lose the job if she became older. She argued,

I don't agree! In our airlines, some who are over 30 even nearly 40 years old remain cabin crew. As long as you are passionate about the job and willing to make efforts, your career will last longer. I'm quite confident of developing my career in the air!

As a Deputy Director of Cabin Crew Training Center, Zhi congratulated herself on her perseverance and effort in her career path. She elaborated,

I did not give up my career as many females did. Instead, I worked very hard and made outstanding achievements. Otherwise, it would not have been possible for me to climb

up to the middle management level. I enjoy such a busy but meaningful job. I hope I will be able to further progress in my career although it's not easy.

The rest of the interviewees did not show a strong sense of ambition. Quite a few were happy to stay in their current position or described themselves as 'not ambitious':

I'm neither ambitious nor pursuing long-term career goals. What I want is to keep doing my current job. I'm very family-oriented, and to be honest, I fancy being a housewife. (Sally)

It is interesting that women's age is perceived by themselves as an obstacle to career development. Middle-aged women are particularly sensitive to this issue. For instance,

Given my age [i.e., in the mid 40s] I don't see there is any further opportunity in my career path, but I'm easily satisfied, so I don't care too much. (Ai)

Another notable finding was that employment type could also be a factor which determines their desire for career progress. In Dragon Airlines, some employees, mainly those who had worked for at least 10 years, were entitled to a permanent job contract and were called 'senior staff'; while others were hired based on a fixed-term contract (generally a two or three years contract). Many ground staff, including Tao, were in the latter category. She was dissatisfied with the way that the company treated them:

My job position is similar to senior workers in the ground service section, but my salary is only half of theirs although I have done more than them. What they earn is always higher than me even if they ask for sick leave. Their welfare is also better than contract workers. I'm de-motivated by this unfair practice.

The gap between contract workers and permanent workers with regard to pay and promotion opportunities created a number of complaints and also reduced their career

ambitions.

*Factors limiting career opportunities and advancement*

Ten of the interviewees admitted that balancing work and family needs would limit their career development, although they tried every means to balance them. The most common reason, as Liang suggested, was that married women with children can not concentrate on their work fully, which hindered their career progress to some extent.

Lily added:

If one day I'm required to choose between my career and my family, I will probably sacrifice my work to shoulder main family responsibility or become a housewife in case my family is in good financial condition.

Childrearing distracted women's attention from their jobs, but educating children was seen as more crucial and, therefore, deserved more attention and efforts from parents in Chinese society. Ge's experience offered an excellent example.

In order to provide a better education for him (my son), we sent him to study in Singapore several years ago. Because he was still a child, I decided to accompany him studying. I therefore asked for 4-year unpaid leave but my job was retained in the company. When I made such a decision, I struggled, indeed. I made a big compromise to meet my family needs, exactly, my child's need.

Ge's career path can be described as discontinuity due to a long-term break from the labour force. Although she eventually went back at work, the periods spent outside of the labour market made her less competitive and, therefore, fewer career opportunities were open to her.

It was apparent that these women were family-oriented and that they often had to compromise their career to shoulder major family responsibilities. Even where a mother did not shoulder all of the responsibility for her children, it was the woman who took overall responsibility. Children's education is particularly important in nearly all Chinese families, but its responsibility often rests on women who have to at least ensure it is carried out appropriately.

Balancing work and family was not the only factor which impacted on these women and there were some other influential factors in deciding their career ambitions. The most frequently mentioned issue were gendered realities existing within the company, especially in job promotion and selection. The traditional stereotypes of the organisation, in Liang's view, meant that promotional opportunities for women were limited and that most of the female workers had to stick to front-line work for a long time. Meanwhile, some women showed a self-knowledge of gender differences and suggested that such differences contributed to the barriers female employees faced in their climb up the organisational hierarchy, for instance:

Because of our nature and self-consciousness, we women are more concerned about family issues. It is not so convenient for women to socialise, including consuming alcohol with clients, which is more suitable for men. (Ge)

Both ground staff and back office staff pointed out that the underlying male-dominated culture limited the career aspirations of female employees, but none of the cabin crew mentioned this as being an issue. This could be due to the predominant number of women in this department, which resulted in a greater percentage of female cadres in the cabin crew department than any other departments.

Some women perceived that their insufficient education and ability would be an obstacle to further development. Both Ai and Di, who did not have a Bachelor's degree, assumed that their limited education stopped them further developing their career. Yan wished she could be more capable. Although being very skillful, Yu was concerned as her job had become one that was very specific and narrow in scope, she predict that 'it will limit our choice if we want to take a different job in future'. Song shared the same idea, she added:

The lack of opportunities for women to be further promoted after we become chief attendants might be due to the limitations of our present skills and knowledge.

The company's employment system could also be seen to stunt the career

advancement of many women. As previously discussed, different treatment and attitudes towards permanent and contract workers created barriers to women's career advancement, and therefore, leads to the depression of women's career ambitions. Yan was unhappy with the fact that contract workers have fewer opportunities than permanent members. She argued, 'but we have contributed equally or even more to the company'. Ning realised that not every capable person could be promoted, she elaborated:

Sometimes an individual's promotion depends on his/her seniority, which is an unwritten rule. In other words, it relies with the time length he/she has served in the company. I sense that senior employees seem have more priorities. The company often gives top priority to seniority in promotion and considers senior workers more than contract workers like me!

In summary, the above major factors (including women balancing work and family needs, disputable employment practices like differentiated employment type and gendered job segregation, individual's real or perceived limited education and women's own perceptions on women) can affect or become obstacles to women's career opportunities and progress. In particular, the male-dominated culture which was perceived by the interviewees should be closely linked to the organisation's gendered views, which have been proved to be positively associated with women's work-family conflict (based on the correlation analysis). Once more, it can be inferred that this informal, but influential, company culture, has resulted in the interference between women's work commitments and family obligations, and suppressed their career pursuits. It was also notable that those who work on the ground were much more sensitive to gender issues than those who worked on flights, as only the former have a strong sense of gender issues within the company. In addition, unfair employment practices (such as less favourable treatment and attitudes towards contract workers) are outstanding issues for back office staff and ground staff, which will be further explored below.



### *Perceptions on the company's HRM policies and practices*

Women had diverse views towards the company's HRM system. Some were content with it and described it as 'fine' or 'improved'. Lily was aware that the company had paid increasing attention to its HR policies and practices in recent years. Ge thought the HR managerial approach was both rational and employee-centered, which she believed was a good combination; she explained:

In terms of recruitment and selection, the standardised and professional assessment system has been adopted, so both males and females are given equal opportunities. On the other hand, the company often uses soft approaches to managing people. For example, our department manager likes to negotiate with and listen to us (subordinates) before making a decision. The employees are not forced to do any work and the selection is a two-way choice.

Liang confirmed that the company's HR policies were better than before because the treatment towards both sexes was generally equal and a sound welfare scheme was offered, and then she stressed:

The company has paid special attention to those who have domestic tribulations, including me. Unlike most of my colleagues' families who are double-income families, I'm the main breadwinner in my family, so I've got a stronger economic burden. When my daughter won top 10 in a national singing competition, the company gave a reward of 3000 RMB to my daughter. I was grateful of what the company did for my family.

Over the course of the interviews some of the women spoke highly of the equal opportunity practices in the company, whereas others disagreed. Mei confirmed that the company had improved its HRM by learning from the Western model of HRM, but she did not think the Western HR model was completely applicable in the Chinese context. She pointed out some drawbacks of the current HR policies and practices:

There are still limitations, such as a lack of effective training courses, unfair work allocation system, etc. If everyone is allocated equal work then everyone should get the equal pay. However, the phenomenon of different pay for same work still exists. Some who have not done much are paid the same with those who have done too much.

Many women complained that insufficient attention and care was paid to women. Xiao argued that the company had not attached enough importance to cultivating female cadres, although it advocated the principle of equal opportunities. Huang felt the same way, she explained:

Since there is a large number of female staff in the cabin crew and ground handling department, the management should have cared about us in different aspects, however, this is not occurring. I feel that we are paid insufficient attention.

The policy of one day's leave on women's period was eventually cancelled, which caused lots of criticisms, especially from front-line staff:

The company used to allow for women one day's leave on our period, but we seldom took it. Our performance appraisal would be devalued and our pay would be deducted in case we ask for sick leave. (Xiao)

It is clear that unfair work allocation and pay is a major flaw in the present HR system. The execution of the equal opportunity principle was questioned. Moreover, an inflexible leave system, as well as insufficient days of leave, was again reported. On the basis of these flaws, many of the women gave their advice. Most suggested to raise pay and improve welfare. For example, Tao insisted that the pay system must be reformed and should be based on job posts and duties instead of seniority and contract type. Xia also agreed that for whichever contract type, the company should achieve fairness in not only attitudes but also pay and welfare for both permanent and contract employees because 'contract workers have equally contributed to the success of the company'. Lily suggested that the company improve the welfare system and relevant treatment to attract more talents. Huang expected a pay rise for flight attendants 'because our jobs are even more demanding than before'; she continued,

In addition, the length of leave is too short and we even cannot enjoy the entitlement fully, so I hope the company can figure out a solution to this problem.

When asked about the family-friendly policies or relevant provisions for women adopted by the company, ten reported that there were no special policies for female employees while many of the interviewees agreed that the company respected and cared for them in some aspects. Women gave some examples to demonstrate the benefits that the company provided. Firstly, they all emphasised that special care for women's health was given by the company. Lily elaborated,

We've been invited to attend regular seminars on how to maintain our physical and mental health and prevent aviation sickness. We are often informed about symptoms of breast cancer and mastitis and some common sense of health care.

Ge told me that women were given a little more benefits than men with regard to labour insurance and hygiene subsidy. Happily, she added, 'we (women) can take two more days off each month.' Liang also talked about the extra days of leave that the women were allowed to take:

Women are permitted to have one day's leave and are given gifts on International Women's Day. Sometimes the company organises free coach trips for us.

In summary, the HR policies and practices adopted by the company were seen to have improved to some extent, which corresponds to one questionnaire finding which showed that the average scale of employees' satisfaction on the HR policies and practices is around 3.1 (just reaching an acceptable level). However, some important employment issues (including job division, work allocation, pay and holiday entitlement) remain problematic.

Without doubt the management has taken some practical measures to support female employees which have been appreciated by them, but the interview quotations reveal that the family-friendly policies offered by the company are limited in scope or have not yet been fully implemented. It appears that Dragon Airlines (like the other two airlines) tends to care more about women's health and family than their career development.

### *Concluding comments*

Work-family conflict was a common issue affecting female employees of Dragon Airlines, but the degree to which this was a problem was the lowest amongst all of the three airlines studied. It was notable that many of the interviewees experienced intense work-family conflict during the early stages of their married life as well as during periods of childbirth and childrearing (when job-parent conflict was considerably higher than other types of work-family conflict) but such conflict was much lower and even diminished as they grew older. Married women experienced various degrees of work-family conflict, ranging from: strong, to moderate, to little. However, working mothers encountered more conflict than those married without children. Therefore, in this case children had an impact on the women's work-family conflict and the age of their children was found to cause differing levels of conflict. It was particularly found that whether the child had started school or not made a significant difference to their mother's experience of work-family conflict. Fortunately, grand-parental childcare arrangements, affordable babysitters and domestic labour have all lessened the domestic burdens on women. More importantly, the interviews indicated that work-family conflict was intimately associated with the major characteristics of women's job roles (i.e., shift patterns, irregular work schedules, and inflexible leave system). It is not entirely surprising that cabin crew encountered the highest degree of conflict among the three job types. In contrast, a non-shift work pattern and plenty of support from families were perceived to be helpful in reducing work-family conflict. Thus, the most common consequence of work-family conflict is that women switch from shift work to conventional office work. Other main consequences included: negative feelings, less ability to undertake family responsibilities, reduced social time, and opting out of paid employment. Work-family conflict was seen to affect women's career aspirations and progress negatively. Other factors which contributed towards work-family conflict included: unfavorable employment practices (which include differentiated pay and welfare scales based on different contract types), the existence of a glass ceiling, gendered job

segregation, limited education, women's age, and women's own self-perceptions. The merged company's HRM system was seen as being slightly better than before, but some policies and practices were questioned by the women (especially the pay system and the leave system). Women acknowledged that the company attached much importance to their health and family (such as providing free gynecological examinations and arranging psychological courses). However, difficulties in asking for leave were seen as contradicting the family-friendly policies and fewer promotional opportunities for women were also seen to contradict the EO policy. To improve this situation, it was suggested that the company should: increase pay; achieve equality in pay, welfare, and task allocation across genders and employment types; and enable flexible leave. Nonetheless, the female interviewees barely mentioned how the organisation should help enhance their long-term career development.

#### **6.3.2.2 Step 2: management interviews**

In order to further explore the experiences of work-family conflict by female employees and the relevant HR policies and practices adopted by the company, I interviewed two middle managers: Ms Zhi, Deputy (Director of Cabin Crew Training Center), and Mr Zhang (Director of the Ground Handling Service Department). Because I had difficulties in getting access to the senior management of Dragon Airlines, I failed to interview any senior managers. Nevertheless, the interviews with two middle managers provided insights into management's attitudes towards female employees and their career development.

#### *Female employees' experience of work-family conflict*

First of all, both heads of the two service departments provided the basic demographic information of their female subordinates. Briefly, Zhi stated,

We've got more than 1,000 female flight attendants with an average age of 29, one third of which are working mothers (including myself).

In a more detailed manner, Zhang described that,

There are 684 staff members in this department, among which there are 415 women. That is to say, over 60% of the ground staff are female. Married women make up around 50% of these.

Having worked in Dragon Airlines for over 20 years and being familiar with the working environment, both agreed that work-family conflict was common in these two departments and explained why by elaborating the main characteristics of these two job types. In Zhi's view, being a flight attendant means that there are more possibilities of encountering work-life imbalance. She attributed this to the high pressure of stewarding work. She continued to explain:

Nowadays, passengers are increasingly demanding. On the one hand, they've got a stronger sense of customer right protection. When flights are delayed, their initial response is to condemn us and require the airlines to compensate. Furthermore, they fail to show any understanding of our work. You know in many cases the flight delay is due to air traffic control and bad weather. They are not sympathetic at all! Under such circumstances, we cannot lose temper. We have to restrain our emotions by being polite, patient, and smiling to customers even if they are getting angry. Meanwhile, we must provide high quality service to air passengers.

According to Zhang, ground staff were in a similar situation to cabin crew. He said that it was the characteristics of the ground handling service work, particularly shift work and emotional labour, that caused work-family conflict for some women. He elaborated:

Foremost, my staff members have to work on shifts. One shift involves 24-hour on duty. The first shift starts from 6:10 AM, but the earliest one can start from 4:00 AM. When they are off duty, they have to await orders at any time. Secondly, ground staff are front-line staff as well, so they must deliver good customer service. However, they often encounter complaints or even curses from passengers in case flights are delayed. Actually, they are innocent because the delay of flights is often due to unexpected bad weather or air traffic control. Moreover, this job brings staff members high

intensification. They are busier on holidays and festivals when most families gather together, when they have to be on duty and often work overtime. Therefore, many staff members have experienced work-family conflict to some extent.

With plenty of first-hand experience, Zhi explained how work-family conflict had influenced the family life of female flight attendants, including herself. She thought that the children were victims of such conflict:

We all feel guilty because we seldom take good care of our children or help them with their studies. We even cannot often communicate with them face-to-face. We don't have much leisure time, not mentioning holidays when families are supposed to get together and enjoy themselves. I think this has affected our children a lot. Many of them would say they don't fancy being flight attendants because it's painstaking if you ask whether they want to do the same job with their moms in future.

When asked about the situation of dual-flying families in Dragon Airlines, she told me that in the past there were many dual-flying families within the company but that the number was now decreasing. She explained that this was because the disadvantages of a dual-flying family were gradually being recognised by the staff.

People have realised that the role conflict tends to be outstanding in such a family and especially neither of them can spare much time to educate children while grandparents often spoil grandchildren, which is not beneficial to children's development. Besides, both wife and husband feel exhausted after work and are all reluctant to do house chores, which also leads to conflict. The home is the only place we can release and relax most. So if we can hardly put up with high work pressure, chagrin or tiredness, we often choose to blow off such repressed emotion at home.

In contrast Zhang did not see the effect of work-family conflict for his female subordinates as being as serious as Zhi described:

However, I feel that they have got used to this working style. I have to say that stewarding is more exhausting than ground service work. Some female staff who used to be flight attendants chose to do ground services because they thought they could leave more time to the family.

So far, we can see that these two managers had similar views to the interviewed female staff. Their explanations were identical to, and corroborated, the questionnaire finding that cabin crew suffered more role conflict than ground staff.

### *Support for female employees' work and family*

As mentioned above, both Zhi and Zhang realised that female employees as a whole, and working mothers in particular, had difficulty reconciling their work and family needs. They also explained what the company, as well as the industry, had done to help women in this regard. The Ground Handling Service Department would rearrange work for pregnant women and provide women with free health checkups as well as psychological seminars. Zhang described this:

If someone has a newly born baby, she will be assigned to some other post which doesn't involve shift work. We also provide female staff with free gynecological examinations. We invite psychologists to deliver lectures on how to understand passengers' psychology and adjust our own mood at work.

Similarly, the Cabin Crew Department provided beneficial practices for pregnant women. Zhi described now:

When flight attendants are pregnant, they can choose to do office work or be off duty. They'll be given post wages if they work at the office and they'll be provided basic salaries if they are not on duty. They can get full pay when they have been pregnant for 8 months.

In addition to the attention of Dragon Airlines, the Chinese flight regulator has also acknowledged the situation of female air staff. As Zhi illustrated:

CAAC has realised the pressure and conflict resulting from this work pattern, so they have regulated that the maximum flight service time is 40 hours per week. If a flight attendant works for 5 days consecutively, she can have at least 2 days' leave per week... For instance, we have recently attended some training courses on customer psychology and emotional labour management, which are very useful to us.



The Woman's Committee of the company was also seen helpful by Zhi:

The Woman's Committee often helps women overcome difficulties in their lives. Once, a female worker's father was seriously ill and she could hardly pay a big lump of money for her father's medical treatment. So the Committee mobilised people to donate for her.

Zhang and Zhi sought to better understand this situation by contacting and communicating with their female employees regularly.

If supervisors or chief attendants notice some (flight attendants) are in low spirit, they will communicate with them. In case it doesn't work, they will report to the middle management, for example me, who then considers possible solutions. (Zhi)

The beneficial practices for women detailed above (such as extended maternity leave, psychology-related training, and free physical examinations) have also been reported by the female interviewees. The questionnaire findings revealed that the female employees of Dragon Airlines received some support from their management. However, such support was not enough as the managerial support was considered least among the various sources of support in the questionnaire survey. Particularly, some HR issues were questioned by many female interviewees (such as the difficulty in taking leave). Moreover, only around 30% of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the family-friendly benefits provided by the company.

#### *Job recruitment, promotion and career opportunity for females*

In terms of recruitment, Zhang explained there were three types of employment in the Ground Handling Service Department. The first type are the long-term contract employees or permanent staff (of which women account for 45%); the second type is contract workers (of which women account for 61%); and the third type is agency workers (of which women account for 91%). Permanent employees are those who have worked in the company for a long time; in Zhang's opinion, at least 10 years:

Since the mid of 1990s, our company has begun to recruit employees based on a fixed-term labour contract and the 'iron rice bowl' era has gone. Besides, we also depend on job agencies to hire some workers for us, but this category of workers are not formal employees of our company.

Recruiting cabin crew is different from, and more complex than, ground staff. Zhi explained that they recruited flight attendant candidates on their own instead of depending on job agencies:

Normally, we select candidates at some local colleges or universities who provide flight attendant pre-employment program such as the Civil Aviation Flight University of China. All the formal flight attendants are entitled to a fixed-term labour contract, mainly 2 years, but the term will be extended as long as they fulfill assigned tasks and don't make big mistakes. I think their job is relatively stable compared to many other job types.

Nevertheless, it was notable that the differences among the three types of employment in key areas like work allocation and pay (especially between permanent staff and contract workers) were little mentioned by Zhang and Zhi, differences which were the complaint of many female interviewees. The fact that female contract and agency workers outnumbered female permanent employees in the Ground Handling Service Department has resulted in their strong dissatisfaction towards the latter. However, this phenomenon seems absent in cabin crew since they are employed under the unified employment system.

When asked why flight attendants earned less in recent years than in the 1990s ( a major cause of complaint from some flight attendants) Zhi thought it was not an odd phenomenon. She told me that a flight attendant's income consisted of three parts: basic salary, salary on flying hours, and subsidies for being resident staff outside their hometown. She further explained why there was a big decrease in their salaries since the end of the 1990s in that a change of the industrial policy on stewarding subsidies had lowered the income level for flight attendants. A new policy regarding controlling the stewarding time length had also attributed to their reduced income:

Before 1997, being a flight attendant was much admired by people because their income was considerably higher than many professions. This, actually, was the major contribution of outstanding subsidies provided by Chinese airlines. This subsidy varied from 40 USD to 80 USD per day based on “the standard of a resident country”. At that time, on average they could earn up to 10,000 RMB per month and even some flight attendants’ monthly salary were 20,000 RMB, which enabled them to be affluent people in society. However, since 1997 CAAC announced a unified standard for this type of subsidy, which is 30 USD per day, and the salaries of flight attendants have been pulled down a lot. At present, they depend mainly on rates on flying hours to increase their income. The longer you fly, the more you earn. However, just as I mentioned, since 2003 CAAC has limited stewarding time, which is no more than 120 hours per month. As a result, their average monthly salary is around 5000 RMB, but some of our flight attendants can earn from 6000 to 10000 RMB per month because we have got international flight routes.

In terms of promotion opportunities for female staff, both managers claimed there were more female cadres than male in their departments. Zhang told me that the Ground Handling Service Department had more female team leaders than male:

The management has attached more importance to selecting females, which depends on their capability and work experience. The equal opportunity principle has been implemented in recruitment and selection.

Zhi felt the same way, and explained that the Cabin Crew Department was always female-dominated, although they had recently begun to recruit male flight attendants. Accordingly, the department had a larger percentage of female supervisors or managers:

As long as you are enthusiastic with your job and perform well in your job post, you will have good chances to be promoted. Apart from this (good practices on women’s health and family), there are no other special policies for women.

However, they also indicated that few preferential policies or development plans were specifically designed to aid women in their long-term career path. Although junior female management in these two departments outnumbered those in other departments (based on the interviews with female staff) both middle and top

management were male-dominated in most sections. Furthermore, only 35% of the total questionnaire respondents believed that the equal opportunity policies and practices adopted by the company were 'satisfactory' or 'very satisfactory'.

### *Concluding comments*

The two managers realised that female employees as a whole, and working mothers in particular, had difficulty in reconciling work and family needs. They both suggested that it was the features of both stewarding and ground service work that made life harder for front-line staff (including shift patterns, work intensification and pressure, and emotional demands). Both the company and the Chinese airline industry as a whole had adopted measures to help female employees handle pressure and conflict, and these were appreciated by the women (such as free physical examinations, work rearrangements for pregnant women, and extended maternity leave). However, some of the managerial and industrial practices caused unhappiness and complaints (such as restrictions on sick or emergency leave and stewarding time, and equal work but unequal pay). The two managers believed that the company offered equal promotion opportunities for female staff as there were lots of women managers in the two departments; nevertheless, they ignored the reality that women accounted for a high percentage of employees within these two sections and that most female cadres were in junior management positions.

## **Chapter VII Overall Analysis: Similarities and Differences**

This chapter will closely analyse women's experiences of work-family conflict which were reported in the three Chinese airlines that I studied, while acknowledging other relevant issues which will be used to inform this process. I will pay particular emphasis to comparing these women's experiences in terms of differences within and between job types. The female employees' perceptions of the antecedents and consequences of the work-family conflict, women's career opportunities, and HR policies and family-friendly provisions are also explored and compared with their managers' explanations. The discussion here is based on the results of both the questionnaire survey and the interviews which were conducted as part of this research. I will begin by providing a broad picture drawn from the questionnaire survey and will then identify the key differences among the three cases. An in-depth discussion will be undertaken and comparisons between the qualitative interview within each of the three cases will be made. In addition, the supplementary interviews (which were conducted via web chat tools including MSN and Skype) will be drawn upon to help clarify and decipher some of the important issues arising from the face-to-face interviews. It was found in this research that although the three cases have a great deal in common, they also differ significantly in subtle ways.

### **7.1 Questionnaire findings**

On the whole the questionnaire findings show that there are more similarities than differences among the three case studies.

#### **7.1.1 Similarities**

The questionnaire findings illustrate that the women in all three cases experienced work-family conflict but in varying degrees. In particular, flight attendants encountered higher levels of conflict than ground and back office staff, and married women with children were more likely to suffer work-family conflict than were married women without children or single women. This finding is not entirely surprising, but what is surprising is that in all the three cases family related factors (including childcare, eldercare and housework) were not statistically significantly related to the work-family conflict, although the later interviews indicated that having

a supportive family that arranges childcare, eldercare and housework has enabled female employees to experience a significantly reduced level of work-family conflict.

The questionnaire findings further revealed that the most popular source of support for childcare was the involvement of respondents' parents or their parents-in-law. Chinese parents who co-reside with their adult children tend to provide help in both childcare and housework (Ikels, 1993; Logan & Bian, 1999). Despite the fact that more young couples do not choose to live with their parents or parents-in-law, the elderly still provide help with childcare by either coming to their married children's home or by inviting them to send the grandchild to them (Stockhman et al., 1995). For example, in Phoenix Airlines 28 of 31 married women with children have chosen their parents or parents-in-law to provide childcare (see Table 6.1), and 18 of 23 working mothers in Panda Airlines benefited most from parental help in childcare (see Table 6.10). Chen et al. (2000) conclude that the presence of grandparents in the household significantly reduces a mother's involvement in childcare.

This research also found that the older generation tended to take responsibility for cleaning and cooking for the family although this pattern is predominantly found among families where the elderly live together with the younger generation (Stockman et al., 1995). For example, when answering the question, 'Who in your home has the biggest housework responsibility?', nearly 30% of the respondents in Phoenix Airlines (see Table 6.1) and 35% in Dragon Airlines (see Table 6.19) reported that their parents/parents-in-law took the biggest responsibility, while around 30% of the respondents in H (see Table 6.1) and Panda Airlines (see Table 6.10) and 38% in Dragon Airlines (see Table 6.19) undertook it on their own. Only a couple of women in all three cases reported their husbands or partners were the main domestic provider. It is not unusual for women to do more housework than men. Recent investigations have also indicated that on average urban Chinese women spend 2.7 hours a week more than men in doing house chores and undertake over 85% of housework, but it was also found that women spend less time doing housework today than they did in the 1990s (ChinaWomen, 2005). The result is also well-reflected in my own research sample, which found that in Phoenix Airlines, for example, more than 40% of the respondents admitted that they spent no more than 2 hours dealing with housework per week and only 5% claimed that they were doing more than 10 hours housework per week (see Table 6.1). When grandparental involvement in childcare and housework was not available many respondents hired domestic helpers: for example,

11 of 50 working mothers in Dragon Airlines (see Table 6.19) hired babysitters.

In contrast, in all three cases work related factors are shown to be strongly related to work-family conflict, which can be linked with the fact that the female employees did not receive adequate support from their managers and supervisors. This will be further explored in the following section and the interview findings.

### **7.1.2 Differences**

Despite the above similarities, the three cases diverge in relation to levels of work-family conflict as well as in its workplace causes.

On average the women in Panda Airlines experienced a slightly higher conflict level (see Table 6.12) than those of Phoenix Airlines (see Table 6.3) and a much higher conflict level than those of Dragon Airlines (see Table 6.21). This result is opposite to my initial expectation that the women in Panda Airlines would experience much less conflict than those of Phoenix Airlines and at a similar level to those of Dragon Airlines, simply because the region where Panda Airlines is located is well-known for having easygoing and relaxed lifestyles. Ultimately the questionnaire can only discover the participants' perceptions of how much role conflict they have experienced. In Panda Airlines women's workload or work pressure is especially outstanding when compared with the local environment. People surrounding the participants (including their family members and friends) who do not work for the airlines lead a relatively relaxed lifestyle. Panda Airline's employees might observe a significant contrast between other people's relaxed lifestyle and their own busy or irregular work schedules. However, as I mentioned, Panda Airlines is actually located in the same city as Dragon Airlines whose female employees had the lowest level of work-family conflict amongst the three airlines. One more important reason for this discrepancy could be suggested to be the recent structural and managerial changes which have taken place in Panda Airlines which remains state-controlled, but due to intensified competition from both low cost carriers and 'Big Mac' airlines (i.e., the merger of Dragon Airlines into the largest Airline in China) in the domestic market, it had no choice but to undergo an effective organisational transformation (this in turn has created a pressing need for improving employees' productivity and commitment). Consequently, the employees would be more likely to become stressed and have a stronger sense of competition and crisis.

In the case of Phoenix Airlines, all of the job-related factors (including job

demands, work schedule inflexibility, length of leave and organisational views of female colleagues) are significantly related to work-family conflict (see Table 6.9 of Appendix III). Nevertheless, length of leave is not a factor leading to work-family conflict in the case of Panda Airlines (see Table 6.18). By comparing the actual number of days leave specified in employees' contracts with the number of days leave said to be taken, it was found that 77% of respondents of Panda Airlines succeeded in taking their full leave entitlement (see Table 6.10). About 70% of respondents of Panda Airlines who were entitled to take the highest allocation available of 15 days annual leave actually took it, but less than 20% of respondents in Phoenix Airlines actually took their full leave (see Table 6.1). It is notable that in the case of Dragon Airlines, job demand is not a factor which leads to work-family conflict (see Table 6.27) while it is a salient factor in the other two cases. This implies that job demands did not generate much pressure on the women of Dragon Airlines. It is my understanding that Chinese female air staff members as a whole, and stewardesses and ground staff in particular, often have busy work schedules involving the need to work shifts frequently. By examining the responses to the statements relating to 'Your experience of job demands' in the questionnaire (see Appendix I), it was found that more than half of the respondents of Dragon Airlines tended to agree with the statement that 'I can handle my job effortlessly' by scaling it as 3 or above, and over 60% of respondents agreed that 'I can always complete my job on time' by scaling it as 4 or above. This might partly explain why job demand has little to do with work-family conflict for the female employees of Dragon Airlines. It is also likely that the merger of Dragon Airlines into the largest and most influential state-owned airlines in China has had a positive influence on people who might feel more secure in a more stable working environment. However, an in-depth analysis and a more grounded explanation can only be given following a comparison of the interview findings from the three cases.

## **7.2 Interview findings**

My in-depth interviews provide a more rounded picture of women's experiences of work-family conflict and of other relevant experiences in both organisational and domestic life. The interview data uncovered many things that the questionnaire data could not explain. The three case studies shared similarities in major regards, while



diversifying in many details.

### **7.2.1 Major causes of work-family conflict**

#### *Motherhood*

The interview data indicated that work-family conflict existed among the female employees studied and that they experienced to varying degree all three types of conflict – namely job-spouse, job-parent and job-home/leisure conflict. Women in Phoenix Airlines experienced considerable job-spouse and job-parent conflicts but little job-leisure conflict, which was very much perceived by women in Panda Airlines. Women in Dragon Airlines suffered a strong job-parent conflict and some job-home/leisure conflict, while job-spouse conflict was little mentioned. Therefore, it can be concluded that job-parent conflict was the most significant type of conflict experienced by these female employees, and that motherhood could be a factor leading to work-family conflict.

Despite the little correlation between childcare and work-family conflict depicted in the questionnaire findings, the interview data showed clearly that having a child did matter as in all the three airlines working mothers were more likely to experience dual role conflict than single or married women without children, in particular some had very intense job-parent conflict.

#### *Shift work and schedule inflexibility*

The only shared cause of work-family conflict was the shift pattern and its key characteristics of irregular or intense work schedules. Shift work (especially evening shifts) generated lots of inconvenience in the women's family life. The busier or the less conventional the work schedule, then the higher was the level of conflict which the women suffered. Due to the time clash between their work schedules and personal social and leisure time, some single females also encountered work-family conflict – mainly job-leisure conflict.

Due to the nature of their job, characterised by emotional labour and busy or unpredictable schedules, cabin crew suffered more obvious conflict than non-flying employees. Women who had to work shifts (such as ground staff) encountered higher levels of conflict than those who usually worked conventional office hours (such as back office staff). Those who regularly worked evening shifts were found to suffer the

most intense conflict.

Furthermore, due to shift work and schedule inflexibility resulting in less family or social time, these female employees often received complaints from their children, partners, other family members or friends, which caused unhappiness and worries, and then a conflict between their work and life outside work.

#### *Impact of organisation ownership, size and market competition*

Causes of work-family conflict were not always identical amongst the three case studies. Work pressure experienced by women was a main antecedent in both Phoenix and Panda Airlines, but it was not a major issue for women in Dragon Airlines who generally did not consider their busy work schedules as a burden.

Based on a supplementary interview with one key informant of Dragon Airlines, it is clear that the merger of Dragon Airlines and A Airlines (the national flag carrier) in 2002 can largely explain the issue. Before the merger, Dragon Airlines was already the largest airline in the west of China in terms of flight routes and market share, while A Airlines was the largest state-owned airlines with the largest total assets and most widely recognized brand. The merger created, in the words of the CEO of A Airlines, a new 'Big Mac' airline (Li, 2008) whose employees now have a strong sense of job security.

A Airlines has recently become a listed company which has improved its reputation, financing capability, and business transparency in the airline industry. This has, in turn, helped build employee confidence and maintain their loyalty and commitment to the company. In addition, as discussed in Chapter III, the new National Labour Law stipulates that those who have consecutively been employed for 10 years or more are entitled to a permanent contract with their employers. This is beneficial for many of their female employees as many have been employed by the company for more than ten years, often since leaving education. Therefore, it can be concluded that a state-owned enterprise when strengthened through positive organisational changes can be beneficial to employees.

Despite also being a state-owned enterprise in the same city, Panda Airlines is not as fortunate as Dragon Airlines. Unlike privatised or joint stock enterprises such as Phoenix Airlines, small or medium-sized state-owned enterprises could not establish a flexible financing system which can be an obstacle to the development of their financial stability (Wang & Yang, 2006). One of the strongest impressions conveyed

to me in the course of my fieldwork in Panda Airlines was that most members felt as if they were living through a period of major restructuring and organisational change which was largely economy-centred and market-driven. The company is aiming to gain a firm foot hold in the west of China, but so far this has proven to be difficult. The management of Panda Airlines suggested that a small-sized airline found it difficult to compete with large government-aided airlines at the same time as needing to cope with heightened competition from newly emerging low-cost carriers. Foreign airlines often choose to only work in partnerships with large-sized and influential airlines. In such circumstances, Panda Airlines has made great efforts to reconfigure by successfully inviting more shareholders (particularly from the private sector). However, the increasingly profit-driven environment has put their employees under greater pressure. Although Panda Airlines is still state-controlled, the employees are no longer given 'iron rice bowls' which means that employees have to change to meet the organisational demands or risk losing their jobs. It was striking that some of their cabin crew had to cope with multiple duties – including stewarding, coaching, lecturing, and even staging (e.g. singing or dancing to publicise the Airline's image), which added to their job pressure and workloads and subsequently generated extra tensions between their work and family lives. These additional problems were not imposed in Phoenix and Dragon Airlines, which may explain why the highest conflict level exists in Panda Airlines.

Although not every employee felt stressed because of job demands, the general trend is for Chinese female air staff – particularly front-line workers – to feel increasingly pressured by intensified competition both in the airline and labour market. In particular, increased work and stress has led to less time for personal and leisure activities with families.

### **7.2.2 Impact of work-family conflict on health, well-being and career ambitions**

The consequences of work-family conflict are largely identical among the three cases, but there were some significant minor differences which are explored below.

#### *Mental health and well-being*

A common consequence identified by nearly all of those who have encountered work-family conflict is negative feelings or psychological problems (e.g. guilt, upset, stress, and anxiety).

In particular, a problematic feature of work-family conflict in all three cases was the lack of time spent with partners or children, or an ability to take sufficient responsibility for domestic work. As a result some of these women's family members – particularly their husbands – worried, complained, and even threatened divorce, which caused unhappiness to the women and created a tension in the husband-wife relationship.

The women in Panda Airlines also felt that their social hours were largely reduced because of the time clash between work and personal life, despite being located in an area which is famous for its laid back lifestyle. This is largely due to the restructuring of Panda Airlines, which has diminished what was a comfortable and easy work environment and has in turn generated stress for employees who have to work harder with less time for leisure.

### *Career ambitions*

In all three cases some women who suffered work-family conflict lowered their career expectations and made changes, either by switching to a job which involved little shift work, or even by leaving their job in order to cater to family needs. Such changes were not necessarily always forced upon the women against their will. On the one hand, quite a few interviewees in Phoenix and Panda Airlines indicated that despite their own reluctance, they had moved to another job (e.g. from cabin service to ground service) mainly for family and domestic reasons (including marriage, childbirth and child-rearing). In these cases the family tended to have a direct impact on women's career decisions. On the other hand, although also influenced by their families, some women changed or left their jobs (particularly in Dragon Airlines) but showed their willingness to make the decision because they predicted that there would be an intense conflict if they failed to do so.

It was apparent that balancing work and family needs limited women's career development. At least 70% of interviewees in each case held this view. The most common but significant reason was that they labeled themselves as a 'family woman' and, therefore, wanted to give family life a high priority. Clearly, this is not an isolated non-social phenomenon but is inherently social and cultural (Venter, 2002). The tendency to put family interests above the interest of all other groups in society is a key characteristic of Chinese society (Lau, 1982). For women, the family remains of foremost importance and the family and work are very much related. A typical

response was that 'I can not work well without a happy family'. These women felt that they should be responsible for major domestic tasks and they referred to deeply rooted traditional attitudes towards women which still existed. This can also explain why around 80% of interviewees in each case admitted that they had either little career ambition or that their career aspirations were held back.

Young and single women were more ambitious than married women, although the former also added that their desires would be dashed when they moved to marriage and childbirth. Those who appeared to be ambitious wished to achieve what they described as a 'middle job', but they could not quite see how they could do so and keep working as usual. In fact, the prominent impression I got was that most of the women I interviewed were unclear about what the next step in their careers would be. They did not have specific plans in place but just wanted to stay with their jobs in a stable manner. Although most of the female interviewees did not intend to give up work or could not imagine that their careers would stop when they got married or had children, they did believe that these domestic events would, to some extent, have an impact. Married women with children had more awareness of this issue because of a stronger sense of responsibility in child-rearing. Although they had worked without any major breaks except maternity leave, most of them did experience a hard time in reconciling work demands and family responsibilities which held back their career progression.

### **7.2.3 Work, societal, and personal factors affecting women's career ambitions**

Juggling work and family life is a major issue influencing women's career advancement, but it is not the only factor. There are other influential factors emerging from work, society and women's own perceptions which affect their career ambitions, and in this aspect, the three cases differentiate from each other.

#### *Training and qualifications*

The first influential factor is insufficient training. This was especially evident in Phoenix Airlines where some respondents, particularly ground crew including line managers, were aggrieved that the company had failed to provide sufficient training schemes and long-term development plans for individuals. This resulted in a failure to improve professional skills or to enhance confidence for their future. The back office staff of Dragon Airlines shared the idea that lack of effective training was a limitation.

This factor, however, was not identified as important by women in Panda Airlines, most of whom were more concerned about their qualifications and capabilities which they suggested were limited and likely to hinder their career progression. The female interviewees of Dragon Airlines also expressed the same concerns which they thought would slow down their career development.

Modern China is aiming to become a knowledge-based society in which communicative, cooperative, and cognitive skills form the basis for the production of wealth. As such it is particularly urgent for people in such a rapidly developing airline industry to update their knowledge and capability. However, a majority of flight attendants and some ground service staff did not hold a bachelor's degree and many only had secondary schooling when they were recruited based mainly on their physical appearance. Therefore, they expressed a strong desire to continue in higher education and learn more about work-related skills so as to develop stable or better career prospects. This finding indicates that the airlines have failed to open up adequate learning opportunities for their staff.

#### *Leave systems*

Flight attendants in all the three airlines felt that they received sufficient on-the-job training. Nevertheless, many flight attendants of Phoenix Airlines complained that the company's inflexible leave system was another limiting factor. Asking for leave was not always easy, and it would lower their performance appraisal or even hold them back from getting promoted if they did. What was worse, few front-line staff (particularly cabin crew) could take the full amount of annual leave that they were entitled to, and they were not allowed to take their leave entitlement in one go. The rigid leave system was also criticised by women in Dragon Airlines who compared their length of vacation with that of foreign airlines and argued that they received shorter vacations but worked longer hours than employees in foreign airlines. Women in Panda Airlines did not complain about the length of leave as many of them could take their annual leave entitlement without difficulty, however, they were not satisfied with the rule that asking for leave during work time would lead to the deduction of their individual performance mark.

#### *Guan xi*

'*Guan xi*' (personal connections) was also found to determine the availability of

employees' job promotion and other career opportunities. '*Guan xi*' can make promotion easier for those not academically qualified or experienced. In Panda Airlines some respondents stressed that lacking access to important informal relationships and networks might make people lag behind in their career development, despite their eligibility as an applicant. It is implied that those women who entered managerial careers usually depended on personal or family networks.

This would not be entirely unexpected as depending on *guan xi* to deal with businesses has long been seen as an unwritten rule as Chinese people live in a well-structured web of social relationships. However, it is neither convenient nor seen as appropriate for women to network with people in power or at senior levels, roles which are usually dominated by men. Firstly, the vast majority of women do not drink or smoke as drinking and smoking are considered unacceptable social behaviour for women in China, which makes it more difficult for women to network with their male colleagues (Cooke, 2005). Secondly, if they do establish good working relationships with men, then women may find themselves hampered by rumours which can be highly damaging to their career because the Chinese society has a relatively low tolerance towards close relationships between men and women outside of marriage (Cooke, 2005).

Panda Airlines is not the only company to experience this phenomenon. A supplementary interview with one middle manager in Phoenix Airlines indicated that '*guan xi*' was often used in their recruiting practices. A typical example was the recruitment of flight attendants. For young women who did not have contact with the company then their parents, relatives or friends tried to use '*guan xi*' to attain jobs for the girls by sending a '*tiao zi*' (message) to associated persons, normally senior managers, who were either in charge, or very influential in the company. Officially, the organisation did not welcome such behaviour because of the implementation of equal opportunity policies in formal hiring procedures that were governed by the industrial authority. However, they had no choice but to allow it to occur if a job applicant's '*guan xi*' was so strong that they could not avoid it.

### *Age*

Age was also perceived to be a problem, particularly by middle-aged ground crew and back office staff. Because they have been in business longer, Dragon Airlines employed more middle-aged women than the other two airlines, which resulted in a

bigger concern about ageing issues. This can be seen as a psychological, physical, and social problem. In her research on Chinese women's managerial careers, Cooke (2005) argues that those women above the age of 35 will not be considered for their first promotion and women have to retire five years earlier than men in the same occupational/official rank. This is actually an age-related policy for management training and development which was introduced by the Chinese government in the 1990s. Based on a supplementary interview with one middle-aged woman in Dragon Airlines, change in physical appearance and lower energy were the main reasons given for some negative feelings about middle age. She reported that she was not able now to perform her work with the same efficiency, which had affected work quality and performance and that, in turn, induced guilt and stress. Furthermore, compared with younger women below 35 years old, she felt that she was losing out on career chances which were open to younger women, although middle-aged women were more experienced. This made them less motivated.

Age was not only a concern of only middle-aged women but also of young flight attendants. In China, certain jobs like stewarding and secretarial work have long been recognised as only being suitable for the young. After their mid 30s, such roles are not traditionally perceived as suitable for employees. The most desirable job role for the cabin crew, as they get older, is as a chief attendant or a trainer/tutor for flight attendant candidates. However, only a small number of flight attendants can attain that goal, many of them will have to undertake a totally new job. The fact that selection of cabin crew candidates relied largely on one's physical attractiveness in China (especially in Panda Airlines) meant that the key quality for being a flight attendant was not likely to be a useful basis for their long term career development elsewhere. The flight attendants I interviewed did not worry too much about this, but many of them had begun to consider what else they could do. Undoubtedly flight attendants possess rich job-specific skills, but these are very limited in scope. Taking another job elsewhere with a similar pay level would require higher skill and knowledge levels.

#### *Employment type*

Employment type was also a determinant in women's career ambitions, as was clearly shown in the case of Dragon Airlines. There were three main types of employees in Dragon Airlines: permanent workers (also called senior staff) who had been employed



for more than 15 years and who benefited from a continuing contract or even a life-long labour relationship with the organisation; contract workers who had fixed-term labour contracts which were reviewed every two or three years; and the agency work force who were supplied by external job agencies and who were not regarded as regular employees.

As the labour contract system has been universally adopted in most urban Chinese organisations since the 1990s, it was surprising to see that in a fast-moving and influential organisation such as Dragon Airlines the phenomenon of the 'iron rice bowl' remained, but not every employee was given such a bowl. During the course of my interviews with female colleagues of Dragon Airlines, a strong feeling of dissatisfaction over some employment practices was revealed among contract workers which generated a gap between themselves and permanent workers. Unfair treatment and prejudiced attitudes towards contract workers led to more stress and a reduced level of job security. In short, they felt that they had not been treated as they should have been. Women were found to predominate in the contract and agency workforce: in the ground service department, women accounted for 61% of all contract workers and 91% of agency workers were female. Thus, the consequences of contract or agency employment status had a more negative impact on women than men. Whereas management made little comment on the gap between contract workers and the permanent employees, they did mention that in the market-driven economy, the existence of diversified employment types can enable an organisation to cope with fast-changing situations in a cost effective manner.

Phoenix Airlines had also adopted the labour contract system, but in this case the respondents showed little resentment about it and it did not appear to be a problem. I was told that every employee in Phoenix Airlines was employed on fixed-term labour contracts, including senior management and other senior employees and core workers who had specific skills and who were entitled to a relatively longer contract, and an 'iron rice bowl' had never been available since the company's inception. In these circumstances, every one had to contribute equally to the organisation and was treated fairly, especially in terms of pay and benefits.

A senior consultant in the Chinese airline industry that I interviewed explained that the co-existence of permanent and fixed-term employment types within one organisation was not unusual. He further explained why state-owned airlines like Dragon Airlines could not employ more employees on permanent contracts. He said

that because a state-owned organisation is controlled by the government, their staff allocation and personnel quotas were regulated. If a state-owned enterprise is short handed while the size of labour force is controlled then the normal approach is to employ contract or agency workers to meet the demand, which results in cost savings. However, there are disadvantages for non-permanent employees in terms of working life, ongoing career development, and performance evaluation as a result of being neglected by management.

#### *Conservative attitudes*

The last factor limiting women's career ambitions was conservative attitudes or extreme opinions held not only by women themselves, but also their husbands or other family members. Although public opinions on women's increasing share of professional and management jobs are positive and encouraging in modern Chinese society, some still see household work and childcare as a woman's chief responsibility while men are viewed as the major breadwinner. For instance, a respondent at Dragon Airlines finally quit her job and became a housewife under the influence of her husband who thought that he could earn enough and her main responsibility was 'looking after children at home'. Traditionally, female identity in China has been understood through 'some form of family context' (Venter, 2002: 31). Nowadays, traditional femininity and financial independence are still seen as incompatible by some. Some even think women's work such as stewarding would damage marriage. For instance, a flight attendant at Phoenix Airlines emphasised that it was not herself but her husband that constrained her career pursuit, by persuading her to give up the job simply because the job 'involved contact with lots of men'. There remains a lack of social expectations and, to a certain extent, tolerance of the idea that women could be as good as men, or that a wife can be more advanced than a husband in her career (Cooke, 2005).

#### **7.2.4 Gendered organisational culture**

The more notable finding, which was shared in all three cases, was the gendered organisational culture perceived to impact on women's work commitment, long-term career development and quality of life. Such gendered organisational culture was explored in this research through interviewing both management and female employees in all three airlines.

### *Masculine management discourses*

Management discourses are formed from management ideas, norms and values of an organisation, and as men dominated the senior positions in these three Chinese airlines I would suggest that their management discourses were necessarily gendered and therefore influenced women's role and status within these organisations – this was especially apparent in Phoenix Airlines. One senior manager told me that it is better for young female employees not to get married in the first three years of their career in order to ensure that they are able to commit to work the same as men. Thus, there is a more subtle constraint which affected women without family responsibilities, but who were still seen as potential mothers.

Another example occurred when several managers, including the Head of HR, were asked why there was no female senior manager in Phoenix Airlines. Their responses revealed that nearly all of the senior managers had qualifications in engineering, piloting or IT as well as relevant work experience, while in contrast the majority of the women did not have similar educational or employment background. However, such an explanation seems hardly convincing as the company tended to have a masculine model of successful management (Halford & Leonard, 2001). To my understanding, this suggests that only people who have science or engineering related work experience can be valued and desired as appropriate candidates for senior positions, the masculine characteristics of these jobs are not associated with traditional female roles. Thus, the senior careers in the airlines are made masculine with little accommodation made for the female employees who work in it. In practice, however, not all job positions of the senior management level required this expertise; some such as finance and HR are viewed as having many feminine traits (e.g. caring, patience, approachability, and attention to detail) which are necessary for successful managerial performance. Nevertheless, the heads of these departments were held by males. Thus, the associations between gender role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics have not diminished in modern airlines.

The above phenomena were not seen in formally written rules of Phoenix Airlines, but they were part of the organisational culture which had a substantial influence on women who had to delay their marriage plans or to compromise their family life for good career prospects if they were ambitious and eager to succeed at work.

### *Glass ceiling*

Here the underlying male culture was more apparently revealed through the interviews with female employees, which showed that women at work faced an additional pressure or a glass ceiling, that their male counterparts did not face. This additional pressure resulted from women's perceptions of their current organisational culture which was less women-friendly and stereotypically masculine. As Venter (2002) argued, women probably do have to work harder and input more than their male colleagues in order to achieve the same positions. In my study, however, such a glass ceiling effect also resulted in the fact that many women tended to lower their career ambitions or give up striving for job promotions in order to achieve a work-family balance.

This was particularly noticeable in both Phoenix and Dragon Airlines. In these two airlines, women's perceptions of what constitutes corporate culture were formed partly by their encounter with an existing male-dominated environment. In the course of the interviews, the respondents articulated a consciousness of gendered realities within their departments or organisations. They indicated that female air staff members had fewer opportunities for professional development than men, while men received more organisational encouragement and trust than women. They complained about this unfairness but also acknowledged that it was partly due to biological differences between the sexes and inherent feminine features. It was also notable that this male culture was discussed by ground and back office staff, but not by flight attendants. This testifies to the predominant number of women in the cabin crew, resulting in a higher percentage of female cadres in this department than any other. However, most flight attendants were at the junior management level even if they had more of a chance to be promoted than other staff.

### *Femininity and aesthetics*

Women of Panda Airlines further confirmed the existence of a gendered organisational culture but in the form of femininity instead of masculinity. They did not seem to identify male-dominated management as a serious problem or anyone's fault, nor did they think that it impacted on their career aspirations. Instead, they saw a failure to get promotion or reach the top as a reflection of individual problems or weaknesses such as limited occupational capability, poor foreign language skills, and

a lack of the necessary qualifications. Thus, the male-dominated culture was not seen to be evident in Panda Airlines, which did not mean that the corporate culture was gender neutral. In practice, sexuality, as a crucial gender aspect of organisational culture, was evident in Panda Airlines. In recent years, this airline has strongly advocated its “Beautiful Enterprise Culture” within which beauty is one key principle. This has been disseminated through their organisational literature and publications, posters in public, and the processes of selection and recruitment. Frankly, the HR specialist of Panda Airlines believed those women’s (flight attendants) appearance and figures were more important than their education background and language skills. The former was seen as a useful way to establish a good image as well as represent the company’s ‘Beautiful Enterprise Culture’. Therefore, aesthetics were possessed by female flight attendants at the point of entry into employment.

The other two airlines did not consider physical appearance as the most important criteria in selection, but they did stress that only young (no more than 26 years old), good-figured and single females could be candidates, and would build them into a desired image through training. Thus, through processes of recruitment, selection, training, discipline and reward these airlines then mobilised and commodified women’s aesthetics and transformed them into desirable physical and emotional techniques in order to attract customers and repeat businesses. These women have to ‘offer their sexuality as part of the skills they brought to the job, a requirement that was not similarly made of the men’ (Halford & Leonard, 2001: 159).

In addition, Panda Airlines expected women who were able to sing or dance to join their cabin crew, which was an unwritten rule governing their selection of female candidates. This prerequisite seemed inexplicable: the actual work that flight attendants do is to ensure passenger safety, serving food and drinks, and so on, while entertainment abilities like singing or dancing seem to have nothing to do with their work. A supplementary interview with one of the stewardesses clarified the situation to me - Panda Airlines had established its own art society, members of which include flight attendants and other staff, the majority of which were female. The Airline Art Society had delighted audiences by giving singing and dancing performances, and has already become an active literary and art community with considerable influence in this region. In the Chinese business culture, an organisation’s reputation and social standing can determine its success. The Art Society had promoted the public image of Panda Airlines. This stewardess had recently won an important prize in a national

talent competition and was interviewed by popular media and the top airline magazine in China. She was said by the management of Panda Airlines to 'win honour' for the company because their flight attendants have gained fame and many passengers have subsequently chosen to fly with them. Therefore, the utilisation of women's aesthetics has turned out to be very successful in the strong competition of air business.

#### **7.2.5 Perceptions on HRM policies and practices**

Women's experience of work-family conflict and its impact on their career aspirations can be seen to be associated with the HRM approaches applied in these organisations. Many of the above mentioned problems (such as leave entitlement, training, and employment type) are ultimately related to some HRM policies and practices which created barriers for women with work-family conflict from pursuing their careers effectively.

Interviews with the middle or senior managers of the three organisations, however, gave a more positive picture. None of them commented on their HRM policies and practices in a negative way. Instead, they insisted that equal opportunity (EO) policies had been carried out within the organisation and were monitored at an industry level. What is more, the managers were optimistic that the organisation or the management had provided effective support for female colleagues in both work and family life and particularly assisted them in dealing with work-family conflict. But, was this effective or sufficient? The questionnaire results of the three cases have already informed us that help from the management was the least among all of the sources of support and that their satisfaction with HR-related issues was low.

The interviews provided further information. On the surface, the existing HRM system was generally acceptable according to most of the female interviewees. When it came to the details, however, women (particularly in Panda and Dragon Airlines) had diverse views of the HRM policies and practices. Some spoke highly of the HRM system and felt it was 'employee-oriented' while others were not content with some HR practices, feeling 'uncomfortable' and pointing out some evident pitfalls. The interview results show that the positive comments that women made on the HRM system tended to be similar in all the three cases. For instance, the organisations attached more importance to developing modern HR strategies, and the employees' needs (particularly women's needs as a mother) were taken into account when establishing HR policies.

In terms of the drawbacks in HRM policies and practices, however, women had more to say, and their views varied between different job types and organisations. Generally speaking, flight attendants were more concerned about work arrangements and leave-related issues, while non-flying staff (including ground and back office staff) were more concerned about selection and promotion practices. The women of Phoenix Airlines were more annoyed by its ungenerous annual leave policy, the women of Panda Airlines were more discontent with its rule forbidding employees from swapping shifts, and the women of Dragon Airlines were unhappier with its different treatment of various types of employment. Some organisations did slightly better than others in implementing EO policies. These are explored in detail below.

#### *The work arrangements and leave policy*

Cabin crew of Panda Airlines were much more critical than those in other departments. Their criticisms focused firstly on the rigidity of work arrangements and relevant policies, for example: single flight attendants had to work in another base of Panda Airlines for one month while married women stayed for half a month; their performance appraisals were closely linked to passengers' complaints; and, there was little pay for overtime work. Secondly, the inflexibility of the asking-for-leave system was an issue, for example: they could not go anywhere beyond 50 kilometers when they were off duty; they had to report to their superior in advance before any personal travel; asking for leave would lead to reduction in their performance mark; and, a shift swap was forbidden. Despite having fewer complaints, the flight attendants of Phoenix and Dragon Airlines were more dissatisfied with the existing leave system. The situation was even harder for the 'dual-flying' family. Quite a few flight attendants of all the three airlines raised a specific issue that they seldom worked with their pilot husbands on the same flights, which meant they had less chance of meeting up and communicating face-to-face, making the relationship hard to maintain. In addition, linking individual leave with performance appraisal, which has widely been adopted by the airlines (particularly in the cabin service department), also disadvantaged women. The longer the leave an individual takes then the lower that individual's performance mark will be. However, it is women who need a rest on their period and who often have to ask for leave because of domestic emergencies such as taking ill children to the hospital.

Such an inflexible leave policy generated a bigger impact than expected as it also caused dissatisfaction and even resentment among the male pilots. It was recently reported by the Chinese Youth Newspaper that around 20 pilots requested resignation from Phoenix Airlines and submitted the case to Local Arbitration Committee in 2007 (CYOL, 2008). The major reason given was that they were dissatisfied with the high frequency of overtime work arranged by the company. This news put Phoenix Airlines in trouble and damaged its public image. The evidence provided by the pilots showed that some had to fly for 7, 9, or even 10 days without a 48-hour break, which was not in compliance with China's Aviation Law. China's Civil Aviation Hygiene Work Rules, available on the official website of CAAC, clearly state that air crew including pilots and flight attendants are entitled to stay in a health resort for at least 25 days per year and the designated health resort is the Convalescent Home and Sanatorium of the China Civil Aviation. Nevertheless, the Air Crew Health and Safety Convention of Phoenix Airlines specifies that air crew could only enjoy health and convalescent services for 20 days every year and employees are not allowed to apply for it in a one-off manner. What is more, the air crew can only stay in a hotel affiliated to Phoenix Airlines for cost-saving purposes, which did not comply with the relevant industrial regulations. It was widely recognised that the work of air crew is crucial, but often laborious and had a negative influence on their health. Airline staff can only guarantee passenger safety and provide quality customer services if and when they are given sufficient time to restore their energy and keep fit.

### *Selection and promotion*

When discussing the selection and promotion processes, nearly all of the flight attendants I interviewed were quite content and some complimented the implementation of EO policies. For instance, the 'backup cadres' scheme launched by Phoenix Airlines aimed to select talent by offering all the candidates one comprehensive exam, and selection and promotion is based on their results. The standardised promotion system adopted by Panda Airlines indicated that people's capability, work experience and performance were more highly valued. In contrast, non-flying staff members had different views. Women were outnumbered by men at the management level and there were far fewer female managers in senior jobs as conservatism and masculinity of power still pervades in the workplace even though all the airlines had promised to implement EO policies.



The male-dominated culture existing in these airlines (particularly in Phoenix and Dragon Airlines) implies that it is impossible to have real EO. The ground staff of Phoenix Airlines felt that the company preferred to select males to females and did not attach enough importance to cultivating female cadres despite the backup cadres plan. Some non-flying staff of Dragon Airlines also shared these complaints and described the existence of a 'glass ceiling', while others identified with HR practices in recruitment, selection and promotion by claiming that equal opportunity policies were well implemented. It turned out that the employment type not only determined women's career aspirations, as previously reported, but that they influenced perceptions of the company's HRM system. Among the interviewees, the permanent staff had more positive feelings about HR policies and practices than the contract employees because the former were better paid and treated, and were given more chances in selection and promotion. Another complaint I received is that these airlines lacked staff in both cabin service and ground service departments, which meant that existing staff were overworked and led to comments like 'the airline needs to recruit more instead of restricting people's leave'.

Of the three airlines studied, Panda Airlines did a little better in terms of equal opportunity in job promotions, although the influence of '*guan xi*' was mentioned by some staff. All in all, horizontal segregation existed in all the three cases, with women concentrated in administration and service work while men dominated in piloting and engineering work. There was a sign of movement across gendered boundaries, but this often took the form of men moving into female jobs on a small scale. For example, all the three airlines have recently started to recruit men as flight attendants (e.g. nearly 9% of flight attendants in Phoenix Airlines are now men). One exception was that Panda Airlines which had two qualified female pilots and was selecting female candidates for future piloting positions.

### *Pay*

The issue of pay was raised by many staff at Dragon Airlines. Apart from the pay gap between permanent members and contract workers discussed previously, the lower level of pay was also a concern of the flight attendants at Dragon Airlines, who claimed that a pay rise was due to the demanding nature of the job and soaring prices. The cabin crew of both Phoenix and Panda Airlines did not mention this as an issue, which suggests that they were not dissatisfied with their pay level. I assume that rates

of pay are relevant to their age and service time within the organisation. I was told that the average age for the flight attendants in Phoenix and Panda Airlines was 22 and 25 respectively, which meant that most of them had never experienced the golden age of being an air hostess in China. The average age in Dragon Airlines is over 29, which shows that many of them have experienced both highs and lows of this profession. One management interviewee of Dragon Airlines explained the issue: because of the change of the industrial policy on subsidies and stewarding time since the late 1990s flight attendants have earned much less than before. Previously, many of them could earn 10,000 RMB, some even up to 20,000 RMB per month, but now their average monthly salary is just 5000 RMB. Such a decrease in pay has disappointed many experienced cabin crew. I also feel that although the job remains a lure to many young women, flight attendants are not in a very strong bargaining position given the intensified competition in the labour market for their jobs. As one management interviewee said, 'there are loads of 20-year-olds who are eager to do this job'.

#### *Family-friendly and women-friendly policies*

Family-friendly or women-friendly provisions were regarded as a key part of HR policies and practices by all of the managers interviewed, who also showed their awareness of the significance of helping women balance their working lives and family responsibilities. Practices aimed at supporting women included extended maternity leave, psychological or mental health seminars and free physical or gynecological examinations. However, women were still suspicious of the effectiveness and sufficiency of these policies. Around 40% of Phoenix and 60% of female interviewees of Dragon Airlines did not recognise any preferential policies for women. They claimed that some policies (such as a half-day's leave on International Women's Day or International Children's Day (for working mothers only)) should not be viewed as an extra bonus. Moreover, many front-line workers seldom enjoyed such benefits because of a time clash with their shift work. Most of the female interviewees of Panda Airlines failed to see any preferential treatment and felt that 'they work as much as men'.

#### *Women's suggestions*

Both the limitation and insufficiency of these practices were pointed out by the female interviewees, and various suggestions were made based on the diverse experiences of different groups of female colleagues.

Firstly, women wanted a change to the existing leave policy. Female colleagues (particularly cabin crew in Phoenix and Dragon Airlines) wished to take their full annual leave entitlement and to be able to ask for leave during their period or for domestic emergencies without that being linked to individual performance appraisal. Once more, this showed that the current leave system was problematic. Flight attendants of Panda Airlines most wanted to be allowed to swap shifts, which reflects the inflexibility of the shift system. Those whose husbands were pilots desired a work arrangement which would enable the couple to work together on the same flight.

Secondly, women called for more attention to their needs as a parent and a woman. Establishment of on-site childcare arrangements (such as a kindergarten or a nursery) and the possibility of extending maternity or lactation leave were desired by the ground staff of Phoenix Airlines, which implies that the company has failed to pay enough attention to the needs of working mothers.

Finally, women felt that they needed a real equal opportunities policy. The ground service and back office staff of Dragon Airlines were most concerned about inequality and prejudiced attitudes towards contract workers in terms of work allocation, pay and promotion. They also expressed the view that the company should attach more importance to developing female talent and promoting more female managers, which was also suggested by ground staff of Phoenix Airlines. Accordingly, they called for a real equal opportunity policy for all staff regardless of employment type or gender.

#### **7.2.6 Family responsibilities and support**

Nearly all of the female interviewees said that they received both tangible and intangible support from their home in terms of childcare and housework, and that the support from family members was greatest of all.

The majority of interviewees also recognised that they had considerate husbands or partners who could understand and care for them. Nevertheless, these female staff still faced a major dual burden of domestic and social labour because few spouses took a major or equal share of domestic responsibilities. The involvement of

husbands in childcare was found to be not as great as was previously suggested by Stockman et al. (1995). Interestingly, fewer respondents complained about this phenomenon, they took it for granted. However, with effective help from their parents, no matter whether they were single or married, most of the female colleagues were less tightly coupled to domestic work since their parents (especially mothers) and hired domestic helpers did a great deal in reducing their family burdens so that they could cope with work-family tensions. Being fit and capable, their parents could be multifunctional: undertaking responsibilities of childcare, cooking, housecleaning, etc. Thus, eldercare was not seen as an issue, at least not a problem which they had to face at this time.

Nevertheless, it quickly became apparent that many of the women, although not all, still believed that men were the major breadwinners and that women were better at focusing more on home affairs. I also felt that their spouses were always the centre of their life. When married women discussed their work experiences and future work plans, most would naturally place these in the context of their husbands and children. Even though some women were aiming to pursue their long-term career development by trying to get a promotion or furthering higher education studies in their spare time, they hinted that they could only do so on the condition that their family members, particularly their husbands or partners, agreed with and supported them.

### **7.3 Summary**

Although selective, these case studies have provided rich insights into the lives of women working in these airlines. Despite some variations the three cases reflect general trends and shared experiences in the face of similar problems and concerns, meaning that there were similar patterns across the Chinese airline industry.

Firstly, reconciling work and home obligations was a common but important issue to women and work-family conflict was experienced by female colleagues in all the three airlines. Although some, mostly single females, found it easy to manage work and domestic roles, they still suggested that career success or family and personal sacrifice was a choice which had to be made in the future. Thus, the general trend was that women who wished to have both a family and a career must make efforts to juggle responsibilities in both work and home, and in reality more female air

staff than average chose to, or intended to, compromise by lowering their career expectations or being family-orientated.

More notably, female air staff suffered considerably less family-to-work conflict than work-to-family conflict. This was largely due to the fact that the unique One Child Policy in China and grand-parental childcare arrangements reduced domestic burdens and, consequently, the degree of such conflict for women. However, having children still means women were taking a major responsibility for organising childcare, and so experienced a strong sense of guilt and stress, which provided a major distraction from career pursuits. This has caused a degree of job-parent conflict.

Work-related factors (including job type, shift pattern with schedule inflexibility, and underlying gendered organisational culture) are the major antecedents of women's work-family conflict and they were shared at all the three airlines. Meanwhile, the increasing job demands and the rigid leave system or insufficient created tensions between their work and family life. Despite the larger influence from the work, the family still had an impact on women's experience of conflict.

Balancing work demands with family responsibilities influenced women's career development and aspirations negatively. Apart from an agreed need for work-life balance, there were a couple of common reasons for women's slow career progress and low ambitions. First of all, in the airline industry the traditional ways of dividing jobs between men and women remain, as the evidence in the three airlines shows that gendered occupational segregation existed, preventing women from reaching managerial jobs (especially senior jobs) or creating obstacles for women to work in traditionally masculine jobs such as piloting and engineering. Such gender stereotyping has also influenced many HR practices (such as recruitment, selection, and promotion) as well as women's own perceptions of their careers, although my research did not uncover obvious gender discrimination in these airlines.

Second, in the workplace the underlying gendered culture was perceived by female air staff as one of the biggest obstacles to their career progress. In all the three cases, organisational structures and practices were seen as carriers of cultural meaning interacting with the gendered division of labour, but they created diversified gendered values and assumptions in different airlines. The male model of a career pattern prevailed in Phoenix Airlines, which showed that the corporate culture had actually been conceptualised in terms of dominating masculinities with less investment in

women's training and career opportunities as women were seen as inappropriate for managerial positions. Male dominance was also significant in Dragon Airlines as well, with an additional but notable gendered phenomenon that contract workers who tended to be women, were treated less favourably than permanent or core workers. The phenomenon of 'guan xi' was also gendered because men tended to have more opportunities to establish informal networks with predominantly male senior managers. In Panda Airlines, both the corporate slogan and advertising are rich in a sexualised atmosphere. Female aesthetics has been used as a criterion of recruitment (particularly of cabin crew) as well as an approach to improving business.

Some ideas on gender, however, have been produced beyond the industry, the organisation, or occupation. For instance, the self-understanding of women associating them with subordination, domesticity and sexuality can also explain why women are concentrated within certain types of service jobs. A lack of qualifications or graduate degrees constrained women's chances of obtaining higher positions in the workplace. The evidence also suggested that some women may lack the necessary motivation to advance their careers or choose to voluntarily prioritise their family responsibilities, in some circumstances, because they felt that avenues for career advancement were blocked. In addition, the experiences and values of women differed as a result of the regions/communities from which they originate, their family backgrounds, and other factors such as age. Some feminists use the concept of 'intersectionality' to draw attention to the relationship between different social categories: gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, motherhood, and so forth in shaping women's attitudes and chances (Valentine, 2007). It is apparent that social attitudes or local views towards women are changing in China as the economy develops. This increases the importance of inter-sectional analysis in gender research in the Chinese context to understand how women's experiences differ as they intersect with the evolving contexts and some other characteristics such as age, being a parent, having a permanent job, living in a specific region etc.

## **Chapter VIII My Research Findings and Existing Literature**

This chapter aims to examine both similarities and differences surrounding work-family conflict and other relevant experiences between Chinese women and women in other cultural contexts - particularly in the West. When comparing the empirical findings from my study with findings from the established literature – predominantly Western literature outlined in Chapters III and IV, I have acknowledged that there are similarities but also significant differences (Anglo-Saxon model, Scandinavian model, etc.) among Western countries. Due to the complexity that exists within the West, comparisons are made between my research findings and the position arising from the existing Western literature which, amongst the diversity within it, conveys similarities. It is found some of the issues that Chinese women face at work and home are similar to those faced by women in the West. However, due to cultural, social, economic and political differences, complete convergence between the experiences of women in the West and China is unlikely to occur. In particular, the different ways in which key factors included in the analytical model presented in Chapter IV influence Chinese women, compared with the way in which the factors influence Western women. Below, a comparative analysis of existing literature and my research findings is given in relation to four major aspects: experiences of women's work-family conflict, barriers to women's career progression and ambitions, women's job roles and status in the airline industry, and the role of modern women in society.

### **8.1 Experiences of women's work-family conflict**

Like Western working women, along with significant increases in female participation in paid employment and of dual career couples in modern China, Chinese working women have experienced work-family conflict. My research supports much Western evidence discussed earlier. For example, Venter (2002) and Winslow (2005)'s research shows that married women and working mothers experience more work-family conflict than single women. Parasuraman and Greehaus (1993) reported that women could encounter mental problems due to their dual roles in the family and workplace, which is also confirmed in my study. However, my research findings indicate that factors from work and family domains leading to work-family conflict for Western and Chinese women are divergent, which will be analysed below.

### **8.1.1 Are family-related factors main antecedents for Chinese women's work-family conflict?**

The Western literature persistently demonstrates that children are at the heart of women's work-family conflict. For example, Premeaux et al. (2007) and Hewlett (2007) suggested that age and number of children in a family affected work-family conflict. Furthermore, childcare in some Western countries, such as America, Britain and Sweden, is seen as one of the most difficult issues in life and the most significant factors affecting women's career ambitions. However, my research contrasts with existing literature, as my questionnaire findings show that the number of children and age of children have little relationship to work-family conflict for Chinese women. The interview findings further demonstrate that childcare is not a big burden to them although having children does impact on them. My study also shows that other family-related factors, namely eldercare and housework, also have little effect on work-family conflict. These are interesting issues worth exploring and some explanations for these differences between China and other contexts are given below.

#### *One Child Policy*

The One Child Policy is a unique feature of modern Chinese society and we would expect it to impact on gender relations in society and work. Although it is viewed as oppressive in the West, it has had positive influences on women's careers.

The implementation of the Chinese family planning policy since 1980 has not only reduced the family size by limiting couples to only one child, but has also contributed to a change in lifestyle and attitudes. Smaller families make social cohesion easier, give more time for community-building, and allow women to create a social life for themselves outside the family (Carnoy, 1999). More importantly, the One Child Policy suits the needs of the modern Chinese woman who wants to pursue their career development. Urban women with full time jobs and dual career households have been the norm in modern China since the 1980s. The majority of female employees in my study worked full-time, as part-time working is very rare in the Chinese labour market, and none of their husbands or partners were jobless. According to an interview conducted in China by Michael Bristow, a BBC journalist, many Chinese simply don't want many children and they have accepted the policy. One of the interviewees said 'One child is enough. I'm too busy at work to have any



more' and she added that most of her friends think the same way. (BBC, 2007). More women like her have rejected bearing the sole responsibility for childcare as well as the homemaker identity assigned them by traditional society in order to pursue a career. Therefore, Clancy and Tata (2005: 1) conclude that the One Child Policy results in a belief that issues like maternity leave and childcare facing women are 'somewhat temporary compared to women in other countries who have several children over a longer period of time'.

### *Multi-generation households*

Multi-generation households are culturally important in the Chinese context. However, they are far less common in the UK and the USA than in China. Thus, as Stockman et al. (1995) previously noted, Chinese women had a significant advantage in getting more help from parents/grandparents with domestic tasks. Surveys conducted in developing countries, including China, show that the extended family system helps provide crucial support for childcare and household maintenance, enabling women to devote more time to their career (Wirth, 2001). The grandparental childcare arrangement was found to be another contributor to women's reduced work-family conflict in my study.

Multi-generation households have also facilitated eldercare. Gu & Liang (2000) and Streib (1997) explained that the Chinese cultural norm of filial piety has long been considered the essential ingredient that holds together the Chinese familial elder system of care. Nevertheless, elder care in the Chinese culture is defined in a slightly different way from the Western context. Caring for ageing parents involves a wide range of behaviours including children's respect, obedience, loyalty, material provision, financial support and physical care to parents (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Many respondents in my study claimed that they needed to care for at least one elder in their family. This, however, did not necessarily mean that they devoted considerable time and energy to looking after their parents or parents-in-law. Recent findings relating to Chinese young people's attitudes towards eldercare, suggest that Chinese young people have lower levels of willingness to sacrifice work for parent care, as they believe the traditional practice of parent care could damage their career or even lose their job (Zhan, 2004). Instead, they usually provide financial support or/and hire a cleaner or house keeper for their parents as a means of caring for the elderly. Many of my interviewees' parents fulfilled childcare and housework needs

for them, as noted above. Taking Phoenix Airlines as an example: it can be seen that none of the respondents were over age 40 and more than 70% were under age of 30 (See Table 6.1), which implies that most of their parents are aged between 50 and 60 suggesting they could be fit and able to assume home responsibilities for their children.

As such, Chinese parents often co-reside with their adult children and help their married children with household tasks voluntarily so that their children are able to focus on their work and career pursuits. Even if parents and adult children do not live together, they contact and exchange help in a more frequent manner than their counterparts in Western countries (Bian et al., 1998; Whyte, 2003; Unger, 1993). According to Chu Jinyi (cited in TP Times, 2007), a leading Chinese academic, more than 60 percent of adults lived together with their parents in China in the 1990s and the percentage of adults living with their parents in China has been declining in recent years, but numbers remain higher than in the US. Chu (2007) argues that many of those who chose to live together with their parents were not necessarily doing so because of filial piety, but rather because they needed their parents' assistance in caring for young children.

### *Cheap domestic labour*

Hiring babysitters to do childcare has become a relatively cheap alternative for women in China which saves them much time and energy. In comparison to their Eastern counterpart, many Western women not only have to undertake childcare themselves, but also have little easy access to childcare provision. Childcare facilities have a direct bearing on their employment, and therefore, expenditure on childcare can 'take up much of a woman's earnings' (Newell, 2000: 95). In the UK, hiring a babysitter can be more expensive than the cost of evening out with the average rate of £5 per hour, so a standard 4-hour shift for a babysitter costs about £20, and in some places such as London, this cost is up to £15 per hour (Thompson, 2006). By contrast, it's much cheaper to hire a babysitter in the Chinese labour market, based on my friends' experiences, it is approximately £80-£100 per month for at least an 8-hour shift per day. In some cases, this cost covers not only childcare but also some domestic work such as washing and cooking.

Amongst respondents in my study it was also popular to use a paid domestic help to do house chores. Lin Yongshan, the Vice Minister of Labour and Social

Security in China, has stated that ‘there is now the need for a domestic help service in the country's medium-sized and large cities due to the rapidly increasing income levels of urban families who are now demanding more outside help in running their household affairs’(Lin, 2000). Using domestic cleaning is very cheap in China. In the place where both Panda and Dragon Airlines are located, one only pays approximately £16 per month for regular house cleaning. However, it is much more costly in the UK at an hourly rate of £9.50 (based on the example of Cardiff).

Most of my respondents have not borne a heavy domestic workload, which is due not only to some domestic help being freely available via the extended family, but also domestic help in the formal economy which is cheap and readily available to provide support.

The above phenomena are largely or partly different from those based on Western samples. The differences in the socio-political framework, levels of economic development, and cultural values between China and other cultural contexts – particularly the West, have resulted in a unique situation in China where there is evident assistance from extended family members and a supply of cheap domestic help to organise childcare, domestic responsibilities and even eldercare. In the airlines I studied, along with paid domestic labour, the female employees’ parents or parents-in-law have taken a major role in childcare and housework, while it is not the case in the West where ‘such similar assistance is not so readily available’ (Venter, 2002: 212). Western women’s employment is usually punctuated by one or more career breaks for childbirth and pre-school development of their children, and by high rates of part-time work, however, this is not the norm in China. Therefore, the Western literature explored in Chapters III and IV, which focuses on the role of childcare as a real and practical constraint for women wanting to achieve high-level positions is not as significant in the Chinese context. Wirth (2001) claims women in the West still have a disproportionate responsibility for raising children and performing household tasks. Rather, I found there were other explanations for Chinese women’s slow progress in work, which have been discussed in the previous chapters, and will be further explored and compared later.

### **8.1.2 Are there different work-related factors affecting work-family conflict**

### **from the West?**

My research findings further indicate that work characteristics have a greater effect than family characteristics on work-family conflict. This result is in tune with some literature discussed earlier. For example, Frone et al. (2006) found that work interfered with family life more frequently than family life interfered with work.

Nonetheless, not all factors from the work domain which were assessed in my study were defined or understood identically to those in the Western literature. Both similarities and differences in relation to each main work-related factor identified in my study and existing literature are discussed below.

#### *Job demands: workloads and emotional labour*

High job demands are antecedents of work-family conflict in my study, which is often reported by Western literature. For example, research of Voydanoff (1988) and Pleck et al., (1980) demonstrated that work demands, excessive working time and other work-related factors are significantly related to work-family conflict for employees. It was particularly notable in Panda Airlines, in which the recent structural and managerial changes and intensified competition resulted in increased workloads and more pressure on employees (see 7.2.1). This phenomenon also occurs in Western organisations. Based on research conducted in British banking, nursing and local government by Halford et al (1997: 65), restructuring an organisation is far from simply changing structures, it is also 'tied up with redefining and contesting the sorts of personal identities and qualities which are seen as desirable or undesirable for organisational members to possess'. In addition, as Rutherford (2001) previously noted, airline employees take responsibility for many people's lives and passenger security constitutes a major part of job demands for airline employees, particularly front-line workers.

Emotional demand or emotional labour is an integral part of the working lives of the contemporary female airline employees. As many Western researchers, for example, Hochschild (1983), Smith (1992), and James (1992), point out, emotional labour is not gender-neutral. My finding demonstrates that the airline service work – such as stewarding and ground handling – which demands significant amounts of emotional labour, remains female-dominated. Furthermore, some Western researchers such as Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) and Boyd & Bain (1998) reported that emotional labour had a negative impact on women's health and well-being. My study

shows the same result. However, there is little existing research examining the direct relationship between emotional labour and work-family conflict. My study has shown that tasks undertaken by female stewards and ground staff include emotion work, which as a source of stress, has triggered work-family conflict for female air staff as a whole and front-line workers in particular. Interviews with managers also reveal that they acknowledged this link between work-family conflict and emotional labour or/and massive work pressure. However, measures provided by management to combat this source of stress have proved ineffective given that both questionnaire and interview results reveal that employees did not receive or perceive strong managerial support in coping with pressure and conflict.

#### *Schedule inflexibility: shift work*

The role of work schedule inflexibility in work-family conflict was very evident in my research. However, the style of schedule inflexibility reported in previous studies (Arora et al. 1990; Aryee 1992), looking at the relationship between schedule inflexibility and work-family conflict, focused on the disadvantages of conventional set office hours (e.g. from 8am to 5 pm). This is different from the schedule inflexibility in my research, which mainly refers to a non-standard work schedule dominated by a shift work system widely found in the airline industry in particular and the service sector as a whole. In my case studies, inflexible schedules were found to be closely associated with work-family conflict especially job-spouse conflict and job-home/leisure conflict. As discussed in Chapter IV, major problems caused by non-conventional work schedules, found by many Western researchers such as Colligan and Rosa (1990) and Wilson et al. (2007), are also identified in my study which include an inability to participate in social activities and difficulties in spending time with children, particularly educating school-aged children.

The issue of shift work has also been the focus of the Western studies of the airline industry. The most symbolic dispute regarding shift issues is the unofficial strike by British Airways (BA) customer services staff which took place in July 2003, which has been reported and analysed by some Western researchers such as Arrowsmith (2003). This strike at Heathrow was in protest at the implementation of automated 'clocking' in for work start and finish times. The strike occurred when it appeared that the company was to impose the new system on 2,500 staff after months of negotiations that had failed to address their concerns. The airport customer service

staff that consisted largely of females, many with young children, feared that full electronic control over rosters could lose them the security of fixed shifts and their ability to swap days with colleagues. They were also opposed to any moves to greater flexibility over scheduling, including sending them home during quiet periods and calling them in at short notice when required. After long negotiations between management and the unions, BA agreed that the electronic time monitoring system would not be used to introduce split shifts. It, therefore, became accepted and usual practice for crew to informally swap shifts.

The latest lawsuit regarding shift swaps took place in October of 2008 when the U.S. District Court, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) accused Mesaba Airlines (a regional carrier for American Northwest) of violating Federal Civil Rights Law by prohibiting employees to swap shifts. Northwest maintained a policy of not allowing employees to swap shifts during the first ninety days of employment. As a result, a Jewish woman was unable to make self-adjustments to her work schedule to avoid working on the Sabbath. Mesaba then terminated the woman's employment when she refused to work on the Sabbath. Based on the U.S. EEOC guidelines, employers must 'explore scheduling changes and shift swaps as a reasonable accommodation' (Wolf et al., 1998: 95). Mesaba now permits voluntary shift swaps.

In contrast, Chinese airlines still adopts a very rigid shift system, and the rule of forbidding employees from swapping shifts with their colleagues as well as linking leave with individual performance appraisal, intensifies work-family conflict. Because of schedule problems, working women especially married ones, reluctantly reduced their leisure time and the time spent with their family, leading to complaints from their families and problems concentrating fully on their work. It is apparent from the interviews with managers in my study that they were aware of these problems and that they have given some thought to them. However, such schedule flexibility was seen to be unrealistic in front-line sections of the airline industry as both the nature of the work and increasing customer demands determine the shift system and the non-conventional schedule. In addition, in my study, there was a sense that the management perceived the problems of work-family conflict experienced by women with children as irresolvable and that this in turn led to negative gendered assumptions about women's career aspirations. This will be further explored in the below section 8.2.

### *Leave Entitlement: rights and length*

The issue of leave entitlement and accepting that one is entitled to take leave was another source of work-family conflict found in my study. However, the link between an individual's leave entitlement and work-family conflict is under-researched in the existing literature, and it appears to have a cultural dimension.

In the West it is assumed that leave entitlement is a basic part of one's terms and conditions of employment and employees feel comfortable in exercising their rights in this area. As shown in Chapter IV, leave arrangements designed for employees in many Western countries have been flexible and are seen to be an important part of family-friendly policies, which have benefited employees, especially working mothers. Compared with the West, however, Chinese governmental leave policies and organisational leave arrangements are less generous.

In China, women are entitled to 3 months of paid maternity leave, but unpaid maternity leave is generally not offered, and paternity leave is unavailable. As previously shown, under the new Labour Contract Law for the first time, employees in China are entitled to paid annual leave. If an employer is unable to schedule annual leave for an employee, the employer shall pay the employee three times his / her salary on a daily basis for the untaken annual leave. However, a vacation remains a luxury for employees in many companies, and the lack of enforcement makes paid vacation a "paper right" only. Moreover, taking vacations or asking for leave in Chinese enterprises is not simply a personal choice. My study showed that difficulties in asking for leave or taking holiday entitlements led to obvious conflict for many female employees. Chinese airlines typically offered 10-days annual paid leave and up to 15 days after an employee had worked for the company for over three years. This length of leave is rather short compared with many Western airlines. For instance, based on the source obtained from websites of different Western airlines, BA offers 4 weeks contractual leave plus 2 weeks duty free leave which can be used for overtime flying; the UK-based Bmibaby entitles employees with 45 days of annual leave; employees of Air of Southwest are entitled 6 weeks leave. Even with such a short length of annual vacation, many employees in this study felt unable to take such leave because of rigid work schedules and increasing workloads. Some airline departments, particularly the cabin crew section, moreover, did not allow staff to take leave entitlement in one go. The fact that individual performance appraisal was negatively associated with the length of leave in these airlines also continued to disadvantage

women employees, as women were more likely to ask for leave for domestic issues. Thus, the leave policy was generally seen as inflexible, and gendered.

This situation may partly derive from labour shortages within the Chinese airlines as they are expanding their business. For cost saving purposes, these airlines are reluctant to employ more labour. Moreover, as discussed in 7.2.3, staff allocation for any state-owned organisation is controlled by government and the number of staff employed is limited. Thus, employees often find themselves tied up with heavy workloads and find it hard to take vacations. On the other hand, some employees are actually reluctant to ask for leave or take holiday entitlements, as they will possibly risk missing promotion opportunities or even lose their jobs. So, this is also a consequence of competitiveness in the labour market itself.

### *Organisational views on female employees*

The relationship between the organisation's views on women and work-family conflict experienced by women is under-researched although much Western literature, for example, research by Halford and Leonard (2001), shows that the stereotyped views of employers towards women make it harder to develop their career. In my study, it is significant that many female interviewees perceived a male-dominated informal culture that indicates that these airlines still hold some old-fashioned or unfavourable views on working women, which impact on levels of work-family conflict as well as women's career ambitions (see 7.2.4). Such organisational gendered views, as part of gendered organisational culture, are persistently found in both the West and China where plenty of similarities are identified, but there are also variations, which will be analysed in the following section.

## **8.2 Barriers to women's career development and aspirations**

Both my research and existing literature show that there are three main barriers to women's career ambitions, namely, gendered organisational culture, unfavourable HR practices, and women's own perceptions and choices.

### **8.2.1 Is gendered organisational culture expressed in a similar way to the West?**

Feminists in the West have long recognized gendered organisational culture. As Alvesson and Billing (1997: 107) noted, it forms 'fine-tuned nets of meaning that



subtly inform and encourage people to play out gender in certain ways and discourage them from doing so in ways that are not socially sanctioned'. Globally, such gendered culture is expressed in two main forms: masculinity and femininity.

*The dominance of the masculine and subordination of the feminine*

As Rutherford (2001) noted, Western airlines' culture was influenced by the fact that it had developed out of the air force and still carried military overtones, and was obviously masculine. It is pretty much the same in China. However, unlike most Western airlines, which are predominantly privatised, most Chinese airlines remain state owned and only a couple are privately-owned, so the Chinese airline industry is still very bureaucratic.

In the three cases, except for the cabin crew, the other departments had a very small percentage of women in middle management and fewer in senior management. Actually, even in the cabin service department where the majority of employees were women and a few had succeeded in obtaining higher level jobs, men still generally held significantly more of the managerial positions due to the fact that managerial competencies were defined in masculine terms. This disadvantage which Chinese women experience due to the male model of career pattern is closely coupled with 'the cultural mandate', which as Wilson (2003) explains, assumes women are primarily committed to the home and family. It can be seen that the masculine model of power, particularly evident in Phoenix Airlines, also reflects what Halford and Leonard (2001: 107) describes as 'a prevailing Western cultural norm that women should not have authority over men' because men and women are popularly believed to have contrasting qualities and those female qualities are of less value than male qualities (Wilson, 2003).

My study also demonstrates that gendered ideas are transmitted to female employees through discourses of management, which were mainly male. Halford and Leonard (2001: 74) suggest that communication patterns are a major means by which power is exercised to marginalise women, and 'it is the language of men, the dominant group in organisations, which has become the norm'. One typical example, as shown in Chapter VI, is that one airline's senior management requested a full commitment from young female employees by advising, although not forcing, they marry late. It sounds ridiculous, but it often occurs in Chinese state-owned enterprises where the issue of an employee's marriage is also what the organisations are

concerned about, and even interfere with. In the UK, employers once experienced a “marriage bar” meaning once you married you had to resign if female. However, this was outlawed in the late 1960s, and such interventionism is no longer acceptable in the West. A Western woman would not take guidance from her employer on when she should get married. Moreover, in my study, the airline management made more efforts to encourage single women in their career progression, which suggests that marriage and children are still perceived by managers as problems to the advancement of women in the workplace. Western evidence, for example, studies by Collinson (1988) and Halford and Leonard (2001) also show that if women marry and/or have children, this is regarded unfavourably and perceived as a drain on commitment and loyalty to the workplace, particularly for women in managerial positions. Such gendered views appear to have de-motivated many working mothers and created a ‘glass ceiling’ in the airlines studied.

Femininity is also valued in the airlines, but in a totally different way to masculinity. My study shows that women’s sexuality, as a crucial gender aspect of organisational culture, has been actually utilized and exploited to achieve better business for the organisations. Similarly, Western research, for example, the work of Alvesson and Billing (1997) shows that sexual attractiveness can affect employment chances and placement and is a vital part of the job. A study of Spiess and Warning (2005) indicates that the deployment of employee’s physical characteristics occurs through corporate production and control of selection and training processes in airlines (see 3.3.2). It is particularly apparent in Panda Airlines where a candidate’s physical appearance, attractiveness and versatility were the most important criteria in recruitment and selection (see 7.2.4). Being proud of its “Beautiful Enterprise Culture”, which heavily depended on women’s femininity and aesthetic value orientation, Panda Airlines succeeded in gaining customer loyalty, to increase business. As Alvesson and Billing (1997: 125) argue, attractive female staff can ‘symbolize power, prestige and success both for the superior person who employs and heads the staff as well as for the organisation as a whole’. Further, it is women who often fill such jobs with a clear sexual labour content (Hochschild, 1983).

As discussed in Chapter III, Barry (2007) explained that such criteria existed in the Western airlines in the past, but today Western flight attendants are most valued as safety experts with few restrictions of age, weight, height and marital status, and they have their own unions. Nevertheless, aesthetic labour remains important in

modern Chinese airlines. Furthermore, because femininity is perceived as useful in certain airline jobs and always utilized by management, women are still clustered in and only seen to be suitable for traditionally feminine jobs, namely cabin crew and ground service. Thus, patterns of horizontal gender segregation were more resistant to change (Bradley, 1999; Charles, 2003), which have been surviving in airlines for ages.

### **8.2.2 Do gendered HR practices in my research accord with the West?**

My findings suggest that HR practices in the three case studies were regarded as generally acceptable to female staff. However, female staff were not as confident as management of the excellence of HR policies and practices. EO policies were spoken of highly by the airline management, but their real equality and effectiveness were questioned by female employees. Further, female employees saw some of these practices as barriers to women in achieving a balanced work-family life and pursuing their careers effectively. Similarly, Ng and Chiu (1997) argue that in Hong Kong organisational HR policies and practices also favour men over women. In the West, as Bradley (1999) notes, EO policies have been criticized and viewed as rhetorical window-dressing and top management's commitment to EO is more concerned with their organisational image. Thus, unequal treatment of women in organisations is a global phenomenon, and in China there are more unfavourable and gendered HR practices due to the endemic cultural influence of 'guan xi' discussed below, deeply embedded traditional views on women, and impact of different types of employment.

#### *Influence of 'guan xi'*

One unique phenomenon in my study was the existence of 'guan xi' which was perceived by women as an underlying obstacle to job entry and career development (see 7.2.3). The concept of 'guan xi' remains an important and conventional factor in Chinese people's social and business lives, although 'the role of guan xi is fading a bit against the backdrop of population mobility and the westernization of some Chinese business practices' (Graham & Lam, 2004: 39). Like in many under-developed countries, informal social relationships provide the much needed lubricant for the Chinese to achieve what otherwise may be difficult to secure. Moreover, Cooke (2005) has noted this presents particular difficulties for women in China because women have fewer chances to establish informal networks with VIPs who were usually male, and women seldom drink and smoke. Thus, in my research, 'guan xi' is seen a

gendered concept.

Although the presence of 'guan xi' disadvantaged many female employees in Chinese airlines, it proved to be particularly useful in order to gain access to the participants in my research. When dealing with business, Chinese people do not have much confidence or trust in the regulatory system or their own abilities and prefer to trust their personal relationships to get things done (Chee and West, 2007). Similarly, at the outset of the research I did not expect that I could get access with my own effort only. Without depending on 'guan xi', I could not have gathered the rich data and completed my fieldwork effectively. Thus, 'guan xi' played a key role in the completion of my empirical research and it was one of the important reasons of my choice of industry and case study organisations. My friends who had worked for the airlines I studied for over ten years were occupying middle management positions so they had a certain degree of authority and influence within their organisations. They helped arrange the questionnaire survey and interviews with female employees and it turned out to be very smooth and effective as my contacts were in much more senior positions than the female respondents who appeared to accept their 'orders' naturally. However, as mentioned in Chapter Five, during the process of interviewing senior management I encountered some difficulties. I failed to gain access to a couple of senior staff who I had originally planned to interview mainly because they were more senior in the higher hierarchy of the organisation so it was difficult for my contacts to request help from them where their links were insufficiently strong. In other words, in some instances the 'guan xi' possessed by my contacts was not powerful enough to enable me to reach more powerful people than them. However, I did successfully gain access to some other senior people with whom my contacts had very good personal relationships with and where it was commonplace for the two individuals (i.e. my contact and the more senior person) to offer help to each other. Therefore, 'guan xi' consists of connections defined by 'friendship with implications of a continual exchange of favors' (Chee and West, 2007). When my friends introduced me to people in their 'guan xi' network it placed an obligation on those people to make an effort to help me. In return, it was necessary for me to demonstrate my appreciation for their time and co-operation by sending small gifts. At the time of doing the research I had little to offer the important dealmakers (i.e. my friends who set things up for me) but I will be expected to return the favours in future when they need help within my capability to provide. Thus, 'guan xi' can also be defined by reciprocity which

indicates the importance of mutual favours for maintaining long-term relationships in China.

Westerners who have dealt with Chinese people or have done business in China have experienced the significance of 'guan xi' in Chinese social and business contexts. According to Seligman (1999: 56), 'it is often the case that you can not even get to first base in China without 'guan xi' and when you have it you can do just about anything'. Westerners also socialise and network with people, but they often find the Chinese 'guan xi' quite different from their own form of networking. 'Guan xi' is 'long-term and concentrated' and the ties are mainly personal, whereas networking in the west is 'about having a wide range of acquaintances' and has a 'group implication' (Chee and West, 2007: 67-68). 'Guan xi' may not be widespread in Western organisations, but the Western 'old boy network' – known as an unofficial male social system that excludes both less powerful men and all women from its ranks – is also a hidden barrier present in organisational culture which inhibits achievements of women managers, especially in senior managerial positions (Oakley, 2000; Mooney, 2008). Wirth (2001) suggests that women's involvement in informal networks in enterprises is essential for obtaining invaluable information, visibility, contact and support for performing effectively and obtaining higher-level jobs. However, such informal networks are not easily entered into by women (Mooney, 2008). Thus, it can be concluded that both the Chinese 'guan xi' and the Western 'old boy network' have opened up more opportunities and resources for men than for women, but 'guan xi' has been seen 'as part of a holistic ethos, embracing all the roles in Chinese life' (Chee and West, 2007: 68).

#### *Acknowledgement of some women's needs and neglect of others*

The three airlines had neglected the career development of female employees. Management did acknowledge that women had unique requirements, such as needing medical check-ups and maternity leave, and they met these requirements but did not provide targeted schemes which would be required to encourage women to develop in the workplace. This suggests that 'difference' is acknowledged only when it applies to paternalism rather than to career development, a factor that many women participating in the research found frustrating. These phenomena are also identical to a great many Western studies, for example studies by Cross (2008), Wellington et al. (2003), and Wilson (2003), which all indicate the widespread existence of stereotyped views on

women and sexual discrimination reduces women's opportunities for attaining management positions. As Hopfl (1992) argued, many Western organisations were suspicious of women's commitment because women were seen to have difficulty in presenting themselves as full organisational members because they had a primary commitment to domestic life outside the organisation. In my study, some airlines have provided women-friendly working re-arrangements, but they currently only focus on flight attendants. Consideration of the career development of female employees as a whole is far from adequate. It is encouraging that one airline has implemented a 'backup cadres' scheme to select talents despite sex and age, however, my research shows that many women were not given varied and challenging assignments and were not being exposed to the full range of operations and activities of the organisations.

There were insufficient training opportunities and no systematic long-term development plans for female individuals in the airlines studied. Similarly, some Western studies, for example, studies of Tharenou and Conroy (1994), and Wright, et al. (1994), report that existing organisational training and development policies and practices shortchange women, who often receive fewer training chances than men and encounter more possibilities of being prevented from attending training. Halford and Leonard (2001) conclude that dissatisfaction with training and/or inadequate training has been shown to be a common complaint from female managers in the West.

My study also shows that middle-aged women were less favoured compared with men of the same age band, and also felt less valued than the young female employees, which, however, is opposite to the Western finding that 'the young and the old are characteristically disadvantaged, with middle groupings forming an age elite' (Bradley, 1999: 23).

#### *Differentiated treatment of different types of employees*

A new finding emerging from my research is that differences in work allocation, pay, and welfare between permanent employees and contract workers in the same occupation held back women's career ambitions. This unfairness also reflects the discriminative nature of certain aspects of HR policies, as well as gendered organisational practices given that female contract worker outnumbered male ones in this airline.

In the West, a similar situation has been described by Atkinson (1985) and outlined in his Core/Peripheral Model which defines core and temporary workers, and

indicates that the former have more privileges than the latter. Results from a research project conducted in six European countries and Israel by Clinton (2005), Guest (2004) and other Western researchers also show that a considerable number of companies offer unfavourable treatment towards temporary workers, as compared to permanent staff. The research reveals that almost half of the companies don't give equal treatment to temporary and permanent employees and permanent workers are favoured in some HR practices, including training, performance appraisals and performance-related pay. Contract workers receive fewer company benefits and incentives than permanent employees. They also enjoy fewer periodic pay rises; and often find it difficult to move into a managerial position and lack job security (Whitehead, 2008).

Nowadays, contract workers are widely used in China, as Whitehead (2008) argues, hiring contractors is often seen as a more attractive option for employers, especially if they are not in a position to add to the head count of permanent staff.

### **8.2.3 Do women's own perceptions and choices also matter in my research?**

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argue that individuals are affected differently by work-family conflict, which is due to both environmental differences and their different perceptions. Hakim (2004) explores women's choices between paid employment and family work and stresses that it is women's lifestyle preferences that determine women's tendency to become work-centred, home-centred or adaptive. My research also shows that women's own perceptions and choices are one of the influential factors affecting their experiences of work-family conflict, as well as their career ambitions. However, some of women's perceptions and choices are not always natural and they have been strongly influenced and formed by their past experience, cultural values, role requirements, and the contexts where it occurred.

#### *Women's own perceptions*

My study suggests that women's judgment on how much work-family conflict they experienced was also based on their own perceptions. For example, women in Panda Airlines were aware of heavier workloads than before and were more sensitive to work-family conflict than others. As discussed in Chapters VI and VII, their perception was strongly influenced by the regional context in which local citizens were generally leading a relaxed life, as well as by their recent different experience

within the organisation where an easy-going working environment was replaced by a fast-paced and busy one in order to cope with the increasingly stronger market competition.

Apart from organisational views, women's own perception towards their job is also an influential factor. In my research, married women appeared to be less enterprising and more family-oriented. They or their family members, particularly their husbands, carried on the tradition that 'women should mainly assist their husband and teach their children at home'. Thus they were not willing to increase efforts in their career path. Younger females tended to be a little more ambitious, but their attitudes might alter when they are married and have children. After all, the centuries-old gendered views of women are hardly eliminated and still exert a subtle influence on modern Chinese society. It is, therefore, difficult to tell whether it is the company culture that is most influential in shaping women's attitudes towards their jobs, or whether married women have become more family-oriented because they realize they cannot achieve their career ambitions. However, one thing is for sure. It is the ideology of patriarchy that still persists in China that makes women's subordination seem natural.

Some women were concerned about ageing issues, which were partly related to their own perceptions and caused them to be less motivated and more psychologically stressed. This phenomenon also occurs in other countries. Research in India by Singh and Singh (2008) shows that more than 80% of middle-aged women have mental tension at their work place and more than half of them admitted work-family conflict; nearly 75% of women studied reported different types of negative feelings like depression, frustration, loneliness, anxiety, and fear about ageing.

Women's perception of their values for their job roles is another interesting phenomenon in my study. As discussed in Chapter VII, some flight attendants, particularly in Dragon Airlines, were very disappointed with what they could earn at present, and insisted that their pay should be increased to the previous level or at least a decent level because of increasingly demanding jobs. Actually, this change is not only occurring in China. Globally, as Eaton (2001:97) argues, 'it is now impossible to describe the flight attendants' job as glamorous in any sense or as well paid with reasonable conditions'.



My interview findings indicate that women’s choices could be either voluntary or reluctant. If their husbands or partners gave priority to work and career instead of seeking a work-family balance, so women were forced to compromise career for family despite being reluctant. Nevertheless, many women were family-oriented in essence by claiming that family outweighed work, so they were willing to spend more time in domestic responsibilities, which led to a reduced work motivation and commitment. As Alvesson and Billing (1997: 151) suggest, management often attribute such a family orientation to women and anticipate women’s motherhood and priority to children will ‘decrease work involvement and upgrade the family as the source of satisfaction’. As a result, women are overlooked when a chance for promotion emerges. In addition, some women were content with their current work situation and avoided competition and higher work goals as they insisted that enjoying the peaceful life and making themselves happy was more important than career achievements.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the barriers to women attaining higher positions are not only a matter of the lack of real equal opportunities, of stereotyped thinking about women, and of gendered HR practices; they are also the result of some women’s own choices between career and family, and perhaps, the result of little interest in management jobs. In my study, few respondents were work-centred women, with the majority being adaptive women who managed to combine employment and family work within their lives. Some tended to be more home-centred although they were working full-time.

### 8.3 Women’s job roles and status in the airline industry

When comparing the Western research regarding women’s job roles and status in the airline industry (see 3.3), my findings above indicate that Chinese female employees in the airline industry are in a similar situation to their counterparts in the West, despite some variations. This is summarized in Table 8.1 below.

**Table 8.1 A Comparative Summary of Women’s Status in the Airline Industry**

Western research findings	My research findings
Female positions have been limited to	Same as the Western finding

stewarding, clerical work or customer service positions.	
Women are under-represented in managerial jobs.	Same as the Western finding
Many discriminatory practices such as no-marriage rule and age limit have been eliminated in the processes of recruitment and selection.	These practices still exist in the Chinese airline industry. Flight attendant candidates must be single and no more than 26.
Women have their own unions such as flight attendants union, which have perceived and challenged sexist stereotypes and unfair work practice.	Some airlines have a women's committee which is, however, neither powerful nor close to female employees.
Aesthetic labour is less important to Western airlines. Flight attendants are safety experts.	Aesthetic labour remains crucial to modern Chinese airlines. Flight attendants are beautiful stewards and encouraged to make full use of their sexualised appearance to gain customer loyalty.
Airline service work has been characterised by gendered emotional labour, but Western researchers have not reached a consensus on whether emotional labour is problematic or pleasurable for female employees (see 3.3.3).	Chinese female air staff also experience emotional labour. Job demands placed on them involve a large amount of emotional labour, which has been seen as a source of stress and eventually triggered work-family conflict for them.

#### **8.4 The role of modern women: shifting beyond the housewife role?**

One of the significant findings emerging from my research is that family related factors were not found to be associated with work-family conflict and in most cases had little or no effect. This indicates that Chinese women are less affected by family responsibilities in comparison with women in the West. However, this does not mean Chinese women's housewife role has gone completely. Rather, their housewife role has become obscured, and they have benefited from this change, compared with their

counterparts in the West. Moreover, Chinese women's role in educating children has gradually been more important than their roles in other domestic work. Meanwhile, their husbands are often found to be more stubborn in abandoning traditional views on women than women themselves.

#### **8.4.1 Women's role in educating children**

In her study of career women in Britain and Hong Kong, Venter (2002: 168) argues that support in any form enabled women to spend long hours at work, 'however, this did not mean that tensions between work and family were completely resolved, but rather they took a different form'. My findings demonstrate that childcare was not significantly related to female air staff's work-family conflict, but children appeared to have another meaning and other consequences for these women and job-parent conflict tended to pervade among all of the working mothers. Similarly, Western researchers such as Alvesson and Billing (1997) believe that having children leads to experiences and orientations that make women at work behave in a different way from men and single females. Carnoy (1999: 309) further explains the intensified competition in the labour market and the increasing job demands in the workplace entail having to acquire new skills and more education, arguing that 'since there is no end to this trend in sight, the existing pressure on adults to acquire more education for their own work would be compounded in the case of their children'.

The situation is pretty much the same as the West and even more evident in China. Family involvement in children's education is seen as more important and complicated than in the past, due to the dual effect of the One Child Policy and the powerful propaganda of 'Knowledge can change one's destiny' across the nation. The One Child Policy has strengthened the emphasis on young children's education and the family is increasingly interested and investing in their only child for his or her school success, and then his or her future career and life success (Li, 2004). One deep feeling obtained from this study is that many women were much more ambitious for their children than themselves and many mothers believed that they must give their children the best possible start in life. Furthermore, in the three cases, it is often women who had to take the major responsibility of educating children or at least arranging it and making sure their only child received the best education, which placed lots of strain on women and was sometimes at odds with the demands of their jobs and careers. That is why many working mothers were still seeking balance in life

between work and family although they received voluntary help in looking after children from their parents or childcare services from paid labour.

#### **8.4.2 Husbands' perceptions on wife's role**

Marital status was also found to influence the level of work-family conflict, suggesting that traditional perceptions of women's role in the family in China continue to influence expectations of their role and contributions in the labour market despite their experiences and 'lived realities'. In my study, many of women's partners or husbands clearly supported their career, but as Venter (2002) also found, this did not take the form of men actually taking on any of the women's responsibilities. In other words, men did not take any concrete measures to relieve women's dual burdens. Some women explained that their spouses' work, such as piloting and owning businesses, was more significant in terms of the nature of work itself and economy, and therefore men had good reasons for lowering involvement in domestic responsibilities and even refusing to undertake any housework.

Some of their husbands were more conservative than them and insisted that a wife should be home-centred. Similarly, in the West, as Halford et al. (1997) previously suggested, men continued to enjoy organisational career advantages, some of which derive from a privileged ability to detach themselves from commitments of time and emotion in the private sphere. Persistently, husbands were found to be more traditional than their wives in terms of gender roles in the workplace and family (Newell, 2000). In China, birth-control policies, and social and economic reforms have helped to change things. Chinese men, however, are taking considerably longer to adjust to the new era than women (McElroy, 2001). The traditional wish that a wife should be a "flower vase" – in the Chinese idiom – remains the ideal for males but who believe that the perfect wife in modern times should be both a home maker (generally more important) and a breadwinner! Thus, Chinese women seem to share significant similarities with Western women in terms of what activities are considered part of a female role.

#### **8.4.3 Benefits of an obscured housewife role**

The modern Chinese women interviewed for this study benefited from a combination of factors not enjoyed by their mothers or grandmothers; factors that were family-related, rather than work-related. As noted earlier, the comparative research by Yang

et al. (2000) on employees in America and China also shows that American employees experienced greater family demands than did Chinese employees. The first and arguably more important factor, as often discussed above, is the unique Chinese One Child Policy. This, in effect, limited and made more predictable women's childcare role. This policy combined with enduring traditional childcare practices, which afford a significant role to grand-parents, has meant that Chinese women have enjoyed privileges that Western women seldom enjoy. For example, British women often have to take breaks from paid employment for childbirth and child-rearing or shift to part-time work (Martin & Roberts, 1984; Stockman et al., 1995; Venter, 2002), but it is unusual for Chinese women. In addition, most women in my study did not shoulder much burden of housework alone because they shared this with their family members and paid domestic helpers who are finding an increasing role in China. Stockman et al. (1995) conclude that there is a higher degree of egalitarianism in family roles in China than in countries like Japan, UK and USA. Similarly, my findings also reveal that modern Chinese women, especially younger women, not only participated but also were involved more in decision-making activities at home such as family financial distribution, childcare arrangements, and ways of educating children. As shown in Chapter VI, many of the women I interviewed enjoyed respect and support from their husbands for their career pursuits, even if such support was sometimes emotional instead of tangible.

These findings, therefore, have shown how the housewife role has become obscured for these working women in China. Though it should be noted that the traditional roles usually undertaken by the housewife are still being performed by women (grand-mothers, domestic help), and are, therefore, still gendered.

## **8.5 Summary**

My research in the Chinese context and literature based on Western contexts show that working women experience work-family conflict to various degrees, but my research appears to suggest that despite some similarities the causes of work-family conflict in the Chinese context are markedly different from other contexts.

Firstly, the family related factors, namely childcare, eldercare and housework - taken singularly or collectively – have been suggested to have a big impact on work-family conflict for women in other cultural contexts, especially the West, while few of

them have shown to be significantly associated with work-family conflict for women in my research. However, the existence of children has brought women another form of responsibility (i.e. children's education) which is usually greater and more important to mothers in China (see 8.4.1). There is the common feature in the West that eldercare has produced burdens for women. It is not an issue for the women of my study at the moment as eldercare may not have been influential because of the age range of respondents (see 8.1.1). However, there is a possibility that it would be more of a problem for Chinese women in the future in comparison with their Western counterparts as many of them are the only one child in their families and the lack of siblings to assist parental care in the future is likely to produce unimaginable stress on caregivers (Zhan, 2002).

Secondly, some work related factors, such as high job demands and schedule inflexibility which have proved to be main antecedents of work-family conflict for Western women also impact upon Chinese women. However, other work related factors, such as length of leave and organisational views of female employees, have in my study been seen to be influential for Chinese women, but have been under-researched in existing studies. In particular, rigid work schedules and staff not being able to take their leave entitlement caused difficulties for women. Rigid work schedules can be found in Western airlines (e.g. BA) and the inclusion of such schedules in individual employment contracts has occurred in Chinese airlines during more recent times. Although – like contracts in Western airlines – the contracts in the Chinese airlines also specify rights and entitlements, increasing workloads meant many employees felt unable to take leave entitlement. Their ability to take leave and benefit from a degree of flexibility was inhibited by management control which often only allowed for more restricted benefits than those provided for in contracts. This situation is in part a consequence of labour shortages: it is also a result of the competitive labour market in China, which has meant employees are sometimes afraid of taking leave, in case they are replaced in their absence.

Thirdly, the ways of balancing work and family are quite different. In the West, the dual burden existing for a working woman is often reconciled by either moving to part-time work or leaving work entirely around periods of childbirth and child-rearing which can dramatically impact on their careers. In contrast, in China career breaks for women to have children appear to be the exception rather than the norm (Cooke, 2005). In many Western countries, especially the UK, there is still great concern about

childcare facilities (Davidson & Burke, 2004). This is not a problem in China because of the plentiful family support and cheap domestic help so, for Chinese women, the family to work conflict appears much less than that for Western women.

Chinese women's career development is influenced by balancing work and family but, as in the West, it is one factor among others impacting upon their career aspirations. As discussed throughout this thesis, it is a series of circumstances, conditions and contexts around women that predispose individual women to make particular types of career or home choices. Among all of the factors affecting women's career progression, the persistence of negative gendered organisational attitudes towards them is the most significant similarity shared by both Chinese and Western women. As noted earlier, the male-dominated culture that prevails in the global airline industry has led women to be marginalized in management positions and to lose developmental and promotional opportunities. However, the ways in which these factors impact on Chinese women are not entirely the same as the way in which they impact on Western women. While the 'old boy network' existing in the West is in some ways similar to the concept of 'guan xi' in China, it does not have such a profound and far-reaching influence on almost all aspects of life in the same way as 'guan xi' does. It is apparent that the organisations studied have been influenced internally, not only by the wider society of which they are part, but also by the cultures of the different regions in which they are located. These influences have made Chinese women's experiences somewhat different from those in other cultures.

I judge that in modern times Chinese women's role in paid employment is very similar to Western women's, but with abundant sources of support their housewife role has become more obscured than that for Western women (see 8.4.3). Nevertheless, Chinese women are still considered as chief organisers of child care and education, as well as secondary earners in many dual career families as Chinese men remain more traditional in their attitudes.

## **Chapter IX      Conclusions and Implications**

This concluding chapter focuses on the research questions, it summarises previously analysed data and explores the implications of key findings. The implications for existing feminist theories reviewed in Chapter II, the six-factor analytical model of work-family conflict outlined in Chapter IV, managerial practices and policies, and the contribution of this research are also considered.

### **9.1 Overall concluding observations**

This thesis has examined work-family conflict among female employees in the Chinese airline industry, and uncovered a number of significant findings. Firstly, the findings suggest that the level of work-family conflict for female air staff was influenced by not only the job role they performed, but also the company in which they were employed. Flight attendants suffered the most intense work-family conflict among all job types, and this finding was evident in all the three airlines. Respondents in the large-scale airline (Dragon) experienced the lowest degree of work-family conflict, while those in the small-sized airline (Panda) encountered the highest degree of such conflict. This suggests that organisational size would also influence women's experiences of work-family conflict.

Secondly, my research found that the causes of work-family conflict differed slightly among female air staff, but a common pattern emerged whereby the conflict they experienced was caused by work-related factors more than family-related factors. The major antecedents including job type, shift work, and underlying male-dominated organisational cultures were found to contribute in all the three airlines. The increasing workloads, work pressure and emotional demands as well as problematic HR practices in relation to leave, appraisal, and type of job contract gave rise to difficulties in balancing women's work and family life. Despite the larger influence from the work domain, the family did, nevertheless, have some effect on women's work-family conflict. Married women with children usually experienced higher levels of such conflict than women without children or single women, and conservative gendered views held by their family proved influential in some instances.

Thirdly, the consequences of work-family conflict were largely similar in each airline but with minor differences among the three cases. Such conflict had a negative



psychological influence on all who encountered it. Reduced family time resulting in worries or complaints from women's family members (i.e. husbands were not satisfied with women's insufficient responsibility for domestic work) was another major outcome. Moreover, it was found that women lowered their career expectations, switching to non-shift work and giving up jobs to meet family needs. Such conflict also caused reduced personal social time for some women.

Fourthly, apart from juggling work and family commitments, other factors were also found to limit women's progression in this study. The phenomenon of occupational segregation, both vertical and horizontal in the airlines, not only demotivated women and hindered their rise to the management level, but also created obstacles for women working in traditionally masculine jobs (i.e. piloting). Underlying this was a male culture, characterised by male-dominated management as well as stereotyped views about women's ability and commitment at work. This posed challenges to many women who had to work harder and perform better than their male counterparts in order to move ahead. Along with this gendered organisation culture, some HR practices including ineffective and insufficient training, the existence of 'guan xi' in recruitment and promotion, rigid leave and appraisal systems, differentiated organisational attitudes and treatment towards different types of employment, and the exaggerated importance of physical appearance in selecting flight attendants were also gendered practices that were barriers to women's further development. Traditional views (such as 'women are chief house-makers, while men are major breadwinners') perpetuating in both modern Chinese society and the women's family environment were another fundamental explanation for the limited career ambitions of women. Individual weaknesses (such as lack of higher education or relevant qualifications and poor foreign language skills) were also considered to hold back career progression. Moreover, women's own attitudes towards their age, work, and family were perceived to affect their career aspirations. Generally, there were considerably more family-orientated women than work-centred women, and middle-aged women were found to be less confident than young women.

Finally, the airline managers were aware of women's experience of work-family conflict and adopted some measures including 'compulsory leave', special duty arrangements for dual-flying couples, extended maternity leave, psychology or mental health seminars, and free physical or gynecological examinations, to help women cope with such conflict. These airlines also claimed that they invested in

training and encouraging female managers by launching special policies such as the 'back-up cadre scheme' and they claimed that they considered women's future development by rearranging work for aging flight attendants. Managers seemed proud of the family-friendly and women-friendly provisions they had designed, but the effectiveness and sufficiency of these policies was seriously questioned by the women interviewed. The managerial implications of this study will be discussed later.

As a consequence of my fieldwork and the variety of opinions that emerged, a further important observation is that the women interviewed had a variety of interests and their circumstances were different according to age, marital status, job contract, local environment etc. It was clear that these differences influenced opinions and led to different groups of women having different experiences of work-family conflict, and diversified views of society, organisation, family etc. It is important to recognise these differences and understand their origins in order to appreciate a full range of factors influencing women's work-family conflict.

## **9.2 Implications for existing feminist perspectives and the rules approach**

These research findings have shown that some feminist perspectives largely developed in the West, as discussed in Chapter II, go some way to providing adequate explanations for the experiences which my research shows women have. However, no perspective provides a complete explanation and it is apparent from my research that some claims or solutions drawing from these perspectives are more useful than others.

The liberal feminist perspective was a good starting point for understanding women's position in work and society. In accordance with what liberal feminists claim, my study shows that negative and gendered organisational practices occurring in these airlines (such as segregated job roles, salary inequalities, and short career ladders and a 'glass ceiling') and cultural norms, traditions and prejudices existing in society, have resulted in women experiencing work-family conflict and being under-represented in managerial positions. However, in accordance with the well-established critique of liberal feminism, my research reveals that creating national laws on gender equality and launching equal opportunity HR policies in organisations can neither completely remove barriers for women, nor directly challenge the ideology of patriarchy. In other words, such gender practices still persist in modern organisations

although relevant laws and organisational EO policies have been implemented. As a result of equality initiatives, including improved maternity provision and regular physical examinations, the concern with women's needs as women and in their domestic commitments as mothers was very much evident within these airlines. The ambitions of women to progress in their careers were also considered by training young talented females (Phoenix Airlines) and encouraging the return to work of women after a baby-rearing break. However, it was felt that the efforts made to help women's career development were not as high as those made to help women with their domestic commitments. The glass ceiling has shifted upwards from the entry level and while it is possible for women to proceed to the junior management level, the ceiling was very much in existence at the step between junior and middle managerial grades. Nevertheless, it can be argued that EO policies have at least helped to partially create a climate of equality which enabled women to pursue equality with more opportunities being opened up.

The value of liberal arguments for achieving gender equality in society is acknowledged. However, in China, legislation is simply the logical conclusion of economic changes and the move towards a 'free' market (it is still politically controlled at some level). The free market not only means that individual employment contracts and regulations become important but also means that the state loses its grip as direct employer and needs to develop a whole apparatus of regulation including regulation of equality policies. But my study has shown that the progress through legislation and policies remains slow and people still find it difficult to exercise their individual rights. Furthermore, liberal feminism ignores social structural factors that some other feminist perspectives see as a basic cause of gender inequality. It is apparent from my research that institutions – such as the family, the political system, or the economy – have influenced women's experiences and their positions in society. In the modern Chinese airline industry one important barrier to women's career development was the male-based power structure and culture within these airlines (especially in Dragon and Phoenix Airlines). This finding conforms to a radical feminist perspective that a masculine hierarchy can lead to women's oppression and inequality in organisations and society as a whole.

Radical feminists call for a radical transformation of current social and organisational structures by initiating women-only activities or establishing separate organisations for women. As previously discussed, however, this sort of separatist

solution is considered to be too radical in Chinese society although the idea of women-only training as part of the equality strategy was supported by many of the female respondents in this research. When asked about the feasibility of such a radical shift in the airlines, the answer was that both men and women would reject it because ultimately Chinese solutions are traditionally collectivist and such proposals go against this cultural norm. Even those men who supported equality initiatives tended to become annoyed by the thought of being excluded by women doing something without them. Therefore, the proposals radical feminists advocate are neither acceptable nor conducive to creating an environment which is in the best interests of either sex in the Chinese cultural context. In this study, women were perceived to favour a mixed-sex working environment which was seen as 'natural' and 'harmonious' and conducive to improving efficiency and enhancing mixed-sex networking. These airlines have shown the tendency to create such mixed-sex working environments in some traditionally single-sex occupations by recruiting male flight attendants (i.e. Phoenix Airlines) and female pilot candidates (Panda Airlines), although these initiatives have only recently started and are very limited. I share Ramazanoglu (1989)'s view that such separatism damages both men and women and it is dangerous to subscribe too heavily to differences, but I also agree that 'we do not need to ignore biology without good reason' (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 40). These airlines have recognised the natural biological differences between women and men, but to a large extent they have also ignored the sameness of women to men in terms of demanding career development and of being capable of undertaking that development.

In the context of the Chinese economy which is both market-orientated and economy-driven, the ultimate goal for all types of organisation is to maximise profit and efficiency. Thus, it is unlikely that modern organisations will be concerned with such radical structural transformation in order to achieve gender equality. My research demonstrates that as a result of free market capitalism in the economic context women have been disadvantaged, which shows some degree of validity in the socialist feminist argument that capitalism is one of the primary causes of women's oppression and subordination. Those women in the large government-owned airline (Dragon Airlines) had a better experience (the lowest level of work-family conflict) than those in the joint-stock airline (Phoenix Airlines) because the former seemed to be protected by the state from fierce market competition. However, even if women's exposure to free market-type conditions was low, they were still disadvantaged within the

workplace as gendered organisational culture and practices persisted. My study further shows that the size of an organisation is a relevant factor. Out of the three airlines, women's experiences were the most difficult (the highest level of work-family conflict) in the small-sized airline (Panda Airlines) despite it being state-controlled. This shows that it is necessary to look beyond free market or ownership conditions to understand the full range of factors (e.g. organisational size) which are capable of developing pressures that make women's experiences more difficult.

It is evident in my research that women's disadvantaged position in the workplace has social and psychological roots, which is also an important observation of socialist feminists. The findings show that the way women did or did not fit into the schema of their paid employment and organisational life was seen by management (mainly male) and women themselves primarily as a correlate of their marital status and, more important still, whether they did or did not have children. This has verified the major claim of socialist feminists who advocate that there is 'the dialectical relationship between the patriarchal relations of domestic life and the patriarchal relations of work' (Cockburn, 1991: 77). My study suggests that a woman's domestic identity resulted in her being a disadvantaged worker, and being a low earner and subject to male authority at work sometimes lowered her status in the family. However, my interviewees' stories and my own experiences tell me that, increasingly, modern women have received considerable support and appreciation regarding their careers from men. This is due to the state's political influence on gender equality and its long-term effort in promoting women's education and employment, the formation of new cultural and social values under the opening-up and reforming policies, and improved awareness of both women and men in the importance of gender equality. This can partly explain why Chinese women are less likely to find themselves confronted to the same extent with the dual burden of employment and family life as women in other countries.

Patriarchal privilege, however, has not completely disappeared in Chinese women's lives which reduces women to a subordinate role in the domestic sphere as socialist feminists claim. My findings show that none of the respondents' partners or husbands undertook a significant amount of domestic work. Some women I interviewed were forced to sacrifice their career opportunities for their home commitments as well as their husbands' career success, but not by working part-time hours as this practice is not widely available in China. This led to much slower pay

increases and the woman having less economic importance than their husbands and, therefore, they became more dependent on their husbands. My study also suggests that due to limited 'choices' available to women some respondents shifted their focus and energy to their families where their input would be appreciated which made them less committed in the workplace. Therefore, as Wang (1999) noted and as discussed in Chapter II, it is important to take women's own perceptions and diversified experiences into account in the analysis of women's imbalanced work-family life.

In fact, as Holmstrom (2003) noted, the work of socialist feminists more broadly has paid increasing attention to intersectionality – the recognition that a woman's position is always a function of her class, ethnicity, family background, etc. – which has integrated these aspects coherently and systematically to enable better understanding of the complexity and diversity of women's experiences. However, some researchers have questioned the appropriateness of focusing on intersectionality without retaining elements of sameness in the analyses of women's experiences and the establishment of gender equality (e.g. Foster & Williams, 2010 (forthcoming); Squires, 2008), and point out that over emphasising the complexity of intersections risks losing sight of the fact that 'the specific social structures of patriarchy... that preoccupied feminists in the 1970s still matters' (Valentine, 2007: 19). It is important to recognise that whilst the categories which can be used to group women (e.g. married, single, old, young) each include similarities, such categories do not always provide the best basis for political action or for formulating policies for change (Foster and Williams 2010, forthcoming). This is because people only mobilise around big identities (e.g. gender, race, disability) (ibid) so the best solution, which has been adopted by some socialist feminists, is to value personal experience but analyse it in the context of larger social structures (Holmstrom, 2003).

The importance of women's own experiences and perceptions has been demonstrated in this research. To this extent I agree with poststructuralist feminism that we should not deny subjective experience. 'The ways in which people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society' and feminist theory needs to elaborate women's experience by 'showing where it comes from and how it relates to social practices and the power relations which structure them' (Weedon, 1987: 8). So the voices of marginalised groups such as women 'need to be heard clearly alongside those of more dominant groups' (Baxter 2002: 4). In my research, the language of the male senior managers

was the dominant discourse which contained gendered ideas which impacted on the experiences of female employees in work. What the management believed was, however, in many respects at odds with what women perceived. The voices of women, as alternative or oppositional voices, therefore, provided insights into their world view and helped in understanding richness and diversity of women's experience in reconciling work and family.

The Chinese airline industry as I described has gone through dramatic changes in its history – for example, shifts in ownership, organisational structures, economic sources, work modes, HR practices etc. These changes (such as the recent merger of two big airlines and reconfiguration of ownership) have affected women's experiences in the workplace (i.e. sense of stability vs. sense of crisis), as discussed in Chapters VI and VII. My study also shows that women in different jobs or at different stages of their life were seen differently in these airlines. For instance, flight attendants were viewed as beautiful objects and their sexuality was utilised by the airlines for economic survival and prosperity; female ground staff were paid less attention and accepted their designation as the weaker sex; and younger female colleagues were regarded more favourably than those who were older with children. As poststructuralist feminists argue, therefore, both gender and organisation are ever-changing in specific times and places and gender is constructed differently in different types of organisations and different parts of an organisation. However, I would question the poststructuralist analysis which privileges discourses over material conditions and causes of discursive production – for as Weedon (1999) suggests, it erases some kind of stable subjectivity from which to develop a coherent political practice. For instance, organisational norms – including formal and informal rules, industrial regulations, and national policies and legislation – are actually important material aspects by which we might explain experiences of women's work-family conflict.

After examining the different forms of feminism in my study, it is clear that all of these feminist perspectives have contributed more or less to my understanding of gender and organisations. In particular, socialist feminism has offered a useful analytical approach: focusing on political and economic systems, and social and institutional practices as they have affected women's experiences in paid employment and the domestic sphere. Western feminist theory is certainly valuable as a rich source of reference. However, whilst recognising both the validity and the

inadequacy of the claims made by a number of feminist perspectives, I agree that Western feminist tradition can not provide a standardised answer to all Chinese women's questions (Li & Zhang, 1994). Therefore, it is more crucial to locate such feminism in the contexts of China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as 'Chinese feminism is differently embedded within contemporary political and cultural relations than feminism in the West is' (Schaffer & Song, 2007: 18).

The above feminist perspectives are useful in understanding the underlying causes of women's subordination. A rules approach or rules-based perspective – which has been applied by Western researchers to studying a relationship between gender and organisation, particularly gendered organisational culture in the airline industry (i.e. Mills & Mills, 2000) – is useful in examining the actual factors influencing women's experiences in the workplace as well as in society..

As shown throughout the case analyses, formal rules provide guidelines for desired employee behaviours in organisations. For example, one of the most significant formal rules in the three airlines that contributed largely to women's work-family conflict was the requirement that front-line staff must undertake shift work which was often irregular and busy. The rule that flight attendants were not allowed to swap shift also caused work-family conflict. Moreover, one of the important formal rules in Panda Airlines that contributed significantly to the gendered organisational culture was the selection criterion for cabin crew which required that they must be single aged between 18 – 25 with a height between 1.62 and 1.72 metres, etc. These rules are formal written rules which were made clear to everyone involved. However, if the formal written rules were all that an organisation had, 'we would have no need of an organisational rules approach' (Mills, 2004: 141). Informal or underlying rules which 'reflect upon dominant ideology and values of the members of those social groups' (Mills & Mills, 2000: 57) have also played a key role in understanding women's experiences in organisations. There is evidence of informal rules operating in the airlines I studied. In the three airlines, the senior management was exclusively male and the middle management was dominated by men. Although the organisations launched EO policies, the informal rules arising from the interpretation of these formal policies through social interactions led to many discriminatory HR practices that affected how women were perceived, how they were treated, and what type of job roles were regarded to suit them. For example, one of the most significant informal



rules in Phoenix Airlines was the unwritten requirement for all people in senior positions to have science or engineering-related educational backgrounds or work experience. This suggests that masculine characteristics were favoured for senior posts and, therefore, women were generally seen to be unsuitable for senior management positions (see Chapter 7.2.4). Moreover, as discussed in Chapters VI and VII, regardless of qualifications or experience, job applicants who had ‘guan xi’ with management or authorities – which is an underlying but influential rule – would be favoured in recruitment or promotion in both Phoenix and Panda Airlines. A unique unwritten rule in Dragon Airlines was that permanent employees enjoyed more benefits (including pay) and more promotion opportunities than contract workers when both groups undertook the same jobs. Mills and Mills (2000) argue that informal rules are not created to meet the goals of an organisation, but in my research some informal rules were seen to be critical to the goals of the organisations. The use of subjective informal criteria, such as aesthetical labour in Panda Airlines, provides an excellent example of how informal rules can also be used by employers to attain their goals. As discussed in Chapter VII, Panda Airlines gained a good position in the competitive air business because the organisation was famous for employing glamorous stewardesses.

There are different forms of rules beyond organisations, as an old Chinese saying goes, ‘there are rules everywhere, as in a nation or a family’. National laws and policies can be the most formal rules such as the New Labour Contract Law and the One Child Policy which have impacted women’s experiences in work and family spheres as discussed throughout the thesis. Some informal rules are actually cultural norms and values, such as ‘guan xi’, and ‘men work outside and women inside’. Such very informal but deep-rooted rules have exerted great influence on women’s experiences, as well as their attitudes towards their own roles in society. Establishing an understanding of how all these different rules come together – as shown in the advanced six-factor analytical model (see Chapter IV) – has provided a better understanding of experiences of Chinese women which are different from other contexts.

### **9.3 Applying the advanced six-factor analytical model to the analysis of work-family conflict**

The six-factor analytical model has guided the in-depth analyses of the three case studies by providing a framework for examining how the factors in the areas of *economy, social-political system, culture, airline industry, organisations* and *family* – both respectively and jointly – have led to women experiencing work-family conflict. Although other scholars (e.g. Venter, 2002) have developed models which include some of these factors, a comprehensive review of existing literature did not unearth a model which combines all of these factors. An important feature of my six-factor model is the way in which it brings together influences that emerge from a specific organisational context, industry or nation. This study has illustrated that the micro-level influences (e.g. workplace and family) cannot be properly understood without considering the broader context from which they emerge.

#### *Industrialisation processes and concurrent economic reform*

China's rapid industrialisation, effective economic reform and consequential unprecedented rate of economic growth have created a large quantity of job opportunities and career options for women. The free-market economy with a heightened focus on economic growth and subsequent fundamental reconstruction of the economy have had significant effects on women, including widening prospects of employment for many, by enabling them to enjoy unprecedented financial freedom and by providing greater lifestyle choices. The market-driven transformation has, nevertheless, also created new barriers for women. The structural economic changes, including large-scale state enterprise reforms since the 1990s, have disadvantaged women (particularly middle-aged women) because they have been laid off in greater numbers than men as was discussed in Chapter III.

#### *Social-political context*

The political role of the Chinese State as well as its 30-year economic reforms – which have brought about substantial social changes – have resulted in both benefits and difficulties to women. The interference of the state in individual women's lives (e.g. the One Child Policy) has been criticised by Western observers as oppressive. Nevertheless, the State has helped women in China to be one of the most liberated among Asian countries as a result of the introduction and implementation of a succession of laws and policies regarding gender equality in all aspects - as discussed in Chapters III and IV. It appears that many Chinese women (particularly well-

educated young women) have benefited from both the new 'market' capitalist system and have been liberated from the burden of raising multiple children as a result of the unique One Child Policy (despite being seen as controversial by Western commentators, particularly because of the manner in which the policy has been implemented). Consequently, many of them have been able to combine the roles of career woman, mother, and wife into a workable package.

With the gaze of the Chinese elite focused firmly on economic growth and material prosperity, however, the state's goals of gender equality have been compromised by its economic goals. Both existing Chinese literature and this study reveal that gender stereotyping remains strong. Thus, the state and its policies have not eliminated gender discrimination. Due to limited 'choice' available to women, many have to lower their career ambitions or even retreat from the increasingly competitive job market. Where they do so, some employers use their actions – which they construe as evidence of a lack of commitment – as a basis for an excuse to practice bias against the women who stay. Chairman Mao once said that "woman hold up half the sky" – which remains a popular slogan in the twenty first century - but their half is usually heavier, less prestigious and more poorly paid.

### *The industrial context*

Factors within the economic and social-political contexts have contributed to the overall explanation of why women are not equal participants in either the economy or the society. The industrial context has also proven to be intimately associated with women's experiences. The distinct and established practices of the airline industry have been shown to impact on women's experiences in a way which creates work-family conflict. The Chinese airline industry (as elsewhere) has always been closely tied to economic and social trends and due to the intensified competition in the commercial aviation market, the industrial authorities have recognised the need for change and subsequently provided guidelines for transformation to ensure airlines' survival and prosperity. To meet the requirements of increasingly discerning passengers, Chinese airlines have had to invest heavily in the quality of the service that they offer – both on the ground and in the air. As a result of a number of well-known characteristics of the airline industry such as shift pattern and work-related travel and some unique features revealed in my research such as rigid leave policies and the utilisation of emotional labour (see Chapter VI and VII) - women have

experienced specific tensions in the industry when seeking to balance their job responsibilities and domestic commitments.

*Cultural values: national, regional and organisational cultures*

This study, furthermore, illustrates that the role played by culture – existing at national, regional and organisational levels – is significant in influencing women's experiences of work-family conflict. Throughout the nation, many traditional cultural values persist but they have been changing and co-existing with modern norms. For instance, in modern cities there has been a decline in the male breadwinner model with the dual-earner model becoming the norm but women remain the secondary earner and the primary carer or holder of responsibility for organising care. Modern urban women stress the importance of their employment and self-reliance, but it seems that they are also prepared to accept gender difference in respect of abilities (e.g. women are less capable than men) and a gender role division in the labour market.

Moreover, it is important to understand cultural differences in order to explain the divergent experiences of Chinese women and Western women in both work and family domains. At the preliminary stage of my research, my hypotheses were developed largely on the basis of existing findings of women's work-family conflict from predominantly Western samples. However, some hypotheses (such as the close correlation between family characteristics and women's work-family conflict) are not so supported by my questionnaire findings as in the West. These differences can only be explained by learning and understanding the unique Chinese culture which is based on the interaction between traditional Chinese cultural influences (e.g. grandparents' involvement in childcare) combined with the modern China experience (e.g. employment of cheap domestic labour).

Identifying the diversity of regional cultures in China is also necessary. China is very large geographically with customs and traditions varying greatly between towns, cities, and provinces. The different geographical locations (i.e. West and South) where the three airlines studied are situated and distinct sub-cultures (i.e. easy-going vs. fast-paced lifestyle) can explain subtle differences with regard to women's work-family experiences. Local environment influences not only organisational culture but individual women's attitudes and values (i.e. 'Enjoying life is most important' vs. 'Life is a struggle'). Thus, it is important to apply specific regional cultural dynamics

to explanations of women's experiences at home and work.

Both national and regional cultures have also influenced organisational culture. For instance 'guan xi', a unique part of Chinese culture, is also part of the underlying organisational culture as it is easier for those who have 'guan xi' to progress within organisations. Furthermore, this research substantiates the evidence that the organisational culture in modern airlines is dominantly masculine. Although all three airlines I studied advocated performance-based managerial approaches to assess employees in terms of their ability to meet certain objectives instead of their gender, age or seniority, this performance-related culture has not replaced the masculine culture. As the management in these airlines was predominantly male, senior positions were made masculine with little accommodation provided for women. The official approaches to assessing performance have in practice not been followed by the majority of managers who were male as they favoured men, single and young individuals or those without many domestic commitments. This made it difficult for women who valued other aspects of their lives, or who had domestic responsibilities they are not able to avoid, to progress in these organisations. Therefore, the difficulty of taking up a managerial position for women stems only in part from the conflict between domestic and work demands and, indeed, problems for working women in China are less influenced by work-family conflict than problems for women in the West are. As discussed in previous chapters, both Eastern and Western studies show that female embodiment is assumed to present problems, and to be in conflict with organisational and career demands. It was apparent that this organisational attitude towards women was prevalent in the Chinese airline industry which influenced women's experiences and their attitudes towards themselves in the workplace. Apart from such a strong masculine culture pervading in these airlines, this study has shown that the airline organisational culture also existed in the form of femininity. Female flight attendant candidates at the recruitment stage were judged primarily by their appearance as many Chinese passengers judged the quality of airlines in terms of the physical appearance of their flight attendants. Accordingly, the use of aesthetic labour in achieving business success has become a distinct feature of modern Chinese airlines.

#### *The organisation/workplace domain*

In addition to the organisational culture elaborated above, other factors (especially

tangible or concrete factors) operating in the workplace also affected women's experience. Organisational rules, strategies and HR policies and practices which were designed to manipulate and control employees' behaviour and to suit employers own interests had a direct influence on women's experiences of work-family conflict. For example, a 'no-shift swapping' rule adopted in the airlines resulted in inflexibility and inconvenience for women. To achieve high customer satisfaction, front-line service workers were required to induce or suppress their feelings (emotional labour) while on duty which, being a source of stress, triggered work-family conflict for them. Young females (particularly in Phoenix Airlines) were encouraged not to marry early so that the organisation could more effectively utilise them for better output, but this interfered with their personal lives.

#### *The family domain*

The workplace has been seen to be the major source of women's work-family conflict but their family - which is clearly associated with women's career choice, social status, well-being, values and attitudes – impacts on their experiences of work-family conflict. For many families women's participation in paid employment is an economic necessity, making the dual-earner family a norm. In this research, family members were generally perceived by women to be supportive and provided assistance in ways that lower the degree of work-family conflict. However, as shown throughout the three cases, some long-standing gendered views about women's role held by women's family members could also explain a downward mobility in women's career paths, women's priority of family over paid work, and women's worries concerning how they can continue to carry out perceived responsibilities to their husbands, children and other kin while at the same time pursuing their desired careers.

#### **9.4 Implications for policy and practice**

This research found that a high level of family support, both tangibly and emotionally, contributed to fewer family burdens and a better work-family balance. Female employees still expressed low levels of satisfaction with their companies' family friendly policies and practices and suggested that they should extend maternity leave and establish on-site childcare facilities which would indicate a willingness to participate in childcare responsibilities. However, despite extensive parental and other

childcare related benefits applying equally to both sexes in China due to the state's attempt to collectivise childcare responsibilities, women continue to undertake more responsibilities.

Key findings from my research suggest that the Chinese airline industry needs to address current problems associated with intense shifts, non-standard work schedules and rigid leave policies. Evidence that work patterns can be adjusted to meet individual needs without reducing actual workload is available. For example, same dual-flying couples could benefit from their shift schedule being synchronized. Flexibility could also be increased if airlines employed a greater number of staff as this would enable employees to take their full entitlement of holidays as well as emergency leave, which are important factors in people's sense of a fair work-life exchange with their employers and their sense of trust between employer and employee (Clutterbuck, 2003). Airlines might allow untaken holiday to accumulate so that employees are able to take it when their workload is not heavy (e.g. off-season in the air transport market). A policy that allows employees to take emergency leave for domestic reasons such as caring for ill children or a parent meeting required by their children's school could also be considered. More seminars or workshops can be designed for women with family responsibilities to reduce their stress and raise their productivity. In short, the organisations should help women find a better way of achieving a work-life balance.

The corporate culture in airlines needs to be more women friendly by not only understanding their family needs but also recognising their career ambitions and the gendered nature of the organisation and their jobs. For these organisations, the implementation of EO policies should be more than a slogan. Positive and affirmative action approaches are generally viewed as a conscious effort to level the playing field so that everyone has an equal chance (Wirth, 2001). This, however, may not be an easy task. In some airlines, such specific career-building strategies like the 'Back-up Cadres' scheme and the female pilots training programme have been found useful. However, little has been done to remove the obstacles for female employees in selection, promotion and training. Equal access to selection and promotion needs to be guaranteed by using fair and equal procedures such as standardised assessment tests, monitoring of employment practices (both documented and operated), and the principle of 'equal pay for equal work' needs to be adhered to in order to eliminate the gap between permanent employees and contract workers. Recruitment and evaluation

of women (particularly flight attendants) should principally be based on their competence and ability. Furthermore, central to the promotion of EO is equal access by women to learning and training opportunities which are critical factors for them to participate more in professional and managerial jobs as well as realise their full potential. In addition, help in establishing positive networking within organisations can enhance the sense of competence that women often lack (Cooper & Davidson, 1982). Therefore, in these airlines, instead of organising social events and activities only, the Women's Committee should play a more active role in representing female employees' voice and establishing an effective communication channel between employees and management.

The removal of occupational segregation and breaking the glass ceiling implies not only effective policies and improved legislation provided by the government and the industry but also significant transformation of the workplace itself. The latter requires a change in the perception, attitudes and awareness of management and individual workers on these issues. The most motivating factor for these airlines to promote more women in management is the realisation that it is good for business. Utilising the full potential of trained and qualified women is an important means of adding value to organizations and a way of improving companies' images and eventually customer satisfaction with services and products that are more women friendly (Wirth, 2001).

## **9.5 Contributions, limitations and implications for future research**

This research has attempted to fill a gap in the literature by exploring experiences of work-family conflict for women in China in an under-researched industry. By providing empirical evidence it develops understanding of issues relating to women, gender and organisations in the Chinese context and provides some theoretical and empirical insights which show the value of contrasting women's experiences in the family and the labour market in the East and the West. The six-factor model has proved to be helpful in assisting a thorough analysis of women's experiences and in examining ways in which both roles of women interact with and influence each other. It is also hoped that this research has identified salient issues that are relevant not only to the airline industry but also to the wider Chinese cultural and business contexts, encouraging reflection on the part of management on the implications for women's



career progression and aspirations.

I also acknowledge a number of shortcomings of this study. Apart from several problems I encountered during the process of conducting the fieldwork as noted in Chapter V, another limitation is that it is based on only three airline companies which may be questioned for its adequacy in providing generalisable conclusions that can be applied in the whole airline industry. Therefore, I recognise that more research is necessary particularly in other types of Chinese airlines such as privately-owned airlines. Meanwhile, this study also provides an opportunity to research employees' work-family issues in other industries which will be able to examine whether the findings in this context are unique or whether they are similar to female experiences beyond the airline industry and therefore represent a common pattern in the Chinese context. This research did not set out to be a comparative study of the East and the West, but because of the dominance of secondary literature in the West these comparisons were made. A truly comparative study should be based on primary data in the West which would offer a better opportunity to compare and contrast women's experiences in the East and the West. It is also noted that men do experience work-family conflict, but this might be in a different form and, therefore, a future research project could focus on understanding work-family experiences among male employees and comparing them with female employees. In addition, the results of the present study, together with the findings of existing literature in both the East and the West, suggest that organisational and managerial support for employees is crucial to eliminate or reduce the conflict from work to family. Thus, future research could aim at gaining a fuller understanding of how organisations can create a positive work-family culture, moving beyond the provision of family-friendly policies, in helping employees achieve a balanced life.

Women's work-family conflict is a universal issue, but this study indicates that economic, social-political and cultural contexts appear to play an important role in the degree of work-family conflict experienced and the factors that contribute to such conflict. The existing literature often suggests that women's work-family conflict results equally from both work and family domains. This research has shown a rather different picture as it has established that such conflict for women in the Chinese airline industry is much more from work to family than from family to work in equal proportions. Due to the unique Chinese characteristics, women's experience of dealing with work and family – both separately and jointly – is more complex than

existing studies suggest or than this thesis is able to reveal completely within its scope. This thesis does, however, provide a foundation for future research and a platform from which others could develop their research designs.

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## Appendix 1 Questionnaire (English version)

### Careers, Family Life and Women in the Chinese Airline Industry

#### About yourself (all answers are confidential)

Q1 How old are you?

- 1  Below 20
- 2  20 – 29
- 3  30 – 39
- 4  40 – 49
- 5  50 or above

Q2 What is your marital status?

- 1  Single
- 2  Married
- 3  Widowed, divorced

Q3 What are your living arrangements? (Tick as many as apply)

- 1  I live alone
- 2  I live with my spouse
- 3  My spouse works away from home
- 4  I live with my children
- 5  I live with my parents/parents-in-law

Q4 Does your spouse work?

- 1  I have no spouse
- 2  Yes, my spouse works full-time
- 3  Yes, my spouse works part-time
- 4  No, my spouse does not work

Q5 How many children do you have? (Please fill in 0 if you have no children) \_\_\_\_\_

- 1  0
- 2  1
- 3  2
- 4  3 or above

Q6 How old are your children? (Tick as many as apply)

- 1  I have no children
- 2  I have one or more under 7 years
- 3  I have one more 7 to 15 years

4  I have one or more 16 years and over still in education

5  I have one or more no longer dependent children

Q7 What kind of childcare arrangements do you have? (Tick as many as apply)

- 1  I have no children
- 2  Spouse
- 3  Nursery/Kindergarten
- 4  Babysitter
- 5  Parents
- 6  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q8 How many elderly or disabled parents/relatives are you responsible for? (Please fill in 0 if you are not responsible for any) \_\_\_\_\_

- 1  0
- 2  1
- 3  2
- 4  3 or above

Q9 Who in your home has the biggest responsibility for domestic work, childcare and/or eldercare?

- 1  I do
- 2  My spouse
- 3  My apartment-sharer
- 4  My parents/parents-in-law
- 5  We share equally

Q10 On average, on days when you are working, how much time do you spend on housework per week (except Saturdays and Sundays)?

- 1  < 2 hours
- 2   $\geq$  2 hours, but < 5 hours

3   $\cong$  5 hours, but  $<$  10 hours

4   $\cong$  10 hours

### About your education and your job

Q11 What is the highest educational level that you reached?

- 1  High School
- 2  College diploma
- 3  Bachelor's degree or equivalent
- 4  Master's degree or equivalent
- 5  PhD or equivalent
- 6  Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q12 What is your present job type?

- 1  Cabin crew
- 2  Ground staff
- 3  Others (e.g. back-office staff)

Q13 What is your present job position?

- 1  Senior management
- 2  Middle management
- 3  Junior management
- 4  Entry-level staff

Q14 Do you work full-time or part-time for your organisation?

- 1  Full-time
- 2  Part-time

Q15 How many years have you worked for your organisation? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1   $<$  1 year
- 2   $\cong$  1 year, but  $<$  5 years
- 3   $\cong$  5 years, but  $<$  10 years
- 4   $\cong$  10 years

Q16 How many hours of work per week are you required to work for your organisation according to your contract?

- 1   $<$  40 hours
- 2   $\cong$  40 hours, but  $<$  45 hours
- 3   $\cong$  45 hours, but  $<$  50 hours
- 4   $\cong$  50 hours

Q17 How many hours of work per week on average do you work for your organisation (including any overtime)?

- 1   $<$  40 hours
- 2   $\cong$  40 hours, but  $<$  45 hours
- 3   $\cong$  45 hours, but  $<$  50 hours
- 4   $\cong$  50 hours

Q18 What is your formal pattern of work? (Tick as many as apply)

- 1  I work approximately from 8:00 to 17:00 on most working days
- 2  I work shifts mostly e.g
- 3  I work. split-shifts mostly
- 4  I regularly work in the evening
- 5  I regularly work Saturdays and Sundays

Q19 How many days leave per year are specified in your contract? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1   $<$  3 days
- 2   $\cong$  3 hours, but  $<$  8 days
- 3   $\cong$  8 days, but  $<$  15 days
- 4   $\cong$  15 days

Q20 How many days leave per year on average do you actually take? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1   $<$  3 days
- 2   $\cong$  3 hours, but  $<$  8 days
- 3   $\cong$  8 days, but  $<$  15 days
- 4   $\cong$  15 days

Q21 What are the proportions of men and women in your particular department?

- 1  All or nearly all are women
- 2  Women are in the majority
- 3  About half and half
- 4  Men are in the majority

## Your views on careers, gender and family life

For the following questions, please give your views by circling one of the numbers next to each statement.

### Q22 Your experience of job demands

	Strongly disagree		Strongly agree		
1. My job requires that I work very fast.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My job requires that I work very hard.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I never seem to have enough time to get everything done on my job.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I can handle my job effortlessly.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I can always complete my work on time.	1	2	3	4	5

### Q23 Your experiences of work-family conflict

Please circle NA if your do not have a partner etc.

	Strongly disagree		Strongly agree		
1. I never have enough time to deal with what I have, at work and what I have to do at home.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
2. I find it very easy to balance my time between my work needs and my family needs.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
3. Problems at work follow me home and disrupt my family life and leisure.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
4. In my job, when I go home at the end of the day, I can leave all my work worries at work.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
5. My job keeps me from spending time with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
6. Worrying about my job is interfering with my relationship with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
7. My working hours interfere with the amount of time I spend with my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5 NA
8. Because I am often irritable after work, I'm not as good a parent as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
9. The amount of time I spend working interferes with how much free time I have.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
10. Worrying about my job makes it hard for me to enjoy myself outside of work.	1	2	3	4	5 NA

Q24 Views in your organisation on female colleagues

	Strongly disagree					Strongly agree				
1. In my organisation, childcare responsibilities are seen as incompatible with a top job for a woman.	1	2	3	4	5					
2. In my organisation, married women are seen as less committed to work than married men.	1	2	3	4	5					
3. In my organisation, men consider it difficult to work for women manager.	1	2	3	4	5					
4. In my organisation, employees have to choose between advancing their careers or devoting attention to their family or personal lives.	1	2	3	4	5					
5. In my organisation, employees' family obligations are respected.	1	2	3	4	5					
6. In my organisation, employees who put their family responsibilities ahead of their jobs are not looked on favorably.	1	2	3	4	5					
7. In my organisation, both men and women are encouraged to pay attention to their families' needs.	1	2	3	4	5					
8. In my organisation, childcare responsibilities significantly reduces women's opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5					

**Your Sources of Support**

Q25 How much TANGIBLE support do you get from other people in managing your work and home life? Tangible support means giving advice, assistance, time and money. Please circle NA if you do not have a partner etc.

	Not support at all					A great deal of support				
Your supervisor/manager	1	2	3	4	5	NA				
Your co-workers/colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	NA				
Your spouse	1	2	3	4	5	NA				
Your parents/parents-in-law	1	2	3	4	5	NA				
Your other family members	1	2	3	4	5	NA				
Your friends	1	2	3	4	5	NA				



Q26 How much EMOTIONAL support do you get from other people in managing your work and home life? Emotional support means making you feel good and giving you an opportunity to talk things over. Please circle NA if you do not have a partner etc.

	Not support at all			A great deal of support		
Your supervisor/manager	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Your co-workers/colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Your spouse	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Your parents/parents-in-law	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Your other family members	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Your friends	1	2	3	4	5	NA

### Your views on equal opportunity issues and work-family benefits

Q27 In general, how important for individuals' careers in an organisation do you consider the following equal opportunity policies and practices to be?

	Not at all important			Very important		
1. Equal opportunity policy	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Equal opportunity committee – representatives of managers and workers meet to discuss equal opportunities issues.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Equal opportunity training for managers and supervisors	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Gender ratio auditing – collecting statistics on the distribution of men and women in the organisation	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Setting gender targets – e.g. aiming for a 10% increase in women managers over five years	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Separate sexual harassment complaints procedure with built-in confidentiality.	1	2	3	4	5	

Q28 In general, how important for individuals' work-family balance do you consider the following organisational practices to be?

	Not at all important			Very important	
1. Opportunity to work flextime	1	2	3	4	5
2. Opportunity to job share	1	2	3	4	5
3. Opportunity to work part-time	1	2	3	4	5
4. Flexibility to take compassionate leave	1	2	3	4	5
5. Flexibility to take extended no pay-leave	1	2	3	4	5
6. Maternity leave and pay	1	2	3	4	5
7. Paternity leave and pay	1	2	3	4	5
8. On-site childcare	1	2	3	4	5
9. Childcare subsidies	1	2	3	4	5
10. Eldercare counseling	1	2	3	4	5
11. Eldercare subsidies	1	2	3	4	5
12. Work-family counseling	1	2	3	4	5
13. Women-only training courses	1	2	3	4	5

Q29 How satisfied are you, overall, with your organisation's provision of equal opportunities policies and procedures and family-friendly benefits?

	Not at all satisfied			Very satisfied	
1. My overall satisfaction with my organisation's provision of equal opportunity policies and procedures (such as equal opportunity training for managers and supervisors)	1	2	3	4	5
2. My overall satisfaction with my organisation's provision of family friendly benefits (such as flextime and on-site childcare)	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix 1 Questionnaire (Chinese version)

### 中国航空业职业，家庭及女性调查问卷（所有的回答都将保密）

#### 关于您自己

Q1 您的年龄：

- 1  20 以下
- 2  20 到 29 岁
- 3  30 到 39 岁
- 4  40 到 49 岁
- 5  50 或以上

Q2 您的婚姻状况：

- 1  单身
- 2  结婚
- 3  离婚或丧偶

Q3 您的生活状态（可多选）：

- 1  我独居
- 2  我与配偶住在一起
- 3  我的配偶在外地工作
- 4  我与孩子住在一起
- 5  我与父母或配偶父母住在一起

Q4 您的配偶工作吗？

- 1  无配偶
- 2  是的，我的配偶全职工作
- 3  是的，我的配偶兼职工作
- 4  不，我的配偶不工作

Q5 您有几个孩子？

- 1  0
- 2  1
- 3  2
- 4  3 或以上

Q6 您的孩子多大了？（可多选）

- 1  我没有孩子
- 2  我有一个或以上 7 岁以下的孩子
- 3  我有一个或以上 7 岁到 15 岁的孩子
- 4  我有一个或以上 16 岁以上的孩子

5  我有一个或以上已经独立的孩子们

Q7 谁在照顾孩子？（可多选）

- 1  我没有孩子
- 2  我的配偶
- 3  幼儿园/托儿所
- 4  保姆
- 5  父母或配偶父母
- 6  其他（请注明）.....

Q8 您需要照顾几个年老或残疾的父母或亲戚？

- 1  0
- 2  1
- 3  2
- 4  3 或以上

Q9 在您家里谁做更多的家务，照顾孩子和老人？

- 1  我本人
- 2  我的配偶
- 3  保姆
- 4  我的父母/配偶父母
- 5  我们平等承担家庭责任

Q10 您大概平均每周做多少小时家务事（周六日除外）？

- 1  2 小时
- 2  多于 2 小时，但少于 5 小时
- 3  多于 5 小时，但少于 10 小时
- 4  10 小时或以上

#### 关于您的教育与工作

Q11 您所取得的最高学历是什么？

- 1  高中
- 2  大专
- 3  学士学位或同等学历
- 4  硕士学位或同等学历

- 5□ 博士学位或同等学历  
6□ 其他（请注明）.....

Q12 您现在的工作类别是什么？

- 1□ 乘务及相关工作  
2□ 地勤及相关工作  
3□ 其它工作（如办公室职员）

Q13 您现在的工作职位是什么？

- 1□ 高级管理（总经理等）  
2□ 中级管理（部门经理等）  
3□ 一线管理者（乘务长等）  
4□ 普通员工

Q14 您在目前单位是全职还是兼职工作？

- 1□ 全职  
2□ 兼职

Q15 您在您的单位工作多少年了？

- 1□ 少于1年  
2□ 1年到5年  
3□ 5年以上到10年  
4□ 10年以上

Q16 根据您的劳动合同，每周您应该工作多少小时？

- 1□ 少于40小时  
2□ 40小时到45小时  
3□ 45小时以上到50小时  
4□ 50小时或以上

Q17 您平均每周实际工作多少小时？(包括加班)

- 1□ 少于40小时  
2□ 40小时到45小时  
3□ 45小时以上到50小时  
4□ 50小时或以上

Q18 您正式的工作模式是怎样的？(可多选)

- 1□ 我几乎每天8点上班,17点下班。  
2□ 我大部分时间倒班工作  
3□ 我大部分时间一天工作几个时间段  
4□ 我通常晚上工作  
5□ 我通常周六周日工作

Q19 根据您的劳动合同，每年您享有多少天的休假？()

- 1□ 少于3天  
2□ 3天到7天  
3□ 8天到15天  
4□ 15天以上

Q20 您实际每年休假平均多少天？

- 1□ 少于3天  
2□ 3天到7天  
3□ 8天到15天  
4□ 15天以上

Q21 在您工作的部门中，男女员工的比例是怎样的？

- 1□ 所有或几乎所有人都是女性  
2□ 女性占大多数  
3□ 男女比例各占一半  
4□ 男性占大多数

### 关于职业, 性别和家庭生活的观点

在下列问题中, 请在每个命题之后圈一个数字表明您的观点.

#### Q22 您的工作压力的个人经历

	极其不同意					极其同意
1. 我必须快速工作才行	1	2	3	4	5	
2. 我必须勤奋工作才行	1	2	3	4	5	
3. 我似乎从来没有足够的时间处理完工作中的任务	1	2	3	4	5	
4. 我很容易地就可以完成任务	1	2	3	4	5	
5. 我总是按时完成工作任务	1	2	3	4	5	

#### Q23 您的工作/家庭冲突的个人经历

NA=无关(例如您没有配偶)

	极其不同意					极其同意
1. 我从来没有足够的时间处理家务和工作	1	2	3	4	5	NA
2. 我发现家务和工作容易平衡得好	1	2	3	4	5	NA
3. 工作中的问题会影响我家庭生活和休闲时间	1	2	3	4	5	NA
4. 在结束一天工作回家的时候, 我会把所有工作中的问题留在工作单位	1	2	3	4	5	NA
5. 我工作太忙, 让我没有足够时间与配偶相聚	1	2	3	4	5	NA
6. 对工作的忧虑影响我与配偶的关系	1	2	3	4	5	NA
7. 我的工作时间影响我与孩子相处的时间	1	2	3	4	5	NA
8. 因为下班后经常烦躁, 我不能成为一个好母亲	1	2	3	4	5	NA
9. 我对工作所付出的时间影响到我的业余时间	1	2	3	4	5	NA
10. 对工作的忧虑让我很难在工作以外享受生活	1	2	3	4	5	NA

#### Q24 您的单位对女性同事的看法

	极其不同意					极其同意
1. 照顾小孩被看作与高层女性管理职位不符	1	2	3	4	5	
2. 已婚女性被认为不如已婚男性对工作投入	1	2	3	4	5	
3. 男性觉得很难接受女上司	1	2	3	4	5	
4. 女员工必须在事业发展或家庭/个人生活中两者择一	1	2	3	4	5	
5. 单位尊重女员工的家庭责任	1	2	3	4	5	
6. 重视家庭胜于工作的女员工在工作中不受重视	1	2	3	4	5	
7. 单位鼓励女性重视家庭需要	1	2	3	4	5	
8. 在我单位里, 女性花时间来照顾孩子回减少事业发展机会	1	2	3	4	5	

### 人际支持

Q25 在协调工作与家庭生活方面,其他人能给予您多少有形支持?有形支持指提供建议,帮助,时间与金钱。(NA=无关,例如您没有配偶)

	无支持			极其支持		
上司	1	2	3	4	5	NA
同事	1	2	3	4	5	NA
配偶	1	2	3	4	5	NA
父母/配偶父母	1	2	3	4	5	NA
其他家庭成员	1	2	3	4	5	NA
朋友	1	2	3	4	5	NA

Q26 在协调工作与家庭生活方面,其他人能给予您多少情感支持?情感支持能使您感到好受并有机会倾诉。(NA=无关,例如您没有配偶)

	无支持			极其支持		
上司	1	2	3	4	5	NA
同事	1	2	3	4	5	NA
配偶	1	2	3	4	5	NA
父母/配偶父母	1	2	3	4	5	NA
其他家庭成员	1	2	3	4	5	NA
朋友	1	2	3	4	5	NA

### 关于平等机会问题和工作/家庭福利的观点

Q27 通常来说,您认为下列平等政策与实践对于单位中个人事业的发展有多重要?

	根本不重要			非常重要		
1. 平等机会政策	1	2	3	4	5	
2. 平等机会委员会- 管理层和员工的代表一起讨论平等机会问题	1	2	3	4	5	
3. 对经理和主管进行平等机会政策的培训	1	2	3	4	5	
4. 性别比例审查- 搜集单位里男女分配比例的统计资料	1	2	3	4	5	
5. 建立性别比例目标如五年之内女性经理的比例要上升10%	1	2	3	4	5	
6. 建立性骚扰申诉制度并对投诉人高度保密	1	2	3	4	5	

Q28 通常来说, 您认为以下工作实践对平衡个人工作与家庭的关系有多重要?

	根本不重要			非常重要	
1. 弹性工作制度	1	2	3	4	5
2. 工作分享制度	1	2	3	4	5
3. 兼职工作的机会	1	2	3	4	5
4. 请事假的机会	1	2	3	4	5
5. 无薪休假的机会	1	2	3	4	5
6. 带薪产假	1	2	3	4	5
7. 给父亲带薪产假的机会	1	2	3	4	5
8. 单位提供儿童保育服务	1	2	3	4	5
9. 儿童保育补贴	1	2	3	4	5
10. 老年看护方面的咨询	1	2	3	4	5
11. 老年看护补贴	1	2	3	4	5
12. 工作与家庭方面的咨询	1	2	3	4	5
13. 专为女性提供的培训	1	2	3	4	5

Q29 总体来说, 您对于单位提供平等机会政策和家庭福利政策的满意程度如何?

	根本不满意			非常满意	
1. 对于单位提供平等机会政策和程序的满意程度 (例如工作升迁机会的平等性)	1	2	3	4	5
2. 对于单位提供便利家庭政策的满意程度 (例如弹性工作时间和单位照顾小孩的服务)	1	2	3	4	5

## **Appendix 2 Interview Schedule and Designed Interview Questions**

**Interviewer:** Xiaoni Ren

**Date:** July 15 – September 10, 2007

**Venue:** Offices of Phoenix Airlines, Panda Airlines, Dragon Airlines, China

**Estimated Interview Time Length:** Around 20 - 50 minutes per interviewee

### **Main interviewing steps:**

**I. Making brief introduction to my research area as well as my purpose of the interviews, and gaining informed consent of my interviewees**

**II. Asking general questions related to the interviewees' background information (age, marital status, job title, etc.)**

*The questions on demography were available in the questionnaire, but it was necessary to ask the interviewees with the same structured questions face to face because the questionnaires was completed in an anonymous way and the interviewees were chosen from those who complete the questionnaires. This question session took around 5 minutes.*

**III. Interviewing the following two groups of respondents formally**

*The following questions are the key questions to be covered in the face-to-face interviews, but it was not an exhaustive list. It turned out that unexpected but relevant questions popped up during the interviews.*

**1. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with female air staff:**

Q1. Who in your home has the biggest responsibility for domestic work, childcare and/or eldercare?

Q2. What is your formal pattern of work? (Do you do shifts?)

Q3. Do you face any major work-family role conflict? (None; mild; intense; extremely intense)

Q4. Can you tell me about your experience of balancing work-family demands?

Q5. What makes you aware that you are experiencing work-family role conflict or problems? For example, what do you notice yourself thinking, feeling, and/or doing to know you are having difficulty in managing the dual roles?

Q6. Do you think balancing work-family demands will limit your opportunities to



advance in your work? What's your long-term career goal? Are there other factors in the pursuit of your career development that will be in the way?

Q7. What do you think about the HR policies and practices in your organisation? Do you have any suggestions?

**2. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the airlines' senior managers, HR managers and line managers:**

Q8. Can you tell me about the equal opportunity policies and practices in your organisation? (How effectively these policies have been used in the process of recruitment, promotion, etc.?)

Q9. Have you been aware that female employees have difficulties in dealing with work and family responsibilities?

Q10. Has the organisation taken any step to support females to resolve the pressure and difficulties of undertaking different roles? If so, what are they?

**Note:** *The face-to-face interviews were carried out soon after the questionnaire survey stage was finished. Therefore, both the stages were implemented during the summer of 2007. However, the supplementary interview stage was conducted to further clarify any confusing or explore new issues arising from the questionnaire survey and the initial interview stage. Since the respondents and I were not in the same country, I utilized online interviewing techniques via MSN and Skype to undertake supplementary interviews with those who had already attended the face-to-face interviews.*

### Appendix III: Correlation Analysis

**Table 6.9 Means, Standard deviations, and inter-correlations among study variables (Phoenix Airlines)**

Work Characteristics	Mean	S.D	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>Work Characteristics</b>																				
1.Job type	1.58	0.568	105																	
2.Work pattern	1.93	0.858	105	0.000**																
3.job demands	2.6143	0.92315	105	0.996	0.605															
4.Leave	2.90	0.741	105	0.331	0.431	0.421														
5.Organization's view on female colleagues	2.7238	0.60456	105	0.331	0.072	0.237	0.918													
<b>Family Characteristics</b>																				
6.Marital status	1.51	0.502	105	0.003**	0.000**	0.028*	0.410	0.564												
7.Number of children	1.29	0.454	105	0.553	0.011*	0.237	0.158	0.648	0.000**											
8.Age of children	1.37	0.639	105	0.156	0.005**	0.810	0.166	0.286	0.000**	0.000**										
9.Elder care	2.87	1.169	105	0.052	0.031*	0.121	0.409	0.594	0.000**	0.001**	0.001**									
10.Domestic work time	1.87	0.921	105	0.252	0.035*	0.810	0.812	0.533	0.030*	0.034*	0.004**	0.054								
<b>Work-family Conflict</b>																				
11.Overall work-family conflict	2.9853	0.81889	102	0.004**	0.050	0.025*	0.210	0.232	0.301	0.065	0.841	0.986	0.618							
12.Job-parent conflict	3.2632	1.13824	57	0.749	0.725	0.213	0.034*	0.004**	0.950	0.373	0.553	0.866	0.155	0.001**						
13.Job-spouse conflict	3.1294	1.02398	85	0.003**	0.021*	0.780	0.158	0.007**	0.020	0.892	0.693	0.427	0.964	0.000**	0.000**					
14.Job-home/leisure conflict	3.1471	0.76134	102	0.024*	0.043*	0.143	0.092	0.005**	0.571	0.980	0.422	0.165	0.504	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**				
<b>Control Variables</b>																				
15.Age	2.24	0.450	105	0.000**	0.000**	0.431	0.114	0.187	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.004**	0.026	0.476	0.400	0.043*	0.067			
16.Tenure	2.37	0.724	105	0.428	0.034*	0.720	0.007**	0.516	0.000**	0.003**	0.002**	0.034*	0.072	0.613	0.719	0.913	0.701	0.000**		
17.Education	2.36	0.681	105	0.011*	0.361	0.453	0.000**	0.724	0.877	0.029*	0.022*	0.026*	0.748	0.798	0.182	0.185	0.314	0.009**	0.015*	
18.Joblevel	3.84	0.463	105	0.285	0.781	0.368	0.860	0.164	0.914	0.319	0.821	0.135	0.121	0.214	0.605	0.170	0.967	0.656	0.096	0.962

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Table 6.19 Means, Standard deviations, and inter-correlations among study variables (Panda Airlines)**

	Mean	S.D.	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>Work Characteristics</b>																				
1.Job type	1.44	0.558	96																	
2.Work pattern	2.20	0.763	96	0.000**																
3.job demands	3.2569	0.76545	96	0.789	0.394															
4.Leave	2.32	0.989	96	0.000**	0.107	0.819														
5.Organization's view on female colleagues	2.5816	0.77081	96	0.160	0.255	0.661	0.979													
<b>Family Characteristics</b>																				
6.Marital status	1.42	0.536	96	0.059	0.000**	0.448	0.554	0.425												
7.Number of children	1.24	0.429	96	0.652	0.007**	0.072	0.391	0.185	0.000**											
8.Age of children	1.33	0.706	96	0.605	0.002**	0.084	0.961	0.843	0.000**											
9.Elder care	2.19	1.308	96	0.096	0.873	0.539	0.006**	0.864	0.010**	0.000**	0.002**									
10.Domestic work time	1.53	0.753	96	0.683	0.606	0.694	0.736	0.396	0.026*	0.066	0.053	0.019*								
<b>Work-family Conflict</b>																				
11.Overall work-family conflict	2.9583	0.84811	96	0.014*	0.087	0.053	0.285	0.877	0.190	0.771	0.590	0.566	0.485							
12.Job-parent conflict	3.1522	0.80389	23	0.215	0.386	0.613	0.073	0.887	0.852	0.876	0.904	0.504	0.220	0.001**						
13.Job-spouse conflict	3.1812	0.93922	69	0.065	0.039*	0.042*	0.618	0.277	0.486	0.964	0.552	0.718	0.307	0.000**	0.004**					
14.Job-home/leisure conflict	3.3229	0.79244	96	0.079	0.183	0.142	0.730	0.031*	0.765	0.440	0.952	0.660	0.092	0.000**	0.001**	0.000**				
<b>Control Variables</b>																				
15.Age	2.24	0.611	96	0.239	0.000**	0.183	0.665	0.065	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.002**	0.131	0.234	0.733	0.897	0.849			
16.Tenure	2.46	0.893	96	0.799	0.000**	0.018*	0.067	0.038*	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.691	0.407	0.757	0.400	0.938	0.000**		
17.Education	2.31	0.549	96	0.008**	0.028*	0.026*	0.489	0.429	0.001**	0.433	1.000	0.295	0.988	0.170	0.399	0.333	0.529	0.393	0.193	
18.Joblevel	3.59	0.625	96	0.371	0.001**	0.257	0.468	0.361	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.003**	0.710	0.792	0.956	0.492	0.621	0.000**	0.000**	0.003**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Table 6.29 Means, Standard deviations, and inter-correlations among study variables (Dragon Airlines)**

	Mean	S.D.	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>Work Characteristics</b>																				
1.Job type	1.56	0.500	81																	
2.Work pattern	1.73	0.775	81	0.001**																
3.job demands	3.2510	0.80886	81	0.776	0.788															
4.Leave	2.63	0.887	81	0.000**	0.247	0.773														
5.Organization's view on female colleagues	2.6893	0.67069	81	0.624	0.569	0.002**	0.878													
<b>Family Characteristics</b>																				
6.Marital status	1.80	0.557	81	0.119	0.015*	0.364	0.110	0.850												
7.Number of children	1.63	0.511	81	0.109	0.004**	0.161	0.089	0.669	0.000**											
8.Age of children	2.06	1.065	81	0.017*	0.000**	0.128	0.009**	0.870	0.000**	0.000**										
9.Elder care	2.62	1.231	81	0.346	0.091	0.359	0.447	0.862	0.076	0.131	0.355									
10.Domestic work time	2.22	0.975	81	1.000	0.453	0.625	0.765	0.217	0.255	0.029*	0.243	0.270								
<b>Work-family Conflict</b>																				
11.Overall work-family conflict	2.9667	0.67669	81	0.000**	0.022*	0.418	0.021*	0.014*	0.411	0.056	0.084	0.591	0.830							
12.Job-parent conflict	2.7745	0.89058	51	0.016*	0.049*	0.981	0.158	0.048*	0.944	0.113	0.093	0.315	0.974	0.000**						
13.Job-spouse conflict	3.0455	0.97558	66	0.000**	0.001**	0.689	0.065	0.056	0.626	0.065	0.081	0.728	0.570	0.000**	0.000					
14.Job-home/leisure conflict	3.1523	0.89760	81	0.001**	0.522	0.507	0.089	0.042*	0.362	0.791	0.869	0.334	0.392	0.000**	0.000	0.000				
<b>Control Variables</b>																				
15.Age	2.79	0.737	81	0.299	0.001**	0.673	0.067	0.979	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.124	0.294	0.212	0.330	0.142	0.511			
16.Tenure	3.28	0.925	81	0.770	0.008**	0.420	0.196	0.402	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.018*	0.273	0.212	0.152	0.111	0.519	0.000		
17.Education	2.35	0.551	81	0.858	0.717	0.323	0.933	0.660	0.866	0.521	0.097	0.907	0.134	0.672	0.811	0.436	0.811	0.092	0.390	
18.Joblevel	3.44	0.725	81	0.124	0.018*	0.186	0.248	0.301	0.013*	0.020*	0.002**	0.126	0.638	0.996	0.600	0.887	0.515	0.000	0.000	0.338

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)