'I Want to Have a Bit of it All'

New Chinese Professional Women's Careers, Work and Life

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Statement of authentication

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

……余英华…… ……………..

Yinghua Yu, October 17, 2022

(Signature)

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Acronyms

ABC	Australian-born Chinese
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
MEPRC	Ministry of Education of PRC
OCP	One-child policy
PRC	People's Republic of China

Glossary of Chinese terms

Daigou   Buyer who purchases commodities on behalf of clients in China and charges a commission for the service

Dushengnv   Only daughter

Dushengzinv   Only daughter or son

Gaokao   National College Entrance Examination

Guanxi   Social connections

Shengnv   Leftover women

Shuliang   Quantity

Suzhi   Quality

Tequanyidai   Privileged generation

Xiaohuangdi   Little emperors

Abstract

There is increasing literature on the new Chinese diaspora in the West (Ang, 2021; Nyiri, 2018; Li, 2017; Stevens, 2019; Wang, 2018; Wang & Collins, 2020). Yet there is much less research being undertaken on the experiences of new professional Chinese women – a demographic that has grown in Australia in recent decades. Most importantly, the significant impacts of China's one-child policy and other post-Mao reforms on these women's work and life choices have received little consideration. This thesis examines the lived experiences of 21 new Chinese professional women, and unpacks the complexity of their choices in career, in the workplace and at home. This study draws on three conceptual ideas – 'inequality regimes', intersectionality and Bourdieu's notions of capital and habitus – to unpack these women's experiences. A key focus of the thesis is the analysis of the consequences of their status as *Dushengnv* (only daughter), who experience intensified pressure to achieve success in both their careers and family life. The central objective of this research is to develop a nuanced understanding of what 'having a career' and 'having a life' mean for these women, embedded in a trajectory shaped by the interaction between its origins in mainland China and its present in Australia. The thesis argues that their aspirations and decisions in career and family life, while clearly gendered, are also dynamic because of the imperative to plan amid constant changes. An idea of Dushengnv capital and new Chinese habitus is developed to understand these changes and make sense of their choices at work and in their family life. The thesis foregrounds the multiple temporal dimensions of paid work and home trajectories to explore the ways 'work-life balance' is a constant experience of negotiation. These women's experiences in the workplace are fluid and contradictory, intensified by a strong professional orientation and the intersectional dynamics of gender, class, race/ethnicity and motherhood. Meanwhile, they also navigate competing priorities in life – as a daughter, wife and mother – demonstrating characteristics of 'privileged daughters' (Xie, 2021) and changing parental expectations of 'daughterly filiality' (Martin, 2022a).

Introduction

In bright-blue sneakers and a freshly ironed Adidas sports suit, Bella sat down on the opposite side of the table with a bright smile and asked, in Chinese: 'What do you want to know? Would my journey be interesting?' Her voice was full of excitement and curiosity, enough to lighten up the dull meeting room at the library. Born in 1990 in the capital city of Xinjiang Province, Bella was the only daughter (Dushengnv) in her family. Her parents were public servants and had to follow the rigid one-child policy. However, being Dushengnv was full of challenges. Bella recounted a long list of parental expectations: such as not being allowed to cry much even if she was hurt or sick, not taking any sick leave, not wearing girly outfits or long hair. Her mother had pulled the strings of her life tight since she was little.

Bella wanted to get away, so she enrolled at the university in Chongqing, some 3000 kilometres away from her hometown, Shihezi city. After graduation from undergraduate studies, Bella was anxious about the future her family pictured for her: 'I could see my life in the next 30 years, getting married, going to the same job day in and day out, having a child and then retiring. That is not the life I want to live. I do not want to work, work and work...I want to have a bit of it all: a career and a work-life balance. You know, have a life.' Bella made a deal with her parents and undertook a postgraduate degree in engineering in Sydney and would return in two years upon completion and use her father's network for her first job.

Life changed after Bella moved to Sydney. She met her boyfriend, now husband and also an engineer. After postgraduate graduation, Bella got married, remained in Sydney and gained permanent residency. But this was supposed to be a temporary plan to accumulate some work experience to improve her employability back in China. Meanwhile, she took up her first professional job (through her husband's network) and has continued to work for the same employer since. Meanwhile, Bella has had a son

(now one year old) and has returned to her engineering job part-time while planning her second pregnancy.

Bella has taken a significant journey from the inner northwest of China to its southwest, and then to Sydney, which also signifies her transition from study to work, from domestic migration to transnational trajectory. Against her parental expectations of a life, Bella does not intend to follow the planned life and career as a woman. Both generation and gender shape how a life is portrayed and experiences for a Dushengnv (only daughter). These generational and gendered tensions play out across different social and, this thesis will argue, temporal spaces. Bella hopes that study in Australia is at least a temporary escape – a 'gap year' to figure out what kind of life she wants to have. Would physical distance help to ease the tensions between Bella and her parents? Would the time apart, meeting the demands of living and studying overseas, give her a clearer sense of what she imagines as a future? How would having a career and a family in Australia differ from what she anticipated before migrating?

This thesis examines the experiences of new Chinese professional women navigating their careers, work and life in Australia. As an emerging subcategory of new Chinese migrants, their growing presence demands research, particularly how they transition from study to work and the challenges and successes of work and family. More specifically, the changing gendered consequences of the one-child policy are little studied. One crucial issue is how the one-child policy shapes women's choices in career, workplace experiences and family life. Those women have experienced dramatic social and cultural changes in their country of origin and have also navigated changes in a transnational space. Their negotiations often occur within both private and public domains and, as we will see, across different life stages. The uniqueness of their experiences is rarely studied or is simply categorised under a larger framework of new Chinese migrants or professional women in China. As a result of the dynamics and complexities of migration, gender and culture, their specific challenges are invisible. The women of this generation have, as a consequence of the one-child policy, shouldered enormous pressure regarding their family life and career prospects.

This thesis aims to bring attention to this cohort of new Chinese professional women who participated in this study and currently live in Australia and have worked diligently in different fields to reach where they are. Through an overall qualitative approach, I utilise mixed methods to draw on statistics from Australia and China, surveys, in-depth interviews and diaries to explore the experiences of new Chinese professional women – who they are, where they came from and how they arrived in their current positions at work and in life.

Like other migrants, new Chinese professional women face social and cultural changes that push them to reflect and adopt changes. How the participants – as women, as Chinese and as professionals – experience differences at work, particularly concerning gender relations, race and migration, is of specific significance. This thesis draws on the notion of 'inequality regimes' to unpack these intersectional dynamics and complexities. Alongside this approach, Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus are insightful for understanding the embodied experiences and changing personal relations of these women (Bourdieu, 1990). Combining Bourdieu's theory and 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006b) helps to achieve an in-depth understanding of phenomena at work and in the everyday lives of these women.

The idea of a 'new Chinese' habitus is used to examine the uniqueness of the dispositions shaped by broader social structures and the dissonances (cognitive and social) that result from changes during migration, study and work – changes that are both personal and historic as this generation navigates from a unique past (under the one-child policy in China) to a fast-changing present (the neoliberal, late-capitalist and digital Australia of the new millennium). This thesis develops the idea of 'Dushengnv capital' as a specific form of capital that new Chinese professional women accumulate and convert into resources – personal, social and professional – that enable them to accomplish this navigation. Through an exploration of their experiences at work and in life, before their migration and after their settlement in Australia, I examine how migration, gender and class affect their choices in career and family life and argue that the idea of Dushengnv capital is central to unpacking the 'promise' of life for them as well as the constraints that draw them back home. This 'promise' is full of hope and yet is also heavily burdened. This idea is used to open discussion on the complexities of new Chinese migration and sharpen our

understanding of the intersections of gender, migration, profession and the status of being Dushengnv.

Throughout this thesis, I discuss the participant cohort using two related terms: Dushengnv (meaning 'only child' or 'only daughter') and new Chinese professional women. I use 'Dushengnv' here to refer to the entire generation of women born in the time of the one-child policy in China – a figure difficult to estimate precisely but numbering in the low hundreds of millions (from 1980 to 2015). While not all women born during this period are strictly 'only daughters', all are marked in varied ways by the forms of capital and the dispositions inherited from growing up in late twentieth century Chinese society. The prevalence of the one-child policy warrants the application 'Dushengnv' in this generational sense. Throughout the thesis, I will however clarify in relation to specific participants whether or not they are strictly Dushengnv, or single children. 'New Chinese professional women' refers to a subset of this generation, defined by further characteristics. 'New' suggests women who are comparatively young (born after 1980) and who possess characteristics that distinguish them from their parents' generation: more tolerant of capitalism; with no experience of Maoist Communism; media and digitally literate, having experienced television, film and the internet most of their adult lives; and motivated to travel, learn English or other non-Chinese languages and acquire the social and financial capital that migration mobility (whether within or beyond China) provides. 'Professional' further qualifies this cohort as women who have been trained at a tertiary level to enter an identifiable profession (such as accounting, engineering, IT or finance). Finally, for this study all participants have migrated at least once – from China to Australia – but often have also moved within China, from rural to urban areas or from city to city. As I discuss further in Chapter One, and throughout this thesis, these characteristics mean that even as this cohort of new Chinese professional women shares many experiences with earlier waves of Chinese – and other groups, particularly Asian – women migrating to Australia, other aspects of their settlement experience are highly distinct and therefore worthy of study.

The rise of new Chinese professional women

This thesis focuses on the experiences of new Chinese professional women, and especially those shaped by China's one-child policy. The thesis also points out that the experiences of those women are diverse, based on often very different family settings and socio-economic conditions. The one-child policy was also not experienced uniformly, nor did it affect all women to the same extent; this is clear from even a cursory look at their geographic hometowns and mobility within mainland China – from rural to urban, from inner to coastal and from itinerant to fixed residential locations. Many factors, including complicated reactions to this government mandate among many others of the post-Mao reforms (which will be discussed in Chapter One), nevertheless produced significant effects on a whole Chinese generation.

Being Chinese itself is too easily seen as a homogenised category in diaspora studies, although recent studies point to some degree of internal diversity, particularly concerning generational differences. A precise time sequence, however, would not help us understand the diversity here (Gao, 2022; Guo, 2022). Migration studies often focus on groups with characteristics defined by migration infrastructure, visa status or citizenship (Ho, E. L. E., 2008; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Grappling with the nuanced, interrupted and dynamic trajectories that migrants often undertake can mean putting more emphasis on the relations between time and migration. Taking a temporal analytical approach is critical to unpacking the complexities of people's experiences at a more nuanced level – multiple 'timescales' (institutional, biographic and everyday) produce specific intersections of challenges (Robertson, 2019; Robertson & Ho, 2016).

Chinese migrants' identities at different stages of mobility and in new contexts have been less studied. For example, the dynamics between being a student and a migrant suggest some degree of difference through regular contact with families at home (Wang, 2007, p. 175). Meanwhile, recent studies on the local formations of Chinatowns distinguish between the 'new Chinese' from mainland China and those from previous cohorts, because of their tendency to have economic capital, higher qualifications and professional backgrounds (Anderson et al., 2019). The recognition that different waves of migration exhibit different

characteristics and histories suggests we need to develop a framework with a heightened sense of spatial and temporal contexts. Through examining new Chinese professional women's trajectories of migration, career and life and through the negotiation of different temporalities (Robertson, 2015, 2019; Robertson & Ho, 2016) in their life course, this study intends to provide an in-depth understanding of their choices of study, work, family and life.

In terms of aspiration and motivation for transnational mobility, this 'new Chinese' category differs from any previous waves of Chinese migrants. Scholars in the United Kingdom tend to focus on different aspects than seen in Australian research. A study of Chinese students migrating to the UK, for example, examined the emphasis on family upward class mobility, capital and networks (Tu, 2018). In comparison, a study of Chinese international students in Australia found that they aspired to delay relationships or obligations in their life course (Martin, 2017, 2018).

The idea of the 'new Chinese' is difficult to define because it is problematic to generalise about huge populations. As discussed earlier, their social, cultural, generational and class backgrounds are diverse. Nevertheless, this thesis will suggest that starting with certain shared contexts – especially being raised under the one-child-policy – allows us to capture both similar experiences and divergent paths. My focus on new Chinese professionals thus provides some certainty here: they are all white-collar professionals from mainland China possessing higher qualifications. More importantly, they are among the Dushengnv generation, particularly those born after the dramatic post-2000 economic developments in China. In choosing this group, I capture some similarities within their migration, life and career trajectories. This thesis will explore, therefore, how their habitus is shaped by their institutional and social contexts and how it influenced their choices in career and life, but also how these women form a new habitus in the transition to a new social and familial context.

Because of the significant social, cultural and political differences between mainland China and Australia, new Chinese professional women, as migrants, have to adapt their embodied dispositions and accumulated and converted capacities to cope with changes. Drawing on

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the thesis develops the idea of a *new Chinese habitus* to describe the formation of embodied dispositions, evidenced in their cultural practices at home and within the broader society. Dushengnv have pre-existing dispositions that are primarily structured by practices at home, but they adopt new practices as a result of institutionalised experiences in Australia through higher education and the workplace (Atkinson, W. 2011).

Because of the one-child policy, parents invested all their resources in Dushengnv; and consequently, gender seemed to matter much less in both education and the workplace. International mobility has added another layer of complexity to this new Chinese habitus, allowing the time and space to compare experiences, including adaptation to the host country. This thesis will suggest that this cohort have characteristics different from other members of the Chinese diaspora because of embodied dispositions resulting from the life chances arising from their middle-class status and the reconfiguration of those chances for young women, especially as they are incorporated through the migration process. This emergent habitus shapes professional Chinese women's identities in Australia and impacts on how they accumulate and convert capital in their professional lives. Moreover, it influences their accounts of the multiple dimensions of their identities (around womanhood and motherhood) within their household and within the broader Chinese community in Australia.

Research questions

Given these considerations, my primary research question was:

> *How do new Chinese professional women adapt to expectations regarding family life and work in Australia?*

The project consequently examined the following secondary research questions:

> • *How do new Chinese professional women navigate their careers in Australia?*

> *• How do new Chinese professionals make sense of their experiences at work, particularly concerning changes in gender relations, race and migration?*
>
> *• In what ways do new Chinese professional women's accounts and experiences of family life shift after they migrate to Australia?*

In this thesis, I examine new Chinese professional women's lived experiences in different spaces – workplace, home and the broader society. A close investigation of their occupations, career choices, educational trajectories and language capacities helps me understand how they construct their identities and position themselves in different spaces – being a Chinese migrant, a professional and a woman. The focus of this study is the interplay of these aspects – migration, race and gender – which cannot be separated within their lives. In terms of career planning, I examine what positions and capital new Chinese professional women possess and how they adapt to the Australian context after migration. I then look closely at their work and household experiences to consider how they interact with others, and particularly how workplace culture shapes their experiences and choices.

Thesis structure

This thesis takes up the task of unpacking the experiences of new Chinese professional women in Australia, in the context of the one-child policy in mainland China, to examine their trajectories of migration, career and family life.

Chapter One captures the unique generational characteristics of Dushengnv as a product of the one-child policy and other related post-Mao reforms, which are important historical contexts for understanding the life of new Chinese professional women before their migration. This chapter also draws on the idea of promise in their career and family life in order to unpack the conflicting demands, specifically in terms of their gendered roles, in demonstrating new Chinese professional women's desires for a career and a life in Australia. It suggests that, compared to other professional migrant women, new Chinese professional women experience a much more intensified pressure to achieve success in both their career and family life, partially generated by the dramatic social and cultural

changes in mainland China since the late 1970s. This background helps us understand participants' experiences of intensified pressure explored later in the empirical chapters.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the conceptual framework for this project. An intersectional approach is adopted because of the complex interplay of gender, migration and culture. Acker's concept of 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006b) is proposed to provide a nuanced framework for an investigation into the dynamics of women's experiences at work. Moving beyond the workplace, Bourdieu's ideas of the various forms of capital and of habitus allow a sociological interpretation to unravel the changes in social and cultural attitudes, dispositions and expectations in family life (Bourdieu, 1990). This approach leads to the development of the specific concept of Dushengnv capital.

Chapter Three discusses the research design, participant recruitment and researcher's positionality. It also includes a brief review of Australian statistics to argue for the significant presence of new Chinese professional women in the Australian workplace. Challenges of multifaceted positionality in this project are also discussed, during both data collection and writing. The chapter recounts the use of mixed methods, including surveys, interviews and diaries, to generate rich data on a specific cohort.

Three empirical chapters, focused on career, workplace experiences and family life, are presented next. Chapter Four focuses specifically on careers, first discussing these women's aspirations and motivations, their mobility within China and their transnational movement. It then discusses, from the status of being Dushengnv, a sense of the continuity of their familial obligations across national and state borders, and the way their independence in choosing their careers and lifestyles is entangled with their families and social and cultural ties. The chapter examines how they endeavour to retain some distance from their family in their career trajectories and yet seek connections to stay closely engaged with their family. This ambivalence shapes the Dushengnv experience as complicated due to the driving force of family obligations and the eagerness to perform as an independent professional.

Chapter Five explores new Chinese professional women's diverse experiences at paid work in Australia. The chapter uses a temporal approach to examining the interplay of several aspects, including motherhood, gender and migration, and how these contribute to the ways new Chinese professional women sometimes experience being marginalised at work. Some participants encountered subtle gendered and racialised incidents, particularly from managers, resulting in their qualifications and experiences not being recognised and limited opportunities for promotion. This chapter focuses on the role different temporal dimensions play in these experiences of work – the macro level of social and cultural regimes, the meso level of organisational processes and micro fragments of everyday interactions and small talk. These multiple temporalities overlap with one another and create complex consequences and tensions for new Chinese professional women in the workplace.

After examining the pressures for the Dushengnv of 'being the only hope' (Fong, 2004) in their family for social mobility, Chapter Six discusses the challenges of 'having a life' and 'having an Australian life' as a way of bridging their ideal career – between self-realisation of their formal education and qualifications (which their parents have heavily invested in) and their freedom to enjoy more quality time with their family and children. Their choices would be a luxury for their parents because they are not possible without financial accumulation and social reforms. Throughout their stories, the guilt of not returning to China and ambivalence about staying in Australia and having a work-life balance frustrate new Chinese professional women in their roles in life – as a Dushengnv, a wife and a mother.

The Conclusion revisits the main arguments of the whole thesis. How new Chinese professional women negotiate their career, workplace experiences and family life is complex. Their choices at times may appear to be voluntary, but in fact they reflect the social and cultural constraints they have internalised as individuals. The multiple dimensions of their identities – being a woman, a professional and a migrant – influence their choices. Their habitus and capital therefore have to undergo transformation, yet this

is dependent on context, and the process becomes quite complex when negotiating with their extended family.

Through an exploration of new Chinese professional women's experiences in the workplace and in life, before their migration and after their settlement in Australia, I examine how migration, gender and class impact on their choices in career and family life, and I argue that the idea of 'Dushengnv capital' is central to unpacking the promise of life for them as well as the constraints that push them to migrate and pull them back home.

Chapter One – The social and policy contexts of new Chinese professional women

This chapter will outline the questions that drove the research and then set up the thesis by describing the broad contexts that significantly impact the life course of new Chinese professional women: China's one-child policy, economic reform and opening-up policy, urbanisation, transnational mobility and higher education. Existing literature often examines one or two of these aspects but rarely considers the interplay of policies and practices and how this shapes the international mobility of Chinese migrants and their forms of capital. The changing dynamics of China's migrants and their positioning within a global setting have become complex. While the focus of my research site is Sydney, Australia, a sense of the historical and social contexts provides a nuanced account of family background, class disposition and gender dynamics to better understand the informants' career and life choices in Australia. Understanding the historical context is also essential to examining the characteristics of new Chinese professional women and the importance of their new Chinese dispositions. This chapter also contextualises the idea of Dushengnv Capital, elaborated in Chapter Two. It draws heavily on social and cultural aspects in the country of origin, mainland China, and also transforms in the Australian context in various forms.

Dushengnv: Post-Mao generational characteristics

"Dushengnv" refers to the cohort of Chinese born between 1982 and 2015, bridging the period of the one-child policy's implementation and termination. While not all members of this generation are exclusively single children, the majority exhibit this characteristic, differentiating them from those born prior to or after this period. However, the distinctive dispositions and attitudes of the Dushengnv generation cannot be solely attributed to the temporal boundaries of the one-child policy. Instead, this era of Chinese history is marked by profound socioeconomic, political, and cultural transformations, including rapid

urbanisation, expanded educational opportunities, market liberalisation, global integration, technological advancements, and heightened exposure to diverse cultures beyond China's borders, particularly among the younger population.

To capture the multifaceted and occasionally contradictory attributes within this generation, the term "Dushengnv capital" is employed. This concept integrates various forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—that grapple with aspects such as utilising family financial resources, the capacity to relocate to major cities within China and abroad, the networks and confidence necessary to navigate China's fiercely competitive educational system, proficiency in foreign languages like English, familiarity with technology, legal systems and both Chinese and global cultures. Furthermore, it embraces a sense of "urbaneness," denoting the general ease with which Dushengnv individuals engage with others from diverse social backgrounds, both within and beyond China's borders.

Dushengnv capital, as characterised here, represents a general attribute of this generation that not only serves as a driving force motivating its members to contemplate a life outside China but also equips them, to varying extents, with the capabilities required to realise such aspirations. Importantly, it should be noted that Dushengnv capital is not a static and fixed resource; rather, it is subject to adoption and accumulation for professional Chinese women residing in Australia as they navigate a foreign environment.

The unique characteristics of Dushengnv women emerge in relation to their distinct history, born after the end of Maoist China and before the new millennium – a time of substantial change, growth and experimentation. Since 1978, when it opened its borders, China has undertaken social and economic reforms. China experienced a transition from a planned economy to a market economy with a degree of economic liberalism, including opening up to foreign investment and fostering a growing private sector. This opening up and top-down reform also resonated with a political shift from authoritarian Mao Zedong to market liberalisation (Martin, 2022a), which fundamentally shook the social structure, including class stratification and many cultural conventions of Chinese society. Consequently, prioritising economic development contributed to a growing middle-class population, including professionals and entrepreneurs (Bian, 2002; Martin, 2022a).

However, it also exacerbated the disparity and uneven development between urban and rural regions, which drove increasing levels of rural to urban mobility (Bian, 2002).

This set of policies, implemented within a similar timeframe, has generated heightened social pressure to adapt to economic changes. While China underwent a profound and lengthy process in the 19th century, marked by several waves of feminism, significant shifts were also observed during the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Notably, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) played a pivotal role in undermining Confucian systems of values, wherein women were regarded as auxiliary figures to men— initially to their fathers before marriage, then to their husbands, and later to their sons in cases of widowhood. However, it is important to note that Chinese society, at that time, had not yet achieved stability in terms of forming specific attitudes and expectations regarding gender relations, particularly regarding women's roles within the family and society (Bian, 2002; Li & Won, 2017). Consequently, a substantial generational burden was placed on the parents of the Dushengnv generation as they faced new circumstances, including increased involvement in paid work and manifested by economic pressures, leading to heightened tensions between work and family obligations. As a result, the patriarchal structure underwent certain changes that impacted family life following the economic reforms of the 1970s (Li & Won, 2017; McKercher et al., 2020; Qi, 2021).

One-child policy (1982–2015): From quantity (shuliang) to quality (suzhi)

In 1979, a group of National People's Congress deputies proposed a one-child policy to reduce the consumption of materials and focus on modernisation and urbanisation in mainland China. The aims of this policy were to minimise the stress from an explosively growing population since the 1960s and to maximise dual working parents' attention on national economic growth. This had a significant impact on Chinese youth, but especially on young women. A gendered outcome was not the intention of policymaking but came about as an unexpected consequence. Fong (2002, 2004) argues that this policy contributed to a growing percentage of girls in higher education. Limited statistics from the Ministry of

Education in China confirms this trend (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). It was not surprising that higher education was the key channel for a family to achieve better career opportunities for their children and, consequently, a better life than the parents' generation (McKercher et al., 2020).

The one-child policy came into place to ease the enormous pressure from the fast-growing population of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This growth forced a progressive transition from a planned economy to a market economy. A common perspective at the time focused on the relative benefits of a population's quantity (*shuliang*) versus its quality (*suzhi*). The quantity/quality trade-off (Becker, 1991; Becker & Lewis, 1973; Becker & Tomes, 1976) claimed that population control enabled a concentration of resources in human capital and thereby raised living standards, among other things. This policy had a significant effect on Chinese society – the implementation of this policy prevented 400 million births (Whyte et al., 2015). This consequently impacted the domains of early childhood development, increasing participation in school. Chen et al. (2020) utilised a quantitative approach to understand the wage income gap between 'only children' born under China's one-child policy and those with siblings. An unintended finding was that 'only children born under the OCP [one-child policy] exhibit lower tendencies for involvement in social organizations, are less confident, and are under-represented in managerial positions' (Chen et al., 2020, p. 2). They explained that '[b]ased on census data, about 224 million only children were born in 1975–2015, which account for 43 per cent of all births during this period (Chen et al., 2020, p. 3)'. Qian (2009) also looked at the quantity and quality aspects of the one-child policy but argued that the only child is disadvantaged in school enrolment in rural China. The study found that the policy has led to a "quantity-quality tradeoff" for rural families, where they invest more resources in their only child but may neglect the child's educational needs. As a result, only-children in rural areas are less likely to enrol in school compared to those with siblings, and this disadvantage is greater for girls than boys. This literature emphasises the question of the quality of the Dushengnv generation and shifts the attention away from the numbers of children to the investment in the only daughter.

The one-child policy had unexpected consequences. The national census data provided evidence of the phenomenon of 'missing girls' due to a low fertility rate and gendered sex ratios (Ebenstein, 2010). Son preferences were a long-lasting cultural orientation in China, and research showed that in 1979–88, particularly in rural areas, they still prevailed (Li & Cooney, 1993). Consequently, those preferences also changed the traditional filial piety of daughters and sons (Wong, 2016). A prolonged son preference coexists with 'daughterly filiality' (Martin, 2022a), during the circumstances of single-daughter generations, relations with parents and opportunities of sons were transformed and passed on to the only daughter. In the context of China, daughter filiality and son preference represent contrasting dynamics within the framework of filial piety. Daughter filiality refers to the expectations placed on daughters to fulfill their duties towards their parents, emphasising respect, care, and support. It acknowledges the vital role daughters play in maintaining family harmony and meeting their parents' needs. On the other hand, son preference reflects a historical cultural bias favouring sons, stemming from beliefs surrounding lineage continuation, Confucian values, and gender norms. Sons are often expected to uphold family traditions, provide financial support, and assume leadership roles within the family. However, societal changes, including urbanisation, economic development, and increasing recognition of gender equality, are gradually challenging son preference and promoting a more inclusive understanding of filial piety in China. Other research examined the impact of the one-child policy on an ageing population, and whether Chinese society could pay the price of scarce labour and the heavy social burden arising from economic, social and cultural change (Wang, 2005; Zhang & Goza, 2006).

People born under the one-child policy were often referred to as *xiaohuangdi* (little emperors) due to the intense attention from their families, which resulted in unreasonable behaviour. The lack of sibling contacts was seen to result in inferior social and emotional capacities, which could be a disadvantage in the labour market (Chen et al., 2020). In contrast to these negative conclusions, Deutsch's (2006) study of graduating university senior students, who were part of the first cohort born under the one-child policy, suggested that only children were just as likely to plan on helping their parents as were those with siblings and they were more likely to intend to reside in the same city.

When implemented effectively across the country, the national policy impacted billions of people's lives in ways other than family structure. It also effected a shift away from the educational focus of *jingyingjiaoyu* (elite education) to increasingly accessible education, and it shifted the burden of supporting the ageing population from the younger generation to the social insurance system. The World Bank (2014) indicated that the total fertility rate in China was 6.0 children per woman in the 1970s, but it dramatically reduced to 2.7 by the 1980s. And fertility dropped below 2 from the mid-1990s and then became stable at 1.7 in 2010–12. With this reduced family size, family dynamics and living arrangements also changed, reshaping child-bearing patterns and changes to traditional gender ideology, with grandparents supporting household duties (Wong, 2016).

An essential aspect of examining the one-child policy was to investigate it in the context of processes of urbanisation in China. Most Dushengzinv were born in metropolitan cities, whereas 1.5 children were allowed in rural areas – it worked like this: if the first child was a girl, the parents were allowed to have a second child (Chan, 2011). The one-child policy was implemented differently and unevenly across large metropolitan cities and rural areas in China, adding to the complexities experienced by Dushengnv – in terms of parental investment in schooling and expectations of family mobility. These urban and rural differences were observed among the interview participants (see Chapters Three, Four and Six) – new Chinese professional women born in large metropolitan cities are more likely to be strictly Dushengnv, while those from rural areas probably have siblings.

Post-Mao economic reform: Emerging new middle-class and working women

Women in China have a long history of being called upon to join the labor force since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). While the thesis primarily focuses on the contemporary context, it also aims to briefly refer to the post-Mao economic reform as a historical backdrop to understand the social and economic environment in which the parents of the participants were situated. Additionally, it aims to explain the changing social expectations towards working women. If the one-child policy provided a specific promise of higher suzhi for the only child, economic reform provided the means to fulfill that promise. China underwent dramatic economic reform starting in 1978, opening its

borders to the global economy. Cities like Shenzhen and Guangzhou became the frontiers of a socialist market economy (Wong, 2016). Parents of Dushengnv often had greater financial resources, and urbanisation and industrialisation offered them more opportunities to utilise those resources. This trend reflected a growing middle-class population, with more people involved in business as managers and professionals (Martin, 2022a). Many more women were called into the workplace, where their value became formally recognised (Liu, 2007). By the mid-1980s, over 80 percent of women were engaged in industrial work (Hershatter, 2004). Furthermore, more mothers of Dushengnv, in particular, were involved in the paid workforce (Liu, 2007). Some of these changes were direct results of national policies promoting gender equality, such as the Marriage Law (Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, 1980), while others were indirect consequences of the one-child policy, which released women from the constant burden of bearing more children and provided them with more time to participate in the workplace (Bian, Y. 2002). The benefits of urbanisation, including improved access to education, migration, and industrialisation, encouraged a sense of "liberation" for women and enhanced their self-realisation. In this aspect, the one-child policy shifted the gender dynamics in Chinese society, enabling more women to step out of their household duties and engage in paid work (Li & Won, 2017).

Because of economic liberalisation, China's economic regime has been transformed since the 1980s, particularly as private ventures and foreign investment became possible. More changes occurred in the 1990s when village enterprises and rural-to-urban transformation accelerated. In the 2000s, the significance of these changes was evident when the private sector surpassed the state sector in driving China's growth (Wu, 2015). This urbanisation process and the transformation of privatisation or the socialist market economy encouraged the parents of Dushengnv to move away from rural areas to large metropolitan cities within mainland China. Through this process, parents of only daughters had accumulated solid economic resources, which they utilised later to support for overseas study in places like Australia (Fong, 2011). At the same time, with the emerging foreign investment corporations and new frontier cities, Dushengnv were able to imagine possibilities in their life courses that inspired them to initiate mobility themselves.

The above research points to a growing middle-class sector in China, yet we cannot equate it simply with the middle-class in the West. How we understand this growing population is compounded by the fact that the literature on contemporary Chinese development does not explicitly discuss class, partly at least because the structural changes associated with class were constantly evolving. The foundation of PRC was seen as China's attempt to deconstruct class. The ten-year Cultural Revolution (1966–76) further blurred class distinction in China, but the middle class in the post-Mao era arose quickly and challenged the political goal of a less class-riven society (Goodman, 2014). This new middle class in mainland China emerged more strongly focused on financial capital: the speed of economic reform hastened this economic prosperity but did not necessarily convert it into other forms more typically recognised in the West. How to solidify social status was one of the critical concerns of this emerging middle class (Xie, 2021). This resulted eventually in an increasing emphasis on the expansion of higher education – upward generational mobility and an advantaged social status could be secured through higher education institutions in the context of post-Mao society (Tseng, 2013).

Gaokao (higher education): Expansion and possibility of upward social mobility

Gaokao (National College Entrance Examination) was reinstated in 1977 (China News, 2007) and was valued as one of the fast-tracking pathways for upward social mobility (Tsang, 2013), particularly vital for those in the rural areas of China where social mobility was more difficult because of the threshold of household *hukou (household registration)*. In 1999, the government decided to expand enrolment in *Gaokao*. The 30 years since then has witnessed a frenzied expansion of colleges and universities. This was designed to increase job opportunities and promote economic development. Many schools, however, had focused on expansion but neglected the improvement of educational quality. Nevertheless, the growth of higher education in China allowed for the highest enrolment of female students (MEPRC, 2019) in the past three decades.

Wu and Zhang (2010) argue that changes in educational inequality in China can be observed through school enrollment data from 1990 to 2005. They demonstrate a significant increase in the enrollment rate of female students at the junior high school level,

from 70.4% in 1990 to 91.4% in 2000 and 96.3% in 2005. Additionally, the enrollment rate of female students at the senior high school level increased from 32.9% in 1990 to 48.7% in 2000 and 58.8% in 2005. According to a World Bank report (2006), women in China were still underrepresented in higher education. The 2000 Population Census reported 146 male undergraduates for every 100 female undergraduates, and 164 male postgraduates for every 100 female postgraduates. This gender imbalance is evident in most provinces, with varying degrees of disadvantage for females. The official statistics showed underrepresentation of female students before 2000 and there has been a clear pattern of growth since then. Table 1.1 below was extracted from statistics from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MEPRC, 2019). The overall student numbers had tripled by 2005 and doubled again by 2017, reaching 15.75 million. In 2005, statistics from MEPRC became available on the numbers of postgraduates. While the number of female undergraduate students gradually increased from 40.98% to 52.45% from 2000 to 2017, there was only a slight increase (5%) in the number of female students in postgraduate studies. While there are no official statistics to demonstrate the differences between rural areas and large metropolitan cities in higher education or any specifics on which disciplines these female students participated in, the concentration of educational resources was more evident in metropolitan cities than in rural regions. In fact, Xie (2021, p. 7) argues that urban Dushengnv are more likely to make their way into undergraduate or postgraduate study through *Gaokao* than their rural counterparts.

Table 1.1: Numbers and percentages of female students in higher education between 2000 and 2017 (MEPRC, 2019)

	2000	2005	2010	2017
Numbers of female students in higher education	2.28 million	7.78 million (0.42 million for postgraduates, 7.35 million for undergraduates)	12.09 million (0.74 million for postgraduates, 11.35 million for undergraduates)	15.75 million (1.28 million for postgraduates, 14.47 million for undergraduates)

Percentage of female students	40.98%	43.39% for postgraduates; 47.08% for undergraduates	47.86% for postgraduates; 50.86% for undergraduates	48.42% for postgraduates; 52.54% for undergraduates

Fong (2002, 2004) observed among high-school students in Dalian (a second-tier city in China) that most parents and students had invested their time and resources to acquire a good score in the *Gaokao* in the hope of future upward class mobility. Chinese women, especially strictly Dushengnv, were given more opportunities to make decisions independently.

More and more women have pursued higher education because of the overall national education expansion. This significant increase also led to severe competition in the labour market after graduation. Consequently, some of these women graduates looked at alternative options to increase their employability. Table 1.2 below was also extracted from the statistics from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MEPRC, 2019). There were 5.86 million Chinese international students between 1978 and 2018, of which 1.53 million were undertaking study and research overseas and 4.32 million had already completed their studies. A total of 3.65 million students returned to China after completion of their studies, making up 84.46% of the overseas student population. In 2018, there was 0.66 million Chinese students studying overseas and 0.52 million of returnees. The overseas study, which typically lasted one or two years for postgraduate courses, was more attractive than three years of study in mainland China.

Table 1.2: Chinese students studying overseas and Chinese returnees (1978–2018, 2018) (MEPRC, 2019)

	1978–2018	2018
Chinese students studying overseas (million)	5.86 million	0.66 million
Chinese returnees (million)	3.65 million	0.52 million

The pursuit of higher education also brought changes to gender dynamics at home. Girls, especially strictly Dushengnv, compared to the past, tended to invest more effort in their

studies than learn the traditional household duties of a Chinese woman. The shift of attention away from household tasks to focus on study also contributed to changing gendered norms for Dushengnv in their household, which impacted their adult lives.

Intergenerational dynamics in family life

Ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the state regime has publicly promoted gender equality as a means to distinguish itself from previous eras. During the Mao era, the status of women was enhanced due to the crucial reproductive role they played in growing the population. However, women's statuses were still primarily recognized based on their gendered role in reproduction. In the post-Mao era, industrialisation demanded more from women, calling them to join the labor force and shoulder the double pressures of reproduction while contributing to the state's economic growth (Liu, 2007). As the family structure underwent downsizing and the one-child policy was comprehensively implemented, responsibilities shifted from individual households to collective national prosperity. Consequently, women's roles in both the family and broader society also underwent significant changes.

Surprisingly, the patriarchal structure of the family and the macro state system took different paces in terms of the changing social value of Dushengnv. Because of modernisation and urbanisation during the economic reform period, the common practice of dual working parents also made it possible for the only child to afford higher education expenses, irrespective of gender. Mothers of Dushengnv, reflecting on their own experiences, reinforced this idea of investing in their girl's education so they could have a better chance of lifting their class or social background (Fong, 2002). Due to the singular investment in Dushengnv, this cohort became the 'privileged daughters', as opposed to their 'unlucky generation' of mothers (Tu & Xie, 2020). Fathers also started to shift their attention to their singleton, particularly their only daughter, to ensure they were independent and could live by themselves financially (Xu & Yeung, 2013). One of the financial investments is through education, which was widely recognised as an important pathway for social upward mobility.

Dushengnv relied on the collective resources of their entire families to access education. However, in doing so, they shouldered the weight of their family's aspirations for a better future, which, in certain instances, did not necessarily translate into a better life for themselves. Fong's (2004) research reveals that the parents of Dushengnv prioritised their daughters' education over gendered expectations related to household responsibilities in China. This pattern also emerged in Tu's (2018) study conducted in the UK, where Dushengzinv utilised their financial capital to establish a stable social network and secure professional careers, thereby enhancing their transnational family connections. Notably departing from traditional notions of filial piety, parents often travelled to provide support for their children's caregiving responsibilities, while not necessarily expecting their only child's assistance in their retirement plans and sometimes planning for nursing homes (Tu, 2018). Both studies underscore the shifting dynamics within intimate intergenerational relationships. In the Australian context, Martin (2022a) introduces the concept of 'daughter filiality' to illustrate the profound emotional attachment of Dushengnv to their parents, as they willingly assume the responsibility of supporting them.

This section has discussed the dynamics of family life in a broader social setting. The following section considers the changing global environment that further complicated family life.

Transnational mobility

Transnational mobility often disrupts a linear progression of life and generates a reconfiguration of gender relations, complicating children's attitudes and life expectations. Fong (2011), for example, followed a cohort of high-school students and found that the wide use of the internet, and social media, and the interest in foreign dramas have changed young people's perspectives on life. This included seeing the transnational lifestyle of Western society as increasingly attractive. In some cases, due to increasing globalisation, broad exposure to information sharing via the internet and national implementation of English language training in the 1990s, more and more women were attracted to a different lifestyle, including the idea of having a choice in their career and in starting a family. As well as becoming conscious of liberal forms of political governance, many wanted another

way of life. Martin (2022a, p. 18) describes a growing conflict between 'the imperatives of individualized striving selfhood and of neotraditionalist familialism', experienced specifically by young women as a 'gendered contradiction'. Studying overseas and working as a professional in an Australian workplace further accelerates the degree of conflict and difference.

Through their transnational mobility, new Chinese women's careers and lives have been further transformed (Yu, 2021). Migration offers them some suspension in fulfilling their familial obligation and from paying immediate debts to their parents (Martin, 2018). Meanwhile, it provides them with space to reflect on different life stages – some start a relationship, some have children. In this transition from single-hood to stable relation-hood, adolescence to adulthood, the weight of their piety obligation, including respect, care, and support becomes pressing, especially with their parents are ageing. This conflict, the emerging self-awareness with independence and the desire for 'daughterly filiality' commitments, rests on their shoulders. There are also generational differences among singletons who undertook global mobility in 1990, 2000 and 2010. The former generations were predominantly staying in a foreign country, but those in more recent times, within five to ten years, have different trajectories, with half returning to mainland China (Miao & Wang, 2017). China's rapid economic and technological development contributes to promising job prospects (Wang & Bao, 2015). Cosmopolitan cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou have become international financial hubs with prospective job opportunities close to parents' homes.

The one-child policy: Promises in life and constraints as Dushengnv

Existing research on the one-child policy often focuses on demographic impacts in mainland China (Hesketh & Zhu, 1997; Keng, 1996). Few studies pay attention to the consequences of this top-down revolution, particularly the significance of its social and cultural dimensions on the Dushengnv generation. Fong explores the experiences of growing up as 'a singleton in a society used to large families' (2004, p. 4). The term Dushengzinv, or 'singleton', is used to refer to the only child that resulted from the policy

(and Dushengnv to refer specifically to the daughter). Fong observes this phenomenon in the context of urbanisation in Dalian city, where migrants moved from rural areas in China to cities and changed from a strict model of social modernisation to an 'open' capitalist world. In keeping up with the broader social changes, families 'put all their eggs into the only basket' in the aspirations for the Dushengnv.

This section focuses on the paradoxical significances of the one-child policy that were not discussed in the Introduction. 'Sex imbalance' (Li, Yi & Zhang, 2011) and demographic changes are often documented (Hesketh & Zhu, 1997) because the policy was implemented within an existing patriarchal system where sons were treasured more than daughters, which led to 'missing girls' – selective births and abortions to ensure the only child was male (Chen et al., 2013; Ebenstein, 2010). The state also emphasised the quality (*suzhi*) (Upton-McLaughlin, 2014) of an only child in the age of material scarcities and preferred the associated characters and quality over the number of children in one's family (Fong, 2007; Qian, 2009). It has profound influences on family structure, relations and filial piety (Deutsch, 2006; Wang & Montgomery, 2003). The quality of children also lies with the idea about whether they could fulfil the filial duties. Meanwhile, the overall social changes, particularly due to the one-child policy, consequently have shaped politics and power dynamics. Filial piety thus has transformed as a practice, differing from those of previous generations (Hesketh et al., 2005).

Given the long history of son preference in China, what does it mean to raise Dushengnv in a changing Chinese society (Li & Coony, 1993)? Researchers have paid scant attention to how parents of Dushengzinv adopted changes and strategised their family outcome as a unit. Social attention shifted from quantity of children (*shuliang*) to quality of the single child (*suzhi*). Education became the vehicle to transfer their focus from quantity to the quality of Dushengnv – girls in large metropolitan cities are afforded more opportunities to get a good education (Fong, 2004; Tsui & Rich, 2002). Veeck et al. (2003) suggested that parents of Dushengnv spent full and equitable resources on their urban children, regardless of their gender, and other studies claimed that gender equality was thus achieved to a certain degree (Lee, 2012). The one-child policy thus drove the attention of

parents away from the differentiation of Dushengzinv's gender onto their *suzhi.* Particularly, parenting of one child become intensified.

As a consequence of the change in family relations under the one-child policy, Ngan-ling and Zhao (1996) argued that child-centredness became more prominent through the flow of financial resources: Dushengnv becomes more overtly a form of investment. Bian (1996) also made the point about parental monetary investment in their children. This financial investment fuelled the expansion of higher education. Domestic educational pathways no longer met the demand of their investment, so parents of Dushengnv, especially those residing in large metropolitan cities, often shifted their attention to transnational mobility (Fong, 2011).

In China itself, Liu (2007) examined the 'unlucky' generation of women workers in the factory and their changing status: entering the paid workforce and getting laid off. A decade later, Liu (2017) conducted research on white-collar professional women in mainland China and provided a vivid description of how gender relations changed in the workplace – professional women are navigating continuing issues at work and beyond and experiencing patriarchal hierarchies. This generational change Liu characterises offers a fundamental insight into how parental expectations and paid work experiences were transferred to their daughters. Dushengnv, thus, became the 'privileged daughters' (Tu & Xie, 2020) and carried their parental desires for mobility, including the pursuit of higher education. Dushengnv, as children of the 'unlucky generation', require different 'gendered roles' at home and in society. Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017) emphasise the reproduction of pronatalist discourse across generations, linking daughters' choices with their mothers. They argue that their mothers often passed down and reinforced gendered roles. More recently, Zhang et al. (2020) argue that singleton daughters were entitled to the empowerment process through the digital space. Generational characteristics are more evident for Dushengnv than for any previous generations.

While the one-child policy unexpectedly granted many girls access to increased resources and educational opportunities, its influence also rekindled gender inequality within family dynamics in China (Fincher, 2016). This is primarily evident through the emergence of the

"Shengnv" phenomenon, or the concept of "leftover women," where parental expectations shift from emphasising educational and career achievements to prioritising reproduction and forming a family. However, Tianhan Gui (2020) argues that the decision of leftover women to remain single is far more complex than solely being driven by traditional gender role pressures. The negotiation of gender roles and marriage intertwines with their career considerations. Consequently, the dilemma between choosing to remain single and pursue a career or sacrificing career aspirations for the sake of starting a family necessitates a more nuanced comprehension of the interplay between family and the workplace.

Acknowledging those generational differences would help us understand the motivations behind the growth in overseas study. Since China's political and economic opening up, especially after 2000, the number of Chinese international students tripled in the Western world. This was not simply an instrumental quest to pursue a qualification, because it could also entail the desire to pursue some degree of freedom through spatial mobility (Fong, V. L. 2011). These aspirations invariably touch on intergenerational relationships. Mengwei Tu (2018) compared parental involvement in one-child migrants' mobilities and sharing of responsibilities in childcare and homemaking in the UK and China. In the Australian context, Liangni Sally Liu (2018) suggests the importance of family in this transnational movement and argues that Chinese migrants' migratory movements rest on intergenerational dynamics and are rooted in the home's construction as a family unit, renewing attention to the changing dynamics within the Chinese family.

Because of this tension between career and family, there emerges the phenomenon of what Xie (2017) calls the shame of 'loser self', where highly educated and professional women enjoy financial stability yet still internalise a conservative view of marriage and 'family life' as their future trajectory. Her work, along with other studies on 'Shengnv' ('leftover women'), has portrayed this paradoxical picture of successful professionals who experience status in public but not always the approval of their parents in the private domain (Xie, 2021). Yingchun Ji examined how women weave traditional expectations within modern life in a transitioning China, where tradition and modernity often clash and coexist (Ji, 2015). The experience of being 'Shengnv' was not the result of individual choice

but rather a product of complicated navigation through parental pressures, socio-economic hypergamy (the pressure to marry-up), the desire to be independent and the desire to return the investment to their parents. Sandy To (2015) explored the reasons behind professional women's late marriage and its consequences and argued that traditional marriage values still prevail in Chinese society.

The one-child policy reflected an age of social and economic reform in mainland China, producing a generational shift for those living as Dushengnv. The accumulation of financial means and opportunities to acquire higher education and overseas studies all promised Dushengnv some future, different from their mothers' lives, full of possibilities, but not without conflict. The most significant promise is that Dushengnv would have more economic and social freedom in general.

Dushengnv and migration

The cohort of professional women born under what Fong (2015) phrased as 'China's most radical experiment' – one-child policy – were conditioned by this regime of no siblings from a state top-down approach. The time before their migration was shaped by expectations of success and the burden of being their parents' 'only hope' in upward class mobility (Fong, 2004). Their time in school was heavily orientated towards study and less about their social life because of a heavy burden of parental expectations to achieve success in mainland China. Many new Chinese professional women unsurprisingly often desired something different – they aspired to have more space to pursue a social life. Qi (2021) argues that China has undertaken dramatic economic, institutional and governmental reform and restructuring, which has had a strong impact on family life. This evocation thus calls for the urgency of upward mobility. As discussed earlier through Liu's work on the unlucky factory women workers and professional women as white-collar beauties, Dushengnv's experiences of time, career and life are quite different – relational and compressed – from those of their parents. The migration process offers more freedom from their family without intimate involvement. Moreover, their experience of Australian society is different from a life in post-Mao socialist China.

Migration is not a homogenous experience: experiences may vary enormously depending, for example, on the visa category people migrate under. Robertson (2020) argues that some visa categories create a sense of 'indentured' mobility because their activities and choices are primarily decided by their visa categories and how much time they can allocate to study and work. Robertson also argues that migration has created a tendency towards temporal experiences because of complex trajectories and multiple transitions, 'staggered' and intersected by 'institutional, biographic, and everyday practices' (2015, 2019). Her study underpins the temporal challenges of transnational mobility (Robertson, 2016). Wang and Collins (2020, p. 587) argue that 'migration aspirations are necessarily temporally distributed – they emerge and develop across time and are subject to constant transformations, disruptions and discontinuities at the level of every day and transnational'. Like other skilled women migrants, professional Chinese women in Australia may pursue a 'temporary' occupation to negotiate permanence for their migration status (Stevens, 2019). Moreover, the aspirations embedded in their migration relate to middle-class values – the attraction of the natural environment and a slower life pace – in contrast with China, where urban and cosmopolitan development is more often at the expense of the environment and life moves forward at a critical speed (Xu, 2021).

Everyday practices do not necessarily synchronise with the macro level of structural forces. The parental expectations experienced by new Chinese professional women construct an overarching timeframe. Historical and cultural references of time in mainland China, institutional- and governance-constrained migration processes and everyday life in Australia all overlap, encompassing cultural reproduction of being the only child, gender, race, migration and, at times, motherhood. This all adds to the complexities and specificities of new Chinese professional women's experiences in Australia, which are different from those of their peers in mainland China.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the contexts that inform the research on new Chinese professional women's international mobility and career choices. By examining the interplay of China's one-child policy, economic reform and opening-up policy, urbanisation, transnational mobility and higher education, this research

sheds light on the complex dynamics of Chinese migrants and their forms of capital. The historical and social contexts are also essential to understanding the characteristics of new Chinese professional women and their new dispositions, which are shaped by both their country of origin and their experiences in the Australian context. The concept of Dushengnv capital, which will be further explored in Chapter Two, highlights the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping the experiences of these women. New Chinese professional women have developed the capacity to effectively utilise social networks, thereby enabling them to navigate the highly competitive educational system in China and the intricate immigration policies in Australia. This chapter provides a strong foundation for the rest of the research, offering a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the contexts and factors that influence the experiences of new Chinese professional women in the global workforce.

Chapter Two – Conflicting promises of paid work, gender roles and family life

Introduction

This thesis discusses new Chinese professional women in Australia. Compared to the entire generation of Dushengnv discussed in Chapter One, this group is much smaller – comprising a subset who are women, who have achieved (in China, in Australia or in both countries) a degree of professional career attainment, and who have the capability to undertake temporary or permanent migration to Australia as young adults. At the same time, this group belongs to the wider Dushengnv generation and shares characteristics inherited from the experiences described in Chapter One. For the rest of this thesis, I discuss this group as new Chinese professional women, without losing sight of their being part of this Dushengnv generation. Regardless of whether, strictly, they were only children, the policy and wider social conditions of their upbringing have left indelible marks on their orientation towards questions of career, paid work and family life that I explore in the chapters to follow.

This chapter extends the discussion in Chapter One on the one-child policy, as a basis for understanding the social and cultural contexts in which new Chinese professional women were born and raised, cultivating capacities and qualities that previous generations would not easily have acquired. New Chinese professional women, as migrants and professionals, arrive with an array of skills and resources, but have to develop new skills and resources to enter Australian workplaces and to fit into society generally. This process poses many challenges and obstacles to the realisation of their dreams for a better life.

The chapter utilises conceptual tools drawn from Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1990) and feminist scholarship to explore the conflict of hope and despair that new Chinese professional women experience as a result of their Dushengnv background. It argues that their aspiration to emigrate and to adapt in a new social and economic context must be

understood both in terms of an intersectional analysis of the inequality regimes of Chinese and Australian workplaces and as the accumulation of capacities – which I call 'Dushengnv capital' – across their career and life trajectories. Central to this analysis is recognising that these trajectories are punctuated by a range of different 'promises' – of migration, career and family. In foregrounding the importance of the one-child policy and reviewing literature that stemmed from mainland China as well as scholars from the West, this chapter calls for a more nuanced approach to understanding the complexities of gender, migration, work and family life, among other aspects, to reconfigure multiple layers of promise for professional Chinese women in Australia and other Western countries. These challenges lay the basis for the concluding argument in this chapter that we need to employ the idea of a 'new Chinese' habitus as a conceptual tool to understand the experiences of career, work and private life.

Migration as a promise?

There is increasing literature on the 'new' Chinese diaspora in the West (Ang, 2021; Nyiri, 2018; Li, 2017; Stevens, 2019; Wang, 2018; Wang & Collins, 2020). Yet there is much less research being undertaken on the experiences of professional Chinese women within this larger population – a demographic that has grown in Australia in recent decades. The one-child policy, in effect, was a historical promise from the Chinese state to guarantee 'better' *suzhi* (quality) than experienced by the parental generation. It also promised *Dushengnv* (only daughter) a more significant opportunity to achieve the outcome of a 'better' life. Emigrating to Australia, one of the most popular destinations among Chinese migrants, also works as another kind of 'promise'. It offers, or appears to offer, greater gender rights, equal pay and the possibility of having a career. However, the numbers and spread of Chinese women migrants have fluctuated between 1900 and 2020 (ABS, 2006, 2011, 2016; Department of Home Affairs, 2022). Some of the changes have been well documented (Department of Home Affairs, 2022; Martin, 2017, 2022a; Stevens, 2022), following Chinese migrants in Australia as an overall trend (Liu, 2015) including the diversity of the population and issues of the invisibility of women mainly before the abolition of the White Australia Policy in the early 1970s (Kamp, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2011). Kamp indicates that

men made up most Chinese migrants in Australia until 1970, and women remained in the minority (Kamp, 2022). Australia then saw a sharp rise in the next decade of migrant women, who surpassed migrant men by 10% in the population in the year 2000 (ABS, 2006). This trend was in line with the one-child policy where parents of Dushengnv were able to fund their children's further studies in Australia (Martin, 2017, 2022a).

Migration, acting as a dynamic and fluid process, adds another dimension of complexity in understanding professional women's work and life (Urry, 2002). Collins' study suggests migrants show a close linkage of desire to meet family expectations. (Collins, 2018). Kamp (2014, 2018) argues that Chinese women migrants have broken traditional 'backdoor' housekeeping barriers and increasingly joined the paid workforce or ran the family business since the White Australia Policy was abolished. She argues that those women have renegotiated their gendered roles at work and within their households. Her study reveals that Chinese women are challenging the distribution of gender power at work and home in Australia (Kamp, 2013). Her research offers a historical perspective on Chinese women migrants in Australia.

Existing research suggests that the aspirations and desires of Chinese migrant women are not always matched by the reality of migration and are complicated by the immigration policies of the destination countries and their families of origin in China. For example, Tu and Xie (2020) emphasise the parental desire for upward social mobility through their Dushengnv's transnational mobility in the UK. However, interesting complications emerge between parental desires and Dushengnv's aspirations. Man outlines Chinese immigrant women's deskilling experience when seeking employment after migrating to Canada (Man, 2004; Man, 1995; Man & Preston, 1999). She argues that labour market experience does not always positively affect the family lives of middle-class Hongkongese women (Man, 2001; Ng et al., 2006). Ho and Ley (2014) share similar insights to Man, 2001 and Ng et al., 2006 and provide some examples of 'unavoidable' downwards career trajectories. Chien-Juh Gu (2015) examines Taiwanese American professionals' experiences of a racialised glass ceiling at work. In Australia, Ho points out that Hong Kong Chinese professionals experience a downward career trajectory (Ho, C. 2008). The works cited above highlight

the challenges that Chinese migrant women have encountered and point to a need to examine geographical bonding as a cultural context to understand the new Chinese women migrants' experiences. Meanwhile, they also suggest that the lived experiences of mainland Chinese women have been less studied, even though they might experience these changes more dramatically than those from Hong Kong, Taiwan and elsewhere because of the one-child policy and the shift from socialism to capitalism (Anderson et al., 2019, pp. 65–66).

Some studies suggest that women play a vital role during the family's migration, such as expatriates' relocation (Sarkiunaite & Rocke, 2015). Some point out other impacts. For example, Gu (2018) confirms that Chinese migrant women have now achieved greater financial independence and contribute to their household income more than ever before. Subsequently, gendered dynamics have changed. Despite this, Chinese migrant women still take on the primary burden of domestic and caring responsibilities – an aspect that remains unchanged. Migration subsequently involves the ongoing negotiation of experiences for professional Chinese women including understanding how their practices prior to migration contrast and commingle with practices in their destination country (Gu, 2018). The age on arrival often shapes not only the impacts of the experiences themselves but also the degree of reflexivity among Chinese women concerning their understanding of work and family, in contrast to the life course in mainland China full of gendered expectations of prioritising family over career (Fincher, 2016; To, 2015). It is critical to examine the influence on these women of both the originating and host country and culture.

Yet it is also important to note that the nature of Chinese migrants as a cohort has changed and diversified over the past two decades (Ho, C. 2006a; Ip, 2001). One of the crucial differences is that Chinese women are no longer 'trailing spouses' nor simply migrating to join other family members. Instead, a high proportion are now skilled migrants and temporary working visa holders (ABS, 2016). This trend can be traced from statistics from the Australian Department of Home Affairs (2018, 2022) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016). One of the consequences of these demographic changes is an increasing presence of Chinese professional women in the Australian workplace and the

unprecedented visibility of new Chinese migrants in Australian social media (Cooke, Zhang & Wang, 2013). Consequently, this change resonates with the promise of migration, including but not limited to more opportunities for professional careers and a better work-life balance (Grimshaw, Murphy & Probert, 2005).

These changes and differences among migrants entail different layers of negotiation with their core family members (Lo & Russell, 2007) and the broader Chinese community (Anderson et al., 2019). Some are predictable because of social and cultural differences between Australia and China. Flexible working arrangements and a less stressful philosophy of life outweighing work centrality make Australia appealing. Other aspects may be more challenging, throwing up new and different obstacles around their professional identities, gender roles, child-bearing and household responsibilities (Cheng, 2016; Ho, C. 2006b).

The analysis of the emerging Chinese middle-class adds to our understanding of professional Chinese women, as class is often not explicitly discussed in China (Xie, 2021). Goodman and Chen (2013) argue that the middle class in China is a complex and diverse group that is profoundly influencing Chinese society while facing various challenges such as social inequality, political constraints, and the struggle between individualism and collectivism. They highlight that the Chinese middle class is not solely driven by economic success but also seeks social recognition and political participation (Goodman, 2014). Miao (2016) further explores the identity, attitudes, and behaviours of the middle class, examining factors such as education, family, consumption patterns, and political attitudes. Although this thesis does not focus on class background, it is essential to acknowledge the broader social context in which new Chinese professional women are situated. White-collar professionals are often neglected among current migration studies, which often prioritise either 'elite migrants' (Ho, 2011) or refugees and working-class migrants such as care-workers (Michel & Peng, 2017). The contradictory effect of gender expectations is driving middle-class Chinese women in two directions: the marketisation of the economy calls on women's labour in the workplace, while 'traditional' forms of patriarchal power relationships pull them back into the household (Martin, 2022a, p. 281). The above

literature points to specific inquiries concerning the middle-class that draw Chinese women to pursue their transnational mobility.

The process of migration adds even further complexity to the experience of being new Chinese professional women. Consequently, a more nuanced approach is required to unpack the dynamics of gender relations, professionalism and issues in the workplace, and how new Chinese professional women adjust to those challenges.

Women and paid work: Inequality regimes and situated gender relations

Abstract jobs and hierarchies, common concepts in organisational thinking, assume a disembodied and universal worker. Joan Acker (1990, p. 139)

Among the literature concerning women and paid work, two important aspects to consider are new Chinese professional women's career and workplace experiences. On the one hand, they learn from examples of their own and their parents' generations in mainland China, a mixed socialist and market economy that makes competing demands on women – calling them to contribute to the labour force and yet fulfil their roles as wives and mothers (Liu, 2007, 2017). On the other hand, they embrace more freedom in Western societies such as Australia, where not only do women fulfil different roles in the workforce, they also tend to have stronger attachments to feminist politics than in China. However, sociological literature suggests career and work in Australia are no paradise. Instead, they represent a compromised promise, full of structural restrictions (Gatwiri, 2021; Li, 2019). How women make sense of social and cultural differences and position themselves within the challenges of work and life as migrants and professionals in the changing corporate life is a question of some complexity.

Work-life balance has been a predominant discussion in recent years in Western society (Brough et al., 2014; Fujimoto et al., 2012). The term work-life balance is used to refer to 'the linkages between work and family roles, originally concerned mainly with women and work–family stress' (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 1). It is often discussed primarily in terms of the challenges faced by married women, juggling achieving a professional career and

enjoying a family life (Fujimoto et al., 2012), and where technological changes and the changing nature of work blur the boundaries between work and domestic life (Wajcman, 2015). Yet, single women, as this thesis will show, also find it difficult to juggle work and (non-work) life demands as they strive for career success.

Conceptual tools from three different fields – inequality regimes, intersectionality and Bourdieusian scholarship – provide richness in unpacking nuanced views of lived experiences. First, Acker's inequality regimes (Acker, 2006b) in the workplace articulate the shift from a simplistic view of gendered power in a patriarchal organisational structure to a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics. Second, as Acker notes, the interplay of gender, race and migration within and beyond the workplace requires an intersectional investigation (Acker, 2006b). In the culturally diverse Australian workplace, dynamics around gender and sexuality are more complicated because they interplay with race/ethnicity. Third, Bourdieu's conceptual framework allows for a grounded examination of the differences experienced during the migration and settlement process (Bourdieu, 1990).

Acker's conceptual strategy emphasises 'the mutual production of gender, race, and class inequalities in work organisations' (Acker, 2006b, p. 459). It draws attention to the structural dimensions of inequality in the workplace, but it also discusses more subtle gender issues challenging organising processes that 'create and re-create inequalities', which are more difficult to examine using a simple gender equality framework (Acker, 1990, 2006b; Pringle, 2019). Moreover, Acker's approach contributes to research on women and organisations in two ways: she observes that 'the abstract bodiless worker who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate' (1990, p. 151). Therefore, we need to consider the embodied experiences of work. Meanwhile, she reminds us not to simplify gender by ignoring patriarchal social structures or seeing organisational structure as simply a reproduction of society. We need to consider the agency of practices. Acker's analytic framework points out the 'gendered nature of organizations and gendering processes that sustain them'; in doing so, she moves from structural and cultural analysis to the experiences of individuals (Pringle, 2019, p. 2).

Acker also concentrates on intra-organisational processes situated within a broader context and argues that 'regimes are linked to inequality in the surrounding society, its politics, history, and culture' (2006b, p. 443). She indicates that regimes have little to do with gender, unless they closely investigate the subordination of women and question how processes and structures shape gender relations (Bridges & Messerschmidt, 2019). In adopting Acker's theory and other current theories of organisation built on feminist analysis, this research can deepen our understanding of embedded structural issues beyond individuals' experiences.

Workplaces have become more complex in developing a global exchange in terms of social and cultural differences. Acker develops her theory to examine the intersectional play between gender, class and race relations and barriers to create 'inequality regimes'. She unpacks the obstacles to women's opportunities for advancement across all organisational levels and processes. Acker focuses on the complexities and dynamics of corporate life, which might deepen the differences from a broader social and cultural perspective.

Acker's theory refers to various dimensions to understand workplaces. Her work and argument connect with emerging transnational mobility, particularly concerning the culturally diverse workplace in Australia. To some extent, her analysis of race, religion, age and disability underscores the 'intertwining of privilege with gendered and racialized identity' (Acker, 2006b, p. 457). Acker also links gender with class in many organisations and argues that class is legitimate, if invisible, and inequality is entrenched in hierarchical positioning (Acker, 2006a).

Another thread of literature on domestic life also requires our attention. For example, Pocock argues that while women are achieving more success in 'winning the right to a job and significant individual equality in paid work', the 'essential accompanying changes on the household, personal and institutional front have been puny, fragile and energetically resisted' (2003, p. 8). The relationship between work and domestic care regimes is deeply embedded in social and cultural values. Hochschild (Hochschild, 1995; Hochschild & Machung 1990) points out that employed women often undertake a 'second shift' at home after their paid work, involving child-rearing, emotional networking and household

planning. Ridgeway (2011) argues that in heterosexual relationships, even when women earn more than men, they still take up more household responsibilities. If the household income permits, women may outsource household and child-rearing responsibilities to manage the dual burden of paid work and care, but this doesn't fundamentally change the gendered division of domestic labour. While Ridgeway's research does not specifically focus on China or Chinese women migrants, it still offers critical knowledge about the wider society they are located in and the workplaces they enter, and the consequences for domestic life.

Some researchers consider work-life balance with limited reference to ethnic community practices. For example, Fernando and Cohen (2016) discuss extended family support with child-bearing and household duties to ensure middle-class Indian professionals allocate their off-duty hours to social networking for their career progression. On the other hand, Shin and Shin (1999) suggest the complexity of dealing with living-in families such as in-laws and the constant negotiation of power relations within households among Korean professionals in the United States lead to the experience of exhaustion at home for these women, and often depression and anxiety. Moreover, work ethic commonly dominates in cosmopolitan cities in mainland China (Chan, 2020). Fernando and Cohen (2016) indicate that Indian professionals sometimes secure their career positions through this stereotype and maintain this spirit throughout their working environment to create a slightly competitive atmosphere. Other research reveals that Asian immigrants are among the highest group that most likely have physical and mental issues interfering with their social network (Furnham & Shiekh, 1993). These studies offer insights into balancing work and life for women of ethnic minorities, but they do not always address how ethnic practices and cultural environment in the host country shape choices between work and life.

Structural barriers: Workplace experiences and migration

Experiences in the workplace are often complex, particularly in culturally diverse Australia. As Acker suggests, relations at work often result from gender, ethnicity/race and class inequalities (Acker, 2006b, p. 459). Van Laer and Janssens (2011) argue that subtle discrimination often underlies workplace conduct. Discriminations usually hide under the

'dominant societal diversity thinking' – where practices are rationalised as differences to some extent that often appear as ambiguous in the micro-expressions in the workplace (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011, p. 1219). Mok and Platt (2020) argue that Chinese minorities may face 'ethnic penalties' in the British labour market because of a monogenetical 'success story'. The interplay between gender and race is more nuanced and difficult to challenge. Especially for migrant professionals from an Asian background, this interplay often serves to rationalise subtle discrimination through a superficial focus on communication or linguistic issues (Li, 2019). Because of this, Chinese professionals who often encounter linguistic difficulties turn their attention away from racial issues.

For Chinese professional women, despite the 'promise' embedded in moving to Australia, the Australian workplace can be highly discriminatory in multiple ways, and initially through the recruitment and interviewing process (Chowdhury et al., 2017). Job preparation for entering a specific workplace shapes migrant professionals' temporal perceptions about their professions and experiences of daily routines and interactions at work. The time they have to wait and the chance of receiving a job offer are influenced by many factors, including Australian immigration regulations concerning visa status and citizenship and unspoken organisational expectations for specific occupational and professional conduct such as a referrer's references.

At the government level, Australian immigration regimes already work as structural filters to facilitate 'appropriate' skilled migrants for its labour markets. Institutional and migration infrastructures (e.g., migration agents) further assist with screening (Lin et al., 2017; Xiang, 2001). Other social and cultural aspects in Australia contribute to this selection. Social class, for example, is one evident factor (Stevens, 2022). Notably, the need to have overseas qualifications officially recognised in the Australian workplace is incredibly challenging.

While there may be some distinctions between the public and private sectors, the usual experience for Chinese migrants demonstrates that there is still a general pattern of subtle and not so subtle discrimination. This often stems from the ways social and cultural values may shape selection criteria, even if these are hidden (Chowdhury et al., 2017). But the

impacts of discrimination are not limited to the recruitment process. Racial stereotypes and microaggressions at work are examples of the contractionary expectations of skilled migrants from particular ethnic backgrounds (Li, 2019).

Situated experiences: Interplay of gender, race and migration

The conceptual tools offered by inequality regimes and empirical research on migrant women help frame the understanding of the workplace context by pointing to Australia's social and cultural environment. However, those studies cannot fully grasp their lived experiences without examining the dynamics of multiple factors. As indicated, the lived experience of new Chinese professional women points to the intersection of culture, gender, class and other aspects. Therefore, as Acker proposes, a systematic unpacking of intersectionality is required for a theoretical and empirical interrogation. Some scholars (see Jordan-Zachary, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2005) have developed Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) initial insights to focus on the ways intersectional analysis informs our understanding of questions of belonging and identity. Work by Valentine (2007) and McDowell (2008) adopts methodological intersectionality, arguing that intersectionality often politicises intragroup differences. Because of that, the intersectional approach often reinforces the marginalisation of women of colour by reducing complexity to essentialised understandings of difference. As Hierofani (2016, p. 2078) argues, '[i]t is thus important to recognize hidden biases in our disciplinary discourses and the intersection of these categories of "difference" in reinforcing marginalization'. As useful as an intersectional approach is, we also need to examine the fluidity and complexity of experiences and the significance of the researcher's positionality within specific contexts. Not all intersectional analyses take this turn: many provide the tools for capturing the complexities in researching migrants. Evans takes intersectionality as feminist practice and explains the importance of recognising that 'we all have overlapping and multiple points of identity that shape ways in which we experience power and oppression' (Evans, 2016, p. 72). Her approach builds on Valentine's theorising of intersectionality that challenges the meaning of being different among many categories (Valentine, 2007). Wilson (2013) argues that intersectionality keeps an analytical gaze steadily on structural power dynamics. She maps

the fluidity, contextuality and temporality of identity construction (p. 3). Cho et al. (2013) insist on the value of an intersectional approach for examining the dynamics of difference and sameness.

The challenge of employing intersectionality is to take account of the overlapping of several structural aspects of inequality while retaining a sense of the complexity and fluidity of these aspects. Harrison (2017) utilises the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical approach to analyse four young African American girls' gendered and racialised experiences. She indicates that the idea of 'race' was primarily situated in a limited black–white discourse. Her approach reinforces the idea – 'an intersectionality lens embraces, acknowledges, and interrogations of marginalized social constructs such as race and gender that often consciously and unconsciously influence ways that adolescents make meaning of themselves' (Harrison, 2017, p. 1036). Tariq and Syed (2017) draw on 20 South Asian Muslim women's experiences of employment and progression to leadership in their workplace and outline multi-layered complexities of the intersectionality of gender, race, religion and family when facing choices. Those studies challenge a one-size-fits-all type of feminism and affirm Crenshaw's argument that women have multi-layered facets in their lives (Crenshaw, 1989).

The need to unpack migrants' experiences through a more flexible intersectional approach is crucial, given the fluidity and contexts that new Chinese professional women experience around migration, gender relations, ethnicity, rural to urban mobility, social and cultural differences in Australia, family life and the professions. Added to this sense of fluidity, we need to return a temporal dimension to the study of women's lives and career trajectories. Unpacking the intersectionality also resonates with Acker's call for a multiple-disciplinary approach to exploring workplace inequality regimes (Acker, 2006b). In retrospect, neither inequality regimes nor intersectionality can fully decode the broader social and cultural encounters that permeate professional Chinese women's work and lives. As useful as the idea of inequality regimes is for exploring aspects of the workplace, it does not examine how migrant women accumulate different kinds of resources and transfer their existing resources to the Australian workplace. We need Bourdieu's (1990) concept of capital and

other work built on it to unpack their experiences, in particular, how new Chinese professional women develop their capacity to cope with changes in different workplaces.

The gain and loss: Various forms of capital during migration

Migrants arrive in the country of settlement with particular types of resources and ingrained habits that derive from their socialisation in the homeland; during the process of settlement, those habits and resources are often put under stress, requiring adaptation or complete change to make life in the new home possible (Noble, 2013). This thesis draws on a Bourdieusian framework to make sense of this process and logic. Capital, a central concept in Bourdieu's theory, can take different forms – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – which may be convertible across different contexts (Bourdieu, 1990). Social capital refers to the relationships and social networks that one possesses (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). Economic capital is the financial resources one can draw on, including properties and other assets. Cultural capital refers to specific knowledge, skills and behaviours that we possess through our association with particular groups. It is often understood in three forms: institutional, embodied and objectified (Bourdieu, 1990). Academic and professional qualifications are examples of institutionalised cultural capital. Speaking a specific language is an example of embodied cultural capital. Cultural capital exists in material objects, such as writings, paintings and so on, and 'is transmissible in its materiality' (Ariss & Syed, 2011, p. 290; Bourdieu 1990). Cultural capital is also informally acquired, through the family, cultural groups and so on (Erel, 2010). Symbolic capital, as defined by Bourdieu, is 'the form that various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognised as legitimate', and it is often reflected in social position, which can be mobilised by accumulating other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17).

Some scholars in human resource management and migration studies have employed Bourdieu's concepts of various capitals to challenge the static use of human capital theory. Moore, for example, argues that Bourdieu's capital extends beyond a narrow sense of economic exchange. He explores transformative and exchangeable assets in a more comprehensive cultural and social dialogue (Moore, 2002, p. 99). During the migration process, some forms of cultural capital, such as qualifications gained in mainland China, are

not necessarily recognised in Australia. In some cases, professional accreditations, such as in accounting and law, are not easily convertible given the differences in context.

Studies have explored different forms of capital, which are helpful for grappling with embodied experiences from diverse categories. Erel (2010) argues that migrants' cultural capital is contested and ethnically bound, yet can be mobilised, validated, extended and rebuilt in many ways in negotiation with either country of origin or country of migration. However, she argues, 'migration specific cultural capital reproduces intra-migrant differentiations of gender, ethnicity and class' (Erel, 2010, p. 642). Following Syed's (2008) study on the rational perspective towards employment and mobility among international migrants, Ariss and Syed (2011) reaffirmed crucial forms of cultural capital – the capacity to speak the language of the country of migration (in their case, French) and mobilisation employed by skilled migrants from developing countries when confronted with barriers to their global career mobility. This mobilisation raises challenging questions around the dynamics and convertibility of migrants' forms of capital.

Consequently, more researchers have investigated 'cultural capital' with an ethnic focus. Fernando and Cohen (2016, p. 1289) argue that Indian academics have extended family members living in and helping with the children and housework, and those academics utilise this form of 'ethnic capital' to exchange their free time for social networking and extending work hours. Ethnic capital thus transforms the accumulation of Indian academics' cultural capital for their future career advancement. Their study (Fernando & Cohen) understands a specific form of capital that is associated with a specific group, such as ethnicity and religion, but they often fail to recognise the nuance of cultural capital as a descriptive category. Tabar et al. conceptualise 'ethnicity as a form of symbolic capital which is fundamentally contradictory, because "ethnic capital" necessarily and overtly entails a kind of engagement with the bicultural dimensions of migrant existence' (Tabar et al., 2010, p. 169). It is more accurate to use the term 'ethnicised capital' rather than 'ethnic capital' to capture the dynamics of migrants' experiences. Meanwhile, Tabar et al. also point to a risk of abstracting the challenges migrants face in the host country as deficiency of

certain forms of capital as a social category to satisfy the needs of deskilling among skilled migrants.

As well as extending Bourdieu's categories to grapple with the experience of ethnicity and migration, other scholars have reworked Bourdieu to address the question of gender (Huppatz, 2009; Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013; Reay, 2004). The concept of 'gender capital' is an example of an embodied form of capital that has a significant impact at work. Huppatz (2009, 2012) conceptualises two forms of gender capital: feminine capital and female capital. She specifies women's perceptions of advantage from ownership of feminine dispositions and parameters to female privileges. Dyck (2018) argues that mothering practices of remaking 'home' in various dimensions – socially and symbolically, everyday activities of 'being-in-place', transforming multiple forms of capital in social reproduction. These studies offer insights into the embodied sexual orientation that reflects feminine characteristics; the idea of gendered capital is thus more accurate than gender capital per se. Gender capital is also a reminder to return to an intersectional approach that explores the dynamics of gender relations with the considerations of cultural and social differences.

Another embodied form of capital is 'emotional capital', which is less often reported or theorised. It is a feminist extension of Bourdieu's capital as transformable forms (Dyck, 2018). Hutchison (2012) explored emotional capital among working-class and middle-class mothers. She found that their engagement with their children's homework suggests emotional capital outweighs social class in their children's achievements. Her study indicates that women often perform emotion as gendered capital. Reay (2004) argues that women have emotional capital that is seen as feminine characteristics in the private sphere (rather than the public), specifically in the household. Women manage their emotional 'banks' between different family members. In the study of organisations, Liu (2017) demonstrates the emotional labour that female sales assistants more typically perform at their workplaces to produce some specific outcomes (Liu, J., 2017). The above studies apply an analytical lens to emotions as labour and the significance of emotion labour as part of gender capital.

In the Australian context, some new Chinese professional women begin their lives here as international students. Martin (2017) explored the experiences of some students and the way they developed micro mobilities in Melbourne suburbs to engage with *Daigou* activities (purchasing Australian-made products for their clients in China), partially because they lacked the social capital to secure a job in the labour market. Martin (2017) proposed 'feminine network capital' as a specific form of network capital that is both mobile and (to some extent) geographically 'tethered' – insofar as social capital is always somewhat tethered. This concept brings back the importance of an intersectional examination; specifically, an exploration of the gendered dimension during social formation and convertibility of social capital in different social structures. It also points to recognising the 'geographic and social mooring in place' of the social capital that 'remains somewhat attached to localized personal and family histories and specific geographies' (Martin, 2017, p. 905).

Capital and resources are also unevenly distributed in a culturally diverse workplace. The intersectional nature of people's lives – especially for migrant women – are often experienced as tensions that must be negotiated as people move from place to place, bringing existing capacities to newer contexts where they may or may not be recognised or valuable. This is often experienced as bodily dissonances (Noble, 2013). I use Bourdieu's notion of habitus to explore how new Chinese professional women experience such dissonance and attempt to adapt their habitus to fit in and make sense of their work and life in Australia. Adopting the work of Bourdieusian scholars, this thesis will aim to develop this framework to yield benefits for the sociology of work by exploring various forms of capital (cultural and gendered). Gendered capital points to a specific dimension of capital that is not often well studied in the public domain (e.g., in the workplace). Yet, gendered capital is robust in shaping the forms of other capital in specific fields (*Daigou*, as in feminine network capital; Martin, 2017). Emotional capital and attributes of women's embodied experiences are not uniformly recognised across different contexts.

Another important aspect we need to discuss through the idea of habitus is recognising how feelings and thoughts are structured. Several scholars have explored the relationships

between habitus and capital in relation to ethnicity, migration and gender (Martin, 2022a; Noble, 2013; Xu, 2021). Cora Lingling Xu (2020) argues that Chinese academics from rural China cultivated a productive habitus with characteristics of hard work, perseverance and self-discipline as driving forces to lift themselves from marginalised positions. Mohyuddin and Pick (2016) argue that South Asian professionals and managers have accumulated their social and cultural capital to overcome barriers at the time of their career progression through developing specific models of habitus as strategies. Their work highlights the importance of studying interrelations between capital and habitus. Bauder (2005) suggests that the workplace convention and hiring practices are barriers confronted by immigrants from South Asia and the Former Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the Canadian labour market. Their 'habitus contributes to the ethnic segmentation of immigration labour' because it reproduces 'ethnic networks', and consequently reproduction of 'distinct occupational preferences' (Bauder, 2005, p. 95). Bauder's research is similar to Parker's (2000) study on Chinese diaspora habitus in London, which points out specific ways of doing things because of their shared material conditions regulated through certain beliefs and values.

These existing studies offer examples of the importance of researching forms of capital with an ethnic focus and identifying the existence of ethnicised habitus or diasporic habitus (Mu & Pang, 2019; Noble, 2013; Parker, 2000). However, it is also important to note that there is a certain perception of a homogenised 'Chinese habitus', despite the growing diversity within Chinese diasporas (Anderson et al., 2019). The complexity of generational and geographical significances within the Chinese community needs to be accounted for and resonates with Martin's idea about the tethering and mooring of social networks in specific places (Martin, 2017). Some researchers have touched on aspects of the habitus of different segments of the Chinese diaspora. Gu (2015) argues that Taiwanese American women internalised their gendered roles at home, even though they have achieved career success and financial capital after their migration. Donald and Zheng (2009) provide reasonable accounts of how class culture in contemporary China still perceives cultural capital in terms of economic and social position. The parents' capital shapes their child's habitus by influencing their local networking and educational pathway, which shapes some social mobility through family and establishes a privilege into their futures. But this work

has two limits: first, it focuses on a simple view of an ongoing Chineseness that doesn't take account of the different experiences and expectations of the 'new Chinese'; second, it doesn't take account of the transformations to the habitus caused by processes of migration.

A 'new Chinese' habitus

The term "new Chinese habitus" pertains to the emergent social and cultural dispositions, practices, and behavioural patterns exhibited by Chinese migrants in response to profound social and economic transformations in China and their experiences during transnational mobility to Western countries, with a specific focus on Australia within this thesis. This idea outlines a complex and nuanced range of deeply ingrained and often subconscious habits, preferences, and norms that reflect the collective experiences, values, and cultural frameworks of new Chinese migrants. The formation of the new Chinese habitus is influenced by a convergence of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors, which consequently shape individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours across various social spheres, including higher education, labour, family dynamics, and immigration patterns. This idea grapples with the evolving dispositions that new Chinese migrants must internalise in order to navigate the multifaceted social dynamics and subjective realities inherent within both Chinese and Australian societies.

A 'new Chinese' habitus emerges because of dramatic changes in mainland China's social, cultural and political structure since 1978. Its outstanding characteristics are different from those of other Chinese diasporas, with specifically embodied dispositions. The middle-class Chinese have invested all their resources in their only child and, because of this, there have been significant changes in gender relations at work. Xu (2021) argues that some international students from mainland China have certain privileges because of their access to certain materials, resources and time. Moreover, international mobility adds another layer of complexity to this 'new Chinese' habitus. It provides a space for those Chinese to compare and reflect on their experience, and to adjust to the host country.

Similarly important, institutionalised and objectified experiences are incorporated through the migration process. Therefore, the idea of the 'new Chinese' habitus is useful for analysing professional Chinese women's identities and the extent to which questions of habitus impact on how they accumulate and mobilise their capital to achieve professional success. Zhang and Xu argue that Chinese women students construct specific transnational distinction through their 'newly acquired embodied cultural capital through mobility' (2020, p. 1251). A 'feminisation of migration' is asserted in a broad sense, not mainly because of the growth in young women pursuing higher education (Piper, 2008, p. 1291). Moreover, habitus are dynamic, which influences migrants' accounts of multiple dimensions of their sense of identity (such as womanhood and motherhood) within their household. The term disposition helps with bringing the ideas of structure and agency together. As Martin (2017) claims, some Chinese female international students develop entrepreneurship via WeChat partly because they encounter a capital deficit; more specifically, their qualifications are not recognised in the Australian workplace, thus impeding greater job prospects and 'integration' into Australian society.

This project looks more closely at the interaction between gender and capital in terms of class habitus. The dynamics of their interaction will impact professional Chinese women's social mobility and their accounts of their identities, for example, Zhang and Xu (2020) discuss transnational distinction. Calvo and Sarkisian, in examining whether pre-migration capital and post-migration socio-economic circumstances can account for racial/ethnic differences in schooling, argue that 'education tends to reproduce class structures across borders, and that social policy should counteract these cumulative disadvantage processes' (2014, p. 1029). Lee and Kramer (2013) argue that students who maintain regular contact with their families and hometown friends develop their habitus and social mobility differently from others, suggesting that social stratification has occurred through reconciling shifts in habitus gained through educational settings. More specifically concerning the Chinese, Zang (2006) points out the importance of in-group association because of the effect of social resources and cultural distinction on friendship formation in urban China, extending the dimension of habitus in social relationships. Xia (2013) uses an ethnographic case study to demonstrate that when middle-class Chinese immigrant

parents change their class habitus and cultural capital, they act as change agents in their adolescent's integration process. Xu's (2015, 2017, 2018a, 2018b) studies of cross-border student mobility show that mobility often complicates and disrupts the advantages that are associated with students' country of origin. The intersection of class and ethnicity with gender is at stake: an intersectional analysis with Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus thus is a more structured approach to understanding dynamic and fluid dispositions.

Understanding how migrant women accumulate their cultural capacities and convert other forms of capital to adjust their pre-existing dispositions requires a more nuanced approach. More specifically, migrants often experience a process of learning their 'difference' in the host country (Noble, 2013). The process is often regulated by different contexts. This thesis explores how migration shapes the dynamics of habitus, the new Chinese professional women, considering the family environment that shaped them and the social expectations and practices they experienced throughout their school life in mainland China. Adopting Bourdieusian concepts as a methodological toolkit, along with an intersectional approach examining the interplay of gender, class, race/ethnicity, migration and professionalism, is essential because of the complexity and dynamics of new Chinese professional women's lived experience. Together with inequality regimes, these conceptual tools enable me to capture the challenges and choices, the possibilities and the constraints that new Chinese women experience in their workplace, at home and beyond. Moreover, I want to explore those issues in relation to the specific experiences and capacities of Dushengnv, whose position as 'only daughter' throws these issues into sharp relief.

Dushengnv capital

Building on Bourdieusian and other theoretical frameworks, I argue the need to use 'Dushengnv capital' as a specific term to grapple with the uniqueness of the changes experienced by new Chinese professional women's when they move from mainland China to Australia. Built on the 'ethnicised habitus' (Noble & Tabar, 2002) and 'feminine network capital' (Martin, 2017), this thesis investigates the changing social and cultural aspects that new Chinese professional women face, from the strict, state-regulated one-child framework

of what Dushengnv's lives should be like to a comparatively free environment but with different challenges in Australia.

From a perspective of class, the parents of Dushengnv were an emerging middle-class generation in mainland China due to an accumulation of economic means through the rapid marketisation and modernisation that followed the opening-up reforms of the 1970s (Santos, 2021). However, the lens of class is not generally discussed in China because of its public discourse of socialism and its assumption that it has transcended class inequalities. The existing research on the middle class offers some valuable insights for understanding aspirations and behaviours in the Chinese context (Goodman & Chen 2013, Goodman 2014). Parents of Dushengnv were among the emerging middle class (mainly from the lens of educational background and financial status) and eager to establish themselves as part of the middle class. They also face structural constraints and limited political freedoms, despite having grown up during the era of economic reforms, benefiting from urbanisation and education (Goodman, 2014).The Dushengnv thus became a vehicle for these parents to explore possibilities in Western society (Fong, 2011), which was seen as a paradise. The compressed class aspiration and desire for upward mobility continues to draw parents of Dushengnv to take shortcuts, through higher education and convertible foreign degrees, to achieve a secure place in the changing Chinese society. Dushengnv generational habitus is where they constructed first. Diaspora Chinese scholars in the West (e.g., Fong, 2011; Liu, 2017) witness the changing social structures through higher education and generational female workers.

The growing numbers of international students in key destination countries – America, Canada, the UK, European countries, Australia and New Zealand – were fuelled by the aspirations of the Dushengzinv generation. The class habitus for Dushengnv often originates from their parental generation, who acquired middle-class dispositions through significant economic accumulation over their life course and placed a high value on education as a crucial asset. They intended to reinforce a social status through Dushengnv's education as symbolic capital. Thus, their practice of converting financial means into

cultural capital – institutional recognition – was passed on, sometimes unconsciously, to their Dushengnv.

Dushengnv capital and Dushengnv habitus also have gendered dimensions. The role of education in Australia, more especially disseminating knowledge, is classed and gendered through practice (Huppatz, 2008). Although feminism is not widely and completely accepted but rather migrated and integrated with Dushengnv's pre-existing dispositions, clashes of this with pre-existing gendered norms among Chinese women often lead to dissonances of their logic of practice. On the one hand, they cultivate gendered capital that they have adopted from their parents, particularly changes within their household and the dynamics of patriarchal behaviours. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness of how to make such shifts in the gendered allocation of tasks in the private domain. Also, since their mothers undertook paid work, they experienced the social changes themselves and made rational choices in parenting (Santos, 2021). So, there is a parallel theme of hope and promise in life that Dushengnv internalise and adopt as they experience changes through their higher education, work and migration.

From a transnational point of view, Dushengnv capital is fluid and convertible – transforming from their economic resources to symbolic capital overseas as a productive way of strengthening their middle-class status in the Western world. Meanwhile, they live with their ethnicised habitus and develop strategies to cope with challenges in the host society. Higher education is the field through which they familiarise themselves with the system in Australia, developing a 'feeling for the game' specific to their profession. Through this path, Dushengnv cultivate their occupational capital, knowing critical players in the field and familiarising themselves with ways to elevate their careers.

From Dushengnv capital to 'new Chinese' habitus

The one-child policy promised many women a certain kind of future. Xie (2021, p. 257) argues,

> the realisation of empowerment is reflected both consciously degendering their female self to appropriate 'manly' qualities, and meanwhile regendering themselves

by selectively using certain traditional gendered ideals in fashioning 'modern' Chinese womanhood.

This opens up the possibility of a different life. Higher education also liberates and empowers Chinese women in China, which works as a promise of a particular career future (Fong, 2004). Consequently, migration to Australia furthers that promise of a career and a new life in a specific way, freeing them from being 'Chinese' to some extent. The process of deploying their capital consciously and unconsciously enables Dushengnv to adopt practices and dispositions across contexts in both private and public domains and their positioning in the local ethnic community and digital space.

Dushengnv capital, as demonstrated above, is significant in terms of its class, gender, migration, culture and temporality; it is different from existing forms of capital. Combining an intersectional analysis with an extended understanding of Bourdieu's capital and habitus is vital for unpacking the specificities of what Dushengnv possess and accumulate. This approach underscores Dushengnv capital concerning the 'tormentedness' (Tabar et al., 2010, p. 170) of this habitus, which lies in its connections through multiple layers of habitus but also oscillates through different contexts (Noble, 2013). It is dynamic and fluid, transformative across space and time, but also containing dissonance.

Dushengnv thus has some capacity to move across space and time and adopt these changes and develop their dispositions, transitioning from the private domain to public domains, including workplace, community and society. Meanwhile, numerous layers of dispositions, from significant social and historical scales to everyday micro and temporal mobility, likely generate and reorient dispositions in complex ways. There is also a specificity of one-child policy experiences, to the general compression of time and changes from the post-Mao period to open up. It pushes us to think of Dushengnv as a dynamic and intersectional category. As I will explore later in Chapter Four, many new Chinese professional women, who were born under the effect of the one-child policy, experienced this sense of time compression and face the challenges of multiple temporal dimensions at three levels: at the macro level, misrecognition of qualifications (also experienced by other migrant women); at the meso level at work, intersectional changes such as concentrations of gender and

cultural capital; and at the micro level in everyday life dissonances and differences in daily practices.

Conclusion

Following on from Martin (2022a), Xu (2021), Xie (2021), Fong (2011), Liu (2018) and Tu (2018), this chapter has argued that a nuanced understanding of new Chinese professional women is needed. More specifically, I have drawn attention to these emerging middle-class professionals via an intersectional approach. Existing research concerning migration and women has often focused on the interplays of both, but the influence of the one-child policy on Chinese women migrants is less studied. A small body of research has touched on Chinese women as one of the sub-themes in considering their overseas study and their careers within mainland China and overseas (Xie, 2021; Martin, 2022a; Zhang & Xu, 2020). However, a complex and dynamic approach is needed to capture the fluidity and temporality of their experiences.

This chapter has presented a range of key literature and ideas for analysing the experiences of new Chinese professional women, exploring how their lives have been influenced by state policies, economic changes, family socialisation, and migration, all with a focus on the promises embedded within their education, work, and movement. Within this context, two conceptual themes, namely Dushengnv Capital and the emergence of a new Chinese habitus, have arisen as a result of my in-depth engagement with the data and analytical efforts. It is important to note that these themes were not deliberately planned but rather organically emerged from my research. As astutely observed by Bourdieu, conceptual categories do not directly mirror reality; instead, they serve as invaluable heuristic tools that facilitate comprehension and interpretation of the available data. This thesis aims to explore the impact of the one-child policy on the experiences of these women, delving into the complex interplay of gender, work, migration, and ethnicities that they navigate. By conceptualising Dushengnv capital, this research sheds light on the often-overlooked consequences of the one-child policy on Chinese professional women, particularly in terms of their career choices, workplace dynamics, and family life.

Chapter Three – Locating new Chinese professional women: Research design, research process and multifaceted positionality

Introduction

This chapter maps out the research design, research methods and data analysis utilised to answer my research questions. To capture the richness of the experiences of new Chinese professional women, I have employed mixed methods in this study. I begin with some discussion of Australia as a research site and include a review of the Australian census data on Chinese migration trends since the year 2000 for the consideration of the significant increase in new Chinese migrants in Australia (ABS, 2006). These quantitative data are helpful for mapping out the changing dynamics and diversity of Chinese migrants. The chapter also offers some evidence from Australian authorities to illustrate a growing presence of new Chinese professional women, including general demographic characteristics of their education, occupation, age groups and visa status.

That data provided the foundation of the survey, which is discussed next. The survey also worked as a screening vehicle to seek informants for this project. Following that section, I discuss the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews to investigate the accounts by new Chinese women of their lives, focusing on their migration and career trajectories, experiences at work and life generally in Australia. I also utilise diaries as a supplement on a small and selective proportion of informants. Qualitative studies are helpful to capture the subjective perspectives of participants (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and they are 'especially effective for studying subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviours' (Babbie, 2020, p. 326). They also allow the methodological richness to explore participants' subjectivities.

The qualitative element of the project cannot, of course, allow for generalised claims about whole populations. Still, a mixed methods approach provides the researcher with a degree of triangulation of data by bringing together the diverse sources. Thus, the strength of this research design provides a detailed empirical study of a specific cohort of Chinese migrants

that, within the broader scholarship of migration studies, allows for a sociological understanding of the individual experiences of new Chinese professional women working and living in Australia.

Following this, I discuss aspects of recruitment, selection and the make-up of the participants. I also then consider my approach to data analysis. Finally, I discuss my own position. Positionality has been one of the central concerns in qualitative migration research. I experienced complex and multifaceted relationships with my participants during the fieldwork and continued navigating them as I progressed. Ganga and Scott (2006) argue that interviewing as an insider within one's cultural community may provoke a paradoxical position between shortening social proximity and increasing awareness of partial class division between the interviewer and interviewees. Ryan (2015) emphasises the need for multidimensional positionality and moves away from simplifying insider and outsider perspectives. More specifically, she calls for attention to the temporal and dynamic rhythms of one's positions, including gender, age, professional and parental status, among others.

New Chinese in Australia

As indicated in Chapter One, we know that new Chinese migrants are on the rise within the Chinese diaspora in Australia, but we have little information or a quantitative sense of their significance, specifically in Sydney. This section thus draws on the official statistics in Australia to build some foundation to narrow down questions in the survey, as well as to propose some areas of discussion in the interview process. New Chinese migrants are often categorised as a homogenous group. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021) offers valuable demographic data that provides more detailed insights on Chinese migrants and their children. In this section, I mainly focus on the Australian Census conducted in 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021 to draw out the significance of statistics on the Chinese.

The dynamics of Chinese as a category

The Australian Census 2001 categorised Chinese by ancestry and the language they spoke at home. The languages were Cantonese (40% of the ancestry group), Mandarin (24%), other Chinese languages (6%) and other Southeast Asian languages (9%) (ABS, 2001).

In the Australian Census of 2006, 'People born in China' were identified specifically, with China 'defined as excluding the Taiwan Province and the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau' (ABS, 2008). It also calculated 'net overseas migration' patterns based on its population and housing data. Other significant changes were identified in the Australian Census of 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021, as shown in the following table.

Table 3.1: Demographics of the population born in China 2006–2017 (ABS, 2006, 2011, 2016; Department of Home Affairs, 2018)

Year of census	2006	2011	2016	2021
The population of people born in China	206,588	318,969	509,557	549,618
Sex (%)	female 54.8	female 55.61	female 56	female 56.3
The median age of Chinese-based residents	39	35	34	39
Visa categories	61.3% through skill stream; 36.85 under the family stream, 1.0% as part of humanitarian program	not available	36.3% became an Australian citizen	41.4% became Australian citizen
Occupational profiles	professionals 21.8%	not available	professionals 28.2%	professionals 31.6%
Education	postgraduate level 18.6%; undergraduate level 37.4%	not available	undergraduate level and above 43.4%	undergraduate level and above 50.1%
English proficiency	64.6% of China-born proficient in spoken English	37.55 of China-born speak English very well	65.8% of China-born speak English very well or well	63.9% of China-born speak English very well or well; 3.4% speak English only.

The 2016 Census showed that Australia has become home to more than 1.2 million people of Chinese ancestry, of which 41 per cent were born in China (ABS, 2016). Sydney attracts 'two out of every five Australian residents born in China (44 per cent)'. It is therefore a

critical research site because of its enormous popularity among Chinese migrants. As the biggest city in Australia, Sydney is the hub for multinational businesses and therefore has a concentration of white-collar professions (Anderson et al., 2019). According to the Census of Population and Housing (ABS, 2016), females make up nearly 30 per cent of Chinese migrants employed in the Greater Sydney Area.

While the Australian Census has gathered comprehensive information on people born in China, the ABS has attempted to avoid homogenising this population. It offers detailed descriptions of this group, with language and education information (except for the Census year 2011, which gave no insights into this population-related statistics). Despite some missing data, there are clear patterns here. The median age of Chinese-background residents became younger, dropping from 39 to 33.6 in the past ten years, and, as we saw above, the proportion that is female is increasing. Moreover, the majority of the Chinese-born population has proficient English skills (ABS, 2016).

According to the Department of Home Affairs, skilled migration is the leading visa category for people born in China to gain permanent residency in Australia. The following table demonstrates that skilled visa holders are growing steadily from 60.4 per cent to 63.1 per cent. This pattern also points to the importance of studying Chinese professionals in Australia.

Table 3.2: Percentages of skilled visas among the people born in China 2014‑2018 (Department of Home Affairs, 2018)

Migration category	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
Skilled visas as a proportion of all permanent visas (%)	60.4	60.6	62.3	63.1

Drawing from these sources, I was able to map out broad demographic characteristics of the latest waves of Chinese migrants since 2000, including their occupation patterns in Australia. This data also allowed me to examine generational differences, particularly across the Australian Census (2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021). The most popular professions among skilled visa holders are accountants, software and application

programmers, civic engineering professionals, marketing and commerce professionals (DHA, 2018, 2022).

Mindful of related statistics from mainland China, I also collected secondary data from the Ministry of Education (MEPRC, 2019), and while it was not as comprehensive as I would have hoped, I was able to find enough data to understand the generational difference that emerged under the one-child policy era, as discussed in the Introduction. The MEPRC data also points to the fact that Australia is one of the most popular destination countries for pursuing further study and settling in, consistent with ABS and DHA statistics. All outlined above provided a broader context in which to understand the qualitative data of new Chinese professional women later in the study.

Research process: Surveys, interviews and diaries

As indicated earlier, the research process involved three steps: an online survey, followed by life history interviews, then selected participant diaries. The survey, posted on a university licensed platform Qualtrics, was designed for two primary purposes. Firstly, it was used to gather quantitative data, including demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, occupation and family status, for a wider sample than simply the interview participants. Other information included professional background, the length of work experience and residence in Australia, and childcaring responsibilities. It attempted to reach a wide range of participants in different occupations but with professional roles. Another purpose of this survey was to screen potential participants for a consequent interview. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

A call for participants was posted on well-known popular platforms among migrant Chinese, such as *tigtag, globalvisa, freeoz.org*, and expatriate communities, such as *Expat Women, Sydney Women's International Club, Sydney Expats* and *InterNations.* I also used professional networking sites, including *LinkedIn, WeChat* and *Facebook*, of which I am a member. Having worked as a consultant prior to my doctoral study, I was considered an 'insider' in the expatriate community with shared knowledge and challenges, which was

critical to attracting potential participants for this study. My position as an 'insider' will be elaborated on in a later section.

Survey methodology

A 'survey' is a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purposes of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members. (Groves et al., 2009, p. 2)

I used a survey to generate a broad sense of the characteristics of my potential participants within a wider sample – their shared demographic patterns, including occupations, industries, qualifications and birthplaces, as well as any generational significance based on my reading of existing research. As part of a larger sample, it provided a quantitative sense of what the cohort I was studying would look like, including the year they migrated to Australia, whether they had moved around since their arrival, and who they socialised with. These questions helped me to understand their choices in career and life in general. Also, the survey helped generate indicative, if not representative, statistics to identify what kind of white-collar occupations new Chinese professional women would generally undertake in Australia.

The survey was open between July 11 and November 15, 2019. Fifty-seven responses were recorded, including two later neglected entries of uncompleted replies or duplicated answers. In total, 20 questions in English and Mandarin were asked. A detailed list of survey questions is attached (see Appendix 2). Immediate responses to my surveys reached a peak within the first week, and I was able to secure ten participants for a follow-up interview after a close reading of my survey data. Individuals were approached via phone or email with a brief description of my study.

The survey also served the purpose of compiling some reference points to reflect the larger data from the ABS. These include a steady increase of Chinese migrants coming from mainland China since 2000; a transitional career or temporary job before long-term career planning; a general trend of pursuing a local higher education experience in Australia to accumulate qualifications and experience before entering the workplace.

Interviews were utilised to gain insights into participants' accounts of their lives, and especially their experiences of migration, work and family. As Babbie (2020) argues, 'being there' and talking with them is an invaluable technique to unpack the rich complexity of the nature of human affairs. Interviewing empowers participants to demonstrate their agency, which adds value to existing knowledge in cross-examining cultural, social and racialised circumstances. Smith, writing on women's career decisions, argues that,

> via the life history interview process, a narrative is co-constructed as interviewers and narrators collaborate to make sense of the narration ... bringing their own meanings and interpretations to bear on it, reflecting [Liz Stanley's] notions of autobiography. (Smith, 2012, p. 488)

Moreover, while interviews do not provide unmediated access to people's experiences as data, the data require in-depth 'interpretation of what happens in life' (Pickering, 2008, p. 19). Silverman argues that the purpose of qualitative interviewing is not to 'get inside the head' of a particular group and to tell things from their 'point of view' (2013, p. 201), because 'you cannot magically assume the position and perspective from within which their own lives are lived' (Pickering, 2008, p. 20). What matters is the 'duality of structure' in experiences, including the process of 'self-interpreting' and 'attending to others' experience' in the various accounts given of it (Pickering, 2008, p. 20). In doing so, interviewing is a valuable process for participants to reflect on themselves in various situations at work and their negotiation of multiple-dimensional identities in describing their everyday practices and major life trajectories. Using semi-structured questions, the interview allowed participants to examine complicated issues around ethnicity and gender in making sense of their own situated and embodied experiences.

Life history interviewing draws on people's lives, elucidating the full range of impacts of social, cultural, economic, institutional and political elements (Goldman et al., 2003). It is valuable in reflecting on participants' identities in their everyday mobility and practice around their professionalism and family-related roles. Sociologists 'use life stories to

understand and define relationships as well as group interactions and memberships'. Therefore, it is 'a highly contextualised, personalised approach to gathering qualitative information about the human experience'. Many feminist scholars consider life history interviews as the way for a female voice to be 'given more opportunities to be heard and understood' (Atkinson, W. 2011, pp. 570–571).

Initial interviews lasted between one and three hours and comprised pre-structured and open questions (see Appendix 1). Questions included participants' professional and personal lived experiences, family background in China, workplace, current family status, and professional and personal experiences in Australia. At the beginning of each interview, I strictly followed WSU ethical processes by informing my participants of the detailed information sheet and consent form.

To capture significant everyday experiences, I arranged a second interview with those participants who may have encountered sensitive issues around work and life. The follow-up interview was scheduled on workdays close to their workplace or over the weekend close to home. In doing this, I was able to study participants' 'experiences in context and experience first-hand what the users experience' (Baxter et al., 2015, p. 194).

Diaries as a supplement

A way of capturing key moments in the participant's paid and unpaid work and family lives was to ask them to keep a two-week diary with structured questions. It allowed me to analyse their experience as 'seen through her eyes' (Baxter et al., 2015, p. 194). and to consider the role of language in their everyday practices. Liu (2006) argues that Western research methods and ideas need to be adopted and researchers should allow for specific socio-cultural practices when researching Chinese populations. Even though my participants were living in Australia at the time of being interviewed, they appreciated small gestures adopted at their convenience, such as writing a diary in Chinese at their preferred time. The diaries were structured around four questions, asking for a general description of their day, their workload, feelings and any significant moments. The questions were designed to allow informants to enter as many details as they wanted. I also

asked them to include a daily to-do list or shopping list in their diary entries. They were welcome to add pictures, videos or images to their diaries. Five participants submitted their two-week journals. Four wrote in Chinese, one wrote in English in detail. Their logs had rich insights into daily routines and some moments of disruption.

Participants' recruitment and selection

During the research, I interviewed 21 women born in mainland China and now resident in Sydney (see Table 3.3 below). The recruitment criteria included women who:

- Held a relevant educational qualification either in China, Australia or other countries and were currently employed in a white-collar occupation that required specific academic training and work experience (e.g., accountant, financial/business specialist, technical support, business administrator, professional staff in the higher education sector, interpreter/translator), which reflected the main migrant categories of ethnic Chinese in Australia since 2010 (ABS, 2011).

- Self-identified as a professional Chinese woman and migrated to Australia after 2000 (for the consideration of the trend of pursuing higher education in Australia).

- Self-identified as closely impacted by one-child policy, either born under the effectiveness of the policy or made specific life decisions because of it.

- Were actively employed (not on leave) in a small, medium or large enterprise that involved other colleagues and workplace culture.

- Had experienced various visa statuses (including achieving citizenship, permanent residence, temporary visa). This consideration allowed me to explore how their attitude changed over time and whether it affected their ability to integrate into the Australian workplace.

- Came from various marital and family statuses (including being single or married and having children or not).

These criteria pertain to the classification of New Chinese professional women, a term that I acknowledge as fluid and subjective. It includes women who, despite being born outside mainland China, identify themselves as "Chinese" within the Australian context. It was during my fieldwork that the significance of belonging to the Dushengnv generation became apparent, manifesting as an almost universal quality among my participants, with only a few exceptions. Majority of the participants, except for one, were born during the years of the one-child policy (1982-2015), and all but four were the sole children in their families. As I started contemplating the concept of "Dushengnv capital" as a useful framework to describe the characteristics of my participants, I encountered the challenge of reconciling the inclusion of individuals who did not strictly meet the formal definition (i.e., not born during the one-child policy years and not being the only child). However, I chose to retain these four participants because they identified themselves within the broader category of new Chinese professional women. Their responses served as a basis for comparison, enabling the isolation of factors specific to the strictly Dushengnv participants.

One particular aspect of this specificity, which I delve into in later sections of my thesis, revolves around the expectations placed on Dushengnv to achieve success in both traditional gender roles and amounted new societal expectations. They are anticipated to excel as dutiful daughters, wives, and mothers, while also striving for successful careers. The inclusion of the four cases involving women with siblings (three of whom were born during the one-child policy period) offers an opportunity to examine and evaluate this argument. For the age criteria, all participants except one were born after the 1980s. The senior participant was included due to her compelling stories about her strong desire to have another child, which was not possible under the one-child policy. Additionally, her extensive experience in Australia was deemed significant for contrasting with the experiences of other professional women in the country.

In this research, I investigated professional women's accounts of their class, gender and ethnicity in their workplace and life changes along with their migration process. I endeavoured to capture their experiences through their professionalism across different

nation-states, their perspectives on womanhood, having partners, being a mother, and the dynamics with their extended family. To grapple with the multiple influences that have impacted upon their mobility, I found it was valuable to draw on their migration experience before departure, during the migration process and after migration.

Following the survey screening, upon their confirmation of interest, I contacted each participant to propose a time for an interview. I conducted individual interviews close to participants' workplaces or residences at the interviewee's preference. Communicating in their mother tongue was valuable for drawing a deeper understanding of their subjectivities and relational positions and developing a solid rapport with participants. As Lee et al. indicate, 'interview language may serve as a better measure for acculturation especially among foreign-born populations with a high proportion of limited English proficiency' (2011, p. 244). I also noticed during my interviews that some participants tended to shift from English to Chinese when they intended to express solid emotions or discuss in a more interpersonal sense concerning specific topics, including intimate relationships with their partners. Consequently, I explained in Chinese what kind of questions would be asked and ensured they were aware of their rights not to answer any questions or withdraw from my project if they wanted to at any stage. At the end of each interview, I offered my participants an opportunity to review their transcripts, but none requested to do so. Some participants wanted to see my publication in the future when I took note of their requirements.

Once I started my interviews, I asked participants to refer their friends or colleagues for my research. Five participants for my interviews were recruited through snowballing. Using snowballing techniques allowed me to target specific participants of similar professional backgrounds.

All the conversations were recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to protect their identities. Eleven were conducted in English and transcribed directly, and the rest were in Chinese and translated by me. I decided to translate and transcribe all the interviews myself for two reasons: on the one hand, it helped familiarise myself with the data and revisit the interview moments and map out the main themes of each interview while

transcribing; on the other hand, the conversations in Chinese were better translated by myself as a professional translator, as I understood the importance of accuracy and when to delve more deeply rather than literally translate what might seem like trivial details. I captured the experiences from their Chinese expressions and converted them into concise English presentations of similar significance. I was concerned that not many transcribing services would be able to do this. I also kept reflective journals during the transcription process, noting moments of difficult or unclear topics in these conversations. In doing so, I was able to compile some questions for a follow-up interview with some participants.

A second interview was scheduled six months later with ten participants. I followed up with these participants to discuss issues raised in the first interview in a more private space, during a lunch break on a workday close to work or on a weekend centred around family life. It was interesting to observe how they described some points about family and work relationships in more detail and more comfortably than they had the first time. My observations and the data from the two interviews served to triangulate significant themes.

Table 3.3: List of interview participants

	Name	Age	Occupation	Qualification	Family status	Self-identified Dushengnv	Interview	Diaries
1	Abby	36	Senior Project Officer	PhD	Married with two children	Yes	2	Yes
2	Bella	29	Senior Engineer	Master's	Married	Yes	2	Yes
3	Charlotte	26	Media Coordinator	Master's	Single	Yes	1	No
4	Darcie	28	Junior Engineer	Master's	Married	Yes	1	No
5	Effy	28	Junior Engineer	Master's	In a partnership	Yes	1	No
6	Fiona	33	Senior Accountant	Master's	Married with one child	Yes	1	No
7	Gina	37	Retail Saleswoman	Master's	Divorced with one child	No (second girl, born in the rural regions)	1	Yes

8	Holly	28	Business Analyst	Master's	In the middle of divorcing	Yes	1	No
9	Iris	30	Research Officer	Master's	Married	Yes	1	No
10	Lucy	36	Junior Accountant	Master's	Married with one child	Yes	2	Yes
11	Judy	37	Assistant Accountant	Master's	Married with two children	Yes	2	No
12	Kayla	31	Tutor	PhD	Single	Yes	1	No
13	Mia	37	HR Director	Master's	Married with two children	No (second girl, born in the rural regions)	2	No
14	Nicole	37	Research Officer	PhD	Married with one child	No (second girl, born in the rural regions)	2	Yes
15	Olivia	49	Small business owner	Bachelor	Married with two children	No (was born before one-child policy)	1	No
16	Penny	43	Senior Research Officer	PhD	Married with one child	No (born in Hong Kong)	1	No
17	Quinn	32	Small business owner	2 Master's	Married with one child	Yes	2	No
18	Rosie	34	Office admin	Bachelor	Married with one child	Yes	2	No
19	Sky	30	Environmental Engineer	Master's	Single	Yes	1	No
20	Tess	36	Production Coordinator	Bachelor	Married with two children	Yes	2	No
21	Victoria	39	Curator	Master's, currently enrolled for PhD study	Married with one child	Yes	2	No

Several features emerged as significant characteristics across my survey data. Over 82 per cent of survey participants were aged between 25 and 44, with a median age of 37. More than three quarters of the informants self-identified as Dushengnv. More than 72 per cent of participants reported that Sydney was not their destination upon their arrival. Slightly over 90 per cent of the respondents came from mainland China, and a small proportion was from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Their visa status varied, and all respondents held valid visas. Over two-thirds of participants had Australian permanent residency or citizenship. Among the remaining one-third of participants on a temporary permit, the majority were studying and working. Family status was also diverse. Over 73 per cent of participants reported being married.

The date of arrival varied. Less than 1 per cent of respondents reported coming to Australia before 2000, whereas close to one-third came between 2000 and 2010. Over half of the participants arrived in Australia after 2010. This 1 per cent of respondents was excluded from the study because of their arrival prior to 2000. This trend of mobility has been consistent with that of Chinese international students since 2000 (Hu et al., 2020). It also reinforced my rationale for the year 2000 being significant for my research cohort.

Regarding educational background, more than 73 per cent of participants reported having a postgraduate degree or above, and less than 20 per cent had a bachelor's degree. Only an insignificant proportion of respondents reported having a diploma or certificate. This finding was consistent with ABS statistics, which documented a relatively high educational qualification among Chinese migrants. It aligned with my interview participants' professions and my rationale for choosing professional women as my research subjects.

Table 3.4: Places of completion of highest qualification among research participants

Places of completion of their highest qualification	Mainland China	Australia	Other
Percentage (%)	20	68	12

Further education in Australia, particularly a postgraduate or above degree, allowed the women to gain their qualifications and local working experiences before entering Australian workplaces. Navigating the pathway from study to migration opened up possibilities for transnational mobility from China to Australia. However, as Robertson (2013) argues, this move from education to migration is often not smooth, but a 'staggered' process. Acquiring degrees in Australia did not necessarily prepare new Chinese professional women for a smooth transition from their studies to work.

Their employment varied. Over 76 per cent reported having a full-time job at the time of completing this survey. More than 42 per cent of participants claimed to experience a career change after migrating to Australia, while over half of participants reported remaining in the same occupation before and after their migration. Participants' professions covered a wide range that included administration, consultancy, education, engineering, business and marketing.

Upon arrival in Australia, the time it took to secure their first job varied from within a week to longer than six months. Less than a quarter found their first job within a month of their arrival, while 15 per cent took two to six months to find one and more than 20 per cent reported a challenging time of over six months to seek employment. There was an overall pattern of temporal or transitional job status reported in this survey. Transitional occupations included entry-level administration, cashier, aged care, childcare, sales and hospitality worker. All professions seemed to fall into a gendered division of labour or functional roles with poor pay rates and precarity.

Half of the survey participants reported working for small and medium enterprises, which generally had less than 100 employees, and the other half worked for corporations larger than 100 employees. Over 80 per cent of respondents reported working for a multicultural workplace with co-workers other than Chinese background. More than half of the survey participants said that their workplace had more female co-workers than male ones. Regarding channels to look for work, 62 per cent of the survey participants reported using social media and popular websites. LinkedIn was the most preferred platform to seek jobs and professional connections.

Participants reported different choices regarding family life after work and over the weekend. 76 per cent of my survey participants engaged in physical exercise, and 41 per cent reported a frequency of once a week. For those participants with a child or children, nearly half of them reported undertaking most tasks of picking up and dropping off children at school and staying at home to look after them in the event of sickness.

To sum up, this survey was useful for mapping out the general trends among new Chinese professional women since 2000. Even though the sample was small, it was consistent with the Australian Census data and, therefore, it was helpful to illustrate some trending statistics concerning general demographic features. Meanwhile, it also pointed to potential participants for the following interviewing process.

Data analysis

Throughout my research process, I conducted three rounds of data analysis, employing a range of techniques and tools. Initially, I organised the data into a preliminary analysis using spreadsheets, focusing on conventional categories, such as participants' occupations, family statuses, and migration statuses. Concurrently, as I transcribed the interviews, I made note of significant themes that emerged. These themes gradually developed into more heuristic ideas as I engaged further with the data.

Subsequently, I employed Dedoose, an online qualitative analysis software, to upload and analyse all the interview transcriptions. For the consequent data analysis, I employed thematic analysis techniques, which involve identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility, allowing for exploration of research questions, sample size, data collection methods and meanings. Its experiential approach aimed to gain insight into participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Dedoose proved invaluable in validating my initial coding themes in a structured manner, helping shape the empirical chapters of my study. Overarching themes emerged from a combination of literature review, research design, and informal discussions. These themes

encompassed a wide range of topics, including ethnicity/race, language, migration, career planning, paid work, family life, being Dushengnv, self-care, and career trajectories. Through Dedoose, I examined these themes with consideration for temporal and spatial changes, mapping significant milestones in participants' life trajectories such as the experience of having a child, settling in Australia, and securing long-term employment. The inclusion of diaries further guided the research focus, facilitated interpretation of interview data, and aided in identifying patterns within the interview themes.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the overarching themes, I cross-referenced my spreadsheets with coding strategies in Dedoose. This approach allowed for the examination of patterns and frequencies of co-occurring codes, systematic re-examination of quotations related to participants' lived experiences, and capturing the inherent complexity and "messiness" of the data (Mootz et al., 2020). Consistent with my theoretical framework, the overarching themes were organised into distinct categories, forming separate chapters within my research. This structured analysis approach facilitated a coherent and in-depth exploration of the data, enhancing the overall clarity of the findings.

Multifaceted and complex positionality: Interviewer and interviewee relationship

Australia was chosen as the research site for several reasons. Firstly, its diverse and multicultural population provided an ideal setting for examining the experiences of migrant professionals, with a particular focus on Chinese women who have emerged as a significant migrant group in recent years. Moreover, Australia offered a unique context that allowed for an exploration of the impact of flexible work arrangements and childcare support on the career decisions of professionals. While it is important to acknowledge that Australia may not be representative of all global contexts, its distinct social and cultural characteristics offer valuable insights into the intricate interplay between migration and societal transformations. By investigating the experiences of professionals in Australia, this research aims to contribute to broader discussions on the challenges and opportunities encountered by migrant professionals across different contexts. Finally, it is worth noting

that the selection of Australia as the research site was also influenced by personal convenience. During the study, I was simultaneously raising a child, and conducting research in Australia proved to be a logistically feasible option.

As a new Chinese professional woman and non-Dushengnv in the strict sense (though still a member of what I have termed the Dushengnv generation), I have experienced several challenges in conducting my research, particularly navigating the positionality of 'insider' and 'outsider' throughout the research process. Ryan (2015) urges migration scholars to move beyond fixed 'insider' ethnic categories to explore how multiple identities are reconstructed through migration. In particular, the researcher needs to build rapport, understanding and empathy in various differentiated situations. As a young migrant researcher on a temporary study visa, I often found it easy to open discussions with participants, mainly asking for their help to finish my study. Like Leung (2015), my participants often showed empathy with me straight away and started to share their insights on navigating the Australian education system. As a professional woman and a mother, I connected with my participants in many aspects – similar struggles in juggling work and family, searching for an inner self and re-establishing our presence in the Australian workplace and broader society – although none of these experiences was easy. Also, because of this closeness, I sometimes questioned my objectivity in my research and always attempted to maintain some distance while building a certain level of trust with my participants.

The data collection process was also a 'moving down' cycle (Ganga & Scott, 2006) as I explained my status as an international student and researching in a second language. Some participants immediately relaxed and talked about their early days of studying here and shared tips such as managing stress, earning extra income and saving money. It was thus a shift of power dynamics and socio-economic situation between us. But with the ongoing interview process, I also shared some insights about Australian workplace policies and other aspects in my research. I 'moved up' as an expert in migration studies to them.

Some participants experienced changes in their career trajectories. I would reflect on my career prospects and sometimes find myself losing focus. Observing some 'staggered'

migration, I was sympathetic as well – how can such skilled professionals with proficient English and other professional capabilities not be accepted within a multicultural society? I had empathy for the participant who had experienced relationship tensions. Again, this system failed to protect those with temporary visas who needed support after devoting many years of financial capital and life here. During my interviews, I aimed to position myself as a researcher and reminded them of my position when our conversation became too personal. At the same time, I did not intend to lose this rapport in gaining the nitty-gritty everyday details from them.

Liu (2006) argues that it is crucial to balance Western sociological and feminist research methods with socio-cultural practice when researching Chinese professional women's lives as an 'insider'. I had to maintain reflexivity and remain at some distance from my participants. A few approached me some time after our interview via WeChat to seek advice on marriage matters. I was, however, uncomfortable with this idea and, after consultation with my supervisors, I reinforced the fact that I was a researcher to maintain a professional relationship with them. I made it clear that I was not a counsellor, but suggested they seek professional help. I also kept reflection journals along the way, noting my struggles and capturing my thoughts.

It was quite interesting to observe some interviewees' accounts as Dushengnv (in the strict sense, as single children). As a non-Dushengnv myself, I was extremely fortunate to be born under the strict implementation of the one-child policy. I came from a rural region in the middle part of China, Anhui Province, where a second child was possible if the first child was a girl, but I had an elder brother. My parents paid a huge penalty to the local government for an exchange of registration of my legal birth – they sold everything of value at the time including livestock, jewellery, furniture and timber. I was also grateful to be raised in a society and era that gave girls more opportunities in higher education and professional life. I have observed more significant and intensified differences in career and life expectations than my Dushengnv peers – my parents never pressured me to do well at school or to undertake the task of family upward mobility through a professional career because my brother is the one who shoulders those responsibilities. Participants often

went on to describe their struggles in life, particularly the intensified feelings of not being able to breathe because of their parental close involvement since childhood. Sometimes they would ask me if I was also Dushengnv. Some envy often showed on their faces when they learnt that I had an elder brother. I could sense a sudden step back after that. What I often did was to share a similar experience that I was raised like a Dushengnv as well due to a large age gap with my brother: I sort of experienced similar loneliness as some participants indicated. I also found it was easy to build the rapport again through sharing similar childhood memories of schooling and TV shows we grew up with. This trivial conversation consequently restored the rapport required to keep our conversation going.

Throughout my candidature, I maintained a keen awareness of my unique social position. To actively reflect on my career-related experiences and frustrations, I diligently maintained a journal. Additionally, I worked closely with my supervisory panel to address and mitigate any potential biases that might have emerged. While I did not explicitly communicate this methodological approach to the research participants, I remained mindful of my various identities as a migrant, non-Dushengnv, professional, and Chinese woman. By consistently adopting a reflexive approach to my research, I sought to uphold the utmost rigor and impartiality in my interpretations and findings. Throughout my journey, I frequently experienced a sense of shifting positions in various contexts. There were instances when I assumed different roles – that of a researcher, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a semi-Dushengnv, a woman, and a professional. Moreover, I remained acutely aware of my 'privileged' position and recognised the need to step back from my research, analysing the data with as much objectivity as possible. Recognising the importance of multifaceted positionality and the complexities involved in maintaining a professional rapport with my participants, I developed a reflexive but more streamlined perspective on my research project.

Conclusion

Utilising mixed methods with a qualitative approach generated rich data and fulfilled the research design. Secondary data from Australian authorities offered a statistical foundation

for selecting my research participants. A survey built on that achieved a relatively small sample but reflected consistent trends with Australian authorities. Consequently, the life history interview allowed the informants to reflect on their individual experiences – in terms of voicing their struggles and successes but also provoking discussions around complicated issues. At times, they experienced constraints under this 'privileged' and 'lost' generation being the only child in their family, identifying their uniqueness in Chineseness and transnational experiences (Smith, 2011). This 'privilege' was reflected in their access to family resources and the generation of significant social, economic and cultural change and positioning through globalisation. The 'lost' sense was because of these unprecedented changes that they experienced that were new to their parental generation, a loss of historical heritage, and a gap in adopting nuanced social and cultural differences through their migration. Therefore, a key strength of my qualitative approach was teasing out the significance of generational trends and a historical framework for analysing this cohort of new Chinese professional women. It also allowed me to examine the mundane dimensions of everyday practice and grapple with an in-depth understanding of their lives. In the following chapters, I extend this discussion of new Chinese professional women in Australia, centred on the complexities of their career, workplace experiences and family life.

Chapter Four – Careers of new Chinese professional women: Planning, pathways and changes

Introduction

That's our life, that's our pathway, that's my network. (Victoria, 39, Curator)

What is a 'career' for new Chinese professional women who migrate to improve their lives? How can we understand their career planning and experiences of career change? To answer these questions, I draw on responses from one participant, Judy, regarding her fragmented career trajectory to demonstrate an example of the interplay of experiences of '*inequality regimes*', the '*motherhood penalty*' and a '*staggered migration pathway*' to unpack the complexity of professional women's career choices. Next, I analyse downward mobility and forced housewiving, which affect the career trajectories of new Chinese professional women, not necessarily in terms of professional decline but in a contingent navigation of limited choices given the constraints on their time and ability to foster support networks. In the next two sections of this chapter, I look at transitional careers through the online platform WeChat, as an alternative space for professional women to develop their careers. Through some examples of interview data, I seek to present different pathways to demonstrate how inequality regimes shape new Chinese professional women's career planning and change. Then I move on to entrepreneurship as an example of successful or temporary attempts at upward mobility by some participants. I argue that new Chinese professional women's choices of career are complex, which requires a multidimensional approach to understanding them. Participants' choices of career result from constant negotiation with their partner, their extended family and their support network. This chapter suggests that these processes, common to many migrant women, are especially intense for those who are children of the one-child policy, across the demands of paid work, family and domestic life.

A career, for professionals, is often seen as a project of the self (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005; Wajcman, 1999). There is a tendency to conceptualise a career as a way of self-realisation as a result of receiving higher education and achieving possible social mobility (Tu, 2018). More specifically, Australia's social and cultural context and the promise of a work-life balance in a freer 'lifestyle' setting offer more options than in China (Pocock, 2003). The working contract is changing, with an increasing emphasis on 'flexible', casual and part-time work, in particular, making it seem possible for professional women to have a career and spend more time with their young children. They can make temporary choices between work and life, but these have consequences. At times, they seem voluntary and beneficial; however, they can be at the cost of a 'broken' career trajectory, with women finding themselves on the 'mummy track' (Schwartz, 1992). Motherhood can become an obstacle to their career progression. Numerous studies demonstrate that a 'masculine' organisational structure works against employees with child-rearing responsibilities (Berggren & Lauster, 2014; Kelley et al., 2020) and workers with fixed working commitments, hours and responsibilities (Acker, 2006a).

As a result, career pathways are often highly gendered. Many factors, including a constantly changing organisational structure (Wajcman, 1999), the vast differences in corporate operations in mainland China and Australia, the flattened hierarchies in small and medium enterprises, the overall design of career trajectories 'to fit men's life course' (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, p. 77), seem to force professional women to have broken or interrupted career trajectories. Besides, migration is often phrased as a deskilling process because of the linguistic disparity and nonequivalent qualification recognition between China and Australia, adding an overarching barrier and reinforcing nonlinear career trajectories (Ho, C. 2006a, 2008).

In particular, a seemingly better work-life balance attracts new Chinese professional women. The concept of a 'working life' also encapsulates the challenges here – the boundaries between work and life are blurred, work becomes life, and life is part of or serves work (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005). A career, therefore, can work not just in terms of

narrowly 'economic' motives but also as an exit strategy to depart from China and an entry ticket to migrate to a 'better life' in Australia.

As discussed in Chapter Two, new Chinese professional women in this project, who have equipped themself with proficient English skills and professional expertise, are often privileged minorities in the Australian workplace with specific language skills and cultural knowledge because of the growing business exchange between Australia and China. They, however, cannot escape the structural issues in the Australian workplace, including the gendered nature of the work contract, resulting in the reproduction of inequality regimes that play out in the gendered culture of the organisation. In some cases, these skilled professionals seek recognition for their qualifications, skills and experiences; they come up against gender issues across organisational structure and practices, and these are often subtle and impossible to challenge.

Fragmented career pathways

A career pathway often means multiple temporary career planning choices, which can lead to a career change, and, for migrants, a change of national location. In this section, I explore how different factors, including higher education, family status and geographical location, shape new Chinese professional women's career choices through a close examination of a case study of Judy's career trajectory. Her experience demonstrates the ways that gender, migration and motherhood can pull a woman away from the linear career pathway followed by many men.

Judy, a mother with two children, works as an assistant accountant. She was born in Beijing as the only daughter. Her parents had a career planned for her – first go to university and study law and then pursue a career in law enforcement. She went to Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, to undertake her undergraduate study in law. But Judy did not want to follow that designed career pathway. Instead, she came to Sydney in 2004 and completed her postgraduate studies in accounting in 2006. Judy found her first full-time job as a bookkeeper right after that and acquired Australian permanent residency. She worked in that job for two years until she got married and moved to Newcastle to be closer to her

husband's family. After that, she was pregnant with her first child and had one and a half years out the workforce but managed to undertake further studies for the Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) examination. With her working experience and a CPA certificate, Judy found a good position in an international corporation as a full-time project officer. Her daughter became sick, however, so she had to take a couple of months off to look after her. Her mother came from China and supported her for a while. Judy continued her job and thought she would progress smoothly, but she became pregnant with her second child and took one year off as maternity leave. When she returned to work at the same company, she had to switch to part-time to cope with the demands of looking after two young children. The workplace was quite understanding but, instead of giving Judy her previous position, they assigned her to a much lower position, in accounts payable. Judy did not like the routinised, repetitive work, so she quit that job and took six months off. She found another job at a local Christian school and worked as an assistant accountant – as a full-time employee where she had more flexible arrangements and could take school holidays off but was considered full-time. Judy's mobility started within China earlier on:

> *I had a little bit of [mobile] experience because I was born in Beijing, so it was the northern part of China, but I went to Hangzhou, which was a city not far away from Shanghai. I went there for my undergraduate studies… That was sort of preparation for my further study in Australia because I want to see the world and experience different cultures.*

In the above quote, Judy frames undertaking postgraduate study in Australia as her aspiration to 'experience the culture'. However, she had prepared herself through geographical mobility within China first. This step of internal movement built up her confidence for her later transnational mobility.

Robertson (2013) points to a direct nexus between higher education in Australia and migration settlement. Regarding Chinese international students specifically, Martin (2017, 2018) argues that Chinese young women may pursue higher education in Australia to delay their commitment to marriage and treat migration as an exit from the patriarchal relations in mainland China. Tu (2018) argues that one-child migrants in the UK use higher

education as a negotiation tool when dealing with parental involvement in the decision-making process and work strategically for the whole family's upward mobility. Similarly, Judy describes how her choice of higher education was part of a wider set of choices about career, migration and her envisioning of a future life, in several ways:

> *At that time, I researched things like why go to come here and what major should I choose? English is not my first language, and I also considered nursing because it's pretty easy to find a job here, although I had this fear when I saw blood. I passed from nursing. Australia doesn't have many choices, to be honest. I was pretty good at maths, so I'm thinking, accounting deals with numbers, I don't need to do more, I don't have to talk, [or] argue with people. Accounting doesn't need much conversation with people: just need to solve the problem of numbers; and at that time, accounting has the potential to immigrate here, I have this opportunity to immigrate here. These are open opportunities for me. So that is why I chose accounting.*

In reflecting on her career planning, she selected a major with potential career and migration prospects. Judy's rationale for choosing accounting as her major is complex. Firstly, Judy's direct endeavour is to negotiate with the options offered by Australian 'immigration regimes' (Ho, 2011) to plan for her future career. The decision to switch her major to accounting was influenced by the requirements of the Australian strategic skilled occupation lists, highlighting her determination to immigrate to Australia by any means possible. Demonstrating her linguistic and professional skills, as well as conducting thorough research and objective assessments of her interests, becomes crucial in maximising her chances of achieving a "better" career through the migration process. However, it is important to note that these considerations are also highly gendered, as her choice of occupations, such as nursing, aligns with the caring professions traditionally pursued by women. Both nursing and accounting carry a respectable social status. Therefore, her educational choices reflect a complex interplay of factors involving gender and migration.

Kennedy (2004) and Favell (2008) both suggest that the lives of young professionals are embedded in informal and small-scale industrial and professional networks. Judy's choice

of accounting as her career is situated as a 'functional job', which will open up opportunities for her. Her rationale for training for limited occupations is worth noting, to the extent that careers for 'white-collar' professionals are somewhat constrained:

> *At that time, to be honest, I had no idea. I thought I would wait and see. So, I was okay to stay here, or it is okay for me to go back to China. I am happy either way. I was open at that time.*

Ho argues that Singaporean migrants who have gone through different life and visa trajectories have developed 'accidental' careers through transnational mobility (Ho, 2011). However, there is no simple linear equation of education-migration-career. Judy's life changes when she has to take into account her relationship. There is a temporality and contingency to career trajectories that must be considered:

> *I left because my husband and I got married in Sydney and because he grew up in Newcastle. Moreover, he got a job in Newcastle after our wedding. We moved back to Newcastle, so that's why I resigned. This is the only reason I resigned. And I also feel that because it's a bookkeeper job. I learned basic skills, and I want to move to the next level. So why family relocation? I also wish to have a change.*

The change in her family status prompts a career change. The family's relocation from Sydney to Newcastle and her husband's new employment becomes her priority in life over her own career progression, interrupting her accumulation of occupational skills and experience. Judy's resignation from her job was rationalised by her identity of becoming a wife and an immediate sacrifice to a gendered role in her family. Ressia (2010) suggests that skilled dual-career migrant couples have to make a range of difficult choices as they seek employment, but skilled female migrants are often the ones that make the sacrifice to focus on their household roles. Moreover, child-rearing responsibilities complicate her career pathway:

> *And then, I found out that I was pregnant. I didn't work for one and a half years. I didn't. I wasn't well because of the morning sick[ness], and I took some exam to become a charted accountant, and I did that at that time. Basically, in the following*

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one and a half years, I didn't work, but I did some further study when I stayed in
Newcastle.

Chinyamurindi argues that in women's narratives their careers are framed in terms of being 'a means of professional attainment and recognition' (2016, p. 6). The experiences of their career success 'considered not only socio-historical issues and community but also the cultural milieu' (Chinyamurindi, 2016, p. 6). Judy also values a professional qualification even when she takes a step back from her career after her unexpected pregnancy. Still, she extends her professionalism by gaining the widely accepted professional CPA qualification to become an accountant. This qualification is used to fill a gap in her professional experiences in the workplace. Consequently, it helps secure her other employment as a professional:

> *That job didn't last very long. It was only one and a half years, and I had to resign*
> *again because my daughter was sick. She had a very nasty belly disease at that time.*
> *No one could look after her during the day. Because my husband had to work at that*
> *time and my in-laws, they also worked. My mother-in-law worked part-time. My*
> *father-in-law worked full-time. My mom hasn't migrated here. At that time, I was the*
> *only one who was supposed to look after her, so I resigned after one and a half years.*

Judy's second resignation is forced, as she struggles to find an appropriate social network to share her child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities. The absence of her husband's involvement reflects these responsibilities as a gendered role. In negotiating two different positions, as a professional and a mother, the latter is normalised as a priority. The 'only one' reflects her guilt as a 'mother', bonded by the social and cultural norms of prioritising 'mothering' responsibilities (Sethi et al., 2017). It also indicates the struggle of being the only daughter and lacking in social support:

> *I went back [to the workplace after her daughter got better six months later]. No, it's*
> *not the same company. It is another kind of international company. It is a big*
> *company. My position was as a finance officer. I learned many skills, like Excel, and*
> *how to analyse the report. It was a lovely company. And then I was pregnant again*

after two years. I left the company two years later after I was pregnant. I started my
second maternity leave.

Though Judy experienced multiple interruptions along her career pathway, she continually undertakes steps to reposition herself in career planning and accumulate her attainments and experiences for future career advancement. Judy lacks reliable support in shouldering her child-rearing responsibilities at home, which prevents her from staying on a linear path in her profession. Judy's situation represents the effects of the 'motherhood penalty' (Aranda & Glick, 2014). While Australia supports women on the legal level with comprehensive regulations guaranteeing maternity leave, practices within organisations do not necessarily realise that guarantee. It is common for women to return to paid work after childbirth; the problem is the quality of part-time work available to them. Judy's experience reflects this:

> *I didn't quit at that time. I started to have my maternity leave for one year. I talked*
> *with my boss. That job previously was full-time, but because I have two young children,*
> *I said I would like to work part-time. The company was supportive. However, they took*
> *me to another contract, it was a different office and a different contract. I accepted the*
> *job; the job was the accounts payable. I feel this job was repetitive, and I enjoyed the*
> *previous environment and the people from the previous office better. I just feel this job*
> *was too repetitive; it was not my career path. I tried for two months, and then I quit*
> *because I was looking for something else, you know?*

The organisational processes that create and re-create inequalities may have become more subtle and difficult to challenge (Acker, 2006a, p. 458). Judy's company is 'supportive' in that they granted her maternity leave and approved a shift from full-time to part-time, but the work they offered was at a much lower level and in a different working location and environment. Although the company fulfilled its legislative requirements, Judy is marginalised in her workplace. These practices represent indirect discrimination against motherhood, and this has particularly harsh consequences for those, such as migrant women, who cannot rely on wider social support mechanisms. While Judy is a highly

qualified accountant who works in a multinational corporation, and so is relatively privileged, she still suffers from this penalty.

Judy's experiences also offer empirical evidence of the gendered nature of the organisation – the masculine characteristics of workplace structure and occupations (Acker, 1990). The conflict between growing numbers of women professionals, with a strong sense of independence, and conventional gendered hierarchies, jobs and structural organisations is accelerating. White-collar professions, such as business analysts, accountants and financial managers, are designed for long working hours, as if their employees are single and have no family obligations. These problematic aspects push some professional women to change their career after having a child or shift their attention from family to work involuntarily. This was the case for Judy:

> *I took a break for a couple of months, six months to be exact. Then I took a job in a school. This is my current job. It was a Christian school, and I started the full-time position at the beginning, which was five days. Then after one year, my manager, she understands that I had a young family and she asked me whether I wanted to also have the school holidays off, because the school had a lot of school holidays here, right? I was really surprised that she asked me this. I asked if I could work part-time because at that time my mum needed to go back to China for travelling purposes. I knew no one could look after her [my daughter] on Monday[s]. She said this was fine, you can work for four days. She also asked me – would you like to have school holidays off. You know, I was really happy. Now I have school holidays I can take my children to somewhere to a park or travel a little bit. I am happy about my current job because it is flexible, and the colleagues are amazing.*

Judy's workplace acknowledges her challenges as a professional and a mother and offers some flexibility to support her role. As a result, Judy is grateful and dedicated to her work. The growth in part-time and casual contracts in Australia seems to offer more flexibility for women. However, this flexibility is problematic because it promotes a gendered norm whereby professional women choose their family over their career and because it offers men the expectation that their wives would make this choice, resonating with Martin's

claim that 'young Chinese women are also the target of a strong neotraditionalist counter-discourse that constructs adult women as "naturally" marriage and-family-oriented' (Martin (2022b, p. 4). Her claim directly links the post-reform Chinese state discourse, which subconsciously shapes the ideas of many professional women regarding work and family in times of conflicts. Judy's decision to change her work from full-time to part-time once again reflects her struggle to juggle full-time work and family. Additionally, this flexibility in part-time contracts slows down her career progression. It also represents Judy's attempt to negotiate with Australian immigration regimes. Her mother was her social support, but she was constrained by Australian immigration regulations and regularly had to travel outside Australia and could not always be there to make her full-time career possible.

Judy's struggles result from the 'oppressive ideology about motherhood – the "super mother" – 'whereby they are supposed to excel in their careers and simultaneously fulfil all the demands of full-time exclusive mothering, without sacrificing the demands of either role' (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, p. 51). With the constant negotiation between career and life, Judy aspires to independence, yet she is constrained by the status of being a woman and a mother with certain 'choices' forced upon her. It leads to a fragmented career pathway, mirroring the disrupted or 'staggered' pathways of many migrants. Judy's attempt to bring in her mother and in-laws to support her juggle between her work and life indicates that maintaining a professional career is almost impossible. But her personal struggle between career and life reflects a larger structural pattern around gender inequalities and migration regimes, organisational cultures and occupational hierarchies.

Judy's fragmented career was largely unavoidable because of the complicated life course involved in being a woman, a mother and a migrant. Fifteen years after her graduation with a master's degree in accounting and 13 years since acquiring a CPA certificate, she still has an entry-level accountancy job. Judy's consequential decisions each time, resigning and taking breaks, are shaped by her larger life milestones. With limited social support and internalised gender roles at home, her career gives way to these temporary suspensions. Even at times, with family support, Judy is restrained by structural regimes in the

workplace and Australian society. Yet Judy is a capable professional accountant, recognised by CPA Australia as a member, and has some family resources as her social support. Even faced with multiple disruptions in her career, Judy may still attain her professional goals. Her experience of being a marginalised professional woman does not stop her from trying to make choices that best accommodate the demands of both work and life.

Downward mobility

Downward mobility is not new for migrant workers, particularly in the context of Australia or elsewhere in the West (Gu, 2018; Ho, C. 2006b, 2008; Ressia, 2010). The barriers for migrants to achieving a professional career are generally seen in terms of their language proficiency (linguistic skills) (Birrell & Rapson, 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007), the lack of recognition of their previous qualifications or educational achievements (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007), and their lack of local working experiences or understanding pre-existing structural regimes (Acker, 2006a). Asian migrants, especially those like the Chinese who don't have a grounding in English, and whose educational experience is not consistent with the Australian system, are severely disadvantage in the Australian workplace (Ho, C. 2006a). Other factors, such as racial discrimination against Chinese migrants, further limit their ability to pursue various occupations. And when we factor in gender, and the historically male-dominated orientation in the migration process, skilled women migrants face more substantial challenges than male migrants (Cobb-Clark et al., 2005). More recently, there is scholarly awareness of the ways the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity and class impacts significantly on the lives of migrant women (Acker, 2006a; Wong, 2017).

As research in the sociology of work attests, the structural issues are compounded by implicit and explicit forms of discrimination against age and motherhood (O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Verniers & Vala, 2018). New Chinese professional women have to encounter another layer of obstacles coming from cultural stereotypes of prioritising motherhood over their career and shifting their focus from work to family life once they step into marriage and motherhood, what scholars have referred to as the 'motherhood penalty' and the 'mummy

track' (Schwartz, 1992). These pressures are particularly significant for strictly Dushengnv, as there is an urgency in their biographic time to find a partner and have a family (Xie, 2021). Being the only daughter, the participants in this study embrace more challenges in life associated with familial obligations, especially when their parents reach retirement and face the lack of social security in mainland China. The expectation of paying individual remittances and repayments to their parents sometimes forces my participants to take a lower position in hospitality or an entry-level job in their skilled occupation to bring in extra income for their wider family.

Lucy, aged 36, currently works as a junior accountant, but she used to be a manager in a big state-owned corporation in China. She has completed two master's degrees since she arrived in Australia six years ago. These haven't prevented her from experiencing downward mobility, and her account is full of frustration. She articulates the challenges of starting anew and the impact this has on her as a professional woman:

> *The most significant difference was … at the beginning, I would feel once we came here … we did not like the working environment in China. We felt that we would have much more freedom here, but we did not expect this kind of freedom to be at some cost. One of the prices we paid for this freedom was that we would never be able to climb the exact height of the ladder as we did in China. That was the biggest change here. Because we were already working at the managerial level in China, we had to restart from the bottom when we came here. Furthermore, the bottom here was so low that we have never experienced that in our lives before. Because I had a very smooth career back home [in China], I got my internship at the local broadcasting company even before graduation, and then I worked as a journalist. It happened so naturally. All the jobs I had in that company were easy to handle and good white-collar jobs for girls. Nevertheless, over here, I needed to earn some extra cash; I had to find jobs such as working as a waitress in a restaurant, that was something I could have never imagined myself doing, isn't it? That's the biggest conflict.*

Lucy justifies her idea of coming to Australia for 'freedom' but explains that it came at the cost of losing the chance of a promising career future. She undertook studies in accounting,

at the suggestion of an education agent who was the first contact regarding occupations in Australia. Studying accounting was suggested to Lucy as a pathway to gain Australian permanent residence but did not attract her interest. Her decision to shift careers meant that she abandoned her seven years of working experience in journalism and had to start from scratch. She also divulged her dismay at having to make do in the lower-class occupation of waitressing. Lucy questioned herself through this change in terms of skills and future, and she also questioned the decision to migrate to Australia because her career pathway was now interrupted.

Similar to Lucy's experience of downward mobility, Nicole, 37, born as the second child in the family in the rural area of Sichuan province, currently works as a casual research officer. As the second child in the family, Nicole's parents exerted significantly less pressure on her compared to her older brother and refrained from getting involved in her studies. She used to be a resident doctor in a prestigious specialised hospital in mainland China and completed a PhD degree in Germany. She anticipated some downward mobility in her profession but remained hopeful before her migration. Her qualifications are not recognised in Australia. A local qualification and additional training other than her previous degree are required if she hopes to maintain her position in the same field. However, Nicole's pregnancy interrupted the chances for this career progression, and she had to postpone her career plans, at least temporarily. She is also not confident of her language skills, particularly the medical terminology in English. In her situation, English proficiency is indispensable:

> *Another thing was that it did not matter whether I was pregnant or not, I could not find a job right away because of my profession in my field. Because they need local qualifications, you have to pass the examination to get it. I could not achieve that in a short period. I actually tried to find jobs completely different from my profession, for example, such as cashier in a convenience store. I was silly. They were ready to give me the offer, but I was a little bit silly, and I told them that I might leave the city after six months or I could not stay on the job. I didn't get the first job. At that time, I just wanted to find a job to practise my English speaking and listening. It was close to our*

home, and my husband supported me. But because of these reasons, I didn't get it, so I gave up.

Nicole's downward mobility appears to be her voluntary choice as a transitional strategy to postpone her career planning so that she could have more time with her child. In her second interview, she mentioned that she had begun to have more time to focus on training and preparing for her examination as her son grew older. Her workplace also offered a permanent part-time position. Still, she turned it down as she refused to accept this degraded part-time job as a permanent position or see any career prospect in it, although she had been working there for four years.

This section illustrates the downward mobility that Lucy and Nicole experienced through migration. While their accounts support the idea that new Chinese professional women share similar struggles to other skilled migrants, both cases also show that this downward mobility does not just have consequences at the occupational level but affects every aspect of their work identities and home life.

Forced housewiving

For some participants, the interruptions to their careers were even more pronounced than the stories we have heard so far. Some have had to abandon the idea of having a career at all, and some have become full-time housewives, much against their hopes. Being a housewife is not usually understood as a career or profession; indeed, it is often seen as the opposite. Johnson and Lloyd (2004) address the problematic figure of the housewife, showing how it is associated with drudgery in everyday life. Hall (2013) talks about the history of homemakers as oppressed subjects subjected to everyday life sentences and confined by household space where their role is simply to support the male, even when the woman has an educated or professional background.

Unlike the Western idea of a housewife, women's studies in mainland China have tracked the changes since the 1950s that promote equal rights for women and encourage them to join the paid workforce, though with unequal pay (Tu, 2018). Not being confined to the

household as a housewife is seen as an opportunity to release women from oppression to the patriarchal hierarchies within a family and broader society. This sense of independence and freedom is crucial for the one-child generation, as they are raised to expect a degree of equality in earning a place in the paid labour market (Fong, 2004). I use the idea of forced housewiving in this section to examine one option arising from new Chinese professional women's experiences to deal with the social and cultural changes resulting from migration and entailing a different kind of negotiation with the constraints of households, organisations and the wider society. Despite its connotations, I will argue that forced housewiving may not necessarily be a negative outcome of encountering 'inequality regimes' but may be a strategic approach to dealing with temporary changes. It is a temporary opportunity for those women to escape from dull working routines and reposition themselves in the broader society.

One prevailing trend in transnational mobility in terms of principal visa applicants in Australia among new Chinese migrants marks this change. Statistics from the Department of Home Affairs have shown a shift in visa categories among new Chinese professional women (Department of Home Affairs, 2018). This change signifies the growing presence of professional (and would-be professional) women. In this study, only three participants migrated to Australia as spouse visa holders, while the rest were on a skilled visa. However, their experiences as spouse visa holders are different from other professional women to the extent that some had to give up or postpone their careers to migrate here as a dependent. Existing literature often refers to them as a 'trailing spouse', and Victoria in the study describes herself in terms of spouse migration as 'luggage' (Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008; McNulty, 2012). Some of the literature in business discusses the importance of spouses in assisting expatriates in integrating into the host country and acknowledges the importance of their involvement in the success of business expatriation (Harvey & Wiese, 1998). Ressia (2010) claims that dual-career skilled migrant couples have to negotiate complicated career planning, and sometimes women have to sacrifice to support men's careers. Among existing studies, scholars often look at the results as a post-migration acculturation process but rarely explore the transition of female professionals to housewife during migration.

In Australia, increasing childcare expenses have made it unaffordable for some migrant families to use that service. The rigid migration policies complicate things for new Chinese professional women when members of their extended family support network (generally grandparents) are not allowed to stay in Australia; some of these women therefore choose to stay at home and look after young children. Other challenges some participants face include not having proficient English spoken and written skills or recognised qualifications. Moreover, an unwillingness to accept a lower occupational status and the desire for better working conditions all encourage some new Chinese professional women to decide to stay at home and become full-time homemakers. I conceptualise this phenomenon as forced housewiving as a result of negotiating with the structural issues as a compromise; these women are compelled to put their careers on hold. Meanwhile, the participants in this project endeavour to transcend the private household sphere and make sense of their limited choices to assert their agency.

Victoria, 39 years old, used to work as a lecturer in Shanghai, China, before she migrated to Australia on her husband's skilled technician visa. She stayed home as a full-time housewife for six months to help her child settle into his schooling. Her choice to be a trailing spouse was rather complex as she and her husband are dual-career migrants who must prioritise the security of their familial livelihood. Because her effort to seek a similar position as her previous occupation in China was unsuccessful, she went back to university to complete another master's degree in cultural studies. She discusses her circumstances in terms of the tension between the expectation of happiness and a feeling of loss:

> So, I thought I would happily become a full-time housewife if I could not find a job here. After about half a year, I didn't feel right. Because when we first arrived, I could stay at home and help my son with his English, as he [had] zero English skills. I can help him with some English readings. And then I did not feel right. After half a year, I noticed that my son loved it, and he adjusted to life here. I started to feel that we would not be able to return to China anymore, back to our previous life. You understand this feeling … A lot of Chinese migrants here, especially spouse migrants, are not even called spouse migration; in other words, we were like luggage, and we did not need to

do anything but [be] shipped here as luggage via express. Since I arrived here, I noticed many women had this sense of loss. Alternatively, perhaps because of their lack of proficient English, they could not do anything even if they wanted to.

Her difficulty lies in this temporal dimension of being a housewife, a symbolic position of shame in the context of having lost her previous valued status. Victoria questions her professional identity – even as she starts to find her presence through volunteering in her son's school, local council and the Chinese community. This non-paid work, however, produces further frustration because she senses a loss of her identity as an accomplished professional. Her professional training, work experiences and interests do not match this idea of being a full-time housewife. She sees no real value in undertaking her household tasks – cooking, cleaning and doing everything for her child. For her, there seems no life beyond the household space:

> *Things also changed at home. I didn't have any income. I cannot say much about my son's schooling. We [my husband and I] had a huge fight about which school my son should attend.*

Victoria's loss of professional status also affects her position at home, as she feels she is losing a significant voice in family decisions, such as selecting her son's school, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Rosie, 34 years old, worked as a human resources supervisor in Qingdao, Shandong Province, got married and migrated to Australia as a spouse. She experienced a long period of jobless after she settled in Sydney. At the time of the interview, she works as an office administrator. She has frequently struggled to find paid work since she came here about seven years ago. Her sense of loss is even more potent than Victoria's, to the extent that she questions her choice of migrating to Australia. Rosie does not have proficient English skills, which limits her options in pursuing a similar career in human resources management or going for any options outside the Chinese community:

> *I had accumulated working experience over the years and reached the level of supervisory role in China before I came here. I didn't adjust nicely when I first*

arrived ... [laughing] In China, we use English sometimes but not as often as we have to [use it] over here. All the knowledge was from my university. When I first came here, I wanted to find a job right away. But when I walked into the city, I was lost. I have this kind of frustration that I did not know where to go. Everything I saw was distant and unfamiliar. I lost my focus and directions there. You may say that I lack a sense of direction, but I had it back in China. I can use my sixth sense and find my way. But over here, I cannot sense anything. Everywhere looked the same. I was standing there, looking like a fool. I sent out countless resumes and knocked on door to door in Chinatown for any jobs.

Rosie expresses a loss of focus and direction – it sounds irrelevant when she talks about a sense of loss in the Sydney CBD, but it works well as a metaphor in her career. She gave up her career in China and migrated to Australia, and this process complicated her sense of identity – a loss of her professionalism and confidence in a familiar working environment. Her limited English skills further constrained her options in pursuing any professional occupation in an English-speaking country. The possibility of returning to China got slimmer because of financial considerations for her family. In another conversation with her on another occasion, she said:

I did not voluntarily choose to be a housewife because of my poor English skills and not [having] a transformable qualification and working experience. I thought I would have achieved many things if I had worked hard enough. Now I have changed my career direction, and I will become a Registered Nurse and am currently taking a TAFE course to make sure I can do that.

Rosie clearly understands her limitations in pursuing a professional career in Australia and is forced to temporarily confine herself to household duties and take time to think of alternative career pathways. However, the new direction – as a nurse – is a typical gendered role in caring for others. Meanwhile, Rosie's previous professional knowledge enables her to see structural issues in the organisational process, mainly recruiting and hiring:

This year, when I went out looking for jobs, I realised there was age discrimination as well. It was the same as in China when I was working in HR. I knew, even though we have different skin colours, I knew what the interviewers were thinking, and I knew why they asked that question. How many children do you have, how old are you? Do you have anyone to help you pick up your children? When they asked the number of my children, I knew that it was actually to know if I have any plans to have more children. It is the same in China. I was told that Australia does not have any discrimination. It is just a saying. Maybe it is related to occupations. As soon as you enter the workplace, it is the same. Maybe it is less obvious.

The aggregated phenomenon in the workplace often pushes participants into the marginalised positions in the Australian labour market. Rosie's narrative demonstrates the structural factors that propel women from a non-English speaking background into specific and narrower occupations. Her professional background as an HR specialist enables her to see through the 'inequality regimes' that have prevented her from entering a particular workplace. Her experiences also lead to other questions on subtle racial discrimination against non-English speaking background skilled professionals and even against motherhood in her situation.

Mia, 37 years old, born as the second child in rural areas in Hubei Province, worked as a Human Resources Training Director in Beijing for a Fortune 500 corporation before she migrated to Australia as a spouse. Mia took pride in her professional accomplishments, starting from her high school days and extending to her pursuit of independence by attending an elite university in Beijing. As the second daughter in her family, she observed the considerable attention bestowed upon her elder brother and exerted her utmost efforts to elevate her social status through education. In the beginning, she had a clear vision of her career and managed to enroll in a related course and convert her working experiences in Australia. Mia and Victoria understand the same practice to utilise their previous skills and knowledge to negotiate within a different social structure. They envision the possibility of augmenting enough resources through acquiring institutional recognition and social networks among peers to adopt a trajectory in a particular direction. Mia explains:

I used to have a clear idea about my career [when I first came to Sydney]. I used to do HR management and consultancy back in China, so I enrolled in business administration once I came here. At that time, I thought I would start from the beginning because the whole social environment was different, and I did not have the same level of linguistic capacities. So, I was willing to get a fresh start. I wanted to continue to do HR management. After working for a little while, I worked in the HR section for a while before I was pregnant with my second child; I found out that that job was quite stressful because the boss only had [a certain] budget but needed me to maximise it... I did not have any support here, so I had to look after my baby by myself while my husband was at work. There was no way I could keep a job and have children at the same time. I could barely find the time to feed myself.

Mia shifts the focus from work to life as a transformation from being a professional to a mother. In another interrogation, Mia's experience also reflects the constraints of juggling a professional career and being a mother due to a lack of societal and cultural support. Her way of being forced into housewiving is subtler than the other two participants, even though, like the others, the 'motherhood penalty' delays her professional career in the Australian workplace. Nevertheless, she reconciles herself to her role as mother and housewife:

Now my life over here is more about life, and I check my phone all the time about what is on sale. My focus completely shifted. My mentality was different. I am much more peaceful. Moreover, after I had my children, my role in life changed as well. I didn't need to learn how to cook or raise a child back then, and now I need to learn to grow with my children because they need different things at different stages. This aspect made up for the fall that I lost in my workplace. My profession was very respectful in China, and I was well-received anywhere I went.

Mia's narrative also recognises that housewiving is not a natural transformation. Household management, including cooking, cleaning and looking after children, does not transform into a 'natural' status as a mother; rather, it is a difficult process of reinventing herself.

The idea of forced housewiving is useful to explore the structural issues that have shaped new Chinese professional women in making this adjustment in their professional career and choosing to stay at home as full-time housewives. This idea of 'forced housewiving' is also a slow process of seeing the barriers that exist in public spaces, accepting the cost of migration and gendered caring roles, learning new skills, and strategically making this transition to the private domain. Significantly, some evaluate it as a process rather than a result. Spouse migrants, in particular, do not go through the same preparation as skilled migrants for their English tests or recognition of their qualifications and relevant working experiences. As a result, they lack the social support to help them find their feet in the host country. Yet migration allows new Chinese professional women to reflect on their experiences and evaluate their life as an aspect of their careers. Despite this, their accounts reinforce the idea that for most of them, this has been a forced transition, even if they frame it as a choice. Importantly, there was an absence of their spouses' involvement in these participants' narratives. The trajectory of forced housewiving is experienced as an internalised process of cultural expectations – getting married and taking care of children falls on the shoulders of women as a demonstration of being a good woman. Having a career, however, means more than fulfilling a 'natural' role. This results in a tension between their careers and extended familial relations.

Career and one-child: Aspiration and familial connection

Thus far we can see a career is complex because of gender and migration. There is another dimension, significant for new Chinese professional women in this study – that of being strictly Dushengnv. One aspect of pursuing a career for the participants is demonstrating their independence and capability. Fong (2004) argues that parents have imposed their enduring hopes on their only child to achieve more in their school and future under the one-child policy. Parental expectations act as the push force of their external aspiration. For one-child girls, this 'only hope' leads to more opportunities for higher education. As characterised in Chapter One, being Dushengnv and the 'only' one also produces intensified pressures. Chen and Wang (2020) suggest that the only-child generation become 'little emperors' in the workplace as a result of the inferior socio-emotional attributes caused by

having no siblings. Looking beyond the China context, Tu (2016, 2018) examines the one-child's mobility in the UK and their ability to build a transnational network. Yet the one-child's career cannot be separately viewed from their extended family and its social mobility. This section, therefore, examines the connection between career and the status of the one-child generation. It draws on findings from three aspects – career planning, career pathway and career change – to grapple with the impacts on their career of being the only child. Specifically, I look at aspects of participants' career choices in terms of their aspirations, their sense of liberation from familial obligation and their constant negotiations with parents in delaying or fulfilling that obligation.

Participants come from an array of backgrounds in China and have diverse skills in language, culture and communication, management and leadership and technical skills. One common element, however, is that, for them, a career is both a vehicle for ensuring financial security and a means of realising their capabilities. Drawing on three participants' experiences below, I argue that through a career, these participants endeavour to strengthen their connection with their parents via constant negotiation of their independence and capability as the only daughter in their family. Meanwhile, their parents take this process as an opportunity to enhance parent–child relationships through a shared professional network. This relationship, however, is far more complex.

<div align="center">*Career planning*</div>

Familial involvement in career planning is gendered in two initial ways. Some of the participants' fathers' preferences – around education and occupation – are considered 'non-negotiable'. At the same time, their mothers' voices are mostly absent. Darcie, 28 years old, is a junior engineer. She was born in a small town in Ningxia (inner west of China) and followed her dad to Guangzhou in high school and university. Her mother joined them when Darcie was doing her undergraduate degree. She talks about the different degrees of parental involvement:

> *My dad suggested that I choose STEM because it was much easier to find a job in any field of STEM. So, I chose STEM. When I needed to decide which major for my university*

degree, my dad asked me what kind of career I would like to have. I said I wanted to be a detective. My dad said that would be quite challenging for a girl, and he was not very sure about the police system because it was quite difficult to get into the system.

Her mother is a dentist, a professional woman with a career in her own right, but she is not involved with her planning. Darcie was profoundly influenced by her father's interpretation of career and what was deemed an appropriate occupation for a woman, and she submitted to her father's suggestions:

I thought about engineering because of my dad, to be more specific. He was an engineer. He said why not choose something like mine – engineering sounded great. And also, we could have more common language.

Her submission to parental authority and the broader societal environment of gendered occupations represents the unequal distribution of decision-making and power dynamics in both the family and wider social structures. Further, choosing a specific career for Darcie also extends the connection with her dad. Yet, in so far as he has asked her about her career aspirations, Darcie's father has also formed a quasi-father–son relationship with her through developing a common professional language.

Nicole's father also had a key role to play in her decision, but with quite a different effect. Nicole (37 years old, research officer) wanted to choose gardening for her undergraduate study. Her father, however, did not approve of her interest in gardening and suggested that she become a doctor:

I have to say it was because of my parents' generation. I clearly remember that I wanted to do gardening, but no one supported that. Everyone said to be a doctor was great. Back then, I had no idea what different professions meant and what people with these professions actually do. If I knew more about these professions and followed my own passion, I would have chosen gardening. But there were other aspects. When I talked about gardening, people could not see a way out and where I could actually get a job.

Her father's consideration, however, is more from a class-influenced decision in two ways. First, gardening is considered no different from farming and geographically bound to rural areas. Second, her father treated Nicole the way he would treat a son, expecting her to realise the family's status through her success in higher education and career after that. Again, the father's heavy influence shapes Nicole's future career.

<div align="center">Career pathway</div>

Familial resources and parental social networks often shape a career pathway. Bella (29 years old, senior engineer) believes that she could use her father's network to get into a specific industry:

> *My father's an outstanding engineer. And if I also become an engineer, at least he can help me find my first job [in China].*

Darcie (28, junior engineer) has the same consideration to utilise her father's network to achieve a linear career pathway after her graduation:

> *I thought about engineering because of my family, my dad, to be more specific. He was a mechanical engineer. He said why not choose something like mine, and hydraulic engineering sounded great. He meant that if I had no luck finding a job myself in China, he could help me find one.*

As strictly Dushengnv, the career choices that Bella and Darcie make really reflect an intimate relationship with their fathers. Their pursuit of higher education and migration to Australia means that they will not be able to use their father's influence in the particular industry. Because the engineering industry is still male dominated in Australia, male counterparts in their lives, partners and husbands play significant roles.

The career pathway, for Bella and Darcie, also entailed some negotiation with their spouses after they migrated to Australia. Both received support from their husbands. The gender aspect in both experiences lies in the challenges preventing professional women from entering male-dominated industries and occupations under their own steam. Their husbands do not act as surrogates for their fathers, but, even as they help their wives

realise their career aspirations in Australia, they represent the patriarchal dimensions of career decision-making. Bella (29, senior engineer) shares:

> *My husband helped me. He sent out a few emails to his connection in the field. I got an interview with my current employer, and I went there. We had a great conversation on a Friday evening, and I received the offer the following Monday.*

Darcie (28, junior engineer), who could not find a professional job in her field for over six months, was financially supported by her husband's income as an IT specialist:

> *I almost gave up looking for a professional job, but my husband supported me. My husband said, why don't you quit the job and focus on finding a new job? He will [cover] all the expenses meanwhile. It was four months of unemployment and three months of the internship; I didn't have any income for over half a year.*

Male encounters, first their father and then their partner, have played significant roles in Bella's and Darcie's narratives in pursuing their professional career pathway. Noticeably, their attempt to seek or maintain a professional career is not just an independent decision made as a woman. It also reflects a generational shift that some new Chinese professional women can be supported by their families to pursue a professional career before having children.

Career change

Nine participants experienced significant career change as a result of the migration process. However, their experiences were also shaped by their status as Dushengnv and the role of the father's expectations. Victoria's (39 years old, curator) experiences reflect these relations:

> *I did not have that idea of a stable job working for the government. It is more like ideas imposed by my parents. My dad is a public servant in China, a high-level provincial officer who used to bring his attitude to our home. My first instinct was not to take that career path, that's too horrible. My mother used to be a high-school teacher, and*

she strictly disciplined me for six years, I couldn't take it anymore. So, I took the opportunity to go to university in Beijing to get away from her.

See, I went to a key high school in our city, top class. Our next door is Zhejiang University. All my classmates followed that pathway to that university. The road is called Sunrising Road. Most of my classmates never left that road. It was too much. If you think about it, we went on the same road from kindergarten, primary school, junior high school, and senior high school, and most of my classmates' parents worked at Zhejiang University. That's our life, that's our pathway, that's my network. I decided to go to university outside the circle, and I wanted to go to another province.

Victoria, however, describes a history of resisting her parents' suggestions for her career, following in her father's footsteps. She rebels in pursuing a career 'outside the circle' against her parents' will. Her parents have planned for Victoria's life to stay on the 'Sunrising Road', like her classmates. However, after migrating to Australia, she faces challenges to position herself as a transition from a professional to a housewife and she starts to think career differently:

I never thought I would pursue a career similar to my parents or listen to their advice when I was young. My dad is a civil servant and he used to bring attitudes back home and I didn't like that. My mum was a school teacher and she used to be so strict with my study and everything. The funny thing is that now I would like to [get involved] with local council work, which is like a civil servant like my dad. I am also doing a master's degree at the WSU in the hope of becoming a lecturer one day, just like my mum.

Victoria was quite emotional when she shared these accounts with me. Her description of her career choices almost sounded like she was regretful of rebellion in her early life. She even thinks about her future career, either following her mother's pathway to be a teacher or her father's suggestion to be a government officer, as an attempt to reconcile with her parents. Victoria considers her career trajectory as her constant negotiation with her parents in an intimate space.

Her career, in this sense, works as a space between independence and submission to familial power:

> *We threw away everything during our migration to Australia because I tried to show my parents that I am finally leaving. I gave up everything, and I left [China].*

As a result, reflections on career and its interruptions can become a gesture to re-evaluate this parent–child relationship. Lucy (36 years old, junior accountant) was in a similar situation to Victoria in that her parents were heavily involved with her career, but with a completely different orientation:

> *Neither of my parents supported my decision. Because of their points of view, I had a perfect job back then. And also, they thought that girls at my age were supposed to have children instead of studying abroad. At that time, I did not care about any of their thoughts. They would talk with me, but none of their ideas would get through. Sometimes, I would say [nothing]. Sometimes I would argue back, but sometimes I would keep silent.*

Constrained to having only one child themselves, Lucy's parents believed that having children was more important than having a career. Her rebellion here was more of a rebellion against her parents' expectation of 'an easy life' for a girl – having a stable job and raising children as her priority.

Sky, a 30-year-old environmental engineer who initially self-identified as Dushengnv when expressing her willingness to be interviewed, experienced a significant shift in her career trajectory due to a change in her family dynamics. Previously, she held the position of the only daughter in her family until her parents had another child later in her adult life, after she had completed her undergraduate studies. This change in her status within the family influenced her decision to transition from full-time work as an environmental engineer to embark on a new career path. Her choice was motivated by considerations for the well-being and needs of her younger brother.

After the birth of my younger brother, I started to read more and pay more attention to kids' education. I think [my parents'] way of educating my brother may not be necessarily wrong, but their way may not keep up with this generation. And also, if I want to migrate my brother to Australia, he needs to adapt to the environment here, so we are thinking about how to bridge something between here and China, that's why I went to the tutoring organisation and work there. So now my students range from year two to year five … these kids are a similar age as my little brother. I would talk with them and learn about their lives. Because I am in Australia and do not live with my little brother all the time, also because of the time differences, 3 hours, I cannot catch up with him all the time, so we chat once a week. Nevertheless, I can understand what the kids are thinking about over here, so I will use similar topics to talk with him.

Because of my mother or father, my parents kind of switch their attention to him, so like, not bother too much on me at the moment. That's the first thing. And second thing is a very good practice for me to learn how to get in touch with them, like kids at baby age. I can see I have the expectation I'm going to go through that same stage in the next maybe three to five years.

Sky extended the focus of her career to strengthen the relationship with her young brother and her parents. For many of these new Chinese professional women, career changes work as a vehicle for them to find a 'middling' space between complete submission to patriarchal relationships and a sense of independence. But the process of finding a career is not complete, even after professional women in the study migrate to Australia: most of them move from one occupation to another, somewhat different but still embedded in reinforcing familial obligations. In some cases, participants were able to negotiate a postponement of those obligations, if only briefly; this was often in the form of periods of study overseas. But such a postponement does not remove the difficulties of eventually confronting the conflict between family expectations and career or life aspirations. Iris, 30 years old, was born in a city in Jiangxi Province, and did undergraduate study majoring in English literature. She came to Australia to study media and communication and then

established a career as a research officer after her postgraduate study, but her parents could not accept the idea that their only daughter would not go back to China:

> *My initial plan was that I just wanted to go outside and see what the world is like and then get some experience and then come back [to China]. I remember that, probably after I worked [in Sydney] for a year, [pause] I invited my parents to come over here, but I was away for a long time back then. And I had a boyfriend and he's an Australian. [My parents] had this frustration to communicate with him. Moreover, having the idea that their only child might stay in Australia is very frustrating. My parents, mainly my mother, felt like she's losing her child. I also then went back to China, and I've seen all these changes and development and an exciting relationship between people as well. Particularly between females and males. I think here [woman] is more independent. But in China, I can feel that females, girls, were, at least back then, treated like princesses. Then I thought maybe I should give my parents a chance and give myself a chance because I even had some internship experience. Then I was having a little bit of a problem with my relationship as well. We could not reach the same page about plans. I thought, in that case, both of us should focus on our careers, that we were seeking for: he was doing something he was very interested in. I thought I better find something I am interested in, something I wanted to do. Then I found a job in Beijing, China, and met my current husband, my boyfriend back then. He is a sort of family friend [in] that my parents knew his [parents]. It is a small town.*

Iris's career pathway is deeply impacted by her filial piety to her parents, her guilt of being the only child, and her inability to live up to their expectation that she stays within proximity. Her parents did not recognise her relationship with an Australian boyfriend. She took the opportunity of a relationship breakdown to return to China. Her consequent move was to go back to China and endeavour to build a career and a relationship with someone her parents agreed with:

> *After we got married, I pursued [my husband] to come to Australia too. I didn't ask him to apply for permanent residency straightaway but said, you can come and have a look and see if you like it or not. If not, we can always go back [to China]. My in-laws were*

against that idea that we migrated to Australia at that time because they did not want to lose their own son. But my husband agreed to that idea and came to Sydney. My parents did not oppose [my leaving] this time.

Starting a family with a Chinese husband, Iris saw this as partial fulfilment of her familial obligations. Therefore, her parents did not urge her to stay in China for her career. Intersecting with the familial obligation of being the only child to live up to certain expectations, new Chinese professional women's choices of career are complicated. Parental involvement in career planning, starting in their secondary school, reflects the high expectations that these daughters have a career and meet family obligations of return and family. Many seized the opportunity to negotiate a temporary space, but with constraints. Different dialogues interrupt the plans for linear career trajectories and often result in a staggered and transitional career. Unequal relations between some participants and their parents demonstrate the power dynamics within families around the life course; while some women manage to negotiate a degree of distance and independence, these dynamics still often shape their choices in career planning, career pathway and career change.

WeChat and transitional careers

Distinguished from other skilled migrants, new Chinese professional women in this study keep bringing up WeChat as an important platform for their careers, and its association with a transitional and staggered sense of professionalism. Half of the participants often find themselves in a temporary or transitional job before landing a professional career in their relevant field. In particular, some are on a student visa that allows only limited working hours; others are waiting for their spouse's visa. This resonates with Robertson's research that migrants often have to negotiate an 'indentured temporality' — where they are confined by certain visa restrictions to specific forms of suspension of 'more desired and intended trajectories' (2019, p. 179). This suspension of careers consequently challenges the participants' everyday identities as professionals. As Mia, who used to work as an HR director, previously claimed: '*there is a lost track of time. I was busy with my*

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everyday life, cooking, cleaning and looking after my children. I could not recognise myself.'
These household routines serve as a disjuncture from her previous professional life. Other aspects of everyday life, such as the growing use of social media, can provide for some a way out of this disjuncture and the possibility of a return to a career.

The popular social media forum WeChat is widely used by new Chinese professional women for many reasons, but in the context of interrupted working lives and the constraints of family life, it opens up new economic opportunities. WeChat, for example, offers some an opportunity, if only in a temporary sense, to explore possibilities of small-scale online businesses known as *Daigou* and *Weishang. Daigou* refers to the practice whereby diasporic Chinese purchase goods such as vitamin supplements and sell them to friends and relatives in China via WeChat. *Weishang* refers to the practice whereby someone purchases goods on behalf of their clients outside China. But while these enterprises offer economic opportunities, they can also limit social engagement and networking in the host country as the trading becomes centred in the diasporic community. This digital platform provides participants with a space to develop a clientele, but at the same time it contributes to a suspension in their professional career in the host country.

As a result of the constraints of migration policies, some interviewees temporarily suspended their careers to find short-term employment, reflecting the classic distinction between occupation and jobs (Acker, 2006b, p. 446). Some interviewees make use of social media, especially WeChat, to develop temporary jobs, such as *Daigou* and *Weishang*. Those who had established professional networks in China found they could quickly transfer their participation on WeChat into a platform to search for potential clients to market goods. Martin (2017) observes that Chinese international students utilise the digital platform to secure an income in response to their experience of social exclusion. Zhang explores the experiences of Chinese housewives in Japan working as *Daigou* to 'overcome social isolation and achieve better economic status' (2019, p. 186).

Echoing this research, Mia (37), used to work in Human Resources and had a wide social network and she did *Daigou* because of the demand in China for particular quality goods available in Australia:

My friends, colleagues and relatives knew that I was in Australia, and they would ask me to purchase some baby products or vitamin supplements for them; that's how I started [purchasing for them].

A career developed through WeChat and the financial benefits it offers is, however, problematic. On the one hand, they work under no framework of legislation as to the quality of products or services, nor do they fulfil the obligation of reporting individual income tax, as all the income is transitioned via RMB currencies. On the other hand, new Chinese professional women are subjected to Australian local tax and legal obligations to register their business and file their incomes. This platform, therefore, works as a grey zone. Meanwhile, the media in Australia often picture Chinese *Daigou* as 'thieves', smuggling baby formulas and vitamin supplements outside of Australia, and as competitors with local mothers for scarce and valuable products. Moreover, a consequence of these professional women taking *Daigou* and using online platforms as temporary jobs is that they become more and more focused on the Chinese diaspora, potentially taking their energy away from building up 'meaningful' connections in Australian life and slowing their integration into the host country. Thus they restrict their chances to build a social and professional network locally and accumulate resources for re-establishing their career here. As Quinn (32, small business owner) explains:

I opened my shops in Burwood and Parramatta. Almost all my clients are Chinese. We have established networks among Chinese suppliers, and we sell products mainly to customers in mainland China via WeChat. I thought of opening a shop on Taobao, but it was too much [trouble].

Her social network tends to operate only within the Chinese community, so her online business activity limits her engagement with other people in a culturally diverse Australia. While it assists those like Quinn in developing their livelihood through forms of entrepreneurship, and in developing their social network via WeChat groups, it reproduces their marginalisation (Zhang et al., 2017). As useful as it is financially, the quickly formed social network does not necessarily help these professional women integrate into Australian society; instead, it reinforces the idea of social and cultural norms from

mainland China, such as the gendered dimension of household tasks and child-bearing responsibilities (Zhang et al., 2017). However, managing a business within the Chinese community was not always easy. Victoria (39, curator) mentioned the challenges in dealing with older Chinese migrants:

> *I also used WeChat group to plan and organise a musical show last year. It was a lot of exchanges among different generations. We have to face the local community and old generations of Chinese migrants. The ways we have to deal with our own community, I can even write a book. It is so much more challenging than dealing with other Aussies because I don't know how to respond to them – should I use my methods from China, or should I use the Aussie way, or should I combine both? None of them worked. There were so many group discussions via WeChat. It was difficult to track them.*

WeChat groups are also a gendered space with a reproduction of 'motherhood' roles through the fixation on virtual groups, for example on school selection and extracurricular activities. Like Gius' (2021) study of Italian immigrants in Toronto, the online diasporic community can reinforce a particular, essentialised version of ethnic identity. Victoria(39, curator) does not have any social network outside of her work colleagues but utilises WeChat to connect with other Chinese mothers:

> *I use WeChat to chat with my friends here in Australia, mainly the mothers of my daughter's friends. We talk about parenting stuff and extracurricular activities.*

The sharing of resources is beneficial, but this connection is culturally bound with a gendered agenda around childcare responsibilities.

WeChat works as a unique platform for most participants in the study. On the one hand, it was set up by a Chinese corporation, under the surveillance of the Chinese government, to the extent that participants will operate with extreme caution as to what they discuss on the platform. On the other hand, it was an effective vehicle for participants to avoid isolation. Bella and Darcie used it to communicate with their family and friends in China, managing their long-term relationships through virtual space as familial and social obligations.

From a professional career to entrepreneurship

In facing comparable structural issues across migration, gender and motherhood, some participants switched their career aspiration to entrepreneurship. This section will discuss those who have developed different strategies to cope with the increasing demands of juggling work and life. One pathway that emerged in some interviews was the option of stepping out of organisational structures. Five out of the 21 interviewees, for example, turned their professional careers into self-run small businesses. Some understood it to be a temporary arrangement while others viewed it as a permanent option; and some did it independently while others became involved in a partnership. These five participants come from different family statuses, occupations and socio-economic backgrounds, but they do share some common characteristics. In this section, I examine how they transform their career trajectories from a professional to an entrepreneurial pathway and explore this transformation through the lens of familial orientation, intersection with gender, migration experiences and work-family balance.

Entrepreneurship among Chinese migrants is not well studied (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009; Vershinina et al. 2019). Among the limited literature, European countries (Wong & Primecz, 2011) seem to be the most popular place where Chinese migrants establish businesses, followed by African countries (Lin et al., 2014; Wang & Zhan, 2019). Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp (2009) argue that traditions of small enterprises and family businesses in Southern Europe encourage migrant entrepreneurship, further compelled by high unemployment rates and low status of migrants in the labour force. Guercini et al. (2017) argue that growing ethnic communities offer substantial social ties crucial to the formation of business networks. More specifically, Rahman and Lian's (2011, p. 253) research on Bangladeshi migrants in Japan who adopt innovative strategies selling both 'ethnic and non-ethnic products' showed that these migrants maintain transnational and multinational networks. The increasing population of overseas Chinese take advantage of local Chinatowns as their starting point for developing networks and resources (Anderson et al., 2019). However, the transition from a professional career to entrepreneurship is rarely acknowledged, especially for those skilled migrants with successful career pathways.

Existing literature on entrepreneurship is also often gendered, aligning with migration studies that ground male migrants as the leading force in transnational mobility. Vershinina et al. (2019) partly fill this gap by examining how women open branches of their family business abroad, as an attempt to overcome structural constraints but also as an aspiration to challenge their roles in the transnational spaces and maintain family ties. Zani (2018) argues that socially and economically underqualified Chinese migrant women fight for their place in the Taiwanese labour market through entrepreneurial creativity. Entrepreneurship is considered an effective approach to develop a professional career among migrant communities, and using social networks is particularly effective for women (Martin, 2017).

Several participants in this project have taken on the role of entrepreneur. Quinn, 32, is the owner of a dry-cleaning shop and a gift shop. Her aspiration to be self-employed emerged from her family's expectations and from growing up in her hometown of Wenzhou, a large city in Zhejiang Province south of Shanghai that is known for the social mobility and entrepreneurship of its residents (López & Ward, 2014). Though Quinn has several qualifications – an undergraduate degree in law in China and two postgraduate degrees in international trade and accounting in Australia – she chose not to build a professional career in any of these three directions. Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, was part of her career planning from early on:

> *My family doesn't have a big business. But you know, I came from Wenzhou. All my relatives are running a business; no one is working for others. My parents' generation all have their businesses. I had this idea to study abroad when I went to junior high school. I made that mind up pretty early on. I admire things outside of China.*

Her reference to Wenzhou posits her geographical origin as explaining the link between entrepreneurship and her career. Wenzhou is a city marked by high rates of small and medium family business. Its residents were among the first generations of mainland Chinese to become entrepreneurs in Europe and the United States as owners of restaurants, retail stores and wholesale businesses. Family and co-ethnic networks are

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Quinn's resources to start her business. She established her business in suburbs with a high density of Chinese to draw on their specific needs and quickly expand her clientele base.

Fiona (33), who trained as an accountant but now owns a construction business, shares a similar familial upbringing:

> *My dad has a business of his own. He did a lot of different businesses. Because I want to, in university, I only studied language; but from my upbringing, I always wanted to do business on my own – I want to learn something about business.*

Yet, despite her upbringing, her father's suggestion was that she become a public servant in China. Even though migration to Australia went against his advice, family and community origins have shaped her perceptions about her future. Fiona comes from Zhenjiang city, Jiangsu Province, where entrepreneurial activity is commonly seen in terms of family-run manufacturing workshops. The strong correlation between their hometowns and entrepreneurship sets a norm for both Fiona and Quinn. The businesses of their parental generation also provided the financial means for them to pursue their education in Australia and offered networks and resources for them geographically.

But in both cases, entrepreneurship developed out of a professional career. Fiona followed a professional pathway as an accountant for seven years before becoming self-employed:

> *I looked into part-time working with construction as well, so kind of like a working daytime, but sometimes I go at the night time to [work], and I am still doing some paperwork for the construction company. So not the whole seven years, it is not like fulltime all the time and I always maintain a relationship. Sometimes, I turned casual; sometimes I turned into a part-time worker. But I haven't liked 100% [to] leave the company all of the years. So recently, I [left] because the company … grew as well … I get it because the company is sponsoring you to learn as well. Moreover, now we feel like we are prepared to [run] our own [business].*

A professional career enabled her to accumulate knowledge, skills and social networks. She deployed strategies to connect with her then employer's networks. Fiona's attempt was

different from those participants who build their clientele within the Chinese community and also serve customers in mainland China. Nonetheless, Fiona's business prospectus is built on consumers of ethnic Chinese backgrounds.

A career as an entrepreneur is often perceived in terms of a growing emphasis on self-reliance (Vershinina et al., 2019). It is often seen as an individual's decision determining their livelihood (Zani, 2018). For some participants in the study, this claim applies to the extent that they demonstrate an effort to achieve financial independence, yet, simultaneously, a career as an entrepreneur offers the space to negotiate their relationship with their spouse. In some contexts, the boundaries between career and family blur due to the extension of their professional partnership through entrepreneurship. Fiona's discussion of working at home suggests that professional relationships and intimacy are not separate for her:

> *We have to talk about work at home. Because he [her husband] needed a bit of help. Cuz he is better at doing things and the building and the skill, but he is not quite good at communicating with clients. So, I have to help a lot in communicating with clients. He can concentrate on [his] side of managing construction onsite. He and I kinda of have the way like I work with my boss. I work to repeat exactly the same way I work with my husband – he is my boss in that sense. I have to look after everything, including paperwork, and he is more into the site. With my husband is barely at home, it is challenging. I just do double [the work].*

This echoes Hochschild's (1995) analysis of the time bind, where home and work are interlocked. Her argument that employed women often do a second, unpaid, work shift at home is the subject of ongoing discussion. Fiona's experience of the time bind means that relationship management at home is transformed and requires more complex emotional labour. Her description of working with her husband, as being the same way as she worked with her boss, indicates that the dynamics of relationship slightly shifted when Fiona's life partner became a supervisor at work. The gendered aspects – assigning tasks differently based on gendered stereotypes – are evident in Fiona's experiences. The power dynamics

thus emerge in different spaces, both at work and at home. I will discuss these implications for the family and on domestic life generally in Chapter Six.

The class dimension is often invisible regarding gender. Villares-Varela (2018) examines the narratives of 35 Latin American women entrepreneurs in Spain and suggests that becoming an entrepreneur involves class distinction but that it is tangled up with understandings of masculinity and femininity. More specifically, middle-class immigrant women start a business as a confirmation of the class-based norms of femininity to assist with their spouse's career progression. In contrast, lower-class women use entrepreneurship – if that is an option available to them – to gain autonomy and upward social mobility as an occupational achievement that is in line with a working-class idea of femininity. Fiona fits in the middle-class category and confirms that her way of undertaking 'double the work' is her way of internalising her gendered roles in both spaces – work and home – supporting her husband's career and their family.

As a result of this entrepreneurial activity, the temporal dimension of power dynamics across different spaces crucially impacts new Chinese professional women's families and life. Gina, 37 years old, is mother of a nine-year-old daughter and she works as a retail saleswoman who used to run a business with her ex-husband:

> I worked a little bit after graduation, and then I got married and had a child. I used to run a business with my ex-husband in the real estate industry. After quitting that job, I worked with my ex-husband to start our own business together. After working a little while, I got pregnant. Most of our business was done by my ex-husband. The business ran pretty well. Our relationship didn't work well after that, so we separated. I quit the industry. That's ok, so I asked for full custody for our child, and I look after her all the time. That's why I always look for this kind of casual work so that I can manage my own working hours. I worked in a childcare centre before, also as a casual. And then I opened my own restaurant. I owned a restaurant. I also thought that maybe I could control this time more, and I could ask someone to stand in for me for a few hours or something. But … In fact, the restaurant tied me up there. I just [didn't] feel safe to

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[leave]. I worried about business, I worried about everything. And finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I [decided] it was [easier] to work for others.

The transformation from life partnership to entrepreneurial partnership does not always work out. Gina gives up her professional career as an accountant and works as a partner with her ex-husband. The gender dynamics in her household change because she becomes a mother. Her focus on her career shifts – in fact, she gives up her profession after her divorce. Furthermore, she believed that entrepreneurship would allow her to control her life, or at least her time. Her separation has changed her perception of her career, and she claims that 'she would never be able to work in real estate or accounting' at all. Gina's accounts of entrepreneurship are complicated, deeply entangled with her marriage and her relationship with her daughter.

Another aspect that complicates her experience is migration. Her guilt as a mother grows along with her daughter's life course. Gina shifts her focus to having a career primarily as a 'means to earn some extra income' and plans everything around her daughter as a single mother. She picks up casual work here and there, working as a childcare educator, a saleswoman and a customer service officer. She does not commit to any form of full-time or part-time employment. Her career trajectory is profoundly interrupted by significant incidents in life and significantly shaped by her roles as a mother and a wife.

Sometimes, entrepreneurship involves the influence of the extended family. Quinn, 32 years old, is a small business owner, and she talks about the complicated family involvement behind a business:

I opened that store with my husband. He was quite supportive … But my husband … I had to get him on board because I didn't have enough funding. For example, I didn't have enough money to open this store, so he asked his mother for some funds. Because after I sold my shop in Burwood, we bought our new house and our dry-cleaning business. All the profits we had were spent. My mother-in-law was lovely too, so she funded us for this. My husband was quite supportive as well … My father-in-law also

runs his own business, and he runs it big. If I wanted to do something, he would be
pretty supportive.

Quinn manages to draw on both her husband and his family's financial resources to pursue her career. Her approach to entrepreneurship, therefore, is not simply a personal or individual career trajectory but involves a constant negotiation of her relationship with her husband and her in-laws. Conflicts and disagreements in Quinn's household are often around personal priorities. I interviewed Quinn at her shop in October 2019, when she was pregnant. She was moving around to welcome clients and stack packages here and there, and occasionally to chat with her son who was about two years old. We had to pause our interview several times:

> *It is not easy to run [the] business while looking after my son. But I have more freedom*
> *– I can take my son to work and make money. My mother-in-law wanted me to spend*
> *more time at home to look after my son after my maternity leave. I could do that.*
> *There is no income. If I don't come to my shop, my clients may go to others.*

On the one hand, the whole family expects a positive return on their business investment; on the other hand, they put pressure on Quinn to give more time to her child-rearing responsibilities. The power dynamics here of working with in-laws is different from traditional familial obligations. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Six on the gender dynamics within the household.

While an entrepreneurial career is a complex experience for those in a relationship, it is also a challenge for those who are single. Sky (30) also developed her business out of a professional career as an environmental engineer. Her hope and expectations are also nurtured through her upbringing as her mother is a businesswoman. However, her aspiration of starting her business as an online educator and a nutrition specialist is also woven into her family relations. Sky self-identified as sole child, as a 'Dushengnv', in our interview. Then she talked about her parents having a baby boy after she graduated from university in China. Apparently, her parents were divorced on paper and her mother went

to Hong Kong to give birth to Sky's brother because the one-child policy was still effective in mainland China. The arrival of her little brother changed her idea of career:

> *I would pay attention to the suitable educational methods here, including forming a healthy reading habit or their [ways of] concentration; I would practise on my little brother. And in doing this, it is good for my little brother, and also it creates a close bond between him and me. Also, he would admire me because he can turn to me for some questions that our parents cannot answer.*

Sky's choice of career is intertwined with taking care of her little brother. But this means it is less about being independent and more about taking on a gendered role of repaying the debt she owes her parents by shouldering the responsibilities of caring for her younger brother. Entrepreneurship offers a space for Sky to navigate this change from being the only child in her family to having a sibling.

My discussion thus far around entrepreneurship suggests that these professional women's choices and aspirations in their career planning are embedded in their social relations and their negotiation of the tensions between their independent self and their bond with their families. Yet it can be more complicated than that. Olivia (49, born as the second child in the family in the rural areas of Hunan Province), having worked as a civil engineer for over a decade, started a business selling nutrition supplements. Unlike other Dushengnv, Olivia was expected to prioritize starting a family and fulfilling her traditional gender role as a woman. Her career success was somewhat coincidental, resulting from her own diligent efforts, while the majority of the family resources were directed towards supporting her brother.

> *Especially coming to an Australian working environment, away from your social networks, even a small family, how they can achieve a life they want or contribute more to other people around me. All these [issues] reinforced my idea of contributing more. I would talk with my sisters and say we need to set up a blueprint as to how to help more people little by little. In fact, if we help others, it will come back to us naturally. Including the influence on our children, if we stay in our conversation and*

do not act, it will not go anywhere. We can only act; our children will be able to see it. It will then impact them.

That's why I [said I] would focus on the Chinese community when you asked me whom I wanted to help. I think I have this closeness or familiarity when I meet Chinese here. If [we work] with the Chinese, we can be more efficient. In the future, my next generation, if they live here in Australia and need to be recognised by this society, I hope they don't have this limitation.

Olivia's desire to create a legacy marks the shift from a professional achievement to a civic commitment in Australia, spurred on by a strong sense of working to support the Chinese community. Therefore, starting a business reproduces her sense of citizenship in Australia and her desire to maintain cultural ties with Chinese communities. Ganzaroli and De Noni (2014) argue that 'entrepreneurship is highlighted as an essential glue in developing an ethnic community'. In Olivia's case, her career is linked to her family, Chinese community and Australian society.

These participants' experiences point to the ways some new Chinese professional women shift their professional careers to entrepreneurship as a means of overcoming the fragmentation that can result from migration and gendered expectations. We have seen how there is a range of motivations for this transition and how the actions of these women relate to their involvement in both private and public spaces. Unlike Zani's (2018) study of Chinese migrant women who face economic and social disqualification, the participants in this study are well educated and more financially stable. Although they are marginalised in the Australian labour market (Martin, 2022a), they are privileged, endowed with class-based resources and able to make the transition to becoming business owners.

Conclusion

This chapter brings three concepts together – 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006a), the 'motherhood penalty' (Schwartz, 1992) and 'staggered migration' (Robertson, 2019) – to unpack the conditions under which new Chinese professional women navigate their

careers in Australia. In particular, a number of different career trajectories emerge due to the need for women to undertake further negotiations in relation to work, family and life. The notion of inequality regimes refers to how the practices, processes, actions and meanings within the workplace create inequalities due to the interplay between class, gender and migration. Sometimes these practices and processes go beyond the boundaries of the workplace and influence professional women's choices when allocating the proportion of their time to work. Becoming a parent involves more responsibilities and time caring for young children. Motherhood becomes a penalty because these women need to suspend their career temporarily to meet the demands of family. However, the gendered assumption that women take on the primary care of young children often demands that professional women stay at home because of limited affordable childcare services or inadequate support from their husbands.

Meanwhile, motherhood also allows some space for women to reflect on the experience of change and the consequences for their futures. Professional women in this study put their career planning on hold and prioritise their children as an internalisation of the gendered norm that family is more important than career. Yet these women can also use motherhood as an opportunity to take a break from the increasing pressures of the workplace as a life-course transition. This reflects a relatively privileged position for professional woman who are more able to make this choice compared to working-class women, although they still experience some constraints. In this sense, the motherhood penalty works as a key element of the reproduction through the family of inequality regimes. As a result of inequalities at work and home, professional women constantly negotiate their time with their partner and existing network, attempting to balance an ideal 'work and life' status. They sometimes take advantage of further education and accumulate their working experiences through transitional jobs. However, this can produce negative effects in the form of fragmented mobilities across occupational levels and professions, sometimes even geographically across different cities and nation-states, thus blurring the boundaries between work, family and life.

A woman's career has been increasingly perceived as a realisation of her rights – women have the freedom to enter the workplace and gain a sense of power through earning an income. This chapter argues that new Chinese professional women navigate their career as a demonstration of their aspiration and as an attempt to negotiate the complexity of being a professional, woman, mother, one-child and migrant. At times, they have to fight against structural issues – such as migration regimes and the gendered nature of organisations and occupations – and constantly negotiate with their partners and extended family in utilising family/partner resources to make a career possible.

Issues arise in several ways. Multiple choices in transitional careers, either in the virtual space, specifically through WeChat or in a temporary or casual manner, are significant and complex. Women struggle to step away from a hectic working life due to domestic demands to bring in extra income. Again, this is another internalised position as a family member, in the sense of gendered care, designed to maximise their contribution in different ways.

WeChat works as a platform to strengthen an online ethnic community, reinforcing identities around gender, class and motherhood. It also creates a shared and constrained space for new Chinese professional women. It works effectively as a financial and social stopgap, in a temporal or transitional manner, to bring in extra income and prevent the women from building external meaningful social networks for their future professional career. Consequently, it also leads to a staggered trajectory, in terms of either stopping or slowing their entry into an occupation. WeChat also works as a platform to explore possible entrepreneurship in these 'indentured' migration statuses.

In the case of downward mobility, forced housewiving and multiple temporary career trajectories, new Chinese professional women in this research are resilient and reflexive. The women in this study can equip themselves with specific skills (linguistic, communication and technical) from their educational institutions and draw from their families rather than directly engage with working experiences. In a multicultural Australian workplace, this means accumulating their resources and expertise to effectively find a way into a specific workplace that would accept their daily presence and support their vision of a professional career. Even after entering a particular workplace, new Chinese professional

women will continue to encounter barriers concerning gender, race and motherhood, either individually or intersectionally. Their experiences in the workplace will be discussed in the next chapter: Chapter Five.

Chapter Five – Managing time in the workplace: Scales of work temporalities

Introduction

> *It took me a long time to find an engineering job. I started in June and waited until the end of October; I only found an internship because I didn't have related working experiences. I was in this awkward situation – I wasn't a new graduate, but I didn't have any relevant experience in the field. When I applied for jobs in an internship or graduate program, they said I was out of the newly graduated range. I have worked for a year and a half [as an education agent], and I cannot apply for any junior position [in engineering] because I don't have any related working experience. It also took me quite a long time to find a full-time job after that part-time work. (Darcie, 28, Junior Engineer)*

Darcie talks about the frustration over awkward timing in entering the profession of engineering – she experiences a sense of suspension while waiting to find a job because she had anticipated a linear and smooth study-to-work transition. Time almost accelerates as she works in a different industry because Darcie misses the timing for graduate programs and cannot accumulate sufficient industrial experience in engineering. Like other skilled migrants, Darcie needs time to accumulate experiences and familiarise herself with industrial practices so that she can develop a sense of ownership and opportunity in her career over time. Meanwhile, she is also a Dushengnv who has an intensified expectation of a linear transition from study to work and career. The disjunctures between her expectation of work and the reality of securing a professional job directly led to her frustration.

What is unclear in Darcie's quote is that her career progression in engineering is interrupted. This also causes her frustration. Darcie received a master's degree from a prestigious university in Australia, which is supposed to guarantee professional work. The

narrow missing out on a graduate program also complicates Darcie's sense of progression in her family life:

> I want to have a secure career so that I could have a sense of financial security. Before that, I don't see the possibility of having a baby. This delay in entering the engineering industry has put off my plans. My parents haven't visited yet, they also wanted to wait until I have a career established.

Darcie seems to be trapped by a sense of waiting and has put everything in her family life on hold. Being Dushengnv, Darcie was raised with certain expectations. First, an excellent academic record is expected to transform into a promising career, through sacrificing her social life and focusing on her academic study. Second, pursuing a degree in Australia allows her to transform her family's economic capital into cultural capital, promising a smooth study–career transition. Like Darcie, most professionals' careers are often recounted as narratives structured by temporality – as key moments and phases – when time seems to accelerate or slow down, when life is suspended or interrupted.

Recent migration studies suggest that temporality is increasingly important conceptually for understanding the collective and individual experiences of migrants (Erel & Ryan, 2019; Robertson, 2019, 2020). Cheng (2014) points out that student migrants attempt to manage their lives by allocating time strategically between their study, paid work and life. More specifically, Xu (2021) argues that time works as a 'privilege' for Chinese international students because they can draw on their familial, middle-class resources and develop strategies for imagining and realising a future orientation to their career. However, we know little about how migrants construct their sense of professionalism and how choices through time shape their perceptions about professions, identities and relations during encounters at work. This chapter draws on new Chinese professional women's accounts to unpack their everyday practices and perceptions in the workplace. It shows how different temporal dimensions shape these women's presence.

In this chapter, I argue that time serves as an underlying structure to new Chinese professional women's experiences in the Australian workplace. Compared to many other

groups, including other professional migrant women, the pre-existing perception of life through their study, work and family in mainland China as shared by being daughters of the one-child policy shape how they understand life rhythms and paces differently. The workplace is an intensive space where Chinese professional women experience multiple challenges that can be understood through multiple scales of time: macro (meaning large, related to careers and other significant phases of life); meso (meaning middle, related to monthly, weekly or daily routines and cycles); and micro (meaning small, related to small 'windows' of time that are significant and interrupt larger intervals).

First, at the macro level, we can see how career is shaped through an overarching timeframe that includes the one-child policy in China and Australia's immigration policies, which explicitly regulates their entry to the Australian workplace through visa categories, language capacities and occupational practices. Second, at the meso level, time in the organisational environment plays a role in new Chinese professional women's professionalism in their occupational conduct and interactions with others. Third, at the micro level, the temporal routines of small talk in the workplace capture the complexities of the negotiation of work and personal identities. Four, the overlapping of multiple dimensions of time indeed creates specific perceptions in the workplace. As discussed in Chapter Four, the majority of the participants are strictly Dushengnv. This chapter focuses on all the new Chinese professional women in the study as they recount their work experiences. It considers how their narratives foreground the importance of being independent and capable as significant generational characteristics (Fong, 2004).

Macro time

Visa, occupation and gender temporality

Different visas often indicate constraints on the development of careers for migrants in certain occupations. More specifically, temporal visas place material limitations and norms on migrant mobilities through national and international governance systems (Robertson, 2014, p. 1917). The Australian labour market reinforces these constraints and regulations as a practice to manage its human capital. Employers can save costs and administrative

time in sponsoring employees' visa process by screening employees through visa categories. Waiting for the state to proceed often requires an unpredictable amount of time. Moreover, employers can utilise Australian immigration regimes to select desirable human capital based on the visa categories, particularly in terms of English proficiency, occupational qualification through skilled assessment and previous working experience.

Darcie expresses her concern when she started job hunting after her graduation with a master's degree in engineering:

> *At that time, I wanted to look for a full-time job and find an engineering-related job. Still, when we looked at the advertisement, everyone had listed the requirements of having a permanent residency or citizenship, but not with any temporary visa. That's the restriction on us.*

She initially had a student visa but then acquired a graduate work visa. The strict visa categories, however, kept her from entering the engineering profession for an extended period. This meant it took Darcie longer to receive permanent residency, which further complicated her sense of waiting because she wanted to set her career pathway before she committed to having a family.

The temporal constraints on occupational trajectory are even more rigid. In engineering, if the traditional apprenticeship of long-term commitment is interrupted, there will be long-term consequences. This occupation is also traditionally 'masculine', and characteristics such as long working hours effectively discriminate against women anyway (Watts, 2009). Darcie, therefore, undertook many fruitless attempts to enter the field while she waited for her permanent resident visa:

> *I literally tried everything. I applied for any job remotely related to engineering. I went to workshops. I even went for TAFE training on writing a cover letter and resume.*

Darcie is not alone. Some other participants who are accountants also face stringent occupational requirements to reach certain thresholds, such as the requirement to have had a paid professional year.

Time, therefore, often has a gendered dimension. I frame the time spent in the workplace to fulfil occupational responsibilities as 'professional time'. In studies of work sociology, time is often conceptualised within specific temporal and spatial constraints (Wajcman, 2015; Wajcman & Dodd, 2017). However, the influence of skilled migrants' previous social and cultural experiences on their perceptions of professional time in the Australian workplace is less studied.

As indicated in Chapter Two, most women in this study were raised as strictly Dushengnv, and were used to being the centre of their family's expectations in China. They are the 'only hope' (Fong, 2004) for their family, and this may shape the ways they understand the temporalities of their careers. Higher education was imagined as a stepping stone for their career. This expectation, however, can be easily undermined by the experience of migration, breaking the link between their graduation and career. As demonstrated in the Introduction to this chapter, Darcie recounts her frustration when facing multiple layers of time after graduation – she is concerned about being 'left out':

> *All the opportunities were cut off. I was very depressed. I faced choices, either changing careers and working as an educational agent or finding a company online that offered an internship with big companies. Still, they didn't guarantee any future full-time jobs. The price was $5000. I thought that was quite expensive and an unfair offer. I thought I could find a job by myself. But it took me four months. Because the company [where she did her internship] offered me a part-time job after training. It was a small Chinese company, and it didn't have enough budget to hire a full-time worker. It also took me quite a long time to find a full-time job after that part-time work. I was pretty depressed even after getting the internship and finding a full-time job.*

It is incredibly challenging for a young female professional like Darcie to enter a male-dominated industry without any references. Darcie's options here are constrained by several aspects: being female, unconnected with anyone in the industry, and not doing a graduate program at the 'right' time. Her difficulties create a temporal dilemma: as the only daughter in her family, Darcie received full investment of high tuition fees and that came with some expectation of an economic return. She needed to choose between an internship

without any income or a non-threshold job to gain some immediate and short-term income. When is the 'right' time and what is the 'right' thing to do seems paradoxical and ambivalent for Darcie. Her choice of the latter option, doing a non-threshold job, prevents her from entering her professional field. It creates another sense of being trapped – as a migrant, she cannot just enter what Coleman (2022) calls the graduate 'waiting room' without financial security. Darcie was caught between her temporary visa status, financial stability, professional career pathway and a suspension in her life plans. At the same time, her situation verifies the earlier point that state and industrial regulation of the workplace does not leave skilled professionals much freedom.

The gendered nature of the temporal dimensions of career was also felt by Bella (29 years old). She is a senior engineer and points out some differences in terms of response time between her applications and her husband's. It seems that an email from Bella's husband is better received than hers, and answered in a shorter time:

> *It takes me a couple of weeks to apply for jobs on Seek. And I sent so many resumes and didn't get a response. And my husband felt [that] maybe he could help. He sent that email, and I got the answer pretty much within one week.*

Bella shared the gendered experiences in the engineering industry. It means gender plays a significant part in the waiting time. In this section, I have demonstrated how the Australian immigration policies and occupational specificities play out as macro structures that shape the new Chinese professional women's sense of pace in entering the workforce. The following two sections will discuss Chinese names and unspoken expectations as invisible walls that impact these women's experiences later at the meso organisational level.

Chinese names in the Australian labour market

Research typically shows that ethnicity is a disadvantage in each step of the labour market. For example, Oreopoulos and Dechief (2012) found that applicants in Canada with English-sounding names are 35 per cent more likely to receive call-backs than resumes with Indian or Chinese names. Switching their names into English-sounding names significantly increases the possibility of receiving call-backs. They also reveal insights from the

recruiters' point of view, suggesting that the need for efficiency and the time pressure to hire exacerbate the effect that names on the resume could intensify bias against the applicant's ethnic background, language abilities and cultural attributes. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) conducted a field experiment in the US labour market and found racial discrimination prevailed. Recruiters have concerns about the language skills of applicants with Chinese names (Oreopoulos, 2011). Chowdhury et al. (2020) also found that Chinese job seekers with an adopted white name have a much higher chance of receiving an interview offer than those with a Chinese first name. Their research presents systematic discrimination against Chinese migrants in the Australian labour market yet fails to tease out two aspects: first, cultural capital – in other words, understanding the specifics of the Australian occupational practices and the ability to 'fit in' – presents as a singular act of adopting a white first name. It takes time to understand this subtlety and make this change. Second, as Chowdhury et al.'s (2020, p. 32) study shows, the likelihood of processing soft skills, including the ability to speak native English and a more robust integration into Australian society such as the name change act, is an explicit demonstration of their disposition of being 'local' and having a 'feel for the game'.

It is often unclear to some of the participants in the present study why their numerous attempts received very few call-backs for a job interview. Charlotte, a media coordinator, speculates on the influence of ethnic background and English proficiency associated with her Chinese names:

> *Chinese people find it hard to find jobs in Australia using their Chinese names. I have to change a lot of different names while finding a job, English names, whatever. I don't remember what I wrote in my resume, but it's more like pronouncing my last name in a Cantonese way. Not really, in a Mandarin way [for example, Ho instead of He]. It's probably because they think I'm not Chinese. That's the thing I find because many ABCs [Australian-born Chinese] find a job [by using an English name]. Another thing is, I think gender is necessary, like the men have more salary than women, even if you are in the same position.*

Charlotte believes changing to an 'Australian name' would increase the chances of getting an interview, particularly for a woman. She adopts this approach in signalling her desire to demonstrate her cultural competence. Her account also suggests an ongoing bias that a Chinese name, speaking with a Chinese accent, implies a lack of English skills. It offers an empirical example of Chowdhury et al.'s (2020) argument on discrimination. Martin (2022a, p. 136) also points out hidden racial discrimination against Chinese names in the job market.

Holly, 28, a business analyst, faces similar difficulties:

> *Sometimes I would be interpreted as Japanese by my colleague. I don't know why. And sometimes they will spell my last name [as though it was an English name] and maybe like, instead of He, they will spell Ho. I didn't think they could be Lao or Vietnamese with the last name. That, that's it. And some people who first met me always forgot my name. And I think [name withdrawn] is very Chinese, a typical Chinese thing. Every time I walk past, they just call me [name withdrawn]. I was like, whom are you talking to? So many people got your name wrong.*

Holly works for the public sector in the Australian government. Her experience of being mistaken as a person from another Asian background indicates a stereotype of Asians in her workplace. This is not particular in her industry or workplace, rather an experience across the labour market (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Booth et al., 2012). Holly reflects the idea of 'racializing names' – a repetition of being called incorrect names accumulates her sense of frustration at work. Her Chinese appearance temporally overwhelms her professional presence. Charlotte's ability to navigate this challenge and adopt a strategic approach indicates her way of converting her cultural capital in the Australian workplace. Holly's frustration demonstrates that there is a lack of up-to-date understanding towards new Chinese professionals at work, specifically about their English proficiency.

This sense of the accumulating effects of discrimination draws attention to the temporal aspects of being 'othered' in the workplace, and how we can capture this methodologically. Existing studies often miss the dimension of time in articulating the experiences of having a

Chinese name in Western labour markets. These studies are often less concerned with analysing the changing dynamics of Chinese diasporas. A quantitative approach offers a systematic understanding of statistical discrimination against a population with a Chinese name in the preliminary recruiting process. However, qualitative methods are required to unpack the thickness of 'invisible' racial discrimination and, more specifically, to investigate the factors beyond explicit selection criteria.

Unspoken expectations in the Australian workplace

There are certain unspoken expectations in the workplace, particularly concerning who is behind the refereeing system and the social network behind it. Job opportunities are often shared with the specific network. The refereeing system consequently has huge impacts on interviewing experiences. In a culturally diverse society like Australia, promoting gender and racial equality is central to the public discourse; selecting criteria through open job listing has legal obligations. Gina, who works as a retail saleswoman, discusses her experiences of subtle attitudes during the interview:

> *I was also looking for jobs on Seek. Of course, there were advertisements on their website. I have some friends who knew about it and referred me to this job. I think you should also talk about a social connection [*guanxi*] here. For example, there is a massive difference in the interview between you simply submitting your resume and mentioning your referee. The interviewer's attitude is not the same.*

Gina suggests that social connection (*guanxi*) in the Australian workplace works to get into a particular workplace. Her experience also points to the importance of familiarising herself with the refereeing system. Interviewing thus becomes a formality that is not about screening potential participants' qualifications, skills or work experience. Immigrant women are more desirable applicants in some cases because they will comply with the increasing expectations of flexible contracts, taking on casual and part-time positions. Gina indicates that online job listing is more about complying with legal regulations and that job posting is open to the public, but what really matters is the refereeing system.

Darcie (28, junior engineer) also found her current job through her own network and shared some insights:

> *I noticed the difference [of being refereed by someone in the industry] when I conducted my interview. I have been interviewed by other companies before [without any referees] and walked into their working space, and I can feel the difference there. The HR manager interviewed me during my discussion here, and the other was my team leader. I can think that they paid attention to my interview and agreed with what I said. After the interview, they said they were happy with me and showed me around their office. Other colleagues came by and said hello to me. I felt great. They didn't give the offer right away because it was late Friday afternoon. They said they liked me, but they needed to discuss it with another colleague. If there were no further questions, they would give me the offer on Monday.*

The refereeing system implies unspoken selection criteria. In particular, a connection to the field of engineering is what Darcie requires to develop her career. Because of her referee, her interview was a smooth process. This hiring approach also creates disadvantages for women who are not the majority in the field or lack male referees.

Rosie, 34 years old, used to work as a supervisor at a human resources department but now works as an office administrator in Sydney. She recounts her experiences in the hiring process:

> *In the beginning, after one or two interviews, I would know what they wanted by and large. Every time I received a phone call, I would expect the first ten questions, but I felt bored saying the same thing a lot of times every day. And also, I understand why they ask these questions. But these questions were just formalities; I wondered if they could ask something else. Because every time, they asked the same questions and we had a lovely conversation, but then there was nothing. And no one told me what was going on. Sometimes, I wanted to know what my disadvantages were. You can say it, it didn't mean that I wanted that job desperately, but why do you think I wasn't good*

enough. But no one told me. They were friendly. Just like I did [as a HR manager] when
I was in China. I would say some nice things and also move on to the next candidate.

Rosie experienced the process of having a phone call and face-to-face interview as repetitive. For other participants, only receiving occasional interviews means they often do not have enough practice to be familiar with Australian workplace culture. Rosie's professional background of working in human resources in China means she is familiar with expectations from the hiring perspective; but although her cultural capital is valid elsewhere, it has not transformed into success in her current job search. This inevitably causes her frustration. She attributes her lack of success to racial factors:

> *But face-to-face, I would still go through a formality. Some Aussies went through this*
> *formality too quickly. As soon as I sat down, they saw my yellow skin. Sometimes I*
> *thought you didn't need to call me if you didn't want to hire an Asian or Chinese. It is a*
> *waste of your time and my time. As soon as they opened their mouth, I knew they were*
> *playing around. I thought it was a waste of my time. I prepared for my interview, and I*
> *came for it. You just talked for a few minutes. I am not stupid, and I knew it was*
> *nothing immediately. How can you say there is no discrimination? Because you were*
> *not in my position, and you didn't enter this workplace. The bias is real. I encountered*
> *some Aussies who asked me a lot, do you understand me? Right? Just that kind of*
> *expression. I thought, how can I not understand you every time? Sometimes, I would*
> *ask the same question – do you understand me?*

A face-to-face interview is more likely to show prejudice against Rosie's racial background. The question 'do you understand me?' indicates a specific inquiry about her language skills. Employers downplay her linguistic capabilities based on a judgement in relation to her racial background, and consequently they also make a judgement about her professional capacities.

Most of the participants' accounts offer evidence that the Australian workplace is highly biased against new Chinese professional women in recruitment. The interview is a process in which their visa status, qualifications, working experiences and social networks have

been examined as a process of being 'othered'. Migrants need time to understand the subtle and unspoken, and often racialised, requirements before successfully applying for a professional job.

Meso time

Time is of great significance to the workplace. Time at work is regulated through the workplace logic of assigned tasks and responsibilities. In other words, work experiences are associated with temporal pace, constrained by the working hours and physical working space. Culturally diverse workplaces in Australia are complex in multiple ways. Migrant workers bring their previous racial and ethnic affinities and different understandings of time, complicating their sense of being. Meanwhile, they are regulated by the Australian flexible work and family arrangements. New Chinese professional women in the study, conditioned by previous generational changes, also combat social changes and try to integrate into the current culturally diverse workplace. Their pre-existing dispositions and sense of time may play out in interruptions to everyday practices and routines. Specific professional differences are generated through gender and sexuality, language, family status and the terms of contracts. I specifically look at the overlapping and dynamic interplay of several aspects – the mixed demographics of co-workers, the wide range of life courses, the diverse and gendered nature of contracts, and the multiplicity of languages spoken at the workplace – and examine how this impacts temporal experiences at work. Existing research suggests migration influences women's perception of time and that time and experience 'engender shifts in migration goals and meaning' and 'shifts in opportunities and resources for individuals to express agency' (Gaetano, 2015, p. 5).

The women who participated in this study were raised in a social context that had a particular rhythm in terms of private, public and interpersonal exchanges. As discussed in the Introduction, China has experienced rapid economic reform in the past 30 years, and it witnessed an urge for efficiency in the process of marketisation. Liu (2016) observes a group of highly educated young professional women characterised as 'white-collar beauties' (professional women working in an office) who skilfully enact gendered and

sexual control against organisational mechanisms in post-Mao workplaces. She pictures a generational trajectory for one-child upbringing, which

> breaks the patrilineal base of familial patriarchy fostering an unprecedented ambition in personal development, gender as inherently relational and a rule-oriented system, and inner-outer cultural boundaries as signifiers of moral agency. (Liu, 2016, p. i)

This one-child generation is distinguished dramatically from the previous age. More specifically, women workers in the factory are primarily regulated through heavily controlled socialist rhythms regarding their working hours and timing regarding when to get married and start a family (Liu, 2007). This section focuses on the meso organisational level of being at work and individual experiences of time fragmentation, accumulation and fluctuations across formal and occasional interactions with others in the Australian workplace.

More recently, Mason (2020) talks about 'chrono-socialism', where middle-class families in China are subjected to time management with Chinese characteristics. Middle-class families, especially mothers, are gendered in managing and controlling their time through effective temporal balancing in the domains of work, play and rest. The experience of time thus creates a specific sense of being, as Eyerman and Turner (1998) argue:

> [This] generation is defined as a cohort of persons passing through time who came to share a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective that serves to integrate the cohort. (1998, p. 91)

They must navigate the new 'freedom' in Australia, where time, at home, school and paid work, is not always as rigidly controlled and managed by their social environment and parental generation because they are physically distant. They adopt a different approach to understanding the rhythm and pace in the Australian workplace and wider society. Of course, each workplace has its unique flows that shape how professional women perceive themselves within it.

Each workplace has its own pace and rhythm. At the meso level of organisational level, time is regulated through routines and mundane tasks of completing specific tasks. There is a division between work time and 'small talk': the latter related to fragments of everyday encounters at work. Within the workplace, 'small talk' is often also valued as social networking and engagement, or the communication revealed in 'getting the work done'. In practice, time works differently for Chinese professional women, compared to these professional women in China, and it shapes their experiences, Chineseness, gender, motherhood and being Dushengnv.

In this section, I first examine diversity at work and then explore the physical working space where daily formal and informal social interactions happen. I look at the everyday social interactions, including small talk and after-work association, to draw a more complete picture of time, rhythm and pace at work. Lastly, I discuss the significance of language spoken at work as it is associated with workplace culture and social inclusion. I argue that all these practices are significantly related to the specifics of the workplace culture and occupational differences. Time thus works as a modality of everyday professionalism and shapes new Chinese professional women's temporal experiences of being at work. Consequently, it may create multiple layers of identities, fluctuating through the mundaneness of formal and informal interactions.

Culturally diverse workplace

At the macro level, time in paid work, specifically among the white-collar professionals that I have interviewed, is regulated through employment contracts and specific occupational responsibilities. I call it professional time. New Chinese professional women are often invisible in professional time because ethnicity is often not exampled due to its complexity in quantitative analysis in labour and employment studies. They are part of the 'abstract workers' who are no different from other employees that are hired and fulfil certain purposes (Acker, 2006a). Huppatz argues that we need to consider race and ethnicity because in processes of vertical segregation these could 'influence position-taking, the nature of the struggle and the operation of power in an occupational space' (Huppatz, 2015, p. 192). In migration studies, time and temporality have gained growing attention in recent

studies in understanding migrants' sense of being (see Robertson 2019, 2020). However, we know little about migrant professionals' experiences in the workplace, how temporality may work in a culturally diverse workforce and how different layers of time may shape their lived experiences.

As Sharma (2017) suggests:

> The term 'temporal' does not imply a transcendent sense of time or the time of history. I mean for the temporal to denote lived time. The temporal is not a general sense of time particular to an epoch of history but a specific experience of time that is structured in specific political and economic contexts. The temporal operates as a form of social power and a type of social difference. Temporalities do not experience a uniform time tied to a particular technology but rather a time particular to the labor and other forms of social difference that produce them. (pp. 132-133)

Culturally diverse workplaces and legal regulations in Australia do not necessarily lead to equality in paid employment. Some studies suggest that ethnic minority professionals face multiple subtle discriminations in the workplace, which are often ambiguous and nuanced, normalised and legitimated by individuals through a disempowering process (Van Laer & Jassens, 2011). While apparent discrimination against migrants, women or ethnic Chinese still exists (as discussed in the previous section), subtle bias prevails, resulting from intersectional plays among these aspects – gender, migration and race (Acker, 2006a; Li, 2019). At times, the sub-aggressions are ambiguous, complex and nuanced, making them difficult to challenge. This literature offers a broad sense of normalised diversity and forges an overarching time at work as a promise to accommodate differences in time management.

Racial discourse in the workplace is also projected from Australian society. Positive stereotypes (such as the belief that the Chinese are intelligent and good at maths) and ethnic advantages are normalised and legitimated in the workplace. Research in work sociology often does not pay enough attention to racial differences. More specifically, migrant professionals transitioning to permanent residency and not able to access the

Australian social security system often find themselves struggling to meet work demands and lacking support from their extended family. Their experiences resonate with the 'indentured' sense of being constrained by their visa status (Robertson, 2020).

The women in this study all work in culturally diverse workplaces. They indicate that their colleagues largely come from different ethnic backgrounds, many of whom are immigrants in Australia and speak English with an accent. Abby, 36 years old, a senior project officer, and Effy, 28 years old, a junior engineer, each gave examples from their organisations:

> *Because our team's ethnic group is diverse, I don't feel isolated*. (Abby, 36, Senior Project Officer)

> *We have different backgrounds, Asian, Australian, Poland, and England. Like quite diverse. And my team is friendly, so I don't find it difficult to [communicate with other colleagues].* (Effy, 28, Junior Engineer)

These narratives among participants suggest that the extent of cultural diversity in the workplace is by no means the same. Abby's strong sense of not being alone in the workplace indicates that her perception of diversity is directly associated with inclusiveness. Effy further explains that people from diverse cultural backgrounds are more approachable and understandable in communicating with each other. Her experience also indicates that it takes time to communicate. Holly, 28 years old, is a business analyst and talks about cultural diversity through other aspects:

> *We have very different [cultural backgrounds], I think. I'm international Chinese, and we've got people from India. We've got people born here, is pure Australian, and got an Italian, and this one guy was Vietnamese. It's pretty incredible. Because of cultural perspective, every time there's a culture festival upcoming, you will feel like this festival so, and Chinese New Year and then for Indians we also have Ramadan, and at the end of Ramadan it is a food festival. An Italian has different festivals, so it's good always to eat different foods in our office and get different opinions. Even though sometimes we have heated debates, it's good to grasp how other people from different nationalities think about certain things.*

Holly expresses the pleasure of sharing cultural differences through events and different perspectives, which promotes a positive sense of workplace culture. Cultural diversity signifies, for them, acceptance, openness and inclusiveness across migration status, gender, race/ethnicity and age; however, it sometimes can reproduce unequal relationships. Some participants believe differences themselves lead to a greater inclusiveness at work. The strong sense of cultural differences among their migrant co-workers also implies the daily differences in their encounters, such as different lunch breaks or ethnic festivals.

I have also observed some occupational differences that new Chinese professional women in this study illustrate in the workplace. Migrant professionals can easily enhance the idea of paid work through occupational conduct and various practices in the workplace. For example, Effy, who is a junior engineer, comments:

> *I think Chinese people are very smart, very good at maths. Maybe because I'm lucky enough to work in different companies. They are multicultural, people are from different cultures and are willing to know a different culture. As a Chinese, I think it's just a matter of what you think; how do you feel you can cope with that environment? If you don't believe you are disadvantaged, like being discriminated against, you are not. It is just a matter of what you think; I think that is to be confident enough. We all are the same, at the end of day, it is to get the work done.*

Effy seems to jump to this easy conclusion of 'getting the work done' as an indication of her professionalism. It is also due to a direct societal comparison between her country of origin and host country. She seems to immediately internalise stereotypes as part of everyday practices in the workplace and chooses to believe there is no discrimination. Effy's narrative also indicates her intention to remain professional.

Some of the women in this study reproduced negative stereotypes of Chinese. Nicole, 37, who works as a research officer, talks about her employer, a Chinese woman with such an interesting approach:

> *Only [my colleagues] complained about our boss lady about her way of management. They probably couldn't feel the difference. But I can tell her management style is*

directly like what I had experienced in China. Her English is fluent, but she cannot express thoughtfully in every aspect, for example, being polite or other related vocabularies. She wouldn't say it. Instead, she would tell you to do this; I do that. I felt it was natural in our Chinese culture, and I wasn't uncomfortable. But other colleagues would complain about this. And they felt this way is too direct. I think our boss lady is trying to make sure things are done.

Nicole's 'boss lady' appears to be demanding and challenging to communicate with. As such, she empowers herself as a leader, which seems to be necessary in certain workplace cultures. At the same time, Nicole interprets her boss lady's management style differently, through emphasising her English-language proficiency and arguing that her communication style is similar to that found in a Chinese workplace. While the power dynamics are an important aspect here, managing a workplace means adopting a style of communication that is typically 'masculine' (Wajcman, 2013). Nicole's comments also suggest that the time-consuming work of building intercultural collegiality that Holly describes above is not valued by her employer. Her accounts resonate with the Australian workplace in terms of cultural diversity, which often overlooks the fact that it takes time to learn organisational and occupational differences. The comments of the new Chinese professional women in this study recognise the need to adopt a different practice in Australian society. The time they spend on this detail might be devalued because of a full work schedule or part-time/casual contracts.

Mia, 37 years old, used to be a HR director in a Fortune 500 company in China but was a housewife at the time of the interview. She initially experienced severe disorientation in adjusting to an Australian pace, but eventually acclimatised:

I didn't have any regrets [coming to Australia], to be honest. The big difference I reckoned with was when I was working in Beijing, I was super busy, and I didn't have a life at all; everything was about work. After I came here, I think my mentality completely shifted. I used to think about clients, work progress, and everything related to work all the time, and I was very anxious. I think it was because I worked in Beijing, and it is the same for my other friends. This kind of anxiety was always there, I cannot

explain what it was, but I was anxious. After I came here and stayed for a little, I became peaceful and got into the feeling of life. When I was in Beijing, I never thought about food or drinks, or anything related to life. My focus completely shifted. My mentality was different. I am much more peaceful.

Mia was work-oriented before she migrated to Australia. Her sense of time was shaped by the overall speed of professional work in Beijing, where the competition was severe and overwork prevailed. Also, born in a small city in Hubei Province and working as a migrant professional in Beijing, she endeavoured to establish her roots in that place. Swept up in the business of her working life, she had no time for a personal or social life. This change consequently led to her anxiety. After she migrated to Australia, she had more 'freedom' to explore what was beyond work. This slowdown brought peace to her mind and body, if only temporarily, before she had two children and entered the Australian labour market.

Lucy (36, junior accountant) describes a constant shifting between work and study in Australia:

> *I quit my job as an assistant accountant after working there for half a year from accounting to sales. I planned to study hard and take my IELTS test for my PR application, but I failed to get the correct score. Then I came across this opportunity to do another study in the arts. I did full-time accounting, but I could not do it full-time if I wanted to study, so I changed it to part-time sales. It was within the same company. I was doing it part-time during my first year of this master's study, but it got so intensive that I had to quit that job and focus on my second-year research.*

Lucy juggled two different jobs, in accounting and sales, and two separate contracts, full-time and part-time, with varying priorities at each stage. The state-regulated visa time and the fulfilment at each stage suggest a time clash between her work, study and visa status. There is also a clash between her immediate need for money, a need to develop qualifications which might gain her a better job and the long-term aim of a professional career. Lucy has to make choices in prioritising specific responsibilities in a particular timeframe.

Andrade (2020) discusses middle-class migrants' complex migration and life course trajectories in the UK and argues that transnational marriages are shaped by the interlocking forces of time and frameworks embedded in the visa regime and cultural expectations of the right time to get married. To some extent, her study confirms the frustration of being Chinese professional women who received focused attention from their parents and organised their lives at a set pace – when to graduate, when to start a career and a family. Transitioning into a culturally diverse workplace might seem relatively straightforward from a professional perspective, yet it is a complicated negotiation process of getting into the right zone, adopting an 'appropriate' schedule and emphasising they are 'lived' and present.

Physical working space for everyday experiences in the workplace

Physical working space is one of the critical meaning-making factors in participants' experiences at work. They develop certain routines and practices with their co-workers through open and shared, mobile or enclosed working stations. Unpacking such physical work settings helps us understand the workplace culture and reveals the power dynamics and hierarchies in the organisational structures that shape participants' everyday practices. Nevertheless, physical working space is not the only factor that determines behaviours. Instead, it intersects with many factors, such as gender, race, age, migration and leadership, which leads to an understanding of complex issues. Charlotte, 26 years old, is a media coordinator in Sydney and gives a clear explanation of physical space and power dynamics at work:

> *I have my own office, which is pretty good. Like, the people I manage, they have four or five people in one big room. It's not a small but open space, but it is a closed space for me because sometimes I must discuss the commercial aspect, and whatever the current issue is. I like to connect with people in an open area. I don't want to, like, stay in one space by myself [and miss something that might happen in the big room] … I used to be in the open space in our office, like four or five people. I moved up, and I got to have my office.*

Space creates distinct experiences of time for Charlotte. This sense of 'moving up' and the practice of working in a small office suggests the power hierarchy in Charlotte's organisation. She is privileged to be able to discuss matters in private, but she is also disconnected from her colleagues. This practice would potentially isolate her from informal social interactions at work because of her 'differentiated' working space.

Other participants talk about different experiences, such as having a mobile workspace that offers a distinctive sense of being at work. Effy (28 years old), a junior engineer, shares these insights:

> *We are doing the moving working desk. We don't have our desks every day; we can move around because we all have our laptops. That's all the things [we need] in that laptop, and we just sit wherever you want. But we have to pack up before we leave every day. And typically, I will sit where my team is. Although there are many people [working in the company], the discipline I work with is just a portion of diverse people like me working in a group, only 20 people in that team. So that's the people I mainly work with. But I want to have my desk [laughing], a spot, because I don't want to move my stuff every day. Like I remember, every person is sitting in a particular block. Say, and they have, they have their own office like a part of, and people will go [to] lunch together.*

Effy is ambivalent about the mobility of her working space, with conflicting emotions about this practice. On the one hand, she can choose her workstation and work closely with her team. On the other hand, she recounts a strong sense of not belonging in the workplace. This practice also implies informal social interactions associated with the mobile working station. Effy works for a big company – 'it's a global one. In Sydney, it has 740 people' – but her daily interaction is limited to a small team. Her sense of being at work is calculated daily – she could occupy a specific space but only last for the day. The mobile time also generates specific temporal experiences and creates uncertainty around who she might end up sitting next to and with whom she would associate.

Holly (28), a business analyst in a council office, portrays a different picture of a mobile working space, and she enjoys the convenience of having two locations in Sydney, which saves her from always travelling:

> *It's an open office. I have my desk and computers, and we all like sitting next to each other. We can work from home if we want. It is currently encouraged to do an activity, activity-based working. That means we can take a laptop and be anywhere and sign in when we have an internet connection. [You] can work on your computer. It just started. I was lucky when I first joined, and the company started promoting it. Not before that. I think they just started last year. It is beneficial because our department has an office in the city too. Sometimes I don't want to travel. I live near the city. I don't want to travel back to Parramatta just for one meeting. I will just Skype people instead.*

Holly focuses more on the professional conduct of 'getting the work done', which for her is rarely related to social interactions. There may, however, be a difference between working in the private and public sectors regarding this issue. Effy is under more severe surveillance in a private corporate environment, whereas Holly experiences more freedom in the public sector. However, the mobile working office shortened Holly's travel time to her occupational responsibilities. Flexible arrangements such as working from home and alternative working spaces are more strategic in terms of time management.

The accumulation of time in the workplace closely links to the participants' ability to fit into workplace culture and ease the transition from a migrant to a resident. Whether fixed or mobile, a physical working space offers specific opportunities for these Chinese professional women to interact with their co-workers and embrace workplace cultural diversity within the timeframe. In general, where they sit and who they sit with is regulated through workplace culture, reflecting power dynamics. Working in an open space allows more frequent and regular contact with others, yet this arrangement puts their daily routine under the surveillance of others. In contrast, having one's own office allows more flexibility to engage in informal daily interactions. Physical working space significantly constrains and shapes how Chinese professional women construct a sense of being at work.

The workplace itself has its own temporal logic. Time at work is regulated through the workplace logic of assigned tasks and responsibilities. In other words, work experiences are associated with rhythms, constrained by the working hours and physical working space. Meso time at work, however, does not function independently of macro time. Of course, each workplace has its unique flows that shape how professional women perceive themselves within it. Bella, 29, a senior engineer, talks about her typical working day:

> *It's like, we start [work] at 8:30. And I sit down, read some emails, and begin my day. I would [make] a plan today, and I need to do something I just need to complete. And I mean, someone needs help; I need to allocate some time for that. Then I am just sitting in front of the computer until lunchtime, and then after that, I sit in front of the computer until at least five [in the afternoon].*

Bella paints a picture of a professional job's everyday routine, which is no different from spending a day in an office in Shanghai (except perhaps that the working day is much shorter in Australia) to undertake a similar occupation. Professional time has some similarities across locations. At a meso level, professional time synchronises with the experiences of that in a Chinese workplace. Time also constrains Bella, framed by profession and restrained in her workspace.

Abby (36 years old), who is a senior project officer in a company with a culturally diverse environment, talks about her daily routine differently:

> *My work pretty much depends on when the due date is. The email could come at any time – [someone] could step in and ask my help to do something and then I'll stop the process, or someone said I'd got the contract and [I will] prepare the paperwork. But typically, when I do, I come in the morning and start browsing through all the newsletters of project opportunities to identify whether there's anything that could relate to or be associated with the expertise of the place I am working.*

Abby's daily routine demonstrates disruptions in allocating specific times to support others in her workplace. Her sense of schedule is full of uncertainties. Abby needs to manage daily mundaneness and project deadlines as a normalised meso time at work. Randomly

allocating time to others and fitting that into a meso-level of professional time is an emerging theme among many participants in different occupations.

In general, new Chinese professional women in the study feel their daily routines are flexible, despite the pressure of deadlines, and that they have a certain level of autonomy and independence in managing their time. However, they all seem to voice frustrations at different levels in having to cope with others' schedules and disruptions, as explained by Abby, by allocating specific time slots to support others. The meso level of time, full of mundaneness and uncertainty, can sometimes cause frustrations and anxieties.

Micro time

Lunch breaks

During a lunch break, after the workday and at weekends, informal social interactions with co-workers often happen within a specific timeframe. Often, professionalism focuses on the abstract idea of particular job responsibilities. And 'getting the job done' is often a key norm of being 'professional'. Socialising with co-workers within the time and freedom of the workplace usually indicates a clear sense of setting boundaries as a gesture of being 'professional'. Lunch breaks often involve interactions with colleagues in a way that is different to this 'professional' sense of workplace association, when they are seen as humans with other experiences and attributes. To some extent, identities such as gender, race, age and family status are discussed. In these breaks within the working day routine, wider social factors often become more explicit, such as being a migrant, a mother and a Chinese.

Both Bella and Effy claim that their workplaces are quite interactive, with lunch associations and social events.

> *My workplace is quite nice. Because I think most of our colleagues are very nice. They're not like, work only people. They will make jokes and do exciting things while working at Tech, or even ping pong tables and the pool table in our office.* (Bella, 29, Senior Engineer)

And sometimes I will go by myself because we have different lunches, and people have different lunchtimes. You can; you can go whenever you feel hungry. Sometimes we have our team lunch. And sometimes, I will go with my colleagues. I'm just saying our team would have many social events compared to other groups. Typically, last Friday, we were having a farewell for one of my colleagues, like, a board game, to get there, play the board game and have some food together. (Effy, 28 years old, Junior Engineer)

They spend time with co-workers in order to understand others and fit into the workplace culture. They quite enjoy being a professional, which means that relevant knowledge, qualifications and working experiences are recognised, not categorised by other – dimensional markers – a conscious choice for what to talk about and what not to talk about:

During lunch, a few colleagues may have it together. Because we have different lunch schedules and varying starting hours and closing hours, a few of us would have lunch together. One is a local, one is from Sri Lanka, three of us usually have our lunch together, and we would chat. We love to accompany each other and have different topics, but we are only colleagues. In general, we don't talk about work. (Nicole, 37, Research Officer)

Different lunch schedules are evident in Nicole's narratives. What Nicole said also indicates other flexibilities in terms of their working hours and occupational practices. Nicole tries to lunch with some co-workers to fit into her workplace culture. The interesting part is who she would sit with to have lunch and what topics they talk about:

We have 30 minutes for lunch; it is our social time. The unspoken rule is not to talk about work. We talk about everything in our life except work. Kids are one aspect, but because their kids are big, one has an adult child, and the other's child is in high school; because we all have a kid, we talk about that. My child is still young, so they sometimes share their experiences with me. I can also get information about different stages to anticipate what it would be like when my child grows up. We talk about

furniture, sports, and other things other than children, but not work. Sometimes, we
would talk about politics too, but because of cultural differences, they would ask me
what China was doing now; I felt I didn't know how to respond. We also talk about
religions because they are believers. But I don't have any beliefs.

Nicole suggests that social interactions with her colleague are confined to standard working hours, so that lunch is clearly constructed as a time for socialising, not work. The significance here is not what they should talk about, but the rule on what *not* to talk about. It is also interesting to note that one topic is the macro time of the child. This is a clear indication of boundaries and rules around small talk. Having lunch together and interacting socially is also a process of 'humanising' others that recognises other aspects of life, such as being a parent or having different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Nicole's interaction here is also an indication of being 'professional' and keeping some distance in the workplace. It also suggests that Nicole and her co-workers do not develop a bond or any intimate relationships outside the workplace.

While some of these informal associations seem to be a choice rather than being forced on the employees, Gina's work in retail requires that she engage with clients and colleagues to fulfil her job of selling products:

Of course, it may have something to do with the present job, my working environment.
You can't have people talking to you all the time. Then you may chat with your
colleagues next to you. Then you will find that the more you talk, the more common
things or topics you find in each other. I found that it was almost about our everyday
life. They all live here in this environment, something like what do you eat and drink
every day. If they have children who go to school, what kind of activities do you
participate in? It's almost everything. But we can talk. But really, that is to say, being
friends and communicating with each other is still not possible.

Gina's account comes from similar day-to-day routines. Her job does not allow her to foster any in-depth conversations. Social connections do not last beyond this temporariness of her paid work hours nor help in any way to cultivate meaningful relations.

Topics at lunch are enriched through different conversations that can range from child-rearing, as a reflection of their mothering self; to culture and diversity, as a reflection of their Chineseness; or the migration process, as an acknowledgement of a status of becoming. But these conversations must not be related to paid work, which would be viewed as an exploration of 'humanising' their labour in another possible way. Such micro times are also interpreted as ways of releasing the stress of the meso times. Time spent between work, and who they spend that time with, become significant when assessing whether this time is valid as a break; a break from paid work, from an 'abstract' sense of who they are as professionals.

Small talk

In the specific circumstances of each workplace, small talk could be an example of what I call micro time, where gender-related issues emerge through temporariness and accumulation over time. It often represents specific working environment closely related to a professional's future orientation, for example, promotions and other social networks. Investigating 'small talk' thus would obscure some nuanced understanding of occupational, gender and organisational culture norms, particularly for 'masculinised jobs' such as engineer. Bella (29 years old) talks about her experiences:

> *… in our industry, most of the engineers are male. And when our colleagues told me when they went to meet workers on the construction site, especially when they met with a plumber, who did not have that high qualification, and when they talked to each other, it's more like it's, how to say that, not civilised, you know, swearing words [in] every sentence. But if a meeting has a lady, the atmosphere is much different. My current supervisor told me it is crucial [to] bullshit. I just said that. Sometimes, they don't want an answer. They just want you to have something for them. And then they can use this to reply to the other people. They just want something, not an answer.*

Bella expresses her concerns about speaking the language of her male colleagues. On the one hand, she signifies her feminine presence by using 'civilised' and 'middle-class' languages, noting a difference in relation to working-class male plumbers. On the other

hand, her male supervisor indicates the importance of using their language of 'bullshitting', which is fitting in with the men. Thus, there is a subtle transition from standing out as a woman among men and speaking their language to be like them. Indeed, several participants notice the gendered difference at work. They either do not feel comfortable fitting in or find it hard to engage in any conversation.

Gina, 37 years old, works as a saleswoman in retail. Small talk is an essential aspect of her daily work:

> *I found in the Western circle; as long as you can talk, relationships are good. This kind of chat is about their daily life. They talk about everything, but they may not want to speak too personal, except for some things that are also private. If you start a conversation, they can talk about anything. And I think they have a way for you to open up a conversation; they have a lot to say to you. They are not like us. For example, if we are not familiar with the field or what[ever], we can't talk. They seem to know what they're talking about. Then they can have a lot of knowledge. It's like I went to work that day and had a little chat with a very young boy, a Western boy, 21 years old. And then I said, we're going skiing next week, and he said he was a ski instructor. He was 21. Usually, you don't know; you can't tell. Everyone is just a colleague. Everyone sells beds here. People indeed cultivate their interests and hobbies from childhood.*

Gina sees small talk as expressing cultural differences and embodied dispositions of hobbies and interests, noting the 'distance' between her and her colleagues. The topics about life show similarities in everyday practices, but 'small talk' can only form shallow relationships. The unfolding of time at work does not guarantee any consistency in mediating the cultural differences but may even reinforce them.

Penny (43 years old, senior research officer) has a similar take on sharing her Chineseness during small talk:

> *Not every day [we] talk about projects, maybe small chat, like, how's your weekend? Or what are you going to do this weekend, or I will tell [them about some Chinese customs], for example, it is our Mid-Autumn Festival today. Then I'll explain what the*

mid-Autumn of this festival is and what kind of ethnic communities are celebrating this, saying not just like I'm talking about my research.

Penny seems to be ambivalent about sharing her Chinese culture. She is happy to take the opportunity to share her knowledge about Chinese festivals, but she also tries to maintain some distance to be professional.

While the workplace experiences are diverse across different professions and sectors, most new Chinese professional women are in a privileged socio-economic situation. When commenting on informal social interactions at work, some participants intentionally keep themselves from frequent and regular engagement and they position themselves as detached from the workplace. Lucy (36 years old), a junior accountant, keeps a clear boundary between her work and family life:

> *For me, when I go home, I would tell myself, it is just a job, and I left it [my work] outside the door and didn't think about it, and now I enjoy my life here.*

For Lucy, 'outside the door' means the closure of any employment experience. Like Lucy, other Chinese professional women tend to normalise themselves as a professional and their workplace presence as abstract subjects.

Small talk is a method to establish some common ground. For example, though small talk is generally associated with specific contexts, adding a touch of humour is usually done by men rather than women in most situations. As studies have shown (Holmes, 2006; Plester, 2015; Vinton, 1989), a lack of humour leads to some degree of stress in the workplace. This creates a dilemma for many people from language and cultural backgrounds that are different from the dominant one. Engaging with small talk can sometimes cause discomfort or be offensive to some extent; but if you do not play a part in it, that can be regarded as a weakness or demonstrate a lack of understanding of specific unspoken rules, resulting in being left out. Dealing in small talk enhances employees' presence as part of the organisational culture and, indeed, is often inevitable: small talk often occurs in enclosed spaces where women cannot leave. Women often dismiss as a language problem things that are deeper or better understood as broader cultural differences manifest in daily life.

In a study of employment and workplaces, Li argues that the intersection of foreignness, migrant status and human capital reflects structural inequality in employment relations in the Australian workplace. An ideological system generates racial microaggressions in workplace relations (Li, 2019, p. 555). This cohort of new Chinese professional women is highly aware of racial differences in the broader Australian society, as discussed in specific topics during small talk. Because of that, the strategy is to minimise interactions in the workplace space. They sometimes justify slight inconveniences or microaggressions (as in Bella's phrase, 'to bullshit'), as Li (2019) frames them, through the process of 'othering' co-workers to some extent. Studying these concerns discloses the dynamics of everyday practices and locates the significance of examining temporalities at work.

Bella: 'It is [the English] language'!

Dale-Olsen & Finseraas (2020) suggest that cultural diversity positively impacts workplace diversity, while linguistic diversity diminishes efficiency. Bourdieu argues that the language spoken entails a 'symbolic power' associated with speech's value and power. Consequently, 'it is inseparable from the speaker's position in the social structure' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 646).

Language competence is often more significant than immigrants think when they enter a different linguistic field. Notably, new Chinese professional women – who may speak English but not as native speakers – often conclude that issues at work are due to a deficiency in their English, either not being able to join in conversations or read between lines. Gina, 37 years old, works in the retail industry as a saleswoman and finds speaking good English is particularly important:

> *I think for immigrants, the biggest challenge is [their] language. If our [English] language is excellent enough, we can do any work. It is not a question of ability. It's a language question. We migrated [when] we were 20 or so, after we graduated from university. [You have to be] in the circle of Westerners, make friends with them, catch up with them every day, or [have] these Western people surround your work. In this way, your English will be perfect. Otherwise, it takes many years to accumulate your*

language … to be good enough to get a job. I think language is a big part. I [must] force myself to speak English all the time. The more you speak, the more fluent you will be. Because I think, for most Chinese people, there is still a little bit of character of being afraid and embarrassed if [saying] something wrong and losing face. I'm always scared to talk in English. It has indeed taken me many, many years to get rid of this feeling. Say something wrong, so be it. I have lost my face countless times. It's all right. Many people may look like a local, but [you can tell they] are immigrants because their English is also terrible. But they're not afraid to speak. Chinese people still have a little bit of self-esteem and fear losing face. I'm so scared.

What Gina indicates is far beyond the language level. Firstly, the opportunity to expose oneself to an English-language environment and then practise it daily entails financial costs and requires certain knowledge or abilities. Further, Gina suggests making friends and socialising with them is a process of acculturation, which takes time and effort. It is also a dispositioned or psychological process of overcoming the language barrier. Finally, overcoming the challenge of embarrassment is a giant step to accepting differences and adopting a new linguistic disposition. Language, often mirroring social dynamics, carries weight in the processes of its formation (Grenfell, 2011, p. 2).

In demonstrating this linkage, language is not the only issue for Gina. The social dynamics and the specific field that she enters, sometimes are difficult to navigate if one is not equipped with proficient English. Effy (28 years old, junior engineer) talks about the relief from the pressure Gina describes when she can talk with those from China:

Because we have the same culture, and we can speak the same language sometimes, it's comfortable to have like a talking point during or after work sometimes.

Effy describes her experiences beyond sharing the Chinese language, suggesting there is also a shared social dynamic with those from mainland China. Bella (29 years old, senior engineer) makes some explicit comments on the language barriers she faces:

When I first start [in a job], I always feel that the most challenging thing for me is the language barrier. Because sometimes I can only [under]stand one thing, and I don't

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know how to explain it to other people. … [F]or some technical questions [or] problems, you always can find a way to solve them. You can ask someone else to help you if you can't … For me, I think it is not a big deal. But just this language barrier. I think it's like a great wall. Yes, always, we have different backgrounds. But most of them, their first language is English. When they say something or talk about something, I just feel like sometimes I can understand, but I don't know how to join this conversation. And sometimes, I don't even realise what they're talking about. Like sports, like some star I don't already know. [I don't know how] to [tell them] I'm not interested in that. But I feel like it will be great if I can get this skill.

Although she is familiar with technical terms in her field, Bella finds it hard to participate in everyday conversations around topics such as sports or hobbies, which, Bourdieu (1977) argues, are the cultural capital often crucial to linguistic competence. What matters is not just mastery of everyday English, but the forms of gendered cultural capital which recur in male-dominated discussions, and which require attention, learning and adoption.

Another significant aspect worth noting is being Dushengnv. The women in the study value being capable but cannot experience themselves as such because of the complex popular cultural nuances of everyday conversation. Bella believes she can learn and make significant changes at work:

Yes. I think, for me, I think my major problem is the language. If this problem is solved, 90% of my questions are solved. It is [the English] language. I always see that as my weak point. Because a way to look at this, like no matter who I think, if you work hard, you learn hard, you can get everything you want. You can [rise to] a senior [position] … someone else, someone more intelligent, [might] take five years to become senior, but for me maybe six, … seven years … I [will] be [older than the person who takes less time, but] … the knowledge is easy to get. I think this is like that if you want to be very professional, want to be well known in this industry; you at least have excellent speaking skills.

What frustrates Bella is the possibility of accumulating specific linguistic and professional knowledge relevant to her professional field but failing to convert it to her everyday usage. She mentioned several times that she intended to improve her English to join in the small talk. Accumulative advantages of being raised as an only child perhaps depend on the classed privileges associated with China's economic and social development, which are not necessarily easy to transfer to the Australian workplace.

The interview data indicates we need to investigate beyond linguistic dispositions and focus on migrants' experiences of 'acquired awkwardness' when moving between specific fields and everyday practice (Noble, 2013, p. 347). The cohort I studied has higher qualifications than other China-born migrants in general. They all spoke English and met the language proficiencies under the Australian skilled migration scheme. Yet many seem to fail to convert their linguistic competence in their everyday exchanges with colleagues. This discussion of the importance of small talk in everyday exchanges in the workplace suggests the importance of micro times. Micro time often indicates a recognition of who they were in the past and a capacity to understand differences across multiple social fields. This capacity requires time and effort and constant reflection.

The nuanced practices at work points to the differentiated purposes of time. This finding resonates with Xu and Yang's research to identify the fragmented moments when people navigate through different contexts (Xu & Yang, 2019). Professional time is when the participants perform their occupational responsibilities. In small talk, they attempt to account for the possible dimensions of their identities, as Chinese, a mother, or someone with a particular hobby or interest. Occasionally, professional time and small talk overlap, creating this difficulty of unsettling either because of their language barriers or as a migrant. The unfolding of such times adds complexity to the relationship between paid work and life.

Conflicting time: Scales and tensions in the workplace

These three scales of time (macro, meso and micro) are often experienced by those new Chinese professional women as dissonant. In particular, moments and fragments

experienced at the micro level have significant impacts on their overall accounts at the macro and meso levels. In this section, I discuss how participants recount their expected futures through their experiences of racialised otherness in their everyday encounters, which often disrupt their macro sense of life and career trajectories. Many interesting insights about past and present experiences in the workplace consequently shape their thoughts and perceptions of being in that specific space. What often is not explicitly discussed is that their previous disposition as Dushengnv significantly affects their choices and frames their future. Fong says of the first generation born under the one-child policy, 'every child was expected to become a winner in a pyramidal socioeconomic system that allowed only a small minority to win' (Fong, 2011, p. 2). Xu (2021) suggests that a class-differentiated perspective, specifically among Chinese international students, is evident when transitioning from study to work. Due to their family's financial security, they view their imagined career as 'deferred gratification'. Notably, the parents and the entire family of the one-child generation have put all their emotions, resources and capital into this one child, expecting they will get somewhere in the 'imagined' better career or family life in the developed world. This heavy burden and pressure become one layer of an extended timeframe for my participants' life course, on top of pursuing higher education in Australia, having a career and starting a family. Confusion and conflict often occur when Chinese professional women negotiate the rigid Australian immigration regulations, mainly when transitioning from a temporary visa to permanent visa/citizenship. However, this macro-level, state-regulated timeframe is not necessarily understood by their parents in China or in line with their parental expectations of having a life. The meso and macro levels of time usually fit into these disjunctions and shape their perceptions of future at work. It therefore also shapes their sense of their professional being.

Gina (37 years old, saleswoman) has over 15 years of working experience in multiple industries, including real estate, hospitality, childcare and retail. Gina obtained her Australian permanent residence immediately after completing her master's degree in Australia as an accountant. She finds it challenging, however, to construct a professional identity:

One advantage [of doing casual work] is flexibility. Another thing is that I think [that] no matter how hard I work, even if I am working full-time, I am still an employee. I always have a job. Deep down, [I am] using my time [in] exchange for money. I've been thinking about where there is any other way out. It's not like this, going to work every morning and back in the afternoon. Just like that, a day is gone. That's it. Unless you suddenly tell me about a job, it is worth over 10K per year. The gap is unexpectedly huge. Of course, it is not possible, you know, it doesn't happen at once. You must work and accumulate slowly to get that. If I go to work, I don't think it's too essential, whether casual or full-time. If you say I can have [greater control over] my [time], I choose to be a casual worker …

Gina has experienced some difficulty in forming a professional identity. She also indicates multiple temporalities through time – everyday work, long-term career pathway and biographic time. The significant accumulation of being at work and in different work creates a ruptured rather than consistent experience for Gina. She shares some similar worldly dilemmas to other skilled migrant women, but she has the advantage of being financially secure. Even though she is a single mother raising her daughter, she has several properties. Doing everyday work is actually the way to connect with Australian society, and Gina has to maintain this in her everyday life. Career-wise, she thinks she is not getting anywhere. Life-wise, she is moving forward because she has accumulated economic resources. Gina is in a comfortable middle-class status where she, as an individual, has the capacity to temporally deconstruct her time, and she understands her 'professional time' differently to other participants.

There is a long-standing 'racial ceiling' (Yu, 2020) in the workplace that does not concern language, particularly for those who were born in Australia. Existing studies present Asian students as elite minority students at school, yet they do not necessarily succeed in getting into the workplace. Occupational difference consequently is more evident. Professions that require technical skills, such as accounting and IT, become obvious choices for Chinese migrants. Tess, 36, production coordinator, says that 'you have to be extraordinarily excellent, otherwise, they will not promote you'. She indicates an 'imagined' future

orientation through temporal constructing of hard work and accumulation of excellence to reach managerial positions. Unlike Tess, Nicole (37), a research officer, points to a big lag in changing the professional environment:

> *If I look back, I think I idealised [migration]. After coming here, I felt I could achieve it through my efforts. It may take some time, but I believe I can do it. But at that time, I think I underestimated the challenges of switching countries. After coming here, I thought I could settle down quickly and finish this transition, but things didn't turn out as I expected. A few things in life I didn't see when I was in China. I could not have my doctoral qualification recognised here.*

Nicole had constructed an idealised 'future' orientation before transitioning to the Australian labour market. She could not identify dilemmas migrants face or foresee complexities in the workplace based on her experiences in China or elsewhere. The unfolding of 'professional time' and small talk is necessary for Nicole to become familiar with practices and expectations at work as a strategy for a future adjustment. In the narratives of both Gina and Nicole, there is an emerging sense of past and present as aggregated sense of their professional dispositions.

Sky, in her early thirties, is an environmental engineer, and she also indicates the importance of professional time:

> *I don't think I'm the person who can do, you know, from 9 am to 9 pm, staying at the same place to repeat things like routine things. I am tired of getting bored.*

Sky's professional time is more about fitting into the rhythm at work and repetition of occupational routines. It is a crucial part of the time needed to reform the habitus. What often frustrates some of the new Chinese professional women interviewed for this study is the inconsistency of 'professional time'. Abby (36), a senior project officer, talks about her frustrations:

> *It's not [so] my direct supervisor … [he] is from Africa. And then above him [they are] Aussie, but I felt they are not very organised. And sometimes, a bit of, how to say not to*

discriminate, but they like to build their empire. They have a bias towards their people – the people they brought in through their relationships, rather than the staff coming through … the usual way, through the application, that sort of thing. Then, of course, it's all purely Aussies in their network. But the people outside of the network could be anyone. Not necessarily minority ethnic groups, they're also bullied.

Abby thinks networks are formed within 'professional time', more explicitly in the decision-making process. This professional time develops a sense of consistency and familiarity and creates a professional disposition. Professional time is also partially regulated by the leadership style, which varies across different disciplines and industries. There is a clear indication of 'a circle' in several participants' narratives, and they feel they are out the circle.

Abby's experience is in line with other literature on the existence of the 'bamboo ceiling', where Asians, whether first or second generation, have this unseen barrier in their career pathway (Gu, 2018). Technical engineers, such as Bella, Darcie and Effy, take this phenomenon as a normalised occupational situation and therefore do not target any managerial roles. Their 'coping strategies' involve avoiding competition with their white and male colleagues. Eventually, they hope they will get somewhere. This empowerment is awarded through their professional conduct. Professional time at work, in the specific field, also mirrors structural issues in the society. Effy (junior engineer) also discusses the racial aspect:

> *Sometimes, the old white people do not really like other people, other cultures, people from other cultures, not only Chinese, because they have some stereotypes like they are like the priority to compare with different cultures. But it isn't very comforting.*

Effy's narrative also points to a changing profile of the workplace: previous generations of white people may not have the experience of working with new Chinese migrants, which is why racial stereotypes prevail. Fiona (33), a senior accountant, talks about claims of racial discrimination more explicitly:

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I didn't feel [I was limited in my career] because I am Chinese. My husband is working in the OZ company; it is a vast environmental engineering company. And he had the experience of some glass [ceilings] … I think, compared to other graduates, his salaries were good at that time. You have superannuation and, and bonus, everything was the same standard at the end of the year … but after a few years, he still doesn't feel he's earning more [money] than me … But he thought he didn't know what he was doing. He doesn't know what he takes no control of even after two to three years of working in a company; he still feels like … you just do anything that people ask you to do and do that. So, I don't make as much money as him, but I have more choice, freedom of choice. And I don't feel too much discrimination … because other people who are contractors say we're not. We're not in the same, you know, same organisation. We are more equal that way. I don't feel [discriminated against], but I have other friends working in big companies. More or less, they felt limitations to some extent.

Fiona did not perceive any racial discrimination because of the 'flattened' organisational structure and occupational differentiation. She works as an accountant in a male-dominated industry, and her ethnic background does not seem to matter as much as her identity as a woman. In contrast, her husband's working situation is more obviously affected. His expectation of getting somewhere did not happen, despite accumulating experiences at work. New Chinese professional women articulate specific future ideas through 'professional time' – the mundaneness at the meso-level, uncertainties of the macro level and 'getting-nowhere' of the micro times. With their generational trajectory of being the only child in their family, these women are caught in an ambivalent and anxious time.

Conclusion

This cohort of new Chinese professional women, born and raised under China's one-child policy and other post-Mao reforms, shares similarities in their understanding of time, particularly concerning everyday pace and rhythm. Before university, their lives' paces and rhythms were primarily decided or at least heavily shaped by their parents' expectations of

achieving success. New Chinese professional women in this thesis are, therefore, heavily loaded with parents' resources and high expectations of a fast-track through overseas higher education but meanwhile are consequently constrained by Australian immigration and workplace regimes. Those who have obtained Australian permanent residency early on often possess extensive knowledge of the skilled occupation lists and subsequently provide me with suggestions regarding potential immigration pathways. They must navigate multiple dimensions of time, making sense of encounters at the macro level of nation-state time, the meso-level of professional time and micro times of small talk and the lunch break. Multiple times often overlap and create disjunctures and clashes in most participants' professional time.

It is helpful to understand time as an accumulation of capital in the specific fields and an attempt to convert capital over time. New Chinese professional women in the study face a foreign organisational environment. It is also critical to articulate their shared similarities as daughters of the one-child generation, but also take into consideration that each professional subject is different in their unique career and professional trajectory. Through migration and settlement in Australia, new Chinese professional women experience different times at work. First, professional time does not necessarily work as a progression that will secure advancement in their careers. Second, informal interactions don't always contribute to meaningful relationships that will assist with the accumulation of professional time. Instead, these interactions create this unsettling sense of being 'othered', and other dimensions of identities such as motherhood. Third, the mundaneness of everyday professional tasks and micro times are a significant part of the temporalities of work, which creates a specific perspective on their future.

This chapter achieved two tasks. First, I brought out specifics of waiting time transitioning into the workplace, mainly through interviewing and recruitment, to identify occupational and organisational practices and processes that do not favour my participants. They often must wait for a specific time for their career to fall into place. Consequently, I have explored the specifics of different scales of time at work and argued the nitty-gritty of temporal structures that shape the experiences of new Chinese professional women at

work. I have demonstrated the complexity of macro, meso and micro interactions with others at work, paying attention to gendered and racialised subtleness in everyday encounters. I argued that time at work is regulated through different dimensions, 'professional time' and 'small talk'. During their professional time, new Chinese professional women reduce their time to reproduce values and work as abstract workers to fulfil their occupational responsibilities.

In contrast, they have some degree of freedom to navigate this 'othered' time as a temporary break from their professional self. Chinese professional women are forced to reconfigure their identities, such as being Chinese and a woman. At times, they seem to encounter challenges related to their gender or racial background. Linking to the overall argument that time needs to be tackled into the specific analysis for new Chinese professional women, who even rationalise subtle discrimination in a gendered occupation and focus on a strategic approach to navigate racial stereotypes to benefit a possible future orientation.

While time management in the workplace is also a class-based privileged ability for my cohort, they often reduce the 'othered' time to maximise their professional time to avoid any 'cumulative disadvantages' to secure their future (Gu, 2015). Their paid work experiences resonated with their career choices, as a negotiation between constrained factors and freedom of choice. Therefore, time does not work as a promised advancement in their career but generates anxieties and uncertainties that Chinese professional women must reflect on and navigate through their construction of ethnic and gender dispositions in and across multiple fields. How well they manage time in the workplace shapes their sense of being in the broader Australian society. Unable to challenge their careers and confronting racial discrimination at work, they turn to family life. Chapter Six, therefore, will discuss in more detail their experiences of life.

Chapter Six – 'Having a life': Return, work-life balance and ambivalence in family life

Introduction

I was raised as a Dushengnv. They are very traditional. My parents dedicated full-heartedly to me. They had been through hardships during the 'great Chinese famine' [1959–196], so they were desperate to control everything because of that sense of insecurity. That, of course, directly results in my rebellion. I would take everything they have done for me as a burden. But the migration process helped me understand them. I used to think everything they did was too much; they were too controlling. Now that I had left, suddenly everything made sense. My relationship with my parents softened in the past two or three years. When I first migrated here, I was like them and demanded my parents relocate here. I thought I was right, and if they didn't come, I would be seen as unfilial. My parents have a very comfortable life in China. Coming here was not their wish, because they don't speak the language and are old. They came here only because I needed their help.

Victoria (aged 39, a curator) was tearful when she shared this sentiment during the interview. As we conversed about her career and work, I noticed a dramatic shift in the tone of her emails to me over time. Early on, she was determined and confident about her immigration to Australia, but later she was not so certain about her escape from her parents' control. Migrating to Australia almost seems to have been a gesture of independence and a break for Victoria. She was desperate to show her ability to pay her parents back and insisted on her parents coming to live in Australia. Victoria also demonstrated her struggles in navigating the relationship with her parents – she felt intense emotions when trying to decide between forcing them to migrate to Australia or giving up everything she longed for and returning to them in China. 'Having a life' and the idea of 'return' are constantly mentioned by Victoria and other participants, which often are associated with ambivalent feelings and uncertain decisions in their family life. Return is not merely about physical presence; it encompasses a complexity that extends beyond

that. The concept of return finds its origins in the notions of family and roots within the experiences of migrated Chinese professional women. However, due to their Dushengnv status, the idea of return does not manifest in the form of spatial mobility or actual physical return. Instead, it alludes to the fluidity of ambivalent emotions and imaginings associated with building a life outside of China (Limbu & Yu, 2023). Having a life in Australia can also be seen as a fulfillment of return, possibly to the principles of filial piety.

As a Dushengnv, Victoria does not have anyone to share the familial obligations:

> *Last July, my mum had a cholecystectomy, but they didn't inform me. My uncle in the United States tagged my dad via our family WeChat group, and I learnt about it. I bought a ticket and went back home the following day. It was a small operation. But I saw my mum lying in bed, pale and haggard. I realised that their time was counting down. It was unfair to drag them into a new environment and start [a new life in Australia]. I thought I might return to China in a couple of years. My mum used to be quite optimistic about our decision to migrate to Australia. But last July, she said the College of Arts was recruiting lecturers. If I wanted to come back, I could stay in their apartment nearby. I turned my head around with tears [in] my eyes. My parents have done so much for me, financially supported me throughout my life, and have always been there for my child and me.*

Her mother's sudden sickness transforms her desire for a life in Australia as a migrant away from her family. Her parents' ageing raises the concern she has for the limited time to 'return the favour' and reminds Victoria of her dilemma about staying in Australia or returning to family in China. An intense conflict arises there – Victoria is guilty about leaving her parents back in China, but she is also ambivalent about returning to them. Migrants' guilt is evident in Victoria's narrative (Baldassar, 2015; Vermot, 2015).

Victoria is not alone, as many informants in this study demonstrate. Bella (29 years old, a senior engineer) talks about parental ambivalent feelings about overseas study and migration to Australia:

> *For a master's degree, my parents have fully supported me. And they saw this is right,*

just one and a half years, and I can save a [lot of] time. But for my immigration here, my mother, she's not happy about that.

Like other participants, Bella's parents supported her in pursuing higher education in Australia as a fast-track and efficient way to improve her employability and competitiveness in the Chinese labour market. A master's degree in Australia typically takes around 1.5 to 2 years to finish, whereas it takes three years in mainland China. Australian higher education seems to offer an escalator to a better way of life, in the eyes of Dushengzinvs' parents. Bella's parents' attitude towards her migration to Australia was ambivalent. It was challenging to accept their Dushengnv's life without their close involvement. Abby (36, senior project officer) shares a similar perspective:

> *I would say my family is not super supportive [of her migrating to Australia] … [they thought] it is better to stay in China to do a master's there. But then, I think … coming over here, getting a degree from a more renowned university, and [in] a shorter period than three years in China [because here it] is only one year of coursework. It's a better option.*

The significance of entering professional occupations earlier makes a strong argument in Abby's defence. After graduation, her pursuit of 'life' works almost like an accelerator in returning the investment. As 'the only hope' in the family, achieving institutional recognition is one signal of upwarding social class status as Dushengnvs bargain with their parents. Thus, it is crucial to negotiate with their parents' expectations of what kind of life they would have.

New Chinese professional women in the study often explain that their parents have a different idea of what life would be like for them, specifically in a 'uniformed timeframe' (Xu, 2021), and generally separate higher education from their work and life. Higher education in Australia is a critical vehicle for Chinese women to experience Australian ways of living and to construct ideas of family life. As discussed in the thesis' Introduction, Chinese students often have to go through the *Gaokao* (National College Entrance Examination). In this lengthy and challenging process, they study and fulfil the family's

hope of 'a better life' (Fong, 2004). But higher education overseas offers some freedom to 'breathe' and experience a different cultural environment (Martin, 2018).

Despite this breathing space, new Chinese professional women's lives in Australia are still heavily influenced by their status as migrants and Chinese. In some cases, being an only daughter is more significant and more complex than being a Chinese migrant. The gendered norms prioritise having a family over a career and shift from work to family after having children. The wide use of WeChat within the Chinese community means that parents and friends in China are important aspects of their everyday lives, as Victoria mentioned earlier, important news is often shared via WeChat family groups. On top of that, Australia's lifestyle and flexible work–family arrangements attract them to stay here for an extended period. Yet, deeply rooted social ties and gender identity still play a significant role in the Chinese community. How to adjust and adopt a 'proper' life – having a career and a family life – becomes a critical concern, mainly after new Chinese professional women start a family. Indeed, while each interviewee has their unique life trajectory, they share similarities in choosing Australia as their life destination and second home. The richness of their stories across different life courses and various degrees of closeness and distance with their extended family contribute to the complexity of their emotions and anxieties about their future.

Chapter Six explores the intersection of life, migration, Dushengnv, gender relations and life courses. I analyse the constantly changing dynamics between life and family those new Chinese professional women must deal with in the short-term and the long-term. I argue that gender relations and family obligations are contextualised and adopted differently as a constant negotiation before and after these women migrate to Australia. First, their roles in life shift, but according to different priorities: as a daughter, as a wife and a mother. Since most women have a family, they often prioritise the intimate relationship with their children and husband over that with their parents. Second, life in the domestic domain is more gendered in the Australian context in sharing household tasks and child-rearing responsibilities for these women. New Chinese professional women in the study mostly take the lead in overall management of domestic matters. Third, many participants' status

as the only daughter has generated enormous pressures, to the extent that they bear the entitlement traditionally granted to a son, binding futures together, yet they also have to fulfil daughterly responsibilities of providing care and emotional support. All manifests the idea of 'return' that is embedded in their everyday experiences of 'having a life' and attempt in a work-life balance.

This chapter begins with the experience of higher education and migration to conceptualise 'life in Australia' for new Chinese professional women. More specifically, this chapter looks at everyday practices within the household in terms of a desire for a work-life balance and the real-time experience of what the nitty-gritty of life looks like. It challenges new Chinese professional women's previous perceptions about the 'second shift' and its emotional impacts. The following section is on lifestyle, which involves with various discussions of their lives in Australia concerning their partner, parents, friends and the Chinese community. Lastly, I argue that their sense of 'having a life' is differentiated from their parents and peers in China, and from their present projection into the future. I conclude with a sense of the uniqueness of the ways they rationalise their lives in Australia as negotiations between migration, Dushengnv and transformed gendered norms and relations in the private domain.

'I was going to return, but ...': Transformed aspirations before and after immigration

New Chinese professional women's aspirations for overseas studies and migration are dynamic. Fong argues that studying abroad offers Chinese students more freedom to decide their own life and develop their capacities to imagine a direct comparison with that in China (2011, p. 219). Simultaneously, however, being away from their extended family and friends, the lack of support and effort to desperately fit into the developed world causes frustrations and anxieties. I argue that an idea of return becomes their new aspiration. 'Return' is an idea deeply embedded in Chinese the philosophy of *Luoyeguigeng* (the leaves always fall onto their roots) – young people, no matter how far they have travelled, will always find their way home. Return to the homeland, a central theme in migration studies,

is often explored in terms of emotions (Baldassar, 2015), imaginaries (Hillmann et al., 2018) and remittances (Yeoh et al., 2013). This section uses the idea of a return to unpack new Chinese professional women's struggles – and the challenges and opportunities that arise from their distance from and proximity to their family in China and their lives in Australia. The concept of return is also transformed in terms of questions of temporality. The return implies a career prospect in the home country and familial responsibilities to repay the investment from their parents. It also suggests the strong call of their Chineseness as they transition from youth to adulthood, returning to the question of freedom and identities in two distinct social contexts. Where to return to and who they are bonded with shifts over these women's life courses, depending on whether they have entered an intimate relationship, enjoyed an 'Australian life' and settled down after having children. Fragmented experiences and eventful choices in their lives all lead to a delay in returning to their family in China or fulfilling their obligations. Meanwhile, new Chinese professional women rationalise their stay as their return to have a good life.

Abby, 36 years old, a senior project officer, talks about her educational trajectory as a series of life choices:

> *After the first year of study, I don't think it's enough. Not because studying is not enough; I haven't had enough fun in this country. And that's why I decided to do a second one [master's degree]). But after that, I realised how easy it was to get a permanent residency. And I'm not, at that time, sure about doing a PhD. If I get a permanent residency, I thought I could do a PhD for free. That's why I [applied for] this skilled migration. While looking for jobs and waiting for permanent residency, I got a scholarship offer first. And that's how I started my PhD. And then I got married during my study and stayed here.*

Like other Dushengnv in this study, Abby made a promise to her parents that she was going to return to China after her two-year master's degree. Abby's decision to do two master's and a PhD in Australia was not planned but changed along with her stay in Australia. The first master's degree bought her time to see what it was like to have a life in Australia. She enjoyed the freedom of being physically away from her family. Marriage plays a vital role in

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Abby's eventual desire not to return– staying in Australia and keeping some distance from traditional filial piety and the trap of long-distance emotional care for parents and in-laws. Eventually, it was her marriage that made her settle down.

Some research indicates that overseas study works as a pause for young Chinese people to escape from the social pressures of getting married and starting a family in China, delaying adulthood (Martin, 2018). In this study, the decision to study in Australia and extend their stay is more complicated than this sense of a 'suspension' of obligations. As a Dushengnv, Abby plans to return at some point. Even after gaining Australian permanent residency, she still considers it. Getting married and starting a family changes her intention to return to her family; instead, Abby sponsored her mother's immigration and invited her to Australia. Her intended physical return to her family in China is transformed through Abby's mother's immigration.

Unlike Abby, Charlotte (26 years old, media coordinator) had a firmer attitude towards physical return. She first came to Australia as a teenager to finish her high school and lived with her aunty's family in Melbourne:

> Because I [didn't] want to immigrate here, I [chose subjects that would not let me] immigrate here. But I still stayed here for over ten years. Oh, my god. Back then, in Melbourne, my aunty told me that if I wanted to immigrate, choosing nursing or whatever was easy. I said, I don't want to immigrate here, and I don't want to take care of other people. I probably don't have to choose whatever [subject] I want and [that subject] cannot [have a direct pathway to] immigrate here. And I will say I am so disgusted with this place. I used to be sad in my teenage time. But it wasn't my choice [to come here]. Eventually, it was my parents' [choice] to send me to study here. If I cannot find a PhD with a scholarship, I will go back to Beijing, two hours' drive from my hometown. You know even between family, we need to have some space, because I don't have a partner or someone that I want to spend the rest of my life with yet. I had to have my own space for myself to do things that I want. I have to like to do whatever the things I want. But if I am too close [to my parents], they are gonna control [me], over control. Another thing, what I have in here [Australia] is pretty much like what I

wanted to do, like a media coordinator. I pretty much nailed when I do it and will continue to do that.

Charlotte faces a strong desire to return to China and wants to keep some distance from her parents. She chose media studies as a way of rebelling against her aunty and her parents. When it was her opportunity to choose a major and a university, Charlotte chose a non-immigration pathway. Her higher education in Australia was always imagined and conditioned with a 'return' to her parents in China. This desire to reunite with her family drives her to return. The timing to return remains unknown because Charlotte also thought about pursuing a PhD degree. Her parents' choice to send Charlotte to study in Australia could be appreciated as freedom in her favour to pursue a career and a life of her own choosing. Charlotte repeatedly emphasised her intention of going back as a signal of her transition to adulthood and returning many years' investment, and her guilt for not being able to achieve permanent residency. Meanwhile, her choices indicated this ambivalence toward fulfilling a familial obligation due to her uncertain status, neither a stable work future nor a specific family.

In other cases, the idea of return works as a strategy for Dushengnv to establish a mutual agreement with their parents. Effy, 28 years old and a junior engineer also uses the gaining of further qualifications as a bargaining chip with her parents:

I had several reasons [for doing two master's degrees] … my parents want me to do that because maybe in the future [I might] go back to China. A master's degree is compulsory to get a better job. And the second reason was that I needed some time to get my permanent visa before finding any job.

Effy utilises the idea of returning to convince her parents to support her overseas studies but fulfils her actual purpose of migrating to Australia. Effy followed her parents' instructions and played by their rules, but she was also buying time for her own agenda – a plan B of having a life in Australia.

Developing an intimate relationship is another form of delaying return. Fiona, 33, a senior accountant, not only stays in Australia but also convinces her husband to stay:

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I decided to stay here after I finished my master's degree. And then [my husband] stayed because of me. His family originally wanted him to go back. Because I wanted to stay [in Australia], he [went] to the professional year to [fulfil the requirements for the points test] and acquired the Australian permanent residence.

Studying in Australia enables Fiona to envision life here. Starting a family in Australia also allows some distance from her in-laws. Mutual influence on a partner's decision to stay is quite common among the informants in the study – because of the shared characteristics of being Dushengzinv, their partner demonstrated a similar desire to escape from their parents' expectations (Tu, 2018).

Darcie (28 years old, junior engineer) was in a similar situation when her boyfriend intended to migrate:

I would do a postgraduate degree in the same field [as my undergraduate] and return to China once I finish it. Here it was the thing. My mum didn't agree with me to go abroad and pursue further studies in the first place. She thought it was too far away. I convinced her that I was young, and I wanted to go out of China and have a look, and I would go back to China once I finished my degree. At that time, I never thought I would stay in Australia. I only chose a one-year postgraduate study. It was not a prestigious degree, but I wanted to see the world because I didn't go abroad before. My mum finally said yes. But unexpectedly, I met my husband now after my one-year study. He wanted to stay here. He considered that he didn't go to a good university for his undergraduate studies in China, and my husband suspected that he couldn't find a good job back home because of his degree. He wanted to stay here. At least his income would be higher than that in the same industry in China. I stayed here with him.

Darcie convinced her parents and promised she could 'return' quickly with an internationally recognised qualification. Developing an intimate relationship with her eventual husband changed Darcie's idea of 'return' because he lacked the qualifications for a secure career or a comfortable life in China. Several studies (Fincher, 2016; To, 2015) in mainland China suggest there is a significant phenomenon of Shengnv (leftover women),

who are 'leftover' because of their high qualifications and work achievements. This concerns some parents in mainland China. The comparatively higher income in Darcie's case outweighs her desire to have them return to China because a stable financial situation generally signifies a possible 'better' life in Australia. Darcie's decision to not return to China is, however, a symbolic 'return' in terms of her familial obligation to have a family.

The idea of return is not simply the opposite of staying. The questions of when to return, return to whom and how to return are flexible. At times, not physically returning to China and instead having a family in Australia transforms the idea of return to their familial obligation and fulfils their parents' investment. Their decisions are also profoundly entangled with the parents' emotions, and the care associated with their ageing. This intensified feeling of repaying their parents' investment also pushes them to seek an alternative option – achieving permanent residency and having a family life. Their parents' physical distance does not necessarily stop them from being connected; rather, they are more involved in grand decisions in life through social media and WeChat, as discussed in Chapter Four. Free to some extent, new Chinese professional women manage to negotiate some flexibilities in having a life in Australia. The perceptions of return thus change from having a specific timeframe to entailing a longer period of uncertainty.

Raised as Dushengnv: 'Having a life'

> *My parents raised me in such a way that they cultivated my sense of independence and let me make my own decision.* (Sky, 30 years old, Environmental Engineer)

The Dushengnv generation was raised with enormous expectations because of their parental generational trajectory (Liu, 2007). Fong argues that social and economic changes have dramatically impacted the one-child generation since the 1970s because 'everything in China is about scale and speed' (2015, p. 7). This idea of efficiency prompts parents of the one-child generation to focus on their single child as their sole investment.

The parental generation of new Chinese professional women have experienced significant changes since the introduction of the one-child policy (Liu, 2007), alongside with the longer

historical processes, including the dissolution of Confucian values and the inclusion of women in the workplace. They have a sense of urgency to push their only child into the world and prepare them for adulthood so they, the parents, can be relieved that they have finished the task of passing on their heritage. Parents of Dushengnv also like this idea of retirement – a life they can enjoy when they finish their working life (To, 2015).

As Mason (2020) points out, the everyday rhythms of work, rest and play in mainland China are still under the strong influence of socialism. There is a disparity between the growing emphasis on individual independence and freedom to work and the post-socialist pressure of regulating one's working life. Acknowledging these pre-existing social and cultural norms helps us understand the importance of having a family life for new Chinese professional women and how they make sense of life. By analysing the assumptions of everyday life embedded in lived experiences, this section argues that new Chinese professional women's life in Australia is a compromise between their aspirations for independence and their negotiation with parents concerning their familial obligations. Gender relations in the private domain are understood through everyday divisions of household tasks and child-rearing responsibilities.

When asked about her childhood, Darcie paused for a moment and took a deep breath before answering. Growing up as a Dushengnv, she believed her upbringing was shaped by the fact that she now carried the burden of family hopes usually reserved for sons:

> *My dad always wanted me to be like a boy. He always said that I needed to be strong like a boy. My dad said I was too shy and introverted, which he didn't like. He said if you don't know anything, ask others for help. Another thing, if [other girls] got sick, they could stay home and rest … But in my family, it was not allowed; my dad and even my mum would say it was common to have a fever and go to school. That's it. I [couldn't] ask for any sick leave even though I was sick. They wanted me to be strong so that I could look after myself.*

Parents of Dushengnv tended to downplay the gendered assumption that girls were weak and encouraged in their daughters a sense of independence. For Dushengnv, autonomy was

introduced early in their childhood. Further, any expressions of emotion would be treated as a sign of weakness, a feminised way of demonstrating feelings. This cultivation of masculine characteristics often led to Dushengnv's confusion later in life, specifically dealing with their parents' demands of having a family or managing any disputes after having a family. Gui (2020), in her study of Shengnv, argues that professional women in contemporary China experience conflicts between the aspiration of autonomy and independence and gendered expectation of prioritising family over career. The discontinuity and disparity of gendered obligation shift as professional women transition from youth to adulthood. Like Darcie, other new Chinese professional women in this study express a similar account of being raised 'like a boy', as independent and resilient as Dushengnv. Effy hesitated when she shared her experiences:

> *They don't have a preference of [me being] a girl or boy. Maybe because I am the only child, they are open-minded.*

Effy's use of 'open-minded' suggests that son preferences prevailed in her hometown – Xi'an, an inner western city in mainland China. Even though she says her parents did not impose a specific gender role on her, she explained how she was raised with masculine expectations – 'not to cry even if I was hurt' – and later pursued a degree in the typically male domain of engineering. Her parents dedicated all their resources to her two master's degrees in Australia – Effy was treated as Chinese would typically treat their sons.

Other participants in this study often talked about place-bound gendered assumptions working differently in Australia and China. Holly (28, business analyst), smiled as she recounted key aspects of her experiences:

> *It is the social and cultural environment that plays a significant role. It's when we're back in China; we have the local family support. And if one couple has arguments, and somebody's mom or dad always gets involved and tries to intervene. And your social value will be shaped by the friends around you, who are all Chinese. But once you come to Australia, you start everything from zero again, and your values and people you talk to. And it's completely different ideologies. And it will shake your values a lot. In*

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between couples, most likely you will lose the common language you've developed back in China because that only works for you in China. It doesn't work when you're in Australia. That's very shaky.

Holly focused on changes concerning the intergenerational relationship before and after her migration and the importance of adopting an 'Australian' way of life. Broadly speaking, parents' involvement in a young couple's intimate life back in China reflects parental power – because of their early investment and their own experiences, they have a parental authority over their only daughter's life. Gui argues that this phenomenon is subjected to 'the ideology of socioeconomic hypergamy' that emphasises the gendered role of having a family as the point of a woman's life (2020, p. 1974). Xie (2021) also discusses the social expectation that women fulfil the role of having a family and a child even at the expense of their career in contemporary China. Shifting localities and social networks in Australia evoke reflections on how they were raised and can have certain freedom in their Australian lives. Meanwhile, geographical distance offers some space for new Chinese professional women to step away from their parents' control. This distance consequently prompts them to reflect on differences in gender relations – as a direct reaction to a more liberal Western family relationship – and to examine the degree of emphasis on family-centred values in a changed social context.

Some evidence is also found in this study concerning the changing parental expectation of Dushengnv after the birth of another sibling because of getting divorced and remarried. Fiona and Sky are two informants who were raised as Dushengnv, but their parents had another child after they both reached their twenties:

> *My mother already got permanent residence here and stayed with us. My parents were divorced after I graduated from [university]. I was the only child with them. But my father has two other kids with his current family [after his divorce with my mum]. I don't have the pressure [to return to China]. Because he has another family, it's kind of like, and I don't really like I'm the only tie with them. But he has other children with another family.* (Fiona, 33, Senior Accountant)

Fiona does not have the same degree of familial obligation to her father and mother. A strong sense of relief is noticeable in her narrative about caring for her father – the 'daughterly filiality' (Martin, 2022a) is often the son's obligation in Chinese traditional culture, which was transferred to Fiona as the only daughter. This finding resonates with Martin's research, which demonstrates that in single-child generations, daughters are increasingly taking on the filial responsibilities of caring for elderly parents that were traditionally assigned to sons (Martin, 2022a, p.19). This trend is also supported by other existing studies, such as Fong (2004, 130-15) and Zhan and Montgomery (2003). However, it is important to note that daughterly filiality, although similar, differs slightly from sons' preferences, as it places significant emphasis on providing care to parents. Because of her father's remarriage, Fiona is no longer expected to look after him or inherit his business.

Sky (30, environmental engineer) shares her experience:

> *I think, especially after my little brother, I can see my parents treated him very differently. They didn't have many requirements when I was growing up, as long as I was happy. But with my little brother, they are very strict. He is about 22 years younger than me, but they told him that he would have to protect his sister. There is a considerable difference between raising a girl and a boy. They want to teach him to be accountable.*

Sky's brother was born after Sky graduated from her undergraduate studies. At that time, they pressured Sky to date and have a family, and continued to do so even after Sky came to Australia for her postgraduate degree. The parenting styles are quite distinct, particularly concerning cultivating masculinity in her little brother. To some extent, her parents are still imposing the gender ideology that a son should take on more responsibilities and a daughter should have a family:

> *Because my parents now, they kind of switch their attention to [my little brother], you know, so like, not too much on me now. Otherwise, I think that they [would] keep pushing me to get married.*

Sky was given less attention, compared to when she was strictly Dushengnv, and granted a breathing space in her intimate relationship. It shows the enormous parental pressure on Sky to fill the role of dutiful daughter. The family pressure has been transferred to her brother, who is now entitled with traditional familial piety. She can finally pursue her interests and have a different life instead of facing the severe pressure of having a family and securing her family's financial stability.

A common theme in the participants' accounts is a strong sense of the urgency of 'having a life'. Yet, in contrast to their upbringing as independent and capable children, they are pushed to start a family. Having a life often has a direct linkage with having a family. To (2013) argues in her study of leftover women in China that this urgency of 'having a family' was subject to men's perceptions of choice; thus, the stress of having children is imposed on women. New Chinese professional women often confuse 'having a life' and 'having a family'. Their feelings about a transition from a work life to family life thus are ambivalence, frustration and anxiety. Compromises are often made at the cost of treating the family as a unit and family life as their definitive account of 'having a life'.

Darcie, 28 years old, a junior engineer, conveys her frustration about her home life:

> *Because [my husband's] work is tiring, he needs to work outside quite often. He used not to do any housework. After a few rounds of negotiation and fights, he started to help me with some. Before, I used to do everything. Now, he will do some if he has time. I manage most of our housework. He would help with trivial things, for example, loading the laundry into our washing machine and cleaning the tray for our cat.*

Darcie takes the household tasks as her main responsibilities. She tellingly refers to her husband 'helping her' rather than them sharing the household labour. This approach demonstrates that tasks within the private domain are still distributed unevenly and gendered.

Household responsibilities are not always well documented in migration studies. Cheng et al. argue that Singaporean Chinese men reproduce dominant masculinity models predicated on 'breadwinning' and 'providing' (2015, p. 867). Louie (2016) examines the

evolving concept of masculinity in China, from the traditional imperial pillars of state to contemporary ideas of 'real men' in a globalised world, and the impact of Confucianism on Chinese masculinity. As a result, masculinity is shaped by masculine identities and the intersection of sexuality, gender and culture. More recently, Wong (2020) explores a new ideal of masculinity being constructed and negotiated in various spheres of everyday life, including education, work and family relationships, which contends the traditional 'tough' masculinity associated with physical strength and dominance is being challenged by new expectations of men to be compassionate, nurturing and responsible in their personal and professional lives. Darcie's husband takes a similar strategy of providing 'economic potency' for her family. New Chinese professional women in the study often express this struggle in the private domain, as gendered obligations are often taken for granted by their heterosexual partners, who are often the only son in their family. Even though Darcie and her husband are a dual-career couple, she takes up the primary role in household duties and undertakes a 'second shift' when doing domestic chores (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Because of the gendered division of household tasks, Darcie's husband manages to 'help' only in relation to 'trivial' stuff but leaves her to take charge of the overall management.

In other cases, new Chinese professional women who are in a dual-career marriage often seek help from their parents or in-laws. Fiona (33, senior accountant) shares her household duties with her mother:

> *My mum was a big help. On the weekends, I would do some cleaning and cook some pasta or something my son likes because my mum only cooks Chinese food. My husband is doing external work, like gardening and something. Internal cleaning that's what we do. He doesn't do [that sort of work].*

The gendered division is transferred from the younger generation to the older generation. It is typical among Chinese migrants in Australia for dual-career couples to outsource household duties to the older female generation, either the mother or mother-in-law (Chan, 2020). Men will, however, often take responsibility for tasks outside the house, such as gardening and mowing the lawn, signifying their masculine strength in public (Walsh,

2011). Gardening work is often treated as a signal of adopting a white 'Australian' life, because it is often not part of household chores in China.

Like most skilled migrant women, most new Chinese professional women often lack extended family to support household duties. Iris and Mia have experienced resistance from their husbands to share household duties:

> *Yes, I think [my husband] still [doesn't] like cooking. I don't like cooking, but I initially forced him to do some cooking. I said because you're not going to find a job soon ... but he was brilliant. He did it poorly; he kept cooking the same thing for three weeks in a row, and then I eventually got sick of them. Then I said never mind, and I will cook and do cooking. It started with me cooking mainly, and he helped and then when I moved around for him to cook for about a month, I eventually took over because I couldn't stand it. And so now I'm doing all the cooking, and he's doing all the dishwashing. It has been changing.* (Iris, 30 years old, Research Officer)

In particular, husbands refuse to undertake tasks that require planning, such as cooking, but instead engage with tasks that require less effort such as dishwashing. Daminger (2019) argues that activities within the household that require making decisions are considered cognitive labour. Women are more likely to undertake this labour and anticipate the needs of the family, making decisions and monitoring progress. Many women in my study are also in charge of their family life, including overall management and planning.

Iris's husband could not find a job for some time after his arrival. Sharing responsibilities within the household seems to be a way of reinstating his role as head of the household. This negotiation implies that a temporary compromise and change of the gendered role in family life is possible. Iris is not alone in this situation. Mia, 37 years old, used to be an HR director in a Fortune 500 company in Beijing, China, and was a full-time housewife at the time of the interview:

> *My husband will never volunteer to clean the house if I don't ask him to do so. He washes our dishes now because I cook most of the time. I cannot cook and wash dishes;*

it is unfair. The regular thing he does every day is to take the garbage out and warm milk for our kids. You have to remind him of these routines. There is a lot of communication and work there. He wouldn't think of [them] himself.

The emotional task (Taylor, 1998) of overall management in the household is often neglected. Mia's husband could not perform routine tasks. This behaviour led to her frustrations and extra emotional management. Participants in the study usually take on everyday duties and regular household responsibilities as if they do not have a daytime job.

Penny (43 years old, senior research officer) is the only one in this study who did not complain about the household tasks:

I want [my husband] to share the housework because I have known him for so long since our university. I know he was a spoiled kid. His mum spoiled him as part of his upbringing. You see, he's from Fujian; Fujian people treasure their sons a lot. He never does any housework. Even his sister complained to me – my brother never does any housework. I have known him for a long time. This exchange is what I expected. He didn't do housework at home. Because I got this expectation before I got married, it's not like a surprise. I'm okay to take over all the housework. That's why I said I assign him one task: clean the house's roof every week and take out the trash or take out the bin. Yeah, that's the thing that I don't like to do.

Even though Penny has a doctoral degree and has lived in Australia for over ten years, she insists that upbringing was more critical in her way of life. She does not conform to the societal expectations of being a Dushengnv, and she mentioned that she was accustomed to consistently performing household chores as a young girl. Managing these tasks might ease the tension at home and reduce her level of emotional labour. Penny internalises the feminised assumptions of overseeing domestic work.

Child caring is also seen as a 'naturally' feminine task. The participants who are mothers often find themselves taking most of the time to look after their child/ren. Abby, a 36-year-old senior project officer, says:

Usually, I will take leave [if my daughter gets sick]. Not that [my husband] offers. He doesn't show any interest to help; it is like my daughter would be more clingy to me rather than him.

Abby's husband does not offer to take turns in looking after their daughter, or even in the event of sickness. Describing her daughter as 'more clingy' with her implies that Abby has put in more time and energy into the day-to-day caring responsibilities. Fiona, 33 years old, a senior accountant, cherishes her time with her son as quality time and values it as a privilege:

We usually have dinner outside after work, and I read books to our son, preparing for the next day. My husband is in construction during the weekend, so he usually works on Saturdays. Last year, I worked on Saturdays too. Starting this year, I take my son to extra activities, including basketball, meeting our friends, or take him to new playgrounds or outside playgrounds, indoor plays, or I would take him out for brunch. I enjoy spending time with him, going somewhere or playing something, or taking him to meet his friends. Sunday is a family day, so we usually go out to do grocery shopping together, do some housework and prepare for the following week.

Collins (2019) argues that work–family conflict is not inevitable but significantly related to where a working mother lives. Policies and cultural attitudes shape how working mothers manage their time between work and family. Fiona values the flexible working arrangements in Australia as excellent support for family life. Consequently, she considers child-rearing as a way of enjoying family life. Fiona seems to find some pleasure in her everyday routine. Grocery shopping becomes a family event. This level of reflection is quite refreshing as opposed to focusing on unavoidable family tasks. Returning to family and life becomes an escape from work pressures.

Tess's husband travelled to China a few days after she had her second child and finished his tasks earlier than planned. He did not return to Australia immediately but toured Shanghai for three days while Tess looked after her two young children by herself:

I think being the only child, as one myself, we are way too independent. I can do

anything, and I don't need to depend on my husband. Perhaps I can have a better life without him, completely detached from him. [My husband] sometimes said I am competent. My mother said a similar thing – she said I should play powerless in front of men so that my husband would cherish me more. Because I am more than capable, my husband took it for granted and thought I could do anything, do all the housework, and look after our children. That's why he never offered to help. (Tess, 36 years old, Production Coordinator)

What is often invisible for Dushengnv is their capacity to solve problems through individual effort, by 'doing it all'. Tess reflects on her capability in managing her household tasks and child-rearing responsibilities. Her husband takes it as an excuse for not sharing them. The assumption that she is able to do it by herself is, however, problematic. Tess's mother suggests she play the feminine card by showing some weakness. In traditional Confucian values, the old, the young, the sick and women are categorised as powerless, while men are responsible for looking after them. However, China's changing dynamics promote women's rights, encouraging them to have a professional career and achieve changes in stepping out of the household. Yet men are quite slow in keeping up with this change, particularly within the household. The reluctance to share taken-for-granted women's tasks, to look after children and household duties, is persistent: men continue to be seen – or to see themselves – as the singular breadwinner.

This section exemplifies the disparity of expectations of a family life as Dushengnv and the mundaneness of everyday life in Australia. It argues that new Chinese professional women in Australia, like professional women in China, are still subjected to a gendered role of managing the household tasks and child-rearing in the private domain, even if the parameters of that gendering are sometimes 'looser'. Unlike professional women in China, they experience relatively less social pressure and are also eager to influence their partners to accept some changes, attempting to adopt a different approach in their family life. Though perceiving some gendered norms reluctantly and adopting some flexibilities with their partners and the extended family, some of these women manage to positively lead some changes in making a family life enjoyable. Compared to other skilled migrants, new

Chinese professional women, raised as Dushengnv, have a greater degree of frustration between having a life and having a family. Many of them endeavour to adopt an 'Australian' way of living.

A work-life balance

Literature on work-life balance is often discussed primarily regarding married women's challenges, juggling between achieving a professional career and enjoying a family life, often excluding single women (Fujimoto et al., 2012). With technological development, new emerging controls via social media and the changing nature of work, boundaries between work and life blur. In recent years, a work-life balance and the pressures of achieving it have become a key concern (Brough et al., 2014; Fujimoto et al., 2012), particularly within corporate life. 'Work-life balance' refers to 'the linkages between work and family roles, originally concerned mainly with women and work-family stress' (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 1). Single women also find it more difficult to 'juggle' work and (non-work) life.

In the Australian context, Pocock talks about 'work/care regimes' and points out the gendered nature of family life (2003). There is an institutional lag in coping with changes in that more women with dependents are in the paid workforce, but the care is still largely shouldered by women (Pocock, 2005b). This section draws on the idea of work-life balance to navigate the challenges and choices that new Chinese professional women face in Australia. It argues that the understanding of work-life balance primarily shapes how new Chinese professional women's perceptions of an Australian lifestyle influence their choices when facing competing priorities between their work and family life. First, new Chinese professional women construct a comparative perspective towards the need to have a family life in Australia, in comparison with their peers in China, and actively seek a work-life balance in Australia. Second, they desire to climb the career ladder and make sacrifices to juggle their work and family life.

Bella (29 years old, senior engineer) explains that:

> *If you start work [in China], you can foresee the coming 40 years of life, not what I*

want. I want to work hard, but I also want to enjoy the time. I don't wish that I work,
work, work, and own a lot of money, but I don't have time to spend it.

Bella envisions a specific work-life balance in China and assumes it is a static and repetitive
life course. The social and working culture of a contemporary 996 work life (9 am to 9 pm,
Monday to Saturday) in large metropolitan cities in China is not appealing (Xu, 2021).
Work-dominated and oriented life is not satisfying. Her idea of life with leisure and
enjoyment can only be achieved through migration. Effy also wants to have a greater social
life:

After work, I [go] to the gym. After that, I [will] watch a drama. I usually go out with
my friends to visit museums and other stuff at the weekend.

Effy sets clear boundaries between work and life through working hours, breaking up a
routine professional task. Life is defined through leisure, through socialisation and
spending time on other tasks.

Holly talks more explicitly about her choices:

I would find activities to do [after work]. I do yoga every week. I tried to run if my work
was becoming too overwhelming. What I would do is I talked to my colleagues a lot.
One of my principles is not to leave anything overnight. If I'm feeling it tonight, not
happy, and I will just say XX if we have a talk in a separate room and then try to
resolve it on the spot, and that's it; life is quite segregated. I don't invite colleagues into
my personal life that much because I keep life as life and work as work quite
separately.

Holly separates the boundaries of work and life. It is an emerging theme for those
participants who are single that life is understood as leisure. Life, however, is perceived
differently by other new Chinese professional women who have family obligations. Fiona
(33, senior accountant) talks about the importance of 'me time':

More freedom, more balance, because I know my kid needs a lot of my time. I don't
want to spend time on other people that much, and you want to treasure your time.

From two years before, one or two years back, I started to feel that time is so important. I spent a lot of time searching for the right school for my kid this year. And I drive him around to parks and go to different classes. I have to go home early, and I haven't worked overtime. My working pattern accommodates my kid because I try not to work late, but I can get up early. It's how you want to work and balance it with your kid's timetable. I don't want to sacrifice for other people. I know some of my friends who work very hard.

Fiona pictures life as an ability to allocate quality time for her child, different to 'having a life'. Her accounts of life reflect her sense of motherhood and the gendered prioritising of child-rearing instead of focusing on her career. Gina (37, retail saleswomen) is regretful about the time she missed:

I feel like I was missing something, for the time that I didn't get to spend with [my daughter] when she was little. I'm still a little sorry.

Gina ran her restaurant in Australia and sent her child to her parents in China. Even though her daughter was loved and taken good care of by her grandparents, Gina could justify this guilt over impoverished time in her daughter's life course – motherhood plays a central role in her family life.

Abby thinks about life in Australia to reflect on her position amid the broader social and cultural environment:

I think Australia is pretty simple, and this multicultural kind of environment is pretty open to migrants … You can do whatever you want and have a life of your own.

Distancing herself from her social networks in China, Abby does not need to worry about complicated interpersonal relations and cultural practices. The openness of an 'Australian life' means she could choose a life detached from her family or country of origin. To some extent, she has the freedom to visualise her way of living, distancing herself from her cultural practices. Tess emphasises her attempt to distance herself from pre-existing cultural practices:

> *If I knew I had to live with my mother-in-law, I would never have married my husband, and I meant if I knew, she would migrate to Australia too.*

Tess takes migrating to Australia as a chance to step away from dealing with her mother-in-law. Many of the participants aspire to be independent, financially and emotionally. Through the migration process, however, they become vulnerable because of the lack of a social support network. Australian society seems to have different expectations of migrants and women. Linked with the previous section, some women, particularly who are strictly Dushengnv, often overcome their struggles and seize the opportunity for a different idea of living. Simultaneously, the desire that drives them to have a better life could justify the lifestyle they choose.

This section argues that many new Chinese professional women in this study have a different view towards a work-life balance in the Australian context. Their idea of having a life often intermingles with a question of what 'a life' is, shaped by cultural attitudes within their family and the Chinese community in Sydney.

Everyday emotions

> *I think I have underestimated the difficulties in life after the birth of my son. I had to learn everything from scratch, from feeding the baby to soothing him to sleep. I had countless sleepless nights. I was frustrated and I was wondering if life would be easier if I had him in China.* (Nicole, 37 years old, Research Officer)

Nicole laughed when talking about the difficulties she experienced in life, but she assured me that life in Australia was a bit challenging with emotional ups and downs. While many women see the move to Australia as giving them a greater chance to have the life they aspire to, there are consequences. For many, like Nicole, the burdens of motherhood mean they do not get to enjoy the social life they had hoped for. As a result, many started to experience emotional difficulties. Emotions are complex reflexive reactions towards frustrations and dissonance. The new Chinese professional women in my study talked about their emotional troubles, even though many Dushengnv are raised to not express

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how they feel. The sophistication of hiding their emotions as a signal of strength was acquired from childhood and conflicted with mixed recognition of uncertainties and heavily weighted gendered roles in the family. The broader social differences in China and Australia also generate unsettled feelings, not as a symptom of psychological stress, but as socially contextualised reactions to confusion around 'what is life'.

Tu (2018) builds on Levitt and Glick Schiller's call to recognise migrants as individuals in 'multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields' (2004, p. 1003) and urges us to look at the personal life cycle and family as factors that 'influence decisions concerning migration and its aftermath' (Tu, 2018, p. 157). Gender relations are, in fact, reworked by reflexivity where it is 'bound up with modes of classification and with specific forms of power and inequality (Adkins, 2004, p. 24; Threadgold, 2020, p. 130). Through the reconfiguration of life, I analyse new Chinese professional women's emotions as their urges to deal with uncertainties and anxieties. On being selective in their expression of emotions, these women constantly reposition themselves through struggles and frustrations in life.

The interesting phenomenon is that to return to their family in China and to have a life there is not considered, even though some professional women in the study face severe depression. Charlotte, a 26-year-old media coordinator, expresses loneliness and struggles with being away from her family:

> *Because of my study, I was depressed. I cried in the middle of the night [laughing]). I don't want to talk with anybody. But the thing is, I don't feel like this is a problem. I do have depression with my studies. But the thing is, I think once I finish crying in the middle of the night, I still have to face the things and face the challenge. I can always handle this by myself, don't worry.*

Charlotte endeavours to navigate the Australian higher education structure, but she struggles because she expects a good academic outcome but lacks support during her study. Depression and anxieties are daily experiences, and they threaten her chances to develop the skills needed in the field of higher education in Australia. Positioning herself as a strong, independent and capable self is, ironically, problematic. As discussed in Chapter

One, Dushengnv have specific capital that allows them to learn new skills and adapt to the environment, but this learning process requires time, effort and networking. Charlotte needs time to navigate the expectations and practices in the Australian institutions, but her sense of not being able to meet her high expectations is emotionally damaging. She keeps pushing herself for 'a life' in Australia.

Darcie also experiences some difficulties:

> *No, I didn't tell [my parents] of [my depression]. I was afraid to do so. On the one hand, I didn't want them to worry about me. On the other hand, because of my dad. He has high expectations of me. If I did something not up to his standard, he would be disappointed. If he is disappointed, I will lose my confidence and be heartbroken. He would not say anything positive to inspire me but discourage me. That's why I felt that I needed to do this independently. I would, in general, only report my happiness and exclude any unhappiness to them. Doing so makes it easier for me, and they are happier.*

Being a Dushengnv, Darcie can sense her parents' high expectations for her. She could not find a full-time job for about ten months and became depressed, caused by frustrations trying to realise a transition from study to work. The physical distance makes any emotional sharing with her father challenging. Darcie does not disappoint her father as she anticipates his disproval and subjects her inner self to this subordination. The parental authority behind this consideration – only sharing positiveness – suggests a specific category of emotional labour.

Darcie is not alone. Nicole (37 years old, research officer) shares her feelings during the interview and in her diaries:

> *In general, I would keep things to myself. Sometimes, I would take it out on my husband, but I wouldn't talk with others when I am sad or something. I would speak to my husband directly. Sometimes I may lose my temper, or sometimes I prefer some silence and keep it to myself. I wouldn't talk with others. Maybe I have spoken to my mother sometimes. When she was here, I would speak to her, but I wouldn't share it*

with her when she was not here. Most of the time, I would internalise it. Sometimes I
cannot take it, but I wouldn't take it to others.

Nicole's narrative indicates that she also needs to manage emotional labour in the domestic space and specify who she could turn to for specific matters. 'Keep it to myself' and 'internalise it' are also common phrases in her diaries, when she writes about incidents that happened at work. Against the feminine tendency to show her feelings, Nicole tries to present her independence and capacity in both the private and public domains. Frustrations are seen as part of life in Australia. Despite the attractions of achieving a work-life balance in coming to Australia, subsequent developments make this much less viable, and this comes with huge emotional costs.

Some participants in this study seek support from the Chinese community, which often plays an important role in new Chinese professional women's everyday life. Abby, 36 years old, a senior project officer, talks about the importance of having her own community:

Our neighbourhood, the whole area, is relatively young and family oriented. Many
people are in a similar situation to share and talk. And of course, I attended a couple of
other family programs, children's education, children–parent relationship workshops,
and counsellors' contact.

In acknowledging these issues, Abby already exemplifies the idea that life in Australia is not as perfect as hoped, though it is manageable. She takes advantage of her neighbours and builds a community of her own, who share similar lived experiences and understand the challenges in life. Speaking the same language also makes it easier to communicate. Because she has engaged in higher education in Australia, she acquires the capability to find ways into the neighbourhood community.

Those who are single face different struggles. Charlotte shares her anxiety:

Everyone around me, friends, they all got married or whatever. Every time they open a
topic, I feel so isolated. I don't like to go with them anymore. Once they got married,
they got a baby. I can't talk to them anymore. If you want to talk to me, I can speak to

you, but I don't want to talk to you about your life, family and baby. I hate babies. For the babies that can control their emotions, I am okay with them, but for these little ones that keep crying, I can't handle them. I hate going out with them, my friends; they started to talk about babies' activities; I don't know what to do.

Charlotte finds it problematic that her friends are moving forward in their lives, getting married and starting a family. It almost seems like she is losing track of her own life. Not being able to synchronise with her friends' life courses causes frustrations and prompts her to think of what life means. Other studies in contemporary China point to this urgency of having a life because of peer pressure, which is unavoidable in their life course because of the expectation that everyone will become a parent (Gui, 2020; Xie, 2021).

Charlotte also questions her earlier decision to migrate to Australia:

Because I think it was unnecessary to baotuan *[form a group]. I believe many migrants' communities are 'young' [new] migrants; they don't understand me; and also 'old' migrants who have lived here for over a decade, they cannot understand my situation – I have lived here for a decade, but I haven't immigrated here.*

Charlotte cannot find a sense of belonging because of particular difficulties she faces in life – she has lived with a temporary student visa for approximately ten years. A strong sense of floating and not being able to integrate into Australian society is evident. Some current research in the Philippines suggests that workers construct this sense of permanent temporariness in Hong Kong as part of their way of living (Boersma, 2019). Charlotte is also living in this 'limbo' (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014) – she is not achieving any life milestones and is left trapped in the temporariness of migration regimes. How to socialise with others and move forward troubles Charlotte.

New Chinese professional women's emotions are shaped by, but not reducible to, the family values, beliefs and practices of their Dushengnv status. Compared to non-Dushengnv, these women, who are used to being the centre of their family in China, experience difficulties in expressing their feelings. Meanwhile, they can also see the differences in Australian society, and that emotions are part of their feminine characteristics. Many of them find it

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challenging to deal with this change. Migration to Australia also means they are deprived of family support, having limited friends and networks. Some are trapped in a space where they cannot resonate with others even within the Chinese diaspora. The disjuncture and disconnection provoke questions among themselves, which they might internalise or use to create a community of their own. Grappling with what 'a life' is is challenging for Dushengnv, whether perceiving singleness or family life.

'Having a life' is not only shaped by the emotions and feelings they experience in their family life in Australia; it also involves emotional labours with their parents in China. It is important to acknowledge that emotional labour is required among all the participants, although the workload varies. Compared to other skilled migrants and other Chinese migrants among the Chinese diaspora, new Chinese professional women in this study share some similarities in positioning themselves in the centre of their current Australian life, subjective to their accounts of their birth family in China and adopted forms of selective perceptions of an Australian lifestyle.

Their lives in China, prior to their migration, of being raised as Dushengnv profoundly shape their perceptions of having a life. Life is perceived as family life with clear boundaries from work. In reality, in Australia the migration process of distancing themselves from their support system creates freedom and space. It also generates frustrations and anxieties that they do not necessarily know how to deal with. The difference between the two societies pushes them to reflect and find ways to deal with dissonances. At times, some new Chinese professional women have experienced severe emotional distress, such as depression – they generally hide these feelings not to show their weakness, particularly as ways not to disappoint their parents, as forms of heavy emotional labour.

Life in Australia: Is it worth it?

The minute I landed in Australia, I saw the natural environment here; I decided to bring all my family members here and make Australia my second hometown. We had missed the golden twenty years in China during the business reform. From the

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economic point of view, we may have some losses, but we didn't regret migrating to Australia. I have a prosperous prospect for Australia's environment. For example, we have free speech here. We have many options to choose freely here, and the living environment is excellent. And I think it is best for our health and mind. Of course, the economic climate in China is fantastic. And there are other good things about China, such as the long-lasting cultural heritage. But you cannot have it all, right? Comparatively speaking, I prefer the living environment in Australia. That's why I never thought of returning to China. (Olivia, 49 years old, Small Business Owner)

Olivia is drawn to Australia's natural environment. Australia seems to have everything she desires: freedom of speech, appealing nature and a good livelihood for migrants. Nevertheless, Olivia constructs these perceptions through a direct comparison with mainland China about twenty years ago – she has missed the rapid economic development there since then. Still, she places more value on other aspects of life that financial capital cannot replace: a desired lifestyle and a healthy balance between work and life. In Olivia's opinion, life in Australia is constructed around good prospects for the future, in direct contrast with the constraints of a socialist life. Another motivation for Olivia to migrate to Australia is that she wanted to have another child, which was not possible at the time of the one-child policy.

Like Olivia, many new Chinese professional women are attracted by Australia's natural environment, which is in stark contrast with mainland China where pollution and food security are growing concerns due to aggressive economic development. Other attractive aspects of Australia include comparative freedom of political choice, ways of living and social values. Unlike literature concerning lifestyle migration, which often discusses mobility from urban to rural localities (Benson& O'Reilly, 2009), new Chinese professional women in this study often move from modern cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen to cosmopolitan cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. An important benefit for these women is escape from the social norms in mainland China, which call for young generations to dedicate themselves to building fast economic development, something that drains professionals' time and energy.

Olivia is not alone. While for some the emotional costs of migration were high, by and large many of the interviewees continued to see enormous benefits in moving to Australia, especially in contrast to the life on offer at home. New Chinese professional women often suggest a positive turn in describing their lives or developing strategies to normalise their status in the broader Australian society. To understand their life experiences, I examine how they interpret their comparative financial stability and flexibility in allocating time beyond work and building the future they desire. Bella explains the negative dimensions of working life in China:

> *Working overtime is very common in China in our industry. My dad and my cousin both work in the same industry, and they must work overtime. I have many friends working in this industry, but they have to work overtime during weekends and public holidays, which are seen as typical. For example, before the long weekend [October holiday], they may be asked to finish one project at the last minute before leaving their office, and they have no choice but to work overtime during the holiday. Working overtime until 7 pm is tiring and unacceptable, but for my family and friends, it is prevalent until late in the night or through the whole weekend.*

Bella contrasts her working life in Australia directly with that of her family and friends in China as a clear indication of distancing herself from an unhealthy relationship between work and life. Overtime work is a common practice in her industry (Wang & Shane, 2019). Bella distinguishes the length of stretching over time. If working overtime is inevitable, the degree of depriving it of life can be lessened by shortening hours. Judy (37 years old, assistant accountant) also tries to keep some distance from a life in China:

> *If I had stayed in China and gone back 15 years ago, I think I could have already probably had a better position. I could work in a court and have a better place there. But at the same time, I do enjoy the lifestyle here. I told my friends in China, friends from the university in China, and many of them have to work overtime. They just work and work. From my perspective, it is tough for them to balance their lives and work, and it is entirely stressful. I want to spend more time with my children. I think it is my personal choice. I don't regret that.*

Judy also paints a picture of a forced and unhealthy working life in China, where work dominates life. She imagines a better career in China than Australia but, in retrospect, she accepts that it would come with a lifestyle with fewer flexibilities in her family life. The fact that a specific lifestyle is bonded with a geographic location becomes her rationale. By contrasting her peers' lives, she finds a reasonable explanation for choosing family over her career. Indeed, Australia has better work and family policies that support various flexible work arrangements. Simultaneously, other invisible barriers (discussed in Chapter Four) prevent these working mothers from having a linear career progression. It seems to be inevitable for them to put their family life first. Gui's (2020) research on Shengnv in contemporary China argues that the gendered norm of prioritising family over career is still prevalent as a sign of dominant patriarchal powers in place. This idea consequently influences new Chinese professional women's view of a 'good life' and accepts having a family as part of that life.

Judy is not the only one choosing family over career. Mia, now a full-time housewife, had a successful career in human resources. She recounts some moments in that life in China:

> *I didn't have any regrets, to be honest. The big difference, I reckoned, was that everything was about work. When working in Beijing, I was super busy and didn't have a life. I used to think about clients, work progress and everything related to work, and I was very anxious. After I came here and stayed for a little, I became peaceful and got into the feeling of life. Now my life over here is more about life, and I check my phone all the time about what's on sale. My focus completely shifted. My mentality was different. I am much more peaceful. After I had my children, my role in life changed as well.*

Mia reports less stress after stepping away from a busy working life in a highly competitive social and cultural environment. Mia calculates the weight of balanced family life with her work's anxieties and stress, repositioning herself as 'family-centred' and wanting a 'good life'. The ability to slow down voluntarily makes up for the symbolic loss in her work life.

An 'Australian life', in terms of actual everyday experiences, is often unfamiliar to parents

of Dushengnv, who might not be in the position for transnational mobility, particularly for those who reside in the third- and second-tier cities in China. Bella says:

> *Because my mother wanted me to go back to Xinjiang, I told her even though I would not stay in Australia, I was not going back to Xinjiang because that province is not highly developed. If you start work, you can foresee your coming 40 years of life; it is not what I want. I want to work hard, but I also want to enjoy the time. I don't want to work, work and own a lot of money, and I don't have time to spend this money. She always said it to me. You come to this world just to suffer.*

Most mothers of the Dushengnv generation have stepped out of their household for paid work (Liu, 2007), but they often stay in proximity to their in-laws and other family members. Familial obligations and repaying the debts are expectations as a woman in their life. Bella's mother is no exception. Although the commitment to financial compensation changes over time (see Tu, 2016, 2018), Bella's parents support a temporary suspension of these responsibilities as she pursues a degree overseas. Bella's mother has experienced the dramatic changes during what Liu phrases as the 'unlucky generation', where women workers were made more redundant than their male counterparts (Liu, 2007). Thus, her mother intended to transfer her idea of life as hard labour to Bella and expected her to work twice as hard to compete with her male colleagues.

Unlike Bella, who has a positive attitude towards the 'Australian life', Charlotte is concerned more about the lived experiences of excitement and a ticket to a rising career in China:

> *It's hopeless [here]. There is nothing [in Australia]; I'm young, and I want to experience something more like something thrilling, something sensational. I want to go to more commercialised industries related to my study. Because I used to be a media coordinator here for a media company. But whatever I have is more like an Australian base. But if I go somewhere else, even in China, it will be worldwide based. I don't want to stay here.*

Charlotte sees life in China as providing a better future career ladder because she thinks of

China as a place with many possibilities, full of richness and adventures. However, Charlotte has stayed in Australia for over ten years and may not have a clear idea about what life would be like in China today. Indeed, the rise of China in the last decade and 'brain drain' incentives in mainland China successfully attract young Chinese to return from overseas (Wang, 2020). Australia's geographic location represents remoteness, and the perception of family life does not entice Charlotte to stay. She longs for the cosmopolitan life in China.

> *Don't come down here [Australia]. It is hopeless, and nothing here. If you have the option to stay in China, stay in China; otherwise, don't come here. What Australia has is only the air and living environment. As to work opportunities, commercial aspects, or personal development, you will do so much better in China. Even though I haven't worked in a Chinese workplace before, I heard my friends describe what it was like working there. The glass ceiling is very low here. Comparatively speaking, it is higher in China.*

Charlotte's perception is that, despite the sense that there is greater gender freedom in Australia, in fact, she believes the Australian workplace is also highly gendered and racialised, negatively impacting her choice. The natural environment is less attractive because it is normalised as an everyday existence. Charlotte believes there is still a 'glass ceiling' in in China, but the situation is improving.

Judy, a 37-year-old assistant account outlines some of the pros and cons for professional women in China and Australia:

> *And if you [are] open [to accepting the Australian culture], it is straightforward for you to adjust to life here because you can have more friends. If you want to have a colourful life, you know, [then] it is a good idea to stay in China, because I feel in Australia it could be, you could get bored, you know, especially in a smaller city like Newcastle. You could get bored because, like China does so many activities, you have many restaurants in China, so many entertainments. But here you just really, it could be boring. [After work] you go home and look after your children. And if you want to*

have a perfect career, I think it's good to stay in China because here as a first-generation immigrant, the language is not your first language. It could be a barrier to your career.

Judy emphasises the boredom of her life in Australia, where time at the end of the workday and on weekends is often associated with family responsibilities and a limited commercialised lifestyle. Thus, a wide range of life choices and having more time for leisure seem to be more attractive. It almost seems like family time is not a choice but a forced consequence of no commercialised relaxation. Although Judy gives up the career prospects and night life (as in going out to restaurants and having funs at night) she enjoyed in China, she values family life as the goal of having a fruitful life in Australia. The possibility of allocating time to focus on her family and children becomes a new way of life. Penny, a 43-year-old research officer, also values highly the time she has to spend with her child:

I think I [would] probably [have stayed] in the public relations firm; I might have become one of the directors and [bought] a big house, expensive car, or probably have a relatively good life in Hong Kong, but on the other hand, maybe I [wouldn't] have that much time to spend with my kids. I probably [would have] got a domestic helper to help me raise my son rather than drive him [as I do] here and spend time with him. Yeah, that's something you must trade off what kind of life you want.

Penny looks at the possibility of allocating time to her child and having a quality family life as something positive she is willing to sacrifice her career for. She actively pursues a vision and a way out of her working life. This approach is taken by most new Chinese professional women who have experienced downward mobility in their careers.

A slow-paced and family-centred life is often more than a forced choice by some new Chinese professional women. Being at different stages in life also prompts some break from their previous busy working life. Nicole, a 37-year-old research officer, has mixed feelings about her Australian life:

I cannot say I enjoy life yet, but I would say I am comfortable here [in Australia]. This degree of preferences of an Australian life, I cannot tell. There are advantages to a

different place. But I have to say, raising a child here is excellent. This policy at work is also perfect.

Nicole describes an ambivalent sense of life, unsure whether her current life is something she was looking for. 'Comfortable' sounds like a compromise to justify her loss in terms of a professional career trajectory as a medical doctor. There are also detailed emotional accounts in her diaries, including moments of parenting anxiety such as: 'I don't know why my son was so moody today' and 'He had a tantrum at the shopping centre, I felt very embarrassed'. The more flexible work-life policies in Australia prompt Nicole to reflect on what matters to her at this stage of her life.

Some professional women, such as Bella, talk about a 'future life':

From when we get a pay rise, our life is getting better. And we do have belief and faith in our future life that we can become even better.

Bella emphasises material satisfaction as an anticipated outcome of her working experience. Life is a positive trajectory, based on her current work and life status. And yet Bella has not grappled with the time deprivation, as experienced by other new Chinese professional women, that results from trying to balance professional advancement and involvement in a child's development. This 'future life' is full of uncertainties.

Meanwhile, plans in life, such as having a baby, are also at stake. Darcie talks about the complications of family plans:

Because of the migration process here, my career has been put off, which meant that my life plan was also delayed. I don't want to have a child before I have my financial independence. Life is constantly changing. It is essential that I wait until I can look after my child and myself financially. It is my responsibility.

Darcie's struggle is real. Darcie delays getting married and having children, and she prioritises migration trajectories, similar to how other Asian migrants in Robertson's study put their life plans on hold (Robertson, 2021). In another study about professional women in mainland China, women express concern over their 'ticking clock' when it comes to

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having a child (Xie, 2021). The pressure of becoming a parent and the importance of financial stability compete. It seems Darcie wants to be 'qualified' as a parent. Her mobility from a small western rural city in Gansu Province to a cosmopolitan city – first Guangzhou and then Sydney – means that financial stability is the key to her inner security.

Other new Chinese professional women also emphasise the importance of having an income as a necessary step to gaining gender equality in their household and sharing household tasks. Victoria thinks she should be able to choose to become a homemaker after her migration:

> *After we migrated here, I had fights with my husband about housework. He said he was the one who brought money to our family. That motivated me to get back into my professional field; especially for women, earning an income is crucial. If I had an income, would he reason with me? Of course not. It was a fact when I was working in China. Back then, the whole society assumed that women should take charge in the household domain, and you had to do this. After I came here, I thought I should have more freedom.*

The exposure to a different idea of life and the deprivation of extended family support in Australia broadens Victoria's understanding of gender relations at home and valuing it as a significant part of her Australian life. The shift from a professional woman to a homemaker confirms her parents' (particularly her mother's) concern for Dushengnv's independence, not just emotional and psychological but also financial. Given that Australia is more developed regarding gender equality, she feels her husband would make some behavioural changes in response to the pressures of Australian social norms.

This section examined what an 'Australian life' looks like in new Chinese professional women's accounts. It argued that 'having an Australian life' is contested and conditioned by multiple aspects. First, new Chinese professional women face challenges at work in their career progressions (as discussed in Chapter Four and Five) and they try to take the lead in the private domain. Second, like other skilled migrants, they have trouble balancing their work and family life in Australia. They attempt to lead changes in the private domain

towards a more equal gender distribution through household tasks and child-rearing tasks. Third, some professional women in the study find it difficult to make changes, they adopt a different approach to strategically rationalise family quality time as an important part of their family life.

As Dushengnv, professional women in this study face some uncertainties in their lives, career changes, life status transformation and social norms. In general, all have to adopt a slower pace in life, explore what is possible in Australia and make strategic approaches to balancing their work and family life. At times, completing tasks at work and in life can be challenging; they manage to transfer their professionalism from work to life and make rational changes. Meanwhile, the seemingly voluntary slow tempo of an 'Australian life' conflicts with their parental expectation of having a life and the urgency to meet life milestones in their transition from a public domain to a private space.

Conclusion

Life in Australia is often understood and experienced differently by new Chinese professional women in this study. Life has been portrayed, experienced and reimagined as they engage with their everyday life. This chapter started with a 'return' of life in both new Chinese professional women and their parents' expectations. On the one hand, new Chinese professional women, particularly those raised as strictly Dushengnv, enjoy the temporary freedom away from their parents' heavy involvement and strict guidelines regarding their lives. On the other hand, they reveal strong desires to return parental investment, especially those who have family obligations. I argue that the idea of 'return' is not opposed to the idea of staying in Australia. Instead, many women reconfigure it through having a family life in Australia, as return to their parental expectation of 'having a life'. The guilt of being away from their family and the ambivalence about returning is usually expressed as conflicted feelings.

In new Chinese professional women's accounts, life in Australia is also contingent and fluid. They see their aspiration to have a work-life balance as having a life in the Australian context. The ability to navigate work/care regimes and negotiate the boundaries between

work and life is a crucial aspect of the lifestyle they long for. At times, they have anxieties and frustrations as their time is stretched between competing demands at work and home. Meanwhile, they can also find comfort through direct comparison with their peers in China, who are often subject to enormous work pressure. Some participants build their network and communities by constantly repositioning themselves and developing compatible strategies to balance their work and life.

New Chinese professional women in this study demonstrate their feelings and expectations in many ways. First, they aspire to pursue an independent life away from their familial obligation through higher education or skilled migration. In the public domain, they are capable and independent professionals. Whereas in the private household, they are no different from other women: they struggle to find their feet in adopting an egalitarian attitude to sharing the household duties with their heterosexual partner and maintaining a Chinese face in the Chinese community. Second, not having extended family support and having limited access to local social welfare, new Chinese professional women also experience tensions often aggregated through negotiations over child-rearing, emotional labour and other trivial tasks within their household. Home becomes the battlefield for these women to fight against parental power and connect with a Chinese community. Third, frustrations and anxieties are embedded in each woman's life trajectory. Life is but a temporary suspension of leisure. The shift from work life to a focus on family life gives Chinese professional women more power in easing their guilt over leaving their parents behind.

Whether aspiration for a good life through higher education, migration and changes in their career or life matters in a temporal setting because all shape Chinese women's idea of life, which is not the pressure to always look into the future. Any structural issues or systematic barriers in their career advancement do not matter as much in that sense. They want to live a life, not be framed by their parents' expectations or social and cultural norms.

This chapter unpacked 'having a life', as different from the expectations of Dushengnv's parents and peers in contemporary China, and an 'Australian life' to explore choices that new Chinese professional women made in their everyday family life in Australia. For some

participants, their status of being Dushengnv interplays with their experiences through migration and transforms their perceptions of family life, career and workplace experiences. What they perceive in their private domain, often neglected in existing research, shapes their positions in a broader social context. Indeed, each individual biographic trajectory is different, but they share a generational landscape under the one-child policy.

Conclusion

In answering Guo's call to develop research on highly skilled Chinese in different destination countries (2022, p. 863), this thesis sought to understand the lived experiences of new Chinese professional women in Sydney and how they make sense of their career, work and the challenges of a work-life balance, considering their origins. The critical research question I asked was this: How do new Chinese professional women adapt to expectations regarding life and work in Australia?

To answer this research question, I needed to ask a set of subordinate questions: How do they navigate their careers and family relationships? How do they make sense of their experiences at work and how do these women's lives change after they migrate to Australia? My research drew on interviews with 21 new Chinese professional women recounting their life trajectories. These were designed to provide a nuanced understanding of their embodied experiences of adaptation and settlement – and how they manage to adjust and make sense of their expectations of careers and family life in the Australian context. Employing three key theoretical inputs – 'inequality regimes', intersectionality and Bourdieu's notions of capital and habitus – this thesis undertook an interdisciplinary approach to unpack the complexity of these women's experiences.

This thesis has argued that new Chinese professional women's experiences are distinguished in several ways. First, as I demonstrated in Chapter One and further illustrated through Chapters Four, Five and Six, their early socialisation because of the China's one-child policy and other post-Mao reforms means they feel intensified pressure to 'succeed' in multiple roles: as daughters, as wives, as professionals, and as individuals

capable of carrying the burden of expectations conventionally held by men. As many participants indicated, the pressures they experience and the burdens they have to shoulder are dual; to some extent and at various times, they have to shift between the good daughter (get married, have children and care for ageing parents) and the 'good son' (do well in school, have a successful career and uplift the family's social status). This argument connects the three empirical chapters. Career, workplace experiences and work-life balance are all experienced through a form of strategic prioritising in the gendered desires of these women.

Second, as I conveyed through Chapters Four to Six, even while they tend to have a common and distinguishing set of characteristics (typically the only child in their family; migrant to Australia; working in a professional capacity in Australia), their experiences are also incredibly diverse. There is no 'single' new Chinese professional woman – each of their stories is unique and individual.

Third, the thesis argued that their early conditioning in 1980s and 1990s China also has produced distinctive – though not necessarily unique – ways in which their experiences are shaped by multiple and sometimes conflicting temporalities. As discussed in Chapter Five, the Dushengnv generation experience time neither according to traditional Chinese cycles nor according to the demands of the Australian paid work and career schedule, and this is especially important for professional women. Rather, they experience time according to multiple and overlapping frames: the everyday routines that combine workplace monotony with surprising pleasures of social interaction; the career plan, which expects a certain elevation up corporate or professional hierarchies; and the family trajectory, which Dushengnv experience as sometimes suspended but always waiting to return, with its demands to have children, to return to China to care for parents and so on. This experience of time, I argue, is also influenced by the complicated and changing gendered expectations discussed in my first argument above: precisely when to do this, or how long to spend doing that, is continuously assessed against a gendered phasing of life – at this point in life, they need to be the 'good son', while in the next they need to be the good daughter. Such experiences of time are not unique, but I argue they are highly intensified for this cohort

and compressed dramatically by generational changes because of the one-child policy and other accelerated social reforms since the late 1970s. The effects of this intensification consequently shape the choices regarding their careers and family lives, which are often complex and dynamic.

This thesis has examined the experiences of new Chinese professional women and how they navigate their careers, work and life in the Australian context and, at the same time, negotiate promises and hopes with their parents as Dushengnv. It explored aspects of their careers – including career planning, divergent pathways and change – and interactions at work and home in terms of different temporal dimensions. Resonating with the growing body of literature on new Chinese migrants (Guo, 2022) and professional women in China (Xie, 2021) that presses the need to look at social and cultural settings, in this thesis I have argued that Dushengnv, under the one-child policy, are constrained by the Chinese state's patriarchal structure and changing family dynamics, and this is especially constraining for professional women. Migration to Australia has prompted, for these women, reflections on their roles and social expectations – changing within the family and broader society. Transnational mobility intersects with gender relations, which results in fluid and situated in time and space. In Chapter Four, I showed that the ways Chinese professional women construct the idea of a career and map their trajectory – as capable professionals – suggested that their choice of career works as a facilitator and also an obstacle in intimate relationships with their gendered encounters, first the father and next the husband. I have demonstrated how different temporalities shape their experiences related to professions in the *workplace* (Chapter Five). Specifically, the waiting before being accepted into a workplace creates a strong sense of suspension. Consequently, I focused on the specifics of time: how macro time (Australian workplace), meso time (professional time, related to organisational culture) and micro time ('small talk' time) work for Chinese professional women, and how these affect the ways they construct a sense of their being in a different place. Lastly, I looked at their future at work, constrained by their perceptions of the awaiting and present time – returning to their primary sense of time shaped by being Dushengnv but constrained by occupational and temporal regimes at work. Multiple

temporalities overlapped with one another, creating complicated contexts for new Chinese professional women, and consequently challenged their sense of being at work.

Being a Dushengnv is full of life challenges, as explored in three empirical chapters (Four, Five and Six) – as a daughter, wife and mother who face competing priorities. At the same time as they are expected to have successful careers, social and family expectations of 'daughterly filiality' (Martin, 2022a) among the 'privileged daughters' (Tu & Xie, 2020; Xie, 2021) of the one-child generations produced an enormous degree of anxiety around the tension between 'having a life' and a family as well as having a career.

Central to this study is the idea that a choice of career is not merely an individual act but a collective and constrained trajectory for new Chinese professional women; one which is full of hope and uncertainty. Having a career fulfils a promise to the parents of Dushengnv to have a specific life. The realities of life are distinguished from what these women expected. A career intersecting with migration and with the usual demands of a woman's life course is more complicated than simply navigating gendered norms. Experiences at work are often complex and eventful in multiple temporal dimensions, including macro social and cultural expectations, meso organisational practices and processes and nitty-gritty nuance in everyday encounters. Having a life – and especially having an Australian life – is different from what they anticipated in mainland China. This thesis argues that new Chinese professional women's challenges in life are often more nuanced, ambivalent and fluid, intermingled and tangled with other aspects through the lens of a sociological perspective on work and migration. 'Having a life' constantly motivates these women to make substantial changes in allocating their time and energy in building up a career while at the same time managing a family life to achieve a possible balance.

Careers of new Chinese professional women: Negotiations between family connections and distance

Being Dushengnv is highly conditioned by the one-child policy, the effects of which, alongside other social, cultural and economic changes, I have characterised with the idea of Dushengnv capital. This concept illustrates how new Chinese professional women's

experiences are shaped in time and space, and how social and cultural expectations and attributes are internalised through self-reflections on career, family and life: of gender relations and ethnicity. Specifically, being the only daughter shaped many participants' ideas of career from an early age and involved tireless negotiations with parental authorities and personal growth. Chapter Four on *career* also included further discussions on new Chinese professional women's multifaceted positionality, challenges of choosing specific career pathways, planning and changes underpinned by negotiations with their family, self and the broader Chinese community. Judy's career (as discussed in Chapter Four) is full of interruptions in life, which is typical of many of the women, including getting married, relocating the family geographically, having two children and the ups and downs with her parents in China. All these factors have created a nonlinear trajectory for Judy.

Across the array of interviewees, the involvement and expectations of their parents and husband help to understand how they managed their career trajectories, as progressed (Bella's career in a male-dominated industry), interrupted (Judy's five career changes) and reoriented (Rosie's change of professions). Their careers intermingle with their life course and positions in terms of the past, the present and the future. Several participants have shared their accounts of their career choices, influenced first by their fathers and then husbands, as supporters, influencers and even mentors in their career pathways.

Through this analysis of their careers, I have shown that historical background is significant to understanding new Chinese professional women's trajectories, emphasising the temporalities of life stages (seen in Victoria's experiences of being forced to stay at home): changing generational characteristics (demonstrated in different parental expectations for Nicole) and the interactions between women in this study and their parents (as seen in many of these women's accounts, for example, Darcie, Sky and Iris). Of course, the unevenness of rural-to-urban mobility and the complications of transnational mobility from China to Australia are crucial in shaping new Chinese professional women's career locations. Iris's narrative marked significant mobility from a city in Jiangxi Province to Xi'an and then to Sydney. This was similar for many women in this study.

Their career choice aligns with new Chinese professional women's motivations to be independent and their desire to remain distant from their birth family. The pursuit of a career thus creates space in which they experience a suspension in fulfilling their familial obligations (Martin, 2018). At the same time, their career choice drives them away from home, away from their established social networks in China, which consequently delays or disrupts their engagement and progression with parental expectations of having a life. Quinn developed successful entrepreneurship through the Australian Chinese network as a substitute for her Chinese connections. A Dushengnv's career is also a vehicle that connects with their parents by sharing a common professional language, as in Darcie's and Bella's cases of pursuing an engineering occupation like their fathers. There are structural issues and gendered expectations in both China and Australia.

These challenges and changes are not simply abstract or 'structural'; they shape the very embodied experiences of these women. A grounded understanding of new Chinese habitus is critical, as I have argued, to unpack the complexities of their career choices as the ongoing navigation of their relationships with parents and husband as well as their positions in the Australian society. The thesis has tried to identify how pre-existing familial dispositions and practices influence their career pathways and the future directions of their lives, and to shed some light on gender relations and its dynamics in a broader social and cultural context. New Chinese professional women in the study are capable and independent professionals who have actively transformed their knowledge, experiences and qualifications to assist with their career planning and change in Australia. There are aspects of the migrant experience that we need to grapple with in their past and present contexts.

Time at work: Temporalities, professionalism and 'othered' experiences

The empirical focus on new Chinese professional women's experiences at work – voiced through interviews and diaries – has shown their accounts are rich in different temporal dimensions. At times, gender relations at work are even more intense and compressed than other aspects such as being a migrant, which results in distinct senses of displacement, disruptiveness and temporariness. What I have illustrated through this study, following

Robertson's work (2021), is a need to understand the contextual and temporal dimensions of work. By analysing the paces and rhythms at the macro or state level, the practices and routines at the meso organisational level, and the mundaneness at the micro level, we can see the complexity, dynamics and fluidity within the Australian workplace. Incidents at work are, fundamentally, often more than reproductions of inequalities hidden by organisational conduct and processes of professionalism.

In Chapter Five, I unpacked the experiences of new Chinese professional women at work, drawing on ideas gleaned from studies of inequality regimes and temporality. I argue that being Dushengnv is not the only aspect that shapes their professional identities. Different times at work also influence new Chinese professional women's interactions with others at work. As discussed in Chapter One, Dushengnv internalise a strong sense of efficiency in their time management and intend to utilise their professional time to 'get the job done' and achieve their career goals. 'Small talk' time, on the other hand, prompts them to reflect and think about the possibility of establishing networks, but, as Gina says, 'it was difficult to form meaningful connection'. Instead, these conversations make the everyday work more pleasant. It is important to understand different senses of time and temporalities. Sometimes, fragmented times at work can be experienced as a slowing down and suspension compared with that in mainland China, as discussed in several comparative perspectives concerning intensified working styles. As we saw in the experiences of new Chinese professional women, high levels of professionalism, specifically about their sense of time at work, do not necessarily fit seamlessly with the Australian workplace.

First, in foregrounding the urgency of building a career (Chapter Four) and returning to their familial obligations as Dushengnv, new Chinese professional women find it challenging. They take time to enter the Australian workplace and adjust to the meso time in the organisational setting. I have sought to align my arguments with intersectionality and migration studies scholars who point to the significance of migration in experiencing differences in temporalities and the need to adjust to distinct expectations. For example, Rosie and Tess touched on different experiences of entering the workplace, frustrated to be tested in the waiting period of entering the corporate environment.

Second, Chapter Five compared the social effects of the post-socialist construction of work time (a contemporary 996 work life of 9 am to 9 pm, Monday to Saturday) and more flexible casual and part-time employment options in Australia. It also includes discussions around 'small talk' at work (seen in Gina's and Nicole's narratives). It argues that micro moments reveal something of the nature of broader Australian society in such a way as to push new Chinese professional women to reflect on their struggles (Bella talked about the need to 'bullshit'). Chapter Five on *work* further expands this analysis via the intersectional analysis. I argue that time works as an analytic lens to 'inequality regimes', and that nuanced reflections of temporal experiences not only demonstrate a historical reference of where these women came from but also illustrate how they work to fit into the Australian corporate practices. Moreover, these women actively contribute to the diversity of the Australian workforce through their interactions with others.

New Chinese professional women, as shaped by a historical policy and Western corporate culture, actively prioritise their capabilities in language and other aspects while downplaying the significance of gender and ethnicity at work. Consequently, they have presented themselves as a professional in exchange for their time and labour as a means to survive, a process that dissolved their sense of ethnic and gender identities. Multiple layers of time, feelings and small talk constantly reinforce the idea that these aspects matter – the gender relations preferred in different occupations and the racialised capacities advocated or downplayed in specific fields, which intermingle with personal life changes such as having a baby and getting married. These women's stories also show that having a family and being a mother do not stop them pursuing a career progression; rather, these roles help them grapple with everyday differences.

Having a life: Return, stay and move forward

By looking at the experiences of new Chinese professional women, focusing on the contexts of Dushengnv upbringing, I have examined the interlocking challenges of gender relations in the private domain – their home and family, in Australia and China. Indeed, new Chinese professional women are daughters, wives and mothers, but their career presence is often less studied. The influences of gendered expectations in their life course, particularly as

Dushengnv, including having a family and fulfilling familial obligations, and the increasing demand of corporate life and their desires to have some freedoms, are often invisible. Many of the participants in this study have attempted to escape the heavy burden of parental hopes – Bella, Darcie and Effy expressed desires to 'explore the world' and 'have a different life'; simultaneously, they express a likely return to their homeland, given the growing demands of parental care – Victoria discussed her ambivalent feelings when she heard about her mother's sudden illness. As professionals, many of them have demonstrated their positions in the specific industry and work hard to have their presence seen and their views heard. It is a testament to the language capacities, qualifications and skills of new Chinese professional women that they are often invisible in the Australian work force. In balancing work and family life, they find it challenging to deal with the mundaneness of everyday life within the household – child-rearing, cooking and cleaning. Time deprivation and lack of social support drove many participants to reflect on their gendered roles at home (seen in Abby's narratives). As a result, some women expressed an idea of 'return' as a strategy to cope with their struggles in life (Iris found it particularly demanding after the birth of her son). This is also ironic considering their migrating was seen as an escape from the life they did not like in mainland China. Although a few participants have their parents (Tess, Quinn and Mia) or parents-in-law (Judy) as helpers in the household tasks, they complain about the emotional labour of dealing with the elders' everyday interactions and mental wellbeing (Fiona and Tess both have their mothers staying with them and supporting them with everyday household duties). The gendered aspects in the private domain, particularly concerning negotiations around parental expectations, remain unsettling and require more effort regardless of whether these women are in Australia or in China.

Life for middle-class professional women in China is often portrayed as a linear progression (Xie, 2021). However, new Chinese professional women, both strictly Dushengnv and other women with siblings who nevertheless experience the same generational conditions and pressures, encounter competing expectations of gender roles in their life course – they begin by being heavily invested in career-oriented schooling but later shift to a traditionally gendered life trajectory of getting married and having a family.

Despite being in a dual-career family, especially among young Chinese couples in Australia, the women are still expected to manage most household duties. A small number of participants' partners (Nicole, for example) share some tasks but need clear instructions from the participants, yet this demands a fair amount of emotional as well as physical labour. The transformation of gender beliefs and realisation of gender equity in this private domain is slow and still in progress.

A work-life balance is imagined as a possible lifestyle in Australia. Despite the challenges of career (Chapter Four) and work (Chapter Five), many participants expressed emotional fatigue and depression at different life stages, and they refused to return to their life in China. Mia claims 'no regrets' as she enjoys the changing roles of being a mother of two children in Sydney and finally has a family life. New Chinese professional women seek to build their community through virtual space (WeChat) and neighbourhood networks despite a growing intensified conflict between work and life. As mentioned by Abby and Quinn, WeChat works as a reservoir of resources and support that no other community could replace. I have argued that their perspective on 'work-life balance' intermingles with their perception of 'what a life is' – cultural attitudes within their family and community embedded in their everyday practice. In no way could their understanding be homogenised and racialised; instead, they share some commonalities among their family in China and incorporate some forms of an Australian lifestyle.

Taking an intersectional approach to explore life, migration, Dushengnv, gender relations and life courses, I have shown that there are constantly changing dynamics between life and family that those new Chinese professional women must deal with in the short term and the long run. Gender relations are contextualised in different social environments and adapted to differentiate before and after they migrated to Australia. Even though most professional women in this study intend to lead some changes concerning gender equality in the domestic domain, they still have a long way to go. And the majority of these women, exacerbated by their status as Dushengnv, have shouldered even heavier loads of duties to care for their parents and parents in-law in China. The richness of their life stories has demonstrated various degrees of closeness with and distance from their extended family.

Research contributions

This study has made five significant contributions to the literature on new Chinese migrants and work sociology. These contributions stem from the interdisciplinary and empirical approach I employed to achieve the project aims outlined in the Introduction. In doing so, I have contributed to the body of literature on 'inequality regimes' to point out the significance of Dushengnv, as the outcome of the one-child policy, to examine the presence of new Chinese professional women in Australia. While more emerging studies recognise the diversity within the new Chinese migrants, I have argued for the need to consider the nuances of professions and generational characteristics. My analysis used different spatial and temporal frameworks to examine new Chinese professional women's lives, emphasising the influence of pre-existing familial dispositions in the migration process. My focus on the different contexts – workplace, family, community and society – provides more nuanced understandings and insights into everyday practices and regimes that have constrained new Chinese professional women's paid work, family and life. This focus thus captures the nuance, fluidity and complexity of their struggles and success. Because of this, I have followed Acker's call for the in-depth exploration of multiple elements and intersectional play. Therefore, this thesis also contributes to an empirical understanding of diversified Chinese transnational networks and unending sojourns (Guo, 2022, p. 858).

This thesis makes a conceptual contribution by enriching Bourdieusian scholarship with empirical insights. It introduces the concept of Dushengnv capital, diverse forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—that illuminate the agency of new Chinese professional women. This agency is demonstrated through their utilisation of family financial resources, their mobility to urban centres within China and internationally, their capacity in navigating the competitive educational landscape, their proficiency in foreign languages like English, their familiarity with technology, legal systems both Chinese and global cultures. Furthermore, it unveils significant characteristics that arise from the emergence of the Dushengnv generation, which cannot be solely attributed to the one-child policy but rather to broader social and cultural reforms. Importantly, this concept is not fixed or static, but rather inherently gendered and contextualised, shaped by various

patterns of adoption and accumulations. The new Chinese habitus, thus, serves as an analytical framework to underscore the complex interplay of deeply ingrained and subconscious norms, exhibiting the social and cultural dispositions, practices and attributes displayed by new Chinese professional women.

Research on Chinese professional women in China often focuses on their 'leftover status' as personal choices as submission to patriarchal power relations (Gui, 2020; To, 2015). Literature concerning Chinese women students in Australia often emphasises their subjectivities in terms of feminine awareness and changes associated with them (Martin, 2022a). There is a need to point to the nuanced dynamics of gendered negotiation as in the temporal dimension. Taking spatial and temporal complexities into consideration, along with other aspects such as gender relations, workplace, and ethnicity, has captured the contextual events, their positionalities, and different forms of challenges in various contexts. In doing so, I argue that new Chinese professional women are not simply defined by their family status, nor their migration or gender, but through their commonalities of constrained work/care and work-life regimes, mainly at the national level, organisational level, and everyday practices.

My research findings on work and family life contribute to the sociological understanding of work-life balance, making substantial contributions to studies of skilled migrants and broadening knowledge of struggles that professionals face between work and life. Alongside the work of Pocock (2005a) and Edwards and Wajcman (2005) in Australia and Liu (2017) in China, this study has demonstrated that work-life balance is not simply a concept for those with families but is also applicable to singles as the boundaries between work and life are becoming problematically looser for all. The discussion in Chapter Five about 'having a life' and in Chapter Three regarding digital space spells out expectations of 'care' demanded at work, in life and among family.

This research also contributes to policies on flexible working arrangements in that government policies and organisational practices could potentially make some changes to assist with employees to balance their paid work and family obligations. For temporary migrant workers who may have neither extended family support nor access to the

Australian social security system, affordable childcare and better social support would allow them to better prepare and position themselves in society and enjoy a better work-life balance. For those who become 'mothers', there should be more comprehensive back-to-work policies and arrangements that emphasise an institutional sense of care.

Existing research related to the one-child policy has rarely extended to an understanding of generational trajectories, and diversities within them. This thesis, although not aiming to make generalised claims, points to some common burdens that women born under the one-child policy and other post-Mao reforms have shouldered in terms of changing expectations from their birth family. Thus, the one-child policy should be not examined as a singular social policy but should be studied along with other social and cultural changes in mainland China, as contexts to understand why the pressures on new Chinese professional women are enormous and cannot be escaped. The discussions in Chapter Six point to a fact that historical policies still influence how new Chinese professional women picture their life in the future.

This small-scale study of new Chinese professional women has produced insights into their challenges, strategies and desires at work and home. New Chinese professional women have more options in terms of flexible work and family arrangements in Australia, which is among the OECD countries that have the highest part-time working arrangements, although most childcaring and household responsibilities fall primarily on women. This thesis thus contributes to studying work-life balance among women in the Chinese diaspora under the influence of the one-child policy.

The mixed methods approach (discussed in Chapter Three) I have employed in this project effectively generated rich new data, including a survey and secondary statistics to map the significance of these invisible women, interviews to explore in-depth understandings of their career, work and family life, and diaries as a supplement to capture eventful moments. This thesis, therefore, makes methodological contributions by enriching our comprehension of new Chinese professional women's experiences.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

Given the increasing presence of new Chinese migrants in Australia, this research points to several directions for future research. First, the broader statistics from China prior to 2000 are limited. More work is needed to examine Chinese Census datasets and other official statistics (such as from the Ministry of Education) and draw on Australian statistics for insightful comparisons, looking more closely at the specificities of those who do not self-identify as Dushengnv.

Second, this study has shed light on the cohort of new Chinese professional women as Dushengnv who migrated to Australia after the year 2000. However, many questions regarding generational characteristics between 1979 and 2000 remain unanswered and are beyond this project's scope. In Chapter Five, I specifically raised the example of one participant, Olivia, who migrated to Australia because she wanted to have a second child, which was not possible under the rigid one-child policy. It is unknown how the one-child policy affected different generations and how it changed the family unit at the micro level. Examining more women's lives across different generations would enrich our apprehension of that historical policy.

Third, I have detailed in Chapter Five the women's experiences at work and challenges of entering the Australian workplace, including issues about having a Chinese name and stereotypes of Chinese migrants. The hiring processes and practices, including job posting, interviewing and the test of cultural fit, can have been insightful in understanding migrant professional challenges in the labour market. In a strong line of research, it might be worth drawing on the perspective of human resource management, especially those who sit behind the desk to review resumes and conduct interviews. Such research would systematically construct an employee–employer dialogue and identify the missing pieces that new Chinese professional women could not see.

Fourthly, this thesis takes an empirical approach, incorporating the conceptual framework of Bourdieu's capital and habitus. Initially, this was not part of the original plan, but it evolved as I engaged with inequality regimes, migration studies, and the interpretation of

the collected data. Through this process, an intersectional framework emerged, shaped by the themes that surfaced from the data analysis. Additionally, I developed a growing interest in Bourdieu's other conceptual ideas, such as field and illusion, which hold potential for future studies focusing on professionals within specific industries.

Lastly, while this study generated rich data, the sample is small. This research does not aim to make generalisable claims about all the new Chinese professional women in Australia; rather, it is a trial process to evaluate their trajectories and voice some of their shared struggles and strategies. While the value of the qualitative nature studies is recognised, further research could design large-scale questionnaires, working with the Department of Home Affairs to map out the quantitative significance of their experiences and correlation of their professions and struggles, life courses and unequal backgrounds. Questions related to the length of residence in Australia and its correlation with integration and acculturation are worth further exploration, at the centre of which could be professionalism and whether it downplays any other aspects of their identity, such as being a migrant, a woman and a mother. More specifically regarding professionalism, we can consider the cultural and social differences to draw out some comparisons in China and Australia.

In my research, I have employed a combination of methods that encompass surveys, statistical analysis, interviews, and diaries. Although I acknowledge that the application of these methods may not have been systematically comprehensive, it provides a foundation for future studies to consider a more systematic implementation of mixed methods. This could entail a more robust utilisation of statistics, extensive quantitative surveys, and ethnographic observations. Such an approach would be ideal for generating a more comprehensive understanding of professionals.

Conclusion: Revisiting the lives of women in this study

Since the interviews were undertaken, many of the interviewees' life trajectories have taken different turns: Victoria, Rosie, Nicole and Mia switched careers and pursued work on the frontiers of fighting against COVID-19, working as community volunteers and liaison officers. Bella and Darcie each had a baby in 2021 and were busy juggling becoming a new

mum and returning to work part-time. Olivia had their second baby in early 2020. Quinn too had another child at the end of 2020; and she shifted to be a banker while managing her own business part-time. Charlotte and Victoria finished their studies and entered the Australian workforce, on the road to acquiring Australian permanent residency and professional positions. Sky got married. Effy moved in with their partners. Their stories of careers, work and family life will continue moving in different directions than what they shared with me during interviews. The realities of how family life is complicated by different temporalities will involve open-ended explorations.

New Chinese professional women in the study continue to make themselves visible in different occupations in Australia. Many constantly think about returning to their family in China, deciding to whether to have more children and shifting working arrangements from full-time to part-time and casual contracts. Most participants are optimistic about their changes in career and life, taking on the idea of 'having it all' but 'having a bit of it all'. At times, they have developed various strategies in life – having an Australian life as a reality and returning to a Chinese life as an emotional and imagined future.

As Australia is recovering from the pandemic, new Chinese professional women will continue their lives by managing expectations in their core family in Australia, their career development and their extended family in China, overcoming challenges – temporary and permanent – and searching for the balance between paid work and family. Nevertheless, career progression is not always smooth; neither is life. Difficulties in working relationships and differences in ethnicity, migration and gender will continue to exist. Temporal struggles emerge as new Chinese professional women deal with competing priorities in the workplace and in life – children growing up and parents ageing. This study thus offers some new insights and theorisation to generate further dialogue on new Chinese professional women among the increasingly complex Chinese diaspora.

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Appendix 1 Interview questions

Part 1. Migration history

When did you first arrive in Australia?
Who was the first one to migrate (relationship to you, age on arrival)?
What was first job after your arrival? And when did you start that job after your arrival?
Where did you migrate from (city, province)? What was your job before you migrate?
What was your reason to migrate? Why Australia? Who influenced you the most about your decision to move?
How did you do to prepare for your move to Australia?
Who did you stay when you first arrived? Where was that? How was that like living in that kind of environment? What was your feeling about your neighbourhood?
Where did you start looking for job? Have your encountered any challenges? What kind of challenges?
How did you establish yourself in Australia (profession, marriage, children)?
Have you ever thought about returning to China at any stage within the first year of your arrival?

Part 2. Workplaces

2.1 Daily work

What is your current occupation? What are your main job responsibilities? Could you please describe one of your typical working days? Do you work overtime? How often do you do that? (Depending on the specific occupation, I may ask further questions for them to describe their indoor or outdoor working environments and the interactions they may have with others. I will also ask my participants to draw a simple map of the organisational structure within their organisation if possible.)
How did you manage to enter current occupation? And why do you choose this occupation?
How do you get to work? How long does it take you there?
What does your current workplace look like? Can you please help me picture it? How much space do you have?
How is the interpersonal environment there? Do you have a big/small gender disparity? What are the ethnical demographics there? What are the age groups there? What language do you speak at work?
Does your work involve with frequent travel outside of your office? If yes, where do you usually travel to? How often do you travel?
What is the particular thing you like the most in your job responsibilities?
Is your work supporting flexible working hours/ flexible working arrangements/ working from home?

2.2 Challenges/ difficulties

Have you encountered any challenges at work? How are you managing different job responsibilities?

How is your relationship with your direct supervisor? Is your supervisor a male? Are there any incidents/ disagreements you had before with your supervisor? Could you please give me an example? Also how did you solve the problem?

Do you experience any difficulties as an ethnic minority (Chinese migrant) at work? If yes, could you please give me some examples. Or has your professionalism been challenged because of your ethnic background?

Do you think your working experiences/ educational background from China help in some way to your current role? If relevant, what are the aspects you can list out?

Have you encountered any disagreement or unpleasant issues at work with other colleagues/clients/work related, for example, with other local white Australians or people from other ethnic background?

Do you treat your colleagues as your friends outside of workspace?

Would you say you that you have proficient English spoken and written skills?

Are you struggling with balancing your work and family?

2.3 Work attitudes

Have you noticed any changes towards professionalism before and after your migration? What are the changes? How do you cope with them?

Do you find it is easier to work with Chinese or within a multicultural environment?

Is the managerial style similar or different from what you used to back in China? What are the major differences?

Will you stand up against any racism or gender discrimination for other colleagues at work?

Are you happy with your current work environment? If there is one thing you want to change at your workplace, what is it?

2.4 Future plans

How long do you plan to stay in this profession? And why? What is your plan for career development?

Are you expecting to some promotion in the next 5 years? What are the obstacles you can anticipate if you want to promote? Is your current supervisor giving you any training for future promotion?

Part 3. Family life

If single

What are the challenges in life? Have you encountered any depression or anxiety outside of workplaces? And why? What did you do about it?

What is your typical weekend like? Can you please describe one weekend?

What are the afterwork activities?

Are you engaging with Chinese communities here a lot? What kind of community events you tend to attend?

Are your extended family in China? How often and how would you contact them? Are you visiting China often?

Have you noticed any attitude changes towards marriage before and after your migration? If yes, what are they?

What is your imagination of a perfect spouse?

Could you please describe your best friend/s? Is he/she someone you met after your arrival?

Do you celebrate Chinese traditional festive? If yes, who are you celebrating with? And how?

If married
- When did you get married and where? How did you meet your spouse?
What are the challenges within the household? Have you encountered any depression or anxiety outside of workplaces? And why? What did you do about it?
How do you describe your relationship with your spouse/children/ extended family (in-laws)? Can you give me an example of any disagreements you may have? On a particular matter or an overall worldview?
Does your spouse have any behaviours/ attitudes changes since you move to Australia? Do your extended family change in some sense after living here for a certain period of time?
Does your spouse share household duties? Who looks after your family finance? Who does the overall management at home?
Who spend the most time with your children after work and during weekends?
What is your typical weekend like for you as a family? Can you please describe one weekend?
What are the afterwork activities during workdays?
Are you engaging with Chinese communities here a lot? What kind of community events you tend to attend?
Have you noticed any attitude changes towards marriage before and after your migration? If yes, what are they?
Please describe your best friend/s to me, and also what kind of things you talk about?
If they have children, were they born in Australia? If yes, what was that like?
If your child is sick, who would look after him/her? Will you and your spouse take turns?
Do you celebrate Chinese traditional festive? If yes, who are you celebrating with? And how?
Will you have more children? Who has the most say in this matter?

Part 4. Transnationalism

Connections: what are your connections with your hometown, your former or present colleagues/friends/ family in other countries, cities, or professional organisations? How often? How do you keep in touch with them?

Social network: who are the 10 key members in your social network? What is their gender, race, and country/ city of residence? What type of relationship do you have with them?

Professionalism: what are the skills that you think can be applied both in China and Australia at the workplace? Why do you think you are successful in current profession?

Part 5. Other questions

What is the advice you want to give to other Chinese professional women who want to migrate to Australia?
Do you identify yourself as an Australian? Why? In what sense?
Are you enforcing your child/ren to speak Chinese (Mandarin/ Cantonese)? And why?

Appendix 2 Survey questions

Demographic information

1. What is your full name? ....

2. What is your country of birth? ....

3. What is your current visa status (residence status) in
   Australia? ....

4. When did you migrate to Australia? And what was your first job after your migration?

   ....

5. What is your current occupation? And how long have you been working in this
   field? ....

6. What is the HIGHEST qualification **you** have completed?

- No formal qualifications
- Vocational degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD
- Other (please specify) ....

7. Where did you achieve your highest qualification?
- Mainland China
- Australia
- Other (please specify)
- ....

8. What is your relationship to the members of your household (including children)?

Member of household (name)	Relationship to you	Sex	Age	Place of Birth
For example, You	Self	Female		
For example, Tom	Son	Male	12	

Relationship Status

9. What is your FORMAL registered marital status?
- Never married

- Married

- Separated

- Divorced

- Widowed

10. If in a partnered relationship, what is your partner's/husband's age and occupation, nationality, visa status? …………………...………………………….……..

11. If there are some extended families staying with you, please specify how long they are resenting in Australia and their visa status?

……………...………………….……..

Paid Work/ Employment

12. What is the name of the institution/company with which you are employed?
……

What is the name of the department you are employed?
……

What position do you currently hold at your place of employment?

(for example, manager, retail/shop assistant, lecturer, etc)

……

Are you employed
- Full-time

- Part-time

- Casual

- Other (please specify)

   …………………………………

13. Is there any changes of occupation before and after your migration to
Australia? …………………………

If yes, please specify the industry and occupation that you were employed before your migration?
……………………………………………………………………………………………

14. If in a partnered relationship, is your partner/husband employed?
- Yes

- No

15. If yes, is this employment:
- Full-time

- Part-time

- Casual

- Other (please specify)

   ……………………………………….

What is your partner's/husband's occupation?
……………………………………………………………………………………

What position does your partner/husband currently hold at work?
……………………………………………………………………………………

Family/life

16. Who usually picks up your child/children from day-care/ school? ………………………………….
   ……………………………………

17. What kind of activities/ sports do you usually engage as a family during the
weekend? ……………………………….
   ……………………………………

18. Do you do exercises or sports just by yourself?   ………………….…………...

19. Who do most of the household tasks at home, for example, cooking and cleaning?

    …………..……………….……...

20. Which suburbs do you stay at the moment? Is it the same one as you first arrived in Australia?

    …………..……………….……...

Thank you.
Don't forget to email or post it back to me as soon as possible!