THE ECONOMICS OF GENDER IN CHINA

WOMEN, WORK AND THE GLASS CEILING

Sisi Sung

The Economics of Gender in China

China's rapid socioeconomic development has achieved remarkable equalizing conditions between men and women in the aspects of health, education, and labor force participation, but the glass ceiling phenomenon has become more prominent. The book develops a cross-disciplinary paradigm, with economics at its core, to better understand gender in China and women in management in the Chinese business context.

The theoretical perspective integrates the knowledge and evidence from cognate disciplinary strands, such as economics, sociology, management studies, and the Chinese literature, into one unified framework. In-depth interviews with managers in China's largest enterprises complement the theoretical perspective with rich empirical details to examine women's managerial experiences and career choices. The book's argument sheds light on the power of stereotypes that specify women's roles in the family, organization, and society. It shows that understanding the socio-psychological and organizational dynamics of stereotyping in the Chinese context, as well as how Chinese women make career decisions, recognizing and deploying these expectations, provides new perspectives on the underrepresentation of women among business leaders in China.

The book offers multidisciplinary evidence on the economics of gender in China that is highly relevant for gender studies in general, and across a number of subject areas, and it can be used in any setting as an introductory reference.

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Foreword

In the decades after opening their first stock markets in 1990, Chinese firms have emerged as global leaders. In 2021, China led the way in the production of electric vehicles as well as in the development of self-driving cars and smart city innovations. They have been pathbreakers in e-commerce, and for almost a decade, Chinese consumers have routinely used their phones for contactless payments.

But dynamic progress has not been limited to the economy; one also sees huge gains in human capital, most notably in an astounding increase in college enrollments. In 1990 less than 2% of the adult population had a college degree; 25 years later it exceeded 15%. Most astounding has been the explosive growth of educational opportunities for those born after 1980. In 1990 3.4% of the college-age group was in college by 2000 it had risen to 12.5%, and by 2020 to 54%.[1] And as Sisi Sung documents, over these past two decades of rapid expansion of college enrollments, women reached parity with their male peers.

Moreover, because for several generations the vast majority of women, including married women with children, worked full time outside the home, women's economic contributions have long been critical to the well-being of their families and the health of the economy. But in the past ten years, a new demographic challenge has further highlighted the vital role of women in the workplace.

In 2020 17.4% of the population was 60 or older; by 2030 that percentage is predicted to reach or exceed 25%.[2] Thus within less than a decade China will not only have the highest number of elderly in the world but because few over age 60 will be fully employed, the percentage of the population who are no longer in the labor force will skyrocket.

Simultaneous with the rapid aging of the population is a decline in the number of new entrants to the workforce. Not only did 30 years of a one-child policy shrink the size of new birth cohorts but the rapid increase in post-secondary enrolments means that as older workers retire the workforce will shrink.

Under these conditions, the economy will become ever more dependent on maintaining high levels of labor force participation among married women, and in particular dependent on the employment of highly qualified college graduates working in managerial and professional positions. Yet in 2021 the

World Economic Forum ranked China 107th of 156 countries in their Gender Equality Index.[3] Moreover, 2021 marked the thirteenth year in which China's rank declined, and of particular note was the low representation of women in leadership positions in the corporate sector.

To explain the failure of women to translate their advanced educational credentials into workplace leadership, economist Sisi Sung offers a path-breaking analysis of the rarely studied case of "glass ceilings" in China. Through mastery of scholarly debates in English and Chinese, Sung brings the Chinese experience into dialogue with a literature that has generally focused exclusively on the challenges of college-educated women in the United States and the United Kingdom. In addition, she stretches beyond discussions of the characteristics and policies of the firm to incorporate broader cultural and sociological dimensions.

As an author, Sung is also in the vanguard of the discipline of economics. In her analysis, assumptions about the primacy of individual utility maximization and the power of statistical discrimination are foundational. But building on the work of Nobel laureate George Akerlof and his coauthor Rachel Kranton,[4] Sung frames her project in terms of the economics of identity. As a result, she systematically explores and evaluates the various ways a societally constructed sense of self and personal obligation is central to explaining why women are largely absent at the apex of the Chinese corporate workplace.

Further deepening her analysis and establishing her own original voice, Sung goes beyond Akerlof and Kranton, by integrating Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Nan Lin, Yanjie Bian, and Mayfair Yang's discussions of the Chinese relationship practices of *guanxi*.[5] Because Sung foregrounds both the motivations and consequences of interpersonal dynamics, individual choice and agency are critical not tangential to explaining women's failure to be promoted to positions of authority and leadership.

The metaphor of a glass ceiling has long been used to explain persistent gender differentials in leadership, but in this monograph, Sung adds analytic rigor by foregrounding the larger framing from the economics of identity and by expanding its application to the experience of Chinese women working in the corporate sector. Through masterful integration of theory and evidence, she deftly creates dialogue with previous scholarship while incorporating extended examples from her own fieldwork and deep knowledge of Chinese history. Undoubtedly, Sung herself will soon become an essential interlocutor for those who follow her.

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Deborah Davis
New Haven, Connecticut
April 10, 2022

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"In a remarkable synthesis of economics, sociology, anthropology, of ancient and modern Chinese history, and of Western and Chinese viewpoints, Sisi Sung has given a subtle and convincing characterization of the position of women in present-day China. *The Economics of Gender in China* should be read by everyone who wants to see social science at its very best, including, of course, all those with special interest in studies of gender and Chinese culture".
– **George Akerlof**, Nobel Laureate in Economics, 2001

"This is an important monographic account of the role of women in the contemporary economy, society, family and workplace in China from a multi-disciplinary perspective. It captures the opportunities and barriers to women's managerial career advancement comprehensively, which contributes to the global agenda of improving gender equality".
– **Dr Fang Lee Cooke**, Fellow, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, Distinguished Professor, Monash Business School, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University

"The book is an important work with profound significance. It analyzes the underrepresentation of women in China's management positions and navigates a path to break the glass ceiling such that courageous and competent Chinese women can truly become 'half of the sky' among leaders and decision-makers".
– **Bohong Liu**, Professor, China Women's University, Former Executive Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Chinese Women's Studies

Preface

This book is about the economics of gender. The theme reflects a long personal and intellectual journey across geographical and disciplinary boundaries. It started with six years at Ying Wa Girls' School in Hong Kong, which helped me realize the importance of achieving equality between men and women. As long as men and women enjoyed the same educational opportunities, there would be no limit on anyone's pursuit of their goals. Soon after, I realized that situations could in fact vary across contexts. I often found myself surrounded by mostly male students in a classroom during my college years in Beijing. It did not seem surprising for female students to be in the minority at this prestigious Chinese science and engineering university. Although I also found myself among a minority of women in a university department of economics in the United States, the situation turned out to be quite different. The benefits, in particular economic, resulting from men and women working together in parity had been well recognized by many. During this time I saw female economists working alongside each other and actively striving for equal status in the diverse areas of the profession, namely academia, business, and government. The journey continued when I was working in Germany. The opportunity enabled me to observe the situation of gender equality in a nation headed by a female leader.

For the past decades, there has been remarkable progress in gender equality worldwide. The situation of women has improved amid economic development, and a growing number of women have entered top leadership positions in many countries. Then I realized that the Chinese case manifests an especially interesting dissociation in the performance of gender equality. On the one hand, there has been outstanding progress in achieving equality between men and women in education and health. The gender gap in labor market outcomes, such as labor force participation and wages, has also been narrowing. On the other hand, women's representation in top leadership positions has dropped from its highest level and stagnated since then. In my first attempt to dive into the paradox, I was fascinated by the fruitful field of gender studies focused on China. Despite the various perspectives available, I was also surprised to see how little has been written about women in management in the Chinese context. This encouraged me to start field research in China and venture work using a unified economic paradigm to incorporate knowledge and evidence

from relevant areas, in particular sociology, management studies, and Chinese literature. In the course of writing this book, I incurred too many intellectual debts to acknowledge here fully. The reference section and notes represent my gratitude to the intellectual inspirations that contributed to the present work.

Working on this book has been a long journey, and I am very grateful to have been accompanied by numerous people along the way. Their support, encouragement, and feedback have made the experience particularly rewarding. So here I pay tribute to the many people who helped shape this book.

First and foremost, a special acknowledgment to George Akerlof, who has given life to the extraordinary field of identity economics and inspired the present book in profound ways. His insights on identity helped me jump out of the box of economics and appreciate the arts of different disciplines. I owe a great debt of gratitude for his generosity in reading the manuscript and providing encouragement and feedback. His thoughtful comments have always been an invaluable source of guidance and wisdom that have significantly contributed to my intellectual growth.

I would also like to thank my academic advisors, Carsten Herrmann-Pillath of the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt and David Daokui Li at Tsinghua University. I greatly appreciate their support, from Germany and China, since the present work first took shape as a doctoral dissertation. They were always generous in offering feedback and advice throughout my years of research. Their encouragement has enabled me to overcome the difficulties during the challenging period of the global pandemic and to complete the book.

I am immensely indebted to Deborah Davis, whose exceptional accomplishments as a professional woman have provided enormous inspiration. She has acted as an informal mentor, supporting me in my intellectual and personal journey, and has been very generous in providing insightful comments on the early drafts of the work and offering guidance along the way.

My sincere thanks to Andrew Walder, Rachel Kranton, Fang Lee Cooke, Mary Blair-Loy, and Leta Hong Fincher for their encouragement and support. Their works have been a great inspiration in shaping the research and ideas presented in this book. I am also very grateful for invaluable advice from Jean Oi, Patricia Ebrey, Li Qiang, Qian Xiaojun, Li Hongbin, Zheng Lu, Dilek Cindoğlu, and Milica Antić Gaber.

Colleagues of the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt have provided me a warm academic home. Many thanks to Bettina Hollstein, who has been my informal mentor at the center and guided me through the journey with continual advice and encouragement. Special gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee: Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, David Daokui Li, Antje Linkenbach-Fuchs, Jörg Rüpke, and Stefan Schmalz. Each has contributed to the present work with insightful comments. I am also thankful for the support of female colleagues at the center, particularly Petra Gümplová, Antje Linkenbach-Fuchs, and Jutta Vinzent. I have constantly been empowered by our regular Frauen-Treffen (Women-Meeting) and greatly benefited from our discussions. I appreciate the input of

everyone at the center who read the early chapters of the manuscript and provided useful comments from various disciplinary perspectives. I was fortunate to be accompanied by my friends at the center, David Palme and Luca Pellarin, along the journey. Their observations on gender in Europe and philosophical insights were always intellectually stimulating.

I am most indebted to managers who were willing to share their experiences, observations, and thoughts with me. Their cooperation helped to make the book possible. I owe thanks to their generosity in offering resources by every possible means to help me gain access to subjects for the field research.

It was invaluable to be able to discuss some of the early chapters of the book with participants of seminars and conferences at the Association for Asian Studies, American Sociological Association, European Sociological Association, Chinese Women's Research Society, China–Germany Gender Equality and Development Association, and International Critical Management Studies. The session discussions and social gatherings helped to shape some of the arguments in the book.

The book has been made possible with editorial support and guidance. Many thanks to Kristina Abbotts, Christiana Mandizha, and the editorial team at Routledge for their support and expertise in publishing this book. I am also grateful for the thoughtful comments from anonymous reviewers who helped to improve the work. I appreciate the efforts of Joan Dale Lace in editing and providing helpful comments to the manuscript.

Finally, gratitude and all my love to my family, especially my maternal grandmother and my mother, who are always significant sources of inspiration.

Notes

1 www.statista.com/statistics/1113954/china-tertiary-education-college-university-enrollment-rate
2 www.statista.com/statistics/251529/share-of-persons-aged-60-and-older-in-the-chinese-population
3 https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf
4 Akerlof, G. A., & Kranton, R. E. (2000). Economics and Identity. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *115*(3), 715–753.
5 Lin, N., & Bian, Y. (1991). Getting Ahead in Urban China. *American Journal of Sociology*, *97*(3), 657–688; Yang, M. M. H. (1994). *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Cornell University Press.

1 Introduction

China has the world's second-largest economy, which continues to grow rapidly. Amid the global pandemic, in 2020–2021, it was the first major economy to report economic growth. The remarkable economic performance benefits Chinese citizens through expanded economic opportunities and improved living standards. However, it is evident that the economic gains have been far from equally shared among individuals within the country. One of the defining measurements of equality, that of gender, has shown a significant gap between women and men in China. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2021), China is ranked 107th of 156 countries on the Gender Equality Index.[1] In the economic participation and opportunities subindex, the gap between women and men in China remains at 29.9 percent. Focusing on various components of the economic subindex, the gender gap is strikingly inconsistent. On the one hand, China has outperformed its global counterparts in having the world's most gender-balanced professional and technical workforce. Likewise, it has achieved exceptional wage equality for women and men in similar work. These successes are partially explained by the remarkable progress in women's educational attainment. As noted by the report, China has completely closed the gender gap in enrollment in tertiary education. On the other hand, whereas women in today's China have caught up with men in terms of economic participation and education levels, in senior management positions they are still lagging behind men by 80 percent. This remarkable dissociation of performance in gender equality makes the Chinese case particularly interesting. Why do Chinese women remain poorly represented in top management positions given the high level of women's economic participation in professional and technical positions and their educational attainment?

Available explanations for the underrepresentation of women among top managers in Chinese organizations are scant. While there is a growing interest in the fields of economics, sociology, and management science regarding Chinese women's work experiences (e.g. Bedford, 2016; Cooke & Xiao, 2014; Ji, 2015; Tang, 2020; Ye & Zhao, 2018), few studies explicitly focus on women's managerial careers in the Chinese workplace (Tatli et al., 2017; Woodhams et al., 2015). This is a notable contrast to the Western context, in which experiences of women in management have been widely documented, and "women

in management" (WIM) has become a well-established field in organization studies. In the Western discourse, the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles is commonly described as the "glass ceiling". Given the lack of systematic research on this specific phenomenon, a better understanding is needed of women in managerial careers, particularly in the Chinese context.

This book fills the gap by contributing to both theoretical social science research and empirical studies on the economics of gender in China. A heterogeneous web of gender concepts and arguments from areas such as economics, sociology, management studies, and Chinese literature is unfolded to provide a holistic analysis of gender in China. The theoretical discussions, drawing insights from different disciplinary strands, converge into a unified economic paradigm, which builds on but also goes beyond the "Economics of Identity" as developed by George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton (2000). This unprecedented cross-disciplinary paradigm of "cultural stereotype", which centers on gender identity, stereotypes, and culture, sheds light on the diverse gender arguments of the identity model, which have not been recognized in previous publications. Empirical observation is embedded in the newly developed theoretical framework and presented in the subsequent chapters to substantiate the approach to better understanding women's managerial careers in Chinese organizations. In-depth interviews were conducted in 2019–2021 with 45 managers from large Chinese enterprises to provide empirical evidence, adding to the available research on women managers and Chinese organizations. In a nutshell, this book examines the economics of gender in China and illuminates the significance of cultural stereotypes in better understanding women, work, and the glass ceiling.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on theoretical discussions, first by synthesizing the different strands of gender research in the areas of economics, management science, and organizational studies, and then by developing a theoretical framework that is relevant to the study of gender in China. Chapter 2 begins with a comprehensive overview of economic theories that interpret gender differentials in the labor market to identify the theoretical framework of the overall study. Economists historically attribute gender inequality between women and men to their rational self-interest based on differences in human capital and psychological traits. It is also commonly explained by discrimination. Recent trends in gender research in economics indicate an emerging focus on gender identity and stereotypes. Among these is Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) economics of identity, which considers the influence of social norms on individual choices, thus representing a major shift from the former standard approaches. It is a pioneering framework that bridges economic and social psychology theory to analyze phenomena of identity-based discrimination and role conceptions in society. Equally significant is the cross-disciplinary explanatory power of the framework in understanding gender theories of other fields. Notably, the underlying decision-making process in the economics of identity demonstrates a characteristic akin to a performativity-based theory of gender as championed in social science research. The identity framework demonstrates relevance to

both interpret the key elements of the theory and introduce economic insights. This chapter examines the economics of gender and sheds light on the remarkable, previously underexplored, potential of the identity approach.

Chapter 3 extends the economics of identity approach to gender research in management science and organization studies, and navigates its possible application in the Chinese context. The approach is apt to synthesize the diverse strands of gender and organization arguments and provides a renewed economic interpretation of the theories. Given its Western orientation, there is an issue of validity in applying the well-established research on women in management to the Chinese case. Notably in the case of the glass ceiling, it is evident that situations concerning the phenomenon can vary across national contexts. The contextual differences potentially challenge the application of a Western-oriented approach in non-Western settings. Without overlooking the differences across national settings, cultural theory in economics and management science are examined to prepare the application of the identity framework to the Chinese context. Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) economic theory of culture builds a bridge to the following chapters because it shares an economic foundation with the identity approach and highlights the role of group identities that have been ubiquitous in the country. The resultant framework, developed on the basis of the economics of identity and the economics of culture, is labeled as the "cultural stereotype". In contrast to standard economic approaches that commonly assume culture as given, the framework acknowledges the complexity underlying the notion of culture and allows culture to be defined in terms of specific contexts. This aspect highlights the additional significance of the theoretical framework and its flexibility in different settings.

To explore the Chinese context, Chapter 4 first examines the background of the situation of Chinese women. The experiences of Chinese women are disentangled chronologically to illuminate the dynamics of the Chinese context, which constantly shapes culture and women's identity in China. The discussion synthesizes the heterogenous strands of arguments about Chinese women to present a holistic and multifaceted image of Chinese women. Significant sources of cultural stereotyping such as traditional gender roles in the Chinese conceptualization of family (*jia*), contribution to social production, and birth-control policies are evidently salient to a better understanding of Chinese women. The chapter then takes an original approach to compare Western and Chinese research on Chinese women by extensively surveying pertinent literature written in English and Chinese. The observation shows an interesting finding that Western research, often motivated by feminist concerns, may itself project a cultural view on China. The last section investigates four concepts: women's studies, gender, feminism, and stereotypes that involve Western influences on Chinese gender discourse. The chapter illuminates the complexity in the Chinese context in terms of three different perspectives that are salient to understanding Chinese women. It creates fertile ground for subsequent research on Chinese women in the organizational context.

In Chapter 5, the Chinese workplace is disentangled, focusing on organizations and companies specifically, with an aim to define the workplace in China for further analysis of women's managerial careers. There are important distinctions among different forms of workplace. For instance, before the economic reform in 1978, the urban workplace was characterized by a prominent work-unit system controlled by the state. More diversified forms of business entities have emerged since 1978, dominated by state-owned companies and private businesses. Regardless of the various organizational settings, the results indicate the workplace is gendered in a two-fold way. The first is associated with the gendered nature of Chinese organizations, which remains intact despite the transformation of the Chinese economy. The early form of the Chinese workplace, primarily consisting of *danwei* (work units), was substantially gendered across occupations and in leadership positions. In other words, the organizational context of *danwei* played a significant role in shaping women's identity and experiences during the period of the planned economy. After 1978, in spite of the outstanding performance of Chinese companies, the gendered workplace persisted based on evidence from the two representative business entities in China: state-owned and private enterprises. The gendered workplace is further justified in terms of the gendered form of theorizing about Chinese organizations. Paternalistic leadership, a theory that first developed from observations in Chinese organizations, remains strikingly male-biased by assuming males as default leaders and explicitly neglecting the roles of women.

Chapter 6 presents evidence from in-depth interviews to further empirically investigate the gendered nature of Chinese business organizations. Data from 45 Chinese managers were collected and analyzed qualitatively. The details provide empirical references about the manifestation of cultural stereotyping in today's Chinese workplaces, including managers' perspectives about stereotypes and their possible influence on women's careers. The results highlight that the cultural stereotyping appears to be mediated by the type of organization and the age of respondents. The former justifies the observation in Chapter 5 in terms of details about stereotypes in each type of organization. The latter finding sheds light on the significance of an individual's age, with respect to the socioeconomic and political context, in better understanding attitudes towards gender and career behaviors in China.

Chapters 7 and 8 add more detailed empirical analysis by concentrating respectively on the aspects of work–family relationships and social networks, both of which have been argued extensively by scholars as being critical constraints on women's careers worldwide. Although the well-recognized work–family relationship is also clear in the Chinese case, Chapter 7 argues that the Chinese conceptualization manifests a distinct relationship between the closely linked work and family domains. The interviews shed light on the socio–psychological dynamics of stereotyping that continue to shape the career experiences of women managers. Women managers in China fully recognize the existing cultural stereotypes of their roles in organizations and the family, and in response to these expectations, they actively and deliberately adopt

certain career choices. This emerging theme offers a relevant alternative insight into women's underrepresentation in Chinese organizations.

Chapter 8 focuses on networking and *guanxi* as a special form of Chinese network. In contrast to the former, which has been widely documented as a source of discrimination and as an approach for advancing women's careers, the latter *guanxi* research often overlooked the role of women. Inspired by Mayfair Yang's (1994) notion of *guanxi*, the chapter illuminates the critical role of women in building interpersonal relationships and practicing *guanxi*. The essential contribution of Chinese women in networking has indeed been documented by kinship research, which include mobilizing and extending networks to support family businesses. Yet how far this role translates into the managerial contexts remains unexplored. The interviews shed light on the potential role of women in *guanxi* practices associated with managerial career experiences which contain implications for future research.

Chapter 9 highlights the major contributions of the overall study in terms of research conclusions and presents perspectives for future research.

Gender in China is an important topic that requires knowledge and evidence from cognate disciplines to advance our understanding. A cross-disciplinary paradigm, with economics at its core, offers a unified framework for the diverse gender research and provides an alternative approach to gender in China. The argument of the book sheds light on the power of stereotypes that specify women's roles in the family, organization, and society. It shows that understanding the socio-psychological and organizational dynamics of stereotyping in the Chinese context, as well as how Chinese women make career decisions, recognizing and deploying these expectations, provides new perspectives on the underrepresentation of women among business leaders in China.

Note

1 Since its first release in 2006, the Global Gender Gap Report has examined four categories, or subindexes – educational attainment, political empowerment, health and survival, and economic participation and opportunity – and given countries a score in each.

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2 Economics of Gender

2.1 Introduction

Over the last decades, women have continued to strive for advancement towards gender equality. For the first time in 15 years, the World Economic Forum (WEF) announced that the global gender gap in educational attainment had closed in 2020, standing at 96.1 percent equality (WEF, 2020), and the progress was maintained in 2021 (WEF, 2021). Women's average level of educational attainment, in particular, has attained a level comparable to that of men in both developed and developing countries. In most of the developed countries, women have surpassed men in tertiary education. It is evident that in all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, 25- to 34-year-old women are more likely to hold a tertiary qualification than men in the same age cohort (OECD, 2020a). In developing countries, rapid improvement in the education of girls partly accounts for the increasing female labor force participation (Duflo, 2012; Heath & Jayachandran, 2016). From a global perspective, women have achieved economic gains over the years. Emerging and developing countries, for instance, have experienced substantial growth in the labor force participation rate since 1998 (Verick, 2018). OECD countries have also shown growing trends in women's wages, with a continued narrowing of the gender wage gap since the mid-2000s (OECD, 2020b).

Despite these gains, women continue to lag behind men in labor market outcomes (Bertrand, 2020). Labor market outcomes involve a broad range of aspects, such as labor force participation, employment/unemployment, wage, and occupation. The present discussion utilizes labor market outcomes as a general term and specifies the particular outcome on a contextual basis. For instance, labor force participation, a widely adopted assessment for labor market outcomes, pinpoints the gender inequality between women and men in the labor market. According to a recent report from the *Economist* (2022), OECD countries were far from achieving a gender-equal labor force participation rate in 2021. Among these OECD industrialized countries, Sweden leads the path towards gender parity, though with women still lagging 4.3 percent behind men in labor force participation and a 0.9 percent decline from the level in 2020. Regarding wages, a typical labor market outcome measurement, the report has

indicated its prevalence across countries. In Belgium, the country in which the gap is the narrowest, women earn 3.8 percent less than men. The striking gender inequality in labor market outcomes suggests the need for a systematic analysis and a holistic interpretation of the issue.

Economics and sociology are two disciplines that contribute extensively to studies analyzing gender differentials in labor markets. Summarized by Granovetter (1988), economic approaches, particularly microeconomics, share the same methodology as sociological approaches whereby they both study the labor market in terms of individuals. Nevertheless, he stresses two significant differences in the approaches. The first difference stems from economists' emphasis on the economic motivation of individuals' behavior. In other words, economic models assume an individual typically pursues rational behavior, whereas it is possible that nonrational, namely noneconomic incentives, will "'cancel-out' in the overall effect" (Granovetter, 1988, p. 188). The second difference concerns sociologists' acknowledgment of the potential impact of social relations on people's behavior. More explicitly, from a sociological perspective, an individual's behavior is not only driven by self-interest but is also likely to be affected by relations with others or by others' behavior. The argument was first made by Granovetter (1985) as the embeddedness of an individual's labor market behavior in social interactions. It criticizes the classical and neoclassical economic approaches, which hypothesize that behavior unaffected by social relations is a "grievous misunderstanding" (Granovetter, 1985, p. 482). Given the visible gaps between economic and sociological approaches, this chapter anchors economic approaches to gender differentials in the labor market. In particular, it argues that gender stereotypes, a gender-oriented framework developed from the economics of identity, can partially close the gaps between different disciplines. The economics of identity is also robust in understanding the differentiated experiences between women and men in the labor market. Notably, the framework maintains an economic hypothesis of individual utility maximization, while taking into account noneconomic incentives and the possible influences of other individuals from the broader social context. In this sense, the economics of identity, as well as its gendered application, gender stereotypes, marks a notable shift from the standard economic approaches.

Before elaborating on this argument, clarification of the standard economic approaches is fundamental. The following sections will thus first explore three standard economic approaches to gender differentials in the labor market: human capital, psychological traits, and discrimination. Human capital often refers to educational level and skills, whereas psychological traits generally focus on attitudes towards risk, competition, and negotiation. To facilitate the discussion, I refer to human capital and psychological traits as personal-level approaches to gender differentials, in which the studies are mostly conducted on an empirical basis (Bertrand, 2011). The term "discrimination", on the other hand, is adopted to analyze the gender differentials unexplained by human capital and psychological traits (Altonji & Blank, 1999). In contrast to the empirically extensive personal-level approaches, discrimination features two

primary theoretical models, namely taste-based discrimination and the statistical discrimination model. Taste-based discrimination indicates the overt prejudice of members in the majority group towards an individual in the minority group and willingness to pay a price to avoid interacting with members of the minority group; otherwise, members of the majority group will face disutility. This model suggests that discrimination will not persist under perfect market competition, given that discriminatory actors will be eventually eliminated from the market (Becker, [1957] 1971). Yet that conclusion has been challenged by subsequent studies. Based on the criticisms of taste-based discrimination's hypothesis of the perfect labor market, the statistical discrimination model was later formulated to stress the imperfect nature of the labor market and the possible persistence of discrimination in the long run. In other words, the statistical discrimination model assumes the presence of imperfect information regarding an individual's skills and traits in the labor market. Discrimination, in this case, takes the form of rational stereotyping against an individual based on the average skills and traits of other individuals from the same group.

In sum, the three standard economic approaches emphasize stereotyping beliefs about how one's skill and traits are determined by the general skill and traits of the group. For instance, a woman's attributes are interpreted based on the aggregated distribution of women's traits in general. Additionally, how women will behave under imperfect information is also surmised from how women typically are perceived to behave. In this regard, it is clear that the standard economic approaches focus on the descriptive nature of stereotypes. Yet these approaches overlook the possible noneconomic motivations of behavior and the influence of other individuals of the gender group on an individual's self-perception. For instance, it is evident that traditional gender roles have an impact on women's labor market decisions by keeping women from joining the labor force, even if their incomes are expected to be higher than their husbands' (Bertrand et al., 2015). The result suggests that, despite the economic incentives, women are still likely to behave according to the gender norms, namely staying at home or finding a job with an income lower than their husband's. The noneconomic motivation and influence of gender norms on behavior have been extensively discussed in social psychology yet remain scarce in economics (Bertrand, 2020).

In contrast to the three approaches, the economics of identity (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, 2010) is the first economic model that recognizes and integrates sociological accounts into standard economics. The identity model describes how an individual's identity, determined by their social category and prescribed behavior of the category, affects economic outcomes. In the case of gender, there are two social categories: "men" and "women". The gendered application of the identity model implies that women's labor force participation, for instance, is not only determined by gender category but also affected by beliefs regarding how women should behave. In other words, the specific behavioral prescriptions, such as "women should be the primary caretaker and men should be the breadwinner", will affect women's decisions on whether to participate

in the labor force. The chapter will thus first explore in detail the concepts and modeling of the identity framework and explore its gender application with a focus on the concept of gender stereotypes. After recognizing its significance in explaining gender differentials in the labor market, I will argue that the economics of identity is a major transition from standard economic approaches in gender studies. The fourth section will explore a key theoretical approach to gender, namely gender performativity, by utilizing the economics of identity as an analytical framework. The primary objective is to highlight the significance of the identity model in understanding gender performativity, which can contribute to the original performativity theory of gender. The last section will summarize the overall discussion.

2.2   Standard Economic Approaches

In this section, I will introduce three standard economic approaches to gender differentials in the labor market: human capital, psychological traits, and discrimination. The objective is to demonstrate each approach and highlight the common focus on what women and men are, and how women and men will be. Given that women and men, in this case, are defined by shared beliefs about each gender, it is certain that gender stereotypes play a role in standard economics. In other words, standard economic approaches study gender differentials in the labor market based on the shared belief about what women and men typically are, as well as how women and men will typically behave.

2.2.1   *Human Capital*

Developed in the 1960s and 1970s, the human capital theory has been widely adopted to examine the impact of individual pre-labor market investment (education) or post-labor market entry investment (work experience or training) on chances of employment or, more commonly, earnings. Education, work experience, and training are regarded as investments in human capital given the direct effects on workers' labor market outcomes. The extensive and detailed discussions based on early seminal works of human capital (e.g. Becker, 1962) are beyond the scope of the current discussion, and the following will thus focus on gender. In the field of education, early studies which examine the various years of schooling have reached an agreement that the closer the education gap between men and women, the narrower the wage gap (e.g. Blau & Kahn, 1997; O'Neil & Polachek, 1993). The strong link between education and earnings prompts subsequent discussions to gradually shift from years of schooling to differences in the type of education, following Altonji's (1993) groundbreaking work. For instance, Brown and Corcoran (1997) as well as Black and colleagues (2008) both find evidence from large-scale national data and support Altonji's argument that differences in college majors chosen by students partly explain the gender wage gap. In the UK and Germany, Machin and Puhani (2003) also identify the significance of degree subjects in explaining the gender wage gap.

Among this group of studies, the general observation is that male-dominated subjects, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, generally yield higher wages than female-dominated subjects, such as education and the humanities. Bertrand (2018) uses more recent data from American Community Survey and shows that women's level of education and area of study continue to directly affect women's expected earnings, a major factor in the wage-based glass ceiling.

Whereas these perspectives center on factors prior to entering the labor market, after entry, human capital investment in terms of work experience and training also becomes relevant to labor market outcomes. Motivated by the seminal work of Mincer and Polachek (1974), subsequent studies such as Olivetti (2006) draw on data from the 1970s and 1990s and indicate that an increase in return to work accounts for nearly half of the increase in women's wage ratio in comparison to men. In addition to the salience of work experience in narrowing the gender wage gap, empirical evidence also indicates that women tend to invest less in on-the-job training than men (e.g. Altonji & Spletzer, 1991; Royalty, 1998). This is mainly attributed to the fact that investment in human capital consumes time, and there is a gendered division of labor in the family. In a traditional division of labor, a woman is commonly perceived as the primary homemaker. Given family responsibilities, the human capital models argue that women are less likely to be able to invest in training and work experience than men. In this case, the standard human capital models are developed from the shared belief that women are the primary homemakers. As such, it is anticipated that women will place a higher priority on family responsibilities and are less motivated towards human capital investment, and thus earn less than men (e.g. Oaxaca, 1973; Mincer & Polachek, 1974).

The economic rationale for anticipating that women will work according to the traditional division of labor can be alternatively explained by competitive advantage theory. The theory was first introduced by Gary Becker (1993) to study how gender roles in the family affect labor market outcomes. Given the focus of the current discussion, the comparative advantage theory will not be elaborated in detail here. The theory is relevant to the human capital approach in the sense that they share a common characteristic of the standard economic approach on defining women and men according to the shared beliefs of each gender. The primary conclusion indicates that the division of labor in a family is determined by the comparative advantage of each spouse in terms of work–related versus non–work activities. Unsurprisingly, a woman is in theory assumed to possess a comparative advantage in housework and child-rearing. Following this assumption, the theory predicts that women should specialize in homemaking and parenting tasks, whereas men should focus on their careers. Similar to the aforementioned human capital model, comparative advantage theory is developed from the stereotypical belief of what women and men generally are thought to be, and how women and men will typically behave. The general implication of this group of approaches is straightforward: women,

as described by gender beliefs, tend to attain unequal, if not always lower, economic outcomes than men.

2.2.2   *Differences in Psychological Traits*

In addition to the early human capital approaches, economists in recent years have been exploring new ways to explain gender differences in labor market outcomes. Psychological insights are particularly prominent in the broadening investigation and have become topics of interest in labor economics (Almlund et al., 2011; Azmat & Petrongolo, 2014; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). The objective of the new wave of studies converges to diagnose labor market behavior or outcomes that are not explained by the traditional economic variables. For instance, research findings suggest that men and women hold different attitudes towards risk, competition, and negotiation (see Bertrand, 2011; Blau & Kahn, 2017; Croson & Gneezy, 2009 for reviews). For the overall purpose of the study, I will particularly focus on gender differences subject to job progression and include pertinent research on China.

2.2.2.1   *Attitudes Towards Risk, Competition, and Negotiation*

Numerous studies have found that women are more risk-averse than men (e.g. Almenberg & Dreber, 2015; Dohmen et al., 2011). After reviewing existing experimental literature, Eckel and Grossman (2008) and Croson and Gneezy (2009) both report the same conclusion on women's risk aversion compared to that of men. One implication of women's risk aversion is that women tend to be more reluctant to take a job with a higher level of risk than men; otherwise, women require compensation to accept the risk. Yet women in managerial positions are the exception to the rule. Women managers demonstrate similar risk propensity and make decisions of equal quality to men (Johnson & Powell, 1994). A recent study by Zhang and colleagues (2016) also confirms the former study. They show that in China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs), there are no significant differences in risk preference between men and women managers.

The second important and robust attribute explaining the differences in labor market outcomes is the attitude towards engaging in competitive environments. Studies suggest that women are found to be less willing to enter competitive settings than men (Gneezy et al., 2003; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007, 2011). These findings also imply that when women and men are equally capable, women are less likely to compete for opportunities that can maximize productivity. Flory and colleagues (2015) suggest that for jobs in which a large share of compensation is attached to relative performance, women are less likely to apply than men. In addition to staying away from competition, women may also underperform men in a competitive environment (Bertrand, 2011). Studies conducted in different regions further suggest that although gendered attitudes towards competition tend to be universal, they are likely to be affected by the local context. For instance, Gneezy and colleagues (2009) study two regions

in India that are characterized by male-dominated and female-dominated cultures, respectively. The results show that women in male-dominated cultures are less willing to engage in competitive environments than women in female-dominated cultures. Drawing from data on two regions in Ninglang county in China, Zhang (2019) has identified that policies on gender equality play a role in reducing the gender gap in a tendency to participate in the competition. More explicitly, she finds that women in the region where gender egalitarian reforms, such as enacting laws to protect marriage freedom, demonstrate more willingness to compete, although still less than men, than those in the region without such policies. The latter group of studies has identified additional determinants of attitudes towards competition which are valid in explaining differences in labor market outcomes.

The third aspect, negotiation, is a relevant factor given its connection to resource distribution. Studies in this group have indicated that women tend to demonstrate a lower propensity to initiate negotiations than men in areas of salaries, raises, and promotions (e.g. Babcock et al., 2003; Rigdon, 2012). While earlier discussions on gender differences in negotiation do not reach a consistent conclusion, later studies suggest the necessity of contextual factors to understand the differences (Bertrand, 2011). For instance, a field experiment by Leibbrandt and List (2015) suggests gender differences in negotiation can depend on signals. They find that men are more likely to negotiate if the possibility of discussing wages is unclear. Once the possibility of wage negotiation is clearly stated, there are no gender differences, and even women are found to be more likely to negotiate in this case. Greig (2008) connects gender differences in negotiation to the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions. Researching an investment bank, she argues that women's lower propensity to negotiate can result in a lower rate of advancement and seniority. Despite the abundant studies in Western countries, evidence of gender differences in negotiation in China's labor market has been scant. There are few available studies focusing on women's relative pattern of negotiation between home and workplace domains (e.g. MacPhail & Dong, 2007).

2.2.2.2   *Personality Traits*

Studies have discovered the correlation of personality traits to behavior and labor market outcomes (Borghans et al., 2008; Bowles et al., 2001). Early psychological scholarship summarizes the five personality traits: extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness – the renowned Big Five model (e.g. Barrick & Mount, 1991; Digman, 1989, 1990). In a meta-analysis, Barrick and Mount (1991) examine the relation of the Big Five personality traits to job performance criteria, namely job proficiency, training proficiency, and personnel data. Their results show that each dimension of the Big Five varies in explaining the criteria and suggests conscientiousness as the most robust dimension. The study concludes that the Big Five model is beneficial in empirical studies. A more recent study by Mueller and Plug (2006) further confirms the

effect of the five traits but notes the gender differences in personality traits. The results suggest that each trait differs significantly across genders. Among the five personality traits, the difference in agreeableness between women and men is a major contributor to the gender earnings gap, whereas openness has no major gendered effect. Other groups of studies examine how specific personality traits affect labor market outcomes. For instance, Niederle and Yestrumskas (2008) find that inadequate representation of women in prominent occupations is a result of their lower willingness to accept challenges. In short, these studies of personality traits have provided new insights into the economic study of gender differentials in the labor market.

2.2.3   Discrimination

Discrimination, as mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, is argued as the "residual difference" in labor market outcomes (Altonji & Blank, 1999, p. 3164). More explicitly, when analyzing gender differentials in labor market outcomes, after controlling for various explanatory variables such as years of schooling, work experience, and psychological traits, the remaining unexplained gap is regarded as discrimination. Existing studies have revealed that discrimination is relevant in explaining gender differentials in labor market outcomes (e.g. Gayle et al., 2012; Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). This section will therefore examine standard economic theories of discrimination that have been largely replicated and tested to explain gender gaps in labor markets.

The economics of discrimination has received much attention since the publication of Gary Becker's seminal *The Economics of Discrimination* in 1957. Decades of economic research on discrimination can be divided into two major analytical frameworks: individual behavior (competitive model) and group-on-group behavior (collective model). Competitive models focus on an individual's behavior with respect to that of others. Collective models study group behavior and how one group responds to another. Given that the current study focuses on individual behavior, the following discussion will emphasize competitive models. This section discusses the two major competitive models (taste-based model and statistical model of discrimination) in economic analysis. For the purpose of this section, discrimination is defined as when some persons are treated differently from others with identical productive characteristics (e.g. physical and material), and solely based on gender (observable characteristic).

2.2.3.1   Taste-Based Discrimination

In his book, Becker ([1957] 1971) conceptualizes discrimination as individual taste and studies how it functions to produce discriminatory outcomes for participants in a market setting. He defines three models from which discriminatory tastes are sourced: employer, coworkers, and customers. Each model and

the respective implication for women in the labor market can be summarized as follows:

- **Employer discrimination** is defined as when certain employers are prejudiced against a minority group. One implication is preferential hiring. When women in an organization form a minority cohort, the discriminatory employer is less likely to hire female candidates or will only hire women at a sufficient wage discount to compensate for the perceived disutility of employing women, regardless of identical productivity characteristics.
- **Coworker discrimination** is when employees from a majority group are prejudiced against those from the minority group. The model implies that a wage premium is required for majority group members to work with the minority group. In this case, women as a minority will earn less than men (majority) of identical productivity.
- **Consumer discrimination** is when discriminatory consumers from the majority group are reluctant to purchase from suppliers of the minority group. Consequently, discriminatory consumers will only purchase from suppliers of the in-group (majority) or request the out-group (minority) to reduce the price. The implication of this model is profound, in addition to depression of women's relative wages. Over a longer period, women will become less productive due to revenue decrease or avoid revenue loss by working in occupations without customer contact.

Becker's taste-based discrimination received criticism from other economists in the early 1970s (Guryan & Charles, 2013). One major debate focuses on the model's prediction that perfect market competition will clear out discriminatory actors. According to Becker, discriminatory employers are less likely to hire minority workers, such as women. These discriminatory employers also tend to pay a lower wage to minority workers than workers in the majority group with the same productivity level. Under free entry or constant returns to scale, in the long run, non-discriminating employers will tend to gain access to the wage differential between identically productive majority and minority workers. In a competitive market, the discriminatory employer will earn a lower profit than the non-discriminating employer and finally will be eliminated, and taste-based discrimination will eventually disappear. Arrow (1972), who later developed the statistical discrimination model, criticized that "Becker's model predicts the absence of the phenomenon it was designed to explain" (Arrow, 1972, p. 192, cited from Guryan & Charles, 2013, p. F418).

2.2.3.2   *Statistical Discrimination*

Following Becker's taste-based discrimination theory and its critiques, Phelps (1972) and Arrow ([1973] 2015) developed a statistical theory of discrimination assuming imperfect information and rational behavior. Since then, extensive economic studies have focused on exploring statistical discrimination theories.

In statistical discrimination literature, the null hypothesis is imperfect information in the labor market. A classic example is a situation in which an employer attempts to access a job applicant from limited information: based on race, gender, and other information provided on a resume, the employer will make an optimal rational decision by predicting the applicant's productivity from both weighted average signal and average productivity of workers in the same group as the applicant. For instance, a new graduate applies for a job with a limited productivity-based signal due to limited labor market history. The employer, in this case, has an incentive to place more weight on the average productivity of workers in the same group (e.g. gender, race) as the applicant. The employer, in other words, statistically discriminates against the applicant under imperfect information and uncertainty in the market. From an economic perspective, statistical discrimination is efficient in the sense that it is the optimal solution to an information extraction problem. Nevertheless, discriminatory behavior is illegal under anti-discrimination law and difficult to detect in many cases (Altonji & Blank, 1999).

A relevant economic model that helps us understand statistical discrimination theory is Akerlof's (1970) "lemon model". Both frameworks share an imperfect information hypothesis and shed light on the economic rationale of discriminatory behavior. Although the original model was demonstrated in a used-car market setting, it can be applied to understand statistical discrimination in the hiring process. The framework describes a market in which sellers are better informed than buyers about the quality of goods and services offered. In this case, sellers tend to offer poor-quality cars at a lower price than high-quality cars, given that buyers could not distinguish the quality of cars under imperfect information. Eventually, high-quality sellers will leave the market, and only low-quality cars (lemons, a phrase commonly referred to as defective cars) remain for sale. In the case of hiring, Akerlof's (1970) model implies that when information about job applicants is limited, it is difficult for an employer to distinguish applicants with good job qualifications from those with poor qualifications. Employers tend to rely on observable characteristics, such as gender or race, for hiring decisions. Consequently, the model suggests that employers may refuse to hire members of the minority group, which is not necessarily irrational or prejudiced, but a profit-maximizing decision. In this regard, the lemon model further justifies the rationality of statistical discrimination in the context of imperfect information.

In terms of gender, the implications of statistical discrimination models become straightforward. When individual skills and performance are uncertain, employers treat women and men based on traits and performances of the gender group instead of the individual. In other words, the judgment on an individual woman or man is defined by the aggregate belief of what women and men typically are, and what women and men typically will do. For instance, when there may be a high turnover rate for women in certain job positions. Given the comparable information on female and male applicants shown in their resumes, an employer will judge someone's productivity by taking into account possible

turnover costs. Imperfect information in the labor market indicates that the employer is unable to distinguish the turnover propensity of both applicants. In this regard, the employer will predict each applicant's productivity based on the average productivity of women and men in the organization. Women's higher turnover than men, in this case, sends a signal to the employer that women have relatively lower productivity such that the profit-maximizing employer will either refuse to hire the female applicant or assign her to a job with lower turn-over cost. Consequently, statistical discrimination creates inequality between women and men in the labor market.

In addition to discrimination during the hiring process, the model also implies the possible persistence of discrimination. Following the case stated previously, the biased belief that women have a higher turnover potential than men will lead to employers' lower tendency to provide job training to women workers and promote women. With less training and unequal treatment in comparison to their male counterparts, women may have less motivation to stay in their jobs and could decide to quit. Ultimately, women's turnover decisions will further affirm the employer's original belief of women's lower productivity in comparison to men and affect the hiring process. The implication of persistent statistical dis-crimination is profound. Drawing from socio-psychological evidence, Bertrand and colleagues (2005) argue that apart from the overt discriminatory behavior that is justified by economic rationality, the discriminatory behavior can also be more subtle and subconscious. In other words, their findings suggest that there exists implicit discrimination which can hardly be eradicated.

2.3   Economics of Identity

The previous section demonstrated three standard economic approaches which have been extensively applied and tested to understand gender differentials in the labor market. It is conclusive that standard economic analyses developed from stereotypical beliefs about what women and men are, and what women and men will be, as defined by gender group characteristics. In this section, the primary objective is to introduce the economics of identity as an analytical approach that is distinct from standard economic approaches. More explicitly, the economics of identity, formally introduced by Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) groundbreaking paper, incorporates into economics the conceptualization of identity from sociology and social psychology. The subsequent parts will first briefly outline the key concepts of Akerlof and Kranton's identity approach, and the modeling of identity. After clarifying the background, the model will be interpreted in terms of gender identity to understand gender differentials in the labor market.

2.3.1   *Concept and Modeling of Identity*

In their original paper, Akerlof and Kranton (2000, p. 715) define identity as "a person's sense of self". They further explain identity as "an individual's sense of

self to the social setting; identity is bound to social categories; and individuals identify with people in some categories and differentiate themselves from those in others" (p. 720). The emphasis of this definition of identity is one's sense of self or self-perception in terms of social category. Davis (2007) contends that Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) concept of identity is in essence a social identity approach to psychology. He cites Tajfel's definition of social identity: "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of his group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292, cited from Davis, 2007, p. 353), and highlights the distinction between one's social identity (identifying with others) and one's personal identity ("identity apart from others") (Davis, 2007, p. 353). Acknowledging the taxonomy of identity, subsequent discussion approaches an individual's identity as their social identity, following Akerlof and Kranton's original assumption. It is stated that every individual in the society belongs to one or more social categories, while ideal attributes and common practices associated with each category will take the form of prescriptions.[1] Drawing from socio-psychological evidence, they acknowledge the effect of social categorizations on an individual's behavior. Based on these concepts, Akerlof and Kranton formulate the relation of identity and associated behavior to economic outcomes with the following utility function:

$$U_j = U_j(a_j, a_{-j}, I_j) \qquad\qquad (2.1)$$

According to the function, a person j's utility depends on j's identity $\mathbf{I}_j$, as well as j's actions $\mathbf{a}_j$, and the actions of all other individuals $\mathbf{a}_{-j}$. j's identity $\mathbf{I}_j$ can be further defined as:

$$I_j = I_j(a_j, a_{-j}; c_j \varepsilon_j, P) \qquad\qquad (2.2)$$

Identity $\mathbf{I}_j$ in the model depends on j's actions $\mathbf{a}_j$ and the actions of all others individuals $\mathbf{a}_{-j}$, which also depends on one's assignable social category $\mathbf{c}_j$, and upon j's own given characteristics ϵ_j, matching the ideal attributes of j's assigned categories, as indicated by social prescriptions of the categories, $\mathbf{P}$. Equations (2.1) and (2.2) pinpoint the contributors to an individual's identity and final utility, but the model's underlying mechanism requires additional interpretations.

2.3.2   *Explaining the Identity Model*

As Akerlof and Kranton (2000) argue in their original paper, the model can be explained with a psychodynamic theory of personality, namely the internalization of behavioral prescriptions (rules). The basic idea is that an individual will experience anxiety when violating the internalized prescriptions. Anxiety, in this case, is created by someone's interaction with other individuals, which could confront their self-perception. In the economic model, anxiety is represented as

a loss in utility $\mathbf{U}_j$. Consequently, according to the psychodynamic personality point of view, identity must be defended against this anxiety to "limit disruption and maintain a sense of unity" (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, p. 728). At this point, it is clear that individuals will behave according to the internalization of prescriptions. The question is: what is the internalization process? Akerlof and Kranton (2000, p. 728) describe the process as "a person learns a set of values (prescriptions) such that her actions should conform with the behavior of some people and contrast with that of others", and refer to it as identification. The definition suggests that one's identification is not necessarily innate but can be constructed through learning. Furthermore, the behavior of other individuals plays a role in a person's internalization process. In short, identification is a dynamic process that involves not only an individual's own actions but also the actions of all other individuals in the society.

The internalization process and responses to it can be explained by a game-theoretic setting. Consider a gender example in which everyone is assigned to a social category, "man" and "woman", and there exists a simple behavioral prescription: "women should work inside the home". Assume that there are two individuals – woman A and woman B – and two activities – work inside home (housework) and work outside the home (office work). In standard economic models, an individual should maximize their utility and act accordingly. Given the assignable social category "woman" and the prescription, the first implication is straightforward: that a woman should engage in housework because deviating from the prescription will make her less a "woman", and result in a loss of utility.

The second implication is more complex but indicates the concept of externality. Suppose woman A has internalized the prescription, while woman B violates the prescription and engages in office work. Based on the aforementioned definition of anxiety, woman B's behavior challenges A's self-conception such that woman A experiences anxiety, a loss in utility. According to the psychodynamic theory of personality, woman A should defend against this anxiety, namely office work, and remain committed to housework to maintain her sense of unity. In spite of the possible cost in doing so, Akerlof and Kranton (2000) stress that agents are willing to pay the cost to maintain their identity (self-image). Consequently, woman B's violation of prescription leads to an externality for woman A. From B's perspective, woman A's response against the externality (housework) will encourage her to devote herself further to office work, which will result in further external effects. In general, the implications of the model can be summarized in two major points. First, it suggests people will act according to the behavior that is expected of their social category. Second, a person's utility will be influenced by the actions of all other individuals.

Given the two implications, Akerlof and Kranton (2000, p. 731) argue that the core of the model is "'situation' – who is matched with whom and in what context". In some of their subsequent articles, Akerlof and Kranton expand the identity model according to other situations, such as institutions and education, and highlight the importance of identity, sourced from group membership, with

its respective impact with regard to the associated situation. For instance, they incorporate identity into the economics of organization and study work incentives in hierarchical institutions, namely the military (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005). As the identity model assumed, behaving in accordance with prescriptions of one's social category can increase one's utility. In this regard, they contend that the military can implement management policies that aim at creating group identifications to encourage work incentives and achieve overall organizational goals. The conclusion has a broader human resource implication which suggests that group membership can facilitate the monitoring of free-riding and prohibit such behaviors (Eckel & Grossman, 2005). The example further suggests the significance of the identity model, which is applicable to diversified contexts and helpful in the formulation of policy implications. As the focus of the present study, the next section will apply the model to interpret gender differentials in the labor market.

2.3.3   *Economics of Identity and Gender*

The gender application of Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) model is relevant to understand gender differentials in labor market outcomes. Notably, the original paper briefly mentions that the identity model is applicable to the two social categories, "man" and "woman", which can help in understanding identity-related behaviors among gender and occupations. The current discussion explores its gender application in understanding labor market outcomes.

The identity model is able to explain women's low level of labor force participation, as well as the enduring occupational segregation in the labor market. With regard to labor force participation, considering a situation with a strong statement that "women should work inside the home, men should work outside the home", it is predictable that women are likely to engage in work inside the home to avoid loss of utility. In contrast, men should participate in the labor force to maintain their social identity. In this case, the identity model provides an analytical tool to understand why fewer women than men participate in the labor force. Furthermore, the model also provides a holistic interpretation of occupational segregation and the difficulty of tackling the segregation. Consider the case of a female Marine, as mentioned in the original paper. Due to the common perception that it is a man's occupation, it is less likely for a woman to become a marine because doing so will deviate from the behavioral prescription of the gender categories. More importantly, from the aspect of externality, female Marines will be regarded as violating the prescription. In this case, women who have internalized gender prescriptions will reject the decisions of women Marines and are more likely to choose to work on jobs that match the prescriptions, such as nurse and teacher. In this case, it explains why women are reluctant to join the Marines and highlights the challenge of addressing occupational segregation.

To demonstrate the ability of the identity model to explain situations other than labor force participation and occupational segregation, I will apply the

model to illustrate Bertrand et al.'s (2015) finding noted in Section 2.1. Drawing on data from the United States, the study shows that women are still less likely to join the labor force even if they expect to earn a higher income than their husbands. If they decide to join the labor force, the result also suggests that women will tend to accept a job with an income lower than their husband's, which is lower than the predicted income. In this case, women's behavior can be interpreted by considering a behavioral prescription that "women should earn less than men". The prevalence of gender prescriptions has been widely acknowledged before the findings from Bertrand and colleagues. After investigating 25 OECD countries for 10 years, Fortin (2005) finds no notable change in the attitudes towards gender roles in the countries over time. The intact gender role expectations are evidently the critical determinants for women's labor market outcomes in these countries. Recent studies further indicate the presence of prescriptions across different national contexts. After extending the analysis of Bertrand and colleagues (2015), Wieber and Holst (2015), Eriksson and Stenberg (2015), and Codazzi and colleagues (2017) reach similar conclusions with evidence from Germany, Sweden, and Brazil, respectively.

In the same study, Bertrand and colleagues (2015) also find that when a woman earns a higher income than her husband, she tends to devote more time to housework. This finding is unexpected given its contrary prediction from the classical comparative advantage model by Becker (1993). In the classical comparative advantage model mentioned previously, it is expected that a woman with higher earnings should devote more time to her job rather than nonmarket activities. According to the identity model, women with higher income than their husbands devoting more time to housework can be interpreted as compensation for the deviation from the prescription "women should earn less than men". The economic rationale of devoting more time to housework has a profound implication, which suggests that the gender gap in nonmarket work (e.g. within a household) remains salient, despite improvement in women's income relative to their husbands'. In this regard, Bertrand and colleagues (2015, p. 574) finally conclude that "women are bringing personal glass ceilings from home to the workplace".

2.3.4   Gender Stereotypes

The previous section demonstrated the explanatory power of an economics of identity in understanding gender differentials in the labor market. The goal of this part is to show that the economics of identity is a major shift from the three standard economic approaches of human capital, psychological traits, and discrimination, with the concept of gender stereotypes. As illustrated in Section 2.2, all three standard economic approaches share a common focus on what women and men are. In this case, the characteristics of women and men are defined by the shared belief about each gender, which provides decision-makers with information about how women and men will typically behave. It is conclusive that gender stereotypes play a descriptive role in standard

economics. Yet in the economics of identity, gender stereotypes not only serve as a description to inform the individual what women and men typically are, but the shared beliefs also take the form of prescriptions which will affect an individual's behavior. In short, the key distinction of the economics of identity is the additional socio–psychological account which contributes to a more holistic concept of gender stereotypes. To better illustrate this point, the following capitalizes on Bertrand (2020) and highlights different interpretations of gender stereotypes from standard economics and social psychology.

- **Standard economics:** Gender stereotypes are rational beliefs about a group member (a woman or a man) based on the aggregate distribution of a trait or skill in the gender group.
- **Social psychology:** Gender stereotypes need not be accurate or rational. They are special cases of cognitive schemas, or generalizations that individuals make to economize on cognitive resources.

Indeed, the economics of identity incorporates the two perspectives. In addition to maintaining the standard economic rationale of utility maximization, the identity framework adopts the psychodynamic theory of personality to recognize the possible internalization of behavioral prescriptions. More explicitly, in modeling two-person scenarios, the psychodynamic internalization process is approached by a classical economic approach, namely game-theoretic. The mechanism suggests individuals should act according to the prescriptions because deviating from prescriptions will result in anxiety, or loss in utility. Based on the results in Section 2.2, the internalization process is overlooked by standard economic approaches. They merely draw conclusions from postulating what women and men are, and how women and men will be based on characteristics of their gender group, but fail to capture the subtle effect of the given gender group characteristics on an individual's self-perception and behavior. More importantly, the externality of one individual's action on another individual is far from being recognized in the standard economic approaches.

   In short, the identity model is a major shift from the standard economic models in two major aspects. The first notable difference is the incorporation of the socio–psychological approach into economic analysis. In its gender application, the inclusion of socio–psychological perspectives broadens the descriptive role of gender stereotyping by considering the internalization of prescriptions associated with the gender category assignable to the individual. The internalization process not only implies an individual's rationality to act according to the behavioral prescriptions of the assignable gender group but also implies the externality of one individual's behavior on other individuals. Externality, in this case, marks the second aspect of change from the standard economic approaches. More explicitly, externality highlights that one individual's behavior not only will affect other individuals but others' responses will, in return, have an impact on the person's behavior.

Differences between standard economics and the identity approach can be more concretely demonstrated with regard to the nature of gender stereotypes. Details are as follows:

- **Standard economic models** emphasize the descriptive nature of gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes, in this case, provide descriptions of what women and men typically do (or how they typically are), which provide decision-makers with information about what the typical woman or typical man will do (or how they will be).
- **The economics of identity approach** stresses both the descriptive and prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes. With the internalization process, these shared beliefs have a prescriptive nature which motivates an individual to adjust their actions according to the prescription as well as others' actions. The prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes implies the gender beliefs are shared by women and men, about what women and men should or ought to do (or how they should or ought to be).

In summary, the economics of identity takes into account the socio-psychological perspective by incorporating prescriptions of gender groups into an economic analysis of gender differentials in labor market outcomes. It is therefore conclusive that gender stereotypes, a gender application of the identity model, is a more holistic framework to explain differences between women and men, in comparison with the standard economic approaches of human capital, psychological traits, and discrimination. The prescriptive aspect of the gender stereotyping approach is vital. For instance, studies have revealed the intergenerational dynamics of prescriptive gender stereotypes which can transmit across generations within a family, namely from parents to children (e.g. Brenøe, 2018; Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014; Farré & Vella, 2013). Drawing from large-scale national longitudinal survey data in the United States, Farré and Vella (2013) find that a mother's view of the role of females in the family and in the labor market has a statistically significant effect on her children. As a result, the younger generation who inherit the traditional view of gender attitudes tends to be affected by their mother's views and less likely to be involved in labor market activities. In this case, the intergenerational dynamic, as well as the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes, can also explain the persistence of the gender gap in labor force participation.

2.4   Economics of Identity and Gender Performativity

In the previous section, I introduced the economics of identity in detail and demonstrated its significance as an approach to gender differentials in the labor market. This section aims to pinpoint the explanatory power of the identity model by exploring a widely discussed gender concept: performativity. In the performativity framework, the basic idea is that individuals are not born into a gender but gender is a performance of repeated actions. In other words, a

person's gender identity is defined by repeated performative acts. It is, therefore, noticeable that the economics of identity and performativity theory share the same emphasis on the constructed nature of one's identity. The common ground offers a natural basis to further explore performativity in terms of the economics of identity. To start with, I first explore the conceptual background of the performativity approach to gender.

2.4.1 Gender as Performance

The performativity theory of gender is formally introduced by philosopher Judith Butler ([1990] 2010) in her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler's theory emphasizes that performativity is the fundament that brings women and men (or feminine and masculine) into being. In this respect, one's gender is defined as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, [1990] 2010, p. 45). According to this definition, it is clear that she detaches gender from a person's body. How about biological sex? Butler stresses that sex, the biological attributes commonly used to distinguish "male" from "female", is a concept created by society. In other words, she argues that a person is not naturally born into a sexual category (male or female) but is assigned a sex by society. The conclusion of sexuality and gender as socially constructed has profound implications for the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, and queer theories, which extend beyond the scope of the current discussion. In the present study, I focus on the basic case of gender and its performative nature by taking sexual categories as given. Based on Butler's primary argument, it is conclusive that gender is independent of one's sex and is socially constructed. More explicitly, gender, in this case, "is always a doing" (Butler, [1990] 2010, p. 34), defined by repeated acts.

Butler further clarifies the relation between gender and identity by arguing that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, [1990] 2010, p. 34). Given the prior definition of gender as repeated acts, it is clear that in the current context, gender identity is not preexisting but is constructed by a person's acts. Differences between expression and performance should be noted here. Expression in the current concept is regarded as an outcome, or manifestation, of repeated performative acts. For instance, Butler's notion of gender suggests that bodily gestures, movements, and styles are performative, defining an individual's gender attributes. These attributes determine an individual's gender identity and take the form of expressions. In other words, gender attributes are expressions of gender identity, which are the performances of bodily actions or styles. Acknowledging these theoretical concepts, some questions are still unanswered: how does performativity determine someone's gender identity? What are the implications?

2.4.2   *Identity Approach to Gender Performativity*

To answer the questions, the economics of identity is able to capture the dynamics of the process and highlight its implications. In Butler's original text, identity is constructed by the process "which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, [1990] 2010, p. 102). Consider a case mentioned in Akerlof and Kranton (2000), where there are two actors – man A and man B – and there are two actions – not wearing a dress (Action One) and wearing a dress (Action Two). In a standard utility-maximizing model, each person would act according to their taste. As noted by Butler, the identities of man A and man B are determined by repeatedly performing the action they choose (Action One or Action Two). Then we assume there is a society in which it is a shared belief that men should perform the action of not wearing a dress. In this case, "men should not wear a dress" is a social prescription, a comparable concept to Butler's social discourse comprised of all language, customs, and patterns of thought in a society. The identity model implies that every man, including man A and man B, should act according to the prescriptions to avoid loss of utility. From an economic perspective, it is utility-maximizing for a man not to wear a dress. The economics of identity provides an economic rationale for the first critical implication of performativity theory: gender norms not only can be produced by repeated acts but can also be maintained through continual repetitive acts.

The identity model can also explain the second implication of performativity theory: individuals who do not act according to gender norms will be marginalized. As described by Butler, the alternative performance that deviates from the norm will challenge the status quo and create "gender trouble". The rationale and implications of this deviating act are justifiable by the identity model. For instance, in this case, man A prefers to perform according to the prescription by engaging in Action One (not wearing a dress), whereas man B decides to perform Action Two (wear a dress). In this case, man B's action in deviating from the prescription challenges man A's self-perception. According to the identity model, man A will respond to B's deviation by staying away from Action Two and continue to perform Action One, despite the possible cost of doing so. From man B's perspective, man A's response to not wear a dress also creates anxiety for him, such that he will continue to wear a dress to defend against this anxiety. The externality of one individual's action on another individual predicts that the behavioral gap between the two individuals is difficult to overcome. This externality pinpoints two implications of the performativity framework.

- First, marginalization, based on the economics of identity, is a natural economic consequence stemming from an individual's utility-maximizing behavior given the existence of a deviating act.
- The second implication is more profound. Externality suggests that marginalization is resistant to change. The primary reason is that individuals who act according to the norms will become more committed to repeat

the norms and defend against the violating behavior. This devotion will further exert an external effect on marginalized individuals whose rational response is to continue actions that deviate from the norms. Externality, in this case, maintains the division between the two individuals.

This example demonstrates the explanatory relevance of the identity model as an economic perspective to understand gender performativity. More explicitly, the economics of identity contributes to the well-studied performativity theory with economic explanations. With added consideration of economic motivation, the identity model complements performativity theory in the sense that identity is an economic decision defining what an individual chooses to become. In other words, putting performativity theory in the identity model, it is conclusive that an individual's gender identity is not only determined by repeated acts but also is an outcome chosen by an individual to maximize their economic well-being. Furthermore, the identity model reveals the salience of context in understanding gender issues. According to the previous example, the discussion is developed based on a designed context such that the behavior norm is "men not wearing dresses". In contrast, when man A and man B are posited in a context specifying that "men wearing dresses" is the norm, the gender identity of both men will be constructed by wearing dresses. The account of the situation/context highlights the flexibility of the identity model to capture the dynamics of the individual decision-making process, which are difficult to explain using standard economic approaches.

2.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter has aimed to develop a holistic analytical framework of economics in understanding gender differentials in labor markets. As indicated by some scholars, economic approaches emphasize individual rational behavior in response to economic motivations while overlooking the roles of noneconomic incentives as well as the impact of others' behavior on the subject. These identified limitations are evident from the earlier discussion on standard economic approaches. In studying gender, standard frameworks of human capital, psychological traits, and discrimination commonly assume what men and women typically do (or how they typically are) based on the aggregate distribution of a trait or skill in the gender group. They rely solely on this assumption to provide information to predict what the typical man or typical woman will do (or how they will be) but fail to take into account the broader social context and the interactions of individuals.

In contrast to standard economic approaches, the economics of identity incorporates a socio-psychological approach to economic analysis. The original model suggests two major implications. First, it indicates that it is economically rational for an individual to act according to the behavior that is expected of an individual's social category. Second, there is an externality of one individual's action on another's behavior. In other words, one individual's

economic well-being, modeled by utility, will be influenced by the actions of all other individuals. The two implications mark the major transformation of the economics of identity from standard economics. In its gender application, the model shows that gender beliefs will take the form of prescription and affect individual decision-making. Additionally, one individual's deviation from the shared belief will influence another's behavior. According to the conceptualization of gender stereotypes, the contribution of the model to standard economics is straightforward. As noted, standard models postulate women and men based on the descriptions of gender stereotypes, namely what women and men are, and how women and men will behave. In contrast, the identity model not only recognizes the descriptive nature of gender stereotypes but also assumes an individual will internalize the shared belief such that the shared beliefs take a form of prescription, which are shared by women and men, about what women and men should or ought to do (or how they should or ought to be).

In addition to its contribution to the standard economic approach to gender, the economics of identity also demonstrates significant explanatory validity in understanding the much discussed notion of gender performativity. Approaching gender as repeated performative acts, the identity model is able to explain the process of an individual's action in determining their gender identity in economic terms. The identity model, in this case, complements the discussion on gender performativity by highlighting the economic rationale in someone's behavior. Notably, the results suggest that gender is not merely a result of a person's repeated performative acts but also their economic decision. Furthermore, the discussion of gender performativity suggests the potential of the identity model for explaining gender within the different situations (context). To elaborate on this point, the next chapter will explore the relevance of the identity model in understanding gender differentials with regard to the organizational context. More explicitly, the identity model will be applied to understand the theories of gender and organizations.

Note

1 In the original text, Akerlof and Kranton (2000) note that they use the word "prescriptions" rather than "norms" to avoid confusion in their paper. The first reason is the inconsistent usage of norms in economic studies. Second, they state that in their paper "agents follow prescriptions, for the most part, to maintain their self-concepts" (p. 716).

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3 Gender, Business Organization, and Culture

3.1 Gender Differentials in Business Organizations

This chapter continues to explore gender differentials by means of the economics of identity. One key characteristic of the identity approach, as noted previously, is its potential to explain individual behavior in terms of various situations. Akerlof and Kranton (2000, p. 731) define "situation" as "who is matched with whom and in what context".[1] In their subsequent paper, "situation" is further clarified as "when, where, how and between whom a transaction takes place" (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005, p. 12). According to this notion of situation, it is feasible to apply the identity perspective to a wide variety of settings. In this chapter, the discussion will be grounded on women and men (between them) and business organizations (where). The chapter is formulated as an extension to a more specific study than that of the general labor market in the preceding chapter. Gender differentials associated with business organizations have indeed received abundant attention from scholars since the late 1970s. Analytical frameworks have been developed by theorists of sociology, psychology, and management science to explain the differences between women and men in an organizational context. Five decades after introducing gender to organization studies, a recent review has revealed the existence of tensions across various classification methods (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019). Highly diversified approaches and limited systematic discussions suggest a unified contour will be helpful to illuminate the different theoretical perspectives. Notably, the contour is able to serve as a systematic synthesis of the critical theoretical frameworks within the field. As such, this section aims to clarify the field of gender and organization. The following parts of this section will explore existing theoretical approaches to gender and organization in terms of an identity framework.

The economics of identity, in this case, takes an active explanatory role in mapping the key organizational approaches into two major groups. The classification is well supported by the two main implications of the identity perspective: (1) economic rationality to act according to the behavior that is expected for one's social category and (2) the mechanism of externality. The first group, referred to by organization scholars as "gender in organization" (e.g. Calás et al., 2014), focuses on explaining gender differentials in an organization

based on what women and men are. The two primary theoretical frameworks: social role theory (Eagly, 1987, cited from Eagly, 1997) and status characteristic theory (Berger et al., 1977, cited from Wagner & Berger, 1997), in essence, share a common approach to pinpointing an individual's response subject to shared gender beliefs (prescriptions). The identity perspective, in this case, can provide an economic explanation, and common ground, to synthesize the two organization theories. The second group of approaches, the so-called "gendering of organization" (Calás et al., 2014), examines how inequality between women and men is produced and reproduced in a gendered context. The central research objective of this group – that is, the question of "how" – can be explained game theoretically by the identity framework and summarized by the concept of externality. The discussion aims to explore the relevance and significance of the economics of identity in approaching the standard organizational frameworks. More importantly, it contributes to the current understanding of gender and organization with a unified framework and economic insights.

3.1.1 Gender in Organizations

Gender in organization studies represents the earliest discussions associated with gender and organizations, dating from the 1970s. This early literature was prompted by the growing economic opportunities and the emerging presence of women in both organizations and academia during the period (Calás et al., 2014). After revisiting organization studies conducted before the 1970s, scholars found that the prior research had failed to address differences between women and men in organizations (e.g. Acker, 1990; Acker & Van Houten, 1974; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Calás & Smircich, 1992a, 1992b; Lewis, 2014; Martin & Collinson, 2002). Given the historical background, gender in organization studies started by exploring women's conditions in organizations and how these conditions differ from men's. With a growing number of women in organizations, the focus of discussion gradually shifted to explore women's status within organizations, often found to be secondary to that of men, including underrepresentation of women in top management positions.

   After reviewing all articles published in the *Academy of Management Journal* between 1958 to 2015, Joshi and colleagues (2015) identified the first gender study as Chapman (1975). The earliest work examined possible differences between women and men in leadership styles. The article concludes that women's leadership style is more relationship-oriented than men's, primarily attributed to gender stereotypes and expectations in society. Chapman's (1975) study is, in fact, a justification of earlier psychology-oriented research conducted by Virginia Schein (1973, 1975). Schein (1973) developed a 92-term Descriptive Index to measure gender-role stereotypes and the characteristics of successful middle managers. Drawing from the feedback of 300 male managers in the United States, Schein (1973) identifies a relationship between gender stereotypes and management characteristics by showing that successful middle managers are perceived to possess characteristics and attitudes more commonly

identified with men than with women. This finding is later referred to as the "think manager–think male" concept. Yet empirical interpretations dominated early scholarship until social role theory (Eagly, [1987] 2013) and status characteristics theory (Berger et al., 1977, cited in Wagner & Berger, 1997) emerge to offer theoretical explanations for gender differentials with regard to social influence. The subsequent sections will first introduce each theoretical concept, followed by an interpretation based on the economics of identity.

3.1.1.1   Social Role Theory

First developed by psychologist Alice Eagly ([1987] 2013), social role theory aims to explain how shared beliefs about women and men affect gendered differences in behavior. The theory sees women and men in the broad social context in which their roles are defined by "shared expectations (about appropriate qualities and behaviors) that apply to individuals on the basis of their socially identified gender" (Eagly, [1987] 2013, p. 12). This concept highlights a critical hypothesis of the social role theory – that is, women and men hold very different roles, given that each gender is subject to social prescriptions detailing what is expected for the gender category. The assumption of women and men taking distinctive roles suggests the social role theory shares the characteristic of gender in an organizational context. Specifically, social role theory is similar to alternative gender in organization studies in the sense that it aims to explain gendered outcomes based on the different roles of women and men. With this foundation, social role theory proposes that the different roles of women and men lead to gendered social behavior.

To explain the mechanism, Eagly ([1987] 2013) argues that given the assignable role, an individual often learns the role-related skills to fulfill the expectations and adapt behavior according to the prescriptions. For instance, when a woman is assigned the role of caregiver, she learns skills such as cooking for children. When a man is assigned the role of breadwinner, he learns skills associated with paid work. In a context where women are commonly involved in the caregiver role while men take the breadwinner role, the theory suggests that this phenomenon will take the form of shared expectations which demand that individuals display the expected qualities and behaviors accordingly. In this case, women will behave according to the caregiver role and exhibit related traits, such as selflessness, whereas men will follow the breadwinner role by working in a job and possess role-related traits such as striving for achievement (Carli & Eagly, 1999). Based upon this reasoning, Eagly ([1987] 2013) claims that, in general, a woman's role is characterized by communal qualities, such as nurturing, sympathy, and interpersonal sensitivity, indicating concern for the welfare of others. On the other hand, a man's role is characterized by agentic qualities, such as aggressiveness, independence, and self-assertion (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Social role theory suggests gender role expectations will affect occupation and workplace behavior that is considered appropriate for women and men. For instance, the labor market in which most nurses are women whereas most

doctors are men will shape the occupational roles of women as nurses and men as doctors. The theory suggests nursing will be perceived as a job associated with female qualities while doctors are associated with male qualities. When top management positions are dominated by men, the theory indicates that top managers will be expected to possess male-related qualities, such as assertiveness, control, and independence. Recent studies have further demonstrated its empirical applications. Drawing from interviews with 44 women in Australian banks, Metz (2011) reveals that women's domestic role will shape the expectation that women tend to leave work due to family responsibilities. This expectation created by gender roles negatively affects women's career development opportunities and decisions on promoting women.

With the general focus shifting to women and management, social role theory is further extended to study gender roles and leadership characteristics. As described, women's roles, characterized by communal qualities, fail to meet the expectations of male-related qualities favored in managers. In contrast, when women managers conform to male-related qualities, they will fail to meet the requirements of their gender role. As such, Eagly and Karau (2002) refer to the mismatch as gender-role incongruity and argue that women will be perceived as less favorable candidates than men for leadership positions. On the other hand, men's gender roles are perceived as being more congruent with leadership roles than those of women. Consequently, there is likely to be prejudice against women leaders. In a more recent meta-analysis, Koch and colleagues (2015) concur with the prior study by indicating a positive correlation between incongruity and gender bias in the workplace. The results suggest that men are always preferred for male-dominated jobs, and women are more likely to face discrimination in male-dominated environments. Based on this theory, gender roles will provide individual information about how women and men typically behave, and how women and men should behave in the workplace. Gender roles are, therefore, both descriptive and prescriptive in nature. This conclusion is consistent with the nature of gender stereotypes developed from the economics of identity. The common ground justifies the potential to discuss social role theory in terms of the identity perspective and will be illustrated in the concluding part of this section.

3.1.1.2   Status Characteristic Theory

Comparable to social role theory, status characteristic theory aims to explain how differences between women and men stem from gendered behavior. Contrary to the hypothesis of different social roles of women and men, the status characteristic theory assumes women and men have different status characteristics. Status characteristics are one central concept of expectation states theory, a broader framework that investigates how members of task-focused groups form expectations, namely expectations about how other members will perform (Carli & Eagly, 1999). In this case, status characteristics serve to provide valuable information about these expectations. Status characteristics describe attributes

on which individuals differ (e.g. gender), and the attributes contain information about how one category of the attribute (e.g. men) is commonly believed to be worthier or more competent than another (e.g. women). Status characteristics are further divided into two categories: specific and diffuse. Specific characteristics involve explicit information (e.g. skills or abilities) about an individual, such as reading ability or computational skill, which well defines the associated expectations of a specific task. Diffuse status characteristics, on the other hand, contain general information that shapes expectations about a wide range of tasks (Foschi, 1996; for a review see Foschi, 2000; Wagner & Berger, 1997).

Gender is commonly considered a diffuse status characteristic due to the fact that it provides information about general characteristics regarding members of the gender group. According to the theory, diffuse status characteristics information will only be useful if the characteristics are salient (i.e. relevant to the task or the issue within the group). Gender, in this case, is salient if it is relevant to the unequal gender distribution within the task group, or if the task is commonly believed to be feminine (e.g. nurse) or masculine (e.g. engineer). When the status characteristic is salient, the theory assumes that an individual who is higher in status (status superiority) is believed to be more competent at the task (Wagner & Berger, 1997). For instance, in an organization where men dominate leadership positions, men will be perceived as "status superior" (higher in status) and thus more competent than women. According to status characteristics theory, gender as a visible status marker will result in men receiving higher evaluations than women as leaders and being offered more work opportunities than their female counterparts.

More importantly, the theory asserts that status not only describes what an individual is but also contains important information about what is appropriate for individuals of different statuses in the task group (i.e. legitimacy) (Calás et al., 2014; Carli & Eagly, 1999). For women leaders, who are commonly the lower status ("status inferior") individuals in the leadership group, the theory suggests they are believed to be less competent and thus have limited legitimacy to influence others as leaders. Profoundly, according to the theory, given the unequal diffuse status, women leaders who strive to gain leadership skills and competency still find it difficult to overcome the perceived lack of legitimacy (Carli & Eagly, 1999; Heilman et al., 1995). Furthermore, Ridgeway (2001) argues that these women's assertive efforts will receive negative reactions from others, which further damage their evaluation. In short, as Ridgeway (2001) concludes, the legitimacy (prescription) implies "men are not only generally more competent, but also more status worthy, than similar women" (p. 648).

3.1.1.3   Identity Approach to Gender in Organizations

Despite variance in theoretical backgrounds, social role theory and status characteristics are, in essence, highly similar. The common ground becomes vivid when understanding the underlying reasoning in terms of the economics of

identity. Before elaborating on this point, a short summary of the two theories will serve as a helpful foundation:

- Both theories assume that women and men are fundamentally different. Social role theory attributes the differences to gender roles of women and men, whereas status characteristics theory stresses that women and men are different in status, characterized by gender attributes. Based upon this hypothesis, the two theories aim to explain how women and men will behave and how women and men are evaluated. In particular, both theories imply that an individual will behave according to the shared beliefs with regard to the gender category.
- Both theories have been extensively replicated as standard frameworks to understand gender differentials in an organizational context, such as occupational segregation and women's underrepresentation in management positions. Yet most replications take the theories' implications as given, with limited discussion on the underlying reasoning of the original theories.

Based on these shared characteristics, the economics of identity is able to provide an economic insight into organizational approaches to gender. According to the identity perspective, an individual's behavior is determined by their identity or sense of self. Similar to social role theory and status characteristics theory, the identity theory recognizes that shared gender beliefs not only act as descriptions about what women and men are but will also exist as prescriptions to demand how women and men should be. This common feature is mainly due to the socio-psychological motivations underlying the approaches. In addition to the shared acknowledgment of gender role expectations, the economics of identity highlights that an individual will internalize the prescriptions. This internalization is further incorporated into an individual's economic decision-making process and modeled by a utility function. The perspective suggests that an individual's decision to act according to the given shared beliefs about women and men is the maximization of economic well-being. In other words, one's behavioral response subject to gender role or status is, in fact, an economic response to shared belief. Economics of identity, in this respect, is an inclusive framework to understand social role theory and status characteristic theory from an economic perspective.

3.1.2   *Gendering of Organizations*

Whereas perspectives of gender in organizations assume women and men as discrete variables, theoretical approaches in this part do not take differences between women and men as given. Alternatively, possible variances between women and men are regarded as outcomes of a gendered context. Hence, studies in the current group developed from the hypothesis that organizations contain an unequal distribution of women and men. Moreover, this hypothesis also marks a distinction from the prior approaches that rarely discuss the role

of the organization. Recognizing the overtly gendered phenomenon in organizations, the current group attempts to answer the question: how are gender differentials produced and maintained in organizations? This primary objective also characterizes this group of approaches centering on the gendering of organizations (Calás et al., 2014).

The core study that shapes the discussions of this group is the seminal work *Men and Women of the Corporation*, by feminist sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter in 1977 (2008). Since then, the book has been extensively studied and broadly cited (Lewis & Simpson, 2012; Metz & Kulik, 2014). In particular, the theoretical perspectives of Kanter's book later contributed to the development of the field of women in management (WIM) (Paludi et al., 2014). The book provides detailed descriptions of gender and organizations, so that it is challenging, if not impossible, to place the entire work in one specific category. Nevertheless, one of Kanter's ([1977] 2008) arguments drawn from the scarcity of women in management positions within organizations is helpful to understand the major theme of the gendering of organizations. Kanter ([1977] 2008) pinpoints gender imbalance in management positions and posits the imbalance as a structural factor leading to the gender differences in organizational behavior. According to the argument, it is clear that gender is not the focus but is the imbalanced structure. For instance, the original work argues numerical dominance of men in management controls and influences the culture of the group. As such, the few women among male peers become highly visible and isolated tokens, who are "often treated as representative symbols of their category rather than as individuals" (Kanter, [1977] 2008, p. 208). In this case, gender differences in behavior and practices within an organization are determined by how the dominant group behaves. Given that the management group is mostly men, Kanter ([1977] 2008) concludes that organizational practices are dominated by masculine principles and explicitly marginalize women. Although there is a limited elaboration on her view of masculinity and organization, Kanter ([1977] 2008) sheds light on gendering in organizations by revealing that an individual's gender/sex is not innate but socially constructed. More explicitly, gender is defined by one individual's interaction with other individuals in everyday organizing practices. Gender as performativity, in this case, can be categorized as one approach in this group in the sense that performativity stresses the constructive nature of gender. In the following discussion, I will introduce "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and "gendered organization" (Acker, 1990, 2006) as examples of the gendering of organizational frameworks. Finally, the economics of identity will be adopted as an analytical framework to interpret both theories and summarize the common theme.

3.1.2.1   Doing Gender

Sociologists Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman (1987, 2009) introduce the theory of "doing gender" with a focus on social interactions. In other words, individuals have to interact with each other in order to be categorized

as a woman or man. As such, gender is defined as "an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of generating one of the most fundamental divisions of society" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). Likewise, sex is described as "determination made through the application of socially agreed-upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). This implies that constant social interactions will result in normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for gender/sex categories, and an individual should behave accordingly to successfully demonstrate that they belong to their category. The theory is an insightful foundation that helps the development of numerous subsequent theoretical frameworks (e.g. gender as performativity: Butler, [1990] 2010, 2004; gender as a social institution: Martin, 2004; gender, race, and class: West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

Empirical applications of West and Zimmerman's original (1987) theory were mainly concentrated in the early periods (for review see Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). For instance, studies conducted by Gherardi and colleagues (Gherardi, 1994, 1996; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001) identified that doing gender plays a critical role in maintaining gender asymmetry in organizations. Drawing from the evidence of male-dominated organizations, the studies demonstrate that they are required both to assume male patterns of behavior and to preserve their distinctively female characteristics. The studies argue that uncertainty, namely how to behave in a specific situation, is the major contributor to the rigid differences between women and men in the organization. In a more recent application, Hytti and colleagues (2017) adopt the "doing gender" framework to examine succession in the family business. Drawing on case studies, they find that daughters in family businesses have to construct masculine identities by behaving according to the gendered leadership expectations within the family business and among external stakeholders.

3.1.2.2   *Gendered Organizations and Inequality Regimes*

In addition to the "doing gender" approach, much of the research on gendering of organizations is developed from Joan Acker's (1990, 1992) "gendered organization" framework. Despite the prior presence of structural explanations of gender differences in organizations (e.g. Kanter, [1977] 2008), Acker's 1990 article provides a theory that explains organizations as gendered phenomena, which has been regarded as a major paradigm shift in gender and organization research (Martin & Collinson, 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Acker (1990) suggests five interacting processes through organizational activities that are likely to generate gender inequality in organizations: gender divisions; the social construction of symbols, artifacts, or images; interpersonal interactions; individual identity; and organizational logic. These processes, "although analytically distinct, are, in practice, parts of the same reality" (Acker, 1990, p. 146). In this sense, organizations are viewed as "gendered processes" (Acker, 1990, p. 145) or "gendered factories" (Williams, 2010, p. 83), both of which shape the concept

of "gendered organization". The framework of gendered organization opens a new space for gender and organization studies by arguing that masculine norms are embedded in management and organizational structures (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). Furthermore, it provides a tool to identify and label organizational practices that produce and reproduce gender inequality in the workplace.

Since the groundbreaking work, Acker's early insights have been extensively replicated to study management and organizations (e.g. non-US context: Murray & Ali, 2017; Pfefferman & Frenkel, 2015; for a recent review see Healy et al., 2019; Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019). Despite the fact that the original theory was developed based on a male-dominated context, Parsons and colleagues (2012) show that Acker's framework remains robust in understanding female-dominated organizations. More explicitly, the nature of the organization is highly male-gendered despite the many female workers in the organization. They argue that societal pressure and women's understanding of organizational logic (i.e. what is "real" and valued in an organization) have been influential in motivating members to create a male-gendered organization. In her subsequent work, Acker (2006) introduces the concept of "inequality regimes" by including class and race in the original framework. Additionally, she extends the gendered organization framework, developed in the context of the United States, to European countries such as Sweden and Norway (Acker, 2006). Inequality regimes framework is also influential given its illustration of how the intersection of inequalities, namely gender and racial inequalities, is created and sustained in organizations (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Sayce, 2019).

3.1.2.3   *Identity Approach to Gendering of Organizations*

According to the earlier descriptions, it is notable that doing gender and gendered organizations are distinct frameworks but share a common goal: to explain how gender differentials are created in organizations. Doing gender, as well as gender as performativity, stresses that differences between women and men in organizations are outcomes of individual doing subject to interaction with others. Gendered organizations, on the other hand, propose five processes that contribute to the gender differences in organizations. Yet there is a limitation in Acker's (1990) framework. Despite its comprehensive nature, the framework is basically developed by summarizing findings from other scholarship. In other words, the theory is a systematic contour of preceding conclusions. For instance, Acker (1990) describes the gender division process as the construction of gender divisions in terms of four aspects: labor, allowed behavior and physical locations, power, and institutionalized maintenance of a gendered pattern. She claims that the process is "well documented as well as often obvious to casual observers" (Acker, 1990, p. 146), such that she cites conclusions from two scholarships with no elaboration on reasoning. In this regard, the economics of identity is able to contribute to gendered organization theory, as well as doing gender

theory, with explicit details about how gender differentials are produced and maintained in organizations.

To demonstrate the rationale of the gendering process, the following discussions consider an example in which an organization's management team is dominated by men. According to doing gender theory, an individual's action constructs their gender identity. Given that men are the numerically dominant group, doing gender implies that normative conceptions of attitudes and activities within the management group are characterized by men. Management, in this case, is a job that requires a "doing of male gender". To fulfill the job expectations, the theory suggests an individual enacts a male-gendered identity according to these structures. Given the challenge for women managers to "do male gender", gender inequality is likely to be reproduced and sustained. Based on gendered organization theory, gender imbalance in the management group will manifest in organizational practices and maintain gender differences.

Contrary to the implications of doing gender theory and gendered organization theory, the economics of identity highlights the economic rationale of the process. More explicitly, it suggests that the persistence of gender inequality in the male-dominated management context is an outcome of an individual's economic decision. In the current example, management is considered a male job due to the fact that the positions are mostly occupied by men. The shared belief will shape a prescription that managers should be male. When there are manager A and manager B, the identity perspective suggests prescription will be internalized such that both managers should act according to the prescription to avoid loss of utility, regardless of the potential cost of doing so. Once manager A violates the masculine prescription, such as demonstrating the quality of sympathy instead of male-gendered self-assertion, the behavior will prompt manager B to continue working in a masculine way to defend against the anxiety caused by manager A's violation. Manager B's response will also result in an external effect of manager A continuing to violate the prescription. In this case, the original differences between manager A and manager B will be reproduced such that the original inequality is maintained. Given the details, the identity theory thus complements the prior two theories with the reasoning of the gendering process in terms of how individuals behave with respect to others. In short, the process of producing and reproducing gender differences in an organization can be interpreted game-theoretically and summarized by the economic concept of externality as demonstrated previously.

3.1.3   Summary

This section explored two major groups of theoretical approaches in gender and organization studies with interpretations from the economics of identity. The situation-based nature of the identity framework provides flexibility to understand the differences between women and men in organizations. In addition to its significance in explaining standard organization theories, the economics of identity contributes to the existing field with economic perspectives

to support the reasoning of these approaches. As briefly noted in the opening section, the growing number of women in organizations has prompted gender and organization studies in recent years and resulted in the shifting of focus towards research on women's underrepresentation at senior management levels. In this regard, the discussion in the next section will explore one of the key concepts in women in management research, namely the glass ceiling. Similar to the discussion on gender and organization, the glass ceiling will be approached from the economics of identity.

3.2   The Glass Ceiling

The "glass ceiling" is commonly referred to in scholarship and the media as an invisible barrier that keeps women from leadership and top management positions (Barreto et al., 2009; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2018; Smith et al., 2012; review of the glass ceiling see Powell & Butterfield, 2015; Weyer, 2007). It became a popular term after being cited in the *Wall Street Journal* by journalists Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986. The glass ceiling has been widely documented (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), and googling the quote shows that the term has been mentioned in more than 690,000 articles/books. Another important piece of evidence that marks the broad acceptance of the glass ceiling is the establishment of the Glass Ceiling Commission in the United States in 1991. The commission is mandated to identify the invisible barriers that block women and minorities from top leadership positions in the private sector (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). In other words, the glass ceiling explicitly addresses the gender disparities at higher levels of an organizational hierarchy. The expansive recognition is partially attributed to the prevalence of the phenomenon worldwide, which is indicated by the latest statistics and recent scholarship (e.g. Powell & Butterfield, 2015; Economist, 2022; WEF, 2021). Acknowledging the glass ceiling as a pervasive global phenomenon, the following subsections first define the notion of the glass ceiling in organization and management studies and revisit its application in the business context.

3.2.1   *The Glass Ceiling as a Metaphor in Organization Theory*

Among studies of women in management, the glass ceiling is mostly applied as a metaphor to describe the experience of women when they strive for advancement in managerial hierarchies. Indeed, metaphors have been a common approach in organization studies, despite the discords among the various discussions (Bendl & Schmidt, 2010). Studies that highlight the value of metaphors have mainly focused on the dimension of merits and significances. For instance, it is evident that metaphors provide fresh insights into the reality of organizational life by offering a lens to conceive one thing in terms of others and facilitating understanding of the organization and social phenomenon (e.g. Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2018; Landau et al., 2010). Critiques, on

the other hand, challenge the lack of corresponding theoretical definitions and testament (e.g. Cornelissen, 2005; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). The following examines one of the debates centering on the glass ceiling as a metaphor to explain women's situation in management.

In WIM studies, metaphorical debates in response to the glass ceiling and its variations primarily center on the accuracy in describing barriers for women's advancement to top management positions. For instance, Acker (2009, p. 199) argues that "'Inequality Regimes' is a more accurate metaphor than 'Glass Ceiling'". According to Acker, the glass ceiling is an undecided outcome of organizational practices, while inequality regimes capture the interlinking processes at all levels of organizational hierarchy (by including gender, class, and race) that are able to produce the glass ceiling effect (Acker, 2009). Alternatively, Carli and Eagly (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2018) posit labyrinth as a better metaphor than glass ceiling in reflecting opportunities and challenges for women leaders. Refuting the simplistic nature of the glass ceiling, they finally contend that the labyrinth is able to provide a more subtle and complex explanation that covers a broader range of circumstances.

Given the disagreements centering on the glass ceiling as a descriptive tool, new metaphors have been adopted to describe phenomena that were previously neglected by the glass ceiling. For instance, early findings by Williams (1992) suggest that men, especially those in female-dominated professions, encounter structural advantages and are more likely to receive promotions. In contrast to the glass ceiling, Williams (1992) describes this gender privilege as a glass escalator effect, which has been supported by subsequent studies (e.g. England, 1993; Goldberg et al., 2004; Maume, 1999). Bendl and Schmidt (2010) propose a new metaphor, "firewalls", to "highlight several points of discrimination missed by the glass ceiling metaphor" (Bendl & Schmidt, 2010, p. 627). Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) develop their argument based on the increasing number of women achieving leadership positions in organizations (e.g. Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Stroh et al., 2004) and attempt to extend the metaphor of the glass ceiling and glass escalator. They propose a glass cliff as a situation in which women are more likely to be appointed leaders in times of poor company performance. Their recent empirical studies further confirm the previous "think crisis, think female" association that women are only perceived as particularly suitable for top management jobs when the companies are in financial trouble (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan et al., 2011).

It is notable that the glass ceiling plays a salient role in stimulating theoretical discussions of various other metaphors. Despite the enduring debates and evolving research trajectories, the glass ceiling remains at the core and serves as a reference, producing its variations to describe the disproportionate number of women at different levels of the hierarchy. In this regard, the concept of the glass ceiling consists of a fundamental and significant descriptor highlighting the barriers that keep women from advancing to top management positions. The following subsections will elaborate on this point.

3.2.2   *Explaining the Glass Ceiling*

Explanations of the glass ceiling have been mostly inspired by classical organization theories. Prior to the wide recognition of the glass ceiling, management and organization studies have started examining women's scarcity in top management positions. As mentioned in the opening section, extensive studies emerge after Kanter's ([1977] 2008) pioneering work on the underrepresentation of women by addressing structural and cultural factors resulting from individual behaviors within an organization. Yet subsequent studies have diverged in their theoretical and methodological trajectories. In an early review, Riger and Galligan (1980) classified various explanations into two groups: person-centered and situation-centered views. Person-centered explanations suggest that individual factors, such as traits and behaviors, hinder women's advancement to managerial roles. Situation-centered explanations focus on non-person factors, such as work environment and access to promotable tasks, as inhibitors of women's managerial attainment. Riger and Galligan (1980) also stress that each group of factors by itself is insufficient to understand the whole picture of women's underrepresentation in management. Hence, they argue for a more comprehensive analysis on "the interaction of both person- and situation-centered variables" (Riger & Galligan, 1980, p. 908). In addition to personal and organizational influences, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) added interpersonal factors, such as networks and mentors, that were equal constraints on women's career advancement. In a later discussion, Fagenson (1990) advocates Riger and Galligan's (1980) assertion and further proposes that interactions between organizational and social environments and gender should be closely examined. A recent review by Powell and Butterfield (2015) contributes to the earlier perspectives by pinpointing the growing emphasis on social system-centered explanations and a notable disappearance of the early person–centered explanations in the study of the glass ceiling.

Five decades after the first generation of studies on women in management, new perspectives (e.g. gender stereotypes) have emerged with the diminishing of several past explanations (e.g. education), with convergence yet to be achieved. It is also evident that multi-level perspectives remain scarce (e.g. Francis, 2017; Metz, 2009). Developing on the available literature, the remaining sections will explore the traditional theoretical paradigms by dividing them into three groups of explanations: person-centered, organization-centered, and social system-centered explanations. The classification method not only is justified by the earlier studies but also facilitates the understanding of the glass ceiling in terms of gender stereotypes, gendered application of the identity framework. Each category, in essence, is relevant to the key concept in the identity framework, "situation". More explicitly, person-centered explanations describe the "between whom" aspect, whereas organization-centered and social system-centered explanations underpin the "where" aspect of the situation. After introducing each group of explanations and the inputs brought about by gender stereotypes, the last section will argue that the economics of identity

is a holistic framework for approaching the glass ceiling, with relevance to an understanding of the explanations.

3.2.2.1 *Person-Centered Explanations: A Micro-Level Perspective*

The person–centered view, in general, attributes the lack of female representation in top management to factors that are internal to women. In this group of explanations, it is argued that women's personal characteristics, namely traits, attitudes, behavior, and cognition, are in conflict with the expectations of a managerial role and therefore hinder women's promotion. In this case, gender stereotypes involve both the subordinate and the leader, each with a distinct set of expectations and beliefs. More specifically, standard masculine characteristics of the promotable image of a manager (e.g. aggression, competitiveness) are often defined and placed in contrast to the characteristics of women (e.g. passivity, irrationality) (e.g. Heilman, 1983, 1995; Schein, 1973, 1975). Schein's (1973, 1975) "think manager–think male" paradigm, as mentioned previously, is one of the classical frameworks developed based on evidence from US organizations. As a theoretical explanation for Schein's findings, Heilman (1983, 1995) proposes a "Lack of Fit" model and suggests that the perceived fit between an individual's attributes and job requirements in terms of skills and abilities determines the evaluation of suitability for the job. In other words, the ascribed stereotypical attributes towards women in traditionally male jobs tend to worsen the perceived fit and consequently produce an expectation that they are likely to fail to meet. This negative expectation of women in traditionally male jobs is a manifestation of gender stereotypes that tends to undermine the evaluation of women in promotion decisions. Thus, according to these aspects, the glass ceiling becomes "a natural consequence of gender stereotypes and the expectations they produce about what women are like and how they should behave" (Heilman, 2001, p. 657). These studies, in general, reveal that shared beliefs about what women and men are, or what successful managers are like, will become prescriptions. These prescriptions are likely to be internalized by individuals and affect behaviors associated with career advancement. In this case, it is possible to interpret the explanation using an identity framework based on the prescriptive nature of stereotypes.

Other scholars in this group adopt a psychological perspective to study whether the sexual difference in cognition is able to explain the disproportionate number of men compared to women at the top management level. In other words, it is a question subject to the descriptive nature of gender stereotypes with an attempt to answer how women and men will be, given what women and men are. For instance, Butterfield and Powell (1981) and Powell and Butterfield (2003) find that the masculinity dimension of a gender-related construct (i.e. gender identity) significantly predicts an individual's aspiration to top management. In other words, a person who is more masculine is more likely to strive for a top management position. Their empirical findings confirm the psychology of gender in the sense that gender-related factors partially explain

different decisions made by women and men. Using more recent evidence from the United States, Powell and Butterfield (2013) further demonstrate that during the current era in which highly educated women are increasingly opting out of careers, individuals who perceive themselves as more masculine are more likely to aspire to senior management positions than those who identify as less masculine.

Despite the diminishing attention to person-centered explanations, debates within this group remain inconclusive in recent studies. For instance, it has been argued that with the remarkable progress in women's education level in the United States, education as a person-centered factor is no longer a major barrier to women's managerial advancement (e.g. England, 2010; Haveman & Beresford, 2012). Bertrand (2018), on the other hand, challenges this conclusion by indicating an increase in the gender gap in relation to the number of years of completed schooling in the United States. Additionally, despite the abundance of psychological explanations, the robustness of these psychological attributes as regards the glass ceiling is still debatable and ambiguous (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Bertrand, 2018; Flory et al., 2015).

3.2.2.2   *Organization-Centered Explanations: A Meso-Level Perspective*

Compared with the diminishing individual-level perspectives, organization-centered approach remains widely discussed and the results are highly diversified. This group of explanations focuses on meso-level factors that are disadvantageous to women's advancement to top management positions. Variables include structural characteristics of an organization, such as human resource management practices and work environment, and cultural characteristics resulting from collective practices within the organization. As argued by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), the structural characteristics of organizations are a major contributor to the rigid glass ceiling issue in organizations. After studying 228 medium- to large-scale corporations, Goodman and colleagues (2003) indicate the explicit contextual factors affecting women's advancement to top management positions. Specifically, they find that women are more likely to be promoted to top management positions in organizations that operate in nonmanufacturing industries. In spite of the increasing number of women in top management, their results also suggest that women have a higher turnover in management positions, and most women managers are still trapped in lower-level management positions. In a recent study, Stainback and colleagues (2016) reveal more details about the constraints on women in management. Drawing data from Fortune 1000 firms, they find that women are less likely to attain top management positions in organizations with a higher level of gender segregation. Even in organizations where women are successfully breaking the glass ceiling, it is evident that women in junior positions still face the same barriers to advancing to top leadership roles as do women in organizations with fewer women in the top leadership. Scholarship attributes this glass ceiling reinforcement to the "Queen Bee (Q.B.)-phenomenon", whereby women leaders keep

their distance from junior women to avoid gender-stereotypical expectations at the workplace (Derks et al., 2016; Ellemers et al., 2012; Faniko et al., 2017).

In addition to structural characteristics, it is well documented that organizational culture and collective practices within an organization are critical factors in women's career advancement (e.g. Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Kossek et al., 2017). Organizational culture comprises shared values, assumptions, and norms which tend to influence an individual's behavior in organizations (Schein, 1993, 2010). For instance, Stainback and colleagues (2011) show that an unsupportive organizational culture, namely working very long hours, is likely to intensify work–family conflict, particularly for women, and hinder women's advancement. Based on interviews with UK-based managers in procurement positions, Lawrence and colleagues (2018) indicate that the high frequency of travel and aggressive norms within the procurement profession are critical explanations for the underrepresentation of women in senior executive positions. With regard to organizational practices, substantial evidence has revealed that the absence of human resource management (HRM) policies to ensure work flexibility is likely to further impair women's career progress and pressure women to leave the organization (e.g. Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Stone, 2008; Williams et al., 2016).

According to these studies, it is notable that the organization-centered perspective is contextually dependent. The identity approach, in this case, is contextually sensitive. More explicitly, the framework is able to accommodate structural characteristics, such as existing gender imbalance in organizations highlighted by the gendering of organizational approaches, as well as the shared organizational norms, to understand how individuals will behave in response to these organizational factors. In this regard, the identity framework is able to integrate individual and organization levels by exploring how individuals react according to the meso-level organizational factors.

3.2.2.3   Social System-Centered Explanations: A Macro-Level Perspective

Social system-centered explanations include factors such as gender stereotypes, gender roles, and interpersonal socializing processes in the study of the glass ceiling (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). This group of explanations is developed as extensions of the classical gender and organization theories mentioned in Section 3.1. Among all variables, it has been argued that gender stereotypes in society present the main obstacle to women becoming top leaders (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). In general, theorists of stereotypes emphasize that it is not the actual stereotypes that disadvantage women in work evaluations but the mismatch between the expected characteristics and stereotypical attitudes towards women that result in a biased evaluation in a workplace setting (Koenig et al., 2011). Earlier reviews of individual-centered and organization-centered explanations have demonstrated that an individual's behavior will be affected by organization-level factors such as structural context and organizational culture. In contrast, macro-level perspectives focus on the influence of societal factors, including social role, on an individual's work behavior. For instance,

role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), as introduced previously, posits a similar argument to the "Lack of Fit" model about the mismatch between stereotypes of women and cultural assumptions regarding leadership roles. Given the traditional female characteristics that are perceived as unmatched (incongruous) to leadership characteristics, women have to work on a job by facing the incongruity of gender role and leadership role (Powell & Butterfield, 2003). In other words, in the workplace, a woman manager has to prove that she fulfills the leadership role by working according to the normative conceptions of appropriate leadership attributes. Yet doing so tends to violate the gender role prescriptions such as domestic responsibilities as a wife or mother. This creates further complexity in women's decision-making due to the fact that they have to consider how they behave and how they should behave according to norms. Furthermore, Heilman and Caleo (2018) develop an analytical framework and show that gender stereotypes tend to reinforce themselves under the condition of low women representation in top management roles whereby the promotion of masculine organizational culture is reinforced. It is possible to explain the underlying mechanism through the identity perspective. The presence of female top managers is regarded as violating male-dominated prescriptions in the organization. The male-dominating prescriptions will be strengthened as a game-theoretic response to defend against the presence of women. As such, women will be further marginalized, and male-dominated organizational culture will be reproduced and sustained. Consequently, stereotyping of women top managers, in this case, will be reinforced due to the rigid marginalization.

Apart from the aforementioned explanations, social networks are a key research focus with regard to women's career advancement. Empirical studies conducted in organizational settings posit the lack of network access as the primary inhibitor in women's advancement to top management (e.g. Ibarra, 1992, 1993; Kanter, [1977] 2008; McDonald, 2011; Metz & Tharenou, 2001). In Kanter's ([1977] 2008) study, it reveals that women are often excluded from male-dominated networks such that the "homogeneous network reinforced the inability of its members to incorporate heterogeneous elements" (Kanter, [1977] 2008, p. 59). Other studies vary in their trajectories, and the results are mixed. For instance, studies that attempt to explain gender differences in networks (e.g. difference in size of social networks: Moore, 1990; different network structures: Lindenlaub & Prummer, 2021) have failed to reach consistency on the extent of the differences (Lalanne & Seabright, 2016; Mengel, 2020). Furthermore, despite the rich theoretical arguments highlighting the positive effect of internal (e.g. Burt, 1998) and external (e.g. Lin et al., 1981) networks in corporate settings on women's advancement to top management, the arguments have failed in robustness under certain empirical settings (e.g. small-scale organizations: Metz, 2009). Despite an improvement in gender equality between women and men participants in mentorship programs, new issues have also emerged. Ibarra and colleagues (2010) show that women in US corporations are still less likely than their male counterparts to be promoted to senior leadership roles. They then argue for a sharper distinction between mentoring and sponsorship, in

which sponsors are usually influential senior managers who are able to provide direct help for promotion.

Social network discussion in WIM studies has demonstrated its salient role in one's career development. In other words, a social network contains a specific characteristic likely to benefit an individual's career. A well-documented concept that focuses on this characteristic is social capital. Given enormous theoretical and empirical discussions, the concept of social capital is multi-faceted (e.g. Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Burt, 2001; Poder, 2011; Seibert et al., 2001). Some of the widely cited interpretations of social capital include approaches proposed by Mark Granovetter (1973), Pierre Bourdieu (1980), James Coleman (1988, 1994), Robert Putnam (1995), Nan Lin (2001a, 2001b), and Ronald Burt (1992). It is infeasible to dive into each approach due to the limited scope of the present study. Nevertheless, there are two notable features shared by the different approaches:

- First, social capital analysis is grounded in a network approach. In other words, the study of social capital is, in essence, an investigation centering on the relationship between individuals or groups. For instance, whereas Granovetter (1973) focuses on the strength of ties (connections), Burt (1992) emphasizes the structure of relations in the network. Lin (2001a) interprets social capital as resources in social networks held and used by actors.
- Second, as Burt (2001, p. 32) describes,

  > The cited perspectives on social capital are diverse in origin and style of accompanying evidence, but they agree on a social-capital metaphor in which social structure is a kind of capital that can create for certain individuals or groups a competitive advantage in pursuing their ends.

This general remark is relevant to summarize the underlying consensus of various perspectives about social capital, that is, social capital is characterized by a beneficial nature.

According to the brief discussion about social capital, it is conclusive that social networks remain the basis for understanding interpersonal and inter-group relationships. Given its prominence in management studies, Chapter 8 will further examine the concept of social network in detail.

3.2.3   Summary

Despite the various concepts in describing challenges women encounter in attaining top management positions, the glass ceiling is evidently at the center of discussions. It is the most discussed metaphor as well as the basis for developing new approaches to the study of women and management. Systematic research on the available explanations subject to the glass ceiling has demonstrated that the existing field is highly heterogenous. Categorizing available discussions into

three major groups helps to systematically evaluate the literature in terms of micro-, meso- and macro-level perspectives. At each level, it is conclusive that the identity approach is relevant in providing additional insights to the studies, which further justifies the significance of the framework. The results show its ability to synthesize explanations of the glass ceiling from different levels into one unified framework. In sum, this section indicates the economics of identity as an analytical framework that is able to facilitate the study of how the dynamics of gender at each level create and sustain the phenomenon of the glass ceiling.

3.3   A Cultural Approach to the Glass Ceiling

The previous section introduced the glass ceiling as a salient manifestation of the pervasive underrepresentation of female leaders. In the global context, the glass ceiling has been a visible phenomenon that waits to be eradicated across countries. According to the recent report from *The Economist* (2022), OECD countries on average have 33.7 percent of women managers. The number is more striking in terms of company boards. According to the same data source, women in OECD countries only hold 28 percent of the total seats on boards. The pathway towards gender-balanced top management varies significantly across countries. In recent years the European Union has dominated the pathway by encouraging the boards of large companies to impose a 40 percent female quota in order to tackle the glass ceiling. In the United States, on the other hand, Spencer Stuart (2020) has identified that despite public awareness of the glass ceiling, in 2020 only 28 percent of board directors in S&P 500 companies were women. While the developed economies, in general, have been navigating the pathway to addressing the glass ceiling, the remaining countries still lag behind. Yet macroeconomic indicators, namely the level of economic development and scale of the national economy, fall short of offering a holistic explanation for the glass ceiling.

A notable example is China, which has been the world's second-largest economy and one of the fastest-growing economies in recent years. Yet its ranking on gender equality has dropped for the thirteenth consecutive year (WEF, 2021). Despite the remarkable economic progress, women have lost much ground in business. According to the official census, women comprised 34.9 percent of board directors in Chinese enterprises in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Despite being officially positioned as a 1.5 percent increase compared to the level in 2019, the number of female board members in 2020 remains 4.2 percent lower than its highest level in 2014. Other sources have indicated a more strikingly few women board directors in Chinese enterprises. For instance, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) records gender-balanced boards as just 3.5 percent among Chinese enterprises, whereas the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020) reports women as comprising 9.7 percent of board directors in Chinese-listed companies in 2017. The current evidence shows consistency in pointing to the ubiquitous gender disparity at the management level and justifies the significance of the glass ceiling in China.

Given the heterogenous web of concepts and arguments illustrated in the previous section, it is clear that the research on China is complex. Although the economics of identity is a significant cross-disciplinary framework, understanding the Chinese case in terms of the economics of identity requires additional clarification of "situation". This is attributable to the fact that the identity approach and the available gendered and organizational approaches to the glass ceiling are developed from Western settings. It remains questionable if the framework remains valid in the study of China. The rigid Western-based analytical foundations are undoubtedly rich resources for further extensions and replications in various settings, but scholars also have underpinned discrepancies when applying these approaches to the Chinese context. For instance, it is evident that social networking is not completely beneficial, or without a negative impact, on women's career experiences. Early findings by Aaltio and Huang (2007) demonstrate that women who participate in work networking also suffer from emotional costs corresponding to family responsibilities in traditional culture. In a more recent study, Tang's (2020) ethnographic study suggests professional women are likely to encounter reputational damage when participating in after-hours networking activities commonly practiced in the Chinese business arena. Indeed, social networks in China (commonly referred to as *guanxi*) are characterized by a unique mechanism that has yet to be recognized by standard network theories. These examples imply the need to adapt the analytical framework according to the Chinese settings in the study of the glass ceiling. As summarized by Adler and colleagues (1989, p. 73), "grounded theory or similar anthropological techniques" are essential "to create new instrumentation based directly on the Chinese managers themselves". The necessity to contextualize the current identity perspective with regard to the national setting is further justified by the cross-national statistics mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section. Specifically, the observable variations in women's participation in management positions and company boards suggest that the glass ceiling tends to vary across countries (Economist, 2022).

Acknowledging these aspects, the following discussions will be divided into two parts. The first part will explore the general economic and management science approaches to examine differences across countries. More concretely, the discussions will center on the concept of culture, which has been broadly defined and highly dependent on disciplines and contexts. In this respect, a more explicit definition is essential before adopting culture as an analytical lens. The objective is to seek a path to sustain the application of the identity framework in China, by taking culture into account. Building upon the conceptualization of gender stereotypes, the second part develops an analytical framework to foster the research on China.

3.3.1 *Economics and Culture*

In most economic studies, culture has been vaguely defined and regarded as an endogenous variable (Alesina & Giuliano, 2015; Fernández, 2011). Culture

has been absent in early economic research mainly due to the lack of testable hypotheses that allow economists to investigate culture using economic methodologies. In recent decades, the development of new approaches and the availability of data stimulate research on the role of culture in economic discourse. Alesina and Giuliano (2015) pursue a relatively clear overview by highlighting the different definitions of culture between theoretical and empirical studies. They find that in theoretical approaches, economists define culture based on either values or beliefs. In other words, some define culture as beliefs about the effects of individual actions (e.g. Guiso et al., 2008; Greif, 1994), whereas others perceive culture as a phenomenon embodied in values and preferences (e.g. Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). In contrast to the clear distinction between values and beliefs in theoretical studies, empirical studies tend to combine values and beliefs together in defining culture. They reveal that empirical studies, in general, follow the definition of culture from Guiso and colleagues (2006, p. 23), as "those customary beliefs and values that ethnic, religious, and social groups transmit fairly unchanged from generation to generation". Alesina and Giuliano (2015) conclude the review by reckoning that the definition of culture in economic studies is likely to remain obscure due to the fact that economists have little motivation in clarifying beliefs with values. Despite the vague notions of culture in economic studies, the economic approach is surprisingly consistent when treating culture as a variable. It has been commonly assumed that culture is a variable that is subject to contexts such as geographical location or historical events. Context determines culture, which further manifests as values, beliefs, and norms and ultimately affects one's decisions. In short, standard economic models can be summarized as an individual (often referred to as economic agents) making (rational) choices given a culture-based determinant.

Among the existing economic approaches, one definition of culture from Beugelsdijk and Maseland (2011) is highly relevant to the current study. Motivated by anthropology, their approach to culture provides a focused lens by addressing its salient role in constructing collective identity. According to the original text, they "loosely define culture as those behavioral and ideational structures that are deemed essential to the constructed identity of a community" (p. 13). In this case, the meanings of culture are twofold. The first implication is consistent with the standard approach to culture; that is, culture is given and fixed such that an individual is able to choose how to behave. Akerlof and Kranton's identity theory, in essence, illustrates this point. The second aspect of culture is associated with cultural change prompted by an individual's continuous identity–seeking behavior subject to utility maximization (maximizing economic well-being). Culture, described by the two elements, is the origin of a person's economic objective, as well as the collective outcome of individuals' economic objectives. Given that every aspect of social reality is regarded as part of the collective, according to their definition of culture, everything is culture. Beugelsdijk and Maseland (2011, p. 112) refer to this approach as a strategic identity "focus[ed] on purposive action of subjects constructing and renegotiating structures of meaning and identity".

Economic studies that focus on the role of culture on gender differentials are scant. Existing discussions mostly emphasize explaining women's labor market outcomes. Fernández (2013) develops a dynamic model to capture the effect of cultural change brought about by intergenerational learning on women's labor force participation. Found to be robust in testing with US data, the model demonstrates that with more women working in the labor market, beliefs about work become more positive such that married women are more likely to choose to work. In the empirical study, Alesina and colleagues (2013) adopt the World Values Survey (WVS), a national individual-level survey commonly used in cross-national research, to examine the effect of a culture shaped by traditional agricultural practices on women's labor force participation. They have found that current differences in gender attitudes and female behavior across countries are shaped by historical differences in agricultural systems. This result further indicates that women's labor force participation has been low in regions that historically use plows for agricultural cultivation. Another empirical study conducted in China has found that the belief in continuing the family line has a positive correlation to the gender gap in income and labor supply (Zhang & Li, 2017). According to these examples, it is conclusive that the notion of culture in economic studies lacks coherence, concurring with the prior observation from Alesina and Giuliano (2015). The scarcity of explorations of gender differentials in economics and culture further justifies the need to develop a holistic economic approach to gender with respect to the national context.

3.3.2   Culture in Management Sciences

Contrary to the limited discussion in economics, culture is highly relevant and has been extensively studied in management sciences. Given the fact that organizations nowadays have to operate in an increasingly globalized business environment, understanding culture is salient. Culture offers business leaders, particularly those in multinational corporations, with international expertise to adapt to different environments and implement strategies accordingly. This practical significance in business operations has brought about detailed descriptions of culture. Among the various comparative approaches, the cultural value framework from Geert Hofstede (1980) is the most influential in the field of cross-cultural studies (review: Kirkman et al., 2006; meta-analysis: Taras et al., 2010). Inspired by Hofstede's original work, House and colleagues (2004) conducted the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) study based on a more recent and larger-scale sample. They expanded Hofstede's five cultural value dimensions to nine cultural dimensions. The following will present each of the two prominent forms of cultural measurement.

3.3.2.1   Hofstede's Cultural Value Dimensions

In his groundbreaking book *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Hofstede (1980) approaches culture at the national level

(national culture). Since the first publication, Hofstede has updated descriptions of his cultural framework and included them in the subsequent books (for complete detail of evolution see Minkov & Hofstede, 2011): *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (Hofstede, 1991; 2nd edition: Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; 3rd edition: Hofstede et al., 2010), *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations* (Hofstede, 2001). Recognizing the evolving descriptions, the current overview develops from Hofstede and colleagues' (2010) edition. The book not only includes the most recent definitions of concepts but the dimensions are also compared with data from other existing cultural measurements such as the Study GLOBE and World Values Survey. As such, it is the latest and the most comprehensive reference among all updates since the original framework.

3.3.2.1.1   THE SIX DIMENSIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Hofstede and colleagues (2010) have been explicit in defining values, culture, and the differences between the two concepts. They describe values as "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 9), and culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 6). They further clarify the difference between the two concepts by stating that values refer to individuals or collectives, whereas culture is presumably collective. Culture is related to values in the sense that values, accompanied by symbols, heroes, and rituals, represent the four visible manifestations of culture. Methodologically, the study of values indicates the individual level, whereas culture is the study across societies. According to these definitions, Hofstede's cultural values dimension can be rigidly interpreted as value dimensions that help to identify and describe the national culture of a country.

The initial framework was developed based on data collected from a large multinational corporation, IBM. The data consisted of responses from over 116,000 questionnaires from 71 countries (reduced to 40 countries when developing the framework). After running the country-level factor analysis[2] of all relevant data, Hofstede first proposed four dimensions that are robust in classifying the 40 countries. The four early dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, and masculinity and femininity (Hofstede et al., 2010). These were later expanded to six dimensions after introducing Confucian dynamism and indulgence versus restraint (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). For the purposes of the present discussion, the following abstracts the relevant dimensions to the study of gender in China, namely the masculinity, femininity and Confucian dynamism.

Masculinity and femininity are defined as follows: a society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are

supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 140). The study shows that masculinity is relatively high in Asian countries (e.g. Japan, China, and the Philippines).

   The dimension of Confucian dynamism was established according to the Chinese Values Survey (CVS), which was first developed to supplement the Western orientation of Hofstede's four dimensions with the Eastern perspective, namely the "Chinese worldview" (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987, p. 144). Measurements of values in the survey were proposed by Chinese social scientists based upon traditional Chinese cultural values and translated into English. The resultant 40-item survey collected data from 100 university students in 22 countries, followed by an analysis in terms of a framework of four cultural factors. The results reveal a correlation with Hofstede's (1980) four dimensions except for the Confucian work dynamics factor. This finding is remarkable and highly significant to the present study. Based on the results, the testing of Hofstede's (1980) framework with Chinese indigenous measurements indicates that the Western-oriented variables are unable to capture the full picture of cultural variations across countries. In this sense, the limitations of the Western-oriented approach further justify the need to contextualize the identity framework with regard to the Chinese context. Hofstede adopted this finding and labeled it as Confucian dynamism, to reveal its connection with Confucius' ideas (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). The dimension was later renamed as "long- versus short-term orientation" (Hofstede, 2011) and defined as follows:

> Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards – in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present – in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of "face", and fulfilling social obligations.
>
> (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239)

After studying 93 countries and regions in the WVS database, the dimension reveals that most East Asian countries, followed by Eastern and Central Europe are more long-term oriented, whereas the United States, Australia, Africa, and Latin American and Muslim countries tend to be short-term oriented (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010).

3.3.2.1.2   CRITIQUES ABOUT HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL VALUES DIMENSIONS

There have been critiques concerning the application of Hofstede's cultural values dimensions (for a summary of the arguments see Jones, 2007; Kirkman et al., 2006). For instance, it is argued that Hofstede's conceptualization of culture is overly simplistic, with data being outdated, which also fails to capture the within-country cultural heterogeneity and the possible change of culture over time (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017; Kirkman et al., 2006; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). Among the five dimensions, Moulettes (2007) argues that the

masculinity–femininity dimension has received the most criticism over the years for vagueness and contradictions. In particular, she stresses the lack of women's voices in Hofstede's original framework due to the fact that most of the survey respondents in that study were men. In this sense, it is still uncertain if all inhabitants of a country, including women, share the national culture. The masculinity–femininity dimension is also later acknowledged by Hofstede and colleagues (2010, p. 144) as the "most controversial of the five dimensions of national culture". Aside from the masculinity–femininity dimension, Fang (2003) questions the robustness of the fifth dimension, Confucian dynamism, by arguing that the conceptualization has a series of flaws, such as misinterpreting the possible interrelation between the two opposing poles and the exclusion of Taoist and Buddhist values. Despite the critiques, there has been little doubt that Hofstede's cultural framework is the most extensively studied among all cross-cultural approaches. Even with the emerging new national cultural dimensions, Hofstede's cultural value dimension remains the core foundation (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015). In the next subsection, I will explore one of the more recent approaches to culture, GLOBE cultural dimensions, which is fundamentally inspired by Hofstede's early work.

3.3.2.2   *GLOBE Cultural Dimensions*

The earliest version of Study GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) measurements was developed with references from Hofstede's cultural dimensions (House et al., 2004). Nevertheless, it does not aim to solely replicate Hofstede's approach but utilizes new data to explore the role of cultural variables in leadership and organizational processes. In other words, Study GLOBE has a specific goal to identify possible relationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and leadership (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). According to the Study GLOBE team (House et al., 2004, p. 15), culture is defined as "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations". The key feature is its measurement of culture in terms of two separate forms: cultural values (modal values of collectives) and cultural practices (modal practices). Cultural values refer to "the commonality (agreement) among members of collectives with respect to the psychological attributes", whereas cultural practices involve "the commonality of observed and reported practices of entities such as families, schools, work organizations, economic and legal systems, and political institutions" (House et al., 2004, p. 16).

The GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) was conducted on a multinational and multi-organizational basis in the mid-1990s and involved data collection in 62 societies over a ten-year period. The sample involved more than 17,000 middle managers in 951 organizations. The sample team finally proposed nine cultural dimensions, which include cultural practices (measured by "What Is/Are") and cultural values (measured by "What Should Be"). The dimensions are

uncertainty avoidance, power distance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation. The first six dimensions are extensions of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (House et al., 2002). Notably, institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism are the sub-dimensions from Hofstede's individualism–collectivism (House et al., 2004). Recognizing the criticisms with regard to Hofstede's masculinity–femininity, the Study GLOBE team developed the five dimensions – gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation – to capture the elements of masculinity–femininity.

3.3.2.3   Hofstede's Cultural Value Dimensions and GLOBE Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's cultural value dimensions and GLOBE cultural dimensions share the common ground that both draw aggregate cultural characteristics based upon responses from individuals. The individuals in both studies are middle-level managers. It is obvious that the resultant dimensions have been labeled similarly in the two frameworks. Yet there are several distinctions between the two approaches. For instance, Hofstede (2006) outlines seven major differences of the GLOBE cultural framework and his dimension: (1) new data versus existing data, (2) team versus single researcher, (3) managers versus employees, (4) theory-driven versus action-driven, (5) US-inspired versus decentered, (6) organizational culture as similar/different in nature to societal culture, and (7) national wealth as a part or an antecedent of culture. Alternatively, major differences between the two cultural frameworks can be captured by three aspects: research objective, methodology, and definitions. Each difference is summarized as follows:

- **Research objective:** Hofstede explored how employees' work attitudes differ by nationalities, whereas the Study GLOBE examines organizational behavior and leadership effectiveness.
- **Methodology:** The two studies seek very distinct approaches. Hofstede utilized questionnaires to collect data from employees in 66 countries within one multinational corporation. In contrast, Study GLOBE adopted both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, such as surveys and individual/group interviews, to managers in 62 societies.
- **Definitions:** Notwithstanding that Hofstede and GLOBE adopt the same label for several dimensions, the respective definition is not identical. For instance, with regard to the uncertainty-avoidance dimension, the Study GLOBE team defines the dimension as "the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on established social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices" (House et al., 2004, p. 11). It indicates the specific behavioral response which is unmentioned in Hofstede's definition: "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 191).

Although the Study GLOBE cultural framework has so far received less criticism with respect to Hofstede's model (Venaik & Brewer, 2010; for a summary of critiques on GLOBE see Minkov & Blagoev, 2012), the validity of the two cultural dimensions remains debatable (e.g. Javidan et al., 2006). One of the concerns challenges the application of national-level measurements in individual- or organizational-level analyses. Given that the cultural frameworks are not drawn from the same individuals of a country/society, robustness of the models for characterization of individuals in a country will be very unreliable (Brewer & Venaik, 2012; Venaik & Brewer, 2013). According to the debates, it is still questionable if both frameworks are completely robust for direct application in the current study. Nevertheless, they serve as informative references to develop a culturally sensitive framework to understand gender and organizations.

3.3.3   *Cultural Stereotypes*

The previous two subsections explored both economic and management science perspectives on culture with the attempt to develop a cultural approach to understanding gender and organizations in different national contexts apart from the Western origin. It is conclusive that culture is a multifaceted and broad concept given the variation in defining and studying culture. For instance, in economic studies, culture is mostly treated as given and fixed. On the other hand, in management sciences, comparative frameworks such as Hofstede's and Study GLOBE's cultural dimensions suggest that culture is a complex notion and varies widely across countries. In the gender aspect, existing economic literature, if not all, solely focuses on the relationship of culture and labor market outcomes. In contrast, management science frameworks look inside organizations, which is more informative for understanding the general characteristics of individual and organizational behavior under a specific culture. Additionally, management science approaches enable cultural comparison across geographic boundaries. Albeit limited in specifying culture at an individual level, the national/societal-level frameworks have established a direct connection between gender and culture. For instance, the gender aspect is particularly visible with respect to Hofstede's cultural dimensions of masculinity–femininity and the comparable GLOBE dimensions such as gender egalitarianism.

Despite differences between economics and management sciences, the gap is possibly filled with Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) economic notion of culture. More concretely, Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) concept provides a broader framework that is able to capture the economic approach as well as the methodology of Hofstede's and Study GLOBE's studies. Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) concept of culture focuses on the individual level, and Hofstede's and Study GLOBE's cultural frameworks are in essence developed from individual-level responses. The individual-level data source creates a common ground to interpret the two cultural dimensions in the field of management science based on Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) cultural framework.

According to Hofstede and Study GLOBE, a nation's cultural characteristics (identity) are shaped by an individual's cultural values and practices. Likewise, Beugelsdijk and Maseland (2011) recognize the role of the individual in determining the culture of a community. They define culture as an outcome of individuals collectively constructing the identity of a community. In this regard, Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) cultural framework sheds light on the shared methodological ground between Hofstede's and Study GLOBE's studies.

More importantly, Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) cultural framework is able to capture the possible change in national culture. As revealed by Study GLOBE (House et al., 2002, 2004), the interpretation of the gender egalitarianism dimension has evolved during the research period, and Study GLOBE anticipates that the dimension will continue to evolve over time. In this case, the framework of Beugelsdijk and Maseland (2011) is able to provide an economic explanation to cultural change in terms of an individual's continuous identity-seeking behavior subject to the maximization of economic well-being. The evidence shows that Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) framework is able to offer an economic rationale to the role of an individual's cultural-related values or behaviors in shaping national culture.

In summary, Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) cultural framework is able to incorporate economic approach and management sciences by capturing the following two mechanisms:

- The first mechanism is the possible influence of a given culture on an individual, a common approach in standard economics.
- Regarding the second mechanism, the cultural framework is able to capture the underlying methodology of Hofstede and GLOBE cultural dimensions by highlighting the economic rationale of an individual's cultural-related values or practices on national/societal culture whereby collective utility-maximizing behavior.

It is therefore conclusive that culture, as defined by Beugelsdijk and Maseland (2011), is a cross-disciplinary framework in accommodating economic and management science perspectives.

The goal of the current section, as mentioned previously, is to develop a culturally sensitive framework to understand the glass ceiling in China. Particularly, the identity model requires inputs from a cultural perspective. Given that Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) notion of culture is an economic framework, it shares a common basis as the economics of identity. Moreover, the identity model is one example, namely the first mechanism stated earlier, of Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) overall cultural framework. In this sense, the cultural framework incorporates naturally the identity model and brings new possibilities to recognize the complexity and dynamics of culture. As such, it is feasible to substantiate the economics of identity in terms of different cultural contexts. The two economic frameworks, identity and culture, are, therefore, compatible, and the resultant framework demonstrates expansive explanatory power.

To label the framework, I draw from gender stereotype, the gender application of the economics of identity, and coin the resultant new framework as cultural stereotypes.

3.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter has narrowed the scope of gender discussion from the general labor market to organizations. Despite the rich gender and organization-theoretical discussions, the economics of identity continue to demonstrate strong relevance. Specifically, it contributes to the current field of gender and organization with a synthesis of the diverse arguments. Likewise, in the discussions on the glass ceiling, the identity approach has demonstrated significance to combine insights from the various levels and provide a systematic explanation. The extensive Western orientation of the available gender and organization studies, and the research on the glass ceiling cause validity issues in explaining the Chinese case. On the one hand, the glass ceiling phenomenon evidently varies across nations. On the other hand, replication of the Western-oriented arguments in the Chinese context has suggested a conclusion that conflicts with Western perspectives. While seeking a cultural input to the economics of identity, Beugelsdijk and Maseland's (2011) notion of culture shows its relevance in capturing the key characteristics of the cultural approach in economics and management science. Remarkably, it shares the same economic basis as the identity theory and enables the natural incorporation of the two frameworks. The resultant cultural stereotyping framework provides a flexible analytical approach to support research on different contexts. To begin the discussion on China, the next chapter explores the situation of women in China and related research. Looking through historical and comparative lenses, culture in China is disentangled to clarify the identity of women. A clear picture of women in the Chinese context is crucial to substantiate the application of the analytical tool in better understanding the glass ceiling phenomenon.

Notes

1 In the definition of "situation", they further argue that in the case when there is more than one social category, the situation could determine which categories are the most significant.
2 Given that the original data was collected from individuals, Hofstede (1980) changes the level of analysis to obtain country-level cultural characteristics by calculating from mean values of variables for each country or from percentages of yes/no questions. In this case, the country-level analysis will forgo the individual differences (e.g. age, sex) across different cultures.

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4   Women in China

4.1   Women in China: From Past to Present

For women in China, the year 1949 not only epitomized the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) but has brought about changes in the country that closely relate to their everyday lives. The historical landmark and its relevance to the situation of women in China are most visible in terms of policies that pledge to liberate women from discriminatory social practices and to promote gender equality. Examples of these policies include the enactment of the Marriage Law, as well as the establishment of the national women's organization, All-China Women's Federation (ACWF). Decades later, in spite of the outstanding economic performance, achievements on the path towards gender equality remain highly debatable. More explicitly, it is still inconclusive that women in China nowadays are better off than in any earlier period. This incoherence is partly attributable to the diverse strands of research and the variations in measuring women's well-being. For instance, economic scholarship commonly measures women's well-being in terms of economic variables such as income and labor force participation, and statistical analysis (e.g. de Bruin & Liu, 2020; Li & Dong, 2011; Chi & Li, 2014). On the other hand, sociological studies reveal a broader spectrum of women's experiences than labor market outcomes and approach the topics with qualitative data collected from fieldwork and ethnography (e.g. Gaetano, 2017; Goodburn, 2015; Ji, 2015).

Acknowledging the varied approaches and findings regarding women in China, this section revisits the various perspectives systematically with an aim to disentangle the macro-level of the Chinese context. Due to the contextually dependent nature of the cultural stereotyping framework, a clarified context is able to support the subsequent analysis of women's career experiences. In particular, culture requires interpretation in terms of the various aspects in China that focus on "behavioral and ideational structures that are deemed essential to the constructed identity of a community" (Beugelsdijk & Maseland, 2011, p. 13). It is beyond the scope of the present study, if not entirely impossible, to survey all the literature about Chinese women across all time periods, given the long history of China. Therefore, the study adopts a general chronological approach. The review will focus on the context of different time periods

and the implications for culture and women's identity in China. The discussion is organized in terms of three major time periods: pre-1949, 1949–1977, and post-1978.

4.1.1   *Pre-1949: Traditional Chinese Society*

Descriptions about women in traditional Chinese society[1] are highly consistent. Most studies refer to Chinese women as inferior to their male counterparts, such that it is commonly believed that the position of inferiority is an outcome of traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism. Departing from the widely recognized Confucianism, I will begin by exploring women's inferior identity in traditional China in terms of the conceptualization of the family (*jia*). As an important institution in traditional Chinese society, family is salient to individual experiences both within a family and in society. Furthermore, the conceptualization of family helps in interpreting Chinese philosophy and its implications for individuals. Drawing from various sources, the study contributes to current knowledge by disentangling culture in traditional China to present a multifaceted image of Chinese women. More explicitly, I will show that culture in traditional China is far from a simplistic interpretation but comprises individual behaviors closely associated with family that were constantly shaping the identity of "woman" in the given period.

4.1.1.1   Jia *and Family*

Before applying "family" to understand women's situations, it is essential to first clarify the concept. Approaching it from a Western viewpoint, Hugh Baker (1979) differentiates the various types of family in traditional China:[2] simple, stem, and extended families. In a general sense, he describes family as "founded by the marriage of a man and woman, and enlarged by the children to which they gave birth, or which they adopted" (Baker, 1979, p. 2). Building on this general notion, different forms of family are defined as follows:

- Simple/nuclear/conjugal family: The family can be a single-generation family (consisting of a man and his wife, or possibly concubines). It can also refer to a two-generation family (consisting of children of the first generation).
- Stem family: When the only son or one of the sons brings his wife to the family and produces children. A variant of a stem family is possible when the parents live in rotation with the families of their sons, creating temporary stem families.
- Extended family: Extension of a stem family involving variants in which in any generation more than one married son is in the group.
- Lineage: A much larger group than extended family consists of a group of males all descended from one common ancestor, all living together in one settlement, owning some property in common, and all nominally under

the leadership of the man most senior in generation and age. In addition, lineage comprises the wives and unmarried daughters of the males.

- Clan: An artificial kin group comprising a number of lineages with the same surname.

Baker's (1979) interpretation of family in China is likely to be incomplete. In his seminal works, Fei Xiaotong ([1947] 2004) argues that the Chinese meaning of *jia* is different from the Western concept of family. He posits the root term "family" as comparable to *jiating* in traditional China, which primarily aims at reproduction, and its boundary is clear. In other words, *jiating* can be interpreted as a nuclear family. Yet *jia* in traditional society is not merely an extension of *jiating* (nuclear family) but possibly also comprises other members of the patrilineal line. *Jia*, in this case, has a closer meaning to the Western term "lineage" (*jiazu*). Drawing from both Chinese and Western interpretations, *jia* can generally be described as a group that consists of expanded family and kinship relations, whereas family refers to the nuclear family. In this regard, the three concepts – *jia*, family, and lineage – are not entirely equivalent. Acknowledging the possible differences, Fei ([1947] 2004) refers to the basic social group in traditional Chinese society explicitly as *jia* (*xiaojiazu*, small-scale lineage), whereas family is often perceived as the basic unit of Chinese society in Western scholarship (Freedman, 1961). Economically, *jia* is the basic social unit of production and consumption salient to the rural society (Fei, [1939] 2013). According to the patrilineal family, sons are preferred for the continuity of the family. The son can provide labor for production and help to expand the family's labor resources. It is conclusive in this case that the traditional family shapes the attitudes of Chinese individuals about children. The varied interpretations of *jia* and family from Western and Chinese attitudes point to critical fundamental questions in studying women in China. That is, what are the possible different views about Chinese women from Chinese and non-Chinese studies? If the differences exist, what is the implication of studying Chinese women today? Details will be further elaborated in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

The significance of clarifying *jia* as a concept is further justified by recent studies that indicate the relevance of the traditional family system in understanding contemporary China. For instance, Trémon's (2015) ethnographical study identifies remarkable traditional family values within the modern socio-economic context of a highly urbanized Shenzhen. The conclusion is further confirmed by the more recent study from Herrmann-Pillath and colleagues (2020). With detailed empirical evidence, they demonstrate the dominance of traditional lineage rules in defining modern management and administration of shareholding cooperatives, which is closely related to societal governance. Given the significance of *jia*/family across time, discussions on the situation of women with respect to family in traditional China serve as references for a better understanding of women in the modern period.

Women within traditional Chinese families are well documented in early works (e.g. Baker, 1979; Fei, [1947] 2004, [1939] 2013; Levy, 1949;

Lang, 1946; Wolf & Witke, 1975, cited from Johnson, [1983] 2009). The evidence mostly sheds light on the inferior position of women, which can be explained by the nature of *jia*/family. As the basic unit of society, the important purpose of a family is to continue the family line. In an economic sense, it secures the well-being of the family when the old are not able to work. The male-oriented family structure implies that male members have to marry women and have children with them. As a consequence, a woman will be naturally regarded as an outsider to the family where the structure is centered on male members. A notable example is a daughter-in-law living under the authority of her husband and in-laws, which demonstrates the disadvantaged status of the woman after marriage, as well as her marginalization in the family structure. In addition to the nature of the Chinese conceptualization of family, women's inferior position was reinforced by legal codes in traditional China. For instance, the law in traditional China explicitly stated that the only son could receive the property of the deceased. In other words, when the man of the family died, neither the widow nor the daughter was able to inherit any property. Under the law, women were excluded from the right to inherit. Given the evidence, it is certain that the nature of family/*jia* (meso-level) and laws (macro-level) are two relevant aspects in constructing women's inferior identity. The subsequent question is: what was the underlying actor that sustained the family practices and legal codes? To explore this question, the following discussion needs to depart from the two aspects and examine a contextual aspect that is closely related to family, state, and society, namely Chinese philosophy.

4.1.1.2   *Chinese Philosophy*

Chinese philosophy was an important element in shaping the social and cultural context of traditional Chinese society. As one of the "Three Teachings",[3] Confucianism played a critical role in ancient Chinese society. Its domination is most evident in its official acceptance by the ruler as state ideology and orthodoxy during the Han dynasty (202 BCE–AD 220). As noted by Freedman (1961), Confucianism is politically paramount to the state. With a moral framework,[4] Confucianism stresses the proper order and hierarchy of family as a building block for establishing and maintaining social order, which aligns with the state's interest in general control. For instance, within a family unit, women's roles are explicitly coined as daughters, wives, and mothers. In each of these roles, women are required to accord with the wishes and needs of closely related men, namely their fathers when young, their husbands when married, and their sons when widowed (i.e. the "Three Obediences"). Women's behavior is strictly mandated by the Confucian doctrines, including the "Three Obediences" and "Four Virtues", in which inferior obligation as well as obedience to the more powerful members in the family hierarchy (men and older generations) is strongly emphasized. In Confucianism, individuals in the family are expected to act according to specified moral codes, which had been adopted by the state as means to support its political interests.

In the Confucian thinking, ritual (*li*) is a concept central to social order and a relevant lens through which to explore women's situation in traditional Chinese families. Ritual (*li*) in Confucianism has received mixed interpretations, but in general, it involves specified individual behavior, ceremonies, or moral codes. The importance of ritual in the social context is indicated by Fei ([1947] 2004). Instead of adopting the Western term "social order", he argues that ritual order (*lizhi zhixu*) is the primary form of order in Chinese rural society. Rules for wide-ranging matters such as ancestral worship ceremonies, weddings, and funerals are explicitly stated in classical texts.[5] According to the classics, it is common to identify practices that stress the inferiority of women. For instance, weddings were deemed to demonstrate the distinctions between women and men after marriage. According to Confucian scholar Sima Guang, a man should lead the bride in a wedding to show that after the ceremony he is the primary decision-maker in the family, leading his obedient bride. In this case, a man's identity is constructed as a decision-maker by the wedding practice, whereas a woman's identity is as an obedient follower. Likewise, during funerals, the wife of the deceased should follow the son in carrying out mourning acts. The son, not the wife, is allowed to meet individuals who come to condole. As concluded by Ebrey (2014, p. 228), "male–female differentiation in family rituals simultaneously reflected ordinary life, validated it, and made it seem part of the nature of things". In other words, ritual not only reflects the different experiences of women and men in the family but also serves as a critical force regulating individual behavior. According to the study, it is the attempt of Confucian scholars to maintain the gender differences in ritual practices as important demonstrations to distinguish men's identity from that of women in hierarchy and complementarity. Situations of women in a ritual context raise salient implications for understanding different concepts of the family in China. For instance, women marrying into a family are, by definition, regarded as members of *jiazu*. Yet their membership is not recognized in ritual terms. More explicitly, in ritual practices, women marrying into the family are excluded from genealogy (the rules that define membership) and participation in ancestral worship (Herrmann-Pillath et al., 2020). From a perspective of identity, it is indeed optimal for an individual to act according to the prescribed rules, and the gender gap is likely to remain intact given the externality of an individual's behavior.

4.1.1.3   *Multifaceted Women in Traditional China*

The previous discussion shows that Chinese philosophy, dominated by Confucianism, acts as a salient philosophical context that sustains women's inferior identity in the traditional context.[6] Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in traditional China, women's situation was not entirely universal. Studies, albeit scant, also point to variations in women's experiences. For instance, it is evident that the informal, mother-centered "uterine family" is crucial to women's lives in traditional China. First described by Wolf (1972), the uterine family involves a

mother and her children. This smaller and unrecognized circle within the patri-archy *jia*/family structure is regarded as women's primary source of security and influence. A son is a form of permanent security for the mother. Mediated by the mother–son relationship, it is possible for the mother to influence the male authority. After her husband dies, the oldest woman can become the center of power in the uterine family. The second example is an exceptional regional deviation from Confucian norms. Topley (1975) reveals that in the early nineteenth century, women who resisted marriage or cohabitation with their husbands formed a sisterhood in southeastern China. These women worked in the silk industry, which enabled them to gain economic independence. Accord-ing to the descriptions (Topley, 1975, p. 67, cited in Baker, 1979, p. 167), the sisterhood was fully ritualized:

> Women who remained spinsters took vows before a deity, in front of wit-nesses, never to wed. Their vows were preceded by a hairdressing ritual resembling the one traditionally performed before marriage to signal a girl's arrival at social maturity. This earned them the title "women who dress their own hair", *tzu-shu nü*. The others, who were formally married but did not live with their husbands, were known as *pu lo-chia*, "women who do not go down to the family", i.e., women who refuse to join their husband's family.

In a more recent ethnography, Siu (1990) confirms this enduring ritual in southern cities, such as Zhongshan and Hong Kong. She further reveals that family members play a critical role in cooperating with the women and help to sustain this subculture. The regional difference is important to understand China. For instance, women in southern China were more commonly found to participate in farm work given the high demand for labor, whereas in the northern region where plow cultivation prevailed, women tended to work only during the peak seasons of the farming year (Davin, 1976). The phenomenon of sisterhood was evidently unique in the southeastern region. Women who worked in silk factories were able to afford independent housing and support themselves, such that sisterhood is partially explained by women's economic independence. In the edited volume, Siu (2010) pulls together scholarship about businesswomen in the southern part of China. Whereas the evidence is drawn from different periods, they contribute to one central theme: women in China are multifaceted across various regional areas.

In addition, the regional difference is relevant in shaping the *jia*/family structure, which should be taken into account in the research on culture and women in China. In the traditional context, it is evident that lineage is com-mon in southeastern provinces characterized by visible ancestral halls, whereas the north of China has fewer lineages. The difference is partially explained by geography: the mountainous northern part was said to limit the expansion of families (Baker, 1979). Limited studies are conducted subject to women in different regions in traditional China, yet differences in geographical location

contain critical research implications for the subsequent discussion on women in modern China.

4.1.2   *Transitional Period Before 1949*

Women in China experienced a transition period from traditional society to a modern context. This period is marked by the critiques of Confucian practices, which prompted changes in the law. It is evident that women's situation began to change during the last years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Snow (1967) documents that in certain areas during the 1900s schools were established for girls and footbinding[7] was abandoned. Notable changes were identified during the New Cultural Movement of the May Fourth Era (1915–1925), positioned by most Chinese feminist scholars as a period of the awakening of women's liberation (e.g. Chen, 2011; Li, 2000; Zhou, 2003). From an academic perspective, Chinese scholars "commonly regarded" the era as the beginning of women's studies in China, making a critical contribution to academic development (Chow et al., 2004, p. 163). Yet its significance to society remains ambiguous. For instance, it is argued that the movement mostly consisted of male intellectuals, and its actual impact on society was questioned, especially in the situation of rural regions (Zhou, 2003). Despite the debates, there is a general consensus that the era opened a window for the inflow of Western ideologies, including Marxism, socialism, and feminism, that were later important in policy planning for women's liberation in China.

Reflecting on the significance of this transitional period, there were several milestones in changing the situation for Chinese women. The first milestone was the establishment of official women's groups. The Chinese Communist Party (the CCP, the Party) formed its special Women's Department in 1922, whereas a Central Women's Department was set up by the Kuomintang (KMT) in 1924 (e.g. Johnson, [1983] 2009; Leith, 1973). The women's groups created space for discussing women's issues, which served as a foundation for improving women's situation in the later period. In both CCP and KMT, policies were implemented centering on women. The CCP abolished all legislation restricting women and granted women equal voting rights. Similarly, the KMT policies included women's equal rights and freedom in marriage and divorce. In addition, the policies prohibited traditional practices, such as footbinding. Women's official rights were granted by the enactment of the Republican Civil Code in 1929. For the first time, the law granted women equal *quanli* (rights) to men in property inheritance and divorce (Bernhardt, 1999). The code had significant impacts in urban areas and served as preparation for the nationwide legal reform after 1949 (Bernhardt & Huang, 1994). In short, the role of the code in changes after 1949 was profound (Freedman, 1961). Other changes include the removal of the admission ban on women in universities and the inclusive attitude towards women in public interactions (Yang, 2013). The increasing number of girls' schools and the return of overseas female Chinese students continue to promote women's education in the country (Chen, 2011).

Due to the fact that notable changes were identified in urban areas, the transitional period is regarded as more of a cultural enlightenment on gender equality than actual improvements in women's daily lives (e.g. Bernhardt & Huang, 1994; Zhou, 2003).

In sum, the descriptions of the situation of women in China before 1949 are generally consistent. Literature from various sources sheds light on women's inferior position in traditional society. Several aspects are relevant to understanding women's situation, including the conceptualization of family and the laws in practice. Both of these are related to the broader philosophical context that actively shaped social practices and women's identity in the period. It is therefore conclusive that traditional Confucian culture involves more pertinent aspects than previously acknowledged. It is also notable that individual experiences differ across various geographical locations in China, with implications for the subsequent discussion on women. Pertinent changes in the social context began during the May Fourth Era and profoundly influenced academic studies of women in China. This particular aspect will be further explored in Section 4.2.

4.1.3   Post–1949: Early Years of the PRC

After the CCP established the People's Republic of China in 1949, the situation for women in China changed drastically. The primary actor is policies guided by the Party's political vision of modernization. In other words, a closer look at the fundamental macro-level context can help us better understand the policies in place and women's situation after 1949. During the early days of the post-1949 period, China's modernization was characterized by economic development and political stability (Meisner, 1999). More explicitly, the objectives were to overcome poverty and backwardness and to establish new political order centralized at the state level (e.g. Grasso & Kort, 2015; Lin, 2006). The political agenda of modernization was vividly reflected in policies relating to Chinese women. According to the provisional constitution that declared the official establishment of the PRC in 1949, the Party's dedication to women's liberation and gender equality was explicitly highlighted as follows:

> The People's Republic of China shall abolish the feudal system restricting women. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational, and social life. Freedom of marriage for men and women shall be placed into practice (Article 6).[8]

Several notable Party-led policies were implemented. In 1949, the paramount national supervision organization All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was established to ensure women's equal rights and gender equality (for details of the ACWF see Snow, 1967; Davin, 1976). As the first step to abolish the feudal system, the Marriage Law was enacted in 1950 as the first national legislation. The law covers a broad range of aspects, including marriage, divorce, property

ownership, and relationships between generations. On the one hand, the law explicitly granted women equal rights in various family matters. On the other hand, the law is argued as a political approach to change the traditional *jia/* family system in the sense that the well-developed patrilineal family system that shaped social structures had offered little room for the new state[9] (Freedman, 1961). As such, the emphasis on the nuclear family is regarded as creating a role for the state in previously private family matters. For instance, couples have to register their marriages/divorces at a state office which offers an informal role for the state as a mediator (Diamant, 2000a). In this case, marriage is no longer a private matter solely determined by parents or the family head. Instead, it has become a public matter, in the sense that marriage is now under the "purview of the state" (Bailey, 2012, p. 101). The concept of private and public will be further clarified in a later section. In short, the Marriage Law is perceived by scholarship as a major policy instrument that served the Party's political objectives.

Apart from introducing the state to the family, the Marriage Law also serves the political agenda of modernization in terms of economic development. Johnson ([1983] 2009) has identified the alignment of marriage reformers' support for the Party's vision of modernization during 1950–1953. In particular, the law was emphasized by the reformers of the period as a foundation to free women from the constraints of the traditional family and supported women's economic, social, and political participation in the new state. In this sense, the law manifests two functions: a tool for women's liberation and a motivator for women's participation in economic development. By means of the national campaign, the Party-led emphasis on women's rights was further publicized. For instance, the Chinese proverb "women hold up half the sky" became widely recognized with the help of a national campaign after PRC leader Mao Zedong's first proclamation in 1955. In this regard, it is clear that the state actively constructed women's identity through the Marriage Law and its campaign. Despite its implementation nationwide, the Marriage Law was found to have different impacts in urban and rural areas. Similar to the notable regional differences, the evident division between urban and rural contexts also provides salient perspectives to better understand individual experiences in China.

4.1.3.1 *The Rural–Urban Divide*

The earliest urban–rural divide was documented during the Shang Dynasty (1600–1066 BC) (Zhang, 1991). According to the official census, in 1949 only 10.6 percent of the Chinese population lived in urban areas (Walder, 1988; Whyte & Parish, 1985). In other words, Chinese society before 1949 was largely shaped by rural areas. Indeed, the dominance of the rural population has not changed until recently. According to the once-in-a-decade official census, less than 50 percent of the Chinese population resided in urban areas in 2010, which increased to 64 percent by 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The previously dominant rural population and its continued significance justify the

exploring of rural areas in the current discussion. The Marriage Law, coupled with nationwide campaigns, was widely documented as having achieved only limited changes in the rural family (e.g. Davin, 1976; Johnson, [1983] 2009; Stacey, 1983, cited from Wolf, 1984, 1985). Scholars attribute the limited impact to various aspects.[10] For instance, some scholars reckon Land Reform, implemented during the same period, accounted for most of the work in the rural areas (e.g. Hershatter, 2018; Wolf, 1985). Similar to the Marriage Law, Land Reform was characterized by a nationwide campaign aiming at abolishing the old power structure by redistributing the land, production tools, and property of landlords and clans equally to peasants. It is argued that land reform leaders posited marriage reform as a secondary priority. With regard to the situation of women, the Marriage Law tends to challenge the authority of older women in the uterine family. Older women perceived the law's emphasis on women's independence as a violation of their power over their daughters-in-law. More explicitly, the lower status of daughters-in-law that maintained older women's mother–son relationship was likely to be affected by the law, which resulted in a threat to the mothers' lifelong security (Johnson, [1983] 2009). In a sharp contrast to its limited impact on rural areas, the law has affected individual experiences in urban areas on a broader scale. Families in urban areas, especially those in Beijing and Shanghai, demonstrated the most significant changes from traditional practices (Diamant, 2000b). The urban areas manifest two features contributing to the implementation of the law. On the one hand, the better communications in the cities favored promotion of the law among urban individuals. On the other hand, urban regions, originally non-agrarian areas, were not affected by Land Reform, such that the new law was implemented as the sole priority (Johnson, [1983] 2009).

In addition to the Marriage Law, the significance of the rural–urban divide is also evident in terms of the specific roles in promoting economic development. Whereas the political objective, characterized by the Marriage Law and Land Reform, was the primary focus during the first few years of the PRC, the Party's strategy shifted to economic development, launching its First Five-Year Plan in 1953 (Stacey, 1975).[11] The plan was a critical component of modernization aiming at economic growth by means of industrial production, with production specialization in urban and rural areas aimed to promote national economic development. Rural areas specialized in agriculture production, whereas urban areas specialized in capital-intensive industries. Given the national economic objectives, women in both rural and urban areas were mobilized to participate in production. Women in rural areas were encouraged to work in agriculture. In addition to working on the land, rural women still had to do housework and care for children (Barrett, 1973). The urban context was significantly different. The state transformed most of the privately owned firms into state-owned and state-controlled enterprises, whereas smaller-scale private workgroups were combined subject to state control (Walder, 1988). Urban labor was centrally allocated to the workplace, namely *danwei* (work unit). In general, *danwei* not merely was a work arena but often comprised

living and social facilities such as housing, schools, childcare, hospitals, and canteens. Compared with their rural counterparts, urban working women in *danwei* had access to childcare facilities and the facilities that shared women's housework (e.g. canteen). Despite the differences in rural and urban areas, it is certain that policies after 1949 brought both areas under state control. More importantly, a salient role of the state is the construction of rural and urban identities by means of its *hukou* (household registration) system. Clarification on the *hukou* system and its social impacts is fundamental to understanding individual experience subject to one's state-constructed identity, which is also relevant to the research on gender in China.

Household registration is not unprecedented in the history of China but the *hukou* system implemented in 1958 had the most profound impact on individual's lives. The system was officially designed to maintain social order, protect citizens' rights and interests, and serve the socialist construction. In practice, the system created a hierarchy of urban over rural, and controlled rural–urban migration and mobility along the state-created hierarchy (Cheng & Selden, 1994; Wang, 2005). More explicitly, individuals are required to register information such as agricultural (rural) or non-agricultural (urban), legal address, and work affiliation to the *hukou* office at the town of birth. The document serves as an identity document, but its social implications are far beyond identification. For instance, the state-created hierarchy is justified by the differentiated access to state provision of social benefits and services between individuals with urban and rural *hukou*. The state directly manages the urban areas such that it provides the necessities of life (e.g. water and food) and social services (e.g. medical care and education) for individuals with urban *hukou*. On the other hand, these urban resources are not available for rural individuals, nor are rural individuals legally qualified to receive these resources. To become officially qualified to receive these services and benefits, an individual must be registered as an urban resident, as stated by the regulations. Yet rural–urban migration has been difficult. For the purpose of population control, rural individuals who seek to move to the city are required to apply for permission from both rural and urban authorities. For women, the initial rural–urban divide that stemmed from geographical differences was legitimized by the *hukou* system, such that the identity as rural women and urban women was created by the state. Explicitly, by means of the *hukou* system, the state defines what rural and urban women are, and how rural and urban women should behave. The implications of the state-constructed identity on women's experiences will be further illustrated in Section 4.3.4.

4.1.3.2 Women and Modernization

As stated, for the purpose of modernization, the Party vowed to liberate women from the traditional family system and granted women equal status to men in social production. Outcomes of this Party-led women's liberation were remarkable in terms of labor force participation and are illustrated by Table 4.1.[12]

Table 4.1 Number of female employees in the period 1949–1977

Year	Total number of employees (millions)	Number of female employees (millions)	Percentage of female employees (%)	Remark
1949	8.00	0.60	7.5	Founding of the PRC
1950	10.24	N/A	N/A	
1951	12.81	N/A	N/A	
1952	15.80	1.84	11.7	
1953	18.26	2.13	11.7	
1954	18.81	2.43	12.9	
1955	19.08	2.47	12.9	
1956	24.23	3.27	13.5	
1957	24.51	3.29	13.4	
1958	45.32	8.11	17.9	Beginning of the Great Leap Forward
1959	45.61	8.49	18.6	
1960	50.44	10.09	20.0	
1961	41.71	8.87	21.3	Contraction of the economy
1962	33.09	6.74	20.4	
1963	32.93	6.57	20.0	
1964	34.65	7.03	20.3	
1965	37.38	7.86	21.0	
1966–1976	N/A	N/A	N/A	Period of Cultural Revolution
1977	71.96	20.36	28.3	

Source: *China Labor Wage Statistics 1949–1985* (Department of Social Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics, 1987).

It is evident that after 1949, the number of employed women rose sharply. The increase is particularly significant in 1958, during which the Great Leap Forward campaign was launched to encourage all citizens, including rural labor, to participate in promoting industrialization. From the labor demand side, state enterprises received massive investment from the state to employ more workers to meet the production target. Furthermore, there was a major boost in labor demand from medium- and small-scale enterprises. Consequently, the scale of women employees expanded substantially in 1958. As shown in Table 4.1, the later peak of women's employment in 1977 demonstrates the profound labor market outcome dominated by China's economic policies and national campaigns. Before 1978, the economy in China was centrally planned and work was allocated to individuals. The well-established allocation scheme was accompanied by the nationwide promotion of women's labor force participation. In the urban areas, for instance, images of women as engineers, drivers, and miners were widely publicized in the national campaign (e.g. Davin, 1975, 1976). The campaign has been an effective political tool. In the period 1958–1960, labor participation of urban women had caught up with that of men (Whyte & Parish, 1985). Regarding the gender wage gap, several Chinese scholars reckon that

the gap has been significantly narrowed by the centrally allocated scheme (e.g. Tao & Jiang, 1993; Wan & Sun, 2010). Although Whyte and Parish (1985) also identify a similarly narrow gap between women and men as junior workers, their study indicated that women and men tend to experience unequal progress in their later careers. This remarkable finding is early evidence that points to the presence of gender differentials in career attainment in the Chinese workplace. To sum up the significance of the Party-led women's liberation, there are evidently notable improvements in economic opportunities for Chinese women during the period, as indicated by labor force participation and the wage gap. Meanwhile, in the labor market, the state constructed women's identity as comparable to men. It is therefore conclusive that during this period the gender binary of female and male identity in labor production was deemphasized by the state.

Similar to the work identity, women's identity as subject to family roles was also largely shaped by the state. It is documented that in the second half of the 1950s, the campaign targeting rural and urban women began to advocate the salient role of housewives. More explicitly, women's roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers were highlighted as contributions to society through husbands and family (Davin, 1975, 1976; Evans, 2010). As noted by Whyte and Parish (1985), young women in urban areas largely accepted their identity in production and rarely considered the option of becoming housewives. Seemingly conflicting but fundamentally aligning, the construction of women's production identity as equal to men and the argument for family roles are in fact both deemed to serve economic interests of the Party-led modernization. For instance, during the first few years of the First Five Year Plan, during which there was excess labor supply, campaigns were launched to convince women to return to their families and resume the role of primary homemaker to prevent growing unemployment (Davin, 1975, 1976; Johnson, [1983] 2009). The evidence highlights two salient implications in understanding women in China.

- First, it demonstrates the presence of parallel, though conflicting, narratives corresponding to women's roles in the workplace and the family, which constantly shape women's identity. Women's identity at work is comparable to that of men, which means they are perceived by the state as no different from men, and they are expected to behave like men. Meanwhile, women's identity centering on traditional family roles suggests women are wives, mothers, and housemakers, and they should behave according to those roles. As a consequence, Chinese women in the early part of the post–1949 period evidently experienced dual expectations of work and family.
- Second, it is conclusive that although two seemingly conflicting narratives in parallel practice, they are crucial means to serve the goal of the Party-led modernization. With regard to a particular context, women's identity is explicitly highlighted, either in terms of work identity equal to that of men or in terms of women's family role, or sometimes both. In other words, "the double burden of the women was a component of the development of the state's policies" (Shen, 2010, p. 388).

Despite the prominence of Party-led modernization in shaping women's experience, scholars also argue that the traditional practices proved difficult to replace. Theorist Tsai (1996) argues that patriarchy is likely to remain intact under socioeconomic changes due to its socially constructed characteristic. She asserts that with respect to its long history in China, patriarchal norms have been thoroughly institutionalized and deeply embedded in every realm of society. Consequently, it is likely that the patriarchal norms will survive regardless of political and socioeconomic changes. She further criticizes the possibility of eradicating gender inequality, given that socialist state policies often place a higher priority on eliminating class inequality than gender inequality. Leung (2003) shares similar skepticism on the state's dedication to gender equality by arguing the insufficient efforts by the state to address women's suppression in a patriarchal society. Despite the enduring traditions, there have been interestingly different observations from field studies after the introduction of the Party-led women's liberation (e.g. Guo, 2003; Rofel, 1999; Shen, 2010). For instance, women have expressed appreciation for the state policies, which provided them with opportunities for possible interactions in the public sphere. Notably, for some of these women, opportunities to work outside the home have been perceived as a form of liberation (Rofel, 1999).

In summary, the early post-1949 period, in general, is characterized by the domination of the Party and the enduring traditional practices. Both aspects resulted in a complex and dynamic Chinese context that shaped women's identity and experiences. On the one hand, the Party-led women's liberation and its pertinent state policies constructed women's work identity as comparable to men in labor production. On the other hand, women's family identity, representing the persistent traditional gender attitudes, remained crucial to the Party-led modernization.

4.1.4   1978 to Present

In 1978, a new phase of reforms was initiated, which triggered a series of transformations in the social and economic contexts. The economic reform, at the core of the reform series, aims at restructuring the Chinese economic system from central planning to a socialist market economy. The reform involved a variety of aspects, including the introduction of the market mechanism, decentralization of state control, encouragement of private enterprises, and international collaboration. Due to its broad coverage, the economic reform is a highly complex national project involving a gradual and ongoing process with shifting focus in a given period. As such, the reform remains in practice today and continues to play a critical role in shaping the Chinese economic and institutional context. It has been justified by macroeconomic statistics as being highly successful given its pivotal role in boosting the Chinese economy to become one of the world's frontrunners. Rapid economic growth provides increased economic opportunities and improvement in living standards. Nevertheless, it is also evident that new problems emerged associated with the performance of

gender equality, a reality seemingly contradictory to upholding the Party-led gender equality. The ongoing reform process comprises continuous structural changes and results in a highly dynamic and complex socioeconomic context far beyond the scope of the current discussion, which will be elaborated in the following discussion.

4.1.4.1 *Market-Oriented Labor Market*

After 1978, women's major gains in labor force participation were challenged by the introduction of market mechanisms in the labor market. Market-oriented policies bring about freedom of choice for job seekers and competition in the labor market, yet the effect on Chinese women was not entirely positive. For instance, the removal of collective allocation gave rise to gender-discriminating practices. One notable example is the explicit discriminatory practices in the recruitment process. Kuhn and Shen (2013) draw from more than a million job advertisements posted in 2008–2010 and find that it is common for job ads to specify preferred gender, even though prohibited by law. In 2019, 11 percent of job postings for civil service positions still stated the preference and requirement for male applicants (Human Right Watch, 2020). The latest finding in 2020 reveals that, of the 5,776 non-tax bureau positions in government organizations, 35 percent overtly state either "men only" or "more suitable for men" (Zou, 2020). Apart from these explicitly stated preferences on job postings, it is common for employers to ask female candidates about their marital and childbearing plans, in order to identify the potential costs of hiring them.

In addition to the discriminating job descriptions, women's traditional identity can affect the possibility of receiving a job offer. In her field studies, shortly after the reform, Korabik (1993) found that employers were reluctant to hire women. She explained that the labor regulations, such as maternity leave, were perceived as an extra cost by employers. The cost potentially increases with the revised protection regulations. According to "the Provisions on Female Labor Protection under Special Circumstances (State Council Decree No. 619)" announced in 2012, maternity leave for female employees was extended in China from 90 days to 14 weeks (98 days), meeting the minimum maternity leave required by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Most recently, maternity leave was further increased in 2021, an act widely perceived as a means to boost the nation's birthrate. In fact, context with regard to maternity leave is far from universal and varies widely across different provinces.[13] For instance, in Beijing and Shanghai female employees now are entitled to 158 days of paid leave, a 30-day extension from the original rule. In Guangdong, women are eligible for a minimum of 178 days of paid maternity leave. Given the uncertainty over compensating employees' paid leave, employers tend to predetermine the potential cost at the recruitment stage by asking questions with regard to marital and childbearing status. In this regard, it is notable that the employer's hiring decision is still built upon the perception of women's roles as mothers and homemakers.

Acknowledging the discriminatory practices in the workplace, the People's Court, along with eight other departments, issued "the Circular about Further Regulating Recruitment and Promoting Women's Employment" (the Notice) in February 2019. The Notice aims to encourage wider and deeper participation of women in social and economic activities by standardizing recruitment practice as a means to promote equal employment for women. It emphasizes the questions asked during the recruitment process. More explicitly, it states that women who seek employment should not be subject to questions about marriage and childbirth, nor should they be asked to take a pregnancy test as part of their medical examination. In addition, the Notice prohibits employers from restricting births as a condition of employment. Under the new law, employers or human resource agencies could face a maximum fine of RMB 50,000 if their job advertisements are found to contain gender-discriminatory content. Some are still skeptical of its effectiveness due to the fact that there has been limited detail officially provided with regard to evaluation of the policy's implementation. Nevertheless, the 2019 Notice represents the increasing state awareness of the need to tackle nationwide gender discriminatory practices in the labor market. In December 2021, a legislative proposal to strengthen the Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law, enacted in 1992 and modified in 2005, was submitted to the National People's Congress Standing Committee, China's top legislative body.[14] With regard to women's employment, the proposal explicitly addresses the discriminatory hiring practices against women by banning potential employers from asking female job applicants about their marital status or child-rearing plans. Under the new rules, it is illegal to reject female candidates based on their answers. For working women, employers are prohibited from firing women or cutting their salaries in case of marriage, pregnancy, or taking maternity leave. From a state perspective, it is clear that women's equal work identity must be maintained. Yet it is also well recognized that from the perspective of profit-driven organizations, women's identity tends to be perceived differently. The situation of women subject to this mixed context remains to be explored.

4.1.4.2 *Privatization in the State-Owned Sector*

Whereas the labor market has gradually become market-oriented, the reform has also brought about privatization and restructuring in the state-owned sector. The latter is widely known as the SOE (state-owned enterprise) reform. In the early 1990s, privatization reached its peak and resulted in unprecedented large-scale layoffs in the country. Women were affected more adversely than men. Based on data from Chinese Household Income Surveys, Ding and colleagues (2009) identify a more drastic decline in women's employment rate in the radical reform period (1995–2002) compared to the previous period of gradual reforms (1988–1995). They further claim that the decline in women's employment is the main contributor to the gender income gap in post-reform China. Other studies concur with these arguments and infer that women, in

general, have experienced layoffs at a higher rate than men during the SOE reform (e.g. Lee, 2005; Maurer-Fazio et al., 1999; Summerfield, 1994). Drawing from different sources of data, recent studies have identified the same pattern of notable decline in female labor force participation in the post–reform period (e.g. Chen & Ge, 2018; Hare, 2016; Liu, 2012). According to feminist scholars, women's unemployment is closely related to the reemergence of feminine roles in China (Currier, 2007; Zheng, 2003). They argue that retreat of unemployed women to the home domain is expected given the society's ingrained belief in women's traditional identity. The resurgence of women's traditional identity is particularly relevant for working women, whose conventional family roles are reinforced by the economic reforms. In particular, following the transition from central planning, state support has been withdrawn from the previously state-subsidized *danwei* daycare centers for working parents. As a consequence, the restructured and privatized *danwei* closed their care centers, shifting the responsibility for childcare back to working mothers (Cook & Dong, 2011; Leung, 2002).

In other words, prior to the reform, urban women's family care work was alleviated to a certain extent given the well-established care facilities administered by the state. After state-sector restructuring, the performance of care work returned to the private family, and in particular women. In this regard, the institutional change sheds light, more implicitly, on the emergence of a culture shaped by traditional gender roles and women's retreat to the home domain from the labor market. In fact, after 1980, traditional roles became increasingly explicit. For instance, the 1980 Marriage Law amendment enacted the obligation for parental care. For the first time in history, the responsibility for elderly care within the family was officially stated. In 2021,[15] the state officially asserted the pivotal role of parental care by introducing policies to encourage adult children to live with or near their parents. Given the emphasis on family that is rooted in traditional society, the amendment of the law and the 2021 announcement further remind individuals about traditional gender roles, particularly women's caretaking role. Studies conducted in the 1990s have revealed that many Chinese women still saw their primary responsibility as in the family domain. Remarkably, many women are still willing to opt out of their career for their family when necessary (e.g. Parish & Busse, 2000; Zuo & Bian, 2001). The rapidly changing socioeconomic context justifies the need to explore women's career experiences in terms of the latest context.

4.1.4.3   The One-Child Policy

The one-child policy is recognized as having strikingly affected the situation of Chinese women. It will be discussed here in terms of how it shapes women's identity in China.[16] In 1979, the policy was implemented on a national scale to control population growth with the aim to sustain modernization (Cai & Feng, 2021). From 1949 to the late 1970s, China's population increased from 542 million to 975 million (Hershatter, 2018), of which almost 75 percent

was in the rural population (e.g. Davin, 1987; Greenhalgh & Li, 1995; Green-halgh & Winckler, 2005). The dramatic increase in population was one critical rationale behind the policy, given that it raised concerns about the potential failure of economic development. Despite its remarkable achievement in slow-ing population growth at a national level, the policy had different effects in rural and urban regions, which further sharpened the rural–urban divide. As the first area of focus, the urban region demonstrated general acceptance of the policy. The remarkable level of acceptance was partially explained by the urban context before the policy's implementation (Kane, 1985). One critical aspect was that young women in urban areas widely acknowledged that their work identity was as comparable to that of men and were reluctant to accept traditional family roles. In other words, urban women's behavior was generally guided by the Party-led women's liberation, which provided a natural founda-tion for birth control policy. Furthermore, in urban areas birth control was easily available, which also facilitated the policy's implementation. The state placed a high priority on women's maternal health and child health, which helped to prevent maternal mortality.

In the rural areas, the situation was different. Unlike the urban context, the rural context remained significantly dominated by traditional family percep-tions. In other words, more children, and particularly sons, were preferred so that an agricultural labor force and continuity of the family line would be secured. The implementation of the one-child policy was therefore difficult, if not entirely impossible, in rural areas. A policy variant for rural areas was permission to have a second child. Yet, the consequences for women were not positive. Given the lower availability of birth control methods and knowledge, officials coerced pregnant women into abortion if the family exceeded the birth limit. The less well-equipped medical services could affect the mother's and child's health, leading to maternal mortality. Women who gave birth to daughters were also poorly treated.

Despite the rural–urban differences, the policy has caused a striking gender imbalance in the society. The widely documented sex ratio at birth is argued to have a close relationship to the preference for sons (e.g. Greenhalgh, 2013; Loh & Remick, 2015). Chinese family tradition, which emphasizes the succes-sion of a patriarchal line, results in the gendered preference. In this sense, a son is perceived as more "precious" (Ling, 2017). It is evident that around 15 mil-lion girls were missing during 1980–1999 (Bulte et al., 2021). Ebenstein (2010) estimates that 3.4 million girls were missing in 1990, increasing to 9.2 million in 2000, and becoming more severe after 2000. The missing girl phenomenon is partially explained by the underreporting of female births, commonly found in rural areas, given the strict enforcement of the policy (e.g. Bulte et al., 2021; Shi & Kennedy, 2016). It is also likely that the phenomenon is sustained by the practice of sex selection (Ebenstein, 2010). The improvement in medical equipment enables the identification of the fetus' sex by ultrasound screening, so that sex-selective abortions can be conducted before birth. Despite banning pertinent prenatal sex-selective practices, China's distorted sex ratio at birth

remains evident to date. According to the latest population census, the sex ratio at birth in 2010 was 121.21 male birth per 100 female births, declining to 111.30 in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The decline is masked by the 2021 household registration report released by the Ministry of Public Security. It shows the significant sex ratio at birth remains intact and widened compared to the level in 2020.[17] Globally, China's sex ratio at birth is one of the most skewed in the world (WEF, 2021).

Regardless of the rural or urban context, it is conclusive that women's reproduction is no longer a decision within the family but a state concern. In particular, the maximum number of children a woman is allowed to give birth to is clearly defined by the birth control policy. From 1979 to 2015, only one child was allowed. The restriction was then eased to two children in 2016. Most recently, in 2021, the three-child policy was approved in the meeting of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo (a committee comprising the most senior officials). Despite changes in birth control policy over the decades, a central theme remains clear. That is, women's reproduction is evidently a state concern in which women's reproductive identity is state-constructed. The state explicitly defines Chinese women's role in reproductive matters and how a woman should behave, by means of birth control policy and pertinent regulations.

4.1.4.4 The Complex Context

After 1978, the context became increasingly complex given the various forces. Some scholars argue that the persistent traditional gender stereotypes, ongoing policy changes, and limited government capacity exist in parallel so that the effect on women outweighed the achievements in gender equality during the reform period (e.g. Bian, 1994; Santos & Harrell, 2017; Shen, 2010; Stacey, 1983). Particularly with regard to limited state capacity, the literature condemns the economic reform in positioning economic development as the central objective, which partially resulted in increasing gender inequality in society. Other scholars reckon that the emphasis of "protection" on state regulations tends to stimulate the revival of traditional gender attitudes (e.g. Leung, 2003; Shen, 2010). For instance, according to the regulations, women are required to retire earlier than men. The unequal retirement age is undoubtedly unfavorable to women's career development in terms of a shortened career span in comparison with men. It is documented that the mandatory retirement age is 60 for male office workers and 55 for females in the public sector and state-owned enterprises, while female blue-collar workers have to end their careers at the age of 50.[18] Likewise, women are positioned alongside individuals who require special protection and support from the state, namely the elderly, youth, as well as those with long-term sickness and disabilities. Notably, regulation on the protection of women workers outlines the specific occupations and work conditions that are not suitable for women, such as physically demanding occupations, in cold and high temperatures.[19] The so-called protection is likely a double-edged sword for the women in China. On the one hand, women

are kept away from discriminatory practices and potential harm. On the other hand, the protection also creates a "paternalistic and restrictive" context (Leung, 2003, p. 367). In both cases, women's traditionally inferior identity is implicitly highlighted by the state. Despite the Party-led dedication to gender equality and the eradication of discriminatory attitudes to women, the traditional attitudes towards gender differentials are also highlighted at a state level.

The complex situation of women in the Chinese context is clear from the latest evidence. A new ten-year plan centering on the development of women was released in September 2021, representing the latest effort to achieve gender equality in China. The document[20] comprises around 200 goals and pertinent measures to improve women's rights in the areas of education, work, and health. Nevertheless, the context is further obscured by the state's increasing emphasis on traditional culture and values. For instance, in 2017 the Party Central Committee and the State Council released an outline of China's cultural revival study titled "Opinions on the Implementation of the Development of Outstanding Traditional Chinese Culture".[21] In 2021, the Ministry of Education published detailed guidelines on integrating cultural education into each subject and level of the current system.[22] Despite the limited evidence on its impact on Chinese women, the emphasis represents the latest context associated with the revival of traditional culture. Given the promotion of women's well-being and the possible revival of traditional culture, it is therefore conclusive that the Chinese context has been, and remains, complex since 1978 with various forces in practice.

4.1.5   Summary

This section presented an overview to disentangle the Chinese context across different periods and demonstrate its complexity and dynamics. Given the findings, it is concluded that culture in China is far from the simplistic interpretation of Confucianism. Notably, since 1949 culture in China has been significantly shaped by Party-led modernization and its policies, as well as the persistent traditional cultural aspects. Accordingly, women's identity and experiences are not static but vary across time and context. The discussion in this section has highlighted the importance of clarifying the cultural context and identifying the relevant forces, which are able to foster the understanding of women in China.

4.2   *Funü yanjiu*: Studies of Women in China

To complement the previous historical overview, this section takes an alternative approach to women in China by examining the studies of women (*funü yanjiu*). More explicitly, the section will explore three major areas. It will look at (1) how the study of Chinese women has been framed by Chinese scholars and non-Chinese scholars, (2) how it is approached by the two groups, and (3) it will critically look at how the trajectories have changed over time and the implications for understanding Chinese women today. To answer such questions, the

section begins by distinguishing research conducted by Chinese scholars and by non-Chinese scholars, each with a brief assessment of the associated development in research focus and trajectories. The discussion will then focus on the two groups of studies with a comparative lens and the implications for the current state of the field will be considered.

4.2.1   Studies From Chinese Scholars

This section revisits the studies conducted by Chinese scholars, including publications in both Chinese and English. The earliest public debates about women in Chinese society began in the 1850s (Chen, 2003; Chow et al., 2004; Li & Zhang, 1994; Lü & Zheng, 1990). The discussion of women was not widespread until the period of the May Fourth Movement (1915–1925). For the first time in history, the situation of women in China was openly and extensively discussed, initiated by Chinese intellectuals (Chen, 2003). Numerous women's groups and journals specialized in addressing the "women's issues" (*funü wenti*) were established. Remarkably, it was estimated that within the first ten years of the May Fourth era, around 30 women-oriented journals were created (All-China Women's Federation, 1989). Topics for discussion have been highly diversified, ranging from but not limited to women's social interactions, equal access to education, financial independence, and reform of the traditional family system. Among all, four major issues were emphasized, which offered profound insights for later studies of women in China (Guo, 1999; X. J. Li, 1997). The first centered on the critics of feudal practices in traditional society. For instance, *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*), one of the popular journals, published a series of articles refuting Confucian ideology, which posited women as subordinate to men. The second focus reflected on the subordination of women in traditional society. It was generally concluded that women's reliance on financial matters was at the root of subordination. To potentially solve the issue of women's subordination, intellectuals pushed for women's equal right to education. As such, the third area is substantially oriented to the means to improve women's access to education. The fourth aspect of the discussion, and the most influential of all, was the introduction of Western ideology, notably Marxism (Chen, 2003). For instance, translated publications on the Marxist ideology of women's liberation were emerging from the Soviet Union (Guo, 1999). Active advocates of women's liberation also sought insights from the work of Marx, Engels, and early Russian feminine scholars (Thakur, 2006). Meanwhile, Chinese journals began to massively report on women in non-Chinese countries. The largest women-oriented journal, the *Journal of Women* (*Funü Zazhi*), drastically increased the ratio of Western-related articles in each volume to 50 percent and more after 1922 (Zhao & Han, 2012). Notably, women's liberation and feminist ideology in the Western context had been widely reported and later became important references for disentangling women's issues in China. In summary, the May Fourth era is a historical milestone in the development of studies about Chinese women. The period has also been defined as the first wave of studies of women

in China. The discussion indicates the significant aspects were highlighted as the basis of later studies. In the research trajectory and focus, the May Fourth era represents the beginning of Western scholarly influence on the studies of women in China. Furthermore, research disciplines such as sociology, history, and law from Western countries have been regarded as critical foundations for Chinese scholars to formulate systematic approaches to women's issues within the country (Du, 2002).

After the May Fourth Movement, *makesizhuyi funüguan* (the Marxist outlook of women) became a critical influence on studying women in China (Chen, 2003, 2007; Chow et al., 2004; Wei & Kang, 2003). It analyzes the origins of oppression, women's liberation, and the conditions for achieving women's rights. For instance, it was thought, according to Engel's view on "women questions", that gender hierarchy would disappear when women joined men in social production. This perspective is based on the classical Marxist assumption that society is a struggle for power and dominance, which originated from the competition among social classes in the areas of production and resource distribution. In this regard, when people are motivated to work for the collective interest rather than the private interest, the economy will benefit. The emphasis on Marxist ideology also sheds light on the particular political and social context that gives rise to the Marxist outlook on women. From a political point of view, Marxist ideology is the primary building block that shapes the CCP's structure and official ideology. In the same period, the reports and articles extensively introduced Marxist ideology, which further stimulated its promotion in society. Both factors strengthen the role of Marxist approaches and perspectives in conducting academic research within China. After the CCP came to power in 1949, Marxist ideology became a legitimate foundation for formulating state policies in the PRC. Since then, the Marxist outlook on women became the guiding principle for women's development. More explicitly, the framework of Marxist theories was applied to identify the problems encountered by Chinese women and to support women's liberation. Given its critical political role, the Marxist outlook has been posited as the main contributor to women's liberation in China (Kang, 2005; Rong, 2003). Its significance in the academic sphere is further enhanced by the research emphasis of the national women's organization All-China Women's Federation (ACWF). Due to its political origins, the ACWF actively adopted Marxist perspectives and approaches in its studies (Zheng, 1997). Still today, publications from the ACWF as well as its local branches and official research institute, Women's Studies Institute of China (WSIC), demonstrate a strong foundation of Marxist ideology. In this respect, the Marxist outlook continues to play a dominant role, both politically and academically, in studies of women conducted by Chinese scholars. It is also conclusive that at this initial stage, studies of women are dominated by the political ideology prevalent in China.

A new wave of studies began shortly after the 1978 reform. This is mainly attributable to the observable gender differentials corresponding to economic transition, coupled with the increasing access to Western perspectives brought

about by the "Opening-up Policy". Both factors shed light on the differences between women and men, and stimulate the reevaluation of women's issues in China. Yet, at this stage, the discussion substantially centered on exploring the disadvantageous situation of Chinese women (Tong, 2008). Topics such as employment and marriage were frequently highlighted to demonstrate the prominence of women's issues. In other words, studies of women's topics from the late 1970s to 1980s were characterized by description of the general situation rather than rigid academical analysis. In general, the studies start with a widely discussed issue, usually a problem commonly encountered by women. A major part of the studies propose solutions after identifying the causes. The problem-based and solution-oriented trajectory is one distinct approach to studying women within China, which remains evident today.

Significant changes in academic studies within China occurred with the hosting of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in 1995 (Chow et al., 2004, 2008; Tong, 2008; Wang, 2000a; Wang & Wang, 2012; Zheng, 1997). Before the 1990s, academic studies within China were massively reliant on domestic resources. Although the Western term "Women's Studies" was officially introduced in 1982, it has had little impact on academia (Wang, 1988). This is partly due to the language barrier. Followed the reform era, there were indeed improvements in access to international scholarship, but translations in the Chinese language were still scarce before the 1990s. The language gap kept many Chinese scholars from understanding the approaches of other countries. In this regard, one of the most direct effects of FWCW on academic studies within China was the creation of space for intellectual exchange between Chinese and international scholars. The exchange has helped to promote the integration of the Chinese approach with insights from women scholars outside China. Interestingly, preparation of the conference, led by the state, is regarded as more significant than the conference itself in promoting academic transition within China (Zheng, 1997). The changes are most noticeable in the areas of research scope and methodology. First, discussion of women's issues at conferences was publicly encouraged. As a consequence, there was a sharp increase in the number of research centers established before conferences, which expanded the scale of academic studies on women within the country (Du, 2001). With respect to research methods, theoretical and analytical perspectives from international scholarships and Western feminist theories were extensively studied during the preparation period. This period is also when the term "gender" began to be acknowledged by Chinese scholars. Access to new concepts and analytical tools triggered the transition from a solution-based framework to a more theoretical orientation in studying women in China.

After the 1990s, the theoretical emphasis shifted further towards an empirical approach. For instance, methods commonly observed in international scholarship, such as large-scale surveys and ethnography, started to emerge in the studies by domestic scholars (Wang, 2000a; Tong, 2008). In addition to the new empirical approaches, non-Chinese scholarship also stimulated the exploration of more diverse topics in China. According to Wang (2000b), within

the sociology discipline, ten areas are extensively studied.[23] Yet the adoption of theoretical and analytical tools from international (mostly Western) scholarship induces debates on *bentuhua* (indigeneity) of these frameworks according to the Chinese context. Notably, critiques pinpoint that a majority of studies conducted by Chinese scholars approach Chinese women as merely a case study of the Western framework (Chow et al., 2004, 2008; Du et al., 2020; Wang, 2006). Irrespective of the debates, it is certain that two distinct research approaches have resulted from Western influence. One approach is to extend the application of the Western framework with evidence in China (e.g. Wu, 2002; Zhang, 2003). The other approach emphasizes developing an analytical framework contextualized in the Chinese context, with reference to the applications of Western theories (e.g. Tong, 2002; Meng, 2004). Both approaches are explicitly highlighted in the 2021 annual conference co-organized by the ACWF and its official research institute, WSIC.[24] Remarkably, the theme of this recent conference was the indigeneity of the Marxist theory of women (*makesizhuyi funülilun bentuhua*) in the last 100 years and in the future, a clear justification of the central role of Marxist perspectives in the Chinese studies of women.

Given the unique historical background and political engagement, studies of women by Chinese scholars can be summarized by several characteristics. First, the Party-oriented sociopolitical factors continue to powerfully influence academic studies within China. More explicitly, it remains common for research to adopt a Marxist framework in studying women, especially studies from the ACWF and its affiliations. Yet most of the discussion demonstrates its implications for the studies of women in China (e.g. theoretical: Shi, 2012; Wei & Kang, 2003; women's liberation: Liu, 2010; Song, 2016; women's status: Yang, 2013), while critical approaches remain to be explored (with the notable exception of Li Xiaojiang: Li, 1988, 2000; Li & Zhang, 1994). The second feature is the strong tradition of a problem-based and solution-oriented focus in academic studies. Notably, recent publications in domestic core journals have focused on identifying detriments to women's well-being and development (Wang & Wang, 2012). This characteristic is partially explained by the dominance of the state-level policies.

For a long period after 1949, academic research on women's topics within China was conducted under the leadership of the ACWF. Given its unique political background, one of the ACWF's major responsibilities is to solve social problems, such that identifying problems and proposing solutions to women's issues are prioritized among the academic studies under its leadership. In this regard, the third feature is observed subject to the division of studies within China. In other words, research on women in China tends to be in two groups: ACWF and academia (Min, 1999). For the ACWF, its interest and study focus are justified by its political dedication. Its prominent position continues to expand by means of collaboration with regional governments in studying key issues. In recent years, the ACWF and its affiliations have dominated large-scale research studies within the nation. A notable example is the once-a-decade national survey on women's status, which began in 1990, in which the questions

comprise a broad range of aspects associated with women's experience.[25] More explicitly, apart from the standard survey, additional questions are designed to explore women's experience with domestic violence, property ownership, and political engagement. Yet the data are only accessible by affiliated domestic research institutes or scholars. Given its restricted nature, it is not surprising to find the pertinent literature published mainly in domestic Chinese journals. On the one hand, academia specializes on theoretical research, following the leadership of the ACWF, while on the other hand, it aims at establishing the academic field of women's studies through course teaching.

4.2.2   Studies From Non–Chinese Scholars

Women in China is one of the main research interests among international scholars and is an integral part of China studies. As distinct from scholars within China, non-Chinese scholars provide new perspectives to study women, characterized by a Western-oriented approach. In the early period, there were few studies on Chinese women from international scholars. One early work is from Olga Lang (1946), which summarized her field study of the family in China. In the book, she documented the lives of women in the Chinese family during the 1930s to 1940s and demonstrated how the status of women varied across time, space, and class. Her findings shed light on a unique perspective from other studies of a similar period, most of which assumed Chinese families as a fixed and uniform system within the country. The first wave of publications, mostly Western, emerged when foreign scholars began visiting China in the 1970s. A large part of the studies after 1970 was written by anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of contemporary literature, and most attempted to reveal the lives of Chinese women (Hershatter, 2004). During the period, new variations were introduced in contrast to the previously universal image of Chinese women. The new research topics emerged, including social change and women's development, reform and women's liberation, and family and marriage. For instance, Davin (1976) has studied the changing roles of women in Chinese society from 1949 until the early 1960s from an anthropological and sociological perspective. The book outlines the transformations in political context during the revolutionary period, the history of the ACWF, and changes in marriage and family life in rural areas. In the study by Wolf and Witke (1975), series of essays written by historians and sociologies highlight two remarkable themes. The first theme indicates the contradictory cultural stereotype in the society during the post-1949 period. In particular, "what women are" and "women should be" are not consistently demonstrated by the studies in the volume. The paradox also agrees with the argument in the previous section that the social and political context after 1949 obscured the images and experiences of women. In this case, a holistic investigation of cultural stereotypes is possible to clarify the confusion. The second theme pinpoints the importance of cultural accounts and the potential interpretation bias, especially in the attempt to find correlation among various factors.

China's economic reform and open-door policy in 1978 catalyzed the next upsurge of publications about women in China. Notable publications, such as Andors (1983), Stacey (1983), and Johnson ([1983] 2009), emerged almost simultaneously. Each selected a certain aspect of the state policy and analyzed the associated impacts on Chinese women. Johnson ([1983] 2009) focused on family reform and related policy. By comparing the family system before and after the CCP's revolutions, she argued that the political movements failed to address gender hierarchy or promote women's liberation. With more detailed descriptions, Andors (1983) undertook a closer investigation into the post-1949 development strategy. Studying the work units, she suggested that gender differentials were unaffected, with new ones created by the strategy's strong economic emphasis. Stacey (1983) departed from the methods of the previous two studies by drawing from other scholarship focusing on the family system in the revolutionary period. She concluded that the policies did not succeed in reforming the patriarchs within Chinese families based on a feminist perspective. Despite variations in research focus, the conclusions converge into one single theme: women's liberation in China remains incomplete, with issues unaddressed and new ones emerging from the revolutionary policies. The interpretation is not an outliner. Among studies conducted in the same period, Western scholars found a similar discrepancy between state rhetoric and what they observed in the field. Perceptions drawn from field studies substantially fortify the image of Chinese women formed from evidence collected in the 1970s and 1980s (see review by Hershatter, 2004). Explicitly, Chinese women from the period were described in terms of self-sacrificial sexuality, oppressed by the traditional practices, and receiving no exceptional benefits from the social transformations.

Economic transition and international engagement shifted scholars' focus to the corresponding impact on women in terms of socioeconomic and political contexts. New topics have emerged highlighting the gender gap in the labor market, such as employment opportunities (e.g. Cooke, 2001), wages (e.g. Gustafsson & Li, 2000), and access to education (e.g. Bauer et al., 1992). After the concept of "gender" was officially introduced into the West in the 1980s, it triggered a transition in the study of women in China. Previously, research mostly approached issues from a woman-centered perspective. In other words, women are represented by a single "unified, timeless", and "ineluctable" category (Hershatter, 2004, p. 994) and posited as the central subject of study. Women, in this case, are primarily identified by their biological sex. Instead, the concept of gender is distinguished from biological sexuality by emphasizing its socially constructed nature. The disentanglement of "sex" and "gender" is clearly explained by the classical definition from Ann Oakley in 1972:

> "Sex" is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. "Gender", however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into "masculine" and "feminine".
>
> (Oakley, [1972] 2015, pp. 21–22)

One key implication of gender is that differentials between women and men stem from and within social forces, subject to a biological cause. A gendered perspective expands the scope of the traditional investigation to identify different contextual factors, correlation among the factors, and changes across time. For instance, inspired by the early scholarship, subsequent studies of women in China with a gendered perspective focus on examining the regional society (e.g. Gaetano & Jacka, 2004; Solinger, 1999) and the subgroup of women affected by the reforms (e.g. ethnic group: Gillette, 2000, 2015; Hillman & Henfry, 2006; Makley, 2002). For academic studies, a gendered perspective also enables studies of women in China to cross disciplinary boundaries. Studies have expanded from having women as the central subject (study of women as a unitary category) to a gendered approach (study of gender in which women can be different). It is certain that gendered analysis has dominated recent studies of Chinese women. One explanation is the inclusive nature of the gender framework. According to the gendered perspective, women and men are easily identified categories. It enables the investigation to focus on contextual factors without further investigating the biological causes. For gender studies that focus on women, it provides a holistic method of studying women from different settings, such as region, ethnicity, and generation. In this respect, the study of gender is indeed the study of women and gender, and in the remaining discussion, I will not include women's studies as part of the broader term "gender studies" but will rigidly distinguish the two fields.

In the academic field of gender studies, it has been common, especially among Western scholars, to study women using feminist approaches (or feminist theory). Although a dominant approach, the definition of feminism remains a broad concept with ambiguous orientations. Details of the debates are beyond the scope of the present discussion. Instead, for the purpose of this study, one notable feature of the feminist approach should be highlighted. That is, the focus of feminist theory and approaches on investigating gender inequality – more explicitly, the situation of women in gender inequality. This feature primarily stems from the feminist movement that arose from the grassroots in Western countries to defend individual women's rights as equal to those of men. As a consequence, the feminist approach is perceived by many scholars as a lens to critically address women's oppression and seek solutions to change the status quo (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Based on its historical background and the definition of culture, the Western feminist approach can be summarized as a cultural approach. More explicitly, the research trajectories and ideational structure feature an individual-centered perspective, originating in grassroots feminist movements. It is therefore conclusive that the Western approach possesses a cultural view when studying Chinese women. Chinese women's identity, from the lens of Western scholars, is indeed a Western description of what Chinese women are and what Chinese women should be.

The cultural factor is justified by evidence from Western scholarship on Chinese women. Notably, before the reform era, the studies were woman-centered and mostly focused on the identity and experiences of Chinese women through the

lens of an outsider. In other words, a majority identified women's subordination and verified the image of Chinese women previously acknowledged by the international audience. Although the studies since 1978 have demonstrated outstanding diversity in topics and research trajectories, the primary objective to address women's unequal situation remains similar to the preceding publications. In this regard, it is clear that studies conducted by non-Chinese scholars, irrespective of the period of study, are influenced by a Western-oriented feminist approach when analyzing women in China. This argument will be further elaborated in Section 4.3.

4.2.3   Summary

This summary presents the shared ground and differences between views from Chinese and non-Chinese scholarship. Studies of women in China are divided into two major groups: those conducted by Chinese scholars and those by non-Chinese scholars.[26] In each group, the historical development is outlined, with an attempt to highlight the study traits. Comparing the two groups, several distinctive features are worth noting:

- First, studies within China started in an earlier period, which can be traced back to the May Fourth era. Nevertheless, common ground is observable between Chinese and international contexts: that is, the political movement played an active role in catalyzing the study of women.
- Second, research by non-Chinese scholars is relatively coherent and dominated by feminist theory. Indeed, the feminist approach itself stems from distinct Western roots. Less coherent are studies conducted by scholars within China, particularly those published in the Chinese language. This is mainly due to the import of Western approaches coupled with evolving political ideology and the socioeconomic context. In other words, the academic study of women within China has been continuously experiencing different influences. Besides, its Marxist outlook can potentially further obscure the state of the field. In spite of the ambiguity, it is certain that the state and its discourse on women will remain influential in the academic study of women in China.
- The final observable difference is the critical analysis that has been commonly adopted in non-Chinese scholarships since early times. This is less of a mainstream practice within China and is scarce among Marxist scholars. Marxist scholars, for instance, develop their studies upon the acceptance that production is the foundation for women's liberation in China. This partially explains the limited critical investigation, and in particular the investigation of potential negative correlation between economic development and women's situation.

In addition to the comparative view, I summarized the implications of historical survey in this section. I pursued studies of women in China as a general category that involves both domestic Chinese and non-Chinese scholarship.

Before systematically outlining the development path, it is important to note that Western ideas not only have influenced Chinese approaches in the recent period but have existed in the field since the very beginning. Explicitly, Chinese intellectuals have incorporated Marxist perspectives into their earliest discussions in the 1910s. Acknowledging the active role of Western perspectives, I identified the critical historical points during the development process that had profound impacts on academic studies of women in China.

As previously mentioned, the first important period is the May Fourth era, during which Marxist perspectives served as a prominent reference. This is also commonly regarded by domestic scholars as the period of the first wave of women's studies in China. The next period was the post-1949 era, during which the PRC leader of the time, Mao Zedong, emphasized women's liberation and mobilized women to participate in social production in line with men. Significant in this period was the Maoist discourse of women in addition to the initial Marxist perspectives. It was also the period when the domestic political setting began to reshape the original Marxist outlook of women. The third period is represented by the influence of Western approaches during the market-opening reform era. Western research approaches significantly enriched the academic studies of women in China and diversified the studies within China. Remarkably, the gender framework and feminist approaches are still extensively replicated among the English language research on Chinese women.

In the present state of the field, the study of women in China involves a complex set of focuses and trajectories. The status quo implies ambiguity, which brings additional challenges to understand women in China today. As illustrated in the preceding section, descriptions of women in China vary across contexts. In this section, the mixed descriptions can be explained by differences in research approaches. The variances can be classified into two major groups: perspectives from Chinese scholars and from non-Chinese scholars. Based on a historical overview, it is also notable that the views about women's situation in China have changed over time. In the present period, the study of Chinese women, in both Chinese and non-Chinese scholarship, is influenced by Western-oriented gender frameworks and feminist theories. The change in views over time and possible differences between Chinese and non-Chinese interpretations raise critical questions with regard to the conceptual framework. That is, given the changes in views and influences from the West, what are the indigenous starting points to define cultural stereotypes in the Chinese context? The question will be addressed in the following section by dismantling the possible Western impacts from the relevant analytical categories of the cultural stereotyping framework in the current Chinese discourse.

4.3   Gender Concepts in China

This section starts with the discussion of three key concepts in the study of women, namely women's studies, gender, and feminism. Each concept is highlighted due to not only its significant role in the overall gender research but

also its relevance to understanding gender in the particular Chinese context. More importantly, the three concepts contribute to the distinctive applications and implications of Western impacts on Chinese gender discourses. For instance, the imported term "women's studies" has resulted in diverse translations in the Chinese language. Yet the import of the Western concept to China involves not only linguistic translation. It influences the discourse in China, which potentially reproduces the Western-oriented cultural perspective in the Chinese context. In this regard, discussions of the three concepts indicate the cultural orientations of gender discourses in China and suggest the salience of clarifying the concept of stereotypes in terms of domestic evidence. The last section, therefore, will apply the precedent discussions to further clarify the core analytical term, "stereotypes", from a Chinese perspective.

4.3.1 *"Women's Studies" (*funü yanjiu, funüxue, *and* nüxingxue)

Since its first introduction in the 1980s, the term "women's studies" has had three versions in China: *funü yanjiu*, *funüxue*, and *nüxingxue*. The first term, *funü yanjiu*, is from the earliest time and is a broad concept referring to both academic and nonacademic discussion of women in China. The discourse of *funü yanjiu* is subject to social and political settings. Notably, women's studies in China "was initially designed for meditating upon the equality that Chinese women had supposedly achieved according to the law established by the socialist revolution of 1949", rather than the feminist movement as in the West (Li & Zhang, 1994, p. 140). Its development is characterized by major milestones. The first was the May Fourth era that initiated the discussion of women, and the second was the 1978 reform era. In this regard, it can be interpreted as an academic study (*yanjiu*) with women (*funü*) as the central subject. Despite its inclusive nature, *funü yanjiu* rarely covers issues of *nüquan* (women's rights) and has been regarded as a separate group from gender (*shehui xingbie/xingbie*) studies. *Funüxue* and *nüxingxue* are more explicit notions that pinpoint the academic discipline of women's studies. Both terms can be generally defined as specializing in the study of women. Alternatively, as explained by Li (1986), *funüxue* (*nüxingxue*) is to add women as a subject to the existing academic disciplines, such as *funüshi* (women's history) and *funü shehuixue* (sociology of women). The two terms are derived from *funü yanjiu*. The development of *funüxue* and *nüxingxue* started in the early 1990s and was initiated mainly by academics. The core task was to emphasize various aspects in the development and promotion of women's studies as an academic discipline. For instance, there is a group of scholarship within China that focuses on exploring and analyzing the paths in promoting *funüxue* and *nüxingxue* (e.g. Chen, 2010; Du & Wang, 2010; Wang, 2004; Wei, 2004, 2006).

The example of "Women's Studies" sheds light on two possible implications of the Western concept in the Chinese context. The first issue is translation, and in this case translation has resulted in three different variations. The reversal, that is translating Chinese terms into a foreign language, can potentially result in diversification or even ambiguity. In respect to cross-national translation, the

linguistic aspect is usually not a core issue but, more importantly, is its cultural interpretation. As asserted by anthropologist Asad (1986), cultural translation should always account for the specific political and socioeconomic settings. This is an important implication and relates to the later discussion in this chapter. A key question in this case: is culture translatable and able to be reproduced across nations? This will be further exemplified by the subsequent discussion on feminism. Meanwhile, it is certain that transnational discourses are not only linguistic translation of texts but involve reproduction in line with the target culture (Venuti, 2017). The second implication is the omitted subfield within "women studies" in the Chinese context. Explicitly, classical Western and global women's studies include a wide range of topics such as women's rights and feminist movements. Yet the latter have so far received limited attention from scholars, which is mainly attributed to the different historical background in China. In short, women's studies in China did not originate from a similar setting, such as the distinctive Western feminist movement. Rather, it is embedded in political ideology coupled with the social changes in China (Li, 1998). The primary causes for the narrower scope of "women's studies" in China are closely related to the discourse of feminism in China, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

4.3.2   "Feminism"

"Feminism" is a broad term that is difficult to define. This section focuses on the discourse of feminism after its first introduction in China. Specifically, a historical approach will be adopted to review the change in discourse and the key agents in the transition. I will also demonstrate that the distinct interest of each agent creates a dynamic discourse of feminism in China until the present. The history-mapping attempts to highlight the political and social context in China give birth to an indigenous discourse of feminism that gradually departs from the Western interpretation.

Feminist thoughts were introduced in China through the translation of Western feminist publications. In other words, linguistic translation is the first key determinant that shapes the initial discourse of feminism in China. According to feminist translation studies, the translator's biological sex and personal ideology can potentially affect the interpretation of the original Western feminist work (Li, 2016; Yu, 2011, 2015). Feminism is first translated as *nüquan zhuyi* ("women's power or rights + ism"), which highlights the nature of the Western women's movement striving for women's equal political rights (Min, 2016, p. 42). As explained previously, the distinct Western political background that gave rise to feminism led to a cultural dimension of the concept. Western feminism takes on an individualistic character in arguing women's equal rights, which is distinct from the Chinese case. Although at first glance the Party-led women's liberation movement in China since 1949 has aligned with Western feminism in emphasizing women's equal rights, its nature still varies from the Western conception of feminism. Women's rights in China, as demonstrated in Section 4.2, is conceptualized by the paramount state as part of the

state-constructed women's identity. In other words, what women's rights are and what women's rights should be in China are explicitly defined by the state. In this regard, it is clear that the Western and the Chinese conceptions of feminism are fundamentally different. The former features an individual-centered perspective whereas the latter is characterized by a state-centered perspective in discussing women's rights. Given the contrast, it is therefore not surprising to observe the transformation of the Western concept of feminism into an indigenous discourse by means of Chinese interpretations.

The first transformation of Western feminism into the Chinese interpretation dates from the pre-1949 period, and yet the discourse of feminism in China remains debatable. As the origin of the transformation, the Marxist outlook of women was first adopted by the CCP after its establishment as the core national ideology guiding women's liberation and academic discussion within China. After the CCP came to power in 1949 and established the ACWF, the political arena continued to echo the ideology and emphasize Marxist theory to study women's issues. Acknowledging the paramount state agency in tackling women's oppression and promoting gender equality during the post-1949 period, some scholars describe the phenomenon as "state socialist feminism" with Chinese characteristics. Yet this scholarship remains inconclusive in interpreting state feminism in China. A common interpretation, dominated by Western literature, is mainly based upon the argument that China is a country with a socialist patriarchal and centralized power structure. In this regard, scholars reckon that there is little room for women's involvement (e.g. Angeloff & Lieber, 2012; Jiang, 2019). In contrast to this view are the Chinese domestic scholars countering with empirical evidence and claiming that Chinese women indeed have played a role in state feminism (e.g. Zheng, 2005; Zhou, 2019). Despite the ongoing debate, it is still notable that after its introduction, Western feminism has begun to form an indigenous shape that aligns with the Chinese political setting. It is also clear that during the transformation process, the state and the ACWF were the two primary active players who worked hand in hand in establishing the Chinese variant of feminism within the political discourse. The conceptual change of feminism in China during the post-1949 period has been described by Elisabeth Croll ([1979] 2011):

> Feminism is not an easy term to define. In China its meaning has been constantly reinterpreted. For the first two decades it was used to denote the exclusive advocacy of women's rights, later it referred to the women's movement which worked to forward the interests of its members within the context of the wider revolutionary movement to alter the basic structures of the society. In the last two decades the term feminism has become much more a term of abuse referring to those who exclusively pursue women's interests without regard for the forms which political and economic systems take.
>
> (Croll, [1979] 2011, p. 3)

After China's opening up in 1978, feminism reemerged in discussion with the second wave of women's studies from Western scholars. It was also the period

during which the *nüquan zhuyi* (women's rights + ism) was reexamined in the Chinese context. Yet academic discussion of *nüquan zhuyi* subject to bourgeois feminism was still scant within China due to political considerations (Min, 2016). The new translation of feminism was created in the 1990s, *nüxing zhuyi* ("femininity + ism"), and remains a popular term in women's studies in China (Min, 2016, p. 42). An important reason is that the translation replaces the specific notion of *nüquan* (women's rights) with the attempt to depart from the original political emphasis and to enclose more aspects, including gender, culture, and social influences. Nevertheless, in contemporary society, both translations of feminism exist. Although the indigenous translation has been widely adopted by the ACWF, its associated researchers, and Chinese scholars of women's studies, the original Western feminism has been imported to China via various channels. For instance, the cross-national academic activities have introduced new perspectives from Western feminist scholarship to Chinese academic discussions on women's issues. In addition, the increase in education levels has allowed more individuals to access Western feminist scholarship without translation. These examples of a more globalized China help to directly introduce the Western discourse of feminism to the contemporary society. As a consequence, in today's China, a dynamic discourse of feminism is observed. On the one hand, the political discourse of feminism as led by the state and the ACWF remains active. This particular cultural dimension is prominent and closely attached to the national ideology and political agenda, which can be defined as the Chinese discourse of feminism. On the other hand, the discourse in China also involves another group of agents, namely feminist scholars, grassroots NGOs, and feminist activists who interpret feminism from a wide-ranging perspective. Among all these, the Chinese political discourse of feminism and classical Western feminism are two perspectives that shape the dynamic.

This suggests that the two translations of feminism in the Chinese language are not solely about linguistic interpretation. More importantly, the apparent contrast between the widely advocated Chinese translation *nüxing zhuyi* (femininity + ism) and the Western-oriented *nüquan zhuyi* (women's right + ism) indicates the active role of culture stemming from the unique historical and socio-political context. Nevertheless, the duality of the two concepts has brought about a dynamic discussion of feminism in China. With the increasingly globalized socioeconomic context, it is likely that the discourse of feminism within China will become more dynamic with the interplay of perspectives from indigenized feminism and classical Western feminism. The next section extends the discussion to gender discourse and further examines how the transnational concepts have affected the construction of gender discourse when it meets the Chinese context.

4.3.3   "Gender"

Gender is a more recent concept in comparison with feminism. It was not until the 1980s that scholars started to study gender differences. The notion of gender, as defined previously, originated from a Western context and can be

characterized by its cultural (or social) nature. This section will examine how the gender lens is contextualized in China and shapes the gender discourse within the country. Following from the preceding discussion, translation of gender in Chinese signifies the primitive discourse of the term in China. Similar to the previous translations, gender has two forms in the Chinese language: *xingbie* (gender/sex) and *shehui xingbie* (social gender/sex). Yet, unlike the designated translations of women's studies and feminism, debates about the two translations of gender endure. For instance, feminist historian Wang Zheng (1997) is not fully convinced by *shehui xingbie* but still favors the term with respect to *xingbie*. She argues that the terms *shehui* (social) and *xingbie* (gender/sex) have been straightforward for the audience in China, while the consolidation of *shehui* and *xingbie* creates a unique new concept. In this regard, *xingbie* (gender/sex) is likely to create conceptional bias and is incapable of conveying Western feminism's notion of gender. An opposite perspective is expressed by Li Xiaojiang (1997, 2002, 2005), a prominent feminist scholar within China. She rejects *shehui xingbie*, believing that the translation overtly emphasizes social factors and can potentially create conflict with *ziran xingbie* (biological sex) in Chinese language discourse. In spite of the gap, the two terms are applied interchangeably in Chinese language scholarship. In general, *xingbie* is more commonly referred to in the discussion of gender research methodology, while *shehui xingbie* is adopted to highlight the socially constructed nature of gender (Yang, 2015). The debates and inconsistencies with regard to gender in China suggest important aspects embedded in a concept, namely contextual elements, which are difficult if not entirely impossible to transport across national boundaries.

Acknowledging challenges for the domestic context to accommodate a Western-constructed concept, the next question is: to what extent has the Western concept influenced the gender discourse in China? Here, I will focus on gender discourse associated with women in China, since Chinese women are the main subject of the overall study. The discussion first begins with the discourse in traditional Chinese society. The introduction of gender provides a different perspective for Chinese scholars to examine history. More explicitly, through the gender lens, Chinese scholars realize that most historical texts have been written by men. This suggests that the narratives center on men and contain strong masculine characteristics, by which the subordination of Chinese women in traditional society has been largely shaped. Gender approaches have been adopted by Chinese scholars to critically reexamine the gender description and explore the role of women in history, something most notable among historians (e.g. Gao, 2015; Lu, 2005; Min, 1994). Yet, gender discourse of this period, especially the imperial era, is only accessible through historical texts. The discourse, in this case, is therefore significantly characterized by male discourse, which has been deeply embedded with the culture in the traditional society. The male-dominated discourse also added further restrictions on women by normalizing their behavior in terms of what women are and how women should behave (X. J. Li, 1997).

The next distinctive gender discourse is characterized by the development of a socialist state and the centralized power structure after 1949. As part of the political agenda, gender differences were intentionally deemphasized and replaced by the discourse of "women equal to men" and "women hold up half the sky". Discussion of women's problems also mainly aimed to fulfill the political interest of women's liberation. As previously mentioned, the primary purpose of downplaying gender differences was to mobilize women to participate in social production. In this regard, it is conclusive that the gender discourse during the post-1949 era was primarily determined by political discourse from the state. Despite the introduction of the gender perspective, Chinese scholarship, in general, agrees on the positive consequences of the state-dominated gender discourse, namely in the improvement in women's status and well-being. Meanwhile, opposite perspectives began to emerge, given the gender approach. For instance, some critiques point out that policies and discourse are still mostly decided by men, such that women's voices have rarely been heard (e.g. Croll, 1995; Jin, 2006).

Since the market transition in 1978, gender discourse in China has become more diversified, if not increasingly paradoxical. During the post-reform period, discussions of women's issues at the local and grassroots level began to emerge, in addition to the gender-indifferent political discourse. This is, on the one hand, attributed to the globalization of China and the introduction of Western feminist and gender perspectives. On the other hand, women's unemployment and workplace discrimination became more overt under the market-oriented economic system. In the increasingly competitive labor market, discourses such as "women should go back home" and images of the "good woman" and "good mother" started to gain attention in local media and news, coupled with public discussion about the division of work in the family (Tong, 2010). These discourses emphasize the traditional gender role of women as primary family caregivers. According to the Chinese Women's Social Status Survey, the only national-scale survey, which is conducted every ten years, the revival is justified. Regarding the narratives "*nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei*" (men specialize in work outside the home domain, women specialize in work within the home domain) and "*gandehao buru jiadehao*" (better marrying well than having a successful career), there are more women in 2010 than 2000 who agree with these descriptions, which suggests growing acceptance of the traditional form of division of labor in the family (Xu, 2016). The resurgence of traditional gender attitudes also points to the critical role of the Chinese mainstream media in constructing the gender discourse (Sun & Chen, 2015). Yet the revival of traditional attitudes only accounts for a part of the overall discourse. With the growing economic opportunities, Chinese women who achieve notable gains in leadership roles have also begun to receive attention from the public. Women business elites, especially female entrepreneurs and CEOs, have been publicized as independent and competent women in modernized China. Nevertheless, in certain cases women's accomplishments in the public sphere are not appreciated, which is partly attributable to the

persistence of traditional gender discourse. For instance, *nü qiangren* (career-oriented powerful woman) is a common euphemism for being unable to fulfill the family caregiver role. The term is closely related to the performativity of gender. *nü qiangren* is the literal Chinese translation of the Western term "superwoman". Similar to its meaning in the English language, the translated term refers to women with a dedication to succeed or those who have already attained success due to their exceptional abilities. Yet in recent years there has been a growing recognition that *nü qiangren* has to possess certain masculine characteristics in order to succeed in a career. For instance, they posit career as a central priority, a decision similar to men. As a consequence, some *nü qiangren* are unable to pay sufficient attention to their families and their marriages fail, a violation of prescriptive stereotypes. It is not completely impossible to find discourses about female business leaders, including a common underlying implication that if one strives to succeed in a career, a certain part of family responsibilities can hardly be fulfilled, and vice versa (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). In contrast to the traditional role, *nü qiangren* has become a negative description highlighting women's ambition and lack of femininity (Aaltio & Huang, 2007; Jiang, 2009; Leung, 2003).

In today's China, major players are shaping the gender discourse, including the state, traditional culture, marketization, and globalization. A product of the globalization process is that Western perspectives have an important influence on the overall gender discourse in China. Nevertheless, the extent to which Western perspectives affect the overall gender discourse within China remains debatable. One potential factor that leads to the ambiguity is the rigid domestic arena shaped by the state and traditional cultural discourse in China. With multiple forces in effect simultaneously, the resultant overall discourse is not only complex but highly dynamic. Moreover, the process involves an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction of understanding about women. In this regard, the gender discourse is a contributor to culture and prescriptions, which can potentially affect an individual's behavior. Thus, clarifying the components and process of gender discourse in a specific time and context is an essential step towards further analyzing its social consequences.

4.3.4   "Stereotypes"

Preceding sections attempted to disentangle Western impacts from Chinese discourses. Discussions of three different concepts converge into one major theme: the salience of contextualizing concepts in China. As such, this section focuses on defining stereotypes in the Chinese context, that is, in terms of domestic evidence. The discussion will clarify the analytical concept to sustain the application of the cultural stereotyping framework in China.

The term "stereotype" generally refers to beliefs about a particular group of individuals. Gender stereotypes, for example, are shared beliefs by men and women about what women and men typically do (description), and what men and women should or ought to do (prescription). Gender stereotyping in China

can be traced back to the distinctive gender roles in traditional society. It is a general belief and a common practice for women in traditional China to be the primary caretaker in the *jia*/family. In addition, ancient Chinese philosophies, dominated by Confucianism, further reinforce gender role expectations with explicit behavioral doctrines. On the one hand, the cultural norms and beliefs in traditional society construct the gender stereotype that generalizes what women and men typically do. On the other hand, the common beliefs and practices, in parallel with the doctrines, also perpetuate gender stereotypes by prescribing what women and men should do. As demonstrated by the historical outline in the opening section, gender stereotypes in traditional culture are characterized by the clear division of labor between women and men. In other words, men should work outside the home and fulfill the role of breadwinner (*nan zhu wai*), while women were expected to stay in the private sphere and were obligated to fulfill the role of caregiver (*nü zhu nei*). In the later period, the emergence of socialism triggered an extended form of gender stereotypes, mainly dominated by the political ideology of gender equality and women's liberation. New beliefs, such as women should have access to education and participate in social production, were more commonly shared, especially in urban regions. Yet these emerging gender beliefs under socialism anticipated that women would fulfill their traditional role as caregivers while at the same time participating in productive activities. In other words, the advocation of women's labor market engagement extended women's traditional domestic role with an additional role in social production. Gender stereotypes, in this case, are further complicated by two parallel sets of beliefs and prescriptions in practice, shaped by traditional gender roles and political ideology, respectively.

Although the state attempted to reduce the burden of childcare through work units, the primary role of women as caregivers remains intact. It is also noteworthy that the work unit's childcare was only available to women who were employed. For unemployed women, the extended gender stereotype has created a dilemma. Housewives, particularly in urban regions, were regarded as "parasites completely dependent on [their husbands]", given the shared belief that women should participate in production (Davin, 1975, p. 367). In this way, a series of policies, regulations as well as national campaigns, socialism, and the associated state-socialist feminism has reshaped gender stereotypes with clear descriptions about what women and men are, and how women and men should be.

Rapid economic development since 1978 has further increased the economic opportunities but created new issues related to gender stereotypes. For instance, increasingly diversified jobs have induced the stereotypical attitude of what is an appropriate occupation for women, and what is not. The stereotype of what is not suitable for women is reflected in discriminatory job advertisements, which state "male applicants only". Occupations such as teaching or civil service are typically regarded as jobs with a stable income while allowing women to fulfill the role within the family. Similarly, there are stereotypical attitudes of how far women should climb on the career ladder. As previously mentioned,

from a cultural perspective career-oriented women are not valued in the public discourse. In addition, it is evident that persistent stereotypes exist regarding leadership positions. Men and women both share the perception that managers should possess characteristics that are more commonly ascribed to men than to women (Schein, 2001). In this regard, women who strive to achieve management positions will be viewed as lacking desirable female characteristics (Woodhams et al., 2015). Thus, gender stereotypes are still closely attached to traditional gender roles and attitudes, which are in conflict with the political ideology of gender equality. In other words, the family role and traditional perceptions of women have not been eradicated but exist in parallel with an additional stereotypical belief created under the political ideology on gender.

The second notable example of stereotypes in China stems from geographical differences, namely rural–urban differences. Many studies continue to show that rural-born individuals have a lower possibility to attain higher education and secure a job after graduation (e.g. Golley & Kong, 2017; Li et al., 2015). A recent finding by Guang and Kong (2010) further suggest that, despite the increase in overall educational level, women are still prejudiced in terms of their gender and rural *hukou* by hiring practices. In the post-reform period, the state attempted to reform the *hukou* system by allowing the relocation of *hukou* to provide qualified migrant labor but the intrinsic stereotypes are still profound (e.g. Cooke & Zhao, 2021; Qian & Qian, 2017; Qian et al., 2020). In this regard, the rural–urban divide not only creates spatial discords in the socioeconomic context but, more importantly, also shapes cultural stereotypes in social practices stemming from the regional identity. In respect of the private sphere, the previous section suggested the persistence of family traditions in China at large. Based upon recent data from the China General social survey, Hu and Scott (2016) find that people from western rural towns and villages exhibit significantly more traditional attitudes towards patrilineality than their counterparts from relatively more urbanized and industrialized regions. Interestingly, the study identifies an exception that people from eastern towns and villages, despite locating in urbanized regions, still show strong attitudes towards patrilineality. The exception in eastern towns and villages is not completely at odds, given the evidence that the traditional family system has been mostly preserved in some of the most developed regions in China, such as Shenzhen.

According to these discussions, it is clear that stereotyping in China is multifaceted. More explicitly, its general definition of shared belief is characterized by culture and practices in traditional Chinese society, political, social, and economic settings in contemporary China, as well as regional variables. In this regard, stereotyping in China requires interpretation with regard to the specific contextual aspects, a characteristic similar to the notion of culture. The complexity of the Chinese context with regard to culture and stereotypes further justifies the significance of a flexible framework to capture the various contextual aspects and provide a holistic interpretation of women's situation in China.

4.4   Chapter Summary

Three different approaches are adopted in this chapter to explore the situation of Chinese women. According to the historical lens, possible changes in the situation of Chinese women are highlighted in terms of the evolution in political and socioeconomic settings. Notably, the broad context is complex and dynamic in nature but highly relevant in understanding women's identity and experiences in China. In the second section, an alternative approach was utilized to evaluate the academic studies of Chinese women by scholars within China and abroad. After revisiting the different research perspectives and trajectories, there is conclusive evidence that the academic field within China is different from non-Chinese academic studies. In particular, academic studies in China are characterized by the political background, which is under strong influence of Marxist approaches and thoughts. Given the vastly diversified research trajectories which have emerged in different time periods, the starting points for descriptions of women's situation and the approach to understanding Chinese women are obscured. Hence, in the last section I revisited the major concepts in gender discourses in China by dismantling the Western impacts and illustrated the salience of contextualizing the analytical categories of cultural stereotyping frameworks in Chinese settings. The next chapter will define the business context by exploring the workplace in China. More explicitly, details of the Chinese workplace, as well as the nature of business entities, will extend the current macro-level discussions with additional meso-level views to prepare for subsequent study of women's career experiences.

Notes

1 Acknowledging the different definitions of "traditional", the term is adopted in a general and static form for the purposes of this study. "Traditional" in the text generally refers to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in China due to the references heavily concentrating on descriptions during the period. Otherwise, specific periods will be explained.
2 Baker's (1979) descriptions of traditional China focus on pre-twentieth-century China.
3 "Three Teachings" mainly refers to Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.
4 The moral framework is mainly based on Confucian five virtues: benevolence (*ren*), rightness (*yi*), ritual (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*).
5 There are two prominent classics: *Li ji* (Record of Ritual) and *Yi li* (Etiquette and Ritual).
6 Two other widely recognized philosophical conceptualizations of gender during the same period are *yin–yang*, and *nei–wai*. The *yin–yang* schema distinguishes the relationship between husband and wife, in which the husband is superior (*yang*) and the wife is inferior (*yin*). *Nei–wai* defines the division of labor between men and women in which women's role is in the internal sphere (*nei*), while men's role is in the external sphere (*wai*). Nevertheless, Confucianism is a more holistic philosophy in capturing both concepts.
7 Reasons for footbinding and its persistence are still debated among historians. There is varied evidence of footbinding in rural and urban China. Bossen and colleagues (2011, p. 348) argue that "footbinding was not only practiced by elite or urban populations, it was also widespread among rural women". On the contrary, other historians argue that the practice was not popular in rural areas due to women's participation in farming (e.g. Drucker, 1981).

8 The clause is translated from the original Chinese text:《中华人民政治协商会议共同纲领》第六条. Detail is available at www.law-lib.com/law/law_view.asp?id=283576

9 Definition of the Chinese state and its relationship to the CCP in the post-1949 period remain debatable and inconclusive. As summarized in the latest review (Thornton, 2021, p. 4), "the Party's relationship to the Chinese state is not necessarily a straightforward one, nor has it remained constant over time". Some scholars adopt notions such as "party-state" (critical review see Snape & Wang, 2020) or "state-party" (e.g., Brødsgaard, 2018) to pinpoint the prevailing interactions between the Party and the Chinese state in practice.

10 For a holistic overview about the research on the Marriage Law focused on rural areas, see Diamant (2000a).

11 In the same year, the CCP officially announced China's transition to socialism (Meisner, 1999).

12 According to official descriptions, total number of employees (*zhigong renshu*) refers to those employed in the sector of ownership by the people (*quanmin suoyouzhi*) and is differentiated from the total number of participants in the labor force. There is also no available official data about the labor force participation of women.

13 There is no official overview about the various situation across provinces. A summary is available from www.163.com/dy/article/GQ0BTVKA05509UST.html (Chinese text)

14 News report about the submission of the proposal is published on www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202112/3530883d59d44cd0a29aeb1f2be3fcb6.shtml. The full text of the proposal is available from www.cnwomen.com.cn:8080/Resource_online/phpad/files/2112/24/1640345943913928.pdf (Chinese text)

15 The official announcement includes a wide-ranging policy comment which aims to address the aging population. One central theme is to improve the well-being of the elderly. For the full announcement see www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11-24/content_5653181.htm (Chinese text).

16 The discussion in this part is based on details about the one-child policy and its impact. Some notable contributors are Greenhalgh (2005, 2008, 2013), Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005), and Croll and colleagues (1985). See Zhang (2017) for a recent review of the one-child policy, and Cai and Feng (2021) for pertinent literature.

17 The official news release of the report in 2021, 《《二〇二一年全国姓名报告》发布》, is available from www.mps.gov.cn/n2253534/n2253535/c8349222/content.html (Chinese text); the 2020 report, 《《二〇二〇年全国姓名报告》发布》, is published at www.mps.gov.cn/n2253534/n2253535/c7725981/content.html (Chinese text).

18 This is drawn from the official statements: "State Council Circular on Issuing 'State Council Temporary Measures on Providing for Old, Weak, Sick, and Handicapped Cadres'" and "State Council Temporary Measures on Workers' Retirement, Resignation", available from www.gov.cn/zwgk/2012-05/07/content_2131567.htm (Chinese Text).

19 The full official document, 《女职工劳动保护特别规定》, is available from www.gov.cn/zwgk/2012-05/07/content_2131567.htm (Chinese text).

20 The full document is published at www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-09/27/content_5639412.htm (Chinese text).

21 For the official announcement see www.gov.cn/zhengce/2017-01/25/content_5163472.htm (Chinese text).

22 The official announcement and the document are available from www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202102/t20210203_512359.html (Chinese text).

23 Including social stratification, socialization, employment, culture and education, health, public policy, marriage and family, crime, women's development, and comparative and historical studies (Wang, 2000b).

24 A summary of the annual conference presentations centering on the central theme is available at www.wsic.ac.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=3&id=17040 (Chinese text).

25 The latest survey,《第四期中国妇女社会地位调查》, was completed in 2021 and a brief overview of the key results is available at www.wsic.ac.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=3&id=17045 (Chinese text).

26 This is different from the classification based on the language of scholarship. The aim is to contrast the insider–outsider perspective.

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5   Workplace in China

5.1   Introduction

The previous chapter disentangled the various aspects – namely social, political, and economic variables – which actively shape the broader Chinese context. These macro-level parallels, although mixed in the narratives, are notably relevant to understanding the situation of women in China. In this chapter, the discussion will narrow from the macro-level to explore the meso-level organizational context. More explicitly, the chapter extends the previous discussion about the Chinese context by exploring the business arena to further specify the variable of "where" in the analytical framework. The primary objective is to define the Chinese workplace subject to individual career experiences, particularly those of women. The meso-level organizational variables, as stated in Chapter 3, are salient to understanding the hierarchical system that directly defines an individual's job ladder. Equally important is the culture shaped by the organizational structures that is relevant to individual career experience. To begin the discussion, the first section provides an overview of the Chinese workplace in terms of the identity perspective. Given the notable economic changes triggered by the 1978 reform, the discussion will be divided into workplace settings before and after 1978 and explore the possible differences. The previous discussion implies that workplaces in China vary across rural and urban areas. Whereas in rural areas, specialized in agricultural production, organized *danwei* were developed for industrial production after 1949. The urban context featured state-owned and state-controlled enterprises, which represent the earliest form of today's business workplace context. Thus, the discussion will center on urban workplaces and their association with gender for the purpose of the present study. After exploring the past and present forms of the Chinese workplace associated with women's career experiences, the discussion will adopt an alternative approach to identify the distinctive gender dimension of the Chinese business context.

5.2   The Workplace Before 1978

In the post-1949 centrally planned economy, China's workplaces were dominated by the *danwei* (work-unit) system. The unique institutional structure and its profound influence on social life have attracted substantial research

interest from scholars of sociology, economics, and political scientists in the past decades. The detailed descriptions offer a multifaceted view of the *danwei* system, which is beyond the scope of the current discussion (for a review of Chinese scholarship on *danwei*, see L. L. Li, 2002). Lü and Perry (1997) provide a relatively comprehensive overview with contributions by scholars from multiple disciplines. In particular, the historical evidence sheds light on the roots of *danwei*, which can be traced back to pre-1949 China (for a more recent historical view see Bray, 2005). Acknowledging its long history, I first clarify the notion of *danwei* following its official introduction as a nationwide system in the post-1949 era. Recognizing that the *danwei* system was radically transformed by the 1978 reform, the introduction thus mainly draws from early scholarship attempting to demonstrate its prominence in the lives of individuals before the reform. In this regard, I will highlight the relevant characteristics of *danwei* to individuals' experiences, particularly those of women, rather than diving into every facet of the system.

The term *danwei* literally means unit, which can be referred to as a unit of measurement or of organization (Lü & Perry, 1997). In other words, *danwei* by itself is a broad concept and requires specification. In most studies, *danwei* has been commonly interpreted as a work-unit (*gongzuo danwei*), with explicit reference to the basic meaning of organization. Yet, as will be explained in the next section, it is notable that *danwei* has a broader meaning extending beyond the basic meaning of the workplace. To clarify the concept of *danwei*, it is essential to examine several classification approaches. One classification is to group the various types of *danwei* in terms of economic sectors. Before 1978, the economy was in general divided into two major sectors: the state and the collective sector (Lin & Bian, 1991). The state sector involved state-owned organizations such as schools, hospitals, government agencies, and state-owned enterprises. The collective sector referred to organizations controlled by government on the city, county, and district levels. According to these two major sectors, China's workplace was characterized by state *danwei* and collective *danwei*. Early studies have identified that the state–collective division contributed to the wage differences between state and collective employees (e.g. Davis, 1988; Lin & Bian, 1991; Whyte, 1984). Furthermore, it is evident that the division results in the gender wage gap. Davis (1988) reveals that throughout the 1970s, women on average receive a lower wage than men, a result echoing the finding by Whyte (1984). In addition to the state and collective categories, Lü and Perry (1997) suggest operation and hierarchical status as two alternative approaches to classification. With respect to operations, *danwei* is categorized into *qiye danwei* (enterprise units), *shiye danwei* (nonprofit units), and *xingzheng danwei* (administrative units). Hierarchical status, on the other hand, divides *danwei* into *zhongyang danwei* (central units), *difang danwei* (local units), and *jieceng danwei* (basic units). The evidence implies that the basic meaning of *danwei* as a working unit involves a broad range of organizations, which requires specification in accordance with the study context. With respect to the current study focus, therefore, *danwei* refers to business organizations, including enterprises in the state and collective sector.

As stated, studies also reveal that *danwei* is not merely a work arena. Its unique institutional characteristics have been embedded in the society and profoundly affect an individual's life (e.g. Lü & Perry, 1997; Walder, 1988; Yang, 1989). To capitalize on the existing literature, the following highlights some of the key characteristics of *danwei* that are relevant to the present study. The multifaceted *danwei* is characterized by its functions. In general, the *danwei* system was established to fulfill three major purposes: economic, political, and social (e.g. Bjorklund, 1986; Lu, 1989; Sévigny et al., 2009). The economic function refers to the production of goods as well as the allocation of resources. Liu (2000) claims that the functions of *danwei*, including production, supply, and mobilization of personnel, should follow both macro-level economics and political planning. To ensure effective implementation of policies, he suggests the internal structure of the *danwei* system duplicates the administrative structure of the planned economy. In addition to economic accounts, *danwei* also serves as a political instrument. The political functions primarily involve, but are not limited to, mobilizing political participation and implementing political decisions to achieve political and social control (Lü & Perry, 1997; Stockman, 1994). *Danwei* as a management tool has been well illustrated in pioneering Western scholarship (e.g. Parish & Whyte, [1978] 1980; Walder, 1983, 1988). Based on the study of state industrial enterprise (state work unit), Walder (1983, 1988) argues that the Party's authority is attained through the dependency of subordinates on superiors in an organization. In addition to wages, the state unit provides facilities such as free housing, childcare, and healthcare, as well as social security, including employment and retirement benefits. In this regard, the multifunctional *danwei* have offered little alternative for workers. Besides, the allocation of resources also greatly depends on the relationship with superiors. Both aspects strengthen the dependency of employees on their leaders, as well as on the *danwei*. The comprehensive welfare and security provisions shed light on the social functions of *danwei*. Particularly in the case of state-owned enterprises, *danwei* have become a "self-sufficient and multifunctional social community" (Lü & Perry, 1997, p. 9), which has been referred to as *danwei shehui* (work–unit society) (Li, 1996; Stockman, 1994; Tian & Liu, 2010). In other words, members can meet almost all their daily needs within the *danwei*. Given its multifunctional character, some scholars posit *danwei* as comparable to kin groups. Lu (1989, p. 79), for instance, contends that *danwei* has evolved into a kin collective by "absorbing" the social functions of the traditional family. Consequently, *danwei* shares the characteristics of former kinship in three major respects. First, both *danwei* and kin possess paternalistic power over members by asserting the power relationship between subordinates and superiors. Second, the obligations of individuals to the collective are stressed extensively compared to the rights of individuals. Third, the collective bears unlimited caring responsibility for its members. Dittmer and Lu (1996, p. 248) share a similar perspective by referring to *danwei*'s political function as paternalistic "(control)" and its social function as maternalistic "(welfare)". The natural question is: how

does the multifunctional *danwei* shape the situations of its members, especially individuals' work experiences?

Dittmer and Lu (1996) point out that various functions of the *danwei* have been exceptionally efficient such that mobility of members has been restricted, if not entirely impossible. From one perspective, the challenge of mobility is attributed to the three systems that have played critical roles in society: household registration (*hukou*), central labor allocation, and food distribution (Yang, 1989). The interconnected systems have been posited as the primary contributors to "the enclosure and partitioning of the population" (Yang, 1989, p. 30). Household registration requires every individual to be registered with their local authority at birth. In order to move across geographical locations an individual must apply to the respective authority and receive approval. In the workplace context, members of the *danwei* can only transfer to a different unit with approval from their original *danwei*. The central labor allocation system echoes the household registration system in assigning new labor to *danwei*. In this case, individuals were allocated to a *danwei* and registered under the unit, both of which indicate the limited opportunities for self-initiated change of labor unit. Yang (1989) notes that most aspects of human resource management, in addition to recruitment, have been monitored to a certain extent. For instance, she highlights that Party affiliates such as labor unions and the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) not only participate in labor assignment to *danwei* but also monitor the work process. Migration across *danwei* is further complicated by the food distribution system. The amount of food an individual should consume has been precisely prescribed by the state, which is determined by an individual's social identity (e.g. student, worker, officer). In addition, to apply for household registration, the food distribution system requires prior approval from the new unit to grant food in any move between units. The challenge of inter-unit migration, together with permanent employment, means an individual is likely to be attached to a *danwei* for life.

5.2.1   Women in **Danwei**

Within a *danwei*, management practices such as recruitment, promotion, employee allocation, and wage determination were also dominated by the government, with supervision at all levels. In the gender dimension, studies have found mixed results. The inconsistency is particularly notable concerning whether the *danwei* system has benefited women in the post-1949 society. On the one hand, studies have revealed a drastic increase in the number of women in the labor force (e.g. Walder, 1988; Whyte, 1984). The significant improvement in female labor force participation was illustrated in the preceding chapter. In short, it is mainly the economic strategy as part of China's modernization that has aimed at expanding the workforce to boost production levels. Jie (2001) further posits the *danwei* system as policy security for the equal status of urban women and men. Her argument in general centers on the four aspects subject to the system's emphasis on equality. First, she contends that the labor allocation

system has provided equal opportunities for women to join the labor force, and women have been provided permanent positions in the same way as men. Her second argument claims that the system distributes work and rewards equality between women and men, which has resulted in an exceptional improvement in women's status within the family. She continues by suggesting that the welfare facilities in *danwei*, such as dining halls and schools, have significantly alleviated women's household responsibilities. This perspective concurs with early literature by Bjorklund (1986, p. 24), which identifies the presence of a special committee within *danwei* to address "women's concerns", namely childbirth, childcare, healthcare, and elder care. In Jie's (2001) final argument, she asserts the top-down efficiency of realizing gender equality within the *danwei*. Given the comprehensive responsibility of *danwei*, she stresses that the inequality of women will be identified and corrected, although little empirical evidence is provided. The four aspects do indeed address the potential benefits of the *danwei* system for women in the planned economy.

Other studies have concluded differently, however. As noted, the gender wage gap remained evident (Davis, 1988; Whyte, 1984). Apart from the gender wage gap, there was a noticeable occupational division between men and women. Drawing from the urban data in 1977–1978, Whyte (1984, p. 216) reveals that men still dominate higher-level professional jobs such as foremen, skilled production workers, as well as police officers, for example. Strikingly, over 80 percent of school teachers, care workers, street cleaners, and ordinary workers are women, seemingly contradicting the state discourse of gender equality. This inequality was also identified in the state and the collective sector. Notably, women have been underrepresented in the state sector and only comprise 32 percent of the urban industrial labor force (Walder, 1988, p. 43). Other studies do not find an alleviation of women's family commitments under the *danwei* system (e.g. Ji et al., 2017; Liu, 2007a, 2007b; Song, 2011, 2012). For instance, Song (2011, 2012) documents the focus of production-orientated *danwei* on women's family roles. Particularly in the 1950s, national awards were given to women who had supported the production efficiency of their husbands by taking good care of the family. The evidence shows that women, on the one hand, were mobilized to work, while on the other hand, they were expected to fulfill the traditional family role. In the next subsection, I will explain how this dual identity is constructed by *danwei* practices.

5.2.2   *Women's Dual Identity in* Danwei

As explained in the previous chapter, women's work identity has been constructed to fulfill the national objective of modernization. During the same period, women's family identity was also emphasized but not specified in the workplace. As such, the discussion in this section will demonstrate how traditional identity, particularly family roles, was constructed as an additional facet of women's work identity. Before elaborating on the detail, it is helpful to first examine the distinct feature of the *danwei* – its multifunctional nature. Some

scholars argue that *danwei* has blurred the boundary between the private and public spheres (e.g. Liu, 2007b; Yang, 1999). More explicitly, Song (2011, 2012) characterizes a *danwei* in which the private sphere (*si*) has been embedded in the public sphere (*gong*). Definitions of the private and public spheres are not universal. For instance, Liu (2007b) refers to the public sphere as work and the private sphere as domesticity, without further elaboration. Domestic–public opposition is first proposed by Rosaldo (in Rosaldo et al., 1974) as a universal concept to understand women's subordination. According to her, domestic refers to "those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children", and the public is described as "activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother – child groups" (Rosaldo et al., 1974, p. 23). Women's child-rearing role keeps them from public activities (e.g. economic and political), which significantly determines the identification of women with domestic activities. Nevertheless, most literature takes a general approach to the private sphere and interprets it as family or individual. Whereas Liu (2007b) defines the public sphere explicitly as work, Song (2012) refers to the public sphere in a broader context as community (e.g. *danwei*, collective groups, class, nation). For the purpose of this discussion, I will adopt Yang's (1999) approach to the public sphere as a manifestation of social life, which can include work and non-work matters.

Based on the definition and available findings, it is clear that *danwei* permeated every aspect of an individual's life (personal, family, and social). The work aspect is justified by the state-led women's liberation and central allocation of jobs. What has been unexplained is the *danwei* practices corresponding to family matters, namely, its salient role in matchmaking, marriage, family relations, and family planning. Evidence about *danwei* practices is most comprehensively documented in Honig and Hershatter (1988) and Liu (2007b). The former described *danwei* in the 1980s, whereas the latter sees little change in the practices up to 2003. Building upon the evidence, I will examine how women's traditional roles became constructed by *danwei*. Indeed, the *danwei* has been involved at every stage of family life. Matchmaking not only was a popular act in the *danwei* but also was perceived as an "operational duty" (Liu, 2007b, p. 66) or political work (Honig & Hershatter, 1988). The role of the matchmaker was not limited to workers but could also be the leader in the *danwei*. The leader would behave "like a traditional elder trying to set up an arranged marriage" and use his power to "interfere in personal matters" (Liu, 2007b, p. 66). This behavior reflects a paternalistic leadership style that is culturally specific to China. This will be elaborated in Section 5.3. The matchmaker would review individual status (e.g. age, education, family background, job position, and wage level) and evaluate the compatibility of the woman and man before setting up informal introductions. The matchmaker usually received public praise if the couple was successfully united. Nevertheless, the role of the *danwei* did not end with matchmaking. It must issue a certificate to each person and ensure the couple had fulfilled the requirements of the Marriage Law. This certificate was a required

document for marriage registration. During marriage registration, the match-maker still played a role in the sense that their name would be asked explicitly by the registration officer. After registration, the *danwei* would organize collective weddings and allocate housing to the couples. Among all the tasks of the *danwei*, family planning was of primary importance. It was the most salient political duty of the *danwei*. Particularly under the one-child policy, it had to ensure that every family had only one child. Birth control mostly focused on women. The women's committee and hospital in the *danwei* would give contraceptive pills to women or encourage them to use an intrauterine device (IUD).

According to the evidence, *danwei* practices were highly institutionalized and actively shaped an individual's identity. For women, it is clear that private life, namely personal and social matters, had become a public concern. Public, in this case, refers explicitly to the *danwei* and the state. In particular, *danwei* practices actively contributed to women's identity by describing what women are, that is, their traditional role as wife and mother. This is justified by the matchmaking practice in which a woman was evaluated for compatibility as a man's possible future wife. Birth control practices focused on women also reflect the common perception of women's childbearing role. More impor-tantly, *danwei* practices also shaped the prescriptions about what women should be. While it was a common belief that everyone would marry, the matchmaker would approach women at a certain age (often early or mid-20s) and attempt to introduce them to men. The common practice of matchmaking created a shared expectation about women in their early or mid-20s marrying someone compatible. Likewise, birth control practices also shape a common expectation that women should be responsible for contraception. Thus, women's identity is characterized by what they should be. The economics of identity in this case provides an explanation to better understand women's experiences in the *dan-wei*. For women, following the norms constructed by the state and *danwei* was indeed an optimal response to maximize their well-being.

As a brief summary, within the *danwei*, there were two parallel constructed identities of women. The first identity was associated with their work situ-ation. Under the Party-led women's liberation and the nation's economic objectives, women were constructed as having a work identity comparable to men's. In other words, women were described as equal to men in receiving work opportunities and were expected to work like men. The second identity was associated with personal and family matters. Constructed by *danwei* prac-tices, women's traditional role was explicitly emphasized and expected. More explicitly, women's roles as wife and mother were commonly described and expected. Given the dual identity that was constructed, it was also likely that women encountered dual expectations regarding work and traditional roles. After 1978, *danwei*, especially state-owned/controlled enterprises, were greatly transformed under the economic reforms. The next section will first generally introduce the transformation prior to examining the two representatives of the Chinese modern business organizations: private enterprises and SOEs.

5.3   The Workplace After 1978

At the Third Plenum of the National Party Congress's 11th Central Committee in 1978, Party leaders decided to undertake a gradual reform program for the country's economy. The objective of the reform was to introduce and increase the role of market mechanisms by reducing, not eliminating, government planning and direct control. Furthermore, the primary goal of market-oriented reforms was to build a socialist market economy with the state-owned sector as a leading sector through promoting institutional reform. After 1978, China began the transition from a state-dominated planned socialist economy to a socialist market economy. The country adopted a series of policies of agricultural de-collectivization, opening up to foreign investment, and the possibility of private enterprise. Private businesses were allowed for the first time since 1949. Since then, privately owned businesses gradually began to make up a greater percentage of industrial output (Brandt & Rawski, 2008). From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, small-scale privatization of state enterprises and the decentralization of state control allowed local, provincial leaders to privatize the state sector into township and village enterprises (TVEs). In other words, the state-owned and collectively owned *danwei* were gradually restructured according to market mechanisms. In the meantime, the discourse of *danwei* in the business context was adjusted in terms of the new official classification. For instance, all business entities in China can be categorized into 21 different types of enterprises, based upon the type of category.[1] Given the wide variation in business entities, the following aims to specify the business workplace context by identifying the representative type of enterprises after 1978.

In addition to the wide range of business organizations, there has been a significant expansion in the scale of Chinese enterprises in recent years. According to the ranking of the business magazine *Fortune*, China has 135 companies on the list of the world's 500 largest companies in 2020 (Fortune Global 500[2]), surpassing the United States. In 2021 an additional 11 Chinese companies entered the list (Fortune, 2021). Among the largest companies, State Grid (a state-owned power company), China National Petroleum (a state-owned energy company), and Sinopec Group (a state-owned oil and gas company formally known as China Petroleum and Chemical), respectively, are the second, fourth, and fifth largest worldwide. The three largest Chinese enterprises are state-owned, and a similar pattern is also evident from Forbes Global 2000,[3] an alternative widely recognized ranking. Among the world's ten largest public companies, four are Chinese enterprises of which three are owned by the state (Forbes, 2021). The promising performance of Chinese SOEs and private enterprises justifies the representation of the two types of business entities. Nonetheless, heterogeneity between private enterprises and SOEs is still visible in many dimensions (Zhao, 2019). The following section will thus explore the organizational characteristics of each type of enterprise associated with individuals' career experiences.

5.3.1   *SOEs in China*

As the business entities with the longest history, Chinese SOEs have experienced major transformations in recent decades (for a recent review see Lin et al., 2020). For instance, some of the former SOEs have been restructured yet remain majority state-owned, whereas others have been privatized to a greater extent. The SOE reform as part of the broader economic reform has remained in progress, which complicates the general definition for all existing SOEs. Given this feature, the following discussion first introduces the historical background of SOE developments to identify a general definition of SOE for the purposes of this study. The discussion then proceeds with the human resource management within the SOE subject to its direct connection with the political context. The objective is to provide an organizational overview to better understand women's managerial experiences discussed in the subsequent chapters.

China's economic reform has remained in effect since it first began in 1978. This characteristic of the reform, as widely acknowledged, has resulted in complexity in the definition and classification of SOEs (Lee, 2009). The first stage of China's SOE reform (1978 to 1990) emphasized the decentralization of managerial autonomy from central government to local governments (Steinfeld, 2000). This is the stage when the government decided to separate ownership and management authority in the state enterprises. Consequently, SOEs were then owned by central, provincial, or municipal governments. In the second stage, marked by the enactment of the Company Law in 1994, some SOEs began to transform into limited liability companies or shareholding companies which issued shares to their own employees or to other SOEs. Regardless of the company categories these SOEs registered under, the government and other SOEs maintained a large percentage of total shares (Tenev et al., 2002). In 1995, following the notion of "*zhua da fang xiao*" (grasp the big; let go of the small),[4] the central government remained in control of the largest and strategically most important SOEs such as banking, mining, and utilities. Concurrently, the central government granted local governments the authority to restructure smaller SOEs through internal restructuring, bankruptcy and reorganization, employee shareholding, open sales, leasing, and joint ventures (Garnaut et al., 2006). In December 2011, China's successful accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) initiated the third stage of reform. WTO accession prompted the government to relinquish further its control over corporations, which also boosted the partial privatization process (Zhan & Turner, 2012).

Given the different focus of each stage, SOE reforms in China have created a new generation of SOEs with diversified ownership types and a significant level of internationalization. In other words, definitions and classification of SOEs can vary across different criteria. For instance, according to the official registration categories, an SOE is a wholly state-owned, noncorporate entity that is registered based on the Administration of the Registration of Enterprise Legal Persons. This classification method is fundamentally developed upon the category of the company registered. Registered publicly listed company,

albeit SOE-controlled, does not count as an SOE under this strict definition, nor would SOE–private joint ventures or partnerships with foreign investors (Hubbard, 2016). In a certain context, SOEs are classified as centrally administered and locally administered to represent their respective roles in the Chinese economy. The division is attributable to the nature of state-owned assets. State-owned assets in China are by definition divided into business operating assets and non–business operating assets. SOEs at large are designated to operate the business operating assets. The business operating assets are further divided into central and local based on the level of government in management. This is the result of implementing the "*zhua da fang xiao*" (grasp the big; let go of the small) policy in the mid-1990s with a series of restructuring policies focusing on the large number of buyouts of small and medium-sized SOEs. In this respect, the centrally administered business operating assets define the central SOEs (*yangqi*), whereas local SOEs are responsible for local-level business operating assets. The group of central SOEs can be further divided into three main types in terms of supervision authorities. The first type includes firms managed by the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC).[5] The second type includes state-owned financial institutions, and their supervisory authorities are in the China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC), China Insurance Regulatory Commission (CIRC), and China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC). The third type includes SOEs whose supervisory authorities are in individual central government ministries but not SASAC, such as the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, and others apart from the SASAC (Lee, 2009).

Among the highly diversified classification approaches, the most general definition of an SOE is provided by the *China Statistical Yearbook*. In its explanatory notes, SOEs are given a broad and explicit definition as "state-owned and state-holding enterprises". In this case, enterprises with mixed ownership, in which the percentage of state assets (or shares held by the state) is more significant than any other single shareholder within the enterprise, are also classified as SOEs, irrespective of the official registered category (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Acknowledging the inconsistent definitions, the discussion in this chapter adopts the definition of SOEs as "state-owned and state-holding enterprises" mainly due to the fact that it identifies SOEs which have been associated with the state to the greatest extent. More specifically, the definition includes SOEs controlled by government organizations and ministries, their partly owned subsidiaries, joint ventures, as well as listed companies of which the government and its affiliates are controlling shareholders.

In essence, the gradual SOE reforms aim at economic growth through a continuous change in institutional structure. More explicitly, the reforms provide the government with new tools to intervene in the economy as a regulator and shareholder of SOEs (Wang, 2012). The active role of the state implies an essential state-level factor in analyzing SOEs in China. Notably, the state-level variables serve as critical macro-level references in identifying the organizational factors contributing to the glass ceiling. Before exploring the detail, the

argument is first detached from the SOE setting, and the organizational structure is emphasized with respect to the PRC government and the CCP. The background is essential to the following discussion centering on the influence of China's unique political setting on the organizational context of SOEs, in particular the system of hierarchy and human resource management. Within the political context, the example of women's political participation underpins a unique gendered dimension in the Chinese political arena.

5.3.1.1   *The CCP, the PRC Government, and Women's Political Participation*

The PRC government and the CCP are the ultimate decision-makers in all aspects of Chinese society in the decades after 1949. China's central political system revolves around two major units: the CCP hierarchy and the government's state bureaucracy. Within each unit, the National Party Congress is the key representative body within the government sphere, whereas the CCP National Congress is the corresponding counterpart in the Party. Structures within each unit have been ingrained in the society with duplications across provincial and county levels (Edwards, 2007). Among the various constituents, the Party is remarkably distinctive, with ultimate authority to appoint and promote government officials. Management of different levels is characterized by a three-level hierarchy comprising the Politburo level, the Central Organization Department, and province-level Party organization departments (Yabuki & Harner, 1999).

Given the significant role of the CCP in individuals' career advancement trajectory in the political arena, it is essential to first acknowledge the personnel management within the CCP, which is mainly overseen by the CCP Organization Department.[6] Within the Party's personnel system, nomenklatura[7] is the primary tool for leadership selection and appointment. Party committees at different levels refer to the list specifying the offices over which the committee has authority. Based upon the nomenklatura system, the CCP essentially controls and manages appointment, promotion, transfer, and dismissal of Party members in leadership positions (Chan, 2004). In particular, appointment to or removal from leadership positions must be conducted on the basis of prior approval of the Central Committee (usually through the Organization Department). Given the fact that the nomenklatura is a confidential and internal document, it is estimated that the central nomenklatura list comprises the top 5,000 positions in the party-state, all of which are controlled by the Organization Department (Shambaugh & Brinley, 2008). According to the principle enacted in 1984, the Party committee at a higher level manages cadres at a lower level. The rank of the personnel allows vertical management of cadres within and across different hierarchy levels. In this regard, the Party is able to manage every person in the system: it directly manages all important cadres in the leadership positions, whereas Party committees and core group at various levels manage the remaining cadres.

Comparable to the nomenklatura list is the *bianzhi* list for all government administrative organizations, state enterprises, and service organizations. The list

includes the authorized number of personnel, their duties, and functions in the corresponding unit. The *bianzhi* covers every state-salaried individual, whereas the nomenklatura applies to leadership positions from the central Party and government leaders to the local township leader[8] (Shambaugh & Brinley, 2008; Brødsgaard, 2002). As stated, despite the different personnel systems in the CCP and government, it is evident that the CCP has a monopolistic and central role over the PRC government. In a recent study, Herrmann-Pillath (2016) argues that the CCP exercises control over the entire political, economic, and social systems of China. The CCP's support for party-state separation will, in fact, strengthen the function of the Party by accentuating distinctions between administrators and those who are Party members.

The prominent role of the CCP reveals a pivotal dimension of China's political culture in terms of direct and indirect personnel management. Yet, due to the limited public sources, little has been known apart from the publicized appointment, promotion, and dismissal of political leaders. For instance, the mechanisms and standard of evaluation of the system remain opaque. The scant detail about the system complicates the study of gender in the political arena. Nevertheless, according to the available sources, it is clear that gender equality is far from complete in the political context. In 2021, among the approximately 95 million Party members, 28.8 percent were women (Xinhua, 2021). The gap between women and men is wider at the higher levels of the political system. For instance, female representatives comprised 24.9 percent of the National People's Congress in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021), while less than 9 percent of Party secretaries and heads of government at the local level are women (ChinaFile, 2020). Indeed, female political leaders have been scarce throughout the history of the PRC. The highest position women have achieved in the political sphere is member of the Politburo. Since 1949, there have been in total six female members of the 25-member Politburo of the CCP system. The current vice-premier, Sun Chunlan, is also the only woman in the Politburo. There is no woman representative above the level of the Politburo, in the Party's most powerful body, the Politburo Standing Committee.

The disproportionately low number of women members of the hierarchy sheds light on the male-dominated political sphere. The resulting structural bias further implies the challenges for women to act in accordance with the "boys' club" culture and to build work-related relationships with colleagues. For instance, smoking and drinking are evidently crucial in lubricating male networks and forming valuable connections for promotion (e.g. Liu, 2017; Tang, 2020). The male-dominated networking activities create a dilemma for women, who have to make a decision between the two conflicting forces: traditional women's role emphasizing responsibilities "inside the home" and the workplace culture featuring social interactions "outside the home". The dilemma is potentially more striking for working mothers, who have to take into account childcare responsibilities. Apart from networks subject to career development, the mandatory retirement age of 60 for male and 55 for female civil servants and SOE workers creates an unbreakable ceiling on women's

political careers. According to the regulation, the shorter career period implies an additional structural constraint on women's career development in the political context. How do the political characteristics relate to the SOE domain? The next subsection demonstrates that connection is vital in respect of personnel management, in particular leadership appointments in the SOEs.

5.3.1.2   *The CCP, the PRC Government, and SOEs*

Due to the particular political system and the complex stakeholders within the context of SOEs, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to approach Chinese SOEs in terms of independent business entities. From one aspect, Chinese enterprises are network organizations with SOEs closely connected to different levels of territorial administration (Herrmann-Pillath, 2016). More specifically, functional groups within SOEs are attached to various parts of the party-state system (Lin & Milhaupt, 2013). SOEs, the SASAC, various government organs, and financial institutions together create a complex Party-controlled network with institutional linkages that are largely invisible in the company law or securities regulations (Lin, 2017). The close connection with the Party is significantly reflected in the corporate governance structure of SOEs, in particular in the aspects of personnel appointment and decision-making procedures (Beck & Brødsgaard, 2022).

Similar to the political system, the SOE hierarchy is mostly composed of two parallel personnel systems: the enterprise corporate management system and the Party system. In the corporate management system, leadership positions include CEO, vice-CEO, and chief accountant, whereas some companies also include board of directors, chairperson, and independent board members. In the Party system, the leadership team involves the secretary of the Party committee, several deputy secretaries, and a secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission (an anti-corruption office), along with other members of the Party committee. The personnel of the two systems customarily overlap and are interrelated. For instance, central SOEs supervised by SASAC feature a mechanism in which senior corporate leaders and Party officials rotate across the pool of SOEs (Lin, 2017; Lin & Milhaupt, 2013). Appointment and rotation announcements are posted publicly on SASAC's official website. These leadership appointments are explained by the fact that the state is the biggest stockholder. In essence, the Party is also the paramount decision-maker of the enterprises, such that SOEs are responsible for following instructions from higher authorities within a top-down command structure. The weak delegation of the enterprise authority and a strong emphasis on vertical links within the hierarchy create a significant "power distance" between top managers and members on the lower levels. The authority of the CCP in personnel management of top-level leadership and decision-making within enterprises also implies a salient role of Party membership on an individual's career development. In every SOE, there is a Party unit established as a subordinate organization of the Party system. From one perspective, the Party unit is a manifestation of the CCP and

is present in the corporate governance structure, not merely in the top management levels. In this regard, Party membership is presumably critical with respect to career progression within the SOE context. The distinct connection between SOEs and the Party sheds light on the intrinsic obstacles for employees at the grassroots levels, not to mention women and those without Party membership.

5.3.2 Private Enterprises in China

In contrast to the predominant SOEs, private enterprises were severely restricted in the pre-reform economy. The contribution from the private sector as a supplement to the economy was not officially recognized by the state until 1979 (Dana, 1999). The 13th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and the 1987 National People's Congress formally defined private enterprises, followed by modification in 1998, as "profit-making economic organizations (whose) assets are owned privately" (Wang et al., 2014). The emergence of private enterprises coupled with market-oriented economic reform has resulted in globally competent large enterprises with strong fiscal power.

Evidence shows that large private enterprises in China have experienced growing association with the government and the Party. This is unsurprising given the embedding of the Party unit in the companies' operations. After 2001, every company in the private sector with at least three CCP members among its employees has been required to establish a Party unit. As the Constitution of the CCP stipulates, Party units in companies are expected to "firmly implement the Party's line, principles, and policies". In 2006, the regulation was introduced to private firms set up with foreign capital, such as Walmart. In addition, top positions in large private companies are in close interaction with the CCP nomenklatura system such that constant communication is maintained. For instance, certain top leaders of the largest private enterprises are delegates to the NPC. Using a large sample of listed firms in China from 2005 to 2008, You and Du (2012) find that politically connected CEOs are less likely to be fired, in addition to the contingent benefits of political connections for the firm's performance. This evidence shows the importance of state-level variables in understanding the organizational context in China, irrespective of the specific category.

5.3.3 SOEs, Private Enterprises, and Identity

With regard to an individual's career advancement, the workplace contexts of large SOEs and private enterprises demonstrate a notable shared feature. That is, both types of enterprise have been under the influence of a broader political context. In particular, similar personnel management in the Party is observed within both the largest SOEs and private enterprises, and dominates the corporate human resource management system. Top corporate managers in these largest enterprises are often appointed by the Party, and thus the Party plays a decisive role in the identity of managers. For instance, top managers in SOEs

are usually Party members such that the shared norms are expected from the manager. According to the identity theory, it is a rational reaction for an individual to follow common practice and become a Party member to demonstrate a manager's identity. This gives the first implication of the workplace discussion. That is, the manager's identity in SOEs and private enterprises in China is primarily Party-constructed. The Party describes what managers are and how they should behave. Given that top political leaders and corporate managers are mostly men, the manager's identity therefore is also male. This result is consistent with the theoretical rationale of Schein's (1973, 1975) "think-manager and think-male" argument.

In addition to the dominant role of the Party, it is evident that the manager's identity in these enterprises is also male-constructed. The implication is straightforward in the sense that major positions of power and decision-making are mainly held by men. In other words, descriptions about managers are determined by men, and the male-determined norms further shape the behavioral prescriptions about what managers should be. This finding contributes to the setting of the economics of identity by revealing that the game design of the identity framework can be gender-dependent and biased. For instance, how women describe women can be different from how men describe women. In the case of managers, what managers are from the perspective of men can vary from how women describe managers. As such, a manager's identity in the workplace context is primarily about how men describe what managers are and how men think managers should be. The male-biased setting should be taken into account when applying the identity framework to understand individual behavior.

5.4   Family Businesses in China

Acknowledging the common feature of SOEs and private enterprises, this section extends the exploration to the special characteristics of private enterprises in China. On the one hand, Chinese private enterprises possess specific organizational characteristics similar to many foreign enterprises. This is particularly valid for listed companies obliged to operate according to the standard rules of respective stock exchanges. On the other hand, a majority of the domestic private enterprises in China are family-owned businesses (Gregory et al., 2000). In other words, one special feature of these Chinese private enterprises is the presence of family culture within the organization (Chen & Huang, 2001). By the end of 2012, China had 1,593 listed companies, including 1,367 non-state firms in which 55.8 percent was controlled by families (Weng & Chi, 2019). From one perspective, the family-oriented organizational culture is sustained by the ownership of family members. Trusted family members such as spouses, children, and close relatives often assume key managerial positions in the enterprises in addition to stockholding. This special form of family-owned business in China has a long history of more than 2,000 years (Lü, 2007). The strong sense of family at the management level shapes a culture akin to extended

family. Moreover, it gives rise to a centralized management system in which the entrepreneur and family members are inclined to maintain their authoritative position through tight control of information and decision-making. How is the unique form of family culture in an organizational context relevant to women's identity and experience?

In a family business, one of the most critical issues is succession (e.g. Ke, 2018; Wang, 2010). Despite the growing number of studies about women in family businesses, discussions on women's experience associated with this particular aspect remain scant (Hytti et al., 2017). The available findings, albeit limited, demonstrate consistency in revealing women's lower likelihood of becoming successors[9] (for the most recent review see Sentuti et al., 2019). Despite the Party-led women's liberation and the one-child policy, less than 30 percent of the successors are women (Chen et al., 2018). As such, the following discussion attempts to explore women's experience of succession in terms of their identity shaped by the organizational characteristics of family businesses in China.

One feature that distinguishes the family business from other types of private enterprise is its family-oriented management structure. In this sense, exploring succession in terms of Chinese conceptualizations of family provides an essential perspective to better understand the gender dimension of succession in family businesses in China. According to discussions from the previous chapter, it is clear that succession in Chinese *jia*/family is characterized by male domination. Major decisions are determined by the male head of the family, and continuity of the family follows the patrilineal principle. In other words, positing the family as a form of corporation, the male head would be the only decision-maker and the successor would be a man. The hierarchical family structure also implies that the normative succession is primogeniture (first-born son). Even in a situation of internal conflict, *fenjia* (family division) is still male-oriented, with sons equally inheriting the family property (Ke, 2018). In these traditional family practices, women possess no right to property inheritance. Women's identity is explicitly characterized by exclusion from family succession. In other words, it is a traditional perception that women are not successors, nor they should be successors. Despite the notable socioeconomic changes after 1949, succession in Chinese family businesses still follows the traditional family practices (e.g. Cao et al., 2015; Deng, 2015; Ke, 2018). Drawing from family businesses in Chongqing and Zhejiang, Ke (2018) finds that the traditional norm of succession remains commonly practiced by the family business leader. Sons are expected to succeed rather than daughters and non-family members, such that they are often trained to be the future successor from a young age. In this regard, it is clear that women's identity in the modern family business remains akin to the traditional gender perception. From an identity perspective, it is an economic decision for individuals to follow the rigid traditional family norms. As such, it is not a surprise to observe few female successors in family businesses in China. It is likely that well-educated daughters, even if in leadership positions, work in hidden roles and support their male siblings to become successors (Xian et al., 2021).

In addition to the traditional succession practices, *guanxi* (networking) practices in the Chinese business context are also a constraint on women's succession. As a Chinese conceptualization of social networks, *guanxi* is a critical source of social capital characterized by a distinct form of social relationship. It is particularly difficult for daughters to continue and maintain the *guanxi* network from their fathers (Deng, 2015). The transfer of social capital associated with succession involves complex and ongoing building and maintaining of relationships (Ke, 2018). From one perspective, women tend to be marginalized in these activities given the gender expectations. Notably, it is a common belief that women are not suitable for the male-dominated business *guanxi* activities (Zheng, 2012). The view is evidently also shared among women (Xu & Li, 2015). The shared perception therefore forms a stereotype working against women's participation in business networking. Given these social expectations and networking norms, it is challenging for women to acquire the essential social relationships for succeeding to the family business.

Family business features a specific type of organizational context that shapes women's identity and experiences, particularly in the aspect of succession. In the present case, it is conclusive that women's identity in Chinese family business mirrors the identity constructed by traditional family practices. The Chinese conceptualization of family and business networking practices results in cultural stereotyping that works against women's succession. The discussion provides an alternative identity perspective to understand women's underrepresentation in family business succession. Moreover, it further justifies the importance of disentangling the Chinese context for better understanding individual career experience.

5.5   Chinese Enterprises and Culture

Given the diversified ownership of enterprises, it is infeasible to conclude with one universal characteristic or management framework representing the Chinese business context (Tsui et al., 2006). Alternatively, this section adopts a cultural perspective to study the specific features of Chinese enterprises for a better understanding of individual career experiences. The studies of Chinese SOEs have identified the persistence of pre-reform workplace culture in shaping the work context, despite the introduction of the market mechanism. For instance, Xin and colleagues (2002) divide the culture of Chinese SOEs into ten dimensions. Among the ten dimensions, six mirror the paternalistic and maternalistic character of the pre-reform workplace: employee development, harmony, leadership, pragmatism, employee contribution, and fair rewards. In other words, the study reveals that SOEs in the post-reform era still emphasize the realms of control as well as interests of their members. The remaining four dimensions – outcome orientation, customer orientation, future orientation, and innovation – are emerging aspects in response to the market competition brought about by the reform. Similar conclusions on the endurance of a pre-reform workplace culture have been confirmed in other studies. A notable

feature is the nurturing behavior of SOE leaders (Leung, 2002). In addition to work-related matters, these leaders also acknowledge their responsibility to be concerned about the well-being of employees, as well as of employees' family members. Evidently, the characteristic is not limited to SOEs. Ralston and colleagues (2006) show that Chinese private enterprises substantially mirror the clan[10] (extended family) culture, which further justifies the family-oriented feature of Chinese private enterprises highlighted in the previous section. Given the clan culture, the workplace is perceived as a sphere where leaders tend to act in a caring role, acting as mentors and parental figures, and members can share their personal feelings and perspectives. A similar clan culture is also identified in Chinese SOEs. Even though business values and management practices of Western market-oriented companies have become more commonly adopted by Chinese SOEs, the traditional state-dominated hierarchical structure has gradually evolved to become more market-oriented consistent with the state's interests (Granrose et al., 2000).

Acknowledging the organizational differences between Chinese SOEs and private enterprises, other studies attempt to understand the cultural differences in terms of traditional philosophies. One widely adopted approach is to focus on the management behavior patterns of current Chinese business leaders. The general conclusion suggests that the various cultural philosophies are reflected in leadership behaviors (e.g. Lin et al., 2013; Liu, 2017; Ma & Tsui, 2015). According to Cheung and Chan (2005), Confucian leadership advocates benevolence, loyalty, learning, harmony, and righteousness. Taoist management behavior, on the other hand, is characterized by flexibility, pragmatism, and humanity (Davis, 2004; Song & Beckett, 2013). In contrast to the former two principles, legalist leadership stresses the importance of law, power, and management techniques in effective management (Liu, 2017). In spite of the distinctions, it is evident that each cultural philosophy is not completely excluded from the others (Cheung & Chan, 2005). In a more recent study, Ma and Tsui (2015) argue that business leaders' behavior usually reflects multiple philosophies. In addition to the multiple philosophical influences, traditional philosophies continue to evolve and consolidate in shaping Chinese culture (Cheung & Chan, 2005). Given the evidence, it is notable that Chinese leadership practices are characterized by a dynamic integration of different cultural sources and result in an obscured organizational context.

5.5.1 *Paternalistic Leadership*

Acknowledging the complexity in understanding the culture of Chinese business, management theorists contribute systematic explanations with a focus on leadership behaviors. Among the available perspectives, paternalistic leadership is a concept that is most discussed (Bedi, 2020; Chen & Farh, 2010). Given the diverse strands, I will not dive into the details but will briefly introduce the research development and illuminate the widely adopted theory from Cheng and colleagues (2004). The phenomenon of paternalistic leadership was first

identified in the late 1960s by Silin (1976) from interviews with leaders and employees of large-scale Chinese family businesses in Taiwan. Farh and Cheng (2000) summarize Silin's (1976) observations into six major aspects: moral leadership, didactic leadership, centralized authority, maintaining social distance with subordinates, keeping intentions ambiguous, and implementing control tactics. Redding ([1990] 2013) further confirms the significance of paternalistic leadership with additional observations, drawing from cross-regional research on Chinese family businesses located in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. After Silin's (1976) seminal work, subsequent studies follow a similar trajectory and provide extended conclusions (e.g. Cheng, 1995; Westwood, 1997). Developing upon these findings, Farh and Cheng (2000, p. 94) define paternalistic leadership as "a style that combines strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence and moral integrity". More explicitly, they propose a three-dimensional model of paternalistic leadership comprised of authoritarianism, benevolence, and morality to measure leaders' behavior and the corresponding responses from subordinates. The authoritarian dimension refers to leader behaviors that emphasize uncontested authority and control over subordinates and require absolute obedience. The benevolent dimension describes individualized and holistic concern for the well-being of subordinates as well as the subordinates' families. The moral dimension is behavior that demonstrates superior moral qualities setting an example to subordinates.

In essence, paternalistic leadership is not a universal concept but is perceived differently across cultural settings. For instance, Aycan (2006) proposes a five-dimensional theory of paternalistic leadership which stresses the superior–subordinate relationship: creating a family environment in the workplace, establishing close and personalized relationships with subordinates, getting involved in employees' non-work lives, expecting loyalty, and maintaining authority and hierarchy. In addition, Farh and Cheng's (2000) model also involves the assumption of moral and benevolent leadership behavior. In recent cross-national research, Aycan and colleagues (2013) test Aycan's (2006) definition in six different countries (China, Germany, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United States) and find that features of paternalistic leadership are more tolerable in a higher collective cultural context such as China. The conclusion suggests paternalistic leadership manifests a cultural dimension. This is confirmed by subsequent cross-national studies that show that Farh and Cheng's (2000) model of paternalistic leadership is more valid than Western transformational leadership to capture leadership behavior in Chinese enterprises (e.g. Cheng et al., 2004; Cheng et al., 2014).

5.5.2   *Gender and Paternalistic Leadership*

Among the well-documented paternalistic leadership studies in the Chinese context, gender discussion has been scant. Strikingly, the consensus of existing literature is that the gender of actors, both explicitly and implicitly, has been

male by default. For instance, in their pioneering theoretical discussion, Farh and Cheng (2000, p. 86) explicitly adopt the "masculine pronouns" (he, his, him) in response to the fact that leaders are "generally men". In this regard, the original argument is clearly established in a male-dominated setting, such that the resultant model is conclusively gendered. Women's identity as constructed by the conceptualization of paternalistic leadership, in this case, is dominated by men. This conclusion justifies the remark regarding the possible male bias in a theoretical setting, in which women are strikingly overlooked and the identity of a manager is male-like by default.

Acknowledging the bias in the research approach, it is still relevant to survey the very few studies to reveal the situation for women. Based on large-scale study of superiors and subordinates in local Taiwan enterprises, Lin and Cheng (2007) find that both male and female leaders demonstrate similar paternalistic leadership, particularly with respect to the dimension of authoritarian and benevolent leadership. Yet the gender of the subordinate tends to affect their superior's behavior. In the case of male subordinates, results indicate the similarity between male and female leaders. Both genders express a higher extent of authoritarian leadership towards male subordinates compared to female subordinates. In regard to benevolent leadership, female leaders are relatively indifferent between male and female subordinates, whereas male leaders illustrate a significant degree of care and concern towards male subordinates. More recent studies further highlight the moderating role of gender that results in different leadership outcomes between male and female managers, which can be interpreted by an individual's identity.

For instance, Cheng and Lin (2012) show that when male superiors demonstrate a high level of authoritarian leadership, their leadership effectiveness is significantly greater than when female supervisors display a high degree of authoritarian leadership. The consistent result has been identified for benevolent leadership. If female superiors demonstrate a low level of benevolent leadership, their leadership effectiveness is notably inhibited. A similar conclusion is indicated with a focus on subordinate performance. Female superiors who demonstrate authoritarian leadership are likely to reinforce its negative relationship with subordinate performance than their male counterparts (Wang et al., 2013). The results can be further explained by the identity of women, men, and leaders. Whereas male superiors demonstrate an authoritarian character aligning with the leadership identity as male-like, women are regarded as not fitting the male-like identity of managers. In this sense, female leadership behavior is less likely to be accepted. Expressing authoritarianism will further violate the female superior's identity as a woman, which will undermine her leadership effectiveness. A female superior demonstrating benevolence (commonly perceived as a female character) will align with her identity, which therefore reduces the conflict between her identity as a woman and a man-like manager. In this case, it is likely that higher leadership efficiency will be observed as female superiors behave according to gender expectations.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Discussions in this chapter illuminate the salient identity perspective in better understanding the Chinese workplace. On the one hand, it is evident that the organizational context actively contributes to the construction of women's identity. Clarifying the context is therefore significant to examine how women's identity is constructed and how women are described, given the prescriptions. On the other hand, the identity perspective highlights the workplace as gendered in a twofold way regardless of the different organizational settings. The first is associated with the gendered nature of Chinese organizations, which remains intact despite the transformation of the Chinese economy. The early form of the Chinese workplace, primarily consisting of *danwei* (work units), was substantially gendered across occupations and in leadership positions. Within the *danwei*, two parallel sets of identity are constructed that emphasize women's comparable work identity as men and women's traditional gender role respectively. After 1978, the gendered workplace persisted based on evidence from state-owned and private enterprises. Discussions on both types of business entities have pinpointed the state-level influence in the workplace, under which women's identity is constructed. The second conclusion is associated with the gendered form of theorizing. After investigating the paternalistic leadership theory originating from the Chinese organization, it is clear that the widely documented concept is developed based on a strong male-biased assumption. It remains evident that its successors continue to follow this gendered hypothesis and neglect the role of women in leadership. To further investigate the gendered nature of Chinese business organizations, the next chapter extends the discussion with empirical analysis centering on the manifestation of gender stereotyping in the workplace.

Notes

1 National Bureau of Statistics of China provides a detailed definition of each type of enterprise. Official classification document is available from www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjbz/200610/t20061018_8657.html (Chinese text).
2 Companies are ranked by total revenues for their corresponding fiscal years ending on or before March 31, 2021.
3 The Forbes Global 2000 is an annual ranking of the top 2,000 public companies in the world by *Forbes* magazine. The ranking is based on a mix of four metrics: sales, profit, assets, and market value, with data from FactSet Research systems.
4 The reform strategy of Chinese SOEs which passed at the Fifth Plenary Session of the Fourteenth CCP Central Committee in September 1995.
5 Established in 2003, SASAC aims at centralizing the administration of national-level SOEs and promotes mergers and acquisitions among large SOEs.
6 The Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is a department of the CCP Central Committee that controls staffing positions within the Party.
7 Bohdan Harasymiw (1969, p. 494) described the term "nomenklatura" (meaning: "nomenclature") as "a list of positions, arranged in order of seniority, including a description of the duties of each office. Its political importance comes from the fact that the Party's nomenklatura – and it alone – contains the most important leading positions in all organized activities of social life".

8　The Chinese concept of nomenklatura is *zhiwumingcheng biao* (job title list); *bianzhi* refers to number of established posts in a party or *jiguan* (government administrative organ), *shiye danwei* (nonprofit units) or *qiye* (enterprise).
9　Most of the studies focus on the succession of daughters.
10　There has been ambiguity in the meaning of clan. Watson (1982) provided a critical discussion to clarify the terminological differences between clan and other associated terms such as "family" and "lineage". In the current context, I adopt the general approach to clan by highlighting the familial characteristics and interpretating clan as extended family.

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6 Gender Stereotypes in Chinese Enterprises

6.1 Introduction

Existing studies demonstrate consistency in revealing the gendered nature of Chinese business. This chapter attempts to corroborate this conclusion using evidence from in-depth interviews with managers in large enterprises in China. Moreover, the empirical analysis aims to explore the sources of stereotypes against women as well as the possible influence on women's managerial careers within Chinese enterprises. In other words, discussions in this chapter illuminate the descriptive and prescriptive dimensions of stereotyping, which are salient but often overlooked by previous research. Before diving into the details, the discussion begins with an overview of the "ideal woman" in China. Specifically, it examines the characteristics constituting the "ideal" Chinese woman in the macro-level context. This information is particularly crucial to the analytical framework in the sense that it defines the descriptions of and prescriptions on women's identity from a broad macro-level context (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). The macro-level stereotypes are fundamental to subsequent analysis in a meso-level organizational context, given that the Chinese organization to a certain extent mirrors the broad macro-level context. The state of the field justifies the significance of the present empirical analysis in two respects. First, it is clear that the discussion contributes to the scant research on women in management in the Chinese organizational context and the underexplored stereotyping of managers. Second, in contrast to the women-only sample, the analysis is developed based upon experiences of both men and women managers, rather than only women, to sustain a holistic understanding of stereotypes. As such, the analysis will follow the proposal of research questions to guide the subsequent discussion. The third section introduces the research methodology and begins by stating the rationale for selecting qualitative interviews as an approach. The methodological discussion continues with the data-collection process and analytical procedure. The fourth section summarizes findings and provides interpretations of the data. The last section concludes the discussion to highlight the significance of this chapter.

6.1.1 *The Ideal Woman in China*

As shown in Chapter 4, the situation of Chinese women is closely related to the constructed image of the ideal woman. Drawing from Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) descriptions, in the current case "ideal" can be loosely defined as specified physical characteristics, attributes, or behavior. In China, the ideal woman in traditional culture is comprehensively defined. She always follows her natal *jia*/family's practices and marries at an early age without owning any property except her dowry and then she obeys her husband's *jia*/family practices. Most importantly, she gives birth (preferably to a son), to continue the patrilineal line of her husband's family. Detailed behaviors are further specified by dominant Confucian doctrines such as the "Three Obediences" and "Four Virtues". In general, the ideal woman in traditional China is characterized by the familial role of daughter, wife, and mother.

Since 1949, rapid modernization and reforms have not entirely reshaped the traditional image but have added new attributes to form a multifaceted ideal woman in contemporary China. It is evident that traditional attitudes towards family and gender roles remain prevalent in the contemporary context. For instance, drawing from a large sample of individuals born after 1949, Qian and Li (2020) find a general acceptance of gendered family roles among Chinese men and women. Although a slight de-emphasis on attitudes towards women's role in the family is identified among individuals born after 1978, there remains a strong endorsement of filial piety regardless of age or education level (Hu & Scott, 2016). The term "filial piety" is rooted in Confucian ideology and referred to as respect for one's parents and ancestors and the hierarchies within society: father–son, elder–junior, and male–female (Feuchtwang, 2016; Whyte, 2004). Whyte (2005) argues that modernization only changes the forms of filial obligations, in which traditions of filial piety are preserved. Indeed, the emphasis on filial piety was officially legitimized by the amendment of the "Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People" in 2012. Adult children are mandated by law to perform care duties and regularly visit their elderly family members. This filial obligation is particularly true for the only child in the family, whether son or daughter, who is expected to take care of aging parents (Hu, 2017).

In addition to filial piety, the women's role in the family is also revealed in the emphasis on women's age in relation to marriage and reproduction. In the case of marriage, the ideal woman in today's China marries before she reaches her late 20s. The most vivid manifestation of this attribute is the gender discourse (leftover women: *shengnü*) (e.g. Fincher, 2016; Ji, 2015; To, 2015). The term has an official definition according to the Ministry of Education, which generally refers to women who are over 27 years old, have a high educational level and high-income level, but are single.[1] Not only is it common to refer to unmarried women as leftover women at the broader (societal) level but the term *shengnü* has also been frequently used by the state and the media (Fincher, 2016). The term

has profound implications for women and marriage. It shows that women's marriage is a concern of the general public and the state and not simply a personal or family concern. In particular, it highlights that women who remain unmarried in their late 20s are not "ideal". It defines the ideal age for a woman to find a marriage partner and likely creates anxiety among women when they pass the ideal age (Qian & Qian, 2014). A similar socially constructed expectation is evident in women's reproduction. In traditional culture, giving birth is one of the most important responsibilities of women, in order to continue the family line. Since 1978, family-planning policies have further reinforced women's reproductive role with a strict number of children permitted per couple. Women's reproduction has come to be of public concern. Similar to the marriage-related discourse of *shengnü*, a medical discourse of *gaoling chanfu* (elderly primipara) is often used to urge childless women in their 30s to give birth (Gu, 2021; Guo, 2016). The concept emerged as an international medical term to define a childless woman over the age of 35. However, the term has been reinterpreted in the Chinese context to refer to women over 30 years old. Despite limited evidence about the influence of this discourse on women's experiences, a woman's reproductive role remains relevant.

Whereas the aforementioned discussion reveals the endurance of filial piety and women's role within the family, there are new characteristics constituting the ideal woman in today's China. These characteristics are largely shaped by the state. Given the promotion of Party-led women's liberation, women nowadays are better educated and more likely to be employed in comparison with the earlier period. The state-constructed woman's equality in work also defines the image of the ideal woman. Alongside the state-defined ideal woman, the opening-up policy of 1978 also brought Western concepts of femininity to China. As described in Chapter 4, Western femininity is primarily a cultural influence that complicates the conceptualization of women in China. Nevertheless, the discussion also shows that the Western cultural impact on women's identities within China is likely to be limited. This is primarily due to the different political origins of Western femininity and of the Chinese conceptualization of women. In this regard, it is clear that the most notable characteristics of the ideal woman in today's China are primarily shaped by traditional family roles and the state. Given the evolving Chinese context, it is also noteworthy that the ideal woman is not static.

6.1.2   Gendered Management in China

China manifests a remarkable dissociation of performances in gender equality. Despite the substantial progress of Chinese women in education, labor force participation, and wage equality, management in China is clearly gendered. Yet research on women in management is primarily based on the Western context, while gender studies on China mostly look at other social domains. Both have resulted in a lack of systematic research on this specific phenomenon. Research on Chinese women managers did not emerge until the late 1980s. One of

the early scholars, psychologist Karen Korabik, conducted fieldwork in 1985 and identified the primary factors that prevented Chinese women managers from advancing to top leadership jobs (Korabik, 1993). The study suggests six major factors – cultural stereotypes, restricted opportunities, discrimination, networks. the dual burden of work–family responsibilities, and the structure of the labor market – as the primary obstacles to career advancement. These factors reinforce the unfavorable stereotype of women managers and create doubts about women's competency. Notably, she argues that this stereotype is likely to be "internalized" and decreases women's motivation for career development (Korabik, 1993, p. 61). Although limited empirical evidence is provided, Korabik (1993) highlights both the descriptive and prescriptive nature of stereotypes with regard to Chinese women managers, which provides a relevant foundation for subsequent studies.

6.1.3   Stereotypes and Women's Managerial Careers

Compared to the plentiful descriptions of Chinese women in general (see Chapter 4), empirical evidence on stereotypical perceptions of women as managers remains scant. Existing studies mostly adopt a quantitative approach (Zhu et al., 2021). For instance, in the cross-cultural replication of the "think manager–think male" model (Schein, 1973, 1975), Schein and colleagues (1996, 2001, 2007) surveyed 273 business school students in China. The survey is developed based on the Schein Descriptive Index (Schein, 1973, 1975), which includes 92 items to describe stereotypes and characteristics of successful managers (e.g. competence, aggressiveness, leadership ability, and emotional stability). The results suggest that the perceived successful middle managers in China predominantly feature male characteristics. In other words, women are regarded as having fewer of the characteristics attributed to successful managers than men do. Furthermore, the gendered managerial stereotype is "very strong" among Chinese male management students (Schein et al., 1996, p. 39). From a comparative perspective, it is conclusive that the stereotyping of managers in the Chinese context has strikingly exceeded that of other nations in the study, namely Britain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. A similar quantitative method has been utilized in more recent studies. Bowen and colleagues (2007) apply the "Women as Managers Scale" (WAMS) (Terborg et al., 1977) to study stereotypical attitudes towards women managers among students and bank employees in China. WAMS comprises 21 attitudinal statements concerning different views of women managers, including 11 favorably worded and 10 unfavorably worded items. The study reveals significant gender differences between women and men in perceiving women as managers. Specifically, male respondents (students and employees) have less favorable attitudes towards women managers than female respondents do, concurring with previous studies (e.g. Schein et al., 1996). In the cross-national study measured by WAMS, Chinese men and women demonstrate the least positive perceptions of women as managers, compared with Chile and the United States (Javalgi et al., 2011). Quantitative studies pinpoint

prominent managerial stereotypes in the Chinese context and serve as statistical justifications of the need for further exploration of the topic.

In studies, stereotypes have been discussed less qualitatively than quantitatively. Nevertheless, the qualitative results confirm the salient stereotypes with respect to women's managerial careers. Based upon reflections of six top women business leaders, Liu (2013) reveals that stereotypes can be both descriptive and prescriptive in nature. The respondents recalled their encounters with stereotypical perceptions, including lower expectations from male colleagues. In certain cases, rumors circulated when women managers behaved differently from what was considered appropriate for a woman. Notably, the study stresses that the shared belief that women are less capable than men, and the stereotypes of women as managers are likely to be internalized and affect women's career decisions. In other words, women's self-perceptions will adjust according to these stereotypical perceptions and will be reflected in their decision-making. For instance, given the prescriptions, women managers tend to hold back their ambitions to attain top management positions and decide to remain in mid-level management. Although no direct correlation has been noted, this qualitative literature complements quantitative studies with detailed descriptions of individual career experiences to facilitate the understanding of stereotypes in the workplace. In a more recent study, Tatli and colleagues (2017) draw on interviews with 30 women managers in private enterprises and show that in spite of the socioeconomic, institutional, and individual accounts, gendered stereotypes are the underlying common theme behind each account and significantly influence women managers' career progression. However, most qualitative studies on women managers in general, including the discussion of stereotypes, have drawn from women-only samples and overlook the possible organizational differentials that potentially result in varied individual career experience (e.g. Tatli et al., 2017; Woodhams et al., 2015; Xie & Zhu, 2016).

The state of the field sheds light on the underexplored stereotypes, which have been justified by previous studies as culturally salient in shaping the experiences of women's managerial careers in China. Given the scarce empirical evidence, the major goal of this study is to enrich the existing understanding of stereotypes. More specifically, it is guided by the following set of questions:

1 How are the stereotypes reflected in the workplace?
2 Are managers aware of the stereotypes? If so, what are their attitudes towards them?
3 What are the potential influences of stereotypes on women managers' career decisions?

6.2   Methodology

Given the aim of the study, this section offers comprehensive descriptions of the research strategy and procedures. To ensure the credibility of the findings, I first present the rationale for selecting qualitative interviews as the approach best

serving the research purpose and answering the research questions. Unlike earlier studies, I attempt to extend knowledge about stereotypes in the workplace using empirical evidence in terms of individual career experiences. Explicitly, instead of testing the generalization of stereotypes in the overall population, the research aims to provide richer, in-depth details recognizing the salience of stereotypes identified by existing studies. In this regard, the qualitative interviewing approach is particularly suitable in several respects. First, the qualitative strategy fulfills the exploratory purpose of the study. Interviews, as one of the qualitative techniques, enable research participants to provide "very detailed and specific answers" (Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2008, p. 8). Besides, interview participants are also offered space to share their perspectives on an open-ended basis (Woodhams et al., 2015). The subjective dimension of career, including thoughts, feelings, and experiences, directly pinpoints the notion of stereotypes. As defined in Chapter 2, in this case stereotypes refer to an individual's belief about what men and women typically do (or how they typically are), and about what men and women should or ought to do (or how they should or ought to be). An interview is a robust tool to collect relevant evidence regarding stereotypes. In addition to the descriptions, a researcher is able to draw conclusions from narratives in a context-specific setting. In particular, the qualitative analytical method, namely organizing data and identifying patterns, allows themes to emerge naturally and informs the research-related questions (Lune & Berg, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Qualitative interviews, though not without their limitations, have been argued to be an approach to extending the statistical understanding of gender and management in the Chinese organizational context (e.g. Cooke, 2009; Zhu et al., 2021). In short, the selection of the qualitative interview approach is, on the one hand, able to contribute additional details to the research on women managers at large, as well as the underexplored stereotypes. On the other hand, the approach allows the researcher to gain insights complementary to the existing statistical conclusions. The following sections will further justify the significance of this research strategy with elaborated procedures.

6.2.1 Sampling Strategy

Research context has been well defined in previous chapters. In general, the study focuses on managers in Chinese SOEs and private enterprises. Given the distinct hierarchical design across enterprises, it is difficult to provide a uniform definition of managerial positions. In this study, a manager is loosely referred to as a person who plans, organizes, motivates, directs, and controls a department or a team of staff, with job titles ranging from head of department to supervisor or manager. In other words, the respondents fulfill a management or supervisory role and have direct subordinates. The study aims to understand stereotypes associated with career experiences on the path towards top management; the target respondents are managers who are not in the highest managerial positions. In other words, the sample excludes

those at the top of the enterprises, namely CEOs, board members, owners, and entrepreneurs.

Based on the research design, participants are identified from the networks of prestige management training programs, namely MBA and EMBA. Participants therefore possess the necessary educational qualifications for management positions. Economists usually refer to education as a form of human capital investment (e.g. Becker & Tomes, 1986). According to the human capital theory, higher human capital implies higher labor productivity and higher incomes for workers. As a result, graduates of higher education institutes are assumed to acquire a level of human capital for employment that should enable them to attain managerial positions in China. In the job market, it is unsurprising to find employers who list educational attainment as a criterion for a certain level of position. This further supports the significance of the sampling strategy, which selects respondents who fulfill the basic requirements for a managerial position and aligns with the research objective. Furthermore, the group is representative for the research purpose in the sense that every sample possesses the underlying soft skills, such as problem-solving, communication skills, and teamwork. These soft skills are always referred to as critical factors in job performance, yet are not usually captured by interviews and questionnaires.

Existing qualitative studies have agreed on the challenge of gaining access to participants in China (e.g. Cooke & Xiao, 2014; Tatli et al., 2017; Woodhams et al., 2015). All highlight the challenges and specific requirements to gain fieldwork authorization (e.g. Heimer & Thøgersen, 2006; Pieke, 2000). For instance, it is important to receive the correct official "red-stamp" authorization for social science fieldwork in China (Turner, 2010). Similar challenges are also identified in Africa and Eastern Europe. Mandiyanike (2009), despite studying in his native country, Zimbabwe, was treated with suspicion by several participants in his research due to his affiliation with the United Kingdom. In more recent scholarship, Kiragu and Warrington (2013) shed light on the ethical and methodological complexities encountered when studying schoolgirls in Kenya. Indeed, fieldwork "is not the art of the possible, the art is to make it possible" (Michailova & Liuhto, 2001, p. 12). Personal networking is one of the keys to gaining access to the field and participants, especially in China (e.g. Cooke & Xiao, 2014; Liu, 2017).

Acknowledging the difficulties of conducting fieldwork in China, this study adopted a snowball sampling strategy to gain contact with participants. Participants were first identified within the management program alumni network, and additional participants were referred from their personal contacts. In this case, participants with the attributes defined by the study, namely managers in SOEs and private enterprises, could be located efficiently. Although snowball sampling has been argued as being a non-random approach that lacks representativeness (e.g. Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2008), it has been commonly adopted by organizational studies in China (e.g. Aaltio & Huang, 2007; Tatli et al., 2017; Woodhams et al., 2015). Furthermore, the exploratory nature of this study aims to complement the existing understanding

of stereotypes rather than stressing its generalization in a broader social context. In this sense, the limitations do not significantly impair the credibility of snowball sampling in fulfilling the research objective.

6.2.2   Data Collection

The data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the addition of telephone interviews. Locations of the interviews were selected by the participants and ranged from offices to cafés and restaurants. The interviews typically lasted from one to two hours. Given the open-ended basis, the duration of interviews varied across participants and could last for three hours, depending on the willingness to share perspectives and experiences after answering all interview questions. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and were audio-recorded with the respondent's permission. Note-taking was kept at a minimum to allow observation of participants' facial expressions and tones. Audio-recording was transcribed after each interview, coupled with field notes highlighting observations and reflections.

During the interview, each participant was first asked the same set of questions:

1   Background information: introduction of the sector and company.
2   Personal career experience: career path since graduation, including job description, duration of each job, and reason for a change of job.

This format was finalized after several pilot interviews in which participants were clearly not fully comfortable and were reluctant to report their personal information once the interview started. The factual questions were first asked in opening the conversation and helped to put the participants at ease. Subsequent questions about career experiences were designed to direct the conversation to more personal perspectives and prepared the interviewee for demographic questions (e.g. age, marital status, educational level). The adjusted format allowed the gradual building of trust with the participants, which facilitated the collection of data associated with the questions. After the first two standardized sets, questions were asked on a more unstructured basis in order to bring in gender topics. The questions were primarily guided by two parts: (1) gender composition of the participant's current workplace, namely department and company's top management team; and (2) the participant's perspectives on the gender composition. The first part involved factual questions, similar to the opening of the interview, which served as a transition to gender topics. Participants were then invited to share their opinions about the gender composition in their company. Follow-up questions were raised to ensure the opinion was clarified and elaborated using specific examples. Additional questions concerning the general phenomenon of the lack of women at the top management level were asked in an unstandardized sequence and format. The objective was

to collect more data and to check if someone's attitude towards top managers would deviate with regard to a particular company setting and the general workplace context. Follow-up interviews were also conducted via in-person meetings and phone calls, which aimed at identifying any possible change in perspectives and managerial careers.

6.2.3   *Data Analysis Procedure*

Based upon the analytical procedure stated by available social researchers (e.g. Lune & Berg, 2017; Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2008), the data analysis process started soon after each interview was transcribed. Before the first interview was conducted, two working files were created for organizing data. One document summarized the answers to the factual questions, such as demographic information and gender composition in the work context, to provide an overview of the data and to facilitate fast identification of participants' basic information. An expanded working file was developed by employing the analytical software, NVivo, to include basic demographic information, transcript, and field notes of each interview. Interview transcripts were entered as text files in NVivo. Observations were included as notes to identify the emergence of potential patterns and characteristics of different demographic categories (e.g. gender, age, type of enterprises). After all the interviews were completed, I went through the transcripts and highlighted significant content as codes. The codes comprised phrases, terms, or descriptions offered by participants with regard to stereotypes and individual career experience. This coding process allowed themes to emerge from the basic data transcripts without predetermination. Additionally, data were constantly reorganized according to different demographic categories in order to identify potential characteristics. The previous procedure was repeated to ensure no patterns were overlooked before interpretation of the findings. Apart from this repetitive verification procedure, further measures were adopted to enhance the validation of the analysis. Due to the fact that interviews, transcriptions, and data analysis were conducted in Chinese, translation was not conducted until the narratives were presented in the written report. Original audio rather than transcripts was used for translation, followed by comparison with textual data (in Chinese) when writing the narratives. This aimed at minimizing the potential interpretive bias created by language differences (Patton, 2014).

6.2.4   *Ethical Issues*

Ethics has been the ultimate consideration underlying the entire research. Acknowledging the ethical obligations of a researcher, participants were informed in detail about the purpose of the research, the theme of the interview, confidentiality and anonymity of the conversations, and how their responses would be utilized. Participants were also informed that they could decide on the detail of their reply to each question, or they could refuse to

answer any question. The right to withdraw from the study at any time was also clearly communicated to each participant. The interview only started after each participant had no further questions regarding the research. The participants were then asked for approval of the audio recordings. Transparency in communicating research content and an emphasis on confidentiality and anonymity have been critical to this study, given the fact that it depends upon personal information such as opinions and experiences. More explicitly, as required for anonymity, any data indicating the participant's identity was excluded or referred to using an anonymized identification. To ensure confidentiality, all data and records associated with the participant's identity were removed after the completion of the research (Lune & Berg, 2017).

6.2.5   Sample

In total, 45 interviews were conducted in the period 2019–2021. The sample comprised 23 female and 22 male respondents, which gives a fair representation of each gender. The inclusion of both female and male managers was essential. Given the fact that the study examines gender stereotypes, it should be noted that stereotypes are "not only contained within an individual's mind, but also exist at a collective level" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2016, p. 167). More explicitly, a stereotype is generally defined as a belief shared by a large group of individuals (Katz & Braly, 1933, 1935; Schneider, 1996). In this regard, a gender stereotype describes a generalized characteristic about a particular gender category that can overlook possible gender differences and is endorsed by women and men. With data collected from women and men, the study is able to fulfill the notion of stereotypes in two respects. First, the sample is able to identify shared views from all individuals. Rather than shared views of women, the male perspective can further contribute to the validity of shared views by avoiding possible gender bias. Second, the sample also allows the investigation of possible differences in attitudes towards woman managers between men and women. In short, the sample can contribute to the female-only studies with a more holistic approach.

Characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 6.1.[2] 35 of the respondents are in their thirties and forties, comprising 78 percent of the sample; the youngest respondent is aged 26, and the oldest is 56. 25 respondents are married and 16 have never married. 25 of the respondents have children. All respondents have at least a bachelor's degree, with nearly 80 percent of the respondents having a master's or doctoral degree. Seven of the respondents received their degrees from overseas, and they are all female, consistent with reporting that Chinese women are more likely to study abroad than men (Tu, 2018). Respondents represent a diversified management background. 35 of them are middle-level managers (17 women and 18 men). Eight respondents are in junior-level management, and two women had recently opted out of management positions and were not employed full-time. Respondents of varied managerial statuses diversify the scope of the data source and enable the study to explore the potential influence of stereotypes on managers' career decisions.

Table 6.1 Sample characteristics (*N* = 45; Women = 23, Men = 22)

	Total number and percentage (%)	Total number of women	Total number of men
Age (years)			
21–30	7 (16%)	6	1
31–40	21 (47%)	11	10
41–50	14 (31%)	4	10
51–60	3 (7%)	2	1
Marital status			
Never married	16 (36%)	12	4
Married	25 (56%)	7	18
Divorced	4 (9%)	4	0
Children			
No children	20 (44%)	14	6
With children	25 (56%)	9	16
Education level			
Bachelor's	10 (22%)	6	4
Master's	30 (67%)	15	15
Doctorate	5 (11%)	2	3
Type of enterprises			
SOE	21 (47%)	6	15
Private	24 (53%)	17	7
Managerial level			
Junior	8 (18%)	4	4
Middle	35 (78%)	17	18
Other	2 (4%)	2	0

Nevertheless, the sample mainly consists of middle-level managers. 24 of the respondents were from private enterprises and 21 from SOEs.

6.3   Findings

This section presents the data on gender stereotypes of Chinese managers. The study aims to enrich the current understanding of stereotypes with added empirical details. Given the objective, the findings are organized into two subsections. The first presents the data according to the institutional category, namely SOEs and private enterprises. Data analysis in this subsection is developed based upon institutional characteristics stated in the preceding chapter. In general, the data confirm the significance of the institutional context in the understanding of stereotypes of managers. The second subsection presents an emerging theme that appears to be associated with the macro-level socio-economic transition. More explicitly, individuals who were born in a similar

period, namely before 1978, after 1978, or in the 1990s, demonstrate a pattern with regard to stereotypes. Before elaborating, it is worth mentioning the language differences. Not all Chinese phrases are directly translatable (Patton, 2014). Quotations of participants' responses therefore include remarks to ensure consistency and accurate presentation of the original narrative in Chinese.[3]

6.3.1 Cultural Stereotypes and the Enterprise

6.3.1.1 SOEs

The previous chapter distinguished the institutional characteristics of Chinese SOEs and private enterprises. The data provide further detail on the contextual differences, particularly with respect to individual well-being. This section, therefore, develops the data and presents the format of interpretation. The presentation of findings is supported using narrative quotations in an attempt to enrich the empirical evidence. It is notable that, according to the data from SOEs, certain characteristics of the former *danwei* system have been preserved. For instance, an employee was provided with space to deal with personal matters without affecting their career. One SOE manager described female employees asking for leave:

> In the state-owned system, if she is a formal employee, she [her job] basically will not be affected [by these matters]. These are also reasonable, that is marriage leave, maternity leave are reasonable requests, are legitimized by the country's Labor Law. . . . In fact, state-owned enterprises perhaps still talk about contribution, that is, your effort. After all there is a mechanism [in place to evaluate a person's contribution]. A person who has made a lot of effort and contributed a lot to the *danwei*, it is impossible to erase all the merits because of little things.

Indeed, most respondents from SOEs still refer to their workplace as *danwei*. According to SOE managers, many of their *danwei* still provide welfare facilities, including free housing and schools. For an interview with a manager from a car manufacturing SOE, I visited the headquarters. The SOE covered a scale of approximately 4 million square meters and comprised more than factories and business buildings. There were residential buildings for employees, childcare facilities, and canteens. The zone was a non-public space in which the facilities were able to sustain a self-contained community. The headquarters was located in a suburban region about an hour's drive from the city. As a visitor, I was not able to directly access the headquarters, instead being picked up by a company car from a nearby location and taken into the zone. According to other SOE managers, their *danwei* also offered similar facilities. I was told that it was better to send children to schools operated by *danwei*. Given the fact that the parents were colleagues within the same *danwei*, they could help each other in times of need. This evidence suggests that the current SOEs, despite the reforms, still preserve the collective characteristic of the former work unit. In this regard,

women, despite the 14-week maternity leave, have been regarded as having no major difference from men in this sense. This is mainly due to the fact that SOEs, as confirmed by managers, are fully capable of leveraging the potential costs created by these short-term absences. Interestingly, the following statement was mentioned in a similar sense by younger male respondents: "It is truly comfortable for women to work in SOEs. The benefit far exceeds the inputs. Women should really work in the SOEs".

It usually appeared as a concluding remark after explaining challenges to move up the ladders in their *danwei*. Sometimes, the statement appeared as advice to me from older respondents. From one perspective, it sheds light on the cultural context of Chinese SOEs that distinguishes women from men in the workplace in a more implicit form. For instance, women have been perceived as physically weaker and requiring special concern. An SOE manager said:

> The [maternity] leaves are mostly short term, a few months [or] half a year. Colleagues can totally help to share the work duties. The cost is still lower than hiring a new person. In this case, the company interest is fully aligned with personal interest. . . . Male colleagues in most cases will help female colleagues in most aspects if they can. For example, when carrying things, although female colleagues are able to lift the item, the male colleagues still carry it [for the females].

The concern for female employees is also reflected in the aspect of business travel. Male employees are preferred for business trips, given the consensus that selecting women is "inconvenient". One manager provided the reason for this preference and the resulting influence on recruitment:

> As a contractor, we have to travel to meet with the owner. Sometimes the location is quite rural, with poor facilities. It is not good to send female colleagues to these remote places with difficult conditions. A male is more convenient, less to be concerned about. When screening resumes, we are more likely to select men. This is not discrimination. Because relatively . . . women . . ., from one aspect are not easily adaptable to the intensity of our work.

The male preference for positions featuring business travel was also confirmed by another SOE manager:

> In our department, we are willing to hire men. It is more convenient [in terms of business travel, working overtime, etc.]. [The department's function of] Investment is similar to investment banking [i.e. very intensive and stressful work]. Certainly, there are some very outstanding women [in the field of investment banking]. For example, in the aspects of talking and thinking, we [our department] have many capable female colleagues, but this is still rare.

These responses show that certain positions have been perceived as more suitable for men. This stereotypical belief is more subtle but manifests in workplace practice. Particularly in the process of promotion to top management, the data suggest that stereotypes are also salient. According to the managers, women are not entirely invisible in SOEs' top management. I was informed that positions in the highest leadership would be reserved for women. As described by a male respondent, who had been recently promoted to Party secretary of the SOE (the highest leadership position of a Party branch within a company):

> We also are very aware of women's promotion issue in our company. The administrative position in our highest leadership team usually is reserved for a woman. So I can say a woman in our company still has a fairly good promotion prospect. It is possible for a woman to enter the top leadership.

In other words, there is a quota system in certain, if not all, Chinese SOEs. This was unanticipated due to the fact that there have been limited public statements about the practice. In contrast to the lack of knowledge in the business context, more has been revealed in the political arena. Indeed, the quota system is explicitly stated by official documents. The National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009–2010),[4] published by the State Council in 2009, requires that women account for no less than 20 percent of reserve cadres. A similar quota is stated in the most recent plan for the period of 2016–2020[5] with regard to villagers' committees (at least 30 percent), villagers' committee chairpersons (at least 10 percent), and members of urban residents' committees (about 50 percent). Given the active role of the state in SOEs, it is likely that a similar quota system is applied in state-owned business entities. Yet the interview data shows that women top managers are perceived as solely suitable for certain positions. This finding also mirrors the visibility of female cadres in traditional female-dominated professions such as health, education, and welfare (Rosen, 1995). As commented by one respondent, it is regarded as very difficult for women to work in frontline positions such as the sales department.

> In our company, only three senior-level managers are women: human resource, administrative and board secretary. Yes [they are all from functional departments]. Women can never work on operating department [e.g. sales]. It is difficult [for them].

In sum, stereotypes in SOEs are reflected in work practices. One remarkable aspect pinpoints the common perception that women are physically weaker than men. This stereotypical belief shapes the subtle consensus that women belong to a group that requires protection and special concern. In other words, protective practice is a manifestation of the stereotypical belief in physical characteristics. As argued in the preceding chapter, state regulations that aim to protect women are potentially a double-edged sword. Women, on the one hand, are protected from discriminatory practices, whereas women's gender identity

is also highlighted by these protections. In the SOE context, perceptions of women's physical characteristics have led to the belief that women are unfit for certain types of tasks, such as business trips. Consequently, tasks are assigned selectively between women and men. The unequal distribution of tasks reflects a bias that can further differentiate work experiences between the two genders. Stereotypical work practices also involve the appointment of top managers. Although the available public sources are limited, the interview data reveal that there is a quota system available in some SOEs, if not all. However, the quota system is potentially gendered. In other words, top management positions are still perceived from a traditional gendered lens. For instance, women have been regarded as suitable for administrative positions and unsuitable for sales positions. The gendered attitude towards top managers demonstrates stereotypes in SOEs that can impede the career prospects of women in the workplace.

6.3.1.2   Private Enterprises

Similar to the SOEs, private enterprises also have few women at top management levels. Nevertheless, data suggest that the institutional context varies from SOEs. Large private enterprises are characterized by their profit-driven nature, in which an individual's work performance is monitored by a rigid evaluation system. As described by one manager:

> Our company requires fast and efficient work performance. Every task is time sensitive. Therefore, the environment will affect young females. For instance, a female staff member takes half a year of maternity leave with additional breastfeeding leave, then one year is gone. This means missing a three-year evaluation cycle since our company's evaluation has to consider performance within the past three years. When the female staff member gives birth to a second child, then it is in total a six-year disadvantage. If her evaluation result is C-grade, and another colleague gets an A, she will find it very difficult to be promoted.

This manager further stressed that women who had children would undoubtedly encounter disadvantages in moving up the promotion ladder within the company. Consistent descriptions regarding the intensive evaluation cycle were mentioned by respondents who also work in private enterprises. One respondent said that the evaluation period could be adjusted unexpectedly based on the company's interests:

> At the time I joined this company, staff performance was evaluated once a year. That is, the leadership gives an annual target and staff will only be evaluated at the end of the year. But in recent years, the annual target has been changed to six-month targets, so the evaluation is conducted every six months. I know in some departments they even set a monthly target, and their staff are evaluated monthly. It is very intense.

Work intensity in large enterprises has been confirmed by managers from private enterprises. Evaluation mechanisms can place women at a disadvantage. However, evaluation is not the only obstacle women have to face. Work intensity is partly created by peer pressure among colleagues in the same department and further challenges the career development of women, particularly for working mothers. One manager commented on how peer pressure can affect someone's career development:

> One point is that the company can be a bit cruel. There is definitely a comparison [among colleagues]. It is not saying that everything will be fine if you complete your own work. If your colleagues have done more than you, better than you, it will appear like you are not doing a very good job. . . . In fact, when working in a company, the level of colleagues and you are not that much different. Therefore, if your colleague works for longer hours, he/she must have worked [completed work] more than you do, at least from the supervisor's point of view. Promotion will definitely be affected [if someone only works office hours]. Domestic internet companies can be crueler, they will dismiss [the least competent worker]. Even if you are not dismissed, promotion will definitely be slower.

This example demonstrates the possible challenges of working overtime for women with childcare responsibilities, particularly in the private sector. The data also confirm previous findings that most women believe pregnancy can harm their current leadership position and future promotion opportunities (Xie & Zhu, 2016). This career stagnation in the workplace setting can affect working mothers' decisions, according to one respondent:

> The work environment will affect working women, especially the attitudes towards work. If promoted slowly, [there could be two reactions]. In one case, she will either give up on trying, and just work for a living but have no urge to make progress. Alternatively, she will feel upset given that her ability is not recognized and want to change company.

In a large-scale survey, Chen and colleagues (2018) find that family is a critical element in Chinese women's career decisions. Their study also argues that concern for family-related issues is likely to affect women's decisions in the workplace. The salience of family for working women was cited by one manager:

> In my company, there are women who just gave birth who will choose to leave the office on time at 6 p.m. no matter what [regardless of the work status]. They know that this is not helpful for their work performance, but they have planned to resign after the one-year breastfeeding leave. They know the company will not keep them, given their low efficiency in the past year [due to breastfeeding leave]. But they all think it is okay and acceptable, as long as their children are placed as the first priority.

Despite the fact that this response is just one example, it sheds light on the significance of family, which can have an impact on women's work behaviors. Family and work relationships should be further examined to better understand the associated work decisions. The next chapter will thus provide a more holistic analysis of this aspect. Unexpectedly, according to a manager, the career decision of one female employee can change the attitude towards all women in the organization:

> There was once a female employee, not sure about which department she was. It seemed that she gave birth to two children in three years. She didn't do much other work [her job duties] and dropped out [after three years]. So now the company poses this as a typical case [as a reference for the whole company], and it affects some of the company's policies.

This manager did not provide further details about the specific change in the company's policy, but another respondent who had worked in the same company hinted at the policy from personal experience: "When I worked in the company, my superior explicitly said that they do not hire female graduates with a master's degree who are aged 25 and 26".

Based on the respondent's lowered voice, this discriminatory recruitment practice should not be mentioned publicly. In fact, this practice is not completely hidden from the public. For instance, it can be found in job advertisements posted by private enterprises. A Fortune 500 company was recently criticized for asking for "male candidates between 28 and 40 years old" in its job advertisement.[6] The evidence suggests that discriminatory recruitment practices are not limited to one type of organization but are prevalent in the Chinese labor market. Stereotypical behavior in terms of gender preference in recruitment exists in the contexts of both SOEs and private enterprises. In private enterprises specifically, the data suggest that stereotyping is a discriminatory practice. It is reflected in a subtle form that can have an impact on women's career decisions. As demonstrated by the aforementioned examples, women in private enterprises encounter the expectation of gender-equal competence in addition to traditional gender role expectations. These dual expectations have posed a dilemma for women, especially working mothers. The evidence shows that some women will forgo career advancement or leave the workplace to fulfill family obligations. As described in Section 6.1, women in today's China are not only expected to work as intensively as men but also expected to give birth, carry out housework and childcare, and take care of the elderly members of the family as prescribed by the legal code. Although little about filial obligations was mentioned by the respondents, it is well documented by statistical studies (e.g. Hu, 2017; Hu & Scott, 2016; Yeh et al., 2013). These observable changes in women's work behaviors imply gender role expectations; that is, having to take care of family can affect women's workplace decisions. In this regard, it is conclusive that women's work behavior is a manifestation of gender stereotypes in the context of private enterprises.

6.3.2 Cultural Stereotypes and Age Cohort

This subsection presents the emerging theme, which suggests the shared characteristics of stereotypes among respondents born in periods with distinct social and political contexts. Categorizing individuals in terms of generation has been a widely adopted approach. For instance, various generations in the Western context are well recognized as the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials/Generation Y, and Generation Z. Each of the generations is named to describe the characteristics of that particular period of time (e.g. Howe & Strauss, 2000; Mannheim, 1952; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Yet the classification of generations differs across countries (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Yi et al., 2015). In the Chinese context, generations categorized by birth decade are publicly known and commonly reported in the mass media: "Born in the 1960s" (*liulinghou*), "Born in the 1970s" (*qilinghou*), "Born in the 1980s" (*balinghou*), and "Born in the 1990s" (*jiulinghou*). There is also emerging scholarship that defines Chinese generations according to different historical events or periods (e.g. Hu & Scott, 2016; Yi et al., 2015). Despite the different classifications, generation is a significant manifestation of a national culture such that generational identity is constructed by a specific set of values, beliefs, expectations, and behaviors (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Inglehart, 1997). In other words, age not only represents work experience over time but, more importantly, also sheds light on the macro-level contextual factors and the potential influence on individual work behavior. Instead of defining generation according to a given classification, the present study allows themes to emerge. To better illustrate the findings, the data are categorized into three age cohorts and summarized in Table 6.2. Each age cohort mirrors the gender dynamics of Chinese reforms since 1978 and will be introduced in detail respectively.

6.3.2.1 The Oldest Cohort (Born Before 1978)

The oldest cohort comprises respondents born before the 1978 reform, who have the most experience in the workplace. As introduced in the preceding chapters, the economy in the pre-1978 period was dominated by state ownership and central planning in which individuals were allocated to work positions and expected to remain in the same work unit until retirement.

Table 6.2 Age cohorts (*N* = 45)

	Total number and percentage (%)	Number of women	Number of men
Oldest cohort (aged 44–56)	10 (22%)	3	7
Middle cohort (aged 32–43)	25 (56%)	12	13
Youngest cohort (aged 26–31)	10 (22%)	8	2

Given the socioeconomic and political setting, the male–female binary was de-emphasized in line with the national ideology (Yang, 1999). This cohort was found to be distinctive mainly due to the fact that the managers have experienced the socialist contexts before 1978 as well as the subsequent series of reforms. What are the individuals' attitudes towards gender and career experience? From the responses, it is clear that this cohort stresses the similarity between women and men in work performance. In some interviews, questions with regard to gender in the workplace were immediately interrupted by the respondents. For instance, I asked: "How do you see gender differentials in the workplace? Are there any differences?" Without any explanation of what I meant by "gender differentials" and before I finished the question, one manager said: "No no, I don't think this [gender] is the point. I always de-emphasize gender as a reason [for the difference in career behavior]. I think one should pursue what one likes the most". Interestingly, when this female manager commented on her current work status, she admitted that the position was not the best decision with regard to her career but was the only choice that allowed her to take care of her family at the same time. Having been an investor, she proudly explained her ability to succeed as a professional in the financial sector and highlighted how she had achieved the highest investment return in one of her previous jobs. At the time of the interview, she was the manager of the administration department, which she referred to as a "supporting role", but a good way to integrate work, personal, and family life. She commented:

> Of course I feel slightly unwilling to be seen as a supporting role. I only accepted the current administrative position since . . . it aligns with my current situation. Firstly, next year my daughter will move to the next stage of her life [giving birth to a child in the United States], I want to be by her side. Secondly, as an investor [former job], investment is integrated into our daily lives . . . now I retreat to the back line [supporting role], I can have more time to plan my upcoming retirement [at age 52] and work on family-oriented wealth management.

She stressed that she was an exceptional case given the fact that she was approaching retirement age and fully flexible after her divorce. In other words, according to her, individual decisions, not gender, resulted in different behaviors in the workplace. Responses from other managers within the oldest cohort demonstrated a consistent theme. Similar to the former interview, my question about gender differentials was interrupted by another manager:

> No. I always repeat a sentence [to women around me]: why can't women? The opportunities [for career development] are the same [for both genders]. There are some traditional beliefs that cause some women not to work hard, don't you think so? . . . If one [a woman] is very devoted to a

goal at work, nothing can stop her. Even in the case of childcare. Today's young people [parents] can take advantage of their parents and in-laws to help look after the children. If they can [financially], they can hire a baby-sitter. Work and family are not in conflict, everyone should allocate time reasonably.

The conclusions about the dual expectations regarding women's work and family roles in the Chinese context are justified by the responses. From an identity perspective, it is not entirely surprising to observe how individuals in this cohort concur with the expectations. According to this cohort, gender differentials in the workplace were not only interpreted as a personal decision but also perceived as a natural outcome given the workplace context. In other words, it is stressed that men and women should not be differentiated from each other in the workplace. As one manager described it:

> More men fewer women, or more women fewer men in a specific work context is an outcome that naturally developed, that is naturally distributed. This is not an outcome because of selecting a specific gender intentionally. Equality in intention is often a form of discrimination.

The final remark from this manager was quite unanticipated yet noteworthy in the sense that it sheds light on the potential underlying rationale of the de-emphasis of the gender binary. Given the explicit social and political period in which the group was born, these responses demonstrate how the macro-level factors, such as national ideology and culture, have played a role in shaping the shared attitudes towards gender in the workplace. The consensus that emerged from the data suggests that gender is insignificant in the workplace context. Yet the group in fact acknowledges the gender differences from a sociocultural perspective. Explicitly, managers of the cohort highlighted the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes on gender differentials in the workplace. As noted by the manager quoted earlier, gender segregation was regarded as a result of women changing their behavior according to traditional gender perceptions: "It is all about personal choice. Others are irrelevant". Similarly, in other interviews, internalization of traditional gender beliefs, particularly by women, was perceived as a potential determinant of the gender differences in the workplace.

6.3.2.2   *The Middle Cohort (Born 1978–1989)*

The middle cohort was born in the period 1978–1989, after the start of economic reform and opening-up policies. As described in Chapter 4, this was also the time during which Western gender perspectives and feminist discussions were introduced to China. The data suggest this cohort are fully aware of the gender differences both in the workplace and in society. Remarkably, there are no major variations in the gender perceptions of women and men.

In other words, both women and men have demonstrated high consistency in this acknowledgment. According to one male respondent, gender differences seemed inevitable:

> Women, in the society, find it very difficult to achieve equality. After all, men and women are different. Besides, women have to work [on a job] in the patriarchal society, it is definitely not easy. For example my wife, who also received a doctoral degree in engineering, decided to not go to work and stay at home to take care of the family. She definitely sacrificed something. . . . That was her decision [to stay at home].

Although it was impossible to confirm the rationale for his wife's decision, the challenge of striving for career development while fulfilling gender role expectations was explicitly mentioned by women managers in the cohort. For most women, traditional stereotypes were regarded as the primary factor for gender differentials in the workplace. As noted by one woman, women were still restricted by traditional gender role expectations, whereas men could devote themselves more to work without responsibility for taking care of family matters:

> This society has some traditional stereotypes towards women, for example women have to take care of children. . . . Men in comparison with women, don't have the obligation to contribute to the family. A man can devote himself to work without hesitation and worry [about family obligations]. All they have in their minds is work, and they don't take care of the family at all.

At the time of the interview, she said she was facing a dilemma in her career:

> I am experiencing a bottleneck at the moment. My job is very intense, and I have to work almost every weekend. I want to take two years off to study for a graduate degree and spend more time with my son. But I also have promotion offers. I am still struggling to make a decision.

According to another female manager, the persistence of traditional culture can lead to gendered attitudes in the workplace:

> I think the Chinese context is different from the West, especially the cultural aspect. The profound cultural connotation. It is difficult for women to receive the same kind of recognition as men [in the workplace]. Because women have to give birth. Also in China [women] have to look after older family members, take care of the household. There are old and young at home. I am also very annoyed [by these gender role expectations placed on women].

This manager was the female with the highest position in her company. She shared the experiences at work that she regarded as relevant to her gender:

> It is not easy to reach the top. One not only has to be professionally competent, she also needs strong ability to take great pressure, and be emotional intelligent. . . . When at the top, your fellow colleagues will implicitly highlight [that you are a woman and a minority]. And their attitudes will clearly show their doubt about your competency. . . . I remember in the first or second month working at the position, a male subordinate suddenly came to my office and had an emotional outbreak with lots of anger and complaint. Although he later apologized and I didn't say a word, if it was a new male boss do you think he would do the same?

It is notable from this response that shared beliefs are a challenge to women working in a male-dominated context. Furthermore, the gendered attitude is also reflected in working relationships. One female manager described the male-oriented communication and work relationships in her previous company:

> I worked in the company for five years. Until the last two years I was struggling, and I was very unhappy. Because of the working environment of my team, I felt that I could not work freely [without any concern] and I was not happy. The form of exchange is completely dominated by men. The kind of relationship between colleagues . . . is very masculine, that is, not very close [to each other].

The male-dominated workplace culture of interpersonal interactions and work relationships is indeed an illustration of the male-oriented culture. As suggested by studies conducted in the Chinese context, it is evident that women are kept out of the networks that promote career success such that they require greater effort to become visible within the male-dominated networks and receive promotions (e.g. Huang & Aaltio, 2014; Zhu et al., 2016). The role of gender in workplace relationships, particularly the associated concept of *guanxi*, will be further explored in Chapter 8. The stereotypical attitudes mentioned by these women managers were confirmed by the comment of a male respondent:

> I am not discriminating again woman. I have to say I think women are born with a higher level of emotional fluctuation. But I see men and women each have different advantage and it depends on how the work is assigned. Men are born to be physically stronger, whereas women are better at specific and detailed work and are more meticulous. In the places with more women, there is more gossip. Men compete with each other at the workplace in a straightforward way, women only gossip behind one's back.

Given these stereotypes in the workplace, it is evident that women not only are aware of the presence of these shared beliefs but also tend to internalize the stereotypes about them. According to one woman manager, the stereotypes result in doubt of their competency:

> Others will also question your ability which makes you want to prove yourself. The work environment will give you pressure, and you will also place pressure on yourself. I was struggling to carry all these with me for the whole time [when at the top position], and I felt vulnerable. Sometimes I ask myself why I have to desperately fight for my career.

A similar impact on woman manager's self-perception was also reflected in one response:

> When compared with them [male colleagues], I could not find my comparative advantage on the team. People around me are too outstanding, too competent. And no matter from what aspect: IQ [intelligence quotient], speed of reading, abilities, and physical energy, I do not have any comparative advantage.

Consequently, some women managers pursue an alternative career path enabling them to fulfill their career goal as well as the gender role expectations in the family domain. The new career path was often described in the following way:

> After quitting my job, I become an independent consultant and have several projects on process. Although I went back to the busy old days, but I have a very flexible schedule. I have things to do, and I feel the sense of achievement from what I am doing now.

Given the limited number of respondents, the data are hardly representative of all women and men in the same age cohort. However, there are features that can be summarized from the evidence. The first finding is the awareness of gender differentials in both the workplace and the social context. This is a clear contrast with the oldest cohort, which de-emphasizes gender differences in the work context. The data suggest that attitudes towards women and men were more explicitly addressed than by the former cohort, with no individuals of the middle cohort denying gender differentials in the workplace. Besides, interviewees from this cohort show that traditional gender role expectations have been recognized by working women as a relevant factor in their career decisions. According to the women managers, the shared gender beliefs were likely to be internalized and affected their self-perception. Although decisions differed, the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes had been identified, similar to the former cohort. In short, both women and men in this cohort were aware of the gender stereotypes, yet it was more likely that women would adjust their behavior according to the shared gender beliefs.

6.3.2.3 *The Youngest Cohort (Born in or After 1990)*

The youngest cohort was the smallest sample among all managers. In China, this cohort has a generational identity: the *jiulinghou* (post-1990s), a term referring to individuals born between 1990 and 1999. The period 1990–1999 was rather different from previous years in Chinese history. In 1990 the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock markets were founded,[7] triggering the connection of the Chinese economy with the global market. The growing integration with the global economy on the one hand contributed to the advent of China's drastic economic expansion in the early 1990s (Woo, 1998; Yu, 1998). On the other hand, it brought about the rapid development of science and technology. Given this special historical background, individuals born during this period experienced the rapid economic growth and were extensively exposed to the Internet, mass media, and social media (Tang et al., 2017). A diverse strand of research has studied the post-1990s (e.g. consumer behavior: Liang & Xu, 2018; educational performance: Yang et al., 2020; employee behavior: Tang et al., 2017) and is consistent in showing that this cohort of individuals display distinctive characteristics. The present discussion contributes to the available research on the post-1990s with evidence from managers. Compared to the older cohorts, respondents from the youngest cohort are currently in entry-level management positions and moving quickly up the career ladder. Meanwhile, they are facing more uncertainties in their personal, family, and working lives. Acknowledging the early stage in their careers, the discussion illuminates their gender role perceptions and the associated career experience and development.

Consistent with the oldest and middle cohorts, this cohort asserted the importance of their career in their lives. All ten respondents demonstrated an equal level of determination in their current job, irrespective of gender. However, the gender role expectations tend to vary among unmarried and married respondents. One of the male respondents in this cohort shared his change of attitude towards work before and after getting married:

> I think my attitude did change because of marriage. Before getting married, there was only work and how I can succeed at work in my head. But after I got married, there is a lot more in my mind. For example, I have to think about when to have children, how much money I need to earn [to support the family]. I am sure marriage will affect women more because after all they have to give birth to a child.

As described by him, women were expected to give birth. This expectation and its potential impact on their careers were recognized by the female respondents. However, they expressed different attitudes on this issue. One married female manager in this cohort was attempting to avoid the topic at the current stage:

> I know I have to give birth sometime. I am not the person who would prefer to be childless. But my work is really intense, I always have to work

overtime. And I was just promoted to a management position, it's not the time to think about a child at the moment. My husband always wants to discuss this topic with me, nearly every day, but I try to avoid the conversation as much as I can. I really can't right now, there's too much for me at work.

Based on her reply, the childbearing obligation was something she was attempting to avoid as long as she could. Yet the data also indicate the presence of stereotyping of married women managers in the organizational context. According to a woman manager who planned to get married after the interview, she had not been promoted solely because her boss realized she would soon get married. Working in the finance department of a large private retail enterprise, her job required frequent travel to various cities for outreach to investors. She described how she was told not to be too ambitious in her career after marriage:

I have the crisis of consciousness [of how childbirth will affect her career] now. Last year and this year I performed quite well, the clients are very satisfied with my work. This year, my achievements, associated with my promotion and the work plan, are intentionally downplayed by my supervisor. He told me something like, "next year you don't have to work as departments' head, or you can think about only being the head of one single department. Or you can consider being in charge of one project instead of many projects". . . . He even proposed that I could shift to an administrative position. This is very frustrating, not because of him but I personally feel very frustrated.

In addition to what she experienced, she also learned from other women in her company who encountered barriers in career development after marriage and childbirth. When talking about her career expectations after getting married, she was more pessimistic.

If I got married and if I was pregnant then maybe I would frequently have to ask for work leave. Until I actually gave birth maybe I would have half a year I couldn't work. I have seen so many working mothers who have lost their [promotion] opportunities because of giving birth and whose career development became more challenging [afterwards]. When there's an opportunity [critical for promotion], the choice of childbirth or work can be difficult for a woman.

She was upset when speaking about how her boss offered to reduce her workload and divided her work among her male colleagues. Despite the fact that she was not married and not pregnant when the interview was conducted, she burst into tears when explaining how other female colleagues had lost opportunities for promotion.

There was a sharp contrast with the unmarried respondents. The unmarried women managers saw themselves as having unlimited potential in moving up the career ladder. As one female manager noted, she enjoyed the new challenges of her current work such that she was reluctant to constrain her career development by making a concrete plan:

> At the current stage I haven't thought about drawing a stable development curve [for my career], such as what position I have to attain within two years. . . . It's very likely I will continue to work. I wish this job is something very interesting to work on and very challenging. I also never think about working on a job with working hours fixed at 9 a.m. − 5 p.m., something not very challenging.

Similar attitudes were shared by other unmarried women managers, akin to the response from the only unmarried male respondent. Both the unmarried respondents were aware that the top leadership level of their respective company was male-dominated, yet they also highlighted that there were plenty of women in mid-level management. When asked about their attitudes towards this situation, most of the respondents said it was difficult to comment given that they were not yet at the career stage. After a few seconds, one young woman manager said:

> I want to say I have never thought about the reasons, one aspect I think is a decision made naturally by women. Women themselves want to retreat to the family and take care of children. I have met someone in our company who decided to quit a mid-level management position. I think I am not there [the mid-level] yet so I can only say this is a phenomenon. I don't know if they really experience a lot of barriers which lead to the decision not to advance further.

With regard to her plan for the next few years, she was quite certain that nothing should affect her work. Moreover, she admitted that it would be challenging to prevent childbirth and childcare from affecting her career:

> I think in three years there won't be too much difference in my work. I cannot make a longer plan because it will lose its function when there is change. . . . I will reconsider about my work if one day I get married or have a kid. But I am quite sure I will not be a full-time housewife or change jobs because of it. At this moment I think my bottom line is nothing should affect my work. I know once I have a kid it is not hard to avoid the impact on my career. Because of the bottom line, I definitely will not give up on working.

Two years after our first interview, she had been promoted to mid-level management and there was no change in her marital status. When asking about any

changes of attitudes towards gender role and career plan, she said there was no change from her previous perspectives:

> I am still single, there's no change. I have been in the same company and recently promoted to a higher management level. I have learnt to enjoy my own life and now I feel more comfortable with the current situation. I now only spend 20 percent of my time on management [the rest to my own tasks and leisure]. Maybe I will change jobs, depending on whether the new job will offer fast-track career advancement.

The youngest cohort demonstrates a pattern distinct from the other two age cohorts, which is partly attributable to the fact that these young managers are at an early stage in their managerial careers. In other words, they are the least experienced among the three age cohorts. According to several recent reports, the post-1990s cohort is characterized as having a better education and more freedom in decision-making (Economist, 2021; Yao, 2021). Despite the possible differences from the older cohorts in ways of searching for partners and entering marriage (Davis & Friedman, 2014), holding on to family traditions is still important. Notably, traditional gender roles and attitudes towards family are still shared among individuals in the youngest cohort, irrespective of marital status. Acknowledging traditional gender role expectations, the young managers mostly chose to respond actively by integrating the expectations into their career development plan.

6.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided examples and complemented the preceding discussions on the gendered workplace in China. More explicitly, the study focuses on exploring how stereotypes are reflected in the workplace, perspectives on stereotypes, and the potential influence of stereotypical views on women managers' career experiences. Based on qualitative analysis, the evidence, in general, is consistent with common attitudes towards women managers in two major respects.

- First, the respondents' perspectives on women in the workplace do not differ from the image of the ideal woman, that is, her role as daughter, wife, and mother, alongside women's equal labor participation. The perspective is shared among all respondents regardless of gender.
- Second, manifestations of the characteristics associated with the ideal Chinese woman in the workplace context are also noticeable from women's career experiences. For instance, some women were denied promotions or job offers due to the stereotypical belief about what women are and how they will behave based on the characteristics of the ideal woman.

In addition to extending current knowledge about stereotypes regarding women, the qualitative study is also important to the analytical framework and

subsequent analysis. The findings first confirm the relevant aspects in approaching stereotypes, namely institutional context and individual age with respect to the macro-level socioeconomic and political context. Furthermore, evidence about the characteristics of the ideal woman in China is significant in defining the prescription variable (P) in the economics of identity (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). Given the results, the next two chapters will apply the framework to understanding two determinants of women's career experience: work–family relationships and social networks. As shown in Chapter 3, both factors have been well studied in the Western organizational context (e.g. Ibarra, 1992, 1993; Kanter, [1977] 2008; Stainback et al., 2011) but are found to be inadequate for explaining the Chinese context (e.g. Aaltio & Huang, 2007; Tang, 2020). The next two chapters aim to examine each salient aspect of the glass ceiling through the lens of cultural stereotypes, as defined previously. In each chapter, the framework will be applied to understand work–family relationships and social networks in the Chinese context and to interpret Chinese women's career experiences with respect to each aspect.

Notes

1 The term, together with other popular discourse in 2006, is defined in an official report published by the Ministry of Education and National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center in 2007. The report is available from: www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A19/s7067/200708/t20070816_76011.html
2 For clear presentation, the percentage is rounded up to the unit digit.
3 The following transcription conventions are adopted:

> . . . indicates the omission of speech in the data;
> . . . brief pause in the speech;
> [for them] indicates the likely interpretation to clarify the speech.

4 Official full text National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009–2010) is available at www.china.org.cn/archive/2009-04/13/content_17595407.htm (Chinese text).
5 Official full text for National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2016–2020) is published at http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2016/09/29/content_281475454482622.htm
6 The job advertisement was initially posted on https://zx.sina.cn/push/2021-01-21/zx-ikftssan9288808.d.html (Chinese text). It was later removed after being openly criticized by the All-China Women's Federation regional division in Guizhou province.
7 The important historical event in 1990 is outlined by the state and published at www.gov.cn/test/2009-10/09/content_1434334.htm

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7 Work, Family, and Women in Management

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have provided essential prerequisites, namely an analytical framework and contextual background, to foster an understanding of women's managerial careers in Chinese business organizations. According to previous discussions, two major aspects emerge which require further exploration to interpret women managers' experiences in China. As described in Chapter 4, it is notable that the private and public spheres, determined by the macro-level context, are relevant in understanding women's experiences in China. Chapter 5 further clarified the Chinese conceptualizations of private and public, which can be different from Western interpretations. In general, the public sphere in the Chinese context is broader than the West's common notion of work, which can include both work and non-work matters. Non-work matters can include life in the public sphere as well as personal and social life, with which the state is also concerned. Recognizing the differences in defining the private and public sphere, the present study focuses on more specific concepts: family and work. This notion not only follows the general practice of existing literature (despite variants that will be discussed in the next section) but also corresponds to the state's emphasis on women's family role and work identity. In other words, the notion is especially relevant to the Chinese context. Regarding the workplace, Western literature on organizations has provided abundant descriptions of the possible impacts of work–family relationships on women's career advancement (e.g. Acker, 1992, 2006; Kanter, [1977] 2008). The natural questions are: how are the work and family domains seen in China? How can these views of work and family be applied to understand women's managerial experiences and the glass ceiling in the Chinese business context? Contextualizing the idea of work and family in China is significant in the sense that Western-oriented work–family theories have been mostly developed based on "predominantly individualistic cultures" (Xiao & Cooke, 2012, p. 7).

   Before analyzing the Chinese case, I will first examine the existing studies associated with work and non-work relationships. After clarifying the broad and ambiguous field, the discussion will narrow to family and work and explore the available findings in the Chinese context. The subsequent discussion analyzes

empirical data collected from interviews with women managers to sustain the understanding of women's managerial career and the glass ceiling in China. The final section summarizes the preceding discussions and identifies the important implications.

7.2   Work and Family Relationships

7.2.1   *Work and Non-work*

Before diving into the research on work and family, it is relevant to first explore the broader discussions on work and non-work. The earliest studies of work and non-work relationships dated back to the 1960s (Beigi et al., 2019; Perry-Jenkins & Wadsworth, 2017). Since then, a wide range of scholars from different disciplines, such as economists, organizational psychologists, and sociologists, have contributed to the research (for the most recent historical review, see French & Johnson, 2016). Given the diversified contributors, the field has been identified as "fragmented" (Allen et al., 2014, p. 112), with very limited coherence (Zedeck, 1992). As Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002, p. 300) conclude, the existing studies vary in "conceptualization, measurement, and treatment of variables". In this case, most of the literature emphasizes one aspect with the attempt to provide a systematic overview of the complexity (e.g. historical survey: French & Johnson, 2016; research methodology: Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Casper et al., 2007; Eby et al., 2005; cross-cultural and region-specific: Cho & Choi, 2018; Wong & Lun, 2018). Instead of diving deep into the debates, I abstract the relevant studies to underpin how an in-depth analysis of work and family relationships in the Chinese context fills a gap in the existing literature.

7.2.1.1   *Work and Non-work Terminologies*

According to Beigi and colleagues (2019), there have been 48 terminologies to describe the interface (or interactions) between work and non-work activities since the 1960s. They introduced a taxonomy to classify the terminologies based on two dimensions, namely "the type of nonwork and the nature of mutual impact" (Beigi et al., 2019, p. 456). Within the first dimension, non-work is further classified into narrow or broad by including one specific subdomain (narrow) or multiple subdomains (broad) of an individual's life (Frone, 2003). For instance, family is a narrow subdomain that refers explicitly to a set of personal relationships (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), while terms such as "life" and "non-work" are adopted to represent a broader setting consisting of multiple subdomains (Beigi et al., 2019). The second dimension categorizes the terminologies into three different types of mutual impact: negative, balanced, and positive (Allen, 2012; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). The implications are straightforward. For the negative category, conflict and compensation are two examples that capture the potential reduction in engagement in one domain

resulting from increased engagement in the other. On the other hand, positive effects of the interaction are presumed by terms such as "enrichment" and "expansion". They grouped the remaining terms, such as "balance" and "interface", into the balanced category (Beigi et al., 2019). Although the taxonomy only captures the perspective of the worker rather than that of the organization or social groups, it sheds new light to clarify the obscure field. According to their expansive investigation, one additional highly relevant finding is that work and non-work in the literature are commonly assumed to be "separate entities" (Beigi et al., 2019, p. 456). Based upon this assumption, work and non-work are first distinguished from each other, and then the study will analyze the relationship between the two distinctive realms. For instance, research into work–family conflict commonly follows the hypothesis of work and family as an independent domain. Given that an individual has "a fixed time and human energy", the increasing time spent in one domain tends to diminish the other. This assumption has received criticism from many scholars (e.g. Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). For Kanter ([1977] 2008), the separation is considered a myth, such that she suggests further investigation on the linkage between work and non-work. The discussion will be further elaborated after narrowing the field of work and non-work to specified work and family.

7.2.2   *Work and Family Studies*

Within the field of work and non-work, the relationship between work and family has received the most attention (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Frone, 2003). As Frone (2003, p. 144) argues, non-work is "often used synonymously for 'family'" and there is a scarce empirical discussion concerning other non-work subdomains apart from family. Yet definitions of work and family remain highly diversified (Eby et al., 2005; Zedeck, 1992). For instance, certain work–family studies restrict work to paid employment only (e.g. Eby et al., 2005), while others include both paid and non-paid work (e.g. Piotrkowski et al., 1987). Regarding the term "family", Edwards and Rothbard (2000, p. 179) define it explicitly as "persons who are related by biological ties, marriage, social custom, or adoption", whereas Eby and colleagues (2005, p. 126) define "family" more loosely as "two or more individuals occupying interdependent roles with the purpose of accomplishing shared goals". Without additional exploration of each definition, interpretation of both terms recognizes the significance of work–family research to establish the focus of the discussion in the following section with respect to the Chinese context.

   Among the existing work and family literature, two notable features are prerequisites to continue the discussion. One emerging theme, according to literature from different periods, points to the dominance of quantitative analysis, in spite of the repeated calls to study work and family using alternative approaches such as qualitative and mixed methods (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Beigi et al., 2019; Casper et al., 2007; Greenhaus &

Parasuraman, 1999). In addition to the extensive statistical analyses, most of the work–family studies concentrate on the Western context, in particular the United States (e.g. Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Casper et al., 2007; Casper et al., 2014; Kossek et al., 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). For instance, a review by Kossek and colleagues (2011) has found that over 95 percent of work–family research was conducted based upon evidence from the US and UK. They urged future studies to "move away from seeing the U.S. value of work–life [family] relationships as the standard" (Kossek et al., 2011, p. 431). In comparison with the Western countries, work and family research in Asian countries started later and remains scarce (Cho & Choi, 2018; Luk & Shaffer, 2005). Apart from the overtly political and socioeconomic regimes, the significance of cultural factors has been well justified by cross-national research (Le et al., 2020). Among studies that consist of China in the comparative analysis, the arguments are in general coherent yet overly simplified. Two major approaches, both stemming from Hofstede's cultural dimensions, have been adapted to explain work and family experiences in China: Confucian cultural values (e.g. Aryee et al., 1999; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002, 2006), and more explicitly individualism–collectivism (e.g. Haar et al., 2014; Hofstede, 2001; Jin et al., 2013; Powell et al., 2009; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006). Despite the relatively coherent approaches, the findings of these studies have been inconsistent (Cho & Choi, 2018; Lu et al., 2015). For instance, in the study of work and family conflict between China and the United States, Jin and colleagues (2013) identify more frequent conflict in China than in the United States, whereas Yang (2005) finds no significant difference between these two countries. Cross-national studies indeed highlight the importance of contexts, yet the lack of clarification on cultural variables and the inconsistent findings suggest the need for in-depth analysis contextualized in China.

7.2.3   *Work and Family in China*

Work and family studies focusing solely on China have revealed additional detail with respect to the country's distinctive characteristics. One notable finding is the blurred boundaries of work and family domains in contrast to the Western presumption of independent domains, as argued by Luk and Shaffer (2005). With samples of employees in Hong Kong, they identified that within- as well as cross-domain variables were both robust in explaining employees' work–family conflict. The result of a more recent study by Li and colleagues (2013) has concurred with the cross-domain effect by analyzing 241 items of survey data collected from organizations in Beijing and Xi'An. In short, it is clear that scholars have identified a linkage between work and family domains in China (e.g. Lu et al., 2015; Xiao & Cooke, 2012). The unique characteristics also suggest that the direct adaptation of the Western-oriented work–family analytical framework, which presumes the independence of work and family domains, may fail to robustly explain the situation in China. Furthermore, it pinpoints

the necessity to examine unique conceptual issues and exploit a China-specific analytical tool for a holistic understanding of the research.

In addition to the potential linkage indicated, studies of work and family experiences in China have identified the pivotal role of the family in society. A group of studies focusing on Hong Kong, a region in which Western and Eastern cultures collide, have found that local Hong Kong Chinese tend to place familial interests above the interests of the self, the society, and the group (Chan & Lee, 1995; Lau, 1981; Lau & Liu, 1984; Redding, [1990] 2013; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002, 2006). More specifically, Lau (1981, p. 978) has coined the theoretical term "utilitarianistic familism" to describe the phenomenon which he has argued as the "dominant cultural code in that society". Similarly, Chan and Lee (1995) posit the term "collective-egocentricism" to identify how interests and benefits are considered in terms of a familial group rather than an individual. Consistent findings have been identified by studies conducted in mainland China. For instance, Zhang and colleagues (2019) test family collectivism, a variable of which prioritizes the family's collective interest over one's own self-interest, and indicate its significant impact on work–family conflict among Chinese managers. Other scholars have identified the cultural perspective of prioritizing work for family benefit (e.g. Xiao & Cooke, 2012; Zhang et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2020). In other words, these studies argue that an individual prioritizes work over family life, and personal enjoyment can be explained by the cultural presumption that financial returns from work ultimately benefit the family. These findings demonstrate that the traditional perception of the family remains salient in modern Chinese society.

Additionally, recent evidence has highlighted the active role of extended family as a robust institution in society. For example, it is well documented that Chinese working couples tend to outsource part of housework and childcare responsibilities to their parents or parents-in-law (e.g. Lu et al., 2015; Luk & Shaffer, 2005; Zhang et al., 2020). In a survey of 204 Chinese dual-working parents, Lu and colleagues (2015) find that the respondents tend to seek help from family members rather than work colleagues when encountering work–family conflict. Given the available support from family members, it is anticipated that managers and professional workers interviewed by Xiao and Cooke (2012) have accepted work–family conflict as a fact of life and successfully identified their own coping strategies. It is worth noting that the cultural norm of filial piety has not entirely diminished over time (Whyte, 2004, 2005). Although the impact of family ties requires additional exploration, the interdependence of family members indicates the significance of extended family, which should be considered as a special feature of the Chinese context in understanding individual behaviors.

Recognizing the distinctive characteristics of the Chinese context, it is clear that the notion of work and that of family are not static but are culturally constructed and vary by context. Particularly in response to the rapid changes in China, the cultural perspective is salient to understanding individual behavior

and decisions. It should be re-emphasized that culture, as conceptualized earlier in the current study, is not approached as an independent factor from the macro-level context. Yet it is a dynamic and inclusive term that has been continuously shaped and reshaped by political and socioeconomic settings. For instance, during the post-1949 socialist setting, work and the family domain were determined by the *danwei* design, particularly in urban areas. The production-oriented socialist setting gave shape to a culture that prioritized production over family matters. More explicitly, much of the domestic work was absorbed by facilities such as childcare centers, kindergartens, cafeterias, and laundries. In both cultural and spatial aspects, the socialist state dominated the interpretations of work and family in the post-1949 period. Economic reforms in 1978 have brought about transformations in the social and economic contexts. Many work units were restructured with the elimination of state welfare support, whereas diversified business entities have since emerged in the market. Yet, given the scarcity in the related studies, interpretation of work and family at the current workplace remains scant. The present study contributes to existing work–family research in the following respects. First, the study is a response to the calls for non-Western samples as well as alternative methodology apart from statistical analyses (e.g. Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Casper et al., 2014). Second, the study adopts an analytical framework within the Chinese context rather than replicating and testing Western work–family theories. Third, the focus of women managers further contributes to the lack of studies on work and family experiences in relation to the career development of women business managers in China.

7.3   Work, Family, and Working Women in China

Similar to their Western counterparts, Chinese women in the labor market frequently encounter the interplay of work and family roles. Yet the boundary between work and the family domain in China is, as stated earlier, blurred in contrast to the absolute separation presumed in the Western context. The subsequent question will be: how do the interdependent domains define the meaning of the work and family roles of Chinese women? In this case, the interpretation is straightforward after a cultural approach is adopted. Culture, in essence, defines the expectations of women's and men's roles in society and the norms and values involved in social behavior. In traditional Chinese society, women's roles are mainly focused on the family domain. Along the life stages, the role moves from daughter and eventually extends to wife and mother, all of which are defined within a family unit. In other words, a woman's role, according to traditional culture, is, in essence, a family role. Given the prevalence of this family role, it is clear that the traditional culture possesses a cultural stereotype of women, describing what women are and what women ought to be. Culture is dynamic and changes with historical events. With the transition of the political and socioeconomic settings, a cultural stereotype that highlights the primary family role has been further expanded by the Party-led women's

liberation. The promotion of women's contribution to social production and gender equality has created additional roles associated with the work domain.

The work and family duality in contemporary society posits two parallel forces on women, as observed in countries outside China. Yet it is evident that the duality has no absolute causal effect on work–family conflict in China (e.g. Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Xiao & Cooke, 2012). In a study of 30 women in Shanghai, Ji (2015) finds that the two forces of gender-role expectations are well acknowledged by working women. Interestingly, the majority of respondents were indifferent to the issue and capable of identifying coping strategies. For instance, one of the interviewees responded to the duality by performing in accordance with traditional gender norms in the family domain, while striving for gender equality in the work domain (Ji, 2015). Potential explanations can be found in family studies. Song and Lai (2020, p. 3) argue that families in China have experienced constant changes, with increasingly flexible relationships, which enable men and women to "seek their individualistic and family-oriented goals". Nevertheless, the consequences of change in the family tend to be twofold. Qian and Li (2020) analyze national data from the Chinese General Social Survey 2010–2015 and identify improving support for gender equality in the public sphere. In the private sphere, on the other hand, the data revealed a revival of traditional gender stereotypes among men and women. The egalitarian view, argued by Song and Lai (2020, p. 66), potentially requires additional efforts as women feel the need to prove their competency to "justify their reluctance to take up a traditional domestic role". According to family scholars, it is conclusive that the nature of family in China is dynamic. Despite family reviving in various forms, traditional cultural stereotype towards gender roles clearly remains intact.

7.4   Work, Family, and Women in Management in China

The discussions on work and family subject to women's managerial careers are scant. In one of the earliest English language studies, Hildebrandt and Liu surveyed 150 Chinese women managers in 1987 (Hildebrandt & Liu, 1988) and found that these managers encountered personal dissonance from two opposing cultural forces: "Women hold up half the sky" and traditional gender roles (Hildebrandt, 1991). In this regard, they argue that women in Chinese enterprises require "both competence in managerial position and ability to accept an enduring tradition" (Hildebrandt, 1991, p. 19). This conclusion also sheds light on the additional management responsibilities of women leaders. As some scholars have argued, a managerial career does not follow the socially prescribed role of a woman, which could result in women managers devoting more time to work to overcome any preconceptions (e.g. Cooke, 2005, 2013; Xian & Woodhams, 2008; Zhao et al., 2019). The natural question is: how do women managers experience work and family given the dual forces of cultural stereotyping? Existing studies have shown mixed results. For instance, Aaltio and Huang's (2007) research on the information technology (IT) industry in

China reveals that women managers demonstrate a complex attitude towards work and family such that the managers constantly have to make choices between work and family. In contrast, Peus and colleagues (2015) indicate no significant conflicts between women's caregiver and managerial roles, which can be partially explained by the strong career orientation of most women managers in the study.

7.4.1 The Complex Work–Family Relationships

Women managers in my interviews provided more details about the complexity of work and family relationships. From one perspective, childbirth status is relevant in understanding the differentiated interpretations. According to the present study, women managers with no children did not explicitly mention the future possible challenges involved in combining a childcaring role with their careers. Rather than avoiding the topic, it is clear that they were well aware of the gender role expectations and prepared to respond proactively. According to one of the young women managers, the choice between work and family was perceived as a series of decisions throughout one's life given the interrelated nature of the two domains:

> In general, it is very likely that women will be always making decisions between work and family in life. Perhaps when my child is younger, I will choose to spend more time on family, less on work. That period is very vital to train the child with good habits. But when my child enters primary school, he/she can be relatively independent. I can again put my effort into work. In this way, from a long-run perspective, work and family can reach a status of so-called "balance".

As well prepared as it seems, the plan to fulfill expectations from both family and work domains usually involved the possible outsourcing of childcare to grandparents, supporting previous findings (e.g. Lu et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2020). Interestingly, parents of the young women managers had prepared well in advance to take care of their future grandchildren. As described by a manager, although her parents were not expecting her to get married in the coming year or so, caring for future grandchildren had already been included in her mother's agenda:

> My mother is very prepared [for taking care of grandchild]. I can just give my child to her [to take care of]. Everything will be fine. So I am not concerned [about childcare] at all. I can still work on my career after giving birth.

In a sharp contrast to the optimistic attitude of women managers with no children, most mothers who were managers frequently raised the work–family topic with stories of how they were striving to fulfill both roles. Remarkably,

the outsourcing of childcare to grandparents tends to complicate the existing work–family relationships, in particular for women managers who are extensively occupied by work obligations.

> I am responsible for childcare at night [after work] . . . One day, my son was sick and cried at night, my father-in-law suddenly became very angry. He said to me, "you do not look after the child during the day, and at night you still cannot take care of him well . . . Starting tomorrow, you look after the child, and I will not".

She explained that it was the first and the only conflict between her and her parents-in-law during the nine years of cohabitation. She felt offended after realizing her father-in-law only started the scene to intentionally remind her, but never to her husband, of childcare responsibility:

> I thought my father-in-law was just complaining but the next day he indeed left his grandchild to me and my husband. I had a very important meeting on the next day, so my husband took a day off and looked after our son. I asked my husband to drive me to the office in the morning but my father-in-law did not allow him to do so. . . . The thing that got me very angry was later in the day I found out my husband went to work in the afternoon. . . . He said he was urged by his father to go to work. Then I realized my father-in-law only wanted me for childcare, and intentionally set an obstacle [to my work]. Although his son was willing to take care of the child, he [father-in-law] never approved.

Nevertheless, she finally found a way to cope with the intergenerational conflict by reaching out to her always supportive mother-in-law. Yet manager mothers who outsourced the childcare responsibility to their parents, instead of their parents-in-law, encountered no similar demands associated with childcare responsibilities. In this regard, the outsourcing is also a dynamic that can shift among the grandparents.

> For most of time my parents live with us and take care of my sons. Only when they take a break to go back to their hometown then I will ask my mother-in-law to visit us and help to fill in the gap. After all I am most familiar with my parents. I feel more comfortable to live with them [under the same roof].

The results not only reveal the factor of children in shaping gender role expectations and experiences but the intergeneration factor is also relevant and can further complicate stereotypes cross-generationally.

   In addition to the evidence just discussed, the interrelated nature of work and family is also justified by the shared perception of women's role at work. Similar to socially expected traditional family roles for women in China, it emerged

from the study that women's working role is equally expected. All women managers recognized this social expectation and stressed the importance of working regardless of family status. For women managers with no children, working is regarded as pivotal to prove their value to society:

> I definitely will not quit working no matter what comes up in my future life [e.g. childcare]. . . . Working is so important to show one's value. If you don't work, what will you be worth to society? I think this aspect is extremely important. One should always work.

Likewise, the expectation for women to work regardless of family situation is well justified by manager mothers. Interestingly, according to one mother who had recently ended her role as a housewife and returned to work, her decision was attributed to the social expectation advocated by her children.

> Actually I didn't expect to return to work so soon. I was searching for the right opportunity and there was no pressure for me to find a job. Until one day my son came back from school and asked me, "why do you never go to work? Everyone's mother in my class has a job". Then he urged me to find a job. This was the time I quickly made up my mind and decided to go back to work as soon as possible.

This was not a single case; instead, similar examples were also mentioned by other managerial mothers. Although some of them did not have the same experience, they still knew someone who returned to the workplace to fulfill their work expectations. Results from the present study justify the conclusions in the preceding chapters by indicating women's work role and women's family role as two parallel cultural stereotyping forces in the current Chinese context. Despite the complexity, it is clear that women managers in this study fully acknowledge the expectations of their roles in both work and family domains. Moreover, working mothers are veterans in coping with the cultural stereotypical expectations and proactively respond to the work–family complexities in their daily lives.

7.4.2   Career Advancement

Contrary to the mixed interpretations of work and family in the existing literature, in the case of career advancement, family is no doubt pivotal (e.g. Aaltio & Huang, 2007; Cooke & Xiao, 2014; Woodhams et al., 2015). On the one hand, the preceding chapters have demonstrated that family is always relevant in the discussion of the Chinese work context. On the other hand, it is evident that family is salient regardless of the gender role orientation of women managers. Zhao and colleagues (2019) indicate the differences between the coping strategies of career-oriented (egalitarian) and family-oriented (traditional) women managers when experiencing work–family conflict. In the IT industry, a sector

characterized by long working hours, Aaltio and Huang (2007) and Xian and Woodhams (2008) both reveal that women managers tend to prioritize family responsibilities over their career and behave according to the gender role prescriptions. A similar conclusion is highlighted by a more recent study from Li (2021), in which women software engineers in China are adopting flexible coping strategies in response to family role expectations.

Family prioritization was stressed by women managers in my field study. One remarkable example is a former women executive who rejected further promotion and left the company to work as an independent consultant after working for seven years as chief financial officer. She cracked the glass ceiling at the age of 37 and became the only woman in the executive team. As a former female manager with no child, she also mentioned she would not accept any position that required long office hours. Although she did not explicitly attribute her career decision to family concerns, she stressed that women should follow the traditional gender role.

> Women have to give birth, and in China women have to take care of the elderly and family affairs . . . I think, as women are granted with a life-duty [giving birth], women have to try their best to maintain a good family. . . . More importantly, women have to change themselves. . . . Women have a life duty, family harmony is also very important [compared to work]. Within a family, a woman has to perform her role well and follow female virtue.

Now it is unusual but not entirely impossible to hear the term "female virtue". Female virtue was advocated in feudal society and originated from "Three Obediences and Four Virtues (*san cong si de*)".[1] The code of social behavior was abolished in 1949 with other feudal practices. However, in recent years the code of behavior seemed to resurge in society. One indicator is the growth in popularity of female morality schools (*nü de ban*) in China in 2017. The curricula often include the Analects of Confucius and other classical texts, calligraphy, *tai chi*, and sewing. Although official news and local education ministries have been asserting that any teaching on the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" should be abandoned, the increasing emphasis on traditional culture implies the traditional gender stereotypes are likely to remain intact in Chinese society.

A similar career decision was made by another woman manager after taking her family into account. She rejected a promotion to an executive position after acknowledging the additional demands of the advanced leadership role.

> When my boss offered me the position, I asked him, "why me?" He said, "we need to boost the performance of our company . . . and we ran the algorithm based on your past record, only you can meet our performance target". Hearing this, I immediately decided not to accept [the offer]. . . . Currently, I am working six days per week. I am very sure that if I accept the job, I would have to be available 24 hours [7 days].

Her decision was a shock and hardly understandable to people around her:

> People around me they could not understand my decision. They called me a fool who gave up such a valuable opportunity. They told me one would only receive a handful of this kind of opportunity in life, and I didn't grab it. . . . "This is what everyone always wanted, they could not get it [and now you give it up]" they said. Not many can really respect my decision. But it was the best choice given the situation at that time.

She further added that she was a person with a strong attachment to tradition. Despite her overseas education and close interactions with global work affiliates, she was attached to the traditional cultural values in society.

Notably, it is also evident that career decisions with respect to advancement are not permanent but likely to change according to the situation in the family domain. Aaltio and Huang (2007) find that women managers only prioritize career development if no conflict resulted in the family domain; otherwise, issues of work and career are perceived as less important. A similar phenomenon was observed among the women managers in my interviews. For instance, two years after our first meeting, one woman manager had decided to take an advanced leadership role in her company:

> Now I am overseeing a business of 100 million [yuen] and supervising 100 employees. It is twice as large in size as my previous management responsibility. . . . Two years ago, I gave up a lot of offers and decided to stay in the position so I could look after my son's schoolwork. He is much more independent now and can take care of himself.

Our second meeting was characterized by a more buoyant manner, in sharp contrast to the previous meeting. From the interviews with these women managers, it is evident that work and family are equally salient to their attitudes towards career advancement. Remarkably, the women managers I met had been consciously making career decisions in response to the family context. The possible changes in career decisions with respect to family are also recognized by the unmarried younger women managers. One of the women managers confirmed she would consider changing work responsibilities in a future context of family and children, which is consistent with previous findings among young urban professionals by Coffey and colleagues (2009). From the identity perspective, it is clear that women managers are likely to behave according to the characteristics of the ideal woman by fulfilling gender roles in work and family. The interviews provide additional empirical details about how individual managers proactively and deliberately make career decisions given the specific context of their families.

In addition to the common practice of prioritizing family, career advancement decisions are likely to have a collective nature. Drawing on interviews

with 20 women managers in China, Woodhams and colleagues (2015) find that career decisions (involving work and family) of women managers are often not made individually but collectively, considering the well-being of their husbands, and sometimes the husband's parents. This conclusion is echoed by one of the women managers in the present study. Once a manager in one of the infamous financial firms, she left the job and worked in a private international school as an admissions manager:

> I was very well-paid in my last job, but at the same time I was very busy. My husband often complained that I did not take enough care of the family. His family is very traditional. I wanted to show I was a good wife [who was willing to fulfill the family role] so I quit the job and later found work in the school.

Two years after our first meeting, she had recently left the school and become an independent consultant. Similar to her previous decision, she now explained the decision as a response to her aging parents:

> After the divorce, I know my daughter and my parents are the most important in my life. In the past years my parents looked after my daughter so I could spend more time working. Now they are older, and it is an important period for my daughter's education. . . . The current work allows me to take care of my family members, and at the same time fulfill my career ambitions to a certain extent.

A similar decision was taken by a more senior woman manager, who planned to devote more time to her family to compensate for her husband's years of career sacrifices:

> I would say my husband is critical [so she could focus on work]. Since the very beginning my husband has been very supportive about me pursuing my own career. After having our child, he gave up some good opportunities. . . . He chose to stay in a job that is more flexible. . . . Of course, it also means he earns much less than me. . . . I feel previously he was the one who contributed a lot [to the family], I should also fulfill my [family] obligations now.

These women managers confirm that any decision on career advancement is indeed complex. On the one hand, it is an individual choice in response to gender role expectations in society as well as the family situation. On the other hand, the individual decision is prompted by a collective interest that deliberately takes into account the well-being of family members, justifying the previous findings (e.g. Chan & Lee, 1995; Zhang et al., 2019).

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to disentangle the conceptualization of work and family and their role in understanding the career experiences of Chinese women managers. To begin the discussion, I first clarified the ambiguous field of work and non-work by reviewing the associated terminologies and narrowed the subsequent discussion to the realms of work and family. Based upon existing studies, it is clear that most work–family research still extensively follows the Western analytical frameworks, which also justifies the relevance of studying the Chinese context. Previous work–family studies conducted solely in China have highlighted the close linkage of work and family and the respective relationships that are distinct from the Western conceptualization. The Chinese view of work–family relationship offers a significant foundation for understanding women's managerial careers. Among the available findings, several implications are relevant to the study of women's managerial experiences. The first emerging theme is the dynamic conceptualization of family across contexts and individuals. It is evident that the notion of family tends to evolve over time. Second, individual attitudes towards family and work are constantly shaped by interdependent factors such as interpersonal (e.g. intergenerational), organizational (e.g. occupation), and socioeconomic and political settings. The results shed light on the complexity of work and family relationships and the limited exploration of women in management.

According to the research on women managers, it is evident that women managers are fully aware of the gender role expectations in the work and family domains. Moreover, they respond proactively to these expectations by identifying coping strategies. Individual decisions are commonly prompted by family considerations. Work and career development will only be prioritized if everything goes well in the family domain. As such, family tends to be posited as a priority in the case of possible work–family conflict. In certain situations, women managers choose to turn down promotion to senior leadership positions, a seeming compromise to the traditional family role. Yet it should be noted that the refusal to break the glass ceiling does not imply that these women managers have a lower level of desire for achievement and ambition. The results show that Chinese women managers are confident of their capabilities and have high future expectations. Remarkably, they did not explicitly regard their career decisions as sacrifices. Although the decision is not explicitly labeled as an economic one, it has been perceived by the women managers as optimal (maximizing their well-being) after taking economic and non-economic factors into account at the time. Moreover, women managers are able to adjust their career decisions in response to changes in the work and family domains. The identity perspective sheds light on the choices of individual women managers which fosters the understanding of their experiences and the glass ceiling in China. This dimension has not yet been captured by the standard economic models of discrimination or the previous explanations of the glass ceiling.

Despite the in-depth discussions on the work–family relationship subject to women's managerial careers, evidence remains scant with regard to the possible changes in individual decisions and the long-term consequences of staying in a lower position at work. In other words, future research can take a longitudinal approach to examine systematically the possible change in a manager's decision regarding promotion to top leadership roles across time. After all, in comparison with the traditional society, in which decision-making was dominated by males, it is certain that women in today's China are capable of making independent decisions. Particularly in the present study, women managers have demonstrated their active consciousness of the cultural stereotypes and a strong self-determination towards possible career development. The role of individual decisions in response to the broader context introduces new insights into the discussion of the glass ceiling in China.

Note

1 The "Three Obediences" (*sancong*) were "obey your father before marriage (*weijiacongfu*), obey your husband when married (*jijiacongfu*), and obey your sons in widowhood (*fusicongzi*)". And the "Four Virtues" (*side*) were "Female virtues (*fude*)", "Female words (*fuyan*)", "Female appearances (*furong*)", and "Female work (*fugong*)".

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8 *Guanxi* and Women in Management

8.1 Introduction

In addition to work and family relationships, the second issue that has been equally well recognized is social network. As briefly introduced in Chapter 3, social networks are critical determinants in women's advancement to top management positions (e.g. Ibarra, 1992; Kanter [1977] 2008). Contrary to the substantial gender analysis with regard to social networks in the Western context, only a few studies analyze social networks in China through a gender lens (Bu & Roy, 2005; Huang & Aaltio, 2014). Organization studies in the Chinese context mostly recognize the cultural aspect of social networks by approaching individual and organizational behavior through a unique form of social network, which is referred to as *guanxi*. As such, I will first clarify the concept of social networks and the Chinese conceptualization, *guanxi*. The subsequent discussion will then focus on *guanxi* subject to women in the Chinese context. Notably, this section aims to address the following two questions about *guanxi*:

1 What is the gendered nature of *guanxi*?
2 How does the gendered nature of *guanxi* explain women's managerial experiences, and what are the implications for understanding the glass ceiling in the Chinese business context?

8.2 Social Networks and Women in Organizations

Before establishing the link between networks and women's career experience, it is useful first to define the notion of a network. In general, a network focuses on the relationship and the actors involved. In a more formal sense, a network is defined as "a set of nodes and the set of ties representing some relationship, or lack of relationship, between the nodes" (Brass et al., 2004, p. 795). Nodes refer to associated actors such as individuals and organizations. With respect to the type of nodes, networks can be further classified into interpersonal, intra-organizational, and interorganizational networks (for some of the reviews on network research, see Brass et al., 2004; Carpenter et al., 2012; Kilduff & Brass,

2010). Given the broad and diversified field of networks, the goal of this section is not to review all network theories but to clarify the concept using existing studies of social networks and gender. In other words, the discussion will center on organizational network research subject to gender differences, with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships. In particular, the identity framework is relevant in providing an economic interpretation of the current social network arguments.

8.2.1   *Formal Versus Informal Networks*

One approach to organizational networks is in terms of formal and informal networks. Formal networks refer to structured relationships determined by someone's formal organizational position, which can involve superiors and subordinates, as well as individuals from different workgroups or units (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010; Ibarra, 1993). Informal networks, on the other hand, are much broader. Informal networks comprise work-related relationships, social relationships, or the intersection of both work and social relationships. It is evident that women and men do not have equal access to formal and informal networks (e.g. Brass, 1985; Brass et al., 2004; Ely et al., 2011; Kanter, [1977] 2008). Gender differentials in formal networks are straightforward and primarily attributed to structural differences in men's and women's formal organizational positions. Brass and colleagues (2004) argue that formally differentiated positions, both horizontally (by defined task) and vertically (by hierarchy), create spatial and task-related restrictions for one individual to interact with others from a distant position. Male domination in certain functional jobs and at senior management level implies that men are provided with more opportunities than women to formally interact with other members. In comparison with the formal networks, an informal network is argued as being more vital on an individual's career path to a leadership position. Early scholars such as Kanter ([1977] 2008) and Schein (1978) stress the significance of informal networks in the acquisition of power. In particular, Kanter ([1977] 2008) contends that power in the workplace is attained by a prescribed role in the organization but depends mainly on social connections with individuals outside the workgroup. The connections, as Kanter ([1977] 2008, p. 181) asserts, should be "long-term and stable and include 'sponsors' (mentors and advocates upward in the organization), peers, and subordinates". In addition to structural factors, Schein (1978) reckons that stereotypical beliefs prompt male managers to exclude women from power alliances intentionally or to avoid work-related conversations with them. The implication of exclusion from informal networks is more profound than from formal networks due to the fact that the companies, in general, take no responsibility for helping employees with informal relationships (McGuire, 2000). Acknowledging its critical role in career attainment, studies have mostly concentrated on the study of informal networks (Ibarra, 1992, 1997; McGuire, 2000, 2002, 2012).

8.2.2   *Composition of Networks*

An alternative approach adopted by network research on gender differences is subject to the similarity of individuals within a relationship. More explicitly, homophily is widely applied to study the tendency of actors to form a relationship with similar others based on attributes such as gender, education, age, or organizational group affiliations (Ibarra, 1993; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). In the case of gender, there are indications that women and men prefer to interact with others from the same gender group. Findings have been consistent in showing that men are likely to have a work-related network primarily composed of men, particularly where they are the majority (Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1992, 1997). Homophily eases communication and fosters trust and reciprocity (Ibarra, 1992; Kanter, [1977] 2008; Lincoln & Miller, 1979). Drawing from a large-scale, longitudinal career database, Lutter (2015) contends that women's gender homophily is lower (male-dominated) in status with fewer influential contacts, which creates a severe disadvantage for women compared to men. In this case, "women may respond to the limited availability of homophilous contacts by reaching beyond their immediate workgroups" (Ibarra, 1997, p. 93). Yet, Son and Lin (2012) have found that women do not benefit as much as men from cross-gender contacts, particularly in achieving positions of higher socio-economic status. One potential reason is that women are distant from the male-dominated networks in which promotion decisions are made (Brass, 1985). Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) challenge the validity of the homophily framework for explaining gender differences in networks. Based on an analysis of recruitment and selection in Dutch academia, they find that men building connections to others similar to them are not making conscious choices. In spite of these debates, network research on gender differences generally agrees that homophily tends to limit women's access to resources in the workplace.

8.2.3   *Types of Networks*

Following the preceding review, the challenge in accessing job-related resources prompts women to use networks differently from men. One notable finding is that women prefer women in expressive networks but favor men in instrumental networks, whereas men's networks are characterized by homophily irrespective of the network type (Ibarra, 1992). Instrumental–expressive is one of the approaches to categorizing networks. Instrumental networks stem from work performance and involve the exchange of job-related resources, knowledge, and information for instrumental purposes. Expressive networks, in contrast, primarily provide social support and friendship (Ibarra, 1993; Lincoln & Miller, 1979). Women, in other words, prefer female colleagues for social support and friendship and choose male colleagues for exchanging information and work-related resources. Network literature reaches a consensus in supporting variety in women's networks. Empirical reports have indicated that women can benefit from a wider range of ties. For instance, in a study of 73 professionals,

Ibarra (1992) indicates that women have not fully taken advantage of network contacts offered by male colleagues. The results further suggest that women are likely to benefit from building more ties with men, which is confirmed by her subsequent study (Ibarra, 1997). In addition to greater heterogeneous ties, the strength of ties is also a notable determinant of network benefits.

8.2.4   Strength of Ties

The strength of ties between two individuals is defined as "a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services that characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Weak ties involve acquaintances and indirect ties, whereas strong ties usually refer to close friends and relatives (Granovetter, 1982, as cited in Kadushin, 2012; Lin et al., 1981). It is evident that weak ties play a more critical role than strong ties in acquiring resources. Weak ties facilitate the diffusion of information with the means of connecting separated individuals, whereas strong ties comprise individuals who share a certain degree of similarity and familiarity such that information obtained from strong ties is redundant (Granovetter, 1973; Ibarra, 1993). Given that Granovetter's (1973) early work sheds light on the beneficial nature of social networks, his work is commonly adopted as one of the approaches to conceptualizing social capital (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Poder, 2011). Despite the salience of weak ties, scholars also indicate conditions under which weak ties are particularly beneficial. For instance, Lin and colleagues (Lin et al., 1981; Son & Lin, 2012) argue that weak ties are more significant for individuals at a lower hierarchical level to access resources than they are for higher-status individuals. In the gender aspect, previous research suggests that men and women form different strengths of ties in the work context. For instance, Ibarra (1997) finds that women prefer strong ties in network development. Despite the preference for strong ties in building connections, women lack close ties in career networks, which can limit their career advancement. Men's networks, on the other hand, are characterized by weak ties that can bring instrumental benefits. In a recent meta-analysis, Lutter (2015) confirms the previous studies and stresses that women can benefit from weaker ties that facilitate the flow of job-related information.

   In response to women's disadvantageous status in networks, scholars recommend networking exercises and human resource management (HRM) practices to promote women's career development. Ely and colleagues (2011) suggest women's leadership development programs to guide women in network development and forming individual networking strategies. With regard to organization, Ibarra and colleagues (2010) argue that sponsorship programs, rather than mentoring, should be adopted to help women's career advancement. They interviewed 40 men and women in a high-level mentoring program, and the results show that women are less likely to be promoted than men with no sponsorship. The study distinguishes sponsors from mentors in the sense that sponsors are influential senior managers who can strive for the promotion of the person

they sponsor, whereas mentors are not necessarily in a management position but provide "psychosocial" support and career help (Ibarra et al., 2010, p. 85).

8.2.5   *Social Networks and the Economics of Identity*

Network approaches to women's career experiences can be interpreted in terms of the identity framework. As stated in Chapter 2, the identity framework suggests two major aspects. First, an individual tends to behave according to the ideal of their assigned category (i.e. social or group prescription) to construct the best self-image (identity). In addition, an individual's decision is influenced by the decisions of others in the reference group. The economics of identity highlights individual behavior corresponding to social interactions. In this regard, it shares the characteristics of social networks by emphasizing social relations. The common ground creates a space to explain social networks in terms of identity framework.

The following considers a case when there are two actors, man A and man B. The identity perspective suggests that both actors will act according to the ideal behavior of "man". Whereas top managers are primarily men, both actors will behave according to the attributes of men of high status to show they are man-like. For instance, when top managers commonly prefer to form instrumental networks, build close work ties, or connect with other men, A and B will behave similarly. Furthermore, if man A does not follow the shared networking practices of top managers, such as forming expressive networks or connecting with (other) women, the identity model implies the deviation will result in questioning of man B's identity. Man B will repeat the networking norms of the ideal man (top managers), whose external effect will result in man A's continuous deviation from the common networking practice.

Given that the identity model allows an individual to be assigned to several categories (e.g. an individual can be both a "woman" and a "manager"), the following considers the case of a woman manager. In a context where manager is commonly believed to be a man's job, a woman manager will encounter challenges in forming network relationships with other men and women. The externality of identity provides the rationale:

- For male colleagues, the presence of a woman manager challenges their male identity. As a rational response, men will be more committed to behaving like a man to act against the woman. In networking terms, this implies that men will be more likely to conduct the shared networking practices of men, such as connecting with only men or forming instrumental ties. As against men's behavior, the woman manager will react by acting more like the networking behavior of a man.
- For female colleagues, the woman manager is regarded as working on a man's job and deviating from the norms of women. In response, the female colleagues will devote themselves to norms of the gender group to stress their female identity as a defense against the woman manager's behavior.

> In response to her female colleagues' decision, the woman manager will
> continue to deviate from the prescriptions of women and behave in a man-
> like way.

In both cases, the externality of identity suggests a gap between women manag-
ers and men, as well as between women managers and other women. Conse-
quently, a woman manager is strikingly marginalized by other women and by
men. Due to the conflicting category of woman and manager, she does not fit
into the norms of either category.

Based on the discussion, the profound implications of the identity approach
to social networks are summarized as follows:

- The first implication is the role of shared networking behavior on an
  individual's networking decision. For instance, when men, especially those
  of higher status, commonly prefer to form work relationships with other
  men, other male individuals will choose to follow. Likewise, when women
  commonly prefer expressive networks, it is rational to act accordingly. It is
  a utility-maximizing response to the gender group, meaning any deviation
  or change can be costly.
- The second implication is remarkably salient to the current networking
  advice for women's career development. As stated, a woman working on
  a man's job or behaving like a man can become marginalized. The mar-
  ginalization is an outcome of social interactions between the woman and
  her counterparts and is likely to persist given the economic incentives. In
  this regard, networking training or guidelines developed based on men's
  networking behaviors can be ineffective in helping women to benefit from
  social networks and promote their career development.

The next section will argue that *guanxi* (a Chinese conceptualization of social net-
works) consists of a gender dimension that sheds light on women's salient role in
social interactions. The study is particularly relevant in cultivating women-oriented
practices in the Chinese context, which can help to improve the networking
situation in the Chinese workplace. Before diving into the specifics, networks in
the Chinese context require clarification. Given the Western orientation of social
network research, it remains debatable if the frameworks will be valid in Chinese
settings. For instance, in a study of the strength of ties, Bian (1997) reveals that
job seekers are able to obtain jobs by means of strong ties. The results suggest the
significance of strong ties in the Chinese context, contrary to the salient weak ties
in connecting separate individuals, as argued by Granovetter (1973). One explana-
tion is the pivotal role of strong ties in building the Chinese *guanxi* network to gain
influence. Yet, in recent research, Burt and Burzynska (2017) draw from a sample
of around 700 Chinese entrepreneurs and find that network measurements (trust
and achievement) are robust in both Chinese and Western context. Despite the
validity of social network framework, they further suggest *guanxi* has compara-
tive significance in identifying certain network mechanisms in China. Developed

upon Burt and Burzynska (2017), the more recent work of Bian (2017) highlights three comparative significances of *guanxi*, including local knowledge, networks of particular ties, and resource mobilizers. Recognizing the significance of *guanxi* in the Chinese context, the following section will first examine the concept of *guanxi*. The discussion then focuses on *guanxi*'s gender dimension and its role in understanding women's career experiences in China.

8.3   The Concept of *Guanxi*

This section prepares the subsequent discussion by clarifying the definitions of *guanxi*. As noted earlier, discussions of *guanxi* vary significantly, which results in different interpretations from different approaches (Bian, 1997, 2019; Yang, 1994). At the current stage, I introduce the *guanxi* definitions by loosely dividing the discussions into two groups. The first group views *guanxi* as a relationship between individuals. In this case, the relationship is simply a matter of fact. For instance, Yang (1994, p. 151) refers to *guanxi* as "an interpersonal relationship or personalistic relationship", and she posits the term as fundamental in understanding social relationships in China. According to the different individuals involved, *guanxi* can be further categorized into various subtypes such as family members, friends, and strangers (Bian, 2019; Kipnis, 1997; Tsui & Farh, 1997). Bian (2019) argues that *guanxi* characteristics stemming from the family domain have expanded into business and political contexts, influencing the relationships of economic actors and political stakeholders. In addition to relationships, the extended definitions include the dynamics of relationships, the special purpose of relationships (exchange, resources), and *guanxi* as a process (Fan, 2002). Early studies from anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists focused on the individual level and examined the nature and effect of *guanxi*. More recently, management and business studies have emerged to examine the potential economic value of *guanxi* (Fan, 2002, Luo et al., 2012). The original meaning of *guanxi* has been extended to the organizational level as a relationship to fulfill organizational purposes (e.g. Park & Luo, 2001; Peng & Luo, 2000). The multidisciplinary perspectives have complicated the field of *guanxi*. Without diving into the complexity, the following review will capitalize on existing classifications (e.g. Bian, 2018; Chen et al., 2013; Fan, 2002; Nolan & Rowley, 2020) and summarize the relevant individual-level perspectives of *guanxi* for subsequent exploration of the gender dimension. The discussion will first introduce the various broad types of *guanxi*, followed by the major perspectives with an attempt to clarify different facets of the conceptualization.

One of the broad distinctions of relationships is between family and non-family members (Chen et al., 2013). Bian (2019) distinguishes the differences by contextualizing family in the Chinese social context: kin and non-kin. In this case, kin relationships include both immediate and extended family, as well as close and distant kin. Aside from the classification in terms of the actors involved, an alternative is to categorize various forms of *guanxi* based upon the nature of the relationship (Chen et al., 2013; Hwang, 1987). Hwang (1987) develops upon social exchange theory and identifies three types of interpersonal

relationships: expressive, instrumental, and mixed ties. Expressive ties are relatively stable and permanent, which provide affective feelings to individuals, whereas instrumental ties are established to serve a particular goal that can be unstable and temporary. He finally argues that expressive ties are more common in family relationships. Fan (2002) divides *guanxi* into three major types: family, helper, and business *guanxi*; yet in practice, she asserted the boundary between the three types was often obscure. She argues in a similar logic to Hwang (1987) that a family *guanxi* is expressive and a helper *guanxi* is instrumental, whereas a business *guanxi* is a process of identifying business solutions by means of personal relationships. Given the extension of *guanxi* research to the business context, organizational scholars such as Peng and Luo (2000), and Park and Luo (2001) propose organizational *guanxi* to describe a manager's relationship with business partners and government officials. These examples are indeed a fraction of the overall classification and it is infeasible for the present discussion to include every possible interpretation of *guanxi*. Yet it is still clear that the actors and the nature of relationship are salient to specify the meaning of *guanxi*. In this sense, I draw from relevant definitions and refer to *guanxi* as a relationship, connection, or network between two individuals, which can manifest in both formal and informal forms, and is potentially utilized for a specific purpose (Bian, 2019; Chang, 2011; Kipnis, 1997; Yang, 1994).

In addition to the diverse concepts of *guanxi*, the field is further complicated given the ongoing debates subject to the nature of *guanxi* in practice. More explicitly, the fundamentals of *guanxi* in practice and its role in the Chinese socioeconomic context remain unclear to date. The argument has been divided between cultural and institutional scholars (Bian, 2018; Chang, 2011; Chen et al., 2013; Nolan & Rowley, 2020). Cultural scholars emphasize the pivotal role of Chinese history and culture in determining the specific nature of the relationship and the practices of *guanxi* (e.g. Fei, 1992, King, 1991; Tsui & Farh, 1997). In this regard, *guanxi* is a unique form of relationship in China and is likely to remain significant given its deep embeddedness in culture (Chang, 2011; Yang, 2002). Institutional perspectives, on the other hand, contend *guanxi* as an outcome of the institutional setting. In other words, particular historical regimes have shaped the institutional environment and led to the emergence of the *guanxi* phenomenon. For instance, it is argued that before the reform period, due to the imperfect legal and contracting system in China, it was necessary for individual reliance on personal relationships in order to acquire resources (e.g. Gold et al., 2002; Walder, 1988). As Guthrie (1998, 2001) asserts, the introduction of the market economy and the development of the legal system is likely to result in the diminishing importance of the *guanxi* phenomenon. Despite the unclosed gap, the debates shed light on the non-static nature of *guanxi* determined by contextual factors. In the current study, the definition of culture has been defined in a broader scope to include the norms and beliefs stemming from political and socioeconomic settings. In this regard, the cultural approach is able to connect the two separate perspectives and focus on the possible dynamics of *guanxi* caused by contextual factors.

These debates also highlight a conceptual difference between *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice. The term *guanxi* is, in essence, a descriptive notion referring to the relationship between two individuals. *Guanxi* practice has several variations. For instance, Guthrie (1998, p. 266) posits *guanxi* as social relations, whereas "*guanxi* practice implies the use of these social relationships to make exchanges, manufacture indebtedness, or accomplish tasks". In this case, *guanxi* practice contains the instrumental nature of relationship. In similar logic, Yang (1994) also points out the instrumental nature of *guanxi* practice by referring to the behavior explicitly as *la* (pull) *guanxi*. As stated previously, *guanxi* itself is a descriptive term that can be expressive or instrumental. Consequently, the resultant *guanxi* practice can be expressive or instrumental practice, or both, which is likely to create ambivalence in interpretation.[1] For the purpose of the current study, I define *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice broadly to include both expressive and instrumental elements. With regard to a certain context, the expressive and the instrumental nature will be noted to avoid potential ambiguity in the discussion.

8.4   The Gender of *Guanxi*

The previous section highlighted the concept of *guanxi*, as well as the nature of *guanxi* practice that is relevant to explore its gender dimension. Among the earlier discussion of *guanxi*, anthropologist Mayfair Yang has provided a comprehensive analysis of the field of *guanxi*. The seminal book *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets* is a summary and reflection on more than a decade of ethnographic research with individuals from various regions of China, including Beijing, Shandong, and the suburbs of Shanghai. Starting from interpersonal relationships, she extended the discussion to identify the role of *guanxi* in broader social relationships. Although subsequent research has extensively referenced the pioneering work as an analytical foundation, the gender discussion is surprisingly unexplored. In this section, I will first review the gender perspective from Yang's classical work. Based upon Yang (1994), as well as additional relevant discussion, I will develop a gendered *guanxi* approach that can facilitate the understanding of *guanxi* in the business context. In other words, the business context will be introduced in the following section as a specific case of gendered *guanxi* discussion.

To understand the framework of gendered *guanxi*, it is essential to first clarify the definition of *guanxi* from Yang (1994). In the opening of *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets*, Yang (1994, p. 1) refers to *guanxi* as follows:

> Relationships between people, not only can it be applied to husband–wife, kinship, and friendship relations, it can also have the sense of "social connections", dyadic relationships that are based implicitly (rather than explicitly) on mutual interest and benefit. Once *guanxi* is established between two people, each can ask a favor of the other with the expectation that the debt incurred will be repaid sometime in the future.

This statement highlights several features of *guanxi*. First, in the study *guanxi* is presumed at an individual level. The dyadic relationship is one of the social network structures that highlights the one-on-one relationship and interaction between two actors. The term *guanxi* network (*guanxiwang*) is adopted to specify the interconnection among various one-to-one relationships at the broader level, such as community and society. In addition, the definition implies that actors should be familiar with each other to a certain extent, regardless of who the actor is, to establish *guanxi*. As such, "familiarity" is the precondition to *guanxi* practice in which actors are the "bases or potential sites for *guanxi* practice" (Yang, 1994, p. 111). It is also clear that actor, *guanxi*, and *guanxi* practice are three different levels that interrelate with each other. According to Yang's perspective, *guanxi* is characterized by reciprocity in the relationship and the indebtedness created by associated behavior. In other words, rather than a static equilibrium, *guanxi* is dynamic, which involves the creation and reversion of imbalance. The distinctive nature of *guanxi* provides a rationale for *guanxi* practice. For instance, to establish a relationship for instrumental purpose, favors or gifts are offered to demonstrate an actor's commitment and to create a sense of indebtedness. In this case, it is expected that the obligation and indebtedness will be recognized, and the recipient will pay back in the future. The establishment fails if the target actor denies the favor or has no interest in the payback. In this sense, *guanxi* can only be successfully established with a complete flow of favors, guided by a mutual interest in building reciprocity (Chen & Chen, 2004).

Throughout her work, Yang (1994) refers to *guanxi* as both expressive and instrumental in nature. Despite the common emphasis on the instrumental dimension, she argues that *guanxi* practice also possessed "an ethical dimension" that stems from *renqing*, a culturally constructed emotion (Yang, 1994, p. 67). *Renqing* is distinguished from the instrumental dimension by three distinctive features: First, *renqing* is regarded as an intrinsic human nature that emphasizes affect (*qing*) in personal interaction. Second, it represents the proper prescriptive form of behavioral conduct in social relationships. More specifically, a person should treat others with respect to the specific status and form of interaction, such as returning the favor. Third, *renqing* is able to facilitate the reciprocity and mutual benefit between two individuals with either "emotional attachment or the sense of obligation and indebtedness" (Yang, 1994, p. 68). Given its distinctive nature, Yang (1994, p. 6) coins the term *guanxixue* (the art of *guanxi*/the art of social relationships) to describe "the exchange of gifts, favors, and banquets; the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness".

Acknowledging these fundamental concepts, the following summarizes the gendered nature of *guanxi* and *guanxixue* underpinned by Yang (1994):

- In terms of the gender of individuals engaged, *guanxi* activities can be classified into two gender domains: domestic and public. Women are more active than men in engaging in activities in the domestic domain, whereas

men tend to be more active than women in the society-wide public domain. The domestic and public domains of *guanxi* practice overlap with each other.

- From a psychoanalytic object-relations perspective, *guanxixue* is more female-gendered because it promotes interrelation between actors. The relationship will only be established if one subject is completed by others in exchange.

The first argument is straightforward from a cultural stereotyping perspective. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, it is a shared belief as well as common practice for women to focus on the domestic sphere while men specialize in the public sphere. In spite of the growing economic opportunities available for women, stereotypical beliefs endure and challenge gender equality in every sphere of contemporary Chinese society. In particular, positions of power are still largely held by men. In addition to the gender of individuals engaging in *guanxi* practice, the clarification of *guanxi* activities in the domestic and public domains facilitates the argument regarding the gendered nature of *guanxixue*. She contended that *guanxi* practiced in the domestic arena focused more on affective, social exchange relations and therefore was closer to the ethic of *renqing*. For instance, women play a critical role in promoting sociality and maintaining a family's good relations with the exchange of favors and gifts among neighbors, kin, and family friends in everyday life. In contrast, activities in the more male-oriented public domain are often instrumental and involve material and political benefits. Despite the significant gender differences of the two, she found that the domestic and public domains often overlap with each other. She also observed that it was not uncommon for women to engage in *guanxi* activities in the public domain, especially among the ranks of cadres and intellectuals. She attributed this phenomenon to the potential advantage women possessed in the more male-oriented public domain. For instance, it was evident that the perceived informal social relationship associated with women could facilitate women in "cultivating relationships and appealing to peopled feelings of indebtedness" (Yang, 1994, p. 82). Given the overlapping of the two domains, she finally concluded that women often engage in the public domain to maintain the domestic domain. Furthermore, it is possible for the domestic or familial *guanxi* network to serve as a resource for the public domain.

Yang's (1994) finding is robust if traced back to the historical root of the development and maintenance of relationship practices in China. In a traditional Chinese family, women's ability to mobilize different relationships is often perceived as powerful and influential. Given that *jia*/family has been a basic unit of traditional society, organizing family affairs to a certain extent is a salient task in maintaining social order in the broader context. The phenomenon is most visible among women in southern China. Faure's (2010) examination of biographies and private family letters from late imperial China indicates the concealed managerial roles of women in the *jia*/family. In his survey, women were in charge of organizing housework, managing the integration of new

daughters-in-law, and, equally important, loans and credit. Early evidence suggested that the managerial roles of women were particularly visible among the mothers-in-law. The mother-in-law in the traditional family system is often regarded as "patriarchy's female deputy in the Chinese family" (Stacey, 1983, p. 54), whose power[2] not only reflected upon housework management but also defined superiority to younger couples.

With regard to close interpersonal relationships, women's management in the family, in essence, is the management of social relationships among different stakeholders in the home domain (Faure, 2010). In other words, women could play a key role in intra-family interaction. It is evident that in traditional Chinese society, women in southern China contributed to the cooperation between families or individuals. Watson (2007) observed the active role of women in maintaining affinal relationships. Representing their husband, women regularly visited relatives and attended banquets organized by relatives. Chan (2010) further indicates the economic importance of women's engagement in these social interactions. Women from villages in Hong Kong maintained and cultivated kinship ties that had substantially benefited their husbands and children. More explicitly, she found that the affinal ties can offer employment opportunities given the common practice of business partnerships among community members. Noticing the potential economic significance, Chan (2010) argues that women's social interactions outside the lineage should be recognized as "kin work". These studies have recognized the role of women in mobilizing inter- and intra-family relationships in traditional Chinese society, which pinpoints women's power and economic significance in the larger community. In contemporary Chinese society, women's salient role is also identified in family businesses. In a recent case study of a three-generation family firm, Chen and colleagues (2018) have identified unique characteristics of female family members in managing the business. One remarkable feature is that these women leaders are better at mobilizing family human resources to serve the development of the firm. More explicitly, they recommend involving qualified family members in the business on equal terms to other employees. In addition, women cultivate interpersonal relationships and involve different stakeholders of the firm, namely family, non-family members, and employees, in the decision-making process. This evidence, drawing on traditional and contemporary China, has revealed women's role in social interactions. Nevertheless, the scarcity of these studies implies that women's potential contribution in social interactions has been overlooked in most scholarship of social networks, particularly among the studies of *guanxi*. The next section will further elaborate on this argument with a focus on the business context.

In the second perspective, Yang detached the argument from the gender of *guanxi* actors and offered a unique perspective on the gendered nature of *guanxixue* itself. From psychoanalytic object-relations theory, she argues that *guanxixue* (the art of *guanxi*) is more female-gendered than male-gendered. To understand the statement, it is essential to give a brief introduction to psychoanalytic object-relations theory. Psychoanalytic theory emphasizes that an

individual's psychological growth and personality formation is determined by socio-relational experience from earliest infancy and continued to be shaped by cultural expectations. The model was later extended by feminist psychoanalytic theorists to understand the personality differences between men and women (e.g. Chodorow, [1978] 1999, [1978] 2001; Dinnerstein, [1976] 1999; Keller, 1982, [1978] 2003). For instance, one of the pioneers of the field, Nancy Chodorow ([1978] 1999, [1978] 2001) has found that women and men grow up with personalities affected by different boundary experiences and different relational issues. She then concludes that feminine personality/sense of self is defined in relation and connection to other individuals, whereas separation and independence from other individuals are typical of the construction of masculine personality/sense of self. In psychoanalytic terms, she argues that women have more flexible ego boundaries and are more relational, while men have more rigid ego boundaries and are more individualistic. The psychoanalytic object–relation theory is based upon human relationships, which are comparable to those of *guanxi*, and a useful lens to disentangle the gendered nature of *guanxixue*. The implication is twofold. First, *guanxixue* is a relational construction that focuses on the interrelation of individuals. From a psychoanalytic feminist perspective, the relational formation manifests as more feminine, in comparison to the construction that disconnects and separates individuals from each other. Second, the psychoanalytic theory also suggests the gender produced by the practice of *guanxixue*. As mentioned previously, the practice of *guanxixue* promotes the relationship of actors, which is therefore characterized by feminine qualities. In this regard, Yang (1994, p. 85) further contends that the focus of interpersonal relations in *guanxixue* will consequently result in a "'feminizing' influence in Chinese culture". In similar logic, Yang proposes a gender distinction between the art of *renqing* and the art of *guanxi*. The art of *renqing* possesses more feminine qualities with emphasis on warmth, obligation, debts, and mutual interests in the relationships, while the art of *guanxi* is more masculine with an increasing interaction with the state. Yang attributes the masculine quality to the widespread influence of state regulations and restrictions on daily lives; the inevitable engagement with the state features the art of *guanxi* as "more instrumental, hardened, cynical, and politicized" than *renqing* (Yang, 1994, p. 320).

Nevertheless, Yang's arguments can be challenged in terms of findings in the previous chapters. As stated in Chapter 4, the Western conceptualization of a feminine approach is cultural, corresponding to its distinct political background from the Chinese context. As such, femininity as defined by Western psychoanalytic object-relations theory is not necessarily equivalent to the Chinese conceptualization of femininity. Given the fact that conceptualization within the Chinese context is largely shaped by traditional culture and the state, the "'feminizing' influence in Chinese culture" (Yang, 1994, p. 85) can be limited. Indeed, she later finds that *guanxi* practices have become more indigenous and male-dominated, in contrast to her initial expectation of a Western-constructed feminizing influence (Yang, 2002). In particular, after 1978, it became more

common for men to dominate most of the business networking practices, whereas women have been treated as commodities in terms of their bodies.

Despite the possible ambiguity in Yang's (1994) original argument, her original perspectives remain relevant as a foundation to exploit the role of women in interpersonal relationships. The framework is particularly vital given the well-documented consensus on the disadvantage of women in *guanxi* in the male-dominated public sphere. Given the limited evidence in Yang (2002), her recent argument regarding the emergence of gendered *guanxi* in terms of the commodification of female bodies requires additional exploration. Nevertheless, it is notable that this recent discussion converges with existing studies that mostly overlook the potential of feminine qualities in the process of establishing *guanxi*. In this regard, an alternative approach is relevant to contribute to the current state of the field by diverging from the standard approach and exploring a gender dimension subject to the gender characteristics in mobilizing and extending the *guanxi* network. In rural areas, Yang (1994) observed that women were the primary actors in the flowing of social relationships across groups and boundaries, whereas men were often responsible for ensuring group unity and security. Likewise, the salience of women can be applied to the urban context, as justified by the preceding discussion and psychoanalytic theory in particular. To further explore the gendered dimension of *guanxi* and the role of women, the next section will focus on the business context as a specific case.

8.4.1   The Gender of Guanxi *in the Business Context*

Before applying the gender framework, it is necessary to review the existing gendered discussion of *guanxi* in a business context, with a focus on China. It has been recognized that, in the Western organizational context, social network is a source of competitive advantage and a salient determinant in individual career success (e.g. Burt, 1992, 1997; Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1997). Studies in the Chinese context mostly follow a Western-oriented social network approach and have identified similar importance and benefits brought by *guanxi* (e.g. Bian, 2019; Bu & Roy, 2005). Conceptualizing the relational dimension of social capital in the Chinese context, Lin (2001b, pp. 160–161) argues that *guanxi* "builds social capital through social debt and social credit, or the symbolic rent of social capital". More explicitly, it is evident that job seekers with influential *guanxi* ties are more likely to receive a better job with higher pay (Bian, 2019; Liu, 2007b). In addition to personal accounts, managers also cultivate and practice business *guanxi* for organizational goals (Nolan & Rowley, 2020). Either way, *guanxi* is widely cited as a personal asset that benefits individual career development as well as organizational performance (Fan, 2002). Given the pivotal role of *guanxi* in the workplace, scholars have attributed the underrepresentation of women in top management positions to their limited access to the *guanxi* networks due to the fact that positions of influence and resources are still largely held by men (e.g. Bu & Roy, 2005; Korabik, 1993; Leung, 2002). Contrary to the abundant studies in the Western context, research on the *guanxi* and managerial careers of

women in Chinese enterprises remains scarce. Recognizing the lack of research on the field, the current study will contribute to the existing literature in two respects: First, the discussion synthesizes the existing gender perspectives on *guanxi* in the Chinese business context. Due to the very limited studies that explicitly focus on *guanxi*, the synthesis will also include social networks. In this section, I follow the preceding structure by dividing the available studies into two broad groups: gender composition, as well as the types of relationships and practices. Second, I will show the significance of the gendered *guanxi* framework in understanding *guanxi* and women managers' career experiences.

8.4.1.1   *Gender Composition in* Guanxi *and Social Networks*

In the earliest research, the gendered discussion of *guanxi* and social networks focused on recognizing the patterns of gender composition and the impact on career development. Studies conducted around the reform period suggested that Chinese women managers, similar to their Western counterparts, were underrepresented in the critical networks that determined career development (e.g. Judd, 1990; Korabik, 1993). They then concluded that male-dominated networks had kept women from managerial positions and appointment to top management. Subsequent studies also identified similar skewed gender patterns in recent periods. Based on social network theory, Bu and Roy (2005) investigate the career success networks (CSNs) among women and men in management. They find that around 90 percent of men's power ties are with other men, whereas 85 percent of women's power ties are with men. This suggests that in the case of power and influence, male-centered ties remain significant, which can result in a structural limitation further holding women back from forming same-gender CSN. The profound implication concurs with the prior studies (e.g. Leung, 2002) in the sense that they underpin the lower tendency for Chinese women managers, in comparison with their male counterparts, to access the type of *guanxi* that helps their career advancement. In a cross-cultural study, Huang and Aaltio (2014) echo Bu and Roy (2005) and further indicate the salience of senior male supervisors in a power-related network. Focusing on the IT industry, they contend that women managers also require greater effort to become visible in the male-dominated networks and to gain promotion. Yet the correlation between gendered networks and network benefits is challenged by recent large-sample research on Chinese CEOs. With data collected from 700 CEOs, mostly founder entrepreneurs, Burt (2019) finds that despite the gendered pattern in networks, men and women benefit similarly from network advantages. In other words, the result suggests gender is not a significant determinant of the differences in network gains between women and men.

In addition to the challenge brought about by male-dominated networks, studies also reveal the potential ethical consequences if women attempt to gain access to *guanxi* and networks in the workplace. In a study of Chinese SOEs, Leung (2002) notes that participation in networking activities can hurt the reputation of women managers. The potentially negative impact of close

interaction with male colleagues is not limited to women managers in the business context but is also visible among managerial leaders in government organizations (Cooke, 2003, 2005) and academic professionals (Cooke, 2005), as well as employed women at other levels of the hierarchy, namely women workers (Liu, 2007b). In a recent study, Zhu and colleagues (2016) provide an explanation of the direct impact of women's social behavior on their managerial career development. Drawing from social role theory, they argue that women managers can hardly be included in networking activities given the ingrained cultural stereotypes in Chinese society. In particular, women who become managers have been perceived as violating the stereotype and therefore are less likely to be accepted within the management cohort. Paradoxically, they also identify a parallel but conflicting stereotype which expects women managers to act according to the managerial role. Acknowledging the contradictory stereotypical forces in practice, they finally contend that women managers face a narrow range of options to gain advancement.

Another noteworthy aspect that is relevant in explaining the unequal access of women and men to business networks is the socializing practice featuring *yingchou* (after-hours activities) (Nolan, 2010). The after-hours setting can exclude women with family obligations from participating (Nolan & Rowley, 2020). Given the still intact cultural stereotypes, women, in this case, have to make a decision between their work role and their family role. Furthermore, the activities often involve drinking alcohol, which can create additional problems for women. For instance, Liu (2013) has found that women who cannot drink are likely to be excluded from work-related networks. She argues that the practice is so prevalent that albeit the excellent record of performance, women still feel the need to show their ability to drink in order to access "men's club". In the case of cultivating relationships with clients, the activities tend to consist of several rounds. J. Y. Liu (2017) and Tang (2020) both highlight that, apart from banquets (mostly in restaurants), post-banquet locations are often determined by men, about which women may feel uncomfortable. The male-oriented after-hours activities are likely to place women at a disadvantage (Bedford, 2016). Yet it should be noted that banquets are multifaceted. In a recent study, Oxfeld (2019, p. 337) argues that banqueting can be characterized as "a customary celebration, a necessary obligation, or an important and strategic intervention for gaining official favor", depending on the particular case. For instance, at a few banquets, he observed that drinking (also involving female participants) served to facilitate workplace harmony by breaking hierarchical boundaries and fostering connections among colleagues. In this regard, clarification on networking activities is useful to examine women's experience in business networking practices.

In sum, studies in this group have identified the male-dominated gender composition of *guanxi* and social networks in the Chinese business context. Although the gendered pattern is not limited to the Chinese context, the indigenous cultural stereotypes and socializing practices have created more challenges for women accessing business *guanxi*. In this regard, it is clear that in addition to

the skewed gender composition within the *guanxi* network, women and men face unequal access to business *guanxi*. Given the fact that positions of power and influence are largely held by men, cultural stereotypes and male-oriented socializing practices have created structural barriers that can potentially keep women from establishing the business *guanxi* critical for work performance and career advancement.

8.4.1.2   *Types of Relationships and Practices*

The discussion in this subsection departs from the gender of actors and explores the different types of relationships formed by the two genders as well as the differences in practice. As stated previously, homophily has been a widely discussed concept in understanding types of relationships (for a review see McPherson et al., 2001). Yet little has been explored in the Chinese context. Based upon the homophily framework, Bu and Roy (2005) focus on career success networks (CSNs) and have identified the variants in homophily preferences corresponding to specific types of relationships. From interviews with 108 Chinese managers, the general result concurs with the prior conclusions in the Western context: CSNs of male managers are more homophilic than women managers. Remarkably, a deeper analysis has revealed that homophily preferences vary across different types of relationship and socializing contexts. For instance, senior managers demonstrate more significant homophilic preferences than other managers in the case of instrumental power relationships. The finding highlights a further obstacle in establishing *guanxi* with senior managers in the case of women managers. In other words, in addition to access networks of the same management level, women managers also have to strive for access to the networks of the higher leadership, both of which are male-dominated and homophilic. Will female managers face less difficulty in establishing *guanxi* with female top leaders than with senior male leaders? A recent study by Burt (2019) shows that the challenge is likely to remain with the presence of female top leaders. Among the 700 CEOs, although women CEOs are more likely than male CEOs to connect with women, their networks do not substantially display gendered homophily indicating robust preferences for male contacts. The finding is understandable given the male-oriented business context – that is, men outnumber women leaders as well as men holding positions of power and influence. Nevertheless, for women managers, the two separate perspectives shed the same light on the structural limitation on establishing a relationship with senior managers.

Apart from the focus on relationship type, existing studies also identify the behavior of women and men with respect to *guanxi* and social networks. For instance, Leung (2002) has found that male managers in SOEs are more willing to develop *guanxi* with leaders and government officials. She attributes the phenomenon to men's instrumentally oriented perceptions of work. In other words, she argues that men define work activities in terms of instrumental accounts and therefore tend to practice *guanxi* instrumentally. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to practice *guanxi* non-instrumentally. Yet the

conclusion is not fully justified by subsequent studies. Ng and Chow (2009) surveyed women managers in Hong Kong (including lower, middle, and top management levels) and the results indicate the strong willingness of women managers to practice *guanxi* for instrumental purposes. The study also refutes the early argument from Ibarra (1992) by indicating that underrepresentation of women in top management positions does not hinder women from reaching out to the same gender for instrumental relationships. They finally claim that the behavior correlates to the perception of women as managers. The study further argues that a woman tends to establish a relationship if she recognizes that the other woman possesses the qualities of a business manager. In a similar sense, Xu and Li (2015) support Ng and Chow (2009) with recent evidence from mainland China. Their findings first reject conclusions from early scholarship, which state that women only use *guanxi* for matters such as "[b]uying foodstuffs that are not readily available in stores through friends" (e.g. Yang, 1994, p. 79). The results reveal that women in the workplace also practice *guanxi* to secure job promotion, and not practicing *guanxi* "may create more obstacles for career development" (Xu & Li, 2015, p. 844).

According to a systematic evaluation of the existing literature subject to gender in business *guanxi*, it is clear that the field remains obscure, with mixed evidence from the Chinese context. Several features emerge from this scholarship. First, the salient role of *guanxi*/social networks on one's career development has been consistently identified by various studies. The consensus justifies the relevance to understanding the glass ceiling in terms of *guanxi*. Second, it is also notable that much of the research follows the Western network approaches (e.g. homophily, nature of ties). Particularly in the discussion of the indigenous concept, *guanxi*, most scholars adopt network frameworks without distinguishing *guanxi* from social networks. Furthermore, the available studies demonstrate a strong emphasis on gender composition whereas other dimensions, such as the role of women and men in *guanxi*/social networking activities, have been underexplored. Likewise, there have been detailed descriptions of women's disadvantaged positions in the relationship, and only a few scholars briefly mention the potential advantage of women in developing and maintaining relationships. Acknowledging the unclosed gap, the next subsection will build upon Yang's (1994) gendered *guanxi* framework and argue for critical approaches to understand the experiences of women managers in the business context.

8.4.2   *The Gender of* Guanxi *and Women in Management*

In comparison with the well-documented research on *guanxi*, discussion on its gendered nature remains scant and has focused less on women managers. Existing evidence regarding women in management demonstrates mixed results on their engagement with expressive and instrumental *guanxi*. For instance, Leung (2002) argues that women managers' interactions tend to favor communication and friendship, which do not enhance their career progression. In contrast, Bu and Roy (2005) contend that women managers are as committed as men to

instrumental networks. The study also reveal an expressive dimension of *guanxi* practice involving women; that is, personal information is more often shared with women contacts. This finding sheds light on the qualities of women in *guanxi* practice. More explicitly, women's relational character, as well as empathetic communication, is likely to establish warmer interactions with less emphasis on aggressive instrumental *guanxi* strategies.

The unique role of women in *guanxi* practice is highlighted in Yang (1994). More explicitly, it refers to women's distinctive role in supporting the building of social relationships across groups and boundaries in traditional Chinese society. For women, the ability to mobilize different relationships for family and economic interests is the major source of power and sustains their status in the family. Yet how far this translates into the managerial context remains underexplored. Studies have widely documented the disadvantages women encounter in male-dominated *guanxi* relationships and activities. In other words, as a minority, the role of women managers is often neglected in gendered *guanxi* research. From a few studies, it is evident that women-oriented *guanxi* is salient regardless of the male-dominated network context. For instance, women more often engage with other women contacts in social activities outside the workplace, such as going out for a drink or visiting each other's homes, than men do with their male contacts (Bu & Roy, 2005). Notably, women managers still tend to establish *guanxi* with other women despite the fact that top management positions have been predominately occupied by men (Ng & Chow, 2009). In addition, women are capable of enhancing *guanxi* in the business context, such as showing empathy and sensitivity with regard to indebted feelings (Xu & Li, 2015). Even at the most male-dominated top management level, the networks of women surprisingly show no significant difference from those of men (Burt, 2019). These findings suggest women's *guanxi* practices are likely to possess different characteristics from those of men.

From a psychoanalytic feminist perspective, it is not surprising to find that women have often played a critical role in cultivating and maintaining *guanxi* in business activities. In my interviews with women managers, the role of women is also visible. According to one manager, the most outstanding individuals in her field of work were mainly women: "In our industry [insurance], the best-performing salesperson are all women. I think this speaks something about the strength of women in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships".

Interestingly, this description aligns with the career experiences of one woman manager. Starting as a grassroots salesperson in a property company, she had remained a top achiever in her team and was recently appointed as the head of the sales department at the age of 26. Moreover, her career attainment was merely one manifestation of her ability in interpersonal relationships. Soon after her appointment, she successfully led the department to the best performance in the region:

> I was a newcomer and a leader who arrived from nowhere. Most employees have worked in the department for many years, and most didn't have

satisfactory work performance [successful sales record]. How to help them achieve [a good] sales record and provide incentives were very challenging issues. So I spent, and I am still spending, a lot of time guiding them individually. I usually accompany them to the meeting with potential clients as much as I can. . . . Each individual is very different. You have to know who they are and what is the best way to communicate with them. You even have to be in their shoes and anticipate what they might need in the future.

Women managers were aware of the potential qualities of women, which include being more relational and attuned to the feelings and needs of people. These qualities are likely to contribute to women's unique roles in *guanxi* practices. Furthermore, it was also stressed that these qualities and soft skills in interpersonal relationships were not sufficient to sustain *guanxi* practices if an individual did not possess professional competency. As a woman manager stated:

When my boss asks me to join a banquet with him, I know it is because he recognizes my professional competency. If I am only a woman [but without any knowledge about the work], I am sure that he will not ask me to go.

Professional competency, in this case, refers to the work-related knowledge and skills of a manager. Whereas all women managers agreed that *guanxi* was a crucial part of their career, they also asserted that an individual's professional competency is equally important as a means to sustain the existing *guanxi* and build new *guanxi*.

8.5   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have examined the concept of *guanxi* as an important determinant of women's career development and a prominent feature of interpersonal interactions in China. The study focuses on *guanxi*, rather than social networks, which is pragmatic in twofold ways. First, the concept of social network is Western-oriented that has failed to capture the Chinese situation holistically, as indicated by existing scholarship. Furthermore, research on gender differences in networks has practical implications such as HRM policies and women leadership training. In this regard, the indigenous concept of *guanxi* provides cultural specification necessary for understanding women's careers. As such, *guanxi* in the current study is interpreted as an indigenous concept that is culturally constructed by the Chinese context. To explore its relevance in women's career experiences, the discussion attempted to highlight the gendered nature of *guanxi*. In contrast to the extensive discussion on *guanxi* in China, its gender dimension has been strikingly underexplored. Available literature adopts social network and *guanxi* ambiguously without distinguishing the two concepts and mostly points to the disadvantages women encounter in the male-dominated network context. Drawing insights from Yang's (1994) seminal work, I argued that the gendered nature of *guanxi* is not merely about

the gender of the actor but the gender of *guanxi* practice is equally salient in discussions of women's career experiences. The former aspect has been extensively emphasized. The gender of *guanxi* practice is posited as a unique perspective with inputs from psychoanalytic object-relation theory. In this respect, *guanxixue* (the art of *guanxi*) is characterized by female qualities. The practice of *guanxixue* also produces a female influence in Chinese society. The gendered nature of *guanxi* not only explains the gendered behavior but, more importantly, highlights women's critical role in the practice of *guanxi*, which has remained invisible in the current discussion.

Available evidence sheds light on the potential advantages of women in *guanxi* practices. Chinese women traditionally provide essential contributions to the social support networks of the family, including in business. The evidence, albeit limited, also pinpoints the distinctive female qualities in *guanxi* practices among women managers. Both results suggest the relevance of exploring *guanxi* centering on women in management. Specifically, the conceptualization of *guanxi* and the characteristics of *guanxi* from the perspective of women managers should be explored to provide additional insight into the current understanding of the glass ceiling. More importantly, the study can serve as a critical foundation to cultivate a path for women managers' career advancement given the rigid maledominated context of *guanxi*.

Notes

1 In Chinese language, *wanglai* is more often adopted to describe the development and maintenance of *guanxi* without specific instrumental purpose (Ruan, 2017). *Wanglai* literally means come and go or contact with somebody (Chang, 2010).
2 Stacey (1975, p. 70) highlighted the distinction between power and authority and argued that "whatever powers these Chinese women wielded were not theirs by right but were delegated to them by men".

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9   Conclusion

I came to this study to attempt to understand women and work in China, particularly why they are strikingly underrepresented in leadership positions despite the fact that they have achieved remarkable progress in educational attainment, labor force participation, and wage equality. Whereas it is well acknowledged that China manifests a dissociation of performance in gender equality, systematic research on gender in China is limited, particularly with regard to women managers in China. Current knowledge and evidence are highly heterogeneous across disciplinary strands, which lacks a synthesis that recognizes the insights of various disciplines. I explored areas such as Chinese studies, sociology, economics, management and organization studies, and Chinese-language literature. During the years of research, I discovered that the picture of gender in China is more complex and dynamic than previously argued. For instance, Western research and Chinese research on Chinese women are possibly differently framed. It is also evident that socio-psychological dynamics are often overlooked although structural factors have been well argued as critical determinants for gender inequality in China. Moreover, the structural factors in China are highly dynamic given the rapid changes in society. This chapter illuminates the research contributions by presenting conclusions drawing from the results of theoretical and empirical discussions.

9.1   The Economics of Gender Identity: A Cross-Disciplinary Paradigm of Gender Studies

The theoretical discussions manifest the significance of the economics of identity by shedding light on its salient contribution to the field of economics, as well as its role in combining different but relevant strands of gender analysis in a convincing unified framework. This conclusion highlights the remarkable features of identity theory, particularly as its application to gender has not yet received any substantial recognition. In the field of economics, the economics of identity is the pioneer in integrating economic and sociological theory in one game-theoretic model to understand identity-based gender differentials in society. It builds a bridge between the distinctive economic and sociological approach and represents a major shift from standard economic approaches. The

distinction between standard economic and identity approaches is striking with regard to the notion of gender stereotypes. Standard economic theories emphasize the descriptive nature of gender stereotypes by predicting what women and men will do according to descriptions of what women and men typically are. In contrast, the economics of gender identity further considers the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes in addition to gender descriptions. More explicitly, the gender identity theory recognizes the internalized process of an individual such that the descriptions of women and men typically tend to become gender prescriptions about what women and men should or ought to do. The theory is therefore a bridge that provides an economic explanation of this psychological process by positing the individual decision to conform to a stereotype in terms of individual choices regarding costs and benefits.

Research results shed light on the cross-disciplinary explanatory power of the identity theory for understanding the gender theories of other fields. In particular, the theoretical discussions highlight the limited exploration with regard to the relevance of its economic reasoning, centering gender identity and stereotypes on existing gender studies from various disciplines. As demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, the economics of identity is capable of offering an economic rationale to the existing gender theories. In exploring one of the well-documented gender concepts, gender as performativity, the identity theory pinpoints the possible economic reasoning for an individual to repeat acts to construct their gender identity. Likewise, the economics of gender identity is robust to interpret the existing gender theories in management and organization studies. Remarkably, it manifests as a conceptual outline to accommodate the diverse strands of gender-organization theories. In the theoretical discussion on the glass ceiling, the identity theory fosters the understanding of existing arguments with an economic insight without overlooking the possible dynamics among micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Given the powerful explanatory capability of the identity theory, the heterogeneous gender theories from various disciplines are able to be systematically reviewed under one unified framework.

The theoretical discussions also illuminate the possible application of the economics of gender identity in different contexts. The notion of context, explicitly defined in terms of "when, where, how, and between whom a transaction takes place", enables the substantiation of the theory in the Chinese case (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005, p. 12). Moreover, this result not only highlights the relevance of context in analysis but also points out the significance of clarifying the different contextual aspects, an emerging theme that guides the subsequent empirical discussions in the present study.

9.2   Culture in China: Complex and Dynamic

Culture in China is often characterized by simplistic interpretations. The standard approach generally assumes culture as given and fixed. A notable example is Confucianism, which has been commonly cited as a defining feature of Chinese culture in economic and management science scholarship. On the one hand,

economic studies of gender mostly refer to culture in China as merely Confucian norms stemming from traditional society. On the other hand, management science literature posits China as a country with strong Confucian characteristics and distinct from other nations. In contrast to this shared knowledge, the present study sheds light on the complexity and dynamics of culture in China.

One observation is associated with the various contextual aspects that are constantly shaping culture in China. Confucianism, as defined by existing economic and management science literature, merely represents one aspect of the culture in traditional and contemporary China. In traditional society, for instance, Confucianism was indeed the dominant philosophy and a definitive concept of culture. Moreover, the conceptualization and common practices with regard to *jia*/family were equally salient in determining culture in traditional China. Culture further grew in complexity after 1949. The research on women in China indicates multiple relevant aspects with parallel effects, such as traditional gender roles in the Chinese conceptualization of family, contribution to social production, and birth-control policies. Given the rapid socioeconomic changes in China, it is also clear that culture in China is likely to manifest a dynamic nature and remains open to interpretation in specific contexts.

In addition, the notion of culture in China is likely to be interpreted differently in terms of various research approaches. The discussion on women in China demonstrates two possible approaches. One approach is characterized by the historical overview, which disentangles culture in terms of various contextual aspects. The alternative features a comparative approach to Western and Chinese research on Chinese women. The observation shows an interesting finding that Western research, often motivated by feminist concerns, may itself project a cultural view on China. Chinese women's identity, seen through the lens of Western scholars, is in essence a Western view of what Chinese women are and what Chinese women should be. Chinese research on women, dominated by domestic scholars and published in Chinese, is characterized by a different framing, such as the women-liberating goal of Chinese socialism. This emerging theme contains important implications for studying China, highlighting the relevance of clarifying the contextual orientation of the research trajectory. More explicitly, it raises the question of whether indigenous views about China differ from Western perspectives on China. If so, what are the differences and implications in interpreting culture in China?

9.3   Cultural Stereotypes: An Approach to Gender and the Glass Ceiling in China

According to the present study, the framework of cultural stereotype is a significant economic paradigm for better understanding gender and women's managerial careers in China. The results of the theoretical discussion pinpoint its analytical importance in synthesizing diverse gender studies, as summarized by the two preceding sections. Furthermore, empirical results regarding women in management in the Chinese organizational context justify its validity in fostering the

understanding of the glass ceiling phenomenon. The first notable result is the gendered organization in the Chinese workplace, which is highlighted by the cultural stereotyping approach and relevant to disentangling the structural context associated with individual career experiences. Stereotyping forces in the Chinese workplace are identified, namely the gendered nature of Chinese organizations and the gendered form of theorizing about Chinese organizations. The gendered workplace structure is rigid irrespective of the changes in the organizational settings, as indicated by the observations on Chinese *danwei*, as well as state-owned and private enterprises. The gendered form of theorizing is characterized by a prominent phenomenon of paternalistic leadership, commonly observed in Chinese family businesses and state-owned enterprises. The results indicate that the theory developed from the research on Chinese organizations is strikingly male-biased. More concretely, the theory is developed from a stereotypical hypothesis that assumes that leaders are male. Women are marginalized in the original theorizing and also neglected in its research applications.

The results of qualitative analysis further illuminate the significance of understanding stereotypes in the study of women's managerial careers in the Chinese workplace. Two major themes emerged from the empirical results. First, stereotyping and women's managerial careers are potentially different, as shaped by various organizational settings. Second, an individual's age, corresponding to the macro-level socioeconomic and political context, is also relevant to understanding the context and individual experiences. This cohort-based approach provides new insight into the widely recognized generation-based approach by examining the impact of the extraordinary dynamics of Chinese reforms since 1978.

Recognizing the earlier observations, the empirical discussions focusing on work–family relationships and social networks demonstrate the salience of cultural stereotypes in understanding the glass ceiling phenomenon in China. Remarkably, the framework is robust to identify additional aspects which have been overlooked by existing studies. In the discussion of the work–family relationship, the framework suggests the boundaries of work and family are often blurred, a sharp contrast to the Western presumption of two independent domains. This is the main contribution to the current discussion of the glass ceiling in China, in the sense that most studies overlook the relevance of clarifying work and family concepts and their Chinese conceptualization. It is also notable that the relationships between work and family are complex in nature and can vary across contexts. Cultural stereotypes provide a lens to view women's managerial careers as associated with work and family matters. The empirical results indicate that women managers in China are clearly aware of the stereotypes of their roles in the family, organization, and society. As such, they actively and deliberately adopt particular career choices, reflexively recognizing these expectations. For instance, the choice to turn down a promotion to a senior leadership position is sometimes perceived by women managers as a deliberate decision that maximizes their individual utility subject to demands of

both family and career. In this sense, the framework is an alternative approach to the glass ceiling in China with a focus on individual choice in response to the conceptualization of work–family relationships.

In the study of social networks, a widely discussed factor in the glass ceiling, cultural stereotypes further demonstrate their relevance by contributing new insights to the field. The results first suggest that *guanxi* is an indigenous concept that can approach the Chinese case better than social networks. This conclusion pinpoints culture as a salient but often neglected aspect in the available studies of women in management in China, drawing from the observation that *guanxi* and social networks are often regarded as interchangeable without any exploration of the possible differences. Similar to the sense that culture has been largely overlooked in the discussion of social networks and *guanxi*, the role of women is implicitly marginalized. The framework of cultural stereotypes sheds further light on the role of women in building and mobilizing *guanxi* that supports family networks, including in business. The results show the significance of exploring the role of women in the managerial context to foster an understanding of the glass ceiling in China.

9.4   Cultural Stereotypes: A Potential to Explore the Economics of Gender across Contexts

The potential of applying a cultural stereotyping framework to various contexts is clear from the results of both theoretical and empirical discussions. On the one hand, the framework is a relevant alternative lens to gender research from different disciplinary strands. On the other hand, the conceptualization of culture is not fixed but is open to interpretation. These two emerging themes suggest that the application of a cultural stereotyping framework is possible in terms of specific time, place, and groups of individuals. In the present study, the innovative approach is substantiated by an application to the Chinese context, coupled with the systematic disentanglement of different cultural aspects. The conclusion contains implications for future research. For instance, it is possible to substantiate the framework in terms of China's public sector, such as schools and government departments, to better understand gender in these organizations. Furthermore, the framework provides a potential alternative approach to gender in different nations. As demonstrated in this concluding chapter, the current study not only provides a better understanding of the economics of gender in China, it also contributes to the broader academic field by offering a cross-disciplinary framework with the possibility for further application to foster the understanding of gender in various settings.

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