

**Raising Half the Sky: Work–Life Balance of Chinese Female  
Administrative Workers**

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## Table of Contents

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<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>Attestation of Authorship.....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Keywords.....</b>	<b>XII</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Problem Orientation.....	1
1.2 Research Questions and Objectives.....	4
1.3 Significance of the Study.....	5
1.4 Outline of the Thesis.....	5
<b>2. Background Information.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Chinese Traditional Values and Culture.....	7
2.3 Chinese Women and Family .....	10
2.4 Women's Employment.....	11
2.5 The Immigration History of Chinese Females in New Zealand.....	16
2.6 The New Zealand Labour Market.....	18
2.7 Summary & Conclusion.....	20
<b>3. Work–Life Balance.....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1. Introduction.....	21
3.2 Definition of Work–Life Balance.....	21
3.3 Work–Family Conflict and Family–Work Conflict.....	22
3.4 Gender Differences.....	24
3.5 WLB Practices in Organisations.....	26
3.6 Under-utilisation of WLB Practices.....	29
3.7 Coping Strategies.....	31
3.8 Summary & Conclusion.....	36

<b>4. Ethnic Migrant Women.....</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	38
4.2 Ethnic Women .....	38
4.2.1 Gender, Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity.....	39
4.2.2 Token vs. Minority.....	41
4.2.3 Ethnic Women and Cultural Barriers.....	41
4.3 Acculturation.....	44
4.3.1 Psychological and Sociocultural Adaptation.....	45
4.3.2 Adaptation Model.....	47
4.4 Migrant Women and Employment.....	50
4.5 Ethnic Migrant Women and Employment.....	52
4.6 The Acculturation of Chinese Women in New Zealand.....	54
4.6.1 Negative Images.....	54
4.6.2 Positive Images.....	55
4.6.3 Employment.....	56
4.6.4 Variables of Acculturation.....	57
4.6.5 Adaptation Strategies.....	58
4.6.6 Astronauting.....	60
4.6.7 Transnational Phenomenon.....	61
4.7 Summary & Conclusion.....	62
<b>5. The Context of the Study.....</b>	<b>65</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	65
5.2 Women in Universities.....	65
5.3 Academic Women.....	66
5.3.1 Gendered University.....	66
5.3.2 WLB and Academic Work.....	67
5.4 Administrative women.....	70
5.5 Organisational Actions.....	78
5.6 Work–life Balance Initiatives at AUT.....	79
5.7 Summary & Conclusion.....	81
<b>6. Research Methodology.....</b>	<b>83</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	83
6.2 Methodological Approach.....	83
6.2.1 The Qualitative Research Paradigm.....	83
6.2.2 The Case Study Design.....	85
6.3 Methods.....	86
6.3.1 Semi-structured Interview.....	87
6.3.2 Pilot Interview.....	88
6.3.3 Documentation.....	89
6.3.4 Archival Records.....	91
6.4 Research Process.....	91
6.4.1 Sampling Decisions.....	91
6.4.2 Participants.....	93
6.4.3 Data Collection.....	95

6.5 Data Validity.....	97
6.5.1 Triangulation.....	97
6.5.2 Bias Clarification.....	98
6.6 Data Analysis.....	99
6.7 Ethical Issues.....	102
6.8 Summary & Conclusion.....	104
<b>7. Personal and Family Life WLB Challenges.....</b>	<b>106</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	106
7.2 Experiences of Immigration.....	106
7.3 Family Responsibilities.....	113
7.4 Family–Work Conflict.....	116
7.5 Personal Life.....	117
7.5.1 Study-related Conflicts.....	117
7.5.2 Personal Activities–Family Responsibilities’ Conflicts.....	118
7.5.3 Recreation and Well-being.....	118
7.6 Summary & Conclusion.....	120
<b>8. Women at Work.....</b>	<b>122</b>
8.1 Introduction.....	122
8.2 Organisational Culture.....	122
8.3 Workplace Issues.....	129
8.3.1 Workloads.....	130
8.3.2 Deadlines.....	133
8.3.3 Difficult Problems.....	133
8.3.4 Work–Family Conflicts.....	134
8.4 Job Satisfaction.....	136
8.5 The Effects of Gender, Ethnicity and Cultural Experience on Work.....	138
8.6 Summary & Conclusion.....	141
<b>9. WLB Strategies Used by Women.....</b>	<b>143</b>
9.1 Introduction.....	143
9.2 Informal Support.....	143
9.2.1 Interpersonal Relationships at the Workplace.....	143
9.2.2 Managers’ Support.....	144
9.2.3 Support from Colleagues.....	149
9.2.4 Asian Staff Network.....	150
9.3 Work—life Balance Policies.....	152
9.3.1 Personal/family-oriented Perspective.....	152
9.3.1.1 Parental Leave.....	152
9.3.1.2 Dependant Care Benefits.....	154
9.3.1.3 Flexible Working Arrangements.....	155
9.3.1.4 Time Allowance/Professional Development Leave.....	159
9.3.2 Workplace-oriented Perspective.....	161
9.3.2.1 Leave Options.....	161
9.3.2.2 Health and Wellness Service.....	166

9.4 Women's Coping Strategies.....	167
9.4.1 Asking for Help from Family Members.....	168
9.4.2 Win-lose Strategy.....	170
9.4.3 Time Management.....	171
9.4.4 Establishing Clear Boundaries.....	172
9.4.5 Changing Mindsets & Demonstrating Commitment.....	173
9.5 Summary & Conclusion.....	176
<b>10. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>181</b>
10.1 Introduction.....	181
10.2 Summary of Key Findings.....	181
10.3 Implications.....	187
10.4 Limitations of Study.....	190
10.5 Future Research.....	191
10.6 Conclusion.....	192
<b>References.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Appendix 1—Interview Schedule 1.....</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Appendix 2—Interview Schedule 2.....</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>Appendix 3—Ethical Approval Memorandum.....</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>Appendix 4—Participant Consent.....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Appendix 5—Participant Information Sheet.....</b>	<b>228</b>

## List of Tables

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Table 1: Acculturation Models.....	48
Table 2: Adaptation Strategies.....	59
Table 3: WLB-related Policies.....	81
Table 4: Thematic Conceptual Matrix: WLB Challenges and Strategies.....	179

## **Attestation of Authorship**

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature:

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Yan Ma

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## Abstract

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In recent years, a growing body of research has examined the issue of work–life balance (WLB). WLB initiatives have been developed by organisations, not only to aid employees in leading healthier and more satisfying lives, but to attract and retain talent. One area where WLB issues have not been examined in detail is from the perspective of Chinese immigrant women. As one of the largest and growing Asian ethnic groups, the WLB issues faced by Chinese women are especially worthy of being examined and addressed. The primary purpose of this research was to explore the WLB experience of Chinese women in administrative roles at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). It also aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on WLB issues for minority ethnic groups and investigated Chinese women’s coping strategies for integrating work with their non-work roles.

An exploratory qualitative case study approach was adopted for this study in order to compare and contrast organisational initiatives and policies for WLB with women’s experiences. A triangulated research design was also employed to glean qualitative data by virtue of multiple methods including archival evidence such as publicly available documentation, secondary research on WLB and AUT’s WLB policies, and semi-structured interviews. This study involved 12 Chinese female administrative staff and three staff members from the Human Resource Department (HRD), the Asian Staff Network (ASN) and the AUT Branch of Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Association (TIASA). Participants were recruited by utilising sources such as the Asian Staff Network (ASN) and the researcher’s network of contacts within AUT.

The findings of the study indicated that Chinese women’s WLB experience and ways of handling work–family conflict (WFC) and family–work conflict (FWC) were affected by their experiences of immigration and cultural backgrounds. In particular, their family situation had a critical influence on the way they organised their households and

arranged for childcare or eldercare. Child/elder care responsibilities, personal/family emergencies, and personal/individual sacrifice engendered tensions around their ability to integrate WLB. In addition, work factors such as heavy workloads, meeting deadlines, and working longer hours, and cultural barriers caused emotional stress and physical consequences.

While informal support from managers and colleagues and the WLB policies offered by the university helped women address their WLB issues, some policies were underutilised. A variety of coping strategies such as family members, win-lose strategies, time management, building clear boundaries, changing mindsets, and demonstrating commitment were actively adopted by Chinese women as mechanisms to cope with tensions between their work and family lives. The implications of these findings are discussed in light of the theory and practice of WLB.

## **Keywords**

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Work–life Balance, Work–family Conflict, Family–work Conflict, Chinese Women, Ethnic Group, Immigration, Administrative Workers, New Zealand, Auckland University of Technology

# **1. Introduction**

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Over the last few decades technological advancements have significantly shaped the international labour market by creating more flexible working patterns. This has resulted in an influx of employees, especially female workers, from dual-earner and single-parent families into the workforce, which inevitably has an effect on their work and family roles. Following the changes in traditional gender-based family roles, integrating work and non-work demands has become one of the most critical challenges organisations, families, and individuals confront (Edwards & Rothbard, 2005; Kossek & Lambert, 2005). In this context, the issue of work–life balance (WLB) is currently receiving a burgeoning amount of attention from social and economic policy makers, organisational employers, HR practitioners and social researchers.

## **1.1 Problem Orientation**

Although WLB is “an intuitively appealing concept...definitions of work and life are slippery and shifting” (Harris & Pringle, 2008, p. 1). According to the Department of Labour (2005), WLB is about “effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us—including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study” (p. 1). Not only does WLB tend to be viewed as an effective strategy to improve employee retention, commitment and productivity, WLB can also be considered as a vehicle for facilitating the integration between paid work, unpaid work and personal time of employees (Department of Labour, 2003).

To help employees manage the conflicts between work and family lives, many organisations have developed WLB programmes and practices. In this regard, the literature on WLB is mainly concerned with the provision of organisational ‘fairness’ and flexible employment options. However, the effectiveness of WLB policies has

been, more or less, undermined by barriers existing in HR management and organisational culture (e.g. ineffective communication systems, unfavourable organisational climates, unsupportive managers and colleagues), which can explain why work–life initiatives offered in organisations are often under-utilised and do not basically solve work–life conflicts, although they do have some favourable effects (Macky & Johnson, 2003). Considering the majority of the potential beneficiaries of WLB policies are women, especially those with children, who tend to experience more work–life conflicts than men in the workplace, under-utilised WLB programmes or limited work–life benefits offered by organisations may undermine women’s well-being.

While many researchers have examined the WLB strategies from the employer-led perspective where WLB policies have been provided as the employer’s choice (e.g. Allen, 2001; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Soonhee, 2001; Wise & Bond, 2003), some researchers have explored WLB strategies from the employee-driven perspective (e.g. Wei, 2007; Woodward, 2007). However, there are quite few empirical studies embracing these two perspectives. According to Harris and Pringle (2008, p. 11), for WLB “to move beyond appealing rhetoric to become a sustainable reality for individual, organisational and societal well-being, strategies need to be developed by individuals, in partnership with workplaces, unions and governments”.

Since globalisation has blurred the boundaries between countries, the international labour market is becoming more diverse due to workforce mobility following a great number of migrants moving into different countries. As an under-researched area, ethnic migrant women’s experiences at work has been wrongly generalised to cover all females without considering ethnicity, culture or religion (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006). Likewise, the issues around ethnicity, culture and religion have also been overlooked by the literature of WLB, albeit with a few exceptions (Bradley, Healy, & Mukherjee, 2005; Healy, Bradley, & Mukherjee, 2004; Kamenou, 2008).

In New Zealand, given the demographic and sociological trends such as greater numbers of females in paid work, an ageing workforce and skill shortages, WLB has been an increasingly vital workplace issue for both society and economy (Spoonley & Davidson, 2004). In August 2003, a Work–Life Balance Project was launched by the New Zealand Government (Department of Labour, 2004). In addition, several noteworthy issues regarding specific ethnic groups were addressed in the project’s report, including Maori and Pacific people (Department of Labour, 2004). However, none of these studies or reports have profiled or mentioned Asian groups.

In New Zealand, the Asian population was 354,552 in 2006 and increased 50 per cent from 6.6% in the 2001 to 9.2% in 2006, making it the fastest growing group in the country over the period (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Chinese immigrants, as the largest Asian ethnic group in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2007), have been absent from the majority of discussions around WLB debates (for an exception, see Wei’s (2007) study). Wei (2007) explored the WLB experience of Chinese female migrants by using a biographical method and focused on six themes: immigration, employment, financial status and accommodation, care responsibility, social and leisure activities, and comparison and improvements in WLB. She found that Chinese women culturally prioritise work and occupation as more vital than family or personal life by putting themselves last on the list, which results in sacrifice and risk. She also found Chinese women have a natural resilience that assists them coping with the changes that come with immigration. Nevertheless, there was a lack of a specific organisational context in Wei’s study.

Following the increased enrolment of Chinese students, more Chinese staff, especially female staff, have been employed to manage the diversity of international students in universities, taking administrative jobs such as student advisors, student mentors, librarians or technicians. However, Chinese women may experience more challenges than women in the dominant society including dealing with gender inequality, ethnic discrimination and issues of acculturation that could shape their choices of WLB.

Auckland University of Technology (AUT), as the winner of 2002 EEO Trust Work–Life Award in the large organisation category, has employed a wide range of WLB-related practices to promote workplace equity and support cultural diversity. Seeing that the population of Chinese immigrants has grown radically in New Zealand, more research focusing on their WLB choices is required, especially in the light of how their choices of WLB are impacted by their culture, experiences of immigration, employment, family situation, financial circumstances, personal goals, and gendered roles (Harris & Pringle, 2008). A study focusing on AUT may well provide some insights into the WLB initiatives of other universities or organisations.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

This thesis constructs a case study focused on AUT which enjoys a good reputation in New Zealand for some of its WLB initiatives such as leave options. The purpose of this research is to explore the WLB experience of Chinese women in administrative roles at AUT. To examine the intricacies of how the organisation supports the needs of Chinese staff, the university's WLB policies and practices will also be reviewed for their effects on administrative staff such as this group of women. Another objective was to contribute to the body of knowledge on WLB issues for a minority ethnic group and investigate Chinese women's coping strategies for integrating work with their other roles and responsibilities. In addition, information on their cultural and employment backgrounds and family situations will be sought since these characteristics could affect their experience of WLB. Their experiences of acculturation in New Zealand will also be explored, as these could have an effect on their WLB strategies. Four key research questions guide the study:

1. What are the tensions experienced by Chinese female administrative staff between their family and work lives? How do these affect them?
2. What strategies do Chinese female administrative staff use to cope with work–family conflict (WFC) and family–work conflict (FWC)?
3. How do their own cultural experiences of immigration or the immigration



experience of other family members affect the way Chinese female administrative staff cope with WFC and FWC?

4. What kind of support structures exist to help administrative staff to cope with WFC and FWC?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This thesis may contribute to the body of knowledge on WLB issues for a minority ethnic group in New Zealand specifically Chinese women's coping strategies for integrating work demands associated with career commitments and life obligations. As the 'life' component of the work-life balance equation is a multifaceted concept (Harris & Pringle, 2008; Kamenou, 2008), this study employs a broader and more diverse approach to evaluate the WLB experiences of Chinese women by concentrating on specific cultural, family, organisational and social contexts. Although it focuses on the Chinese ethnic group, the implications of this study could be of interest to other ethnic groups. For instance, the reasons for Chinese immigrants perhaps working longer hours could be the same as those of other ethnic group immigrants who are seeking to build their financial base to settle in New Zealand. Therefore, the findings of this research may benefit other ethnic groups beyond just the Chinese. The results of this research may be of help to design more effective programmes and services for immigrants. It may also elicit the government's attention to different ethnicities and aid policy makers.

### **1.4 Outline of the Thesis**

Ten chapters are included in this study. Chapter One introduces the research topic by discussing the problem orientation and justification. It also presents the research objectives and questions while explaining the importance of the research before the structure of the thesis is outlined.

Chapter Two provides a brief account of the background of Chinese women, including Chinese traditional values and culture, Chinese women and family and women's employment. After giving an overview of the immigration history of Chinese women in New Zealand, it identifies the characteristics of the New Zealand workforce. This chapter provides further justification for the research and acts as a basis for the next chapter.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four review two main themes of the literature related to the research topic, namely, work-life balance and ethnic migrant women. The literature in each theme is integrated and analysed in order to offer a coherent and rational overview of the existing knowledge associated with the relationship between the work-life balance and minority female migrants.

Chapter Five offers an overview of the research context. The culture in the university, WLB issues faced by both academic women and administrative women, the actions taken by universities to create a more equal environment and WLB initiatives at AUT are discussed.

In Chapter Six, a discussion of the research methodology is provided. It firstly justifies the method and procedures employed. After an evaluation of the data validity, it discusses how information is analysed while the final part provides a consideration of the ethical issues.

From Chapter Seven to Chapter Nine, findings from the research conducted are analysed and discussed in three categories, including personal and family life WLB challenges, women at work, and WLB strategies used by women.

The final chapter concludes the thesis. It provides a summary of the key findings and discusses the implication of the findings. It acknowledges the limitations of the study, followed by suggestions for future research.

## **2. Background Information**

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### **2.1 Introduction**

To facilitate a deep understanding of the immigration experience of Chinese women, the Chinese cultural and immigration context is overviewed in this chapter. It first introduces Chinese culture and values, and their influence on the role of women in the Chinese family. Then women's employment situation and work-life balancing strategies are discussed. After describing the immigration history of Chinese women in New Zealand, this chapter identifies the characteristics of the New Zealand labour market.

### **2.2 Chinese Traditional Values and Culture**

People's way of balancing their work and family lives is a reflection of their lifestyle, which is unavoidably influenced by their social culture. To explore the WLB experience of Chinese female immigrants, it is imperative to understand traditional Chinese values and culture.

Although culture and religion tend to be explored simultaneously, the Chinese have been relatively free of religious impact as the term 'religion' did not even exist in the Chinese lexicon until the 19th century and the ruling elite were never religious practitioners (Bhasin, 2007). During the ancient dynasties that ruled a variety of groups of Chinese people before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a feudalistic, patriarchal tradition affected by the wisdom of Lao Tse, Confucius, Buddha and the Legalist scholars dominated the lives of most Chinese (Stockwell, 1993). Their practical philosophies have to do principally with ethics and conduct in real life, while a highly mystical element has been seriously related to Western metaphysics, combined with some abstract questions (Morton & Lewis, 2005). There were two noteworthy exceptions:

Buddhism, derived from India and being spiritual and intellectually complex; whereas Daoism concerns Being and Nonbeing (Morton & Lewis, 2005).

Although Taoism and Buddhism have had some impact on daily life, the innate practical tendency in Chinese values and philosophy finds its fullest expression in the dominant strand of Confucius (551–479 BC), which has had the most profound and over-arching effect on Chinese families, society and political life for more than 2000 years (Morton & Lewis, 2005; Peng & Wang, 2005). Confucianism improved harmony through moral tenets at all levels of human relationships, which directly led to the formation of “a collectivist social order and an agnostic attitude towards the supernatural” (Bhasin, 2007, p. 50). Four main values are prevalent in Chinese-heritage cultures and include: Integration (focusing on harmony, tolerance and social stability); Confucian Work Dynamism (valuing maintaining the social hierarchy, personal virtue, favours and gifts’ reciprocation, respect for customs, schooling and learning); Human Heartedness (being kind, benevolent and caring); and Moral Discipline (advocating self-control, moderation, and prudence) (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). According to Granrose (2007), there may also be individual values that vary within society, even though cultural values at the societal level refer to the values shared by the majority of societal members. The co-existence of commonality and individuality may contribute to the profoundness and diversity of the culture. As a result, people may make their personal choice of their ways of life and conform to basic public values on the other hand.

China is regarded as a high-context culture in which people are inclined to rely on the context of nonverbal actions and environmental settings to express meaning, and thus tend to favour communication media with high media-richness (e.g. face-to-face communication or phone calls) (Li, Ardichvili, Maurer, Wentling, & Stuedemann, 2007). Five dimensions of national culture have been described by Hofstede (2001), namely, individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and long-term/short-term orientation.

Many scholars (Chinta & Capar, 2007; Hoivik, 2007; Li & Zhou, 2005) employed Hofstede's cultural theory to evaluate Chinese cultural values. Chan, Tong-qing, Redman, and Snape (2006) assert that China's Confucian heritage has resulted in a collectivist culture that is highly focused on harmony, interpersonal relationships and group loyalty (Hui & Tan, 1996). By comparing managerial values in the USA and China, Chinta and Capar (2007) found that people in China tended to accept more inequality in organisations (higher power distance), and were less open to uncertainty (higher uncertainty avoidance) than people in more developed countries. Chinta and Capar also found that the higher average of the Chinese on masculinity scales demonstrated that assertive and aggressive thoughts are a characteristic both of the Chinese and of most Western countries. This suggests that masculinity is a common phenomenon that exists in all cultures, and has determined women's subordinate status and disadvantages in all human societies. Confucian dynamism in China is also known as 'long-term orientation', which gives emphasis to perseverance, persistence, and the sacrifice of short-term gains for long-term prospects (Li & Zhou, 2005). Therefore, diverse cultures may inevitably cause a diversity of values and behaviours in all aspects of people's lives, including their employment, and their career development in business settings.

'Face' and 'guanxi' are another two crucial concepts in Chinese culture. 'Face' refers to the image that people endeavour to maintain before others in pursuit of recognition and inclusion (Chow, Deng, & Ho, 2000; Hwang, Francesco, & Kessler, 2003). Chen (1995) asserted that face could be viewed as a mixture of four rudiments, namely: self respect, dignity, social position and status. For Chinese, "their faces define who they are and their relationships with others in the society" (Seak, 2006, p. 34). The other term, 'guanxi' also has a crucial effect on Chinese culture. It stands for interpersonal relationships and can be regarded as a key dynamic in Chinese society (Hoivik, 2007). Unlike business practices being backed by contracts and institutions in Western society, they are supported by guanxi in China, which is one of the Chinese cultural norms (Seak, 2006). In other words, without establishing a fine net of guanxi, it is tough for Chinese to gain a firm foothold in their careers, let alone success in life. Consequently, both face

and *guanxi* may guide people's overall behaviours in most forms of social interactions, especially those relative to their employment in the workplace.

### **2.3 Chinese Women and Family**

Traditional Chinese culture and values have also significantly shaped the social status of Chinese women, which determines their role in the family. The core values cherished by traditional Chinese families include patriarchal ideology, moral principles (e.g. filial piety), duty, obligation, service, and the importance of the family name (Ip, 2002; Selvarajah, 2004). These values spread following the migration of the Chinese people throughout many countries in Asia (e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan) and form the controlling cultural force (Granrose, 2005b).

Family-centredness and child-rearing are symbols of traditional Chinese culture, which determine the responsibilities of women as home-making and domestic work while men are the primary income providers (Chiu & Kosmski, 1995; Peng & Wang, 2005). However, this distinction of roles between men and women exists not only in Chinese society, but also in most societies in the West, which further indicates that male-dominated culture is not a special phenomenon confined to a certain country.

Given the description by Mao Tse Tung, 'the moon reflecting the sunlight', women in traditional culture were still subservient to males, first to their fathers, then to their husbands and later to their adult sons (Granrose, 2005a), which can also be reflected by the proverbs: 'It is a virtue if women don't have capability' and 'Education is unnecessary' (Peng & Wang, 2005). In such a world controlled by men, women need to be obedient, invisible, domestic, uneducated, loyal to their men and tolerant of worldly injustice. Women tend to be viewed as dangerous warriors and something to fear due to their powerful life force, that which could be at the base of all existence (Granrose, 2005a). These influences can explain why Chinese women were socialised to be 'shy' and 'unassertive' and tended to be discriminated against (Frank, 2001). For a long time, being both a good wife and a qualified mother has been the fullest

expression of an ideal Chinese woman. They were discouraged from being self-expressive and self-centred.

Women, on the other hand, were generally content with the sense of fulfillment generated by helping parents, or in self-sacrifice for a worthy cause (Ip, 1996). Sun and Liu (1994) discussed that the relationship between parent and child tended to be viewed as the nucleus of the Chinese family. This has drawn more attention in the literature on Chinese societies, unlike the studies of Western families that have focused on the relationship between husband and wife while most of the literature on parent-child relations emphasises the corrosion of parental authority (Hutter, 1981). Childcare in the first three years of a child's life is considered as the mother's duty since the care-system in China is under-constructed when compared to Western countries (Aaltion & Huang, 2007). In addition, considering the examination-oriented school system in China, students at the primary level have to spend 1-4 hours doing their homework each day, and thus providing assistance and advice to their children became the mother's burden of responsibility (Aaltion & Huang). Sun and Liu (1994), on the other hand, argued that children in the traditional Chinese family were expected not only to offer subsistence for their elderly parents or parents-in-law, but to be filial to parents by respecting and treating them with love in order that they could live happily during their old age. This explains why Chinese women are inclined to be viewed as a severely disadvantaged group due to their double burdens of childcare and eldercare deriving from their family responsibilities.

## **2.4 Women's Employment**

It could be unwise to evaluate the employment status of Chinese female immigrants in their host country without discussing their employment situation and their coping strategies for work and family issues in their original homeland.

Yutang Lin (1935), a famous Chinese scholar, once argued that: "The fundamental dualistic outlook, with the differentiation of the Yang (male) and the Yin (female)

principles, went back to the Book of Changes, which was later formulated by Confucius” (p.137). Confucianism turned the marriage system into a form of bondage for females by viewing them as possessions for their husbands (Gao, 2003). As women’s traditional roles within the household are opposed to change, for them, working outside the home is more likely to be an extra burden. Chan (1986, cited in Sin, So, Yau, & Kwong, 2001) stated that women’s domestic duties of child-bearing, childcare and assisting parents were still formidable barriers to their employment. In addition, the Confucian ideology deeply rooted throughout Chinese history restricted women to an oppressed social status, which has caused deep resistance to the changes that would otherwise develop women’s education (Liu & Carpenter, 2005). Such a Chinese institutional setting causes women to be traditionally discriminated against with regard to education, health care and employment (Summerfield, 1994). Jordan (1996) cited the concepts of ‘housewifization’ and ‘femininity’ to portray Chinese women’s plight. She contended that ‘housewifization’ referred to the idea that women’s genuine role was restricted by their socially-constructed responsibility while ‘femininity’ reflected women’s natural talent for homemaking and mothering. This means that public work is divided into two spheres: lesser paid, low status ‘women’s’ work and higher paying, higher status ‘men’s’ work. The predicaments experienced by women within the family have been unavoidably transferred to the workplace.

The differences between men and women’s careers may be derived from females’ socialisation to different gender roles, their restrictions in education and training, the less time they spend in paid work, their segregation into separate occupations (e.g. part-time work), or the discrimination they encounter (e.g. glass ceilings) (Granrose, Chow, & Chew, 2005).

Under the State Owned Enterprise (SOE) system in the 1970s in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the government Personnel Labour Board decided people’s career options. Both men and women were accountable for finding their own jobs, with the assistance of the state serving as a personnel bureau of last resort through a steady shift from the 1980s to 2000 (Aaltion & Huang, 2007). However, unequal career options



still exist as getting a good job would be impossible for those without advanced education and powerful *guanxi* to persuade a personnel manager to hire a particular individual (Aaltion & Huang). Women in particular suffered due to their relative lower levels of education and *guanxi* support they received when compared to men. They then remained under-represented in higher ranks and were often paid a lesser amount of money than their male partners for similar work.

However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the status of modern women in PRC has changed dramatically since governmental measures have been taken to minimise gender inequality. The rapidly increased influx of women into the workforce could be the most major change in the history of the Chinese workforce, which happened after the open-door policy of China in 1979 along with the launch of the market economy in the 1990s. Three concepts were cited as contributing to the phenomenon of increased number of women in the workforce: capabilities, entitlements and technology advancements.

According to Sen (1990), capabilities encompass the definite choices of what a person is able to do or to be such as reading, writing and communicating; entitlements reveal individual control over diverse commodity bundles; and technology advancements are not only about equipment and the operational traits but about social arrangements influencing the usage of the equipment. Improved education was the most crucial indicator of the enhanced capabilities of Chinese women. The 1990s were also a period of increasing post-secondary educational attainment among women. This trend has continued after 2000. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the proportions of female students in regular higher education institutes have steadily increased, being 43.65, 44.80, and 48.06 per cent in 2002, 2003 and 2006 respectively. As a result, well educated women have won more entitlements and been employed in greater numbers in organisations to 'raise half the sky' (Chow, 2005; Fang, Granrose, & Kong, 2005). This in turn benefits the further development of women's capabilities. Technology advancements have made people's lives easier, for example, it is possible through use of email and laptop, for women to freely choose where they

work. Women are not only working outside the home, but increasingly undertaking 'male' professional careers (e. g. doctor, lawyer, professor and engineer), and even occupying upper positions with outstanding achievements in organisations.

However, these professional women were characterised by having little or no personal leisure time as they spent as much of their free time as possible with their family in order to perform their domestic role (Aaltion & Huang, 2007). They were used to making sacrifices for their work and family by putting themselves last on the list (Wei, 2007). They were expected to "Prioritise work and occupation as more significant than family or personal life" and "would be criticised and made to feel selfish" if they had concerns about WLB (Wei, 2007, p. 124). The strategies employed by Chinese women to save time included seeking support from parents or parents-in-law, hiring a tutor for a child's homework, employing a domestic helper to fill the roles of nanny, cleaning lady, cook and shopper, and sharing family responsibilities with their spouses. On the other hand, they formed a close support network that was significant for women's career development (Aaltion & Huang, 2007). The first two strategies frequently employed by Chinese women are not often reported in the Western literature (Lo, Stone, & Ng, 2003). Chinese women seldom made recourse to their work organisations for support since they thought they alone should resolve any conflict between work and family (Aaltion & Huang, 2007). As competent professional women, they thought it was one of the basic capabilities they needed to possess to prevent family issues from affecting their work.

Many young educated women in urban China have been a privileged group compared to other women in China. These white-collar women redefined their gender identity based on their own work and life experiences as 'modern women', being accepted as career women with independent economic lifestyles, gaining a measure of decision-making both at work and at home, and taking pleasure with regard to their families (Sun, 2008). However, the reasons these women could dedicate themselves to their jobs were that many lower-class females took care of their children and assisted them with housework by sacrificing their own maternal duties and reimbursement, or

even rights to education for young rural girls (Sun, 2008). Therefore, considering their social status and financial conditions, women may have diverse choices for handling conflicts from work and life, including employing expensive ‘helpers’ to achieve a more relaxed life or working harder to earn more money.

Women in cosmopolitan cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore have also experienced WLB issues. Although most women made compromises to balance their career and family and some even compromised on their careers so that they could dedicate themselves to family issues, there are a number of successful professional women who prioritised career over their family and partner’s career, showing a much more open attitude to career and more concern for quality of life (Brooks, 2006). These women, however, tended to make more decisions in favour of intimacy and relationships, life quality, and no longer desired a top position if the sacrifices were too great (Brooks, 2006).

In Taiwan, both husbands and wives having careers has become a must for many families, and therefore there were many professional females with high ranks in the labour market. When facing the pressure coming from the conflict between family and work, except for pursuing full support from family members and turning to domestic service support (Brooks, 2006), the main strategies employed by these female elites included making quality time at home to satisfy their psychological involvement and seeking advice from their partners before making major decisions at work (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

Although a range of strategies has been adopted as expedencies to alleviate the immediate tensions felt by Chinese women and to facilitate their career advancement to a great extent, as ‘ideal women’, their final choices are more likely to be the family no matter how successful they may have been, or could be, in their career when they have to make decisions. This reflects the unfathomable impact of Chinese culture on Chinese women’s attitudes to family, life and the ways to tackle work–family issues.

## **2.5 The Immigration History of Chinese Females in New Zealand**

Chinese immigrants in New Zealand came from a range of places including mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia. Their reasons for immigration included being attracted to New Zealand's perfect natural environment, dynamic education system and favourable immigration policy, its nuclear-free policy, the Christian society or its small geographical size, which makes it easier to learn about the local culture and lifestyle (Beal & Sos, 1999). According to Ip (2006), the Chinese could have a great "Western experience" as, being a young immigrant country, New Zealand tended to be comparatively egalitarian and does not have highly stratified social classes when compared with other white settler countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Very few Chinese migrants were found in New Zealand in its early years. In New Zealand's first census in 1851, there were six Chinese females and a total of 1217 Chinese males. Ip (2002) argued that the gender imbalance was commonly known in early migrant communities, and that this was the direct result of New Zealand's discriminatory immigration policies. These policies arose from the apprehension at the prospect that any Chinese kept out of Australia might try to get into New Zealand (McKinnon, 1996). The first restriction on Chinese immigration was the Chinese Immigration Act imposed in New Zealand in 1881, which was followed by subsequent acts in 1888 and 1896, and were openly informed by assumptions of racial distinctions, competition and hierarchies (McKinnon, 1996). Even though there were no definite laws against Chinese female immigration, archival records clearly showed that Chinese females were perceived to be potentially more menacing than Chinese men by the authorities of New Zealand since they could procreate (Ip, 2002). Before World War II, some Chinese wives arrived in New Zealand as war refugees, but the total number in Chinese females still remained small, around 511, according to the 1936 census (Chan, 2007).

The phenomenon of low numbers of Chinese females in New Zealand in the early years could also be explained by four disincentives to the emigration of Chinese females. One reason was that the traditional role of Chinese wives was maintaining and caring for the family, while another was the cost of emigration and uncertainty in the prospects for emigration (Chan, 2007). Also, young girls were frequently sent back to China based on the desire for them to find appropriate marriage partners (Ip, 2002). Furthermore, in some areas in China, women were the main industrial workforce in work such as silk-production (Chan, 2007; Mazumdar, 2003). These deterring factors hindered women from leaving their hometown and emigrating overseas.

A momentous turning point for the Chinese community in New Zealand came in 1987 when a proactive immigration policy was carried out by the fourth Labour government to recruit talent and economic investment (Ip, 2002). The government's free-market economic deregulation focused on the 'brain drain' and net migration losses was in line with a desire to boost New Zealand's competitive edge globally and to tap into the new powerhouses of Asia. These factors were driving immigration policy (Henderson, 2003). The new immigration policy based on personal merit irrespective of racial or national origin, was "measurable by youth, educational qualifications, professional experience, business track record as well as settlement capital" (Ip, 2002, p. 160). The numbers and characteristics of Chinese migrants to New Zealand had been significantly affected by the subsequent changes of targeting skills in immigration policy in 1991 and 1995. According to the 2001 census, the number of Chinese women, approximately 55,000, has exceeded that of Chinese men, being 50,000 since 2001.

Statistics New Zealand (1999) subdivided the Chinese population into three categories, namely: the New Zealand-born; the settler who had been in New Zealand 10 or more years; and the 'new' immigrants who had arrived within the decade before the 1996 census. The newcomers after 1986 were distinguished from their predecessors who came in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ip, 1995). They were more transnational and stood for a rich mix of talents, possessing invariably university degrees (which was twice the national proportion of New Zealand similarly qualified

women, at 14 per cent), and employment experience in professional or managerial/administrative positions before migration, good basic level of English-language proficiency required for entry under the points system, and much more investment capital (Henderson, 2003; Ip, 2002). Between 1997 and 2001, PRC contributed the second-largest number of residence approvals in New Zealand (21,491), after only Britain (25,560), while immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan to New Zealand shrank (Ho, 2003). According to Ip and Murphy (2005), most immigrants from Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, from the late 1980s to 2004, were under the skilled migrant category, except for Hong Kong immigrants who favoured the use of business migration. There were 24.4% degree holders found in the PRC cohort, being the best-educated group among the Chinese, when Taiwan and Hong Kong counterparts stood at 16.9% and 16.8% respectively (Ip, 2006). All of these changes contributed to the formation of a new profile for the Chinese New Zealanders.

The lengthy and winding immigration experience of Chinese women in New Zealand provides a historical perspective where their immigration lives can be comprehensively and thoroughly reflected.

## **2.6 The New Zealand Labour Market**

The status of the New Zealand labour market is one of the main variables influencing the employment of Chinese immigrants, and therefore affects their ability to balance their work and family lives.

Globalisation has produced some profound influences in the nature of the New Zealand workforce. In view of the emigration of talent and demographic ageing, over the past eight years, there has been a serious and increasing skills shortage in the New Zealand workforce that hampered New Zealand's economic growth and development (Department of Labour, 2007; North, 2007). Over the last two decades, immigration policy has been transformed to tackle the demand for skills by targeting young, skilled migrants. For example, "New Zealand's permanent residence approval system gives

significant weight to a New Zealand job offer” (Department of Labour, 2003, p. 18), which can account for the phenomenon of increased immigrants coming to New Zealand. The New Zealand workforce has increasingly become more culturally diverse and this is specifically related to growing ethnic diversity and immigration (Spoonley & Davidson, 2004).

According to the 2006 New Zealand Census the largest non-European ethnic group, Maori, account for 14.6% of the population, and Asian people increased from 6.6% in the 2001 census to 9.2% in the 2006, whereas the Pacific Island group accounted for 6.9% of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Asian people are more likely to contribute an increasing section of workforce growth, though this mostly depends on migration and is, therefore, more difficult to foresee (Workplace Health and Safety Council, 2006). Although an increase in skilled immigrants has buffered the pressure from a shortage of human capital, it is not uncommon that some immigrants in New Zealand have confronted the issues of being unemployed or underemployed. Immigrants confront bias and prejudice when breaking into the labour market.

To address such discrimination and prejudice, the leading responsibility rests with central government and a balanced, well-integrated institutional structure of immigration is needed, including a well-designed immigration to control entry, an immigrant policy based on the diverse post-arrival demands of new immigrants, and an ethnic relations policy supporting a variety of measures both in legislation and education (Trlin, 1993; Trlin, Henderson, & North, 2004). In addition, both government agencies and private-sector organisations need to employ independent or partnership practices to facilitate the development and implementation of the immigrant-supporting policy (Trlin, Henderson, & North, 2004). For instance, the Auckland Chamber of Commerce (2001–5) initiative allowed employers to trial immigrants at no cost to the company (North, 2007). Also, a joint work experience scheme between the Auckland Chamber of Commerce and Work and Income Auckland North was effectively put into practice to assist unemployed immigrant professionals in finding work (Fisk, 2003 cited in Trlin, Henderson, & North, 2004).

Women's increasing participation in the labour market is another important phenomenon to take account of in terms of the workforce's changes in New Zealand. The role of working has becoming increasingly important to women when a more flexible work pattern provides them with chances to pursue their career development outside the home. Spoonley and Davidson (2004) note that non-standard work, either part-time or casual employment, has been dominated by New Zealand women for a long period. The EEO Trust (2000) has developed a set of resources to aid employers in establishing policies and initiatives (e.g. supporting recruiting), which will support diversity in the workplace. On the other hand, the growing numbers of women entering the workplace may contribute to one of the justifications for the phenomenon that balancing work and home life has become a growing vital concern for both employers and employees. It is now a strategic priority for the New Zealand Government.

## **2.7 Summary & Conclusion**

This chapter has sketched the significant factors closely related to the WLB experience of Chinese female immigrants. Chinese traditional values determine women's way of life and development of their careers in the business setting. Traditionally, the male-dominated culture in Chinese society caused women's inferior status in society (as it discourages women from being self-expressive and self-centred), giving women a heavy burden in the family (being child-carer and elder-carer simultaneously), and disadvantages in employment (being under-represented in higher ranks and being less well paid than men). However, more and more women are employed in upper positions and make great achievements in all kind of organisations. Many of them begin to be concerned about their own WLB, albeit that their attitudes to family and life as well as their ways to tackle work-family issues are shaped by Chinese culture. The labour market characteristics and the immigration policies in New Zealand also have an effect on women's cultural experience of immigration. Based on the content of this chapter, the WLB literature will be reviewed in next chapter.



### **3. Work–Life Balance**

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#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter starts with a definition of WLB, followed by a comparison between the concepts of work–family conflict (WFC) and family–work conflict (FWC). The relationship between the gender differences and WFC is then discussed. After identifying WLB practices in organisations, the causes of under-utilisation of these practices are explored. Lastly, the diverse strategies employed to achieve WLB practices are discussed.

#### **3.2 Definition of Work–Life Balance**

There has been a proliferation of recent research interest in WLB (e.g. Collins, 2007; Harris & Pringle, 2008; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). As one of the organisational ‘fairness’ approaches, WLB is associated with several positive outcomes including less work–family conflict (e.g. Howard, Donofrio, & Boles, 2004), increased job satisfaction (e.g. Howard et al., 2004), reduced job-related stress (e.g. Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004), increased commitment (e.g. Batt & Valcour, 2003), improved employee retention (e.g. Wise & Bond, 2003), reduced economic losses (e.g. Lim & Teo, 2000), and increased productivity (e.g. McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005).

The early concept of ‘work and family’ was initiated by Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) concerning contemporary society. After that, as an emerging field of study, ‘work–family’ was marked by Kanter’s (1977) first full-scale review of work and family interactions. According to Coffey and Tombari (2005), WLB was about creating and embedding a culture in the organisation, assisting men and women to better rally the competing demands of work and interests outside of work through a comprehensive series of policies, programmes and resources. Compared with the term

‘work’, the concept of ‘life’ appears equivalent to ‘non-paid-work’, which is an expansive sphere including a range of determinants such as “family, friends, pets, leisure, recreation, unpaid home activity, caring for children, and love-motivated activities” (Harris & Pringle, 2008, p. 1). The ‘balance’ refers to a win-win situation for both individuals and organisations (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). It also “should be a joint responsibility between unions, employers and employees; should be affordable and available to all employees regardless of their working pattern” (Harris & Pringle, 2008, p. 1).

### **3.3 Work–Family Conflict and Family–Work Conflict**

WLB is more likely to be achieved by carefully handling work–family conflict (WFC). This is a kind of inter-role stress significantly affecting the quality of work and life (McElwain, Korabik, & Rosin, 2005), and impelling employees to consider leaving their organisation (Haar, 2004).

The causes of WFC have been extensively explored in the literature (Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004; Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). Huang et al. (2004) identified causes of WFC including work role stressors and characteristics (e.g. inadequate support from supervisors, long work hours) while theories of resource scarcity and resource drain mainly justify such conflict (Huang et al., 2004; Martins et al., 2002). Although such conflict is mainly derived from individuals’ high workloads rather than too little work, there are many exceptions. For instance, for people on minimum wages, the path to balancing work and life could be achieved by assuming more work to earn more money (Harris & Pringle, 2008). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three different types of WFC, including: time-based conflict (time is limited to handle duties in both domains); strain-based conflict (stress in one domain influences the other); and behaviour-based conflict (the required behaviours in the two domains are incompatible).

Jennings and McDougald (2007) examined the outcomes of WFC from both conflict and enhancement perspectives. From the conflict perspective, WFC may engender many serious consequences, the degree of conflict, imbalance, and the negative spillover has been examined (Pocock, Skinner, & Williams, 2007; Sumer & Knight, 2001). For many employees, most conflicts are stressful and related to anxiety, tension, discontentment, confusion and frustration (Kinman & Jones, 2005), which undermines the employee's well-being and organisational commitment as well (Poelmans, Chinchilla, & Cardona, 2003). Huang et al. (2004) identified the negative outcomes of WFC from three aspects, namely, work-related distress or behaviour; dissatisfaction with job, family and life; absenteeism, tardiness or poor performance at work, or resignation; poor mental and physical health. In terms of the less commonly adopted view of enhancement, the positive spillover (e.g. the sense of security, increased empowerment, bargaining power and self-esteem) has been evaluated (Brooks, 2006; Sumer & Knight, 2001). A combined analysis of the WFC causes from both perspectives while depleting in some respects, enriches current research (e.g. Rothbard, 2001).

What is common to the research mentioned above is that the causes and consequences of WFC have been examined from a psychological or micro-sociological level (Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), which might contribute to an incomplete causal explanation. The establishment of a broader model by Fleetwood (2007) filled this gap by considering causal elements from the social, economic and political spheres. Although the micro-sociological model can highlight managerial adjustments as expedients, the macro-sociological method can contribute to employee's well-being and organisational performance in the longer term.

In addition to centring on conflicts between work and life (e.g. Behson, 2002; Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002) the literature on WFC also focuses on the impact and relationships of conflict on individuals and family well-being (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005). While a one-way methodology had been employed in traditional studies of WFC from a single dimension, WFC has currently been described

as having two types of conflicts: work–family conflict (WFC) or ‘work interfering with family’ (WIF) and family–work conflict (FWC) or ‘family interfering with work’ (FIW) (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, & Walters, 2002; Fu & Shaffer, 2001). According to Huang et al. (2004), WFC is more inclined to cause job dissatisfaction than FWC, while FWC, mainly caused by care responsibilities, tends to produce family-related distress or behaviours such as less family satisfaction.

### **3.4 Gender Differences**

The differences in the levels and nature of WFC experienced by men and women as a result of gender differences has enjoyed a growing interest among WLB researchers in recent years (Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Konrad & Mangel, 2000). Gender differences in employment can be understood by examining four theories: *gender role socialisation theory*, *human capital theory*, *dual labour market theory*, and *gender discrimination theory*.

*The Theory of Gender Role Socialisation* clearly describes that men and women take different roles within the family and outside the family (Sen, 2003). Since working women tend to assume most of the domestic roles and encounter more WFC (Konrad & Mangel, 2000), WLB strategies place more responsibilities on women, especially those with children, even if these strategies affect both sexes (De Cieri et al., 2005; Sallop & Kirby, 2007). However, men’s and women’s roles both in the workplace and at home have changed due to the growth in women’s job attachment and an increase in men’s involvement in housework and child care (Marshall, 2006). Fu and Shaffer (2001) explored the effects of gender role discrepancy on WFC. Their findings tested the stereotypes of women as primary caregivers for the family and the men as the main income providers. Compared with their male counterparts who are more likely to experience WFC by allowing work demands to encroach on the family domain, women are inclined to experience FWC (e.g. letting family demands intrude into the work realm). Based on this, Martins et al. (2002) extended the research by examining the relationship between WFC and career satisfaction. They found that WFC unfavourably

influenced women and older individuals' career satisfaction. They further discovered that men and women's career satisfaction affected by the WFC was different, that is, men tended to be negatively affected only in their career (40 years or older) while such inauspicious effects on women's career satisfaction could follow them their whole lives.

*Human Capital Theory* sets up a viewpoint that women have less human capital than men since they tend to take more family responsibilities than men and thus they acquire less education or work experience, which impedes their progress towards better pay or promotion (Alkadry & Tower, 2006). Wong's (2003) study examined the women's employment in Hong Kong. Wong found that, to avoid missing the chances of education and to improve their competitive advantage for employment, women in Hong Kong tended to delay marriage or even abandon their marriages. However, results from Simpson and Stroh's (2002) work were contradictory, suggesting that gender differences could be ignored in training in terms of some specific occupations. They contend that certain occupations could be female-dominated (e.g. nursing) or male-dominated (e.g. engineering). In addition, more women have gained advanced education and obtained extra training (Blau & Kahn, 2007) due to their improved social status following the international women's movement. Gender differences in this sector need to be related to variables such as nationality, occupation and culture, which could have varied impact on the employment of both men and women. Furthermore, although human capital distance between men and women is now closer, women are still disadvantaged by the non-standard work they do.

*Dual Labour Market Theory* states that, to meet family demands, women are more inclined to take part-time jobs with lower pay and lower status compared to men (Bosanquet & Doeringer, 1973). This can be explained by the extension of gender inequality, which creates a barricade to women's career development since they have to take unpaid work in households and choose part-time jobs (Moen & Yu, 2000). Empirical research conducted by Dijkers, Geurts, den Dulk, Peper and Kompier (2004) tested such arguments by providing evidence that female employees utilised childcare

arrangements more frequently than male employees due to their ‘dual burden’ of being housekeepers and income earners.

*Gender Discrimination Theory* asserts that gender discrimination is the institutional bias built into organisational systems, practices and policies (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). This results in women’s lack of equal opportunities to compete with men in terms of career development. Maume and Houston (2001) argue that when women entered male-dominated occupations, ‘social controls’ will intensify. In other words, there are prevailing attitudes and behaviours in society reminding women that they are in alien terrain. This will make women experience more stress from the competing demands from work and family than men. Maume and Houston also found that long work hours augmented the occurrence of WFC.

The four theories outline the factors causing gender differences from multiple dimensions. It has been generally acknowledged that gender differences can restrain women’s career development and disadvantage them in employment by setting an ‘or-or’ (family or work) option, while their male partners can achieve ‘and-and’ (family and work) wins simultaneously.

### **3.5 WLB Practices in Organisations**

Work–life practices are viewed as “those which, whether intentionally or not, increase the flexibility and autonomy of the worker in negotiating attention and presence in employment” (Felstead et al., 2002. p. 56). Diverse WLB practices and programmes have been developed to facilitate the retention of valuable employees and create a committed workforce when the issue of skill scarcity has resurfaced (Haar, 2004; McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley, & Shakespeare-Finch, 2005; Wise & Bond, 2003).

Felstead et al. (2002) categorised WLB practices into bi-dimensions including increasing the variety of ways to make employees bond spheres of work and non-work (e.g. flexi-hours, job sharing), and facilitating changes in allowing employees to

connect spheres of work and non-work (e.g. parental leave, paid holidays). Compared with the bi-dimensional method, WLB practices in organisations can be classified into six categories from multiple dimensions:

- 1) flexible work options/flexible hours arrangements, such as part-time work, job sharing and telecommuting/work-at-home (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Roberts et al., 2004);
- 2) leave time policies, such as mandated maternity and paternity leave entitlements (McDonald et al., 2005);
- 3) dependant care benefits, such as child care and elder-care (Lambert, 2000);
- 4) managers' support in resolving work and family conflicts (State Services Commission, 2005a);
- 5) health and wellness service, such as stress management workshops, fitness centres (Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2002); and
- 6) accommodation of outside commitments, such as leave to meet cultural, religious or community obligations (State Services Commission, 2005a).

The primary strength of the multiple model is to provide WLB practices with a more specific and expanded perspective where the work–life benefits can be gained by employees in a more systematic and standardised way.

WLB practices act as a strategy to attract and retain employees since they can provide benefits, which is also a way of conveying a favourable organisational culture and values. Variables influencing the work–life benefits such as demographic characteristics and worker employment types have been reported by some scholars (for example, Konrad & Mangel, 2000). Based on previous research, Lingard and Francis's (2005) study disclosed that the employees' characteristics and the type of work–life benefit would influence the relationship between employees' attitudes towards the work–life benefits. They also found that employees' preferences in respect of work–life benefits varied according to their age and stage of family development. They emphasised the diversity and autonomy of employee needs. This can be laterally explained by referring to the 'no one size fits all' principle, namely, there is no solitary

work–life benefit which could convene the needs of all employees in organisations. From the vertical perspective, they suggested that it was vital to regularly assess both the availability and accessibility of work–life benefits since employees’ requirements tended to change following the changes in lives.

In all types of WLB practices, flexible working arrangements have drawn most concern from researchers (for example, Poelmans et al., 2003; Lim and Teo, 2000; McDonald et al., 2005). Many of them upheld that there was a positive relationship between flexible working practices and employee retention although a distinction of preferences between men and women has been observed. Men were more likely to take the telework option while women favoured part-time jobs (Tremblay, 2002). This showed a clear contrast to others’ views (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Wise & Bond, 2003) that there was no significant relationship between flexible working practices and retention. Fleetwood (2007) explained this contrast by arguing that, although WLB practices were closely associated with the flexible working schedule sometimes, it was erroneous to assume that *all* kinds of flexible working practices enabled WLB since some of them could restrict it. Three categories were drawn in terms of these flexible working practices, including:

- (1) employee-friendly or employer-unfriendly (e.g. flexible start and finish times, voluntary part-time, job-sharing);
- (2) employer/business friendly or employee-unfriendly (e.g. twilight shifts, overtime, stand-by and call-out arrangements); and
- (3) being ‘neutral’ and ‘friendly’ to both parties (e.g. employee-friendly practices).

While most of the research discussed above centres on WLB practices from a single practices perspective, current research has started to explore the effects of multiple WLB practices. Lambert (2000) assessed the effects of 20 WLB benefits on employee behaviours and perceptions of organisational support; Allen (2001) examined the effects of 10 specific WLB practices on perceived organisational family support; Haar and Spell (2003) examined a compound index of the past, present, and future application of six WLB practices. Similar research was conducted by Anderson et al.



(2002), Batt and Valcour (2003) and Konrad and Mangel (2000). This multiple approach provides a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of WLB practices and contributes to the improvement of the whole WLB system in organisations.

An important finding from the work of Kopelman, Prottas, Thompson and Jahn (2006) needs to be pointed out. An integrated approach was applied in this study from individual and group levels respectively. The result of their research suggested that organisations should apply more, rather than fewer, WLB initiatives and practices. It echoed an earlier study by Grover and Crooker (in Batt & Valcour, 2003), which suggested that employees with access to more WLB practices had lower intentions to leave. The provision of more WLB benefits can be usually viewed as an employee-focused culture, which will contribute to a higher organisational commitment and employee belongingness in the long run.

### **3.6 Under-utilisation of WLB Practices**

While WLB practices have been undertaken well in some organisations, many still face challenges from ineffective implementation of WLB initiatives. Why did the WLB practices fail to exert their function as a strategy facilitating the employee's well-being?

De Cieri et al. (2005) answered this question by discussing two factors from an organisational perspective, including 'organisational inaction' (e.g. a lack of effective communication within the organisation and a supportive environment) and 'organisational values' (e.g. function-oriented rather than culture-focused). This perspective provided a unitary-analysis model to understand the barriers of WLB practices' utilisation. A multiple dimension approach was adopted by McDonald et al. (2005) to explain the provision-utilisation gap. The dimensions are: *managerial support, perceptions of career consequences, organisational time expectations, the gendered nature of policy utilisation and co-worker support.*

*Managerial support* refers to the extent to which management in the organisation is perceived as sensitive to the work–life demands of employees from all the middle managers and the supervisors (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). Incorrect attitudes or misleading opinions held by managers could limit the manager’s ability to facilitate the WLB practices (e.g. the erroneous belief that only working parents want WLB) (Messmer, 2006).

*Perceptions of career consequences* asserts that employees believe that they are more likely to be viewed as less committed to their career and their future development could be influenced if they use the WLB practices provided by organisations (Griffin, 2000). An empirical study by Drew and Murtagh (2005) tested this explanation. The researchers examined the relationship between gender and WLB from a senior management perspective. Their findings disclosed that quite a few senior male or female managers felt unable to avail themselves of WLB practices since it would undermine their career prospects and convey that they were not committed to the organisation. Woodward’s (2007) argument was consistent with this finding, which is that managers in university deemed that it was inevitable to make sacrifices to be a dedicated manager. However, results found in some studies contradicted this by stating that managers and professionals have greater flexibility and autonomy in their roles than employees in the lower levels (Harris & Pringle, 2008; McPherson & Reed, 2007).

*Organisational time expectations* refers to the culture of long hours rewards and high organisational commitment that organisations put job priorities before employees’ non-work lives in order to be viewed favourably by management (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). The advantages and disadvantages of ‘time demand’ in organisations have been commented on by Glass and Finley (2002). They argued that, while supportive time expectation and outcome-focused measures could facilitate a high performance, ‘face time’ as the main way of assessment of productivity was more reliable and easier to handle than the performance-based assessment.

*The gendered nature of policy utilisation* means that gender-focused issues could undermine the uptake of WLB benefits (McDonald et al., 2005). Since women can be viewed as the primary beneficiaries of WLB benefits, to avoid overlapping with the “Gender Differences” section (3.4) of this study, the causes hampering men using WLB provision will be discussed here. Bittman, Hoffmann and Thompson (2004) identified barriers from three perspectives, namely, the organisation of the workplace (e.g. uncertainty of the legitimacy of paternal leave), the business environment (e.g. pressures from fierce competition), and the family condition (e.g. men mainly being viewed as the breadwinner).

*Co-worker support* explains that unsupportive co-workers may make employees reluctant to utilise WLB benefits (Haar & Spell, 2003). This means that the non-users of WLB benefits might resent people who had used this provision. Also, some employers feared that a ‘backlash’ from non-users might emerge, which could be more likely to cause low morale and job dissatisfaction (Haar, Spell, & O’Driscoll, 2005).

Accurately locating the crux of under-utilisation of WLB practices is the basis to further investigate corresponding solutions and facilitate the implementation of WLB policies in organisations.

### **3.7 Coping Strategies**

Many researchers (e.g. Allan, 2003; Allen, 2001; Hacker & Doolen, 2003) contributed to the literature by exploring strategies to achieve WLB practices and improve the effectiveness of WLB initiatives in organisations. One group of researchers focused on the function of supervisor and line managers. Since the attitudes, skills and behaviours of line managers and supervisors would ultimately determine the success of implementation of WLB initiatives, training and educating them could be the key to effectually transfer the WLB policies into practices (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Soonhee, 2001).

Since WLB practices offered by organisations tended to address only logistical issues, long-term solutions for the issues of WLB have been called for. There were dozens of studies which emphasised the establishment of a more supportive work environment (Allan, 2003; Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Robinson, Davey, & Murrells, 2003). Hacker and Doolen (2003) examined the positive effects of a supportive work environment on employees, including encouraging them to bring their capabilities into full play, enhancing job satisfaction, loyalty and commitment, thereby improving retention, productivity and well-being.

While Robinson, Davey, and Murrells (2003) asserted that one of the crucial indicators of creating an organisationally supportive environment was to be family friendly, Allen (2001) further developed three dimensions of 'family-supportive organisational perceptions' to enhance such family support including family-supportive policies, family-supportive supervisors and family-supportive organisational measures. They compared these dimensions to WFC, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intention, which provided a more practical way to the measurement of WLB policies.

Here, rather than unitarily focusing on the organisational perspective, Burgess, Henderson, and Strachan (2007) emphasised the importance of governmental and legislative power in respect of the establishment of family-friendly organisations. They admitted that a series of government-supported programmes may undoubtedly benefit the reconciliation of the conflicts between work and life (e.g. funding childcare places and maternity leave). In addition, building legislative instructions and requirements into EEO programmes can prescribe and set the minimum conditions for workplace agreements, which plays important role in achieving WLB.

Some scholars, however, have actually advocated establishing a positive culture in organisation. Drew and Murtagh (2005) advocated that management needed to facilitate a cultivation of a corporate culture of WLB. They emphasised that attention

was needed to transfer from ‘presenteeism’ to performance outcome and pursue a strategic and organisation-wide change. Such change should embody the commitment of organisations through a series of ritual and events (e.g. family days).

The argument from Coffey and Tombari (2005) clarified the employer’s responsibilities in terms of WLB practices. They asserted that, rather than creating the balance for employees’ lives, the responsibility of employers should be assisting employees in better handling, uniting or merging work–life priorities into a ‘total rewards’ framework by offering resources, tools and opportunities. They stated that the total framework of WLB had evolved over time and the concept of WLB had changed from being reactive and active to be proactive and interactive.

To value employees and consider the WLB to be the ‘employers of choice’ rather than an expedient, organisations, as Coffey and his fellow researcher suggested, would face a range of challenges and risks that could be viewed as opportunities sometimes, which includes embracing leadership in action and attaining total leadership reward of every stakeholder winning; regularly evaluating the implementation of the WLB goals and effectiveness of WLB assessment vehicle; and facilitating communication as well as education to ensure the access of employees to work–life resources.

When compared with research from the employer-driven perspective, studies adopted an employee-driven strategy from both individual and couple levels could enact a complementary way to achieve WLB in organisations, and improve the overall effectiveness of organisational WLB practices accordingly (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Woodward, 2007).

The studies of coping strategies can be reviewed from both individual and couple levels. From the individual level, Kirchmeyer (1993), categorised the coping strategies as consisting of three sections, based on the perspective of expectation:

- 1) structural role definition: altering the expectations of others;
- 2) personal role definition: changing one's own expectations; and
- 3) reactive role behaviour: attempting to respond to all demands.

Except for the expectation theory, coping tactics may be basically divided into three categories, including segmentation, compensation and accommodation (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Segmentation means that individuals strictly divide the two domains through the intentional curbing of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to the out-of-role domain (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). In Woodward's (2007) empirical study, one of the WLB coping strategies identified was creating rigid boundaries between work and non-work by using temporal, spatial and symbolic distinctions to contain work.

Compensation refers to the way that individuals highly devote to one sphere in order that the dissatisfaction in the other can be made up. The literature about workaholism may be one of examples in this category (Burke, 2001; Russo & Waters, 2006).

Accommodation means that individuals constrain their psychological and/or behavioural involvement in one realm to gratify the demands of the other (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Woodward (2007) proposed a compromise strategy by setting a 'good enough' work standard instead a 'perfect' one. Woodward argued that rather than achieving perfection, a most effectual way to endorse WLB is doing something to a 'good enough' standard. Although such 'give-ups' can effectively alleviate heavy pressure from work and win additional energy to address the life issues, it unavoidably challenges the security of an employee's career when high performance is more likely to be viewed as one of the indicators of high commitment.

Furthermore, there are also researchers focusing on the boundary management work engaged in by individuals in creating, maintaining, and crossing borders between the

two domains (Clark, 2000; Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999). To rectify the criticisms and gaps within previous theories on work and life, and explain why conflict exists, a new theory needs to be mentioned here: work/family border theory (Clark, 2000). In accordance with this theory is the idea that people are daily border-crossers between the domains of work and family. The theory negotiates “how domain integration and segmentation, border creation and management, border-crosser participation, and relationships between border-crossers and others at work and home influence work/family balance” (Clark, 2000, p. 747). It offered a framework for both individuals and organisations to create an improved WLB.

At the ‘couple’ level, diverse strategies have been identified in the literature (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Moen & Yu, 2000). Except for the traditional strategy, namely, the husband has paid employment while the wife stays at home, there are other typical strategies employed by many couples, including one-job/one-career strategy (e.g. one partner taking on a less demanding job while the other pursues his or her career more vigorously), delaying children, hiring a domestic helper, lowering expectations for long-term career advancement or lowering expectations for housework.

Previous research sought solutions for WFC from a ‘win-win’ perspective by employing WLB practices to aid employees trading off work and life and maximise total utility and satisfaction, which would encourage employees’ contribution and in turn improve employee retention and productivity as well (Collins, 2007). A new paradigm based on a ‘win-lose’ perspective has been explored by Hacker and Doolen (2003). They reconsidered and conceptualised the relationship between individual, work and life by proposing a different way. This new *balance* approach focused on limiting and keeping individuals from creating integrated lives. Rather than criticising existing flexible work initiatives, such a perspective tended to challenge the current paradigm centring on pursuing balance between work commitments and those outside of work. They argued that balancing did not mean to embrace the integration of life, but described life as a range of competing priorities, which suggested when we thought

highly of one thing, other things would lose out. They further called for individuals to be sure why they had a life and then combined this purpose with their organisational contribution.

Although this new paradigm provided an alternative to perceive the implications of WLB, its validity needs to be tested since its balancing objectives have been multiplied (e.g. pay, interest, career promotion, quality of life) rather than focusing on the traditional division of work and non-work into two spheres, which could undermine the rationality of the argument to some extent.

Lastly, another effective way to handle WFC has been empirically tested by Batt and Valcour's (2003) study, which was combining WLB policies with other human resources practices, such as work redesign and commitment-enhancing incentives. This finding demonstrated the effectiveness of an integrated method to handle WFC, widened the scope of WLB strategies, and benefited the implementation and management of WLB initiatives in organisations as well.

### **3.8 Summary & Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature concerned with five aspects in respect of WLB. Through defining the WFC/FWC and discussing the causes and consequences of WFC/FWC, the literature suggests a positive relationship between WFC and turnover. Since the utilisation of WLB has a gendered nature, gender differences are identified by discussing four critical theories including gender role socialisation theory, human capital theory, dual labour market theory and gender discrimination theory. After providing an overview of the current WLB practices in organisations, this study assesses the effects of these practices on employees. The attitudes of both employees and employers may influence the effectiveness of the WLB practices, especially those with flexible arrangements. The existence of the gap between WLB policies and their implementation can be explained from five aspects (e.g. managerial support, perceptions of career consequences, organisational time expectations, the gendered



nature of policy utilisation and co-worker support). Diverse strategies employed to achieve WLB can be categorised from organisational, individual and couple perspectives. Also, the 'win-lose' paradigm and integrating with other human resource practices may also be used as the tools for balancing work and family lives.

## **4. Ethnic Migrant Women**

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### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the cultural experience of ethnic migrant women in the context of WLB. It firstly focuses on the cultural barrier faced by ethnic women. Then adaptation processes, strategies and models are discussed. After identifying the employment barriers encountered by migrant women and ethnic migrant women respectively, the discussion then focuses on the acculturation of Chinese women in New Zealand.

### **4.2 Ethnic Women**

Ethnic women have been historically discriminated against due to significant or slight effects of patriarchal and sexist stereotypes in society. Karlsen and Nazroo (2002) discussed that, compared to their ethnic majority counterparts, ethnic minority women were inclined to have lower incomes and less desirable careers, and were grouped in environmentally and economically poorer geographic regions. They lived in inferior quality accommodation, and had longer periods of unemployment or more possibilities of underemployment. The disadvantages encountered by these ethnic minorities have been viewed as complex issues because of the intersection of their gender and ethnic identities (Syed, 2007). Differences which focus on gender and sexuality, race and ethnic identity, nationality, and class have been extensively evaluated within feminist work (Bhopal, 1997; Lorde, 1984), which challenges theories based upon limited models of the unitary category of 'women' (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Spellman, 1990).

#### ***4.2.1 Gender, Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity***

According to Behera (2006), the concept of gender could be understood in reference to three debates: ‘sex and gender’, the ‘women’ and gender, and the plurality of feminisms. Behera stated that the ‘sex and gender’ debate focuses on the differences between males and females from the ontological perspective. She argued that gender was a relational concept incorporating both women and men who could not be evaluated separately and independently. As the terms man-woman and masculine-feminine presuppose each other, she further discussed that it was crucial to understand how they were mutually constituted and interdependent. Here, gender differences have been often evaluated to explain the gender inequities, namely, the unequal treatments received by males and females, in the patriarchal or gendered culture (see Granrose et al., 2005).

Although the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ can be used interchangeably on some occasions, the differences between them should not be overlooked. Kamenou (2007) compared the distinctions of the two concepts. Race could be defined as the disparities stemming from skin colour or biological characteristics while ethnicity was “based on a social construction of an origin as a basis for community or collectivity” (Kamenou, 2007, p. 1999). Compared with race, the meaning of ethnicity has a broader coverage including a range of characteristics relative to not only the race, but also the culture. Ethnicity is principally primeval and expressive at the personal level, and it is also distinctly cited at the group level towards group unity (Kwok-bun, 2005).

In the literature of ethnicity, Critical Race Theory (CRT) needs to be mentioned. It was initiated by an American intellectual movement of liberalist law scholars primarily from minority ethnic backgrounds (Syed, 2007). Critical race scholars view the laws as “complicitous in sustaining white supremacy and upholding racial hierarchies within gender, class and other dimensions of human diversity” (Syed, 2007, p. 1956). CRT has been adopted by some scholars to look for an offer of liberatory or transformative response to ethnic, gender and class repression, and thus achieving equality legally and

socially and exhibiting its commitment to social justice by promoting the consciousness of race (Matsuda, 1991; Syed, 2007).

Scholars employed a range of interpretive stances to explore the sundry social hierarchies and the contingency of normative practices. Compared with scholars who adopted ‘the master’s tool’ to interpret the world (Lorde, 1984), feminists challenged the neutral norms or structures since their built-in biases confined “their putatively universal character in respect of race/ethnicity and gender” (Syed, 2007, p. 1956). Feminists explored the world by focusing on the experience of ethnic non-mainstream women rather than the views of dominated white people.

As an essential construct for understanding the effects of ethnicity on individuals, ethnic identity can help clarify individuals’ perceptions and intentions during the process of job recruitment and in employees’ careers (Kim & Gelfand, 2003; Pio, 2005; Ross, 2004). According to Pio (2005), ethnic identity broadly referred to an individual’s sense of self in regard to membership in a certain group, with value and emotional significance attached to that membership (also see Chavira & Phinney, 1991; Orbe & Harris, 2001).

Kwok-bun (2005) discussed that people may sometimes provisionally submerge their ethnic identity in favour of a facade closer to, and more identifiable with, the other group, mainly the dominated group. However, at another moment, they may make a decision on purpose to express their ethnicity by symbolic use of the language, clothing, culture and customs of their own ethnic group since sometimes maintaining ethnic boundaries and stereotypes sometimes could facilitate transactions (Kwok-bun, 2005). These two different behaviours seem contradictory, but the former actually can be looked as a kind of temporary expedient employed by ethnic people now and then.

#### ***4.2.2 Token vs. Minority***

A most common issue that ethnic women face is the burden of being a symbol or token of a gender or racial group. Powell (1988) argued that tokens face additional performance pressures because of their high visibility due to the physical differences; differences between the tokens and the rest of the group tended to be inflated, which was another pressure derived from tokenism. Also tokenism denied the individuality of person since tokens were singled out due to the differences, rather than the particular accomplishments of an individual. This unitary cultural perspective provides a limited evaluation of the ethnic women's plight.

Kanter (1977) however suggested that once the non-dominant members in a particular organisational context reached or exceeded 35 per cent, they could influence the culture of the organisation and become a 'minority' rather than 'tokens' (also see Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006). According to Acker (1980), if minorities could form coalitions, affect group culture and be viewed as representatives of a social type; they were more powerful than tokens. Therefore, the focused attention paid to women of colour can help create a more diverse, supportive and equitable environment.

#### ***4.2.3 Ethnic Women and Cultural Barriers***

Three multidimensional factors, including interpersonal violence, institutional discrimination, and socioeconomic disadvantage, may have unfavourable effects on ethnic minority women (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002). From the broadly socioeconomic perspective, access to financial resources, education, employment, and affordable housing influences everyone and can be viewed as structural determinants shaping life chances for ensuring people's well-being (Cabaniss & Fuller, 2005).

Overt discriminatory practices in housing, employment, and educational opportunities disadvantage ethnic minority women who may have to handle the challenges of

deficient social and financial supports, insistent material hardship, wobbly employment, language and skill scarcities, childcare and healthcare expenses. These structural constraints are more likely to be augmented and deteriorate the dilemma of women when they are related to individuals' circumstances (e.g. living in a poor area) and people's particularities (e.g. being an immigrant) (Cabaniss & Fuller, 2005).

In the studies of Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996), social cognitive career theory (SCCT) was used to conceptualise the contextual variables (e.g. perceived barriers) influencing the ethnic women's experience of career development and forming the perceived opportunity structure within which career plans are developed and put into practice. Since these perceived career-related barriers tended to restrain the translation of interests into choice goals and goals into actions (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001), they might further affect the process of career decision-making and even career exploration and planning (McWhirter, 1997; Swanson & Woitke, 1997).

Once ethnic minority women decide to get paid work, they may encounter barriers including both interpersonal and institutional discrimination. Interpersonal discrimination refers to discriminatory interactions between individuals, while institutional discrimination tends to be more invisible than the former and rooted in the organisational structure (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002).

Glenn (1994) argued that the ability of ethnic minority women to be full-time mothers would be circumscribed due to their participation in the workforce when their partners failed to provide sufficient family income. From this traditional perspective, women need to enact another breadwinner to meet the economic needs of family. Minority women are more likely to face discrimination such as the barriers of language or discrimination when hunting a job (Pio, 2005; Tzeng, 2006). Such disadvantageous situations may exist even after minority women successfully get a job and these hamper their upward mobility within professions.

From an interpersonal perspective, they may suffer harassment, violence and bullying in the workforce. Although gender and ethnicity are two main themes of diversity management and have drawn increasing attention in organisations, from the organisational perspective, women and ethnic minority groups have still suffered conscious or unconscious discriminative policies or initiatives embedded in organisational structures (e.g. glass ceilings) due to racist and sexist organisational structures (Kamenou, 2007). As race, gender, and class were frequently treated as the proxies for reliability, stability, experience, suitable manners, and attitudes which employers utilised to assess prospective employees (Hammons-Bryner, 1999), ethnic women usually confront occupational ‘double jeopardy’ and ‘developmental plateau’ (Kamenou, 2007).

Considering the individual perspective, another concept needing to be mentioned here is ‘coping efficacy’. Bandura (1997) defined coping efficacy as the degree to which an individual had confidence in her or his ability to handle thorny situations. In Luzzo and McWhirter’s (2001) empirical study, when compared with their European American counterparts, ethnic minorities exhibited more perceived educational barriers and lower self-efficacy for coping with perceived career-related barriers.

A integrated approach has been employed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) to evaluate the career development of minority women. This ecological model of behaviour identified four major subsystems shaping human behaviour:

- 1) microsystems refer to the interpersonal interactions within a specified context (e.g. home or workplace);
- 2) mesosystems include interactions between microsystems (e.g. the relations between family and workplace);
- 3) exosystems comprise connections between subsystems that do not directly affect the individual (e.g. media); and
- 4) macrosystems contain the societal ideological areas (e.g. social norms).

The four subsystems are interactive and affect each other. Cook, Heppner, and O'Brien's (2005) empirical study conceptualised the career development of white women and women of colour from micro- and macrosystems' perspectives. They discussed that minority women's perceptions of themselves had been affected "by ongoing interactions with others within their immediate environments (microsystem), and by broader sociocultural dynamics defining a woman's life according to parameters set by the interaction of her gender and race/ethnicity (macrosystem)" (p. 175). Considering that race and ethnicity are powerful determinants of individual's career development, they highlighted the dynamic and complex nature of such developmental processes and then claimed that minority women tended to be significantly influenced by externally defined constraints. A strategy of ecological career counseling was recommended to make the environment more helpful and affirming for minority women and also to help them gain more coping skills.

### **4.3 Acculturation**

Moving to a new country is a complicated process of adapting to a new culture and society (Sonderegger & Barrett, 2004), since cultural differences may trigger systematic differences in utility functions that cause systematic differences in behaviour of women who confront similar restrictions or opportunities (Orcutt & Sanders, 1993). Such cultural uprootedness and territorial displacement mean that it is imperative for migrants to learn a foreign cultural language, become familiar with local norms and shared meanings, and behave in accordance with the tacit ground rules (Toren, 1999).

In the migration literature, some scholars explored this adapting process by using terms like 'cross-cultural adjustment', 'culture distance' (Bank & Rothmann, 2006; Oberg, 1960), or 'assimilation' (Read & Cohen, 2007; Schoeni, 1998), while most cited the concept of 'acculturation' (Fuligni, 2001; Pio, 2005; Watts, White, & Trlin, 2002). The early research about cross-cultural adjustment was evaluated from a unitary perspective of culture (Oberg, 1960; Torbiorn, 1982). Oberg's (1960) work focusing on



culture shock is a the theoretical foundation of the cross-cultural adjustment research. Additional contributions were made by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962) who claimed that the basic aim of cross-cultural adjustment was to reduce the uncertainty about which behaviours were appropriate in the new culture and which ones were not.

Acculturation does not come easily. Migrants have to live within and between two cultures, making every effort to incorporate with the country of resettlement while maintaining an affiliation with their homeland on the other hand (Kwok-bun, 2005). To become well-assimilated immigrants, they are expected to know well how to evade the formal rules and be familiar with the shortcuts, back alleys, and informal manners of doing things (Toren, 1999).

Also, they have to substitute unfamiliar practices for consecrated traditional customs, adopt a new language, revise their beliefs and morals, eat different food, tackle racism, marginalisation and anomie, make new friends and leave family behind (Beal & Sos, 1999). However, it is common that some migrants cannot assimilate themselves well into the dominant majority and they might still remain different, which leads them to get lost in the system and flounder (Beal & Sos). Some migrants had no idea at first whether to follow the host culture for upward mobility, or to keep their original cultural identity, which might relegate them to the bottom of the social hierarchy (Kwok-bun, 2005).

#### ***4.3.1 Psychological and Sociocultural Adaptation***

The ‘separatist’ or the ‘assimilationist’, as two contradictory orientations, can be found both at an individual level and in the group perspective (Kwok-bun, 2005). According to Berry (1999), the general framework for understanding the procedure of acculturation consists of “the possibility for both cultural (group-level) and individual (psychological-level) factors to influence the choice of a person’s acculturation strategy, and thereby the course of their acculturation outcomes” (p. 15).

Searle and Ward (1990) initially identified and verified the distinctions between psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Berry (1999) further validated such differences by arguing that psychological adaptation principally concerned one's psychological and physical well-being, and psychological difficulties were likely to increase soon after contact and decrease in time, whereas sociocultural adaptation focuses on how well an acculturating individual was capable of dealing with daily life in the new cultural background and typically had a linear progress over time.

The degree of psychological ease with diverse aspects of a host country can be tightly related to the cross-cultural adjustment (Oberg, 1960; Selvarajah, 2004). A failure to assimilate to a new country is more likely to cause psychological problems (Sonderegger & Barrett, 2004; Young, 2001). Berry (1999) discussed that psychological adaptation might be affected by personality variables, life change events and social support. In addition, acculturative stress was reported by some scholars (Ponterotto, Baluch, & Carielli, 1998; Sonderegger & Barrett, 2004), and often associated with anxiety, low self-esteem, identity perplexity, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

According to Hammons-Bryner (1999), involuntary immigrants (e.g. refugees) had more disadvantages in adjusting to the new society over their voluntary counterparts and were more likely to have deteriorated conditions of mental health. Voluntary immigrants tended to regard cultural and language differences as barriers to overcome, while involuntary minorities develop new, different cultural features. Young (2001) in her empirical study, evaluated the moderating effects of both social and personal resources on the relationship between stress and subjective well-being of Salvadoran refugees in Canada. She found that, for the recently arrived refugees, personal resources played a significant role in that locus of control and self-esteem buffered migration stress, while no moderating influences were found for social resources; however, in terms of established refugees, both personal and social resources buffered stress. Therefore, supportive social networks and feelings of self-worth are important in facilitation of the maintenance of life quality (Young, 2001). This stress-moderating paradigm extended its evaluated target from narrowly focusing

on physical and mental health to a broader measures outcome, including life satisfaction and quality of life.

Some strategies of adaptation have been frequently employed by migrant women to ease the tension of being viewed as strangers. Foucault (1982) stated that women immigrants were capable of handling little tactics to achieve greater degrees of freedom in expressing their own cultural ‘style’ publicly through dressing, speech and behaviour when these styles and strategies of the marginalised may not always overrun, upset or extinguish the ‘self-other boundary’—which reflects the fact that the place of the ‘other’ was not necessarily a position of weakness (also see Yeoh & Huang, 1998).

Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, is related to cultural knowledge, degree of contact, and intergroup attitudes (Berry, 1999). Kwok-bun (2005) discussed that such sociological analysis of adaptation was also likely to be evaluated at a group level and was influenced by the following variables: group size; extent of residential concentration or dispersion; length of stay; ease and frequency of return to homeland; familiarity with host culture; extent of homogeneity or diversity in class and career; education status; experience of discrimination; and degree of social mobility in the host society.

When acculturation is evaluated from a sociocultural perspective, it may reflect the collective experience of a certain cultural community in the host culture, which inevitably has a more far-reaching impact on both migrants and host country when compared with the research which focuses just on the psychological level.

#### ***4.3.2 Adaptation Model***

The models of adaptation are complicated and have often been reported from unidirectional (linear), bidimensional, bilateral, or multidimensional perspectives respectively in the literature. Historically, acculturation was mainly treated as a

unidirectional/one-way process where the microculture employed the norms and traditions of the dominant culture without a corresponding influence. It was also regarded as a linear of ethnic alteration focusing on the acquisition of new cultural patterns (Keefe, 1980).

Given that migrant people are more likely to have bicultural identities, a total rejection of original culture and highly orientation on host culture may cause cultural loss. For the bidimensional model, original culture and host culture have been regarded as two independent factors. Berry (1980) examined the individual cross-cultural adjustment by identifying four modes of acculturation summarised in Table 1, an orthogonal and dynamic social process, combining a variety of behaviours, attitudes and values that may change when the contact occurs between the migrants and the host culture (also see Pio, 2005; Sam, 2000). According to individuals' personal status and their perceptions of the host society, individuals may opt for different acculturation paths at different times (Watts, White, & Trlin, 2002).

**Table 1: Acculturation Models**

<b>Mode</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Assimilation	When the individual has no desire to keep his/her original cultural identity and looks for daily interaction with members of the dominant society.
Integration	When the individual hopes not only to maintain his/her previous culture, but to interact with members of the dominant society.
Separation	When the individual values his/her original culture and tries to avoid interaction with the dominant group.
Marginalisation	When there is little possibility of, or interest in, maintaining one's own culture, and little possibility of, or interest in, interacting with members of the other cultural group due to exclusion or discrimination.

*Source:* Adapted from Berry (1980).

Ho's (1995) empirical study explored the identity changes of Hong Kong Chinese adolescents during their settlement process and found that there were steady shifts in acculturation modes over time, especially in moving from separation to integration. The effectiveness of the four-path acculturation model is undermined due to its limited and ambiguous characteristics, which make it fail to provide a comprehensive analysis of acculturation.

The bilateral model admits the interaction between original culture and host culture, and the effects on each other. Ogden, Ogden, and Schau (2004) explored the effects of intra-national cultural differences within the specific context of the United States on consumption-oriented behaviour. This model values the diversity of culture and emphasises social equality.

Whether acculturation is just a process of a unidirectional or a two-way shift from native to host culture or even a more multidimensional negotiation of old and new traditions has been argued by scholars (Fuligni, 2001; Kwok-bun, 2005). The more vibrant multidimensional or multilinear modes based on a range of assumptions about the relationship between sociocultural, economic, organisational, personality features and values were also adopted by some researchers to fully examine the acculturation (Elenkov, 1996; Pires, Stanton, & Ostefeld, 2006). Black and Stephens (1989) suggested that acculturation was a multi-sided phenomenon where the emigrant and spouse adjusted to employment and the host surroundings, and interacted with host nationals.

A range of empirical studies can be found from the multidimensional perspective. Kwok-bun (2005) argued that attempts of the immigrants to reproduce tradition and familiarity might be not only the transitional behaviour to alleviate them through the early stage of adaptation, but an integral and essential element of the global development in the long term; Kwok-bun, on the other hand, questioned the value of acculturation by discussing that the acculturation might be problematic when its occurrence was at the

price of the demise of ethnicity. Toren (1999) cited multiculturalism to be a compromise between the two perspectives mentioned above, which exhibits an attempt to embrace the plurality of cultures within the framework of a national identity when the moorings of cultures have been lost in explicit places. Considering the fact that women and new immigrants were usually viewed as strangers, Toren employed a wider framework of social distinctions and inequality to conceptualise gender-based occupational segregation in respect to territory, borders, and migration. She then found that neither gender equality nor cultural pluralism can instantaneously get rid of such strangeness and otherness.

Since acculturation is a typical social phenomenon, a full investigation on it could not be made without considering the wide-ranging societal context around it. Therefore, a multidimensional mode facilitates the comprehensive analysis of acculturation.

#### **4.4 Migrant Women and Employment**

A number of researchers explored the relationship between migrant women and employment (Kamenou, 2007; Long, 1980; Orcutt & Sanders, 1993; Pio, 2005; Read & Cohen, 2007; Schoeni, 1998; Zulauf, 1999). Whether a migrant woman works depended on the observed outcome of a decision-making process in which she compares the wage she would receive if she worked (the market wage) with the wage she needs to receive in order to work (the reservation wage) (Orcutt & Sanders, 1993). This means that, the same as for ethnic women, a migrant woman taking a job faces mainly economic issues and the employment can, more or less, satisfy her economic needs, although attempts to develop a career and enrich her life experience may also inspire her desire for a job.

For migrant women, except for the extent of acculturation, another two factors chiefly related to their work decisions: the transferability of country-of-origin skills to the labour market of the host country, and family circumstances (Orcutt & Sanders, 1993). Orcutt and Sanders (1993) found that a woman's decision to work could be viewed as a

family investment strategy influenced by whether she had a spouse who invests in skills specific to the US labour market, and also by the level of that investment. However, a cross-sectional analysis used by this study may limit the generalisation of findings, and further exploration from historical and institutional perspectives were required.

Since migrant employees are highly dependent on the individual assessment of employers and affected by labour-market needs, they frequently suffer barriers in their access to employment (Zulauf, 1999). Excepting the gender inequalities, the barriers the migrant females encounter when they seek a job, comprising a lack of proficiency in language and unfamiliarity with the business context, economic and political background of the host country. These barriers may seriously hinder a woman from being successfully employed by organisations. Even when these women enter organisations, they will still be affected by the structure of the organisation. Organisations in different countries present diverse training systems and recruitment practices, the outcome of political, social and patriarchal structures and relations in society, which has resulted in different outcomes between migrants in different countries (Walby, 1990; Zulauf, 1999).

One of the most cited issues in the migrant women literature is their lower wages and that can be viewed as one of the crucial indicators of their disadvantageous status in the workplace. Long's (1980) study was perhaps the earliest work on migrant women. He examined the pattern of wages of white women by using an approach similar to that of Chiswick (1978). He found that wives in immigrant families in their initial time of immigration after entering the US might have to work to finance their husbands' initial investments in education or job skills required in the US labour market.

The result of Baker and Benjamin's (1997) study was consistent with this finding. Long also found that these female immigrants' annual earnings exceeded even those of native-born women, but such advantages diminished following the increase of

earnings of their spouses in the US when women would reallocate their time from market to nonmarket activities and their earnings decreased accordingly. The result of MacPherson and Stewart's (1989) study echoed this finding by admitting that there were inequalities in labour force participation among female immigrants coming from different countries while such disparity diminished with the length of time they were in the host country. Another study, by Cobb-Clark (1993) examined the relationship between the characteristics of female immigrants' home countries and their economic performance in the host country, and found that wages were more desirable for immigrants from countries with higher GDP, higher income equality and lower returns to schooling.

#### **4.5 Ethnic Migrant Women and Employment**

For an immigrant ethnic minority woman, Pio (2005) stated that, she not only confronted an escalating intricacy due to the status and stages of her life, suffered the burden of being emotional labour (also see Ciulla, 2000), but faced the challenge of balancing love and work (also see Gallos, 1995). This argument was consistent with the findings of Kamenou's (2008) empirical study. A social constructionist framework acknowledging an interaction between structure, culture and agency was employed by Kamenou to explore the ethnic minority women's experiences of balancing their work and personal life, which provided a broader, more diverse approach to the 'life' component of the work-life balance equation.

When these women enter the workplace, they are disadvantaged by 'triple jeopardy' as females, minorities and immigrants, which might multiplicatively affect the others (Mighty, 1997 cited in Kamenou, 2007, p. 1996), although the experience of immigrant ethnic minority women cannot be necessarily distinct from those of other groups at all times and in all settings (Kamenou, 2007). Pio (2005) in her empirical study explored the work experiences of Indian immigrants in New Zealand from three strands: entry into the world of work; staying in the world of work; the effect of work experiences on ethnic identity. Her findings indicated that the barriers encountered in entering the



workforce and in maintaining work created knotted strands in the females' lives, which supports Mighty's (1997) arguments.

A much broader approach examining the relationship between the minority migrant women and employment was employed by Read and Cohen (2007). They noted that ethnic minority women's labour force participation could be directly affected by the human capital characteristics, labour market factors, cultural assimilation, and family structure respectively. The four theoretical frameworks can be briefly reviewed as follows:

1. Most variation regarding ethnic women's labour supply can be explained by human capital characteristics, especially formal education, which can not only be a key predictor of women's employment, but help to differentiate immigrants and native women. Education is the crucial building block of labour market success for all groups, which provides governmental policy makers with an opportunity to improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged groups. Without achieving advanced education and high levels of language ability, women may be hindered from getting good jobs or being promoted due to the concerns of their inadequate capabilities and entitlements.

2. The influence of the conditions of the local labour market needs to be emphasised. A diversity-oriented labour market may offer more opportunities of employment to ethnic migrant women when their heritage culture and previous work experience are valued. Otherwise, they tend to be discriminated against when racism and sexism are prevalent.

3. Cultural assimilation for women in labour force activity is also a significant topic in the literature. New female migrants have lower employment rates than women with longer duration of residency in their host country since the latter were more likely to win competitive advantages in employment such as higher professional skill or English language proficiency. This part has been discussed in the "Acculturation" section (4.3).

4. Family conditions, structure and household financial resources can affect the employment of ethnic women. For example, young children reduce the labour force participation rates of women while having older children can have the opposite effect by aiding their mother. Also, the need for women's earnings may be significantly influenced by household size and income. Family members' support may greatly contribute to the well-being of minority female migrants.

Read and Cohen's (2007) four theories provided an important framework and an integrated approach to identify the characteristics of minority women and evaluate the relationship between them and employment. The empirical study of Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999) tested this framework by focusing on Mexican-American women who were an ethnic minority in North America. Their lower participation rates were evaluated by relating to fertility levels, educational qualifications, and discrimination.

#### **4.6 The Acculturation of Chinese Women in New Zealand**

As New Zealand culture is a combination of people of mainly Anglo-Saxon origin and a strong South Pacific and Maori presence, the new migrants and their families with different backgrounds will indubitably experience cultural adjustment when facing a totally new environment (Selvarajah, 1998). Migration, settlement and intermarriage were regarded as the necessary steps for any migrant community to become embedded and integrated into the adopted country (Ip, 2002).

##### ***4.6.1 Negative Images***

The literature of the acculturation of Chinese women in New Zealand depicted both their positive and negative images. The early Chinese female migration stood apart from mainstream migration history since they came only as a result of male migration, namely, as the wives or daughters of Chinese men, which was in direct contrast to

female migrants from Britain or Ireland, who were independent and recruited as domestic helpers or simply welcomed to boost the female population of the new land (Ip, 2002).

Since Chinese in South-east Asia display a strong sense of cultural perseverance and continuity (Kwok-bun, 2005), they are amazingly loyal to their own culture and exceptionally attached to their homeland, and would always return to their homeland after decades of overseas hard work (Chan, 2007; Ip, 2002; Kwok-bun, 2005), which can be reflected in the widely quoted saying: *Like fallen leaves returning to the ground*. Other factors hindering these women's assimilation into the New Zealand population comprise "resistance to out-marriage, residential self-segregation, the establishment of language and cultural schools for their children and the maintenance of distinctive cultural traits" (Yee, 2003, p. 217). This created a self-enclosed situation, and at the same time their desire for exchanging with the dominant society had been notably reduced. As a result, there was a delay of the process of acculturation.

For the new Chinese migrant families who have arrived in recent decades, similar negative comments have been found in acculturation literature. Many Chinese migrants were wealthy and economic self-interested and were described as leading luxurious lives and possessing expensive cars and properties, and were 'ripping off' New Zealand's health, education and social resources given that they left their children in New Zealand while they were themselves still running businesses back home (Ho & Farmer, 1994). They were often blamed for lacking commitment to their new homeland and tended to isolate themselves from the host society although this could be a result of misunderstanding, ignorance and racism (Palat, 1996 cited in Friesen & Ip, 1997).

#### **4.6.2 Positive Images**

On the other hand, some scholars focused on the acculturation process of Chinese immigrants from a positive perspective. In Ho and Farmer's (1994) empirical study, they

stated that, to make their initial economic and cultural adaptation in a new environment, many Chinese New Zealanders had concentrated on establishing ethnic support networks, including starting up a number of new ethnic services (such as a Chinese business directory, Chinese telephone counseling service and Chinese radio programmes, Chinese newspapers and magazines, Chinese clubs and associations), which have promoted mutual aid and the maintenance of heritage culture among Chinese.

Meanwhile, the Race Relations Office and some Chinese associations in Auckland had started exploring ways and means of enhancing understanding, tolerance, and constructive interaction between members of the host community and new immigrants (Ho & Farmer, 1994). Recently, the Chinese community turned their attention to the wider community; many Chinese newcomers have becoming increasingly aware of the importance of integrating into the host society. They are trying to preserve their cultural identity and working on economic adaptation at the same time (Ho & Farmer).

Ip (2002) further described the image of some Chinese females by employing the term ‘superwomen’: they would be highly skilled, adaptable to construct better futures for themselves and their kids; they then would indoctrinate an international viewpoint and global perception within their communities. As mothers and wives, their successful coping strategies would facilitate the acculturation and establishment of social networks in New Zealand. Wei (2007) in her work validated that migration had definitely changed the lives of Chinese female New Zealanders in many noticeably positive ways by stating that “Chinese women have a natural resilience that helps them cope with the changes that come with immigration”, and their “flexibility and adaptability have helped them improve their financial and social circumstances” (p.137).

#### ***4.6.3 Employment***

For Chinese women, life in New Zealand has not only simply meant an adaptation to a new culture, but involved an entire alteration of lifestyle since they have faced the

extra alteration of life as professional career women combined with being housewives in the new cultural background. There was a dissatisfactory occupational profile of the new Chinese women: 17 per cent of them were employed as machine operators and in the textile/apparel industry, and their income level was well below the New Zealand average correspondingly (Ip, 2002).

This adverse situation did not change until an educated professional group of local-born Chinese emerged in New Zealand in the 1960s. A number of professionals far exceeding the proportion of the tiny Chinese population appeared within the Chinese communities, including medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, and accountants, although the biggest single employment category for Chinese New Zealanders was still market-gardening (Ip, 1996). This suggests that education can not completely ameliorate the whole condition of Chinese women but can partially improve their negative employment situation such as being unemployed or underemployed.

#### ***4.6.4 Variables of Acculturation***

Since language is generally considered as an essential indicator of acculturation, it was frequently mentioned as the main barrier to the employment of Chinese immigrants (Beal & Sos, 1999; Ip, 2006; Veltman, 2000; Watts, White, & Trlin, 2002). The progress in acquiring and using the language of the host society was related to the age of immigrants on arrival and their duration of residence (Veltman, 2000). This means young migrants usually develop proficiency in understanding of the host society language more quickly than their parents.

Considering the issue of unemployment and underemployment suffered by many Chinese professional immigrants, the cause was identified by Beal and Sos (1999), namely, a lack of recognition of their original skills in New Zealand by professional bodies, combined with a lack of proficient English skills and unfamiliarity with the New Zealand culture and business practices. By comparing immigrants from PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan, Ip (2006) found that immigrants from PRC might have a better

chance of successfully acclimatising to New Zealand society due to their comparative youth. Their high education and willingness to actively take up employment determined that they had many more opportunities than other Chinese groups to rapidly incorporate into New Zealand mainstream society (Beal, 2001). Therefore, education, language, length of stay, age of migration and attitude towards employment may affect the process of acculturation.

#### ***4.6.5 Adaptation Strategies***

There were some initiatives used by Chinese women to smooth the progress of their adaptation. Yee (2003) explored the coping strategies employed by Chinese to tackle discrimination, social exclusion and demands for assimilation and enhance their security within New Zealand society from a impression-management perspective, which was a kind of placating strategy and aimed to pacify the host population and encourage acceptance (see Table 2 ).

Since acculturation experienced by Chinese female New Zealanders is a multidimensional issue, to overcome the barriers encountered by them, multidimensional strategies are needed. Ho (2003) identified various strategies employed by Chinese new settlers to deal with their employment problems, including ‘astronaut’ family arrangements, returning to school for English-language training or skill upgrading, return migration, self-employment, early retirement and engagement in any job. Ho also found that the ‘astronaut’ strategy and early retirement were more preferred by Taiwan and Hong Kong immigrants than those from PRC when considering the older age of the immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

To the younger immigrants from PRC, returning to school for further training was more popular seeing that a local qualification was regarded as having advantages in getting a good job or a better position. Moreover, PRC immigrants were more ready than their Hong Kong and Taiwan counterparts to engage in just any job in order to establish themselves in the new country (Henderson, 2003; Ho, 2003). This verifies the fact that the differences

in education, age of migration and the attitude towards employment would not only have an effect on the process of acculturation, but would also influence the strategies employed to handle acculturation.

**Table 2: Adaptation Strategies**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Tactics</b>
Showing commitment	<i>To be worthy citizens; good-will gestures.</i>
Blending in	<i>Geographical spread and size of the Chinese population (enhancing the impression of a small community); avoiding incidents (avoiding being viewed as troublesome); normalising (being normal and keeping up the image of being neither rich nor poor, neither over-achiever nor under-achiever); acting passively (behaving passively in public situations); identity manipulation (effectively disguising the identities and coming to be seen as members of the dominant group).</i>
Distancing	<i>Display (minimising Chinese attributes and emphasising assimilative aspects); association (surrounding with members of the host population and making themselves ‘seen’ as assimilated ethnics); explanation (presenting a convincing argument).</i>
Role play	<i>Assimilative roles (displaying their assimilation); foreigner role (displaying the stereotypes as perpetually foreign).</i>

*Source:* Adapted from Yee (2003).

Since some Chinese women had previous experience of employing domestic help or getting support from family members or relatives to aid in their housework in their home country, life in New Zealand might be a big challenge to them. They may need to learn to cook, clean, garden and care for the children (Lidgard, 1996; Pe-Pua, Mitchell, Iredale, & Castles, 1996). Considering the impact of the New Zealand

lifestyle, Wei (2007) identified that undertaking recreation, exercise and hobbies to maintain physical and mental health was regarded by some Chinese women as a useful vehicle to achieve their WLB. In the new home, the meaning of WLB has correspondingly changed following the alteration of the context of life and work.

#### ***4.6.6 Astronauting***

An increasing attention has been drawn on the ‘astronaut’ family in literature (Aye & Guerin, 2001; Friesen & Ip, 1997). Astronaut families are characterised by the head of the household living and working in the original country while the remaining family members inhabit the host country due to economic and legal problems (Aye & Guerin, 2001). It is a product of the forces of globalisation (Friesen & Ip, 1997).

However, Ho (2003) argued from the perspective of the new settlers, the astronaut strategy was not an option they had chosen carelessly since many arrived with permanent settlement in mind, but altered their plans following changes in situations and the emergence of new opportunities. Ho identified some key factors that discouraged or delayed the potential entrepreneurial activities by business people from Hong Kong, including the lack of ability to source information, knowledge of local market forces and language proficiency; poor business networks and understanding of government regulations and consumer behaviour.

Astronauting was adopted by these business migrants who continued to run their business in their original country as a strategy to visit families in New Zealand. Aye and Guerin (2001) stated two main reasons for the importance of the research towards the astronaut families in New Zealand:

1. This arrangement was not fully understood and was abused by politicians in the past to justify their policies of reducing Asian migrants (also see Friesen & Ip, 1997); and
2. The astronaut arrangement was more likely to cause stresses due to the overloaded dual burden, which could account for instances of mental and physical illness.



The astronaut arrangement can be viewed as a compromise in regard to unsuccessful adaptation. Although astronauting can temporarily settle issues of unemployment and underemployment, it may cause further social and economic problems in the long run. Also, how to provide a supportive environment for assisting the acculturation of immigrants, men and women, is an imperative issue worthy of further exploration.

#### ***4.6.7 Transnational Phenomenon***

Unlike the old theory that states that only people failing to settle down in the host country would return to the country of origin, Ip (2006) argued that many new migrants, PRC migrants in particular, made the homeward move specifically for the reason that they had high qualifications and needed to be successful from a transnational perspective. While most scholars criticised the negative effects of the longer-term 'transnational' paradigm or the more transient astronaut mode employed by new Chinese migrants who showed a lack of commitment and loyalty to their new country and desired to have the best of both worlds, Wong (2002) asserted that these high flyers "are truly global citizens and, although they may hold New Zealand passports and many have a strong sense of allegiance and goodwill towards their adopted country", and "being 'New Zealanders' may not mean staying put in New Zealand for extended periods" (p. 140).

Ho (2003) supported this argument by asserting that as multi-local families had been becoming increasingly common, the volatile movements of astronaut families were merely a dimension of a new worldwide trend that many people would expect to circulate between various locations where family members live, and work for changeable periods in these locations. They claimed that this kind of non-permanent migration was replacing the permanent settler migration in the global migration systems of countries. They then advocated that policymakers should adjust to this new pattern of movement which brought a more mobile workforce into play for the more wide-ranging benefit of the country.

Since the women were typically the spouses of the astronauting or transnational husbands living the host country with the children while their husbands continued to

earn a living in the home country, it might be difficult for these wives to handle a mishmash of aspects of New Zealand life on their own account.

#### **4.7 Summary & Conclusion**

In summary, there are double disadvantages encountered by ethnic minorities since the intersections of their gender and ethnic identities have been viewed as complex issues affecting both their life and work. As minorities, they may, more or less, affect the social culture as one of the social types. However, individual, interpersonal, institutional and socioeconomic barriers can, in turn, shape ethnic women's lives and impede their work. A comprehensive reflection of the life experience of these minorities calls for a more integrated evaluative approach.

As a complicated process of adapting to a new country, acculturation encloses a range of issues that need to be evaluated. It not only concerns the individual's psychological well-being, but also focuses on an individual's capability of managing daily life by employing a sociocultural perspective. Although the psychological adaptation may experience fluctuation at the beginning of contact, both psychological and sociocultural processes of adaptation are inclined to make progress over the time. The sociocultural adaptation is often explored at the group level and associated with a certain cultural community. Among the four categories of acculturation (unidirectional/linear, bidimensional, bilateral, or multidimensional adaptation), the multidimensional perspective provides a comprehensive method to fully evaluate the acculturation and has been adopted most in recent literature.

The employment experience of migrant women can be regarded as a process of overcoming all kinds of obstacles. From making decisions, getting a job, being recruited by an organisation, to finally working in an organisation, women were inclined to be challenged by their identity of being a new arrival or a stranger, and struggled to become competent in their work and 'fit' in the organisation.

If minority women face the double disadvantages in employment when compared with the women from the dominant culture, the predicaments of female minority migrants would be triply deteriorated when they have to overcome the difficulties from being women, minorities and migrants simultaneously. While a general exploration from a unitary perspective is more likely to partially reflect the actual condition of these women in employment, an integrated approach concerning their characteristics of human capital, family situation, experience of acculturation and the condition of the local labour market will contribute to a full understanding of these women.

There were both positive aspects and negative images of the acculturation of Chinese women in New Zealand. Although education can partially improve these women's negative situation, they still confronted discrimination in employment. Their acculturation experiences in New Zealand may also be affected by their levels of language proficiency, lengths of stay, ages at migration and attitudes towards employment.

A placating strategy from an impression-management perspective and other multidimensional practices (e.g. astronaut family arrangements, returning to school for English-language training or skill upgrading, return migration, self-employment, early retirement and engagement in any job) have been employed by Chinese women to conquer the barriers during the process of acculturation. As the notable issue related to Chinese migrants, astronauting or the transnational phenomenon may create a new pattern of migration. Nevertheless, these phenomena are more likely to further disadvantage women when considering that these wives had to deal with a whole mixture of New Zealand life on their own.

The review on this chapter has offered some insights into the ethnic migrant women's cultural experience of immigration. This experience of their own or their family members may significantly shape the way they cope with WFC and FWC. As the study is intended to increase the existing knowledge of the WLB experience of Chinese migrant women in New Zealand and its setting has been focused on AUT, the

following chapter will integrate the findings of past three chapters and highlight the university context.

## **5. The Context of the Study**

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### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a discussion on the university context. First of all, it introduces the classification of employees in universities. It then identifies and discusses the tensions between their work and lives that are faced by both academic women and administrative women. The organisational actions taken to enhance the gender equality in university are argued before a discussion of the WLB initiatives available at AUT.

### **5.2 Women in Universities**

Women in universities have been historically portrayed as a disadvantaged group with the lowest pay and the least secure contracts, but such an equality gap is narrowing since many universities have devoted themselves to upholding gender equality in their employment practices (Woodward, 2007). According to UK higher education institutions (HEIs), employees in universities can be classified into four main sections: academic and research (academic non-clinical, academic-clinical and academic-related employees); administrative and clerical employees (administrative, secretarial and clerical employees); academic-support staff (technical, computing and library staff); and facility-support staff (those working on estates/craftwork, catering, cleaning, manual and security) (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, & Ricketts, 2005). Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Hapuarachchi and Boyd (2003), in their study of 17 Australian universities, categorised academic staff into five sectors: research only, teaching only, teaching and research, heads of department, and deans or above, whereas there were four parts identified in the 'general staff' category, including professionals (e.g. accountants), clerical/administrative and technical, and service (e.g. cleaners, security and hospitality). In this section, the tensions between work and family lives faced by academic and administrative female staff will be reviewed.

### **5.3 Academic Women**

Although increased numbers of women have entered into higher education, they are still very much a minority sector at the higher levels of the university hierarchy and struggle to cross the threshold of the academic profession in greater numbers and to advance. For this section, the tensions between work and family confronted by academic women have been reviewed from two main starting points, including gendered university and WLB and academic work.

#### ***5.3.1 Gendered University***

Feminist critics have tended to describe universities as male-defined culture (Chanana, 2003; Sutherland, 1985; Twombly, 1998). Although universities provide women with a more tolerant and more liberal environment when compared with other industries, almost all university women have recollections or impressions of a paternalistic university (Sutherland, 1985). Under this culture, concepts of career, academic achievement, and institutional and intellectual work have been reproduced on the basis of male life trajectories (Itzen & Newman, 1995). Men act as the decision makers and the avenues to success have been established according to their traits and characteristics, whereas women often feel discouraged and intimidated due to their powerlessness caused by a lack of female numbers and seniority in universities (Bagilhole, 1993a; Izraeli & Adler, 1994).

In some male-oriented fields in particular, women's contributions tend not to be recognised and treated as 'invisible', while in all spheres of life male academics are visible. There is an inseparable relationship between authority and power (Dube, 1989 cited in Chanana, 2003). Most of the female faculty members tend to be younger and clustered in the lower ranks and nontenured positions of the academic hierarchy, and make more sluggish progress than males toward higher levels (Menges & Exum, 1983).

Park (1992) pointed out that the ‘bottom-heavy’ distribution of women within the professional hierarchies was reflected in the significant differences between the levels which males and females reach on the academic career ladder. Gendered culture may expand the merits of academic males while worsening the women’s disadvantages on the other hand.

### ***5.3.2 WLB and Academic Work***

Work and family conflicts have been viewed as another main barrier to academic women’s success (Thanacoody, Bartram, Barker, & Jacobs, 2006). Internationally, WLB issues have been slowly responded to in universities (Raabe, 1997). Mather (1998, cited in Armenti, 2004) categorised the traditional social pressures on academic women confront into two main dimensions: one was the assumption that providing family care was women’s responsibility and they should sacrifice parts of their life to achieve it; another pressure derived from the stereotype that women, considering their gender, were more competent to teach and care for the students than to do research.

In contrast, Barry, Berg and Chandler (2006) pointed out that another pressure from externally imposed sources the academic females often encountered was the new public management, namely, “severe financial cut-backs, increasing student numbers, technological demands from improved forms of electronic communication, pressure for research output, enhanced levels of managerial control and the surveillance of regulation, audit and peer review” (p. 291). In addition, Tytherleigh et al. (2005) identified the occupational stress reported by academic staff including excessive working hours, heavy workloads, heavy administrative work, lack of promotion opportunities, lower salaries, role vagueness, diminishing resources, increased teaching loads, job insecurity, poor management and lack of recognition and reward.

Another two major issues closely related to academic females’ work and life are marriage and children. In terms of the process of women pursuing their career development, Freeman (1977) found that female academics confronted quite different

options in choosing to marry or not and deciding whether to have children, compared with their male colleagues. Married academic women were much more likely to have no children or to have considerably fewer children than married male faculty members who tended to view marriage as an asset to ensure their stability and maturity and who could benefit from the assistance and support of a wife (Freeman, 1977).

The study results of the relationship between parental status and women research outputs are mixed. A negative relationship between parental status and women research productivity has been uncovered by some researchers (Hargens, McCann, & Reskin, 1978; Thanacoody, Bartram, Barker, & Jacobs, 2006) while other studies found that there was no relationship between women with children and their research productivity (Zuckerman, 1991). Conversely, a positive correlation between women with children and research productivity has been reported by Bellas and Toutkoushian (1999). Since women with children were more likely to be found in lower positions with higher teaching loads when compared with faculty members without children, it was not easy to examine the effect of having children on productivity (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

When confronting the challenges from work and life conflicts, many academic women tended to choose negative strategies. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) employed three theories, i.e. *role conflict*, *ideal worker*, and *male clockwork*, to outline a portrait for academic females attempting to handle the conflicts of work and life from a negative perspective. Role conflict theory has been extensively cited to account for the incompatibility of the roles of professor and mother. It states that considering an individual's limited time and energy, extra responsibilities will unavoidably produce tensions between competing demands. In the unique environment of academia, the image of the ideal worker is that of 'being married to his or her work', working endlessly to meet the demands of tenure and moving at will when little time has been left for childbearing or child-rearing. The tenure clock theory based on a male model is another explanation for the challenges women face. For the sake of the family, women tended to sacrifice themselves by extending or suspending their graduate school



careers, or stopping or slowing the tenure clock. Another strategy the female academics often adopted that was identified by Ward and her colleague was working in institutions with a less research-intensive academic environment. The WLB coping strategies of academic women are seriously affected by their family roles, which suggests that, for most female staff, they tended to give priority to their families although work also played an important role in their lives.

Other researchers (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004) advocated that the multiple roles of academic women should be evaluated from the positive perspective. The expansionist theory emphasises that women can benefit from the role combinations in such ways as increased income, a broadened perspective on work and life, greater social support, and improved self-esteem (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), which could motivate female academics to employ the coping strategies of WLB in a more constructive way.

It was also common that universities did not provide WLB policies and facilities to support their women faculty members. Even in a university where WLB programmes had been designed to enhance equity, those untenured women tended to be reluctant to seek their parental leave due to fear of reprisal (Orel & Whitmore, 1998 cited in Armenti, 2004). For example, many junior female academics postponed their timing of childbirth for productivity and tenure reasons (Armenti, 2004). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) stated that personal and institutional accommodations were once considered to be unnecessary since many professionals in academia were men with stay-at-home wives or were childless women. Such accommodations were more likely to be negatively related to employees' satisfaction, productivity, retention and even the overall quality of the university.

Although husbands of younger generations are more likely to share the household tasks, "the acceptance of the right of women to a career in all the countries concerned has not been accompanied by an equally rapid acceptance of the corollary of men doing housework and coping with children" (Sutherland, 1985, p. 26). As a result, WLB

practices may be under-utilised due to objective barriers or subjective concerns, which calls for solutions on both individual levels and from an organisational perspective.

Although WLB is a common issue for women academics all over the world, some empirical studies found the effects of WLB on women in different countries were diverse due to the different social, cultural and economical contexts (e.g. Johnsrud, 1995).

WLB is a crucial issue for female academics, considering their dual burdens of being the main householders and employees. When facing the conflicts between work and life, some negative coping strategies were more likely to be employed by women in order to support their husband or family. Even use of such strategies means that a sacrifice needs to be made. Although organisations offered some initiatives to assist women in handling their WLB issues, these practices may be under-utilised due to objective barriers or subjective concerns. Also, the effects of WLB on women in different countries may vary considering their diverse social, cultural and economical backgrounds.

#### **5.4 Administrative women**

The majority of studies focused on academic women's career development (Acker, 1980; Bagilhole, 1993b; Forster, 2001), hence employees in administrative roles in higher education literature have not yet received similar research attention, especially female administrative staff. Although administrative jobs were classified as high 'skill atrophy' occupations (Polachek, 1981 cited in Okunade & Walsh, 1993), in most organisational settings, this sector is fundamental to the ongoing functioning and organisational success, and performs boundary-spanning and service roles (Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997). The conventional "pink ghettos", such as Human Resources, Student Services or Equity, had high concentrations of female administrative staff, and most of them held assistant-director posts rather than director positions (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006).

When there are competing or conflicting demands in a university environment, the responsibilities taken by administrative employees in boundary-spanning positions are multifaceted. Rafaeli et al. (1997) stated that most of these employees are likely to deal with diverse sets of clients (e.g. students, faculty and business executives) in two normative contexts, namely, the university and the business community. Despite the extent of such conflicts differing among individuals, it is self-evident that this group of employees needs to perform diverse duties and thereby to overcome more challenges. Rafaeli et al. stratified administrative employees according to their functional unit and level. In regard to their positions, they might hold non-managerial jobs (e.g. clerical jobs) or managerial jobs (e.g. directors, professional administrators and managers). Considering the functional unit, there is a wide variety of departments these administrative employees might come from, such as the library, the dean's office, faculty support, student services, placement services, document processing and executive education.

Some scholars have focused their attention on the relationship between administrative staff and service activities in higher education even though service has been viewed as relatively unimportant part in academic institutions. Similarly, in teaching, service activities inescapably varied along gender lines. Women administrative employees tended to engage in considerably more and more diverse types of service activities in addition to spending more time advising students when compared with males (Park, 1996). Park (1996) stated that tenured women faculty were frequently ignored for senior level of administrative posts and were asked to work on a variety of committees in order to ensure representation of their group as minority or merely to present the organisational commitment to affirmative action and diversity targets. This suggests that the administrative women in university still confronted the same difficulties from gendered culture as female academics did, and any affirmative action sometimes tended to be a mere formality.

The concept of 'feminisation of student affairs' has been cited to characterise student services by focusing on women and feminine gender traits (Street & Kimmel, 1999). Since the section of student affairs stood for an increasingly compound set of programmes and services (e.g. admission, financial assistance, student accommodation, and academic support services) in contemporary academic institutions, student affair professionals need a mixture of opportunities, skills, good fortune, and hard work to climb to higher levels of power and achieve success (Hirt, Schneider, & Amelink, 2005). In Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink and Bennett's (2006) empirical study, they evaluated the work nature of administrators serving students at historically black colleges and universities. They explored the professional lives of these administrators from three aspects, namely: the nature of the work, the nature of their relationships, and the nature of their rewards, revealing that work for these professionals was demanding, highly nerve-racking, and enacting change on campus took time. It has imposed severe stress on these professionals, especially women who bear the heavy burden of family at the same time.

Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, and Gregory (2005) evaluated the relationships between the stress of full-time student affairs administrators and gender. They found that women outnumbered men in the student affairs profession, and might be at high risk for burnout while few of them reach top administrative positions. Nevertheless, according to Hirt et al. (2005), student affairs professionals perceived intrinsic rewards (e.g. meaningful work) more favourably than extrinsic rewards (e.g. salary and benefits). This means that the challenges deriving from the student services may motivate women and help raise their self-esteem.

While some scholars explored the career development of academic and administrative women in university without distinguishing them (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Woodward, 2007), others attempted to make a distinction between these two different groups (Tytherleigh et al., 2005). Tytherleigh et al. in their empirical study found that non-academic general employees including administrative staff reported not only lower levels of work pressure and work-life conflict, but lower levels of job

satisfaction when compared with academic employees. One of the reasons could be that women in academia who have gained advanced degrees in the disciplines, perceived themselves as potential college or university faculty members seeking further scholarship, and thus gaining higher job satisfaction (Grambs, 1976). It appears that administrative women tend to suffer more pressures from job insecurity and lack of promotion opportunities. This verifies again that women prefer intrinsic rewards over extrinsic returns. To these women, a promising career and meaningful work can offer them more satisfaction than salary or benefits do.

However, the development of administrative women's careers is inclined to be blocked by sex discrimination or gender inequality in the workplace. For them, achieving equity within academic institutions eventually depends upon the equivalence in career advancement (Johnsrud, 1991). To systematically analyse both the advantages and disadvantages of career advancement of female administrative employees, Johnsrud (1991) posited two areas of resources and vulnerabilities related to the promotion of administrative women, namely, individual characteristics and structural characteristics. Each of the individual characteristics, including gender, education, experience, age, and race, not only can be viewed as a potential resource or a vulnerability to the individual and the organisation, but has its specific potential effects on individual outcomes. Johnsrud defined the structural characteristics as the reflections of "the decisions that match persons and jobs as well as the arrangement and attributes of positions within the organizational work structure" (p.127) (e.g. sponsorship, new positions, administrative unit budgetary allocation and prior work structure).

Johnsrud then found that the individual characteristics of education, years of experience and age are resources for both women's and men's promotion, while being female is a vulnerability in the process of promotion. For the structural resources examined, the prior work structure is the most powerful resource. For instance, employment in non-administrative work structures (e.g. the clerical ranks) serves as a vulnerability to those employees in the promotion process. Furthermore,

considering the unitary work structure of administrative and professional positions, a manager is the only person who has the prudence to make promotion decisions within normative guidelines. The inherent systematic discrimination detracts from the advantageous situation of administrative women and makes their advancement even more difficult.

To gain an overall comprehension of how individual characteristics and the structure of work perform to create a stratified workplace, and to test the cumulative effects of these characteristics on decisions that determine status, responsibility, and salary levels within an organisation, Johnsrud and Heck (1994) evaluated the separate and cumulative effects of individual and structural characteristics on the outcomes of administrative promotions. They developed the logic of three perspectives consisting of: the gender differences in positions held, the power of prior position on subsequent outcomes, and the role of gender in decisions that determine attainment.

The findings of their study indicated that being female had a direct effect upon the status and responsibility attained from the position held in the organisation. The initial gender bias was cumulative. Although women had equal educational backgrounds and significantly more experience when compared with males, they still received lower returns in status and responsibility, namely, considerably lower salaries and significantly more classified jobs, to their initial placement, which in turn influenced their following status over time. Consequently, gender stratification is both perpetuated and additive in its impact and is detrimental to women. It means that, to completely eradicate the barriers on the path of women's success, not only do the policies and systems of universities need to be transformed, but basic societal values and attitudes need to be changed.

Although women are more likely to be hired in traditional jobs (e.g. clerks and secretaries, librarians, janitresses and service workers as well) and relatively few of them were employed at senior levels such as executive, administrative and managerial positions (Allan, 2003), the representation of women administrators also grew at a

relatively mild pace following a rise in the numbers of women administrative staff in colleges and universities. The literature on administrative women has started focusing on the careers of female administrators in higher education (Loder, 2005; Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1987; Sagaria, 1988).

Interestingly, among these women, to enter and succeed in leadership roles, they tended to develop and emphasise high levels of masculine gender traits (Hughes, 1989). Street and Kimmel's (1999) study enriched this finding by offering a model for the assessment of gender role preferences and perceptions in higher education. Women administrators interviewed depicted their ideal woman, ideal man, and themselves as androgynous, while their male counterparts described their ideal man and themselves as masculine, and the ideal woman as androgynous. Although these women typically had more formal education and higher incomes than classified and clerical staff women (Allan, 2003), they bore more stress and pressure in their work accordingly (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003).

These aspiring and practising principals and the inequitable treatment they experience have been well portrayed by some scholars (e.g. Allan, 2003; Valian, 1998), which was quite similar to the experience of academic women and were mainly reflected by pervasive discrimination in hiring, pay and promotion, lack of sponsoring and mentoring, and the entrenchment of the "good old boy network" (Loder, 2005, p. 741).

A range of empirical studies can be easily found to test if such discrimination is deeply rooted in organisational structures. The work of Sagaria (1988) examined that job movement patterns of four-year college and university administrators during the 1970s when sweeping changes had been occurring in administrative employment practices. A demographic approach was employed to explore the trends in a number of women administrators in universities.

According to her findings, women were more likely to come from within than from outside the university when they are selected for administrative positions, whereas

their male colleagues tended to be selected for administrative positions from both within and outside the institution. It is plausible that the risk of hiring women from outside the institution could be eliminated by promoting women internally since women hired from outside the institution were less well known or proven and might have been potentially undesirable or disruptive. This indicates that discriminated standards have been employed in the process of promotion due to gender differences.

Also, another empirical study from Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1987) about the effect of the proportion of female administrators on the salaries of both men and women in administrative positions goes further to demonstrate such deeply rooted discrimination. The proportion of women had been found to be inversely relative to the salaries of both males and females. This indicated that the higher the percentage of administrative females, the more open the organisation, and the less protected its administrative labour market since a higher percentage of women suggested that women were less likely to be excluded from administrative positions, which caused an increased labour supply and decreased wages for both men and women accordingly. Since an increase in salaries may contribute to parity and the retention of administrative personnel in a fiercely competitive and less localised labour market, the findings of this study could be another demonstration of the deterioration of the female administrator's situation.

Mentors or sponsors played a crucial role in the career development of administrators since mentors shared values and offered invaluable career information, advice and counseling (Eberspacher & Sisler, 1988). Smith and Crawford's (2007) work found that administrators without mentors or sponsors might be disadvantaged by experiencing more sluggish progress toward the attainment of career targets. They found mentoring would be an effectual tool in offering support for the career success of female administrators, even though it could not pledge career success and an absence of mentors or sponsorship did not necessarily mean employees could not succeed in their careers.



There has been quite limited evidence concerning work–family conflicts among women administrative employees in higher education (Doherty, 2004; Doherty & Manfredi, 2006; Loder, 2005). Although the conflicts of work and life encountered by academic women could be basically similar to those that administrative females face, there are still discrepancies. Doherty and Manfredi (2006) found significant differences existing between the experiences of APT&C (administrative, professional, technical and clerical) staff and academics: the former sought a greater sense of ‘entitlement’, and more trust and autonomy, while the latter preferred a more manageable work load; even among the female administrators, women from different generations or with different racial/ethnic identities may adopt different strategies to settle work–family conflicts.

The latter findings of Doherty and Manfredi (2006) can be further clarified by the work of Loder (2005). Loder found that women in the ‘older’ generation were coerced to give family precedence over career pursuits more than females in the ‘younger’ generation; considering the race/ethnicity, white women administrators principally sought their partners’ support while their Black counterparts tended to rely upon extended family women for child care and household support. The differences mentioned above are unavoidable since every woman is an independent individual with different experiences and her own ethnic identity. These variables may have significant effects on women (including academic women) and their way of handling conflicts between work and life.

Administrative women also face a gendered culture in academic institutions, their career development and WLB have been seriously affected by such culture, but their experiences are different from those of academic females due to the distinctive responsibilities borne by each of them. These differences determine that their experiences of employment and ways of dealing with WLB issues are diverse.

## 5.5 Organisational Actions

Many universities took affirmative action by developing 'non-discrimination' policies and practising affirmative action to remedy the impact of past discrimination in respect of sex, race and other categories. Such affirmative action, however, has minimally affected academe (Freeman, 1977; Rai & Critzer, 2000). Affirmative action is "owned by the Faculty and statements about barriers and solutions to equal opportunity for women are no longer general statements but are becoming specific and have already resulted in action" (McCall, Liddell, & O'Neil, 2000, p. 146).

Other measures taken by universities to reduce sex role stereotyping include challenging sexual harassment, developing women's studies and women's awareness programmes, giving support to women's careers and employing women as faculty members and administrators (Street & Kimmel, 1999).

To handle inequality and diversity in the workplace, Doherty (2004) suggested that two different approaches need to be employed, these are: equal opportunity (EO) and diversity management (DM) initiatives. Compared with the dominant group, women and ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience disadvantages because of their differences. An EO approach can be firstly used to analyse such disadvantage and help offer targeted provisions to conquer this drawback. For example, the family-friendly policies designed to assist women with dual roles through some special arrangements. However, women who employed these arrangements may be disadvantaged by limited career prospects and resented by their colleagues with no caring duties (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006). The DM approach focuses on the benefits of a diverse workforce such as a range of diverse points of view that everyone brings to work rather than social justice and fairness. The limitation of this approach is its purely voluntary nature (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006). In terms of the EO approach, staff with caring duties are empowered to bring their family role into the organisation while the DM approach empowered employees to take their private self into the organisation.

They have been described as a ‘push’ (EO) and ‘pull’ (DM) set of methods respectively (Doherty, 2004).

## **5.6 Work–life Balance Initiatives at AUT**

AUT adopted its current name after inauguration as a university in 2000. Its predecessor was the Auckland Institute of Technology (AIT) which had more than 100 years’ of tradition in technical education (Auckland University of Technology, 2006). There are three campuses in AUT, namely, the Wellesley Campus, Akoranga Campus, and the AUT Technology Park. By 2007, AUT had 1839 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 976 were teaching staff and 863 were administrative staff (Auckland University of Technology, 2007a).

As one essential part of the organisational mission, AUT is dedicated to equity and diversity by encouraging all employees and students to “reach their potential, mindful of culture, socio-economic background, gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or life experience” (Auckland University of Technology, 2007c, p. 10). Such commitments are also immersed into the university’s governance and management structures. At its governance level, Māori education and Pasifika education had been under the sub-committees’ (of council) surveillance; from the management level, not only had AUT appointed a PVC (Pro Vice Chancellor) for Māori Advancement, a director of Pasifika Advancement and a manager for Disability Resource Service, but had established an Equity Steering Committee to facilitate the implementation of the policies related to equity and diversity (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-b). In addition, the AUT equity and diversity caucus and the equity and diversity portfolio holder in each faculty effectively contributed to reinforcing AUT’s dedication to equity and diversity (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-b).

As far as all its staff were concerned, AUT committed itself to being the employer of choice. As AUT’s central educational development and staff training unit, the Centre for Educational & Professional Development (CEPD) had been established to facilitate

quality-focused and student-oriented learning, teaching, researching and development of all staff by offering a wide range of courses, workshops and resources (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-d). To facilitate employees' professional and personal growth, CEPD worked closely with the faculties, central management and other collaborative universities (e.g. the University of Auckland), aiming to design appropriate programmes to provide employees with useful information and effective assistance (Poulter & Wyse, 2006).

To accommodate the diversity and achievement among staff, five funded staff networks have been established in AUT, namely, the Māori Staff Network (Nga Whānau Māori Ki Horotiu), the Pasifika Staff Network (PSN), Women on Campus (WOC), LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) Staff Network and Asian Staff Network (ASN) (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-d). In particular, trained equity representatives and a staff service diversity coordinator have been appointed to ensure that equity and diversity strategies were implemented in the process of employee recruitment and support (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-d).

AUT was dedicated to creating a positive working environment to support staff careers, family commitments and lifestyle choices. A range of initiatives has been launched by the university to meet employees' WLB needs and promote their well-being.

Firstly, flexible working arrangements have been offered to staff (see Table 3). Seeing that leave is part of a wider package of WLB (State Services Commission, 2004), a number of leave options<sup>1</sup> have also been made available such as public holidays, annual leave, sick leave, domestic leave, bereavement/tangihanga leave, miscellaneous leave provisions (e.g. leave without pay), long service leave, buyable leave, time allowance, and transition to retirement (Auckland University of Technology, 2005a). In a recent report by the State Services Commission, AUT's buyable leave, leave without pay, time allowance and transition to retirement had been regarded as the best practices of a new leave-arrangement policy (State Services Commission, 2004). Also, other

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to statutory minimum requirements (e.g. public holidays, parental leave).

initiatives available encompassed dependant care benefits, health and wellness service, and workload policy (see Table 3).

**Table 3: WLB-related Policies**

	<b>WLB-related Policies at AUT</b>
1	Flexible working arrangements (e.g. flexible start-and-end time, part-time work and work-at-home);
2	Leave time policies (e.g. parental leave, buyable leave, time allowance, and transition to retirement);
3	Dependant care benefits (e.g. child care facilities, school holiday programme/kids on campus);
4	Workload policy (only related to academic staff);
5	Health and wellness service (e.g. employee assistance programme, chaplaincy, fitness centre, and workshops);

## **5.7 Summary & Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the tensions between their work and their family lives that are faced by women in universities. For academic women, gendered barriers and WLB issues are frequently employed to explain their disadvantages in the process of their career development.

Administrative women also confront a gendered culture in academic institutions, their career development and WLB have been seriously influenced by such culture, but their experiences are different from those of academic females due to the distinctive responsibilities borne by each of them. These differences determine that their experiences of employment and ways of settling WLB issues are diverse.

Although some organisational actions have been taken to improve equality issues in universities, considering the limitations of these practices, it cannot be expected that

they will thoroughly settle all of the inequality issues in these institutions. However, they do facilitate the release of women's extra stress and improvement of equity to some extent.

As one essential part of the organisational mission, AUT's commitment to equity and diversity has been well built in the organisational system and policies. To create a positive working environment, a range of initiatives had also been launched by the university to meet employee's WLB-related needs.

From the previous chapters, it is evident that there is little empirical evidence on how Chinese immigrant women balance their work and family lives, especially within particular situations. As mentioned in Chapter One, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the WLB experience of Chinese women in administrative roles at AUT. We explore these issues by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the tensions experienced by Chinese female administrative staff between their family and work lives? How do these affect them?
2. What strategies do Chinese female administrative staff use to cope with work–family conflict (WFC) and family–work conflict (FWC)?
3. How do their own cultural experiences of immigration or the immigration experience of other family members affect the way Chinese female administrative staff cope with WFC and FWC?
4. What kind of support structures exist to help administrative staff to cope with WFC and FWC?

An appropriate method of inquiry will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **6. Research Methodology**

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### **6.1 Introduction**

The approach taken to answer the four main research questions is discussed in this chapter. The methodological approach is firstly introduced and justified. Before an evaluation of the data validity, the methods and processes employed in undertaking the research are described. A discussion of how the data is analysed then follows. The final part of this chapter provides a consideration of the ethical issues.

### **6.2 Methodological Approach**

This section proposes and justifies the methodological paradigm and research design best suited to the study.

#### ***6.2.1 The Qualitative Research Paradigm***

Qualitative research is typically subjectivist, humanistic and interpretivist (Collis & Hussey, 2003), and takes place in the natural setting where human behaviour and events are involved (Creswell, 2003). Rather than micro-analyses, qualitative research is steered by highly abstract principles, and tends to present broad, panoramic views by examining social phenomena holistically (Bateson, 1972; Creswell, 2003). Its intent is to comprehend a particular social situation, event, role, group, or relations (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987), to document the world from the perception of the people studied (Hammersley, 1992), and to recognise how people identify their circumstances (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

More researchers in basic disciplines and applied fields (e.g. psychology, public administration, organisational studies, and educational research) have shifted to this

qualitative paradigm in past decades (Miles & Huberman, 1994) owing to its nature of being partially self-validating (Bateson, 1972).

On the contrary, quantitative research tends to involve the collection of numerical data and display a well-generalised viewpoint of the relationship between theory and research, and a preference for a natural science approach (especially positivism) (Black, 1999; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Neuman, 2003; Vogt, 2007). It offers an objectivist concept of social reality that is independent of people's view (Gephart, 1999), assuming an objective world where everything involved can be gauged and characterised systematically via statistical methods, and is generally focused on attitudes and descriptions of what people do (Gephart, 1999; Hammersley, 1992).

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), when determining the research paradigm, the researcher needs to consider three aspects including: ontology (what is the nature of reality?), epistemology (what is the relationship between the inquirer and those being studied?), and methodology (how do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?).

In terms of ontological orientation, constructivism was considered appropriate as the images and realities of Chinese female immigrants in New Zealand were multiple (i.e., as women, as immigrants and as ethnic groups simultaneously), and needed to be subjectively and mentally constructed through recollecting and describing their experiences of WLB. Here, Chinese women's reality was established in the form of words (participants' words), rather than objectively tested through numerical or statistical data (Gephart, 1999).

To collect information needed, it was essential for the researcher to observe, talk with and listen carefully to the people researched (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) when the face-to-face interviews were conducted. Apart from the process of data collection, the findings were also the outcomes of an interactive process adopting an interpretivist strategy to interpret data and human action (women's experience of coping with WFC and FWC) in depth (Wright, 1971). In other words, given that qualitative research is



often viewed as ‘soft’ and basically descriptive and inferential in nature, although the findings were mainly the reflection of the experience of the participants, the in-depth quality of data could not speak for themselves and the researcher had to speak for them through appropriately describing and interpreting (Gillham, 2000). As a result, the perception and understanding of the researcher may influence the methods of describing and interpreting (also see the section on Bias Clarification: 6.5.2).

In relation to methodological aspects, qualitative research tends to employ an inductive approach using a exploratory and open-ended research question (Grbich, 2007). This research aimed to explore the WLB experience of Chinese women at AUT. Four main open-ended questions had been designed to help collect qualitative data (also see Data Collection and Data Analysis sections). In addition, the process of the research was inductive as the researcher inferred the implications of the research findings that prompted the research (also see Data Analysis section: 6.6).

However, in a qualitative model, an obvious issue that needs to be mentioned is that uniqueness is inclined to be favoured while widespread generalisation is to be avoided (Grbich, 2007). For this reason, the compatibility of interpretations and explanation-generalisation depend on the recognition of the limits to generalisation (Williams, 2002).

### ***6.2.2 The Case Study Design***

A research design lucidly sketches the purpose of the study, the research questions (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993), and the strategies (e.g. case study, phenomenological and ethnomethodological techniques, grounded theory) used to obtain the most proper information to answer the specific questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Yin (2003b) defined the case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). It also can act as “a disciplined force in public policy setting and reflection on human experience” (Stouffer,

1941, p. 449). The case study is a comprehensive strategy for research inquiry and a choice of what is to be evaluated rather than a choice of methodology (Stake, 2000). It has been considered an overture not only to further social research, but to other case studies (Ogawa & Malen, 1991).

The purpose of this research was to explore the WLB strategies of AUT and WLB issues for a group of female Chinese administrative employees. To obtain appropriate information to answer four main research questions, a single case study approach incorporating a qualitative methodology was employed. The case study approach entailed a detailed and intensive analysis of the WLB issues within AUT while enabling the study of WLB policies to be compared and contrasted with the Chinese women's experiences. Ogbonna and Harris (2002) explained that "researchers should concentrate on understanding the ways through which organisational members construct and reconstruct their 'reality' (Smircich, 1983), rather than seeking to establish abstract variables to quantify their experiences (Schein, 1996)" (p. 39). Since the intention is to construct knowledge from a specific site, what can be examined in this site is at a certain time (Hough, 2002), and merely relevant to individuals in the same context (Walliman, 2001), which may affect how the research develops. To "minimize the chances of misrepresentation and to maximise the access needed to collect the case study evidence" (Yin, 2003b, p. 42), careful concern about the above issues is imperative during the process of investigation.

### **6.3 Methods**

In this section, the research methods adopted are described. A semi-structured interview including a pilot interview is used as the main tool to collect the qualitative data. Secondary research on WLB and AUT's WLB policies via publicly available documentation and archival evidence is also involved.

### ***6.3.1 Semi-structured Interview***

To enable people to understand the meaning of what is going on, the qualitative tradition elucidates issues and provides possible explanations by putting emphasis on evidence (i.e. what people tell you, what they do) (Gillham, 2000). The foremost strength of using interviews as an evidence collection instrument is to find out feelings or thinking that we cannot observe in a straight line from people (Patton, 1990). Since the study aimed to evaluate the Chinese women's experiences and listen to their stories, the qualitative interviewing was considered as the appropriate method to be employed. The study was mainly based on face-to-face and in-depth interviews with participants who had consented formally to be interviewed. Qualitative interviewing can focus on an interviewee's own point of view and give insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Shank, 2006). The researcher can ask new questions that follow up interviewees' replies and expect rich and detailed answers (Shank, 2006). When necessary, the interviewee can be interviewed more than once.

There are two main types of qualitative interviewing: the unstructured interview and the semi-structured interview. The former was not chosen in this study as it usually uses a single question to allow the interviewees to respond freely, which might cause similarities in character to a conversation (Burgess, 1984), and become non-directive. Therefore, the interviews had a semi-structured format with open-ended questions.

Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) defined the semi-structured interview as a research process that entails researchers utilising the broad topic in which they are interested to direct the interview, while the type of questioning and discussion allow for greater flexibility than does the structured interview. It is featured by setting up "topical areas and by the purposive formulation of questions based on specific theories on the topic (in the hypotheses-directed questions)" (Flick, 2006, p. 158). Also, the semi-structured format ensured that the interviews were conducted with a guide, which made the data analysis easier. In addition, questions that were not

included in the lists were asked as the interviewer picked up on things said by interviewees (Shank, 2006). However, to make the semi-structured interview a productive research tool, the interviewer needs to be natural in the interviewing process, which rests on a clear structure and the use of skilled interview techniques (Gillham, 2000).

### ***6.3.2 Pilot Interview***

Before the commencement of the major data collection, a pilot study should always be conducted as it can confirm that all the points posed in the interview schedule have been satisfactorily responded to, and early feedback has been provided to the interviewer (Keats, 2000). The first interview of this research was carried out as a pilot to ensure that the interview questions raised could be understood by the participants and that there were no problems with the wording or measurement. This may minimise the risks of conducting ineffective research. After receiving the participation consent from the first participant, the interviewee was provided with a question list in advance and informed of the intention of the researcher regarding the pilot interview. After this interview, some revisions of the proposed schedule were considered by seeking suggestions and opinions from the participant, and analysing the issues arising during interviewing.

Issue 1: Since the participant talked a lot in the first half section of the interview, there was not much time left for the WLB part.

Solution: At the beginning of the interview, participants were informed as to the key parts of the interview in advance in order that they could focus on those parts and be kept on track. When the participants went too far off track, the researcher changed the topic and refocused the interview, for example, by saying: “That is really interesting... I would like to come back to this later on”.

Issue 2: When asked the question “Do you know of any formal work–life balance policies/practices at your workplace?”, the participants generally had no idea about what the WLB policies/practices were as AUT did not have a formal policy called ‘work–life balance’.

Solution: The researcher asked participants the question: “Do you know what support AUT gives to help employees have a reasonable work/life balance?”, then observed what answers they gave before asking more specific questions like “Do you know about the AUT policies/practices listed” by offering them an exemplary list (see Table 3).

Issue 3: The participants found some questions difficult to understand, especially the questions with more abstract key words.

Solution: The questions were made easier for participants to understand and some examples have been given for explaining the abstract words like “highlight”, “prioritise”, etc.

### ***6.3.3 Documentation***

Documents typically occur as standardised artifacts with particular formats (Wolff, 2004). They stand for a “specific version of realities constructed for specific purposes” (Flick, 2006, p. 249), and are often available as printed text, electronic file, photos, films, and “the Internet or the World Wide Web can be added as a special sort of document” (p. 251). Yin (2003b) categorised the documents as follows:

- Letters, memos, and communiqués;
- Agendas, records of meetings, and other written reports of events;
- Administrative documents, and other in-house records;
- Formal studies or appraisals of the same “site” under study; and
- Newspaper clippings and other articles in the mass media (p. 85).

As part of the evidence base, according to Gillham (2000), documents were not made out to give the answer to the research questions, but the search and analysis for them epitomises the research strategy in most case studies, and should be the one of the objectives of data collection (Yin, 2003b). Not only can analysing documents be viewed as a complementary strategy to other approaches (e.g. interviews or ethnography), which provides a researcher with valuable contextualising information, but can create a fresh and unfiltered standpoint beyond the perspective of members on the site (Flick, 2006). Yin (2003b) asserted that the strengths of using documents in case studies to corroborate evidence from other sources include: 1) making sure of the correctness of terms and names that might have been mentioned in an interview; 2) offering other specific details to confirm data from other sources and making a further inquiries into the contradictory evidence; and 3) inferring carefully from documents and perhaps some new problems associated with communications and networking within an organisation can be found out.

Except for the main method, the semi-structured interview, this research also employed the strategy of collecting publicly available documents and conducted secondary research on WLB, AUT and its WLB policies (e.g. the search of reports, contracts, handbooks, evaluations and accounts on the AUT website, formal policies or studies on the New Zealand Government website, newspaper or journal), which ensures that “the core problem of relying too heavily on interview data” and an overemphasis on the stances of interviewees could be avoided (Flick, 2006, p. 252). However, the validity of a document needs to be carefully considered since every document was drawn up for some specific purpose, which might mislead the inquirer accordingly (Yin, 2003b). Scott (1990) suggests four criteria for evaluating the quality of documents, namely, authenticity (genuine and unquestionable origin), credibility (free from distortion and fault), representativeness (typical of its kind), and meaning (understandable).

#### ***6.3.4 Archival Records***

Archival records normally take the form of computer files and records (e.g. service records, organisational records, maps and charts, name lists or personal records), and can be used along with other sources of information in a case study, although its usefulness and importance vary from case to case when compared with documentary evidence (Yin, 2003b). The records, being statistics and summary information, can track back quite a few years, and “provide a dimension that you could not hope to create for yourself” (Gillham, 2000, p. 43). Several problems might come up when access to records is considered, such as getting formal ethical approval, operating a computerised system, and guaranteeing the data quality (e.g. accuracy and completeness) (Gillham, 2000). However, “getting round the constraints of the way the statistics are organised” and picking up appropriate and valuable information can be “a testimony to a researcher’s ingenuity” (Gillham, 2000, p. 44).

This study incorporates the method of an analysis of archival records. The researcher collected some statistical records from AUT’s annual report, such as the current academic and administrative employees’ numbers. However, in view of the fact that most records were also maintained for a specific purpose, the issue of validity cannot be neglected.

### **6.4 Research Process**

In this section, the reasons for selecting the target organisation and participant group are firstly discussed. This is followed by descriptions of the basic situation of participants and the process of collecting data.

#### ***6.4.1 Sampling Decisions***

At the initial stage of research, the issues of case sampling and sampling groups of cases needed to be carefully considered before any decision was made (Flick, 2006),

which was crucial for the researcher to best comprehend the research question (Creswell, 2003). AUT and Chinese female administrative staff were selected as the target organisation and participant group of this study respectively.

The reasons for selecting AUT as the target organisation for this study could be justified in several respects. First of all, AUT had some comprehensive WLB policies and some best practices to promote workplace equity and support cultural diversity, including flexible working hours, a strong commitment to parental leave, academic year aligned with primary school holidays, child care facilities and family days on campus and comprehensive range of funded staff affinity network (Work/Life Balance, 2003). It “won the EEO Trust Work Life Award for large organisations in 2002 and its two Senior Managers were awarded the EEO Trust’s ‘Walk the Talk’ Award in 2003” (Auckland University of Technology, 2006, p. 64). Although facing the challenge of a tight job market, AUT had achieved a good level of staff retention. WLB policies and practices had contributed to the good working conditions said to facilitate WFC and FWC management.

Although women in universities had been historically portrayed as a disadvantaged group with the lowest pay and least secure contracts, such an equality gap was narrowing since many universities had devoted themselves to uphold gender equality in their employment practices (Woodward, 2007). However, the majority of previous studies had focused on academic women’s career development. Women in administrative roles had not received similar research attention.

Auckland, being the biggest city in New Zealand with the highest Chinese population density, it was much easier to recruit Chinese participants in AUT. The proportion of AUT’s Chinese international students remained higher than those for students from other countries, being 48% in 2007 (Auckland University of Technology, 2007a), which had caused a growing demand for Chinese administrative staff to meet the needs of a diverse culture in the university as these staff tended to be more advantageous when dealing with issues related to Chinese students and giving them support than



people of other nationalities. For example, some Chinese female staff worked for the Chinese Student Centre, International Student Centre and International Student Support Service (ISSS).

Being an ethnic minority population, these women tended to experience more challenges than women in the dominant society such as gender inequality, ethnic discrimination and issues of acculturation, which could shape their choice of WLB.

#### ***6.4.2 Participants***

The participants included Chinese female administrative staff and a staff member from the Human Resources Department (HRD), the Asian Staff Network (ASN) and the AUT Branch of TIASA<sup>2</sup>. For the Chinese females, the criteria for deciding upon the feature of the sample included: 1) women of Chinese ethnicity; and 2) those employed with administrative roles (non-academic roles) in AUT. They were all skilled Chinese immigrants and first-generation New Zealanders. Fifteen participants were selected including 12 Chinese female administrative staff and three staff members from HRD, the ASN and the AUT Branch of TIASA. Considering the time required for translating interviews, a small number of Chinese women (12) were interviewed.

Given the limited number of Chinese female administrative staff in AUT, the research did not intend to focus on a specific Chinese group first (e.g. people from mainland China) in order to get sufficient participants. However, participants being recruited via the researcher's network of contacts within AUT were all mainland Chinese, and most of them were members of ASN. By using the participants' networks, more mainland Chinese women were located.

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<sup>2</sup> Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Associate: a Union in New Zealand which gives nationwide coverage to employees in tertiary education, principally allied/administrative employees.

The age of these Chinese women varied from 28 to 57. Half of them had been in New Zealand for more than eight years, but here there was a range from two to 13 years. All of them were skilled migrants except one who migrated due to her long service for the New Zealand Government. While seven women had Bachelor's degrees, two had postgraduate diplomas, and three held Masters degrees. Seven of them obtained their tertiary qualifications in New Zealand. Except one who was permanent part-time staff, other women all held permanent full-time jobs. The number of years these women had worked in AUT ranged from six months to 10 years but most (seven out of 12) more than seven years. In terms of their positions, four women held managerial jobs (e.g. managers and administrators), whereas eight worked in non-managerial roles (e.g. advisors, technician, assistance, clerical/administrative staff). For the functional units they came from, a wide variety of departments were identified, encompassing student service, library, faculty support and facility support.

From the family perspective, among nine married mothers, four lived with their husbands and children, while five also had their parents/parent-in-law living with them. Two unmarried women with no children lived with their partners while one single mother, however, lived with her child and parents. All participants' husbands/partners were Chinese except one whose partner was local. However, there were no marked differences in respect of the responses of this interviewee and those with Chinese partners.

In order to protect the confidentiality of specific individuals, 12 Chinese participants were given fictitious names so that they could not be identified and their names would not be used in any outputs from the study. Details of their specific job role and job location (department, campus etc) would also not be disclosed. Also, the comments of this study were disguised in order that "no one involved in the case can infer the likely source" (Yin, 2003b, p. 158). More detail will be discussed in the "Ethical Issues" section (see section 6.7).

### ***6.4.3 Data Collection***

Keats (2000) advocated that the research interview should be conducted in the interviewee's preferred language so that they could communicate effectively without being distressed by having to speak in a language with which they were less familiar. With the researcher's bilingual language skills, the participants had been given the choice of being interviewed in a language comfortable to them, such as Mandarin or English. Although such choice had been given, all women chose to speak English during the initial interviews. Only three participants used Chinese to clarify some points when they felt their English expression was not clear enough.

The qualitative researcher is also the core instrument in the data collection (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). To be highly involved in participants' actual experiences and explore the detailed information about participants and their surroundings, the researcher often calls on the participant's office or home to conduct the research (Creswell, 2003). Unexceptionally, all interviews in this research were conducted at the participant's own office or in a quiet and private place to avoid being interrupted. The interviews were audiotaped by the researcher. The majority of interviewees (11) preferred to be interviewed at lunch time or after work, whereas the other four were interviewed in working time or during the weekend. The interviews lasted between 40 and 150 minutes and were transcribed and translated from Chinese into English where necessary by the researcher so that confidentiality could be guaranteed as no other translators were involved. Since there were some grammar mistakes in people's words and it was necessary to transcribe the interviews word for word for the purposes of credibility, notes were taken where necessary in order that the words of participants could be correctly understood whenever the researcher read them.

The 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted from May to July 2008. Since the interview was semi-structured, all questions had been designed in advance. Seeing that the four research questions were drawn from a relative broad range, the responses to them would be quite similar in character if they were posed in the process of

interviewing. To facilitate the collection of rich and detailed qualitative information, several sub-questions were designed in accordance with the four main research questions and provided to Chinese female interviewees before the interview (see Appendix 1)<sup>3</sup>. The interviewees had a great deal of flexibility in how to respond and questions sometimes did not follow on exactly in the way sketched on the schedule. The response sheets were also prepared in advance and used during interviews rather than “simply tacked on afterwards” (Keats, 2000, p. 75).

The interview schedule was divided into six sections with headings, instructions to interviewer and questions (Creswell, 2003). The first section was a quick check of the participant’s basic situation at work. Then their cultural experiences of immigration were explored as these could have an effect on their WLB strategies. The third section consisted of some questions about how gender and ethnicity influenced women’s lives since these two factors could also affect their WLB experience. After that, the women’s daily experiences regarding WLB were explored. The fifth section focused on the women’s perception of AUT’s WLB policies. Recommendations were solicited from the women in the last section. At the beginning of each section, some quantitative questions related to women’s background (e.g. age, qualification, length of employment at AUT and family situation) were asked.

Different types of information were sought from the three staff members from HRD, ASN and TIASA, which included participants’ perceptions of the concept of WLB, AUT’s WLB initiatives, the costs and benefits of these initiatives, and the ways to improve the effectiveness of AUT’s WLB policies (see Appendix 2)<sup>4</sup>.

In some cases respondents were contacted again and asked to clarify or expand on comments they had made in the initial interviews.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1- Interview Schedule 1.

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 2- Interview Schedule 2.

## **6.5 Data Validity**

The trinity of validity, reliability, and generalisability has been frequently mentioned in the quantitative research (Janesick, 2003). Reliability and validity in particular, are two of the more significant criteria for the quality of the research procedure and the objectivity and credibility of the research as a whole (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Silverman, 2001). However, for the qualitative inquiry, the role of reliability and generalisability are minor except for research involved multiple researchers or multiple cases (Creswell, 2003).

As a strength of the qualitative research, validity needs to be concerned with “how well the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure” and evaluated under the purported context (Keats, 2000, p. 77; Newman & Benz, 1998). It is often utilised to examine the credibility of the explanation, namely, whether or not the explanation fits the description (Janesick, 2003), and whether or not the findings are accurate from the perspective of the inquirer, the participant, or the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The issues in regard to validity will be discussed from five aspects, namely, triangulation, negative or discrepant information presentation, bias clarification, peer consultation and rich description (see Creswell, 2003).

### ***6.5.1 Triangulation***

Triangulation is initially seen as a strategy for the validation of results achieved with the individual methods (Flick, 2006), and as a process of utilising multiple perceptions to elucidate meaning, validating the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2000). Flick (1998) discussed, however, as an alternative rather than a tool or strategy for validation, triangulation combining manifold methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and inquirers could facilitate rigorous, holistic and in-depth comprehension to any inquiry (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and minimise the inquirers’ biases at the same time (Patton, 1990).

There were four basic types of triangulation outlined by Denzin (1978, cited in Janesick, 2003): data triangulation (a variety of data employed), investigator triangulation (several researchers or investigators involved), theory triangulation (multiple perspectives used to analyse and interpret data), and methodological triangulation (the use of multiple methods involved in the research).

In this qualitative case study, triangulated methods were utilised to collect multiple data: semi-structured interviews, document and archival record analysis. Also interview data was collected not only from Chinese female staff, but from members of other groups (HR, ASN and the Union). This allowed the researcher to analyse and understand the phenomenon from a more comprehensive perspective, set up a logical justification for themes, and augment the validity of the findings.

#### ***6.5.2 Bias Clarification***

As part of the process of knowledge production, the reflections of the researchers on their research is one of the features of qualitative research (Flick, 2006). As the qualitative researcher is interpretative and typically involved in a constant and intensive experience with participants (Creswell, 2003), the strategic, ethical and personal issues arising in the research procedure it is the essential role of the inquirer to deal with concerns (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000).

One of the crucial principles of case selection is taking the one that is the most accessible and that you can spend the most time with (Stake, 2000). The researcher was a current student at AUT University, which could be an advantage in regard of gaining access to the site and the participants (the administrative female staff) as well. Also, a familiarity with the AUT setting benefited the in-depth understanding of the organisational values and culture. Moreover, the research student was herself Chinese and had the necessary bilingual skills and a comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture. This allowed the researcher to respect and understand the social and cultural

feelings of all participants. All the features and experience of the researcher, however, shaped her understanding of the research data and way of interpreting findings to some extent, which might produce bias in this study.

A consideration for ethics will be presented in the Ethical issues section (6.7). The other three aspects of issues in respect of the validity, including negative or discrepant information presentation, peer consultation and rich description will be discussed in the following section, Data Analysis.

## **6.6 Data Analysis**

As an ongoing process, qualitative data analysis tends to investigate the art and practice of coding and analysing from a more conventionally systematic perspective (Shank, 2006). It entails continuously reflecting data, asking analytic questions, and not being sharply alienated from the other activities in the process, such as data collection (Creswell, 2003). Miles and Huberman's (1994) three procedures of data analysis were employed in this study, namely, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Thematic analysis and coding were used as the main strategies in this process. The relations between the findings and the key questions of the research have been explored.

Data analysis is primarily interpretive and deals with meanings, values and features of people and phenomena by utilising thematic approaches (Grbich, 2007), which permits the researcher to "contrast, compare, analyse, and bestow patterns" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 7). In other words, thematic analysis is the main route for the researcher to search for patterns in data and organise these patterns into themes after the jumble of confusions of raw data has been actively inspected (Shank, 2006). It insists that "the data should speak for themselves initially before any predesigned themes are imposed" (Grbich, 2007, p. 32)

As qualitative data can be “assembled, subclustered, broken into segments” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 7), in order to make initial sense of the raw data, reducing and grouping it into specific themes was essential. The first reduction of data occurred when the interview data was solicited by focusing on the six categories according to the literature review with a range of sub-questions. Firstly, one interview transcript was selected. Its responses to each question were read through carefully to elicit meaning and interpretation. At the same time, key words in responses were identified. By looking for emerging patterns, tentative themes were identified, and the emerging ideas and insights were recorded. The themes were also drawn from the literature review which was viewed as another rich source for themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or came from gut feelings as well (Grbich, 2007). After several interviews’ data were inspected, a list of tentative themes was produced and similar themes were clustered together.

To expand, it was necessary to discard these tentative themes and fully develop them into refined themes. Coding was employed here as the procedure of organising the data into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998 cited in Creswell, 2003). These tentative themes were abbreviated as codes. The data of the documents and the remaining interviews were coded, and new themes emerged while some were rejected. After comparing and contrasting, then using “cut and paste”, similar coded themes were grouped and turned into four categories: personal and family life WLB challenges; women at work; support at the workplace; and WLB strategies used by women.

The second major flow of analysis was data display. The narrative passages/sentences were employed to communicate the findings. The long and short quotations were adopted variedly. The descriptive data especially the conversation were based on participants’ wording, which attempts not only to convey a feeling of “walking in the informants’ shoes” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 135), but to present in detail the context and meanings of relevant events and scenes (Emerson, 1983). Presenting the direct verbatim quotes from participants was also employed to describe themes-as



examples of concepts, of theories, and of negative cases (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Here, to call attention to these quotations, indents and italic were utilised. Miles and Huberman's (1994) thematic conceptual matrix were involved to present an organised, compressed assembly of information indicating the relations between findings, and the researcher's account was built to convey the themes in a coherent way. This made valid conclusions and practical suggestions possible. For the sake of avoiding a loss of the context and to "give the discussion an element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196), the findings were conveyed with rich and thick description while insightful inferences and interpretations rather than a commonsense conclusion could be drawn (Denzin, 1989).

The third procedure within the data analysis was the interpretation of findings, which was also identified by Miles and Huberman's (1994) study as conclusion drawing and verification. This section was incorporated into the section of findings rather than in a separate one. The researcher amalgamated inferences drawn directly from the findings and the rational interpretive commentary was presented by citing relevant theories. Participants' quotations sometimes were intertwined with the researcher's interpretations (Creswell, 2003).

Considering the existence of miscellaneous opinions and perspectives in real life, apart from the general variables, it was unavoidable to have some negative information opposed to the theme (Creswell, 2003). For example, when 10 out of 12 Chinese female participants admitted that they had quite supportive managers who were always positively conducting flexible arrangements to help them deal with family issues, one participant gave a negative comment by stating that her manager showed apathy to employees' family issues.

In addition, some discrepant and extreme cases were also found. For instance, when asked if using the WLB policies and practices such as leave options might endanger their career development, the overwhelming majority of Chinese interviewees gave clear affirmative or negative answers as expected. There was just one response which

was distinctive from the others. The participant disclosed that she did not worry too much about this problem since she was not ambitious and would not like to aggressively look for promotion. She expressed that what she wanted was to enjoy her current life. These problems mentioned above were addressed by incorporating data and theory, discussing and putting forward a reasonable interpretation (Brannen, 1992), which might enhance the credibility of an account for a reader (Creswell, 2003).

To improve the accuracy of the description and explanation, as the research is thesis-based, a peer consultation was employed. The researcher's supervisors acted as the peer debriefers who were familiar with the broad area of study the researcher was engaged in (Creswell, 2003; Gillham, 2000). By reviewing, questioning and guiding the research, the supervisors had a powerful disciplining influence on the thinking of the researcher (Gillham, 2000). Therefore the research account also resonated with people other than the researcher. Furthermore, considering that in the "Bias clarification" section, some of the researcher's personal characteristics and experience were given in a detailed account, and the bias the researcher might bring to the research was articulated, such "self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with the reader" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

Finally, the study's contributions to theory, implications for practice, limitations and possible areas for future research are discussed.

## **6.7 Ethical Issues**

The case study along with much qualitative work research pays intense attention to personal visions and circumstances, and those "whose lives and expressions are portrayed risk exposure and embarrassment, as well as loss of standing, employment, and self-esteem" (Stake, 2000, pp. 447-448). All researchers have an obligation to ensure the participants' rights, needs, privacy, and well-being are protected (Berg, 2001). Since in any private space of the world, researchers are only guests and "their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict", and most importantly, "the

value of the best research is not likely to outweigh injury to a person exposed” (Stake, 2000, p. 447).

As this research mainly related to human subjects, an ethical approval was sought and granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethical Committee (AUTEC) (see Appendix 4)<sup>5</sup>. A range of key ethical principles containing “Informed and voluntary consent”, “Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality”, “Minimisation of risk”, and “Social and cultural sensitivity” have been cautiously dealt with and applied through the whole research (Auckland University of Technology, 2007b, p. 77):

—*Informed and voluntary consent.* All the participants of this research had been informed as to the research project including research methodology and its purposes. They had been given an Information Sheet that provided them with full disclosure about the research (Please refer to Information sheet)<sup>6</sup>. This was to guarantee that their privacy had been well protected, and at the same time to provide them information with respect to the things they could do if they had concerns and people they could contact for further information about the research. A Consent Form was required to be signed by each participant. This was to ensure that they were informed of the opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered. It was also to ensure that they were informed that their participation in this research was entirely voluntary and they were entitled to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw themselves or any information that they had provided for this study at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way. (Please refer to the Consent Form)<sup>7</sup>. Since the findings of this study were of particular interest to Chinese female staff, once the research summary of this project was finished, they were given the option of receiving a copy of the findings if desired.

—*Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality.* Every interviewee’s identity including their name and position remained confidential. “Chinese women”, “Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix 4 - Ethical Approval Memorandum.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix 5 - Participant Information Sheet.

<sup>7</sup> Appendix 6 - Participant Consent.

female participants” or “Chinese participants” were used to indicate the Chinese female administrative staff from a collective perspective. Individual Chinese female participants were given fictitious names, while “HR staff member”, “Union staff member”, or “ASN staff member” were the terms utilised to indicate the three staff members from HRD, the ASN and the AUT Branch of TIASA respectively, so that they could not be identified (see Appendix 1).

—*Minimisation of risk.* There was a small risk of participants feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed when they were asked for information about their own immigration experience. However, as participation in the project was voluntary, participants in the study were given the right to refuse to answer any question that they deemed embarrassing or that they did not wish to answer, or withdraw from the research at any time.

—*Social and cultural sensitivity.* All precautions had been taken with particular sensitivity to the participants including their feelings for society and culture. Considering that the researcher was herself Chinese and had the necessary bilingual skills and comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture, this increased her ability to respect and understand the social and cultural feelings of all participants.

## **6.8 Summary & Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the main factors in respect of the research methodology. A qualitative case study was employed to obtain the proper information to answer the research questions. Multiple methods including secondary research on WLB and AUT University’s WLB policies, the collection of archival evidence such as publicly available documentation, and the semi-structured interview have been adopted to collect qualitative data. The reasons for selecting AUT as the target organisation and Chinese administrative women as the participant group were discussed. After describing the background information of all participants and the process of in-depth interviews, the issues of triangulation, negative or discrepant information presentation,

bias clarification, peer consultation and rich description have been discussed, which may contribute to the validity of this study. Miles and Huberman's (1994) three procedures for data analysis were employed in this study. The ethical issues were also examined in this chapter. The research findings of the study will be presented and discussed in the following chapters.

## **7. Personal and Family Life WLB Challenges**

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### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings based on the interviews conducted under four areas: Chinese women's cultural experience of immigration, their family responsibilities, the FWC they faced and the tensions confronted by them in regard to their personal lives.

### **7.2 Experiences of Immigration**

Although the responses to their motivations for immigration were diverse, most of the Chinese women interviewed expressed a feeling of dissatisfaction with the status quo in their home country, compounded by a hope for changing in pursuit of a better future. In addition, New Zealand's favourable immigration policy, ideal natural environment, social democracy and lifestyle, and advanced educational system coincide with these motivations.

For "Linda" and "Caroline", New Zealand's favourable immigration policy and straightforward immigration process were the primary incentives for their decision to move to achieve a change in their lives. Although New Zealand had not been viewed as the port of destination at first, obtaining a satisfying job led Linda to abandon her initial plan for transiting to Australia and enjoys her current stable life in New Zealand. While "Teresa", "Karen" and "Peggy" came to New Zealand due to its incomparable natural environment, "Lucy" and "Nina" were attracted by its positive social system such as allowing freedom of speech and providing a dynamic style of education. Compared with "Sandy" who made up her mind and came to New Zealand as a result of complying with her husband's decision, "Michelle", "Ida", "Clare" and "Lynn" migrated due to the recommendations of their friends who had already lived in New Zealand and felt satisfied with their new lives.

There was a general perception among all Chinese women interviewed that the lifestyle in New Zealand was more relaxed and family-centred and totally different from their life back in China where people usually faced fierce competition and tended to be work-focused. Clare, who had lived in New Zealand for 13 years, compared the life differences between her and her friends in China:

*... their lives I feel [are] quite different from my life here. They're more like engines and go all the time; they are more stress out. And obviously most of them can only have one child ... so I become busier than them because I have two kids [laugh]. I guess the stress may be from life [rather] than work.*

For Lucy, she preferred the 'simple but healthier' life in the new country:

*It's happier and healthier here. You don't have to go out [and] eat with your clients ... because I used to work in China; I worked in [a] design company. We used to spend a lot of time with these people [clients]. Actually it's not good ...*

While Sandy and Nina felt their entertainment activities were restricted in New Zealand since in China they had many friends and usually spent most of their spare time meeting with them and going shopping together, Ida expressed her satisfaction with her current life considering the increase in opportunities and promoting access to sporting activities of all kinds.

The findings above appeared to parallel those of Wei (2007), in which empirical data indicated that most Chinese New Zealanders enjoyed their simple, healthy and family-oriented lives in New Zealand, as it is easy to attain "numerous opportunities and adequate freedom to pursue their own goals in their career and personal life" (p. 15). However, the different lifestyles between the two cultures may more or less bring both impacts and challenges.

Except for one participant, all the Chinese women interviewed admitted that they did not think that women in New Zealand had been considerably disadvantaged. They stated that while being women could be a barrier to finding a job in other countries, they felt it was easier in New Zealand for a female to get employed. There was just one participant who reported that she experienced mistrust at her first job:

*... because I studied electronics in engineer ... I got the first job in the car yard to fix the car, the electronics parts ... so I found out people didn't really trust women to do this job, because I thought they would like to see men staff [there] ... (Peggy)*

This correlated with previous research indicating that the social culture of New Zealand was viewed as relatively equal in contrast with other countries given that the gender differences varied across different nations, occupations and cultures (Blau & Kahn, 2007). Conversely, when women entered male-dominated occupations and took on non-standard work, the gender disadvantages and prejudices deeply rooted in social stereotypes would be unveiled and the prevailing attitudes and behaviours reminding women that they were in alien terrain would intensify (Maume & Houston, 2001). This disadvantageous situation would unavoidably add extra stress to these professional women.

There was a general belief among all Chinese participants that the traditional Chinese culture profoundly affected all aspects of their lives in New Zealand. The cultural differences between China and New Zealand were compared by Clare. She argued that most Chinese New Zealanders were more conservative and less aggressive in comparison with local people, and were culturally expected to be humble to deal with stress. Lynn analysed the positive and negative influences of being Chinese on her new life:

*... Chinese people have many good habits, we are good at saving; we are good at making money; we are good at working hard. These all gain respect from other people [with different ethnicities] ... we do have some*



*disadvantages as well. For example [pause and reflect] ... sometime we are not very active in the sports and we are not very warm-hearted compared to Kiwi.*

In the light of earlier acculturation studies (Ip, 2002; Kwok-bun, 2005), the results of the current study were not altogether surprising considering that Chinese typically displayed a strong sense of cultural perseverance and continuity, namely, being amazingly loyal to their own culture and exceptionally attached to their homeland. Therefore, it could be argued that apart from struggling with juggling work and personal lives, Chinese women had to overcome the difficulties deriving from bicultural stress: the set of emotional and physical upheavals produced by a bicultural existence (Thomas and Aldefer, 1989 cited in Kamenou, 2008).

It also became clear that all the Chinese females interviewed faced a number of cultural barriers to adaptation. Half of them mentioned that the main difficulty they encountered was the language problem. Linda, for example, stated that: “because English is not my first language, sometimes when I talk with people, I can’t completely express myself, so I feel a little bit frustrated.” The same problem was also confronted by the family members of some participants. Nina for example, stated that:

*... like my husband, his English is not good ... when I bring him to meet with my Kiwi friends, he doesn’t like ... he doesn’t want to talk in English. That’s the difficult[y]. For my parents-in-law ... they can’t speak English totally ... so they feel very bored all the time, no place to go, [and] no place to play.*

For these women, a lack of language proficiency was one of the primary factors that intensified their own cultural uprootedness and territorial displacement (Toren, 1999). Seeing that most of the women interviewed had higher levels of language proficiency than their family members, the problem for the latter was even more serious.

As new migrants, making new friends and establishing social networks may to a great extent smooth the assimilation. However, it was important to note that most women

(eight out of 12) indicated that still the majority of their friends were Chinese. Linda who had lived in New Zealand for seven years felt the cultural difference was the main barrier to making local friends. She sometimes invited her Kiwi friends to her house to have dinner and chat together, but she didn't think they were close. Sandy's argument provided further support in this regard:

*I have some Kiwi friends, but because of the culture differences, it is really hard to communicate [further with them] ... It's easy if I call my Chinese friends, "Would you like to come to visit us", or "can I come to visit you"? Easy, right? But if you have Kiwi friends, you seldom ask them to come ... It is like we don't know if we can invite them. We may feel embarrassed if we get rejected ...*

The findings gave an indication that the limited social network caused by the language and cultural barriers might notably reduce women's desire for assimilating to the dominant society and retard their progress of adjustment, thus resulting in a self-segregated situation to a certain extent (Yee, 2003; Young, 2001), and causing psychological problems (Sonderegger & Barrett, 2004; Young, 2001) and acculturative stress such as anxiety, low self-esteem and identity perplexity (Ponterotto et al., 1998; Sonderegger & Barrett, 2004).

As a common problem related to the ethnic groups, the empirical data indicated that discrimination and racism were additional tensions the women unavoidably faced. In view of the language barrier along with a lack of local working experience, some female participants felt it very difficult to find their first job. Lucy, for example, described her experience of searching the first job as a 'dark moment':

*... finding the first job was really hard. I did have experience of sending possible one hundred CVs, and [it was also] hard in the interviews. So [I was] very lucky to get this job [current job]. But I guess actually after you start, it's possibly ok, but [looking for] the first job was very hard.*

Revisiting earlier discussions in this study relating to the employment of ethnic minority women (Tzeng, 2006; Zulauf, 1999), the interview data showed that Chinese

migrant females confronted disadvantages when hunting for their first job and experienced difficulties in their initial entry into the labour force. Similar findings have also been found in Pio's (2005) empirical study of Indian female immigrants in New Zealand. It would be correct to suggest that the barrier to entering employment was one of the aspects of the discrimination Chinese women encountered, which lends support to Cabaniss and Fuller's (2005) claim that overt discriminatory practices in societal systems may augment and deteriorate the dilemma of ethnic migrant women. Such employment barriers not only increased their psychological burden, but worsened women's economic situation, which may limit their ability to achieve WLB and negatively affect their well-being accordingly.

There was evidence that discrimination still existed after these women entered employment. In her previous work, Lynn was employed as the case manager in a government agency. She once came across the situation that one of her customers requested a change in his case manager when he saw Lynn was not Kiwi. Although such situations had developed not only for Lynn, but also for others who belonged to the ethnic-minority group, she somehow felt unhappy, and even angry, but powerless to make changes.

Apart from employment, discrimination and racism in other aspects of society had been reported by some women:

*... when you go to kids' school, they know you are not local, even your kids were born here; you are not the majority ... New Zealand is not as bad as some other countries but the discrimination is still common, which [is] something you can't really change too much.*

A parallel perception was also held by Linda: "For my daughter, she has difficulties of mixing with the local kids ... when she entered the high school, the students started separating into different groups, like Asian group, European group, India group, Maori group."

The findings strongly resonate with the findings of previous studies (Beal & Sos, 1999; Cabaniss & Fuller, 2005; Kwok-bun, 2005; Wei, 2007), in which empirical data revealed that, as acculturation did not come easily, migrants had to make every effort to incorporate with the resettlement country by adopting a new language, revising one's beliefs and morals, making new friends and tackling racism, marginalisation and anomie, while maintaining an affiliation with their homeland on the other hand.

Although facing many cultural challenges, most Chinese respondents expressed their satisfaction with their WLB in the host country when compared to China. They felt the advanced welfare system and more equal social environment in New Zealand offered them more freedom and chances to lead their unique and desired lives. Moreover, the cultural experience of immigration made these women more flexible and adaptive to overcome all the kinds of difficulties encountered.

In addition, according to the interview data, a wide range of positive actions had been taken by these Chinese women to smooth their cultural adjustment. They took every opportunity to learn English, such as reading newspapers, listening to the radio, watching TV and going to language school. To learn local culture, they went out, communicated with local people, and participated in community activities. Some of them also positively expanded their social network and made a number of friends from different cultures. After several years' hardship, these women led a more stable life, as the following participant discussed:

*... when we came to New Zealand, we didn't have our house; we looked for work and set up our family and set up our economic base [smack] ... [but now] I [have already] bought house and set up the relationship with the neighbours and the community. Everything has been set up little by little.*  
(Lynn, who had been New Zealand for five years)

The results of the study disclosed that all participants had led a more stable life after several years of endeavour given that the sociocultural adaptation typically had linear progression over time and was positively related to the length of residence (Berry,

1999). This also lends support to Wei's (2007) conclusion that although WLB was viewed as a luxury in the initial stages of immigration, Chinese women have a natural resilience that assists them in tackling the challenges that accompany by immigration, which has, in turn, positive effects on their WLB.

### **7.3 Family Responsibilities**

For Chinese women, one of the main burdens they unavoidably carried was being housewives. Although all Chinese women interviewed believed that they always highly valued their work and put it first during work time, most of them (seven out of 12) admitted that their families would be their first priority when work demands clashed with family responsibilities and was at the expense of the care of their family, especially their children. Here, women who did not have care responsibilities and big family issues tended to prioritise their work over their family, expressing that they did not mind working longer hours when necessary, as long as such a primacy of work over family interests did not mean that they had to sacrifice too much in regard to their family lives. By contrast, women with younger children were inclined to put their family first after work hours given that their work restrictions greatly increased due to childcare obligations. The remarks made by Caroline were typical in this respect. She stated that she used to work a lot of overtime when she was in China. But she felt her life now has changed a lot and she tends to spend more time with her family. Especially, after the birth of her second child, she had to take more family responsibilities.

Considering the unfathomable impact of Chinese culture on Chinese women's attitudes to family, the results of this study were not surprising at all, and correlate with previous research indicating that family-centredness and child-rearing are symbols of traditional Chinese culture, and therefore women tend to give priority to their families (Chiu & Kosmski, 1995; Peng & Wang, 2005). Although Chinese women at some stages of their lives (e.g. at the initial stage of their immigration) could prioritise their work and careers over family (see Wei, 2007), such precedence would change following the change in their family situation. For example, after leading a more stable life and having

children in particular, women may become more family-oriented due to the caring responsibilities.

While some household tasks could be shared to a varying extent by their family members, most of the female respondents still undertook the majority of the family responsibilities. This was congruent with the discussion provided by previous qualitative studies (Konrad & Mangel, 2000). According to Taylor (2002, cited in Woodward, 2007), women's family responsibilities were likely to be at their height in their 30s and 40s when they have significant care responsibilities, which may influence WLB and cause conflicts between work life and family life (Fursman, 2006). As nine of the Chinese female participants' ages were between 30 and 50, it was understandable that some of them assumed fairly heavy family duties.

Generally, those who had children and did not live with their parents faced the heaviest family burdens, needing to cope with most of the child caring and domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, and laundering. Caroline (the mother of two boys) described her typical activities when she returned from work:

*I cook for the whole family. I think I am [the] most important person in my family. My husband is pretty busy at his work, so he doesn't do much [house work] ... sometime he cleans with vacuum. I think I look after the boys a lot, I check their homework, and do the most of the [house] work ... Every time I go home, I cook, because my boys, the younger one is 9 and the elder one is 12, they eat a lot [Chuckles] ...*

For interviewees with care responsibilities and who lived with their parents/parents-in-law, the family responsibilities they assumed were obviously less than those not living with such relatives owing to the family support they received from their parents/parents-in-law.

Reverting to the earlier discussion in this study relating to the astronauting family (Aye & Guerin, 2001; Ho, 2003), it was usually difficult for women with an astronauting husband to handle a mishmash of aspects of life on their own account in New Zealand.

Nevertheless, the empirical data have indicated that in this case Chinese women's plight was greatly improved with the parents/parents-in-law's support. Since her husband travelled back and forth between China and New Zealand, Clare felt a lot of stress when her husband was not at home. But she felt very lucky to get help from her parents-in-law:

*I got my parents-in-law here ... they are still healthy. They look after the kids after school and go to shopping and [do] cooking and everything. I guess later in their life I will look after them, but currently they still quite expect to help ... I am lucky to have my parents-in-law support me. That's big thing due to our cultural background that grandparents they feel like they have responsibility to look after their grandchildren ...*

After work or at weekends, it was noted that the interviewees with younger children often spent some time on child-related activities such as ferrying them to school or to all kinds of classes (e.g. dancing, music) or activities (e.g. visiting friends, sports). Similar results have been found in Woodward's (2007) empirical study, which were that some of women's time after work and at weekends was occupied by servicing children's activities. Comments from participants suggested that Chinese women tended to encourage their kids to participate in local activities, which was viewed as a significant way to encourage children's involvement into the local society.

The research also indicated that the lightest family burden was borne by unmarried women or mothers without dependent children. When there was no need to take care of a child any more, Karen felt that her family life became easier: "Because for me, my son is adult, I don't need more time to look after him ... or send him to school, send him to hospital ... so it's a little bit simple and easier." For Teresa and Michelle, who both had no children yet, they shared the housework with their partners and believed they could achieve a better WLB than the mothers with younger children.

The findings above were consistent with previous studies indicating that for Chinese women, their ways of arranging their household and organising care responsibilities were significantly affected by their family conditions and structure (Read & Cohen,

2007). There was also an indication that most of the conflicts between work and family were caused by care responsibilities (Fursman, 2006; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Read & Cohen, 2007).

#### **7.4 Family–Work Conflict**

It has been widely observed that employees' family demands regularly interfere with their ability to carry out work demands (Cleveland, 2005). Female participants in the study with younger children reported that child-related issues such as picking up kids, attending school meetings or taking children to hospital usually required them to take time off work.

Other family–work conflicts reported by these Chinese women encompassed car-related problems (e.g. car broken down) and family emergencies. Lynn described a family issue she recently experienced:

*... that happens before I took a holiday last month in May [pause and reflect] ... Before I went on holiday, there was a family issue. It was an emergency and needed to be solved as soon as possible but we needed to wait for the other party's feedback as well. So at that time, [the issue] made me very stressed. It was a big issue but I needed to go to work every day as normal ... Sometimes I just felt I couldn't 100% concentrate on the work ... because I worried too much about the issue... I also used the break time like to call the lawyers and tried to get things done.*

As these emergencies were unintended and had an immediate effect, they were inclined to throw the people's individual and working lives into chaos, and demanded an urgent reorganisation of usual arrangements (State Services Commission, 2005b), which could be a time of enormous stress and tension and produce family-related distress or behaviours such as less family satisfaction (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, & Walters, 2002; Fu & Shaffer, 2001).



## 7.5 Personal Life

Access to time for self outside of work and family responsibilities can be vital to people feeling a sense of relaxation, as the time for self includes a wide variety of things such as “family, friends, pets, leisure, recreation, unpaid home activity, caring for children, and love-motivated activities” (Harris & Pringle, 2008, p. 1).

### 7.5.1 Study-related Conflicts

For some Chinese interviewees, they had to spend some of their personal time on studying in order to constantly upskill themselves and pursue good career prospects. However, since Chinese females culturally put themselves last on the list, and most of their time is spent on their work and family responsibilities, the ‘time for self’ therefore gets the lowest priority (Wei, 2007). Hence, it was not surprising that finding time to study was mentioned by these women as a big challenge. As the HR staff member pointed out, this was a common issue many staff confronted: “A lot of staff want qualifications, [they need to] find enough study time and they work on weekends or nights, or they go to classes at night. So that can really impact their free time.” One participant felt stressed when she needed to work and study at the same time:

*I think now [I feel] a little bit stressed, because I just started studying the library qualification and library course at the moment, so I have to work full time but take part[-time] study ... After[a] full day [of] work, it is quite hard for me to concentrate on my study.*

Nina suffered from the clash between work and study: “Like yesterday, my class started at 2 o’clock, but you know yesterday was very busy. I couldn’t like run away. So I worked to 3 o’clock and went for my class.”

The findings of Woodward’s (2007) empirical study revealed that study activities required an extended period of concentration often inaccessible at the office on weekdays. This appeared to be supported by the findings of this study.

### **7.5.2 Personal Activities–Family Responsibilities’ Conflicts**

Some interviewees felt their personal time at home was quite limited due to family responsibilities. Linda, for example, argued that:

*You know we work 8 hours every day. After go[ing] back home, you wouldn't have much spare time left. Like in the winter, if I go back, it has been already dark, so I can't go outside to have a walk, [or] do some exercise. Just cook, then prepare the next day's lunch ... go to bed.*

For Ida, even on the weekend, she was always entangled with tedious chores: “Only on weekend, we had a lot of time...but most of the time was still spent on the housework.” A similar situation was faced by Lynn:

*When I got home like 6 pm or 6.15 pm, it was already dark and I felt very tired after a whole day's work. I also needed to cook and take care of the family. So that may be one of the typical conflicts ... when I finished all the work, it's already like 8.30 pm in the evening, and I felt my own time was very limited for myself to do some[thing else], maybe to develop personal interest or learn some knowledge, maybe just to get on the internet to look around or talk with my family members in China. So I felt stressed and unhappy as well.*

MacDermid's (2005) claim that the personal activities might conflict more directly with family work (e.g. cooking, laundering, or cleaning) than employment because they usually occur during evenings and weekends appeared to be supported by the results of the current study.

### **7.5.3 Recreation and Well-being**

Although Chinese women culturally tended to neglect their self-care, social life, recreation and leisure, their experience of immigration “broadens their horizons to experience diverse cultures, meet new people and attend events” (Wei, 2007, p. 133). Through the empirical data of the study, as discussed earlier, women's personal

activities (e.g. reading, surfing the internet and studying) usually occurred after work, while the recreational activities in weekends or holidays were mainly family-oriented, encompassing going shopping/fishing, having a special dinner, going to the cinema/park/museum/beach, and traveling. Lynn described her typical weekend: “At weekend, we [family] always find one day to spend together. Usually on Sunday we go out together for dinner. We go out for dinner at least once every week ... And [then] we wander around the city [laughs].”

This indicated that, after one week busy working, making quality time with family was viewed by these women as a main way to relax and satisfy their psychological involvement in their family role, which greatly contribute to the quality of their lives (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

In the holidays, most women interviewed usually went overseas with their family. Especially for those whose parents were not in New Zealand, they often spent their holidays on going back to China. However, there was clear evidence that for women whose parents were still in China, they hope to collect most of their leave days for visiting them. As for Clare, whose parents were both in China, she went back to China almost every year to visit them. But considering the high travel expenses, she had to accumulate all her leave days to stay longer in China:

*For me I save my leave days for the holiday when I go back, [and] I don't take any other leave ... I want to use all the days for my trip; I give up taking other leaves to go to other things. So that's just something you have to sacrifice.*

This situation raises questions about how these women handle their daily tension between work and family lives without using any leave days during the year and to what extent these women would be able to achieve their WLB. Further, managers need to be aware of the potential hazard that Chinese women may face due to a lack of rest during the year, and efforts that could be made to help them avoid burnout.

Physical recreation and leisure activities such as massaging, climbing, swimming, going to the gym were typically employed by women as favourite ways to relax. In addition, by visiting friends and participating in community activities, these ladies had built up their social networks. This gave an indication that moderate recreation, exercise, and social activities could benefit women's physical and mental health, facilitate their social adaptation, and eventually contribute to their WLB. This was congruent with the findings of Wei (2007) indicating that all types of involvement have helped them engage with a social network, establish good friendships and become a part of the local community.

## **7.6 Summary & Conclusion**

A range of findings have been discussed in this chapter. The major discussion indicated that, although Chinese women enjoyed their simple, healthy and family-oriented life and the relatively equal social culture in New Zealand, they still faced a number of cultural barriers such as language problems, limited social networks, employment obstacles, racism and discrimination. In addition, a number of positive actions were taken by them to ease their adaptation, namely, taking every opportunity to learn English and local culture, positively expanding their social network and participating in social and community activities. Given that the experience of immigration made Chinese women more flexible and adaptive to cope with the challenges that come with their immigration, after several years' hardship, all of them now lead a more stable life.

The findings also showed that Chinese women tended to give priority to their families, albeit that they all attached high importance to their work. For these women, their ways of arranging their households and organising their childcare or eldercare were influenced by their family situation. Those who had children and did not live with their parents faced the heaviest family burdens by taking on the most of the child caring and domestic chores. For the interviewees having care responsibilities and living with their parents/parents-in-law, the family responsibilities they assumed were noticeably less than those not living with their parents/parents-in-law since the support from their

parents/parents-in-law mitigates the pressure from daily domestic errands. After work or at weekends, women with younger children often spent some time on children-related activities. As most of the conflicts between work and family were caused by care responsibilities, the fewest family burden/family–work conflicts were faced by mothers living with adult children and unmarried women with no children.

In relation to FWC, Chinese females with younger children often encounter some children-related issues and personal emergencies. In addition, the findings of the study indicated that finding time to study was one of the challenges Chinese women faced. Conflicts between women’s personal activities and family responsibilities were also reported. While women’s recreational activities in weekends or holidays were mainly family-oriented, their personal activities usually occurred after work. The women actually engage in physical recreation such as climbing, swimming, or going to a gym as effective ways to relax, reduce stress and maintain fitness and health. Moderate social activities facilitated women’s social adaptation and were found to gradually contribute to WLB. The tensions faced by women at work are discussed in the next chapter.

## 8. Women at Work

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### 8.1 Introduction

Three specific themes from the findings are discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the organisational culture is discussed. The second area covers the workplace issues faced by Chinese women including tensions caused by workloads, deadlines, difficult situations and WFC. Their job satisfaction is also included. This is followed by a discussion of effects of gender, ethnicity and cultural experience on their work.

### 8.1 Organisational Culture

AUT's commitment to equity and diversity has been well built into the organisational system and policies, however, organisational culture "is not necessarily what is stated and explicit" but the reality and "the way things are done around here" (State Services Commission, 2005b, p. 21). It was widely acknowledged during the interviews with participants in this study that as a good employer, AUT provided a positive working environment for its staff through its favourable academic atmosphere and equity and diversity setting.

Linda, Clare and Peggy expressed their enjoyment of working in the academic environment where many people working or studying here had relatively high qualifications, had been provided with more chances to learn and were motivated to upgrade their skills. AUT was also regarded as an employer advocating equity and diversity, with the following kind of remark commonplace:

*... it's just because we are now contact centre, we have people from all different background. We have people from Pacific islands, from other Asian countries, India, Indonesia, from everywhere, so I don't think the [cultural] background [matters] ... so I am basically satisfied and it's quite equal.*  
(Clare)

For Lynn, she argued that AUT's multicultural environment improved the organisational cohesiveness. In such a cultural context, she stated that people became more adaptable in embracing diversity and accepting people with different ethnicities:

*... the colleagues in the university are better than other [sector's] colleagues because they come across students from different cultures every day. So sometimes I can feel they are very interested in Chinese culture ... we learn each other's culture. By leaning each other's culture we understand each other more.*

Similar comments were given by Michelle:

*... I was the only Chinese in the school when I first started my job, three Asian people in our school. So in the beginning peoples ... they knew I was Chinese, but just when things have gone, they sort of start forgetting I am not the Kiwi people I am Chinese ... So, now they just look me as a workmate, not a Kiwi or a foreigner or a Chinese, which is good.*

Caroline and Peggy believed that AUT was very supportive of employees and their family members, and felt happy with the variety of flexible policies in AUT.

In spite of such positive comments, some negative remarks regarding the workplace culture were also given by some participants. While Nina felt her manager could be a little apathetic on the part of employees' family issues, the Union staff member discussed issues around breaks taken in the workplace:

*[When] I first came to AUT, people ... took lunch. If they had lunch, they stood nearby the desk ... To me that's really strange. That's not a lunch space. It's like eating at your computer ... like one person would [like to] leave so another person would [say] like: "Oh, I'm not gonna leave". So it was the culture. If one leaves for the breaks, and you know there was just crazy ... sit[ting] behind your computer for seven or eight hours a day doesn't mean you are actually a productive and effective staff member. Yeah, I could sit behind [the computer] ... but I could [just] play games, I could be on the Internet, nobody knows ...*

As WLB is part of an organisational culture, WLB policies and practices within organisations are inevitably affected by such wide environmental contexts (Coffey & Tombari, 2005). Thompson et al. (1999) defined work–family culture as the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organisation supports and values the integration of staff’s work and non-work lives. The research findings above indicated the coexistence of the positive and negative sides of organisational culture. As positive results from WLB practices can only be achieved when the organisational culture is supportive and staff are actually confident of using their benefits, WLB initiatives could be undermined to a certain extent due to the existence of the negative side of organisational culture (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

Even though there are so many WLB initiatives available in AUT, surprisingly, most interviewees’ awareness of them was low. The Chinese female interviewees fell into two different groups when asked if they knew of any formal WLB policy and practice at their workplace. The majority of the group (seven out of 12) gave a negative answer by stating that they had no idea about the WLB policies in AUT. For others, their responses showed that their knowledge about WLB policies was also limited and many could identify just one or two of the policies. It was interesting to note that the women’s awareness of WLB policies had not improved following their working years at AUT.

However, after a policies list (see Table 3) had been provided, most women admitted that they knew or used many policies, especially those working at the university more than seven years expressing that they were quite well acquainted with most of the policies listed, while a few still showed a limited knowledge about them. This may be due to the problematic internal communication in AUT. Connected with this, the research showed that female respondents learned about the WLB-related policies mainly through the orientation programme, the AUT website, recommendations from managers or colleagues, and advertisements (e.g. posters, brochures). Caroline, for example, explained that:



*... [during] those orientations, [when] each new staff arrives, they give you lot of information [as] they have introduction pack ... I think the TIASA-[the]Union and allied staff<sup>8</sup> they gave us quite a lot of information. Also lots of information is [accessible] on the staff notice board on the website ...*

However, Linda discussed that although most policies had been introduced by the university at the new staff orientation, when facing information overload, people may overlook some important information. Therefore she suggested that AUT should promote its service by enhancing its advertising efforts.

The comments given by the HR staff member corresponded with Linda's suggestion. She discussed that it was necessary to advertise more and to ensure that the employees had a clear idea about the WLB policies:

*Probably [employees] just [need] more clarity around the entitlements, benefits, and what's available ... So a lot more advertising in terms of the actual benefits [is necessary]. I should say benefits don't need to be increased. All the entitlements and the things all seem very good, but just more clarity and some more advertising.*

The research indicated that Chinese women's exposure to the WLB policies was either by need or chance rather than because AUT was proactive in ensuring all individuals were introduced to the proper documentation and procedures (Naming & Wright, 2006). Without knowledge of the types and extensiveness of WLB options available, staff were unable to take advantage of them (Prottas, Thompson, Kopelman, & Jahn, 2007).

Since one of the big barriers of WLB practices' implementation was organisational inaction, namely, a lack of effective communication within organisation (De Cieri et al., 2005), WLB policies needed to be widely communicated in order that staff were aware of what was available. In other words, communication across all levels of employees was significantly important with opportunities available for everyone to talk about their views and perceptions of WLB and with forums that would facilitate discussions

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<sup>8</sup> Allied staff- Administrative/Non Academic Staff.

on the needs of specific groups of individuals (Kamenou, 2008). In addition, the work–life package needed to be publicised, at a minimum posted on the organisational web site, since the greater the range of provisions recognised to be available, the greater the benefit to employees, to reinforce the commitment to WLB initiatives (Bird, 2006).

The Union staff member explained that many WLB policies existed in AUT, but they were not actually acknowledged as WLB initiatives in an ‘umbrella’ WLB policy, and people even did not say the words WLB. As one of the HR policies, WLB policies have the characteristics of being ‘commitment initiatives’, which may shape employee behaviour and attitudes by building a psychological link between organisation and employee goals (Arthur, 1994). It would be fair to say that setting up a formal WLB strategy/programme could ensure that both employer and employees had a thorough understanding about the concept of WLB, and enhance their commitment to creating a healthy workplace.

Although AUT has already a wide range of WLB-related policies on specific situations, they are separately located for example, in employment agreements and health and well-being, it would be highly beneficial to pull them together and merge them all in one general WLB programme (Bird, 2006), and to have them allied to the organisational vision and business strategy. This may smooth the progress of the implementation of all initiatives in a more systematic and standard way without being secluded from the organisational goals.

There were different perceptions among the participants of this study towards the concept of WLB, for example:

*[WLB means that] maintaining a healthy balance is a demand for both the work and home [pause], and achieving what you have desired within both.*  
(HR staff member)

*It [WLB] means a healthy employee who can understand that they get to work but at a certain point when they return home they totally focus on*

*their spiritual, physical and mental well-being ... [your work] should actually be [in] harmony with your physical self, spiritual self, mental self ... for a lot of people at AUT, they do study as well, so it means [being] able to harmonise all of those things, all the responsibilities in their life, which [means] work is just one of them. (Union staff member)*

*Personally, [WLB] is just being able to have time for my family. I have a young son; he is two and a half. So for me, [WLB is] being able to be there for him when I need to ... When he feels not well, I can sort of start [working] later ... So it's just being able to adapt flexibly ... (ASN staff member)*

This gave an indication that since the meaning of WLB varied for employees at different stages during their life, often in response to milestones on the road of life (Department of Labour, 2004), their preferences in respect of work–life benefits varied according to their age and stage of family development due to the diversity and autonomy of needs (Lingard & Francis, 2005). It was also understandable that female interviewees having no certain kind of demands may not consider using some policies. The ASN staff member explained this by taking an example: “They [employees] would not seek child care if they did not have a child.” A similar argument was given by Caroline, the mother of two kids: “I think it’s just because I gave birth to a baby, otherwise I wouldn’t notice it [childcare].” Here, efforts should be made by managers to ensure that the needs of staff were reviewed on a regular basis in order that WLB practices were applicable to them (Lingard & Francis, 2005).

According to the interview data, AUT had some advantages over other organisations in New Zealand with respect to its WLB-related policies. The ASN staff member discussed that as a public organisation, AUT was more family-focused than some commercial organisations, although more and more commercial organisations did take the issue of WLB seriously. When compared to other universities in New Zealand, the HR staff member believed that although the universities generally had good family-oriented policies, AUT was more generous in terms of leave provisions and did have some unique initiatives such as the buyable leave (4 for 5 / 2 for 2.5 schemes):

*... the 4 for 5 schemes ... we won award for that in 2003 and that's you have 80 percent of your salary. It's over four years; we deduct 20% of your salary, and in the fifth year we will pay you the rest salary. You can have a year off, so a lot of allied staff do that ...*

It was encouraging to see that the WLB practices in AUT were designed to cover all staff. The ASN staff members, for example, asserted that WLB practices were attractive for employees with different ethnicities when achieving WLB became imperative due to more and more dual-earner families' emergence:

*... because there is more and more two income earners in a family rather than one, so whatever ethnicity, you look around [and will find] more and more men and female are working. In the past in eastern culture probably the wives stayed at home as long as they had children ... while their husbands were working. But now it is not the case. Both husbands and wives are working. So it's attractive to any ethnicity.*

This strongly resonates with the discussion of Harris and Pringle (2008) that WLB policies should be affordable and available to all employees in organisations. In other words, WLB policy should be fair, equitable and obtainable by all staff regardless of their working pattern, gender, culture, belief, and religion. But since 'one size does not fit all', WLB policies need to reflect the distinctive demands of employees from different cultures by embracing representatives of all employee groups who would be influenced (Lingard & Francis, 2005).

Connected with this, there was evidence that AUT's WLB policies were also fairly attractive to ethnic employees from a culture that esteemed eldership, observed filial piety and emphasised care, especially eldercare, responsibilities. The Union staff member thus stated:

*... I'm sure for Chinese, family is very important, especially old people ... A lot of initiatives are based on caring for dependents. People think dependence is just children ... [actually] a dependent could be my elderly mother ... because it's good you can ring up and say: "I have to look after my mum or take my mum to the hospital and take a day [off]", and AUT [says] like: "Ok!". So I think it's really attractive to Chinese culture because*

*AUT recognises that families are esteemed. I mean the beautiful thing is that you know Maori is our indigenous culture so we have cultural aspects in our collective agreement about things like funeral leave ...*

As stated earlier, women tended to assume most of the domestic roles and encounter more work–family conflicts/family–work conflicts than men. One would expect therefore that WLB policies were especially attractive to female staff. The HR staff member stated that many female staff came to work for AUT due to its good reputation in family support policies:

*I think they [WLB policies] are very attractive to female staff ... especially when we got a high proportion of female staff at AUT. Staff deliberately come to AUT, especially female staff with children who want part time work, who want flexible hours, and they recognise AUT is good employer. So we advertised; we promoted those policies.*

The findings were fully consistent with previous studies in the literature, especially with regard to the gender role socialisation (e.g. Konrad & Mangel, 2000), which suggested that women utilised childcare provisions more frequently than their male counterparts in consideration of their dual burden: being housekeeper and income earner simultaneously.

### **8.3 Workplace Issues**

The type of culture that exists in the organisation will significantly shape women's workplace experiences and generate work-related issues. The interviews showed that the reasons that Chinese women chose their current job were diverse. Half of them admitted that they took their current job to meet their financial needs. This seemed to reveal women's disadvantageous situation discussed in previous studies: ethnic minority women tended to work full time and be another breadwinner to improve the family's economic status (e.g. Glenn, 1994). Other reasons were reported by these women. Some expressed that they liked to work in an academic setting and deal with students, while three of them took the jobs because they related to their qualifications or previous working experience. Two participants also stated that they desired to pursue their career

rather than become a full-time housewife. As Lynn commented, she thought work was one part of life and urged people to improve their skills, refresh their knowledge, and seek their personal fulfillment accordingly.

These findings indicated that Chinese women taking on a job mainly confronted economic issues and that employment can, more or less, gratify their economic needs, albeit that attempts to build up a career and enrich the life experience may also inspire their desire for a job (Orcutt & Sanders, 1993).

### ***8.3.1 Workloads***

The workloads of Chinese women interviewed varied across different working roles. Participants working in administrative roles usually had to handle many tasks from multiple areas in view of the fact that they worked very closely with both academic staff and students, and covered roles in student services and academic backup. Michelle described her typical day at work as including answering students' queries about courses' or papers' selection, handling enrolling and applications, arranging timetables and room changes, and supporting academic staff. Caroline, on the other hand emphasised her role as the 'first contact' when students had queries: "They come to see us or talk to us first, and then if we can't answer the question, we refer them to programme leader or academic staff. But we usually are the first contacts."

The findings above appeared to fully support previous studies in literature (Hirt et al., 2005; Hirt et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2005; Park, 1996; Rafaeli et al., 1997), which indicated that in most organisational settings, the administrative job was essential to ongoing functioning and organisational success. Administrative employees tended to perform boundary-spanning and service roles, engaging in considerably more types of service activities and dealing with various sets of clients, such as students, faculty and business executives, in two normative contexts (e.g. the university and the business community).

The interviews revealed that the major tension at work faced by the majority of women interviewed (nine out of 12) was their heavy workloads. The Union staff member believed that the workload issue was probably the biggest issue, not just for academic staff, but the administrative employees as well. This was especially so for Chinese females working in administrative roles and in student services. This may be due to the fact that the individuals who had too much rather than too little work were generally presumed to confront more conflicts between their family and work lives (Harris & Pringle, 2008).

Through the interview data, although most women experienced stress from the heavy workloads, there was some seasonal variability. The ‘crazy time’ usually occurred before every semester’s start. For Caroline, she felt that, apart from the peak time, the workloads were still controllable:

*Well, we have busy peak times ... between semesters is very busy. Many students enroll and [we get] many phone calls. We have to prepare the timetable and we have to report them [managers] last semester’s result. That’s quite busy. But during semester, generally, I think it’s not too bad.*

This was somewhat similar to the research findings of Woodward (2007), albeit that her study focused on the women managers in universities. Not surprisingly, staff shortages were mentioned by some participants as the main crux of the heavy workload. Karen stated that she had to handle extra jobs due to the limited staff:

*... because everyone is busy now ... we definitely need more staff in our office...since the shortage of staff we have to think about how we handle the promotion material by ourselves. Dispatching of course is the simple thing but [it] takes time.*

Before a part-time employee was employed, one respondent, as the only person in her office, described herself as a “quite busy person”. She had to do everything in her office, such as tidying up the room, maintaining the database, organising the magazines and books, and answering students’ questions face-to-face or by email. Since she was also

responsible for international affairs, it was normal for her to be the translator when required. Likewise, Lynn argued that her role determined that she was always busy:

*... we are busy at all the time. At the beginning of the semester, we have more staff, because the campus staff will come back to work together with us, but at that time the workload is actually double or three times than current, so we are busy at that time ... people will think this is examination period, exam time, so we shouldn't get busy compared to the beginning of the semester. But actually ... [now] we only have one person staying on the desk for the whole day, and we need to keep talking for the whole day as well.*

For Lynn, sometimes lunch breaks were a rarity and her personal leave was also limited:

*We need to keep the desk attended all the time ... Sometimes we do need to take break and need to go to the bathroom, and have a rest. But if we get very busy sometimes, especially when we stay by ourselves, we can't find another person to cover us. So my breaks are delayed. And that definitely adds stress to me ...*

According to some Chinese interviewees, the shortage of staff was mainly due to school restructuring and a lack of budget. Other possible reasons could be poor job design or the managers' lack of commitment to being the backup for staff. The findings also supported the previous research in respect of the theories of resource scarcity and resource drain (e.g. Huang et al., 2004; Martins et al., 2002), which suggested that resource scarcity such as staff shortages may mean that there was limited capacity in the workplace to assist people in balancing work with their personal duties, and cause higher workloads and more stress at work as existing employees needed to cover vacancies. Such situations may deteriorate when the vacancies took a long time to fill.

Some negative spillover from high workloads was reported by some interviewees. For example, one respondent commented that:

*I think I had a lot of stress last year ... not only last year, [but] the year before last. I mean since I started my work at AUT, because I was the only person [in my office] ... So actually I had a lot of independence, a lot of*



*freedom, but at the same time, I have a lot of responsibilities: [to] organise things, think by myself, and do things by myself ... Last year my stress was exploded, I felt sick. I had to see the doctor ... It has become chronic disease called repetitive strain injury ... because [of] too much typing [and] computer work ...*

It has been argued that while short-term stress could be stimulating, people taking a job where there is ongoing, constant exposure to stress may feel exhausted and devastated, which eventually results in some negative spillovers such as anxiety, tension, discontentment, confusion and frustration (Kinman & Jones, 2005), and undermines the employee's well-being and organisational commitment as well (Poelmans et al., 2003).

### **8.3.2 Deadlines**

Another challenge encountered by the Chinese women interviewed was due to deadline issues. Lucy, for example, discussed her deadline stress: "When I have a project, the project has to be finished before the deadline, and [I also need to] push people to do their job, I feel a little bit stressed." The issue of deadline could be viewed as another type of resource scarcity—time scarcity and explained by the role conflicts theory proposed in previous studies (Huang et al., 2004; Martins et al., 2002), which indicated that when employees had insufficient time and limited energy to meet all kinds of deadlines and take extra responsibilities, they can feel frustrated and dissatisfied (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

### **8.3.3 Difficult Problems**

It would appear that, when facing difficult problems at work, Chinese interviewees were more likely to feel strained. Nina thus remarked: "I feel stressed when I meet some tricky problems ... they [AUT] can't give students answer straight away, so sometimes they [students] blame you, but it's not your fault. So sometime if the situation happened, I felt very stressed." In addition, although organisational systems always need to be improved, one participant thought that some of AUT's systems

caused trouble sometimes. She argued that the time-consuming process of problem-solving usually added extra stress on her.

The findings above correlated with previous research indicating that work for these females on administrative staff was demanding, highly nerve-racking, but that enacting change on campus took time (Hirt et al., 2006).

#### **8.3.4 Work–Family Conflicts**

There was a great deal of evidence in earlier discussion in this study that the number of work hours was linked to the amount of work–family conflicts (e.g. Harris & Pringle, 2008; Maume & Houston, 2001). In other words, the more hours people work, the higher level of work interference with family, and the lower their psychological and physical well-being (Major, Klein, & Erhart, 2002; Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005).

Through the empirical data of this study, the work–family conflicts faced by Chinese women were usually caused by *bringing work home, working for longer time periods or emergency callbacks after work*. As Linda admitted, she often suffered from sleep problems due to bringing work home: “Sometimes I like to bring things back home and think about work in the middle of night, so I cannot have a good sleep.” Caroline, who has two boys and was responsible for the cooking at home, stated that: “When I was very busy, I would go home late, and the whole family is waiting for me to eat [laugh].” Karen also described her experience of emergency callback during her vacation:

*I remembered [once] I came back from overseas ... should have two days off. But my boss said they wanted some [my] comments on restructuring, and they waited for me. So I just came to AUT ... to meet the boss and share my opinions.*

It was interesting to note that most women did not express antipathy to the conflicts they experienced. The possible explanation for this could be that female staff might

feel that organisational demands on their time and energy seemed to be more irrefutable than those of the family because of the financial contribution of work to the family's well-being (Cleveland, 2005), especially considering that the cases of overwork and callback did not happen frequently and would not impact their family lives too much. This might also be attributed to personal characteristics such as the propensity to take on too many commitments (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; MacDermid, 2005). For instance, Linda believed her personality determined that she could not separate her work and life as she tended to bring work home in order to perform it well.

There was also evidence that thinking about work at home—being unable to switch off—was more likely to cause WFC. The Union staff member discussed that the worst case scenario was that, for many people, the harmony between their work and family had been disrupted since when they went home they could not switch off; they tended to keep thinking about their work or their unpleasant employment relationship with others, which may manifest in a physical way so they may feel very unwell and stressed. She felt a job providing people with financial support meant that they could enjoy all the other parts of their lives. She emphasised that health should be the priority for everyone as it was the base for everything such as a good job or a happy family.

The findings above lend support to Eikhof, Warhurst, and Haunschild's (2007) comments that while some employees experience work and life as separate and balanceable, for others, "work and life are intertwined, even amalgamated, so that they cannot or do not want to distinguish and disentangle work and life." (p. 326)

A good atmosphere in both work and family was reported by several Chinese female participants as the prerequisite for achieving WLB. Linda believed that people who were happy with their personal life may concentrate on their work and become more efficient than those struggling with WLB issues. Caroline also gave a deep insight into such mood spillover:

*I think if you are happy with family, then you [are] happy at work ... when everything has been done in your family, you won't think of the family while you work here; if you finish everything at work you don't have to worry about work in the family ... [Otherwise] your family will suffer as well. Quite important to have happy family and then work happily at work.*

This seemed to reveal the importance of managing the work–life boundary in view of the fact that negative moods in one realm may impede the person's ability to fulfill role demands in the other realm (Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker, & Larson, 1994 cited in Edwards & Rothbard, 2005).

#### **8.4 Job Satisfaction**

Although many tensions were reported by female participants at work, it was widely acknowledged by all of them during the interviews that they, more or less, found enjoyment in their jobs. This would make the findings of the present study contradictory to those of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), which found that stress was more likely to be related to job dissatisfaction.

However, evidence from the interviews also indicated that women in managerial positions saw their work as enjoyable owing to being given more entitlements, trust and autonomy. This may be one possible explanation and was comparable with the comments of some researchers (Harris & Pringle, 2008; McPherson & Reed, 2007) that managers and professionals having greater flexibility and autonomy in their roles were more likely to get satisfaction due to a great sense of entitlement, especially for those working in administrative roles (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006).

Two respondents in managerial positions expressed their satisfaction with the feelings of control and autonomy:

*This organisation is quite a big one, a sort of public service ... this organisation is not like private sector [organisations], [in] which the boss watches all the time [chuckle]. We unify our initial course, and we control our working loads, so we know what we need to do. [Not] like working*

*under some other people's supervision. It's self-control for us ... I quite enjoy that ...*

*... I am just quite independent; I do my own job every day. Basically you know I have bosses, but they don't really watch what I do all the time. We do report them and contact them, but I look after myself most of the time. I got sort of satisfaction from my job.*

Another manager interviewed stated that the multifaceted role at work was the main motivation keeping her passion for work. It may be due to the fact that the combination of roles may contribute to a broadened perspective on work and life and improved self-esteem (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

For women working in a non-managerial position, especially those working in student services, they believed that their job was meaningful, providing a great sense of achievement by helping others. Two student advisors thus remarked:

*... when the students come with a trouble or with a doubt, they feel stressed and they feel don't know what to do. So after you explain, after you help, they feel happy and ... feel released. So I got the point, if you [are] satisfied [with your job], you feel achievement as well. You feel your job is meaningful.*

*... we are able to give people advice [on] the big things in their life; it decides on taking some study. Obviously that's a big change, so if I am able to help in this way then I feel that's a great achievement ...*

The findings were consistent with the earlier arguments of Hirt et al. (2005) that student affairs' professionals perceived intrinsic rewards (e.g. meaningful work) more favourably than extrinsic rewards (e.g. salary and benefits). This could have been that the challenges deriving from the student services may motivate females and help raise their self-esteem in the long run, which could be viewed as a good intrinsic reward for their hard work although money was also important for them.

## 8.5 The Effects of Gender, Ethnicity and Cultural Experience on Work

The career experiences of ethnic minority women cannot be considered in isolation without the acknowledgement of their broader life circumstances relating to gender, ethnicity and cultural experience (Kamenou, 2008), especially given that ethnic female immigrants were disadvantaged by a 'triple jeopardy' as females, minorities and immigrants when they entered the workplace (Mighty, 1997 cited in Kamenou, 2007).

It was not surprising that most Chinese female interviewees argued that being a woman was an advantage for their current job considering that administrative roles and student services were generally regarded as women-dominated (Simpson & Stroh, 2002). There was also a sense that gender differences may cause different behaviour tendencies (Brandser, 1996). The quotations below are illustrative of the views of some participants:

*I think because the nature of this job requires the person with patience; the person needs to be gentle and nice to people, because our students they come to New Zealand ... when they come cross difficulties, they are quite weak. So [they] need people to be nice to them. I think because of the nature of the job, my boss looked for the female staff to work here ... usually people prefer women to take the administrative role. (Linda)*

*I think a woman always seems to be warm hearted, to be gentle, so to be easily to be accepted ... especially in this job [pause] ... when they[students] see you are a lady, they like to talk [with you]and tell you their troubles, their worries. (Lynn)*

The interview data indicated that their Chinese identity had both positive and negative effects on women's current work. Apart from two female technicians, all women interviewed stated they benefited from their bicultural background and from being bilingual. Karen argued that her Chinese culture background was definitely an advantage to her as she was in charge of looking after the Chinese students. Caroline reckoned that the bicultural background helped her a lot in her current job:

*... we have quite [a] lot of Chinese students here in AUT, so I do use my knowledge to help them a lot, use my un-Chinese background plus my work experience and knowledge about AUT ... for employers they do need someone who knows Mandarin, because there are quite a lot of students coming from mainland China. That did help me to get this job.*

For Michelle, who can speak English, Mandarin and Cantonese, she argued that one of the positive sides of her cultural background was that she could act as an interpreter for Chinese students whose English was not proficient enough and who had problems with communicating with the academic staff or other administrative employees.

Despite the positive remarks, nevertheless, the cultural background was viewed by some women as a barrier to further communication with their colleagues, which may influence their interpersonal relationships at the workplace in some way. For people who valued harmony, guanxi and group loyalty regarding the Confucian heritage (Chan et al., 2006; Hui & Tan, 1996), a disagreeable interpersonal relationship could cause additional tension for them. Nina took the ‘office joke’ as an example:

*... when you communicate with your Kiwi staff, you know they are always talking about jokes, and you can't understand sometime. When they are laughing you don't know what's happening now ... it's quite difficult to get into their culture because the jokes are [mostly] slang language, so [it is] very difficult to learn ... sometime when you communicate with them, most of them ... might think you do not understand the joke, so they would not talk to you too much.*

The same perception was found in Karen's comments:

*... here the work environment is different. Some topics [of my colleagues] we are not involved in. So sometimes ... we have less connection with our colleagues. Not everyone, like the Kiwi group, they chatted and talked about something they had experienced ... people, artists and actress, they knew quite well ... it's different.*

It would seem that women perceived their ethnicity and bilingual ability as the reward when communicating with students of Chinese cultural backgrounds. But such an

advantage may be undermined or even disappear at managerial level or other areas because of the occupational 'developmental plateau' faced by women (Kamenou, 2007).

In addition, there was evidence that when they were in China, most of the Chinese participants had good jobs and a stable income, but after migrating to New Zealand, they had to start doing very basic jobs, usually unrelated to their qualifications and previous work experiences. This finding confirmed the situation of underemployment faced by Chinese immigrants proposed in the preceding literature review (Beal & Sos, 1999). Carr, Inkson and Thorn (2005) described such a situation as 'talent waste'. It was also significant to note that five of the Chinese female participants considered themselves to be underemployed in their current job due to cultural and language barriers. Lam's (2006) conclusion that the situation of underemployment still happened to immigrants even after several years of working experience in New Zealand appeared to be supported by the findings of this study. In this context, one participant commented:

*... because we are not the local people, and also English is not our first language, so I think this makes us more difficult to get a good job. Because actually my major is hospitality, and I think the culture in New Zealand is different from China. I got a master degree but I think the employers they more focus on the experience than qualification ... if I want to start in hotel I have to start from very basic position like front desk. But in China, I think they focus more qualification than experience ... like I got Master degree, I possibly can get management position in hotel ...*

Another female staff, who had a postgraduate qualification and once was a lecturer in a university in China, believed that it was hard to move to higher positions in AUT such as being lecturer due to the language and cultural barriers. A similar situation was also faced by one of the administrative staff who had an overseas Bachelor's degree in law and a local accounting qualification.



As stated earlier, it was not surprising to note that the Chinese participants expressed that they attached importance to their paid work as it obviously reduces the economic burden for their families. Caroline, who had a qualification unrelated to her current job, argued that the financial needs of her family were her first priority to consider: “I give up my previous qualification [and] come here just for this job ... who care, I just need this job to feed my family [laugh].” Lucy also stated that she had to put her work first as she was the only breadwinner of the family, while Nina expressed that she had the economic pressure of paying the house mortgage. Since her parents still lived in China, Clare usually took her children back to China once every two years. However, visiting their parents entailed huge travel expenses, which was an additional financial burden on the family.

In light of earlier acculturation studies that have investigated the adaptation strategies employed by Chinese female migrants (Ip, 2006), the results above were not altogether unexpected. Chinese female migrants, especially those from mainland China, had been viewed as having positive attitudes towards employment and were flexible enough to engage in just any job in order to establish themselves in the new country (Beal, 2001; Henderson, 2003; Ho, 2003). It would appear that, while some of them got stressed because of the devaluation of the work qualifications or other cultural barriers, for most female participants, their work played a significant role in their settlement and decided to a large extent their family’s economic status. Further, employment made a great difference to balancing paid work and individual life (Wei, 2007), because with an adequate income and decent standard of living, women could be “well-placed to participate fully in society and to exercise choice about how to live their lives” (Ministry of Social Development, 2008, p. 56).

## **8.6 Summary & Conclusion**

In this chapter, the findings indicated that there were both positive and negative sides in regard to organisational culture. Although a range of initiatives had been launched by the university to meet employees’ WLB needs, Chinese women’s awareness of WLB

practices were low due to a lack of a formal WLB strategy programme and an understanding about the WLB along with ineffective internal communication in the university. Establishing a formal WLB strategy/programme incorporating training and evaluation mechanisms may greatly improve the effectiveness of these policies. However, the study found that all WLB related policies were positively viewed as fair, equitable and available to all employees and quite attractive for female and ethnic staff.

The findings also revealed that the reasons Chinese women chose their current jobs were diverse but were mainly due to economic motivators. Although the workloads of Chinese females varied across different working roles, a heavy workload was the biggest issue faced by women working in administrative and student service roles, albeit with some seasonal variability. Meeting deadlines and dealing with difficult problems may also add pressure. In terms of work–family conflicts, Chinese women may encounter issues such as bringing work home, working longer hours or emergency callbacks after normal work hours. In spite of the many stresses faced, most Chinese women reported high job satisfaction.

This study found that gender, ethnicity and cultural experience considerably affected Chinese women at work. Being a woman was viewed as an advantage for women working in administrative and student service roles. While all of them benefited from their bicultural background and being bilingual, the cultural background had been viewed by some women as a barrier to develop further communication at the workplace. The findings also revealed that underemployment had been faced by some women. Although a few of them got stressed due to the devaluation of the work qualifications or other cultural barriers, most female participants valued their work highly as it played a significant role in their settlement and decided to a large extent the economic status of the family. The next chapter provides an overview of the WLB strategies used by women to balance their work and family lives.

## 9. WLB Strategies Used by Women

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### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter covers three main areas. It firstly focuses on the informal support at AUT helping women deal with the tensions between work and family lives. Following this, the WLB policies employed by women are discussed before the introduction of women's own coping strategies for managing these tensions.

### 9.2 Informal Support

This section of the chapter discusses the informal support from four areas: interpersonal relationships at the workplace; managers' support; colleagues' support; and the Asian staff network.

#### *9.2.1 Interpersonal Relationships at the Workplace*

There was a strong belief among most Chinese female respondents (eight out of 12) that good interpersonal relationships both with management and colleagues at the workplace were crucial to getting informal support. This not only benefits work performance but also contributes to a reduction of stress at work.

Sandy believed that communication was the basis of establishing a good interpersonal relationship as it could facilitate understanding; otherwise work life might become tough. Lynn felt that "communicating with colleagues helps you to relax and to download the stress". Likewise, Caroline stated that one of her strategies of coping with interpersonal relationships was trying to obtain the understanding of others when she was busy, especially in a bad mood: "I guess you need to tell other people close to you, let them know your situation, let them understand your situation, so maybe I am

in the bad mood, people can understand you are busy at that time.” She also felt it was important to ask for help from others and get co-operation at the workplace rather than solve every problem by oneself:

*At the beginning of my employment, I tended to work longer hours to finish everything. But now I feel like I can actually tell everybody I am busy and then I can get some help. It's quite good actually because some people they are not busy [at that time]. When you are busy, they can share some workloads. [We need to] support each other.*

On the other hand, Sandy discussed that, taking the Chinese culture into consideration, many Chinese women might feel shy about asking for help and try to do things by themselves, although it was unavoidable sometimes. She shed light on the importance of mutual help by stating that people should show their willingness to help others instead of just accepting help. She also argued that it was not a good idea to ask for instant help:

*... if you have difficulties, just let them [managers or colleagues] know earlier, not just: “Oh, I need help now, who can help me?” Everyone gets job... If you need help, you give people time, not just ask for instant help. Managing your time is important. People may say how I know when I need help, how I tell people before I need help. You can plan your things; you put your things in schedule, [and] then you know: this time I may need help.*

A number of authors have recently observed that ineffective communication or a lack of communication/co-operation often causes negative interpersonal relationships at the workplace and may result in stress, burnout or job dissatisfaction (Hanlon, 1996; Morrison & Nolan, 2007), which appears to be supported by the findings of this study.

### **9.2.2 Managers' Support**

Managers may consent to support staff through a range of policies such as flexible work arrangements, or the utilisation of university resources besides development time and financial support (Auckland University of Technology, 2005b). Although HR staff and

the Union may provide some help when staff needed to discuss their concerns about the issues affecting their WLB, it was acknowledged by some interviewees that the individual line managers should be regarded as the first contact. The remark made by the ASN person below was typical in this respect:

*For any employment issue if someone comes and asks me, [I think] you must first approach your manager. If you think that conversation is unfair then you can seek assistance of HR or TIASA [Union], but you know, I believe at first instance anyone should really check with the manager.*

It was stated that the individual line managers sometimes were more crucial than the WLB policies in view of the fact that some employees tended to seek the help from their manager instead of looking at the policies. The ASN staff member believed that some managers were quite flexible and supportive by allowing employees to deal with something they preferred when they had completed their daily tasks. As the Union staff member stated, the individual line managers had “to be the ones to be put in any kind of contingencies or plans of the staff members”. Therefore, it was crucial to train managers in work–life skill sets such as relationships, time-management, focusing, and project-management instruments, and matter-of-fact work and life goal creation and attainment (Bird, 2006).

There was a general belief among the Chinese participants that the managers (both line managers and senior managers) in their workplace were fairly supportive in regard to assisting employees in achieving WLB. Linda, for example, expressed her appreciation to her boss who always cared about employees’ well-being:

*I think my boss is quite supportive. Whenever I felt sick or he saw I worked overtime, he always pushed me to go home. So sometimes, [when] there were a lot of students coming to ask questions, [which] delayed my lunch time, he was not happy and he said: “You should know how to look after yourself” ... I was very very sick last year. My boss pushed me to see a doctor, [and] then he reported to a health and safety advisor. The advisor [then] came to my office and inspected my work station.*

The findings fully support a previous study which suggested that managers' support in resolving work and family conflicts could greatly affect employees' ability to achieve their balance between work and family (Hacker & Doolen, 2003).

There were some indications that whether or not a manager granted a request initiated by employees regarding WLB policies was discretionary and mainly depended on the relationship between the employee and the manager, especially considering that a manager usually would not initiate a number of WLB policies. The HR staff member indicated that a good personal relationship between staff and manager was significant for the staff to communicate their concerns about WLB:

*... every year staff have an IDP which is an Individual Development Plan for the goals the year ahead ... I think it is also an opportunity to talk about the aspects that impact your workload, including the important things happening in your life. As I said mainly these conversations will happen casually and informally, so it does depend on the relationship you have with your manager [laugh], I think to a large degree ... you know it's a comfortable method to sit down [and talk about] what happens to me and I gonna need some time off and I have to do this matter. That probably is best ... if you don't have the kind of relationship with the manager, I think it could only be reserved for the formal time when you do your performance review or your individual development plan, and also not all managers or staff they do have individual development plan or should do. Not all managers do performance reviews and things like that. So there are limited opportunities to formally discuss WLB, but I think it does come down to the informal relationship.*

The Union staff member argued that for a lot of employees when they were told their request for WLB solutions had been declined, they even did not want to appeal or apply again since they would like to keep a good relationship with the managers rather than make any trouble with them:

*The thing I think is that a lot of people once the managers say no, they will stop it, they won't progress it. They need some kind of mechanism where they can appeal it or they can challenge the decision, but there isn't. So if the manager just say flat no to your suggestion of using WLB, a lot of people [would say]: "right!" That's the barrier and then they won't go any further. And only if you are in the Union you may discuss it ...*

This situation, of course, raises questions about whether it would cause a power wedge and be utilised as a power trip for the manager and a tool to control staff (Naming & Wright, 2006). One would expect therefore that staff having a conflict with the manager may suffer from such a negative relationship at the risk of not being given WLB support or not being permitted to use a WLB solution, which could undermine the effectiveness of the implementation of WLB initiatives. As stated earlier, an appropriate measurement mechanism may ensure the manager's commitment to the WLB management.

There was also a belief among some of the interviewees that the manager's management style, attitude and understanding in respect to WLB may impact, to some degree, on the implementation of WLB policies. The ASN staff member explained that the reason some managers do not like to approve staff's leave requests could be that they did not understand the meaning of WLB as well as its importance, which may cause people to leave the organisation.

When the manager considered a request from an employee in respect of WLB, the feasibility of the employee's proposal needed to be taken into account. The HR staff member for example highlighted that managers should not only check a range of factors such as an employee's performance, but to look at all staff whether it was feasible before he/she grants a request for working at home. In other words, managers should consider the employees' reasons for looking for the arrangements, the impact on other staff, performance and productivity.

WLB courses and training were strongly suggested by some interviewees to ensure that managers were best qualified to implement the WLB practices. The Union staff member admitted some managers were really good at their jobs, but they were not necessarily good at managing staff's WLB issues. She thought the managers should be trained to be more proactive and actively concerned about the employees' need regarding WLB:

*I think the biggest challenge for AUT is to train its managers to manage its people, and to manage those WLB initiatives ... when you sit down and do a professional development plan, it's normally in conjunction with your performance ... [The manager is expected to ask:] "How you've done through the year? [Does] that match up to your job description? How's [your] WLB going?" I actually have never heard [these] ... At least we can train our managers to be conscious [of this]. When they do these plans, [they] start talking, and opening [the topic] about WLB initiatives.*

A similar argument was offered by Lynn:

*We have the formal performance review every half year, but during this half year, managers are suppose to have a quick catch up with each staff about their current feeling, current job, if they have any issue or have any question to ask or discuss with the manager. [Although] there is no a policy [or clear regulation about] how often the managers [are] supposed to talk ... I think that's a very good support for us to talk about our workplace concerns or issues and also our family issues ...*

Previous qualitative studies (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Soonhee, 2001) have given some indications that, as the attitudes, skills and behaviours of line managers may decide on the success of implementation of WLB initiatives, training and educating them could be the key to eventually turning the WLB policies into practices. This may encompass training on WLB principles and practice, upskilling managers in managing workload allocations and ensuring them to be open, understanding and responsive. The two main bottom-line goals of implementing successful work-life training programmes throughout the management ranks were enhancing the retention, commitment, and productivity of the organisation's most valuable people asset, its managers and supervisors, and creating a much more positive view of the organisation at all levels through the managers and supervisors (Bird, 2006). This therefore would shape the attitudes, morale and productivity of all employees in a positive way.



### 9.2.3 Support from Colleagues

There was evidence across all interviews that support from colleagues was also important for managing the conflicts from both work and family. While Karen discussed that she and her colleagues used to help each other at work, Nina thought that her colleagues were usually quite supportive when she had some family problems: “Like quite a few of my female colleagues, I once told them what my family issue was and they gave me some suggestions ... because they might have the same situation in their family.”

Some Chinese female interviewees believed that a good relationship with other colleagues was fairly crucial to seeking some WLB solutions. One participant, for instance, stated that:

*Well ... when I go to China like I have four weeks' leave, so somebody has to cover my role. That's an example [laugh] ... like I have to go home [in China] on holiday to visit my family, but I can't leave my job for four weeks without any people's support. Students will call constantly; I need to direct my phone to another colleague's [phone], so the relationship between you and your colleagues is quite important. They know what you do, so they come to help you at that time, otherwise you will accumulate a lot of work when you come back. [Then] people will complain, students will complain ... (Caroline)*

In contrast to the positive attitude towards the role of manager and colleagues in helping employees handle their work and family issues, some concerns about using WLB policies may place pressure on others due to the unmanageable ‘busy time’ at the workplace was reported by one participant:

*... the non-positive thing is when somebody leaves, we have busy time, so we can't manage. We have to take another person's work, to cover other person's work ... for the managers, it is very difficult to make [arrangements] ... If two people or three people take annual leave at the same time, they [managers] worry [about whether it's] going to affect the work a lot ... (Ida)*

These sorts of views were also frequently expressed in previous studies in WLB literature (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006; Haar & Spell, 2003), which suggested that individual beliefs, attitudes that others' WLB solutions should come at their own personal expense could become a powerful inhibitor against employees' utilisation of WLB initiatives. But it would be fair to say that the personal attitudes towards the work life benefits among employees would, to some extent, be a reflection of the organisational culture. On the other hand, when utilising WLB initiatives, it should be the individual's responsibility to respect and be supportive of colleagues' and managers' WLB needs.

#### ***9.2.4 Asian Staff Network***

As one of the AUT funded staff networks, the Asian Staff Network (ASN) was established in 2004, sponsored by the General Manager of Operations and Services, it has the purpose of upholding, informing and uniting all Asian staff at AUT through launching relevant activities and events (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-a). The ASN staff member stated that, as part of the equity and diversity corps of the university, the ASN contributed to staff welfare by organising all kinds of activities and events to gather staff together with their colleagues and families. Through such non-political but formal social gathering, she argued that employees would feel that they had someplace to go to and someone with similar interests and background to talk to. She stated that the ASN currently had nearly 120 members from all over the Asian region such as India, China, Malaysia, and Singapore, and organised a range of family activities including a family barbecue and family sport day:

*Two weeks ago we had what we called family sport day. Its location was not at AUT. We just hired a venue at YMCA Lynnfield [Recreation Centre] where staff and their family could come. The employees paid for the venue, we provided some lunch, afternoon tea. We invited our family.*

The research findings appeared to parallel the comments made by Pio (2005) indicating that ethnic identity generally referred to an individual's sense of self in terms of

membership in a certain group, with value and emotional significance attached to that membership (also see Chavira & Phinney, 1991; Orbe & Harris, 2001). Allied with membership of any cultural group was a range of rights, responsibilities and obligations and all staff members needed the time and freedom to perform these cultural requirements (State Services Commission, 2005b).

Notably, most Chinese staff across all the interviews acknowledged that they were ASN members and were satisfied with the activities and events provided by the network. For Linda, she felt that participating in ASN was a good way to both learn and relax: “Asian staff network is quite useful because you can handle team building with other staff, share experience with them and know each other. It is also kind of relaxation.” This perception was also held by Teresa who believed that the ASN helped her know more staff from other departments and make friends with them, which provided social relations. She quite enjoyed the activities launched by the ASN such as skiing. Sandy asserted that the ASN made it easy to learn from people from different cultures: “The network provides you with chance to know people from other countries, other background, and ... cut the distance between people, so it is quite good”. While Lucy got great pleasure from the Chinese friends’ circle, Caroline discussed that using the network and establishing a good relationship with other staff could make the job easier and solve problems efficiently:

*[When] we know staff members across the university, I know: [when] I do this next time, I [should] start [from] this area, and I [will] know who to contact ... it is quite helpful for my job as well. When you find the [right] persons, usually they can solve the problem fast.*

It was not surprising to see that the ASN was viewed by most Chinese women as a significant channel to seek their WLB, given that, as new migrants, WLB would be a particular challenge as many of them leave behind valuable support structures such as family that assisted them in tackling fickle work demands. There was also a sense that “The workplace is one of the most powerful institutions in which to form friendships, especially in increasingly secular societies where the workplace gives a

sense of belonging that people formerly drew from their church, community, or extended family” (Harris & Pringle, 2008, p. 4).

To help ethnic migrant employees achieve their WLB, the university should recognise that the solutions to WLB in different cultures may vary significantly. A lack of understanding of the deeper issues confronted by ethnic minority groups could create more problems than it resolved, causing antipathy and tokenism (Kamenou, 2003). Cultural awareness training for managers was essential to ensure that they understand the diverse needs of different groups and the cultural constraints of some ethnic staff by flexibly managing employees, conflicts related to WLB (Kamenou, 2008). AUT also needs to conduct diversity management initiatives in an open, sensitive and well-informed way in which employees feel comfortable in discussing leave and other provisions in a culturally proper manner (Kamenou, 2008).

### **9.3 Work—life Balance Policies**

In this section, WLB policies used by women to deal with the tensions experienced by them are discussed from the personal/family-oriented and workplace-oriented perspectives respectively.

#### ***9.3.1 Personal/family-oriented Perspective***

From the personal/family-oriented perspective, parental leave, dependant care benefit, flexible working arrangements and time allowance are covered in this section.

##### **9.3.1.1 Parental leave**

For some Chinese women, parental leave was one of the most important leave policies offered by AUT to enable them to take leave from employment on the birth of a child (Department of Labour, 2007). Its provisions and eligibility criteria complied with the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Act

2002 (eligible workers will be entitled to 14 weeks of paid parental leave from 1 December 2005), but with enhanced conditions (Auckland University of Technology, 2005a). According to the Union staff member, AUT was more generous regarding its parental leave policy owing to its ex-gratia payment:

*... you can get something called a six weeks' ex-gratia payment ... If I were to go on a maternity leave tomorrow, they would pay me six weeks of my salary. That's really a wonderful provision ... we are given six weeks' pay even for some men who work here, he can go off and get six weeks' pay ...*

Here, the ex-gratia payment was detached from any legislated entitlement and would be paid “regardless of whether an employee returns to work before the expiry of six weeks' leave and receipt of salary will not affect entitlement to the full payment” (Auckland University of Technology, 2005a, pp. 34-35). Two Chinese female interviewees recalled their experience of taking parental leave. For example, Caroline, who had her second boy while working at AUT, stated: “I took one year's leave from AUT, six weeks I was paid ... That's earlier stage, now the Government changed the weeks.” For Clare, since she had given birth to her two kids at AUT, she felt the parental leave policy was really supportive:

*... when you have baby you know you have job to go back to... you know you still have a position there, it would not be too bad when you come back ... because I had my two kids from my employment ... I twice took parental leave yeah, so it helped a lot.*

These findings lend support to the argument of Woodward (2007) suggesting that the likelihood of retaining skilled staff would be increased and the costs would be reduced by ensuring that the jobs of the employees on parental leave were ready for them on their return.

However, there were some challenges faced by managers or HR staff when employees took their parental leave. The HR staff member, for example, disclosed that many staff who took maternity leave wanted to come back earlier than expected due to financial

reasons or they wanted to come back to work part-time, which was difficult to arrange. There were some indications that it was important to form an effective psychological contract and develop mutual trust, respect and commitment between managers/HR staff and employees (Skinner, Saunders, & Duckett, 2004).

#### 9.3.1.2 Dependant Care Benefits

Although childcare and school holiday programme had been made available for employed parents facing a shortage of affordable childcare, working mothers with young children who were interviewed found insufficient day-care facilities in the university were the main difficulty they confronted. The Union staff member felt that childcare needed to be addressed since there were only quite limited places available for working mothers who needed to compete not only with other staff (e.g. male staff) but with students. Nina, the mother of a girl, stated that she booked the kindergarten last year, but the soonest a place would be available would be in 2009. Although her parents-in-law were looking after her daughter during the day time, she did not think it was good for the child's growth, considering the discrepancy between the two generations' educational styles. She hoped that AUT could expand its childcare. The ASN staff member pointed out that a lack of childcare in the organisation was more likely to cause women to withdraw from work after they had a baby:

*If someone like me, we got no other family members [except my husband] ... if you don't have a childcare for your child, it might be very simple for you not to come back to work ... if you get a nanny, it will be quite expensive and also you might not want someone strange in your own house.*

As reflected in the empirical data, some interviewees had never heard about the school holiday programme. The Union staff member explained that a lack of advertising could be one of the reasons that not many staff were aware of the existence of the provision: "It was very limited. There were not many kids. They didn't either advertise, so how will half of the AUT staff know about it?"

The limited childcare may be due to a lack of needs analysis caused by an inaccurate staff profile, whereby the university was not aware of the childcare issue faced by many women of childbearing age at AUT. Another possible reason could be tight financial margins, which constrained the university's ability to expand its provisions for both routine childcare and school holiday childcare.

#### 9.3.1.3 Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working arrangements were one of the main practices AUT adopted to meet staff needs for WLB, including flexible start and finish times, working at home and part-time work. The HR staff member stated that:

*... your hours [start times] are generally between 7am and 9 am I think, basically around 7 am ... it could be exceeded to 9:30 am. I mean very flexible hours depending on your operations. And [it's]also flexible in terms of variation of full time equivalence...you can have formal arrangements like one of our staff here when she joined AUT, she wanted to work from 3 o'clock to 5 o'clock at home every day, so they are formal arrangements. Otherwise [there are] a lot of informal arrangements. For example[pause and reflect], if we got a project to finish and I need some free time, I [can]ask to stay at home on Friday, things like that, so that's more discretionary.*

Likewise, the ASN staff member believed that a notable advantage of working at AUT was its flexible start and finish times:

*We don't have a fixed start and finish times in a contract ... everyone don't have to start at the same time finish [the] same time. You can start half an hour earlier, or you can [start] half an hour later, and finish earlier or later, so that's one thing good at AUT.*

Therefore, according to the Union staff member, there was always a negotiable situation between the employee and the employer/manager. Employees could choose to take a better time to work and make up the hours later.

For the Chinese women interviewed, they believed that the flexible work arrangements helped them a lot at work. Lucy once used the flexible working hours provision by starting working later and making up the time later, feeling that such flexibility was quite helpful to deal with some unexpected issues. She even expressed that she would like to stay at AUT as long as she could given the generous policies offered. Michelle stated that she once requested to work from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm instead of working from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Although she was finally allowed to work from 8 am to 4 pm since 7:30 am was regarded as too early, she believed that working half an hour earlier was still good and made a difference to her.

This gave an indication that flexibility around begin and finish times enabled both managers and employees to flexibly adjust the times of their working day and to select those most suitable for them. According to earlier studies (for example, Poelmans et al., 2003; Lim & Teo, 2000; McDonald et al., 2005; Spoonley & Davidson, 2004), there was a positive relationship between flexible working practices and employees' retention and job satisfaction since more flexible work patterns provided them with more opportunities to pursue their career development outside the home.

However, there was evidence that for some women who needed to deal with students, their working time was more fixed. Caroline, for example, asserted that "I think we have sort of quite strict working hours like from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm ... because students come this time." Similar information was also given by Nina. This revealed that operational requirements and the nature of the work may limit flexibility at work, further supported by comments made by the ASN staff member that the attractiveness of the WLB policies varied from person to person and depended on what people did. However, as stated previously, for a position excluded from flexible working hours for an individual employee and requiring the employees to be available during regular work hours, employees should be informed during the recruiting process and a detailed job description needs to be given indicating this limitation.



As the only woman respondent doing part-time work, Clare expressed her satisfaction with her current life:

*I used to [work] full time when I had no children ... now I work from 10 am to 3 pm but it's quite right for me. I can take the children to school in the morning; I can help a little bit in the classroom and [then] come to work. I also need to pick up them from school. When I go home, I have afternoon tea...yeah part time permanent position is quite good ...*

By contrast, a few Chinese participants expressed their unwillingness to use part-time arrangements as a result of economic concerns. For women who are the only breadwinner in the family or who face family economic pressures such as needing to pay a mortgage, they usually would not consider taking a part-time job or use other policies (e.g. buyable leave, or leave without pay), as it would mean sacrificing some of their income.

As stated previously, managerial support played a significant role in the implementation of the WLB initiatives among employees (also see Hacker & Doolen, 2003). This was the case given that most Chinese female staff (10 out of 12) admitted that their managers were quite supportive when employees solicited them over flexible arrangements to handle their family issues. The quotes below demonstrate the views of some Chinese women:

*... when I needed to attend a school meeting for the kid, I needed to leave earlier, and it's not necessary to apply for a leave for just two or three hours, so I just talked to [my] manager. My manager said: "Okay, you can come [and] start earlier [or] maybe you [can] work half an hour extra in the following two days or three days to win the lost time". So this was a kind of informal support in the workplace to balance the family life. That's kind of flexibility. (Lynn)*

*... when my kid is sick, I just call the manager, they will say: "Don't worry, just take your time". So sometimes you feel comfortable ... because most time we [are] reliable here, so when you called the manager [by saying that] you have difficulties, even [if you] don't say the detailed reason, they [usually] say: "Don't worry, just take your time". (Ida)*

*Like [sometimes] I have to be late or I have to leave earlier ... my manager can accommodate ... if I need to be late half an hour, I can ask my manager*

*to come [and] just stay about half an hour to make up my time, she [normally] says no problem. So that's sort of informal [support], because it's not written in my employment contract ... (Clare)*

Nevertheless, some negative comments about management were made by some interviewees. Michelle implied that a change in leadership style was imperative for some managers, while Nina felt her manager showed apathy to employees' family issues:

*For work life, they are very supportive. But I don't want to talk to them [about the family issue]. I don't think they care about that. I prefer to tell my friends; some colleagues are my friends. I prefer to tell them ...*

It was worth repeating that the manager's management style, understanding and the appreciation of WLB does influence, to some degree, the implementation of WLB policies. It would be correct to suggest that unsupportive management regarding WLB could cause the underutilisation of WLB practices and low morale and job dissatisfaction at the workplace. However, unsupportive management could also be a reflection of their concerns that employees could abuse alternative arrangements, which may impose undue stress or extra workloads on others and trigger a 'backlash' from non-users (Haar, Spell, & O'Driscoll, 2005). An interrelated argument on such apprehensions was given by the HR staff member: (Haar, Spell, & O'Driscoll, 2005)

*I guess people maybe focus more on their home life than their work life [laughs], and maybe put numerous requests to work at home, time off, all those type of things ... Managers have to spend more time sitting down and talking, maybe declining an application or declining the request ... I think [there are] more opportunities for staff to request something from the managers at AUT in terms of work life balance ... especially if you've got a number of staff, they all want their time off, they want something special. If I say you can work part time for the next several weeks, it is often that someone has to pick up your work, which impacts that person [laughs]. So another employee's work might increase. The manager has to balance that.*

Connected with this, it should be managers' responsibility to carefully and objectively consider requests for flexible arrangements in regard to whether or not the job could be

completed in a timely manner but without sacrificing quality and causing irrational effects on other staff.

On the other hand, when using flexible working hours, some interviewees pointed out that employees should take responsibility for making up the time they had taken. The ASN staff member for example, commented that:

*I guess the employee has one responsibility is that follow [ing] up what they said they were going to do. Do what they said, and not just say I would do this but they didn't come up like they didn't work later [and] pay back the hours that they had taken them earlier. So I guess [it is necessary] to be honest and do what you said.*

As stated previously, to maintain an effective psychological contract (Skinner, Saunders, & Duckett, 2004), as far as employees were concerned, it was necessary to keep their promises and use WLB provisions candidly and honestly.

#### 9.3.1.4 Time Allowance/Professional Development Leave

For employees at AUT, asking for professional development leave also played an important role in handling their study-related conflicts. In terms of the commitment to the ongoing professional development of staff, AUT provided staff with a certain amount of study time (e.g. five days for allied staff and ten days for academic staff as a minimum) to undertake a course or study related to their personal or professional development, since the university recognised that study could be very challenging for staff and have an unfavourable effect on their family life.

Considering the huge benefits of this policy, the Union staff member expressed hope that staff should make full use of it:

*We are very fortunate that allied staff are given five days' professional leave, which means they can use the time for classes, for conferences. They are also given 800 dollars towards their professional development ... people think 800 dollars is the maximum, it's not ... if your manager wants to support you*

*with more money, that's great ... the professional development leave is great. The Union negotiated it for you, so we hope people know it.*

Eight out of the 12 Chinese female respondents indicated that they took professional development leave to engage in their studies:

*I think professional development leave is very important. I can have some time to attend the conference and then I studied by using that leave ... now I used it to do some professional reading. So that's very helpful. (Karen)*

*Actually [thank] for the time allowance, I can have five days off [and be occupied] with my own development. So it's quite good because it can give you some time to learn extra. I studied a lot. Actually they paid my school fees, so it's quite good. (Nina)*

The findings gave an indication that for most Chinese women, they tended to continually upskill themselves, which may be of great advantage to their career prospects and benefit their adaptation both economically and socially (Ho, 2003).

However, the interview data revealed that there was an underutilisation of the professional development policy in AUT as a whole. The Union staff member stated that some managers were too busy doing their jobs and did not realise that the personal professional development of their staff was an integral part of their own role:

*... a lot of staff, they are not encouraged to do the professional development. The managers just ignore their professional development and say: "Oh, no! You are on the front line receptions; you can't do any classes because we need you to be at the front line" ... And some people are denied even though they know they have an individual development plan ...*

There was an indication that incorrect attitudes or misleading opinions held by managers could limit their ability to facilitate the WLB practices and thus constrain the effectiveness of WLB policies of AUT (Messmer, 2006). Managerial training should be conducted to improve the manager's skill at implementing WLB initiatives.

### 9.3.2 Workplace-oriented Perspective

In this section, a wide range of leave options and the health and wellness service are focused on from the workplace-oriented perspective.

#### 9.3.2.1 Leave Options

Apart from some personal coping strategies, all participants felt very lucky to have an assortment of leave options offered by AUT to help them deal with tensions from work and reduce their stress (e.g. annual leave, sick leave, leave without pay, buyable leave). The Union person commented that the beauty of the leave options was that staff can mix them up: “If I want to take extended period of time off, I can say: ‘Ok, look! Can I use my annual leave?’ And then I [also] have leave without pay ... We are very lucky. We can mix them up.” She also argued that, to prevent employee burnout, the university put more emphasis on ensuring that staff took leave at some point through the year:

*I think they [AUT] are very very proactive now and ensure that the staff take the leave. They don't want to see staff accumulating long periods of leave because it means they've worked a whole year [without a break] ... Sometimes people can apply to carry their leave over [and] take a big holiday but you have to ensure that staff are not overworked or burnout ...*

Here, the research findings appeared to parallel the comments from the previous studies suggesting that leave options were designed to meet the employee's need for relaxation and recreation, facilitate the reconciliation of the conflicts between work and life and change in the ways of allowing employees to connect spheres of work and non-work (Felstead et al., 2002; Burgess et al., 2007). It would be correct to suggest that the manager needs to take the responsibility for checking staff workloads by ensuring that they were not being expected to work unreasonable hours. Heavy workloads and long hours may leave little time for enjoyment with family and cause some serious negative outcomes such as work-related distress or behaviour, dissatisfaction with the job, absenteeism, tardiness or poor performance at work, resignation, and poor mental and

physical health (Huang et al., 2004). On the other hand, employees should discuss their issues with the managers when they felt it was hard to fulfil their work commitments within the specified working hours.

What could also be viewed as the manager's responsibility for helping employees achieve WLB would be doing their best to help employees maintain their boundaries between work and family lives. This would mean that the managers need to remind employees to take leave and minimise the need for contacting employees about work issues out of work hours. Managers should ensure that employees were not imposed upon by unreasonable burdens and working longer than normal working hours.

However, for most of the Chinese women interviewed, the leave policies were usually limited due to the nature of their work. The HR staff member clarified the difficulties faced by women in administrative roles or working in services:

*... [for]administrative staff, they don't have other staff to cover themselves when they have holidays, no one is doing the job ... you know you can't leave the situation and put off holidays when you have to work overtime before and after ... if your work is in services, you need to be available ... during semester break, semester time ...*

Ida stated that 'no leave during peak time' had already become an unwritten rule at her workplace. She argued that: "Even we have lots of leave, the busy time we can't take. The manager said at the start of every semester nobody can take the annual leave". For Linda, she usually took her annual leave during the Christmas season since she was quite busy before the start of each semester when all kinds of workshops needed to be prepared for the new students.

Two years ago, Karen once tried to take long weekends (Friday to Sunday) by separating her annual leave. She felt it was really good for the family life since she got extra casual time to stay with her family and undertake her personal activities. On the other hand, she found it was quite difficult to come back to work as there were hundreds of emails waiting to be replied to and she had to work awfully hard for the

first two days. She felt the long weekend did not reduce her workload but actually added to her stress. She expressed that she would not like to try again.

A possible reason for the limited chances for taking leave could be that the structures and locations of jobs determined that Chinese women with certain kinds of working roles may have to confront different pressures to achieving WLB and have limited access to some type of work-life initiatives, although these initiatives should be available to all employees regardless of their working pattern. Another possible interpretation could be that the shortage of resources (money and staff) causing a limited backup and a lack of capacity to help employees balance work with their personal responsibilities may limit their opportunities for using leave options.

When asked if using the WLB policies and practices such as leave options might jeopardise their career development, some Chinese female interviewees disagreed. Lucy took one of her colleagues as an example: “I know a lady ... she left [asked for leave] a half year. When she came back, she worked quite hard and had been promoted. I don’t think [using WLB policies] actually endanger your promotion.” Michelle believed that employees should not be punished when claiming something they were entitled to. Lynn holds a quite positive attitude by arguing that using any of policies available might make themselves look refreshed and avoid burnout, which was definitely good for staff as well as their career in the long run:

*... instead of making you lose the opportunity to be promoted, it [WLB policy] actually is good for life, for health and is another good start for you to work in the future. If you are stressful, because you get too much workload or you get too much family burden, you couldn’t concentrate on the work. So I think that’s what the manager would not like to see ... You’d better take leave to have relax [ed] and to get yourself ready again. For example, before I always tried to get things done, get work done as soon as possible, so I ... didn’t take break, and I felt very tired. But later I found this was not a correct way. Even [if] you take 5 minutes break and go out [and] have a dinner then that makes difference.*

In spite of the positive attitudes held by some interviewees, there were comments from several participants indicating otherwise. They expressed some concerns about negative effects on their career as a result of using WLB provisions. The ASN staff member discussed that some staff might think if they asked for help or applied for leave, their manager would not like it, which may work against their career. Caroline thought that taking leave frequently could cause a bad impression at the workplace:

*... if I take leave too long or if I take too much study leave, then I probably can't complete my job. I do worry about that ... I do worry like it would not make good impression ... I think it's something I need to think about carefully ...*

The findings above seem to reveal one of the causes of the underutilisation of WLB practices is similar to those proposed in previous studies: perceptions of career consequences. Griffin (2000) claimed that employees tended to think that if they utilised WLB practices they would be regarded as less committed to their careers and their career advancement could be hindered. The findings also lend support to the comments from a recent report by the State Services Commission that sometimes personal barriers, being the inhibitors, were self-imposed, and “based on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of staff who might otherwise desire access to work–life balance policies and practices” (State Services Commission, 2005b, p. 22). For instance, people may have the feeling that they were weighing down others as a result of utilising WLB policies. It was also possible that, according to the principle of depletion theory, employees might fear that if they asked for excess help from a manager it could diminish the readiness of the manager to offer needed support in the future (Edwards & Rothbard, 2005).

However, one Chinese female interviewee's response was distinctive from the two groups of participants mentioned that she did not worry too much about whether using WLB initiatives would endanger her career since she was focused on enjoying her current life:



*I guess that opinion is individual, I am not that ambitious. I am just happy ... I am not looking for promotion [laugh]. You know I got a job to go to, [from] 10 am to 3 pm, and I got family to go back to. Well, I know some people are more concerned on the career thing. I mean it's a good job; I am not looking for the challenging life ... if you choose to be happy about your current environment. That's that. (Clare)*

Here, appearing to lend support to Hakim's (1996, cited in Belt, 2002) study the research findings suggested that although women were clearly making their choices not to move up the career ladder, it was vital to be aware of that for women, decisions about careers were often made in response to social constraints rather than made freely. These social constraints could include gender inequality and cultural barriers.

Also, there was evidence all across the empirical data that the financial situation of the organisation could cause the underutilisation of WLB policies. In terms of tight financial margins, the HR staff member argued that the implementation of leave policy had been influenced:

*... we have very tight margin in AUT. There is not a lot of money. So allowing someone to go on leave, paid or unpaid, can be difficult in terms of ensuring that someone had been brought to cover [the vacancy], ensuring that you can do the job at home because it's a very changeable environment ... the funding is so tight, and so variable, we don't have huge reserves, so that can impact what we can provide for staff.*

When facing the kind of situation such as declining a staff member's request, the HR staff member said that "We need to come back to the staff with a good reason. We don't say no; we sit down; we explain the reasons. Hopefully the staff will understand." This correlated with some recent studies (Naming & Wright, 2006; Redman, Snape, Thompson, & Yan, 2000) indicating that managers or HR staff should be aware that feedback could afford direction and boost confidence, whereby negative feedback must be handled with care.

### 9.3.2.2 Health and Wellness Service

The policies employed by Chinese female participants to reduce their stress at work included an employee assistance programme, a fitness centre, and workshops.

An employee assistance programme (EAP) was designed to offer counselling support (up to three hours) to all employees with personal issues that may be interrupting their work and/or family life (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.-c). The Union staff member indicated that there were many organisations using this programme to give their employees support rather than to leave them alone. She also believed that the qualified counselors in EAP could provide staff with confidential counseling and professional suggestions. The HR staff member discussed that the EAP was helpful for employees to communicate the issues they faced:

*We have EAP, which is employee assistant programme, which is access to counselors, talk [ing] about work life issues, stress, financial problem, anything, so that's really positive; any conflict we may come across like that. You know people have used it for say a staff I remembered was going through a divorce in a custody battle for their children and found EAP was really helpful.*

According to Arthur (2000), EAP can be viewed as workplace-based counselling and advisory services intending to offer consultation, appraisal, referral and short-term treatment to employees experiencing a wide range of psychological and mental health difficulties. This study gave some indications that reactive use of the policy was generally accepted as a positive intervention that may assist employees in understanding their problems and formulating strategies and solutions, and thus reducing stress both at work and home (Cuthell, 2004).

Surprisingly, among all Chinese female participants, only one claimed she once used this policy:

*... once I just come back from my [parental] leave. Work was busy, children were small, I got depressed and some worries ... so I went there and talked to the counselor. [It] maybe release my stress, that's helpful ... Like you need to talk to somebody [and] release your feelings.*

A possible reason for the limited application of this policy could be that some participants did not know the existence of EAP. Perhaps this indicates a lack of good communication strategy in terms of WLB initiatives at AUT. Another explanation may be that self-referral often occurred only when an issue had grown into a crisis, and heavily depended on the person recognising that they had a problem (Cuthell, 2004). This “restricts the role that an EAP can play because many people who would benefit from help do not, or will not, recognise that they have a problem and are, therefore, unlikely to contact their EAP” (Cuthell, 2004, p. 14).

While some Chinese female participants used the fitness centre to maintain fitness and health and release their stress, others attended a range of workshops related to professional skill upgrading, stress management and WLB/health issues.

#### **9.4 Women's Coping Strategies**

When facing WLB issues, if an individual effectively adopted coping strategies, his or her perceived WFC/FWC should be lower as the conflict becomes controllable (MacDermid, 2005; Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2002). It was encouraging to note that all Chinese participants seemed to actively seek effective ways of coping with tensions from their work and family lives. Six coping strategies employed by Chinese women are discussed in this section, including: asking help from family members; win-lose strategy; time management; establishing clear boundaries; changing mindsets; and demonstrating commitment.

#### **9.4.1 Asking for Help from Family Members**

All the Chinese women interviewed expressed that *asking help from their family members such as their husband and children* could help them reduce their family burden. While Linda, a mother with a 16-year-old daughter, shared the housework with her husband, Ida felt it was a good thing to ask for kids' help:

*Here is no way I would hire somebody [due to the high expenses], so most housework [I] have to do by myself, sometimes [I] ask children to help. Because I think here is different [comparing to the life in China] ... children study here, [they are] not very busy ... So sometime we ask children to do some housework. Sometimes they helped [pause] ... Not to spoil them.*

Since her son had grown up and her husband took a part-time job, Karen stated that she assumed little housework as her husband took a large share of the domestic responsibilities:

*... because my husband has a part time job so he looks after the family quite well. [When I] go back home, I do not do many of things. Maybe after dinner ... I wash the dishes; sometimes the kid washes ... [I also] do some exercises, read newspaper, novel ...*

It would seem that a one-job/one-career strategy (one partner takes on a less demanding job in order that the other can pursue his or her career more vigorously) could greatly reduce the domestic responsibilities assumed by women (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Moen & Yu, 2000).

*Seeking help from their husband/partner* was often adopted by women to cope with FWC and personal emergencies. One respondent thus stated:

*For example, if I need to go to school to attend the [school] meeting, but I also need to work at the same time, I will communicate with my husband and tell him in advance, so he can attend the meeting. (Linda, the mother of 16-year-old girl).*

The findings above supported Read and Cohen's (2007) argument that family members' (especially the husband/partner) support may greatly contribute to the well-being of minority female migrants, while the older children could have some positive effects on women's employment as they may share some domestic chores.

When there was no immediate solution available to address the difficult problems at work, women tended to *communicate with family members*, especially their husbands/partners, and ask for some advice to solve their problems or at least release their stress. One of the respondents, Lynn, for instance, expressed her appreciation to her partner: "My partner is very good. He always try to comfort me and try to do what he can do to solve the problem ... we can always support each other, and that's a very good and important base to balance the work and life."

This indicated that the stress women endured could be effectively reduced by speaking out and sharing their worries with others. Similar findings have been reported by one of the previous qualitative studies (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000) in regard to the work-life balancing strategies employed by professional females in Taiwan.

It was important to note that for interviewees with care responsibilities and who live with their parents/parents-in-law, the family responsibilities they assumed were obviously less than those not living with their parents/parents-in-law. With the help of her parents-in-law, Clare gained more time to spend with her children. She expressed that she was close to her children and really enjoyed working with them. A similar family situation was also Lucy's experience: "I do cook dinner sometimes but not always, because my parents cook. Sometime we just take turn in making dishes, watch TV, and play games." She stated that in a Chinese family every member used to help each other, which was quite different to a local Kiwi family. She believed that even though the parents in local families also tried to help their adult children, they would not be as involved as the Chinese parents were.

Likewise, with her parents-in-law's assistance with child caring and cooking, Nina felt happy that she could take a full-time job. She also had more time to conduct more personal activities: "I don't cook, my father-in-law cooks ... After that [dinner] I may watch TV, or play the computer on the internet ... I have to study as well after work."

The results of the study fully correlated with previous research (Aaltion & Huang, 2007; Lo, Stone, & Ng, 2003; Loder, 2005) indicating that seeking support from parents/parents-in-law was a unique strategy adopted by ethnic women such as Chinese women to lessen their burden of daily domestic errands but was not often reported in the Western literature.

#### **9.4.2 Win-lose Strategy**

When several issues needed to be settled at the same time which were hard to prioritise, some female interviewees tended to *take up one thing by giving up another*. For Linda, she reported that she had to cancel some activities that were not compulsory, such as attending school meetings, when she was at work. Clare also recalled her experience of missing out on her daughter's school celebration:

*[Sometimes] I just cannot go [to school] because I still have my work hours. There is something [you need to be aware of that] you can't have everything. But at least for me when I [am] at home, most of time is [spent with] my kids.*

These findings endorsed the 'win-lose' strategy of WLB proposed in previous qualitative studies (Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Woodward, 2007): some tasks given lower priority did not actually need to be done at all, albeit that most of sacrifices appeared to be related to family duties. This could have been that some women would not like to take too much time off from work as it may challenge the security of their career to a certain extent.

### 9.4.3 Time Management

Notably, *time management* was viewed by a large proportion of women interviewees (nine out of 12) as an effective tool to arrange their working time and make them more efficient at work. It has not been referred to previously in this study since it may be more related to stress management than to WFC/FWC solutions. In respect of the importance of time management in achieving WLB, Lynn argued: “If you have good time management skills, you will make your work and life completely different ... to be efficient, you need to have a plan ... otherwise you will make both your work life and family life a mess.” Caroline believed that managing time smartly could avoid an uncontrollable situation when something urgent happened:

*The first thing [is] you don't leave anything urgent at work; you have to finish all your work ... If I have to finish it today, then I finish it. So in the second day, if I suddenly have some problems with my family, I don't have anything leave behind from the previous day ...*

As a way of monitoring and controlling time (Claessens, Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2007; Eilam & Aharon, 2003), the focus of time management is on some goal-directed activity, including performing a work mission or an academic task, which is carried out in a way that entails an effective use of time (Claessens et al., 2007). According to Misra and McKean (2000), time management is conceptualised in regard to setting priorities, utilising mechanics (e.g. listing priorities) to create an organised workplace, with the following kind of remark commonplace:

*So basically everyday when I go to work, I normally get a list for myself [about] what I have to do today ... yeah what's the most important thing to finish, what's [the] second. When I finish my part [I] push other people. Then they do their part and I do something else ... you just have to prioritise ... (Lucy)*

Time management was also utilised to handle the conflicts arising from personal activities and family responsibilities. Lynn demonstrated her way of overcoming her difficulties:

*You can make up a menu of dinners at the beginning of the week, and then you will feel it is much easier to do the scheduled things. For example, what to cook for the dinner today, you may feel uncertain, and you feel you need to spend more time thinking what to make ... and that wastes your time. So when I just spend maybe 5 minutes or 10 minutes on making up a dinner menu at the beginning of the week, then everyday when you go back home, what you need to do [is] just follow the menu and getting the things prepared and cooked ...*

Although all these sounded like small things, Lynn felt she can do more things now than ever before, which makes a real difference:

*... this is just a piece of paper and just a small menu. But it saves me I think at least one hour every day ... I feel I have enough time to go out for a walk after dinner every day. And that makes me feel relaxed and helps me do my job better ...*

There was also a sense that a person engaging more often in time management behaviours would suffer less physical and psychological stress and be more likely to gain more controllable time and thus achieve job satisfaction or life satisfaction (Claessens et al., 2007; Misra & McKean, 2000).

#### **9.4.4 Establishing Clear Boundaries**

It was also encouraging to see that eight of the Chinese women interviewed exerted themselves to *set up a clear boundary between work and life* in order to enjoy their family and personal lives without being affected by their work. Clare, for instance, stated that she did not bring any work back home now. What she did now was switch off from work when she went back home. Nina believed that a clear distinction between work and family could avoid disagreeable family conflicts:

*... work life is work life, family life is family life, don't mix them up. Because you know when you bring your work to your family, sometime [it] causes very big conflicts ... when you finish your work, just leave it, don't think about it at home ... it's easier. This is what my previous supervisor told me.*



Lynn, on the other hand, discussed her way of establishing such boundaries from both work and family perspectives:

*... when you get home, you don't need to worry about the work or think about the work. Don't talk about work. When you go to work, [you] just do the work although you have the big family issues need[ing] to be solved. You are still supposed to concentrate on the work ... Maybe you can use the break time or lunch time to deal with them, but you can't mix them up.*

These findings were consistent with those of the preceding qualitative studies (Woodward, 2007), which suggested that the coping tactic of segmentation had been used to divide life into the work domain and the family domain by intentionally restraining thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to the out-of-role realm (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Having a clear boundary between work and family life may effectively keep the negative moods in one realm from interfacing the other realm.

#### ***9.4.5 Changing Mindsets & Demonstrating Commitment***

There were some strategies adopted by the Chinese women to cope with the cultural barriers they confronted. Some participants suggested that *changing mindsets by thinking in another way or from another's perspective* may facilitate the establishment of a positive mentality. This could be explained by Kirchmeyer's (1993) personal role definition, which means that by changing one's personal attitude or behaviour, the conflicts or stress confronted could be reduced. According to Edwards and Rothbard (2005), it was also an emotional coping strategy that focused on making efforts to reappraise the disadvantageous situation and adjust the negative emotional reaction.

Another tactic employed by Chinese women was *demonstrating commitment* to the host country, which was regarded as the most favourable way to gain acceptance:

*I think the only thing we can do to solve the problem is that you need to perform well, do best to show the others and to gain their respects ... to be honest, being a migrant is not an easy thing at the beginning ... you need to find the way from not being unaccepted to being accepted and then even to be respected ... I think the migrant experience ... makes you more tolerant. So like the small difficulties, you will not care too much; you feel you can make it done, and be more open- minded [laughs]. (Lynn)*

The study's result appeared to support the findings of one previous study of Chinese New Zealanders (Yee, 2003). According to Yee (2003), showing commitment could be viewed as a placating strategy tackling discrimination, pacifying the host population and encouraging acceptance from an impression-management perspective. Showing commitment means a dedicated demonstration of the functional role Chinese are expected to play within the host country (Yee, 2003). Yee (2003) also discussed that, for the sake of being viewed as worthy citizens, Chinese New Zealanders needed to show their ability to fulfill their roles as migrants, to tolerate, endure and slowly prove themselves, and eventually they would be accepted. In this context, my research findings showed that Chinese women employed this strategy to mitigate the stress caused by discrimination and racism and to facilitate acceptance. Also, feelings of self-worth are essential for facilitating the maintenance of life quality (Young, 2001).

Notably, *working hard* was mentioned by the majority of women interviewed (eight out of 12) as a strategy to demonstrate commitment and get through both their financial and cultural adaptation, which echoes strongly with the findings of Lee, Chan, Bradby, and Green (2002), whose work highlighted that the overseas Chinese community generally perceived the traditional virtues of working hard as one of the determinants of financial success. Lynn, for example, argued that she felt a responsibility to work hard for the sake of building an economic base rather than receiving a benefit from the government:

*I think the most important thing is the responsibility. Chinese people take responsibility of our life ... for example, the benefit here, some people they don't take responsibility, they used to ask for money from the government, they never tried their best to look for work, to work for their lives, but we*

*can't do that, because in our culture, you work, you live, otherwise no work no income. So we always try to earn more money and try to work harder ...*

As stated previously, working hard could be viewed as a means of showing commitment in pursuit of recognition and inclusion (Chow et al., 2000; Hwang et al., 2003; Li et al., 2007; Yee, 2003), as the following interviewee explained:

*I think because sometimes I do feel that we are the new immigrants here we need to build a good image for ourselves. I think I need to work a little bit harder than Kiwis, just to show them we do make contribution to the society. So ... I always do not allow myself [to be] bad ... (Michelle)*

One recent report claimed that there were often dissimilar sets of expectations at work and at home with family for ethnic minority women. At work they were expected to be assertive, confident and unreservedly committed to the organisation (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006). This may have been due to the fact that Chinese female migrants perceived themselves as part of a prominent minority and needed to outperform colleagues belonging to the dominant ethnic group in meeting the demands from work.

Connected with this, there was also evidence that for most participants, they tended to throw themselves eagerly into the work by positively taking responsibility. Caroline took herself as an example by saying that she did not mind working longer when necessary. Linda who usually took work home commented that: "Some people when they come to work they just wait for going home by counting time. But for me, I feel people need have strong sense of responsibility at work and need to be reliable." Apart from bringing work home and working overtime, the research findings revealed that for most Chinese women working hard also culturally meant doing their work well and efficiently without compromising quality. In this context, one stated that:

*I guess we are always to be taught to be humble to work hard ... We concentrate on things and we should be the best ... this is the culture. Ok, I work for you, you know I am paid, so I need to do my best for my work. It's the moral thing to do. (Clare)*

Lynn stated her views on working hard and believed that Chinese people and Chinese culture were very strict on the work quality so that she always endeavoured to do things well. For Michelle, working hard meant doing things quickly:

*At work, I am quite efficient; I don't take the things to the last minute ... for example, I don't need to finish this day say today is Thursday, but I do need to finish by next Thursday. If I got time I still wanna do it today, it's my way.*

As far as Caroline was concerned, working hard, to some extent, was an effective way to cope with her deadline stress, which could facilitate her balance between work and family:

*Like some people they say: "Oh, it's time, I have to go". They leave everything out and go and come back next day ... I'd rather to complete [my job] on time by the deadline, I don't like leaving anything ... So that's helpful ... I think most of Chinese people are the same. That's our culture [laugh]. We try to do things as soon as possible then we relax after work.*

The finding above seemed to reveal the determinants of Chinese women achieving success in settlement as proposed in a previous study (Wei, 2007): flexibility and adaptability, which helped them improve their financial and social circumstances.

## **9.5 Summary & Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the study showed that for Chinese women, good interpersonal relationships in the workplace and informal support from managers and colleagues played a crucial role in handling their tensions from work. In addition, the Asian Staff Network had been established by the university to help Chinese employees develop their circle of friends and give them a sense of belonging, which also provided women with informal support.

Parental leave, childcare and school holiday programme had been made available for women with care responsibilities, especially those facing a shortage of affordable

childcare. However, many Chinese women were not aware of the existence of the policies due to a lack of advertising and insufficient provision limited the ability of women to manage their tensions from care responsibilities. The services regarding childcare and the school holiday programme remain to be improved. Soliciting leave or flexible working hours had been employed by the women to cope with their FWC. Here, unsupportive management may seriously limit the implementation of these WLB practices. It was strongly suggested that training managers to have the necessary skills to implement WLB practices and manage WLB issues. Managers were also expected to be sensitive and open to employees' demands related to their culture and to be flexible in managing their WLB issues. When facing study-related conflicts, most of them were inclined to ask for professional development leave/time allowance to engage in their studies. An assortment of leave options, the EAP, fitness centre, and workshops offered by AUT help them deal with tensions from work and reduce their stress, even though EAP was underutilised to a certain extent.

This chapter has also outlined and discussed a range of strategies adopted by Chinese women to cope with the tensions between their work and family lives. Asking help from their family members may greatly contribute to their well-being by reducing their family burdens and psychological stress. Seeking support from parents/parents-in-law was viewed as a unique strategy adopted by ethnic women such as Chinese women but was not often reported in the Western literature. When several issues needed to be handled simultaneously and became tough to arrange, a win-lose strategy was employed to reduce their stress, namely, taking up one thing by giving up another. As for time management, it was a crucial tool used by women not only to improve their efficiency both at work and with their family, but to assist them effectively arranging their study time and handling the conflicts between their personal activities and family responsibilities. In addition, setting a clear boundary between work and family lives may keep women from WFC/FWC.

Most Chinese women also positively seek ways to facilitate their socioeconomic adaptation, encompassing changing mindsets by thinking in another way or from

another's perspective when feeling frustrated, and demonstrating commitment to the new country in order to achieve acceptance.

Table 4 summarises the key findings of the study. The final chapter provides an overall conclusion for this research, discussing the implications and identifying the limitations of the study and suggesting directions for future research.

**Table 4: Thematic Conceptual Matrix: WLB Challenges and Strategies**

Stress & Conflicts			Coping Strategies			AUT Support	
				Cultural	Family members-related	Policies/informal support helped	Causes of being underutilised/limited
Immigration	Stress	Cultural Barriers		Changing mindsets; Showing commitment			
Family	Stress	1.Heavy family loads 2.Care responsibilities	Seek help from husband/partner/children		Seek help from parents/ parents-in-law	Parental leave	
						Childcare	Insufficient day-care facilities
						School holiday programme	A lack of advertisement
	Family– work conflicts	Child related issues	Seek help from husband/ partner; Win-lose strategy			Flexible working arrangement	1.Nature of work 2. Economic concern
		Emergencies (e.g. car broken down, family issues)	Seek help from husband/ partner			Manager support	Unsupportive manager (lack of understanding and training about WLB)
Personal life	Stress	Lacking time to handle personal activities	Planning/ time management				
	Conflicts	Study-work/ family conflicts	Planning/ time management			Time allowance/ professional development leave	

(continued on p. 180)

**Table 4 (cont)**

Stress & Conflicts			Coping Strategies			AUT Support	
			Cultural	Cultural	Family members related	Policies/informal support helped	Causes of being underutilised/limited
Work	Stress	1.Large workloads 2.Deadlines	Planning/time management; Communicating with family members			Leave options (e.g. annual leave, sick leave, leave without pay or buyable leave)	1.Nature of work; 2.Perceptions of career consequence; self-imposed inhibitor; principle of depletion 3.Tight financial margin
		3.Difficult problems	Communicating with family members			EAP	1.Low awareness of the policy (lack of advertisement) 2.Unwillingness in recognising the problems
						Good interpersonal relationship; Support from managers and colleagues	Unsupportive manager or colleagues (lack of training and understanding about WLB)
		4.Communication barrier; 5.Underemployment		Demonstrating commitment (working hard)		ASN	
	Work–family conflicts	1.Bring work home 2.Working overtime 3.Emergency callbacks after work	Establishing clear boundaries between work life and family life			Manager support	



## **10. Conclusion**

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### **10.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the conclusion of the thesis. It firstly summarises all of the key findings, followed by a discussion of the implications of this research. After offering an assessment of the limitations of the study, some suggestions are also made for future research.

### **10.2 Summary of Key Findings**

The preliminary purpose of this research was to explore the WLB experience of Chinese women in administrative roles at AUT. Another objective was to contribute to the body of knowledge on WLB issues for a minority ethnic group: Chinese women's coping strategies for integrating work with their other roles and responsibilities. A qualitative case study approach was adopted, enabling the study of organisational initiatives and policies for WLB to be compared and contrasted with the women's experiences. A triangulated strategy was employed with the aim of gleaning data by virtue of multiple methods including secondary research on WLB and AUT University's WLB policies, the collection of archival evidence such as publicly available documentation, and in-depth interviews with Chinese female administrative staff, and staff members from the HRD, the ASN and the AUT Branch of TIASA.

The findings from this study indicated that most Chinese women struggled with juggling their work and family lives. The minority status of Chinese women impacting on their WLB experience could not be truly reflected without evaluating their ethnicity, gender and cultural experience of immigration, which to a great degree, place added stress on them both at work and within their family. Although they usually faced a range of cultural barriers encompassing language problems, a restricted social network,

employment obstacles, racism and discrimination, most of them, in spite of these, expressed that they enjoyed their simple, healthy and family-oriented life in New Zealand. They reported that their experience of immigration made them more flexible, adaptable, tolerant and open-minded enough to tackle any challenges in their lives. A wide range of positive actions were taken by them to smooth their adaptation including taking every opportunity to learn English and local culture, expanding their social network and participating in social and community activities. For these women, WLB tended to be regarded as a luxury in the initial stage of immigration, but after several years of endeavour, all of them now lead a more stable life.

It would appear that women's family situation had a crucial effect on their ways of arranging their households and organising their childcare or eldercare. That is to say, the women who had children and did not live with their parents faced the heaviest tensions, as most of the childcaring, domestic burdens and family expectations were put on them. For those having care responsibilities and living with their parents/parents-in-law, the family responsibilities they took on were obviously less than those not living with such relatives. There was also evidence that women with younger children often spent some time on children-related activities after work or at weekends. The lightest family burdens were assumed by mothers living with an adult child and by younger women with no children given that most of the conflicts between work and family were caused by care responsibilities.

In terms of FWC, Chinese females with younger children often encountered some child-related issues and personal emergencies, which may cause them to take time off work. Along with this, the findings revealed that finding time to study and managing the conflicts between personal activities and family responsibilities were another two major challenges the Chinese women faced.

Women's recreational activities in weekends or holidays were mainly family-oriented, while their personal activities usually occurred after work. With the purpose of relaxing, reducing stress and keeping fit and healthy, physical recreation such as climbing,

swimming or going to a gym had been actively adopted by these Chinese women. In addition, moderately participating in social activities also played an essential role in facilitating the women's social adaptation, and therefore contributing to their WLB in the long run.

There were both positive and negative sides with regard to AUT's culture regarding WLB. Chinese women's awareness of AUT's WLB practices was quite low due to the lack of a formal WLB strategy/programme, resulting in an inadequate understanding of the WLB concept along with ineffective internal communication in the university, albeit that an extensive range of WLB initiatives had been launched by the university to meet employees' WLB needs. It would seem that establishing a systematic WLB strategy/programme incorporating training and evaluation mechanisms may improve the effectiveness of these policies to a great degree. There was also evidence that all WLB-related policies were positively viewed as fair, equitable and available to all employees and were especially attractive to female and ethnic staff.

Apart from pursuing a career and enriching their life experience, Chinese women decided to have a job mainly because employment could, more or less, satisfy their economic needs. Heavy workloads became the major issue, especially for the Chinese females working in administrative roles and in student services, although there was some seasonal variability.

Some negative spillover from high workload was reported by some interviewees such as emotional stresses and physical consequences (e.g. occupational overuse syndrome). There was evidence that meeting deadlines and handling difficult problems also caused tensions. Moreover, bringing work home, working longer hours and emergency callback after work were reported as the main WFCs encountered by these women.

There was evidence that all of the Chinese interviewees, more or less, took enjoyment in their jobs, albeit with tensions from work. Women at managerial levels saw their work as enjoyable owing to being given more entitlements, trust and autonomy, while, for

participants working in non-managerial roles, they tended to believe that their job was meaningful and felt a great degree of achievement by helping others.

It seemed that the cultural barriers faced by Chinese women were clearly reflected in their career experiences. The study showed that being women and bilingual were basically viewed as advantages for women working in the administrative roles and in student services, while cultural barriers caused ineffective workplace communication and underemployment on the other hand. Although a few of them experienced stressed due to the devaluation of their work qualifications, most female participants still highly valued their work and did not mind this too much. This may be due to the fact that being new immigrants, the financial contribution of work played a crucial role in their family's well-being that was more likely to be one of the main factors contributing to their WLB. In addition, the natural resilience of Chinese women helped them improve their financial and social circumstances (Wei, 2007).

It would appear that good interpersonal relationships, both with management and colleagues at the workplace, were vital for Chinese women to get informal support, which may not only contribute to their work performance but to a reduction of stress at work. A manager's support in particular, could greatly affect employees' ability to achieve their balance between work and family. Nonetheless, there was evidence that whether or not a manager granted a request initiated by employees in regard to the WLB policies was discretionary and primarily rested on the relationship between the employee and the manager. Therefore staff having conflict with a manager may suffer from such a negative relationship and be put at risk of not being permitted to use WLB solutions. It was likely that the manager's management style, understanding and appreciation regarding WLB may affect the implementation of WLB policies.

WLB courses and training were strongly suggested by some interviewees to ensure that managers were best qualified to implement the WLB practices. Although most women felt their colleagues were very supportive, which was pretty crucial for women in order to use WLB solutions to manage the conflicts between work and family, employees'

beliefs, attitudes that others' WLB solutions were coming at their own personal expense could become a powerful inhibitor against employees' utilisation of WLB initiatives.

Since ethnic identity generally refers to an individual's sense of self in regard to membership in a certain group (Chavira & Phinney, 1991; Orbe & Harris, 2001), it was not surprising to see that the ASN was viewed by most Chinese women as a significant channel to build friendships and seek a sense of belonging at the workplace. Therefore, for Chinese women, the existence of the ASN itself may contribute to a better WLB.

The research indicated that there was also a wide range of policies offered by the university to help Chinese women in addressing their personal and family issues. Parental leave, childcare and school holiday programme had been made available for women with care responsibilities, especially those facing a shortage of affordable childcare. Nevertheless, many Chinese female participants were not aware of the existence of the school holiday programme due to a lack of advertising, whereas insufficient provision limited the ability of women to manage their tensions from care responsibilities. Childcare services and school holiday programme remain to be improved. Moreover, asking for time off or flexible working hours had been adopted by women to cope with their FWC. Here, unsupportive management may seriously limit the implementation of these WLB practices. The study also found that to handle study-related conflicts, most of the Chinese women tended to solicit professional development leave (time allowance) to undertake their studies.

It seemed that all participants felt it very auspicious to have the assortment of leave options provided by AUT to aid them in tackling their WFC and reduce their tensions from work. For the majority of women, however, their chances of taking leave were more likely to be constrained given that the nature of their work determined that they could only take leave during non-peak times such as Christmas. Moreover, women's opportunities of using leave options could be reduced due to limited staff backup or back-fill.

When asked if utilising the WLB policies such as leave options might endanger their career development, some Chinese female interviewees disagreed by stating employees tended to be encouraged rather than penalised when looking for WLB solutions. There were women, though, who expressed some concerns about the negative effects on their career as a result of using the WLB provisions. It seemed that employees were inclined to think that if they used the WLB practices they would be viewed as less committed to their career. It would also appear that the tight financial margins may limit the implementation of leave policies.

Other policies employed by Chinese women to reduce their stress at work was health and wellness service including EAP, the fitness centre and workshops, albeit that there seemed to be a limited application in terms of EAP due either to a lack of communication strategy within AUT or women's reluctance to recognise their problems. Here, training of managers was strongly suggested to ensure they gained the skills in implementing WLB practices. In spite of the stresses faced, most Chinese women reported high job satisfaction.

It was encouraging to note that some strategies had been actively adopted by Chinese women to reduce tensions between their work and family lives. Asking for help from their family members may greatly contribute to their well-being by reducing their family burdens and psychological stress. Seeking support from parents/parents-in-law was viewed as a unique strategy adopted by ethnic women such as these Chinese women but was not often reported in Western literature. When several issues needed to be handled simultaneously and it became tough to arrange, a win-lose strategy through giving up less crucial or imperative activities was also employed by these women.

As an effective way of monitoring and controlling time, time management was employed by a large proportion of the women interviewed (nine out of 12) to gain more controllable time, improve their efficiency both at work and within their family, assist them in arranging their study time, and handling the conflicts between personal activities and family responsibilities. Eight out of the 12 women tried to build clear

boundaries between work and private lives so as to enjoy their family and personal lives without having them impacted on by their work.

Most Chinese women also positively seek ways to overcome cultural barriers and facilitate their socioeconomic adaptation, including changing mindsets by thinking in another way or from another's perspective when feeling frustrated, and demonstrating commitment to the new country in order to gain acceptance. As one of the Chinese traditional virtues, working hard was employed by these women as a tactic to demonstrate commitment, get through the cultural barriers they confronted, and facilitate their financial and cultural adaptation. Apart from the traditional meaning of bring working home and working overtime, the connotation of working hard had been enriched by these women, which encompassed a strong sense of responsibility and doing a job well and efficiently without compromising its quality. It was also viewed as an effective way to build a good image and gain acceptance.

### **10.3 Implications**

The findings of the study contributed to an understanding of the WLB experience of Chinese migrant women in New Zealand through an exploration of what coping strategies were employed by them for integrating their work demands associated with career commitments and life obligations. The 'life' component of the work-life balance equation of these women had been evaluated by a broader and more diverse approach. This allowed establishment of a vivid image of Chinese women and a well-rounded profile of their WLB experience.

The study indicated that the WLB experience of Chinese women could not be altogether independent of the specific organisational and social context and was closely related to their family situations and cultural backgrounds, which lends support to the claim of Kamenou (2008) who employed a social constructionist framework to explore the WLB experience of ethnic female individuals:

*When examining work–life balance issues, organisational structures and cultures are considered in conjunction with the broader life experiences of ethnic minority women within their home and community’s structures and cultures. Their own strategies and attempts in balancing their work and personal life are also a fundamental component of this framework. (p. S103)*

Likewise, the findings of the current study were congruent with Harris and Pringle’s (2008) comments:

*Effective strategies are required to raise awareness of work–life balance as a multifaceted concept, shaped by unique life paths encompassing differences in culture, income, gender, age, occupation, personality, class, health needs, personal goals and choices, responsibilities for families and other life stakeholders, migration experiences, workplace relationships, hobbies, critical life events and other factors. (p. 9)*

By introducing a cultural dimension, this study filled a gap left by most previous WLB studies. It found that Chinese women faced additional tensions due to cultural obstacles. While their bicultural identity to a certain extent deteriorated Chinese women’s financial and social circumstances, the cultural experience of immigration was viewed as fortunate for their lives on the other hand, making them more open minded, flexible, adaptable, and tolerant so as to overcome their difficult times. Their ability to settle in New Zealand, lead the life they desired and achieve a balance between their work and family lives had been enhanced accordingly.

This study also explored the WLB experience of Chinese women from both employer-driven and employee-led perspectives, which had also been an under-researched area in previous studies. From the employee’s perspective, Chinese traditional culture and women’s employment patterns have profoundly shaped women’s values and lifestyle choices. As a result, their WLB experience and ways of fulfilling family responsibilities/work demands and handling the WFC and FWC could inevitably be influenced by their characteristics of being an ethnic minority group, their cultural expectations, experience of immigration, family structure and situation.



Although the study focused on the Chinese ethnic group, the findings could be of interest to, and benefit, other ethnic group immigrants who are seeking to build their financial base to settle in New Zealand and who are struggling in balancing work and personal life demands.

In terms of the employer's perspective, the WLB policies and practices were evaluated for their effects on Chinese female administrative staff. Seeing that some WLB policies were underutilised at AUT, this research sheds light on the significance of communication across all levels of staff regarding WLB practices, suggesting the establishment of a formal WLB strategy/programme incorporating training and evaluation mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of these policies. Employers, employees, HRD, managers, the Union and the Government take a joint responsibility for facilitating the effective implementation of WLB in organisations. Especially, it highlighted that the cultural values of different ethnic groups need to be understood, appreciated and respected (Harris & Pringle, 2008), and cultural awareness training for managers could be crucial in equipping them with information on the diverse needs of different groups and aiding them to deal with issues that employees outside the mainstream white group may encounter (Kamenou, 2008). Beyond offering WLB policy implications for AUT, this research contributed to the enhancement of the ethnic minority women's well-being and improvement of workplace equity.

The research also indicated that the WLB experience of Chinese women was also affected by Government's policies. Considering the unique identities of female Chinese immigrants, social culture and the policies of the New Zealand Government determined Chinese women's employment status, life patterns and the experience of immigration, and often influenced the WLB strategies employed by Chinese women. The results of this research may also draw the government's attention to different ethnicities and aid policy makers.

#### **10.4 Limitations of Study**

It is obligatory to acknowledge the limitations of this research. A major limitation was the small sample size. For thesis-based research, a population-wide model could be difficult to conduct and the important thing was to establish workable criteria (Keats, 2000). Considering the time required for translating interviews, a small number of Chinese women (12) from mainland China were interviewed. The quite limited scope of the study may cause the category inequivalence and a lack of representativeness in sampling, and then influence the wider theoretical inferences (Williams, 2002). A representation of the population and generalisation thus became problematic.

Being conducted in the same site (AUT) and during a certain time was the second limitation of this study. Such a specific context determined that the reliability of the findings could not be examined without relating to their context. In other words, the findings of the study may not be totally applicable to a different group of people in another context or geographic location over different periods of time.

The study was further limited by the sampling technique. The first several participants were recruited through the researcher's network at AUT. By using participants' networks, more mainland Chinese women were located. This snowball technique, however, without conducting a random selection, may have introduced a selective bias into the study (Walliman, 2001).

Fourthly, by utilising anonymity, some undesirable issues might be triggered. Considering that the position of the participants also remained confidential, the mechanics of composing the case might become tricky and some essential context information might be lost (Yin, 2003a).

Finally, the findings of the study were limited by the semi-structured interview questions. Although the interviewees had a great deal of flexibility in how to respond to the questions, the specific, open-ended questions with narrower ranges may have

produced more limited responses to a certain extent when compared to the unstructured interview technique (Keats, 2000).

### **10.5 Future Research**

Some particular directions have been identified for future research. Since the study focused only on a small number of Chinese women from mainland China, future research incorporating a larger number of Chinese females from different Asian areas (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, or Malaysia) would be of value. Chinese women from different countries have vastly different social backgrounds, what is unique but common to them that makes them different from Caucasians would provide a more in-depth understanding of the WLB experience of Chinese women.

Since managers played a significant role in implementing the WLB practices, additional research is also needed to involve the perceptions of both line managers and senior managers. Their understanding regarding WLB and their views of Chinese women's tensions at the workplace would be valuable to be explored in future research.

According to empirical data of this research, among the Chinese female participants, there were only two who mentioned the Union but neither of them was a Union member. The reason for this and whether the benefits of being a Union member could improve women's WLB would be another two areas needed to be explored in future research.

The Chinese participants in this study were all permanent employees. Further research could involve the temporary female staff who were more likely to adopt flexible working arrangements such as taking a part-time job or working at home. Seeing that many women worked part-time after their parental leave, an exploration of the WLB experience of women having part-time employment on a temporary basis would offer more insights into the topic. In this regard, women's husbands and their children may also need to be involved in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of their family situation and their life experience.

In this study, in terms of the Chinese women whose parents were still in China, they tended to save most of their leave days for visiting their family in China. Another area of future research could examine how these women handle their daily tensions between work and family lives without utilising any leave options during the year and to what extent these women would be able to achieve their WLB, and how managers handle the tensions faced by this group of women.

Women working in different roles may have to confront different pressures to achieve WLB. Future research could compare the different WLB experiences of Chinese female administrative staff and academic staff in the same context. Their job satisfaction and organisational commitment should also be evaluated and compared.

It would be important to conduct future research in other contexts such as other universities, other sectors or other countries to scrutinise any difference that may emerge. Also, a cross-sectional comparison study among Chinese women in different universities would then help decide on what changes should be made and identify best practices in different contexts. Here, given that more participants could be recruited, a multiple research method may be employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, which would add strength to the validity of the study due to the use of the triangulated method.

It is important to mention that the discussion offered above included only some future research possibilities related to the findings of this study rather than an exhaustive demonstration.

## **10.6 Conclusion**

This research explored the WLB experience of Chinese women in administrative roles at AUT and contributes to the body of knowledge on WLB issues for a minority ethnic group. The findings of the study also expanded the existing understanding of the WLB

experience of Chinese migrant women in New Zealand. The ‘life’ component of the work–life balance equation of these women has been evaluated by this research study. This study filled a gap by most previous WLB studies by introducing a cultural dimension. Additionally, it explored the WLB experience of Chinese women from both employer- and employee-led perspectives. It is hoped that the findings could be of interest to, and benefit, other ethnic group immigrants. Well-designed WLB policies that address employer-driven concerns and employee-led perspectives can contribute to the enhancement of ethnic minority women’s well-being and improvement of workplace equity.

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## **Appendix 1-Interview Schedule 1**

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### **1. Background**

Where are you from?

How old are you?

What qualifications do you have?

Why did you decide to have your current job? How did you hear about it? When did you start here?

Tell me about your role in this organisation. How do you see your role in this organisation?

What are some features of a 'typical' day at work?

What are some of the things you like about your organisation?

What are the things you like most about your role in the organisation?

What are some of the things you like about working here?

What are some of the things that were difficult about working here? Why?

What would you say are some of the most interesting parts of this job?

### **2. Acculturation**

When did you migrate to New Zealand?

Why did you choose to migrate to New Zealand?

What kind of immigration did you use?

How much of your/your family's life has/ have changed since you lived in New Zealand?

What are some of the highlights for you and your family of immigrating to New Zealand?

What are some of the difficulties you/your family encountered? How did you/they cope?

### **3. Gender & Ethnic Identity**

What does being Chinese mean to you?

How has your gender or your Chinese identity shaped your career in any way?

How has your gender or your Chinese identity influenced your other aspects of life in New Zealand?

### **4. Work-Life Balance**

Can you describe your family situation? Who is in your family?

How do you see your role in the family?

What are some of the typical activities that you have to deal with when you return from

work?

How do you see your current workload?

What are some of the challenges with balancing your home life with work life?

How do your Chinese identity, cultural background and experiences influence the way you manage the demands of work and home life?

Is there anything you would have done differently when you are living here compared to your life back in your home country?

How do you prioritise work and family activities and issues?

Do you face stresses with home and/or work? How do you cope with these?

## **5. Support Structures**

Do you know of any formal work–life balance policies and practices at your workplace?

Do you utilise this support? If so, what and how has it helped?

What kinds of informal support do you receive from your workplace to deal with family issues?

What other forms of support would you think would greatly improve the work–life balance of employees at your workplace?

## **6. Other**

Can you give me an example/s of when family and work responsibilities have clashed? How did you resolve them?

What are some of the positive and not so positive things about work life policies and practices at your workplace?

What would you advise people in your role with how to balance their family and work lives?

## **Appendix 2- Interview Schedule 2**

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### Work–life balance

What does the concept of work–life balance mean to you?

What role do you think the employer has in assisting employees to have effective work–life balance?

What responsibilities do you think the employee has in regard to their work–life balance?

Do staff have the opportunities to discuss issues affecting work–life balance?

How do staff tend to discuss issues of work–life balance they are facing?

Can you give me some examples of work–life balance challenges that staff face?

### Work–life balance initiatives at AUT

What types of WLB initiatives does the AUT offer to support staff to achieve work–life balance?

Who uses the WLB initiatives?

Are there statistical records of uptake of these?

How attractive are the WLB initiatives to female staff?

How attractive are the WLB initiatives to staff of various ethnicities for example Chinese staff?

How does your role contribute to improving AUT as a workplace in which employees can enjoy work–life balance?

What challenges do you face in your role with regard to working on work–life balance policies?

What do you think other things could be done in the workplace to help staff achieve work–life balance?

### Work–life balance cost-benefits

How would AUT benefit from implementing some of the other work–life balance initiatives you have discussed?

What are the barriers for AUT making some of work–life balance initiatives discussed unattractive?

### Conclusion

How do you see the role of the Asian Staff Network and the TIASA for assisting staff in gaining information on work–life balance?

How important do you feel the individual line manager is in regard to staff achieving work–life balance?

Relative to other universities, how much do you believe AUT emphasizes work–life balance for staff?

Are there any further comments you would like to make about AUT and work–life balance?

## Appendix 3- Ethical Approval Memorandum

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### MEMORANDUM Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

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To: Candice Harris  
From: **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC  
Date: 8 April 2008  
Subject: Ethics Application Number 08/14 **Raising half the sky: work-life balance of Chinese female administrative workers.**

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Dear Candice

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 11 February 2008 and that I have approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 12 May 2008.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 8 April 2011.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 8 April 2011;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 8 April 2011 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are

provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction. When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at [charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz](mailto:charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz) or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the AUTECH and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Banda', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Madeline Banda

**Executive Secretary**

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Yan Ma [wsv9458@aut.ac.nz](mailto:wsv9458@aut.ac.nz), Marcus Ho

## Appendix 4- Participant Consent



### Consent To Participation Research Form

Project title: **Raising Half the Sky: Work–Life Balance of Chinese Female Administrative Workers**  
Project Supervisor: **Dr Candice Harris; Dr Marcus Ho**  
Researcher: **Yan Ma**

- 
- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project (Information Sheet dated 10 December 2007).
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I am interested in participating in the follow- up interview (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant :

Signature:

Participant Name :

Participant's Contact Details (including daytime telephone number):

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2008, AUTECH Reference number 08/14

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

# Participant Information Sheet



## **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

10 December 2007

## **Project Title**

Raising Half the Sky: Work-life Balance of Chinese Female Administrative Workers

## **An Invitation**

You are invited to participate in a research project. My name is Yan Ma. This research will form a thesis component of my Master of Business degree that explores Work-life Balance (WLB is defined as creating a supportive work climate to minimise the potential tensions between work and other parts of people's lives) initiatives of AUT University and WLB issues for Chinese female administrative employees.

## **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research is to review AUT's WLB policies and their effects on the WLB experience of Chinese women in administrative roles. The aim is to also contribute to the body of knowledge on WLB issues for a minority ethnic group - Chinese women's coping strategies for integrating work with their other roles and responsibilities.

## **How was I chosen for this invitation?**

The decision to choose to invite you was based on the factor that you belong to one of the following categories:

- 1) Chinese female administrative staff;
- 2) AUT staff working in Human Resource responsibilities.

Your identity including name and position will remain confidential.

Please feel free to ask me for more information regarding this research.



**What will happen in this research?**

I will be asking you questions based on an interview schedule, which is approved by the AUTECH. The questions are about the WLB initiatives offered by AUT and/or your perception and experience of WLB. Each interview is expected to last around one hour. When necessary, you may be requested to be interviewed again for further information.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

Since the main activity of the research is talking, there should not be physical discomfort. We may however, discuss issues which may make you feel uncomfortable or embarrassing. As participation is voluntary, you will not be required to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering or discussing. You will also be given the opportunity to withdraw your participation in this project at a later time.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

You have the right to refuse answering a question or withdraw from the research at any time and your consent form, interview tape and transcript will be destroyed accordingly.

**What are the benefits?**

Beyond offering WLB policy implications for AUT, this research may contribute to the enhancement of the ethnic minority women's well-being and improvement of workplace equity.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The researchers are the only people who will know who you are in respect to the information collected in the research. All records are strictly confidential and your name will not be used in the thesis and future publications.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The principal cost for you is your time. An approximate time commitment of around one hour is needed from you.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

I will contact you within two weeks to ensure if you are interested in and willing to take part in this research. Also, I will answer your any further questions.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

You will need to fill and return the Consent Form to the researcher.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

As a participant, you will be given the option of receiving a copy of the report of the research's findings. Please indicate on the Consent Form if you wish to receive a copy.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Candice Harris, [candice.harris@aut.ac.nz](mailto:candice.harris@aut.ac.nz), or 64 9 921 9999 ext 5102; Dr Marcus Ho, [marcus.ho@aut.ac.nz](mailto:marcus.ho@aut.ac.nz), or 64-9-921-9999 ext 5448.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?****Researcher Contact Details:**

Yan Ma, mobile phone: 021619688, email address: [wsv9458@aut.ac.nz](mailto:wsv9458@aut.ac.nz).

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Dr Candice Harris, office phone: 64 9 921 9999 ext 5102, email address: [candice.harris@aut.ac.nz](mailto:candice.harris@aut.ac.nz);

Dr Marcus Ho, office phone: 64-9-921-9999 ext 5448, email address: [marcus.ho@aut.ac.nz](mailto:marcus.ho@aut.ac.nz).

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 8th April 2008, AUTECH

Reference number: 08/14.