Women Managers' Careers in a Chinese Commercial Bank

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By

Yue Fei

School of Management

University of Leicester

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Abstract

China's rapid economic growth since 1978 has made the country an important place to examine. This growth, though raising 800 million people out of poverty, has also created challenges for the state, one of which is how to integrate China into the global economy, and how to create understanding between distinct business practices. Increasing trade between China and the rest of the world has made it necessary to understand different cultural business practices to avoid conflict and misunderstandings. Another challenge for China is the increasing economic independence of women, which has resulted in the need to address gender inequality in the workplace in terms of women's experience in their careers.

This is a micro-ethnographic study of a Chinese bank in a medium sized city on the east coast of China, and I collected the data between July to September 2012. This includes over 492 hours of observation in the working practices of the bank, examination of 164 documents, and interviews with 51 managerial employees. The study focuses specifically on woman managers in the bank, and examines how they made their decision to work in banking, how their career developed and how they understand gender equality in the bank. It also examines whether they experience discrimination because of their gender, in what is usually regarded as a male dominated career. The study found that the women managers negotiate their gender positions moving between the established feminine and masculine characteristics in their role as managers depending on the context. However more relevant to the female managers is the cultural context of working in a Chinese bank. *Guanxi* was a prominent feature in this study; this was in terms of recruitment, promotion, discrimination and job allocation. The study argues that *guanxi* has adapted to the political, social and economic development of China, but continues to be essential for understanding Chinese culture and gender relations in the bank, which would be relevant in other industries in China. The implication is that to work with Chinese companies, other countries need to have a deeper understanding of how *guanxi* operates if they are able to successfully operate in a Chinese context. Furthermore, this study also postulates that traditional Chinese cultural values promote informal flexible work for women, protect their career progress during their maternity leave, encourage cooperation at work, and encourage commitment to the bank. This study contributes to the discussion on Chinese women's career in management and argues that categories such as collectivism, individualism, feminism, and masculinity are too narrow for the complexity of the modern Chinese professional woman.

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Word list of Mandarin Pin Yin used in this study with English definition

Bao: repay.

Chadeng: Social equality is unrealistic, and therefore the society should be differentially equal.

Danwei: represents the employers in China. Before 1992, it refers to the state-owned enterprises (SOE) and government department which were all the employers in China.

Dazhaohu: take care of, attend to.

Ganqing: feeling.

Gejvqiwei: everyone should be in his or her own post or position in the society.

Gong: universality that excludes the private lives but looks at the society as a whole.

Gongfen: is a system of payment for a person's working hours which is calculated on the value of the production of the community in conjunction with the number of hours worked by all individuals.

Gongping: equality or fairness.

Guanxi: is distinctive in the Chinese social context, in comparison to social networking or social capital in the western context.

Guanxihu: the person who has *guanxi*

Han: the main ethnicity in China.

Heqingheli: taking care of both affection and rationality.

Houmen: back-door or under-the- counter.

Hukou: household registration required by law which restrains a Chinese person's residency.

Huoxialaile: is a spoken expression which literally means survive.

Jijao: a person is fussy about trivial things for example some people always compare how much work they have done with their colleagues.

Jundeng: Social equality.

Maiduangongling:	redundancy without employer welfare, which was illegal and banned by 1995, 1996, 1998 and 1999 legislations.
Mianzi:	face, refers to reputation, prestige, feelings.
Neitui:	internal retirement for the employees that have not yet reached their retirement age. Statistically these people are still employed but in reality they are out of a job with a reduced salary.
Nvziwucaibianshide:	ignorance is a woman's virtue.
Pilingpikong:	anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucian.
Pindie:	directly translated as 'competing daddies' and refers to competition based on the power and influence of family.
Ping:	the balance and harmony of the society.
Quanzi:	'the circles', refers to the networks which are likely to be exclusive. Similar to English word 'clique'.
Renqing:	worldly wisdom, human relationship; sensibilities, feelings; favour; custom, convention.
Renqingwei:	the flavour of human kindness.
Sancongside:	three types of obedience, four virtues, for women.
Sangaonv:	'three high women'; refers to the women who are highly educated, and highly paid but old and still single.
Shennv:	'left-over women' who are over the age of 28 and still single
Wu:	region coving southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang. *Wu* is also a dialect, varieties of which are spoken in Shanghai, south-eastern Jiangsu and most of Zhejiang.
Xiagang:	similar to redundancy but with no compensation.
Yang:	the masculine principle in nature, as it is the complement or sometimes opposite to *Yin* in Chinese philosophy or medicine.
Yingchou:	socialize, entertain, and treat with courtesy.
Youmianzi:	'have face', refers to enjoying due respect.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

My interest in Chinese women in management is from my personal experience. I worked as a front-line manager in a Chinese commercial bank from 1997 to 2006. It was a dynamic work experience as the banking industry was developing fast to 'catch up' with the rest of the world. Immediately after graduating from University where I studied Business Administration at undergraduate level, I started working as a graduate trainee where I stayed for one year before moving into the finance and accounting department for two years as an accountant. After this this I moved into the Global Transaction department as a specialist in international trade, and again stayed in this position for two years. I moved from a supportive role in the bank to one in the core banking business units. My final position in the bank was in corporate and investment banking, first as a relationship manager and then as a supervisor in trade finance where I stayed for four years before leaving the bank. My progression in the bank in the early stages of my career was a result of achieving high grades in professional training and development and through my work performance. However, towards the end of my work experience in the bank it became apparent to me that progression through performance was not sufficient to make further progress, and it was dependant very much on other factors such as *guanxi*, political affiliation, social status and gender.

Guanxi is a term used among people of a Chinese heritage culture and essentially at is most basic level refers to relationships between individuals, a fuller explanation of which is given on P.34. *Guanxi* was always an essential part of my work, as for a few years I was a Relationship Manager for the bank's corporate clients. *Guanxi* is a legitimate part of everyday work and life and I was so familiar with it that I hardly noticed it. Cultural differences between Chinese people was also something which could be overlooked except when I worked with foreign clients. Difference among my colleagues however was something I never thought of: we are all Chinese and with few exceptions almost everyone is from the same ethnicity which is Han and we speak the Wu dialect and sometimes a mix of Wu and Mandarin, we have the same skin and eye colour and we have similar educational and family backgrounds.

Differences are likely to be hidden behind these visible cultural and racial similarities and so inequality is less visible in this context than in a multicultural environment.

However, it was when I came to study in the UK and became more critically aware that I reflected on my time in the bank and about issues such as gender and *guanxi*, and how this fitted into the wider context of the development of China. I believed that this would be an opportunity to gain access to the western-centred business and management theories which would open new perspectives for me and be able to examine the place I worked with a more critical perspective. Many aspects of my life and my friends' and colleagues' lives such as career, family duties and obligations, traditional norms that I used to see as legitimate were discussed widely in western academia. Women's position and experiences in the Chinese labour market is an emerging theme in the economic and management literature (Maurer-Fazio et al. 1999, Leung 2002, Dong et al. 2004, Cooke 2005, Cooke 2010, Nolan 2010, Xiao and Cooke 2012).

These studies have helped to contribute to a better understanding of women managers in a Chinese context. However, investigating how gender interacts with other factors such as organizational hierarchy, cultural values and *guanxi* have not been explicitly explored. Though acknowledging diversity, women managers' individual construction of gender and culture through their career is discussed less, and research of Chinese women managers in the Chinese banking industry is lacking. There is also a lack of ethnographic studies of women managers in China, and therefore investigating their home and work life may present a more complete picture of the complexity of Chinese women managers' life. Women managers' variety of positions in the organizational hierarchy also potentially adds richness to women managers' career experiences. Another important aspect of women's career is *guanxi,* and is prioritised by the participants in their contributions to this study. Although *guanxi* is discussed in the studies mentioned previously (e.g. Woodhams et al. 2014) it is noticeably absent in the authors analysis of the data. The purpose of my study is to contribute to existing knowledge and develop a better understanding of women managers in China, which may serve to challenge current perceptions of the working environment in China.

1.2 Outline of the study

In the following chapter I introduce and discuss some of the major themes which underpin my discussion on Chinese women managers. I discuss women's position in the Chinese labour market, their employment and career opportunities, the legal framework and *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices at an individual level and relate this to the established literature of gender inequality in employment, gender role differences, cultural differences, *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices in Chinese context and how they have sustained people's views on Chinese women in the labour market. I then outline my research question: to what extent and how do Chinese women bank managers experience inequality in their day to day experience of work and employment and its impact on their career opportunities and decisions?

In Chapter 3 I will present the organizational ethnography methodology that supports the exploratory purpose of the studies. The principal aim of this research is to examine women managers, but I did not exclude men in this research in order to gain a realistic view on the gender roles in the Chinese organization. In chapter 4 I contextualize the banking industry and the particular bank that forms the setting of my research. As an ethnographic PhD study, this chapter represents partial aspects of the data to establish the research setting within the industrial and cultural complexity.

Chapter 5 will look in detail at how the Chinese women managers in the bank represent their gender and cultural characteristics in detail. *Guanxi* is an essential theme that is repeatedly interwoven with their career experiences in the bank and this will be analysed in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7 I discuss how these women managers' gender roles, cultural characteristics, *guanxi* practices, age, education and financial motivation influence their employment experiences in relation to the established literature. In the conclusion, I highlight my findings from this study that Chinese women managers' cultural and gender characteristics are not always identical. Therefore a dynamic understanding is needed in order to capture the complexity among Chinese women managers; their cultural and gender identities may not require a western ideological adjustment in order to achieve their career advancement in China.

Chapter 2. Women in Employment in China

2.1 Introduction

Labour market inequalities, particularly the differences in earnings, access to opportunities, the freedom of choice and personal self-fulfillment have become important topics across many countries. Women, along with minorities and migrants are often studied because of their lack of rights to equality in economies (Machin 1997, Maurer-Fazio et al. 1999, Martin and Morrison 2003, Thorat and Neuman 2012).

Gender inequality issues in modern society that affect working women such as the *glass ceiling* (Davidson and Cooper 1992, Ragins et al. 1998, Meyerson and Fletcher 2000, Cotter et al. 2001, Adams and Funk 2012, Polachek et al. 2015), work-life balance issues (Doherty 2004, Gambles et al. 2006, Emslie and Hunt 2009, Watts 2009, Xiao and Cooke 2012) and women in the service industry (McDowell 2011, Allen and Sachs 2013, Beck et al. 2013, Tlaiss 2013, Rao and Das 2015) are outlined in section 2.2 addressing the gender inequality that is evident in different organizations and the labour market in China. Individuals are affected by and embedded in a complicated 'matrix of domination' (Collins 2000) stemming from inequality which could be based on their ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, culture and several other multiple statuses rather than gender alone.

Sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this chapter focus more specifically on these issues in China which examines gender roles specifically related to an Asian cultural context, and how traditional Asian concepts of gender roles remain relevant. This section also considers the impact of socialism on gender and the influence of the recent market reforms which have dramatically changed both the working and home environment as well as the expectations of women's roles in both these environments. I also outline women's employment in China from a macro perspective, and then more specifically. Finally, section 2.5 presents a discussion on *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices because this is one of the most significant aspects of the organizational life in a Chinese business and management context.

In this literature review I focus on empirical studies on women's employment in China, and theoretical and empirical studies about *guanxi*. Western centred theories explaining women in employment such as gender segregation, career theory and intersectionality were not deemed applicable to the Chinese context of professional women in the bank in China because these theoretical approaches have a tendency to categorize Chinese women through the lens of a western perspective. Moreover, to understand Chinese women from their point of view, this study has an exploratory nature, therefore I decided not to depend on these theoretical approaches to avoid misrepresenting their women's employment experience and 'forcing' an interpretation of the data to match the theories.

2.2 Gender discrimination, the glass ceiling and the work-life balance

It has been argued by several authors that women hold a subordinate position in employment (Elson and Pearson 1981, Chen and Francesco 2000, Webster 2014), and this stems from not just gender alone, but also from other factors such as ethnicity and age. Working women's issues such as job, occupation and industry segmentation, pay gap (Blau and Kahn 2001, Henderson and Fredrickson 2001, Arulampalam et al. 2007), mobility and advancement (Loprest 1992, Rosenfeld 1992, Tlaiss and Kauser 2011, Gayle et al. 2012, Cha 2014, Tanaka 2015), as well as ageism and women's image (Jyrkinen and McKie 2012, Wolf 2013, Betti et al. 2015) have been widely discussed.

It has been observed that both women in employment in general and women in management positions are continually restricted by the dominant cultural and social norms of 'managers' or 'leaders'. Women are segregated into 'women's jobs' and 'women's industries' across nations (International Labour Organization 2012) and women who do 'squeeze into' what are considered male industries achieve this by complying with male norms (Mirchandani 1999, Watts 2009, North–Samardzic 2011). Although technological development has allowed some organizations to promote family-friendly work environments (Allen 2001, Darcy et al. 2012, Herr and Wolfram 2012), women are still under-represented in the category of "managerial and legislative" occupations both in European and developing economies (International Labour Organisation 2012). Women's share of these in European economies is very low (about 4 per cent), but this is still almost double the women's share in developing economies. Overall,

despite the improvement in women's education and workplace practices, in terms of quantity, women are still far behind men in managerial positions.

The metaphor of *glass ceiling* is arguably one of the most well-known concepts in English speaking countries, and is relevant to both developed and developing economies (European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment 2009, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women 2009). According to the ILO (2012) the *glass ceiling* refers to vertical segregation in women's employment as a consequence of discrimination, a lack of training, and a lack of acceptance from their male counterparts, contributing to women's slow career progression. Recent studies, such as Ryan and Haslam (2005) and Ryan et al. (2011) suggest that even if women were able to achieve top management positions, they are more likely to be associated with a new gender stereotype that connects women leaders with business failures. They also point out that firms which appoint women executives are likely to experience an average of 5-month negative reactions from the stock market before the appointment. Women's involvement in top management appears to interact strongly with the market's prediction of a firm's poor performance. Therefore, women who are in the top position not only struggle in their own organizations but also attract a negative reaction from the financial markets. Despite this Sealy and Vinnicombe (2013) suggest that more women on boards and executive positions are associated with firms' financial success and positive performance statistically. While these studies identify gender as the main cause of the *glass ceiling* effect, women are sometimes found to be the ones to blame for their failure to move into top management. For instance, Galinsky et al (2003) report that women are less ambitious than men, though this is somehow the result of women's failures in their career advancement in the first place rather than the reason for it. Women's lack of career advancement may not only be because of the *glass ceiling*, but also possibly affected by many other factors such as organizational culture and personal experiences.

Another aspect of women's careers that has also been investigated is work-life balance and gender roles. For example, Crompton et al (2005) compared survey data collected from 1994 and 2002 in Britain, Norway and the Czech Republic, and though they concluded that gender role attitudes have become less traditional, household task allocations have changed little between women and men. The authors argue that the consistent gendered housework allocation

is because men's work has become increasingly demanding. However, women's increasing workload is largely ignored in their study, and there is not necessarily a direct connection between attitudes to gender roles and allocation of household tasks. A further change to the workplace has been a consequence of organizational structural changes, with increased working flexibility. Russell et al (2009) suggest that part-time work and flexible working has reduced work-life conflict as well as work related pressure. Women's conscious decision to take temporary work is also addressed positively by Casey and Alach (2004), arguing that work is only one part of women's lives along with their social and cultural participation. Both Russell et al (2009) and Warren (2004) point out that women need to balance their lives between family, employment, financial security and leisure because women's lives are not only divided between family and work.

Although flexible working hours have contributed to women's ability to maintaining a healthy work-life balance, there have been some negative impacts as well. For example, Smithson and Stokoe (2005) suggest that work-life balance and flexible working is associated with the construction of 'a female parent'. By relating work-life balance and flexible working to women, these discourses place women in the 'parent' position in an organizational context, despite this being a gender–neutral term. Therefore, the authors argue that the official gender-neutral context can in fact encourage and maintain gendered practice within organizations rather than undoing it. Moreover, by taking part-time employment, women are less satisfied with their social lives and have the least financial security compared to their colleagues who have full-time jobs (Warren 2004). The work-life system according to Warren (2004) is not a simple two-dimensional system and working part-time in fact cannot solve or improve women's work-life balance issues because part time work means less financial resources to enjoy leisure time in comparison to the women who work full time. Furthermore, Lyness and Judiesch (2008) and Beauregard and Henry (2009), after reviewing relevant literature on this topic conclude that promoting the work-balance does not necessarily result in a better performance for the firms, because although there is no significant cost to introducing flexible working it does not economically benefit firms.

The *glass ceiling* and work-life balance are issues which are particularly pertinent to the

banking industry. Several studies suggest that the banking and finance culture either prevents women working in this industry or constrains their career progress (Kerfoot and Knights 1993, McDowell 1997, Granleese 2004). In the UK, the banking and financial industry has attracted negative public attention by simply paying off victims of gender discrimination and sexual harassment suits without any changes of their policies and practices. Top firms in the City have been repeatedly taken to court for sex discrimination against their female staff. The most recent examples were Katie Tantum against Travers Smith (Dowell 2013) and Latifa Bouabdillah against Deutsche Bank, London (The Telegraph 2013). Despite the effort of researchers, the media and female workers themselves, gender equality is still lacking in the City and sexism is still prevalent in the UK's banking and financial industry and may contribute to a lack of women on the boards of directors of companies.

Worldwide, research of female workers or managers in the banking sector seem to repeat the findings of Kanter's (1977) study on women managers' less fortunate situation in a male dominated corporate culture. Rich, for example, (1995) explores the reasons for the feminization of the US banking industry from 1940 to 1980. He notes that although the female employment participation rate in the banking industry increased from 30% to 70% between 1940 and 1980, this represents a gender segregation process with women more likely to work in low positions. More recent research conducted by Berdahl and Moore (2004) shows that, during the local bank mergers in the US, low status workers and middle women managers with less formal education are in danger of unemployment. In the UK, Savage and Witz (1992) found that formal and informal gender discrimination in British banks have had an impact on women's grading and promotion that links to fewer women in managerial positions. Furthermore, the gendered culture in the Australian financial sector forces women to replicate masculine behaviour and norms which reproduce gender inequality in these organizations (North–Samardzic 2011).

A significant amount of gender discrimination in the banking industry appears to relate to associations of women as mothers. Granleese (2004) suggests that females in the UK are significantly more likely to hold managerial positions when compared to males if these females are not married and have no children. She further claims that these female bank managers have higher pressure that comes from the 'perceived gender inequality and work-life balance

concerns' (Granleese 2004: 219). In addition, a study by Charlesworth (1999) on Austrian banking industry's 'working mums' provides a clear picture of employers 'protecting' them by putting women in low skilled and low paid positions to reduce stress but has the effect of enhancing gendered occupational segregation and the gendered pay gap in a time of increasing unemployment. According to the same study, maternity leave or potential motherhood are the causes of workplace discrimination in this particular industry. Two studies have suggested ways to tackle gender discrimination in the banking industry. Based on a study of an Australian bank, Metz (2008), for example, suggests that a shift from emphasizing gender differences to gender similarities could bring a positive organizational change that leads to increasing representation of women in management in the banking industry. In addition, Maxwell (2009) argues that effective and formal mentoring could enhance female bank employees' career development and re-balance gendered career perceptions in the UK. The recommendations by these authors are in line with the Institution of Leadership and Management (2012: 13) which concluded that in the UK '[t]he biggest challenge to women's career advancement in banking is not about organizational processes, but about awareness, attitudes and behaviour of senior managers, and the culture of the organization'.

Except for research on female bank employee and managers in western countries, there are a few studies that represent the female bank employees' experience from other parts of the world. Burke et al (2008) suggest that female bank managers in Turkey have less job satisfaction, lower levels of working engagement and higher levels of job related stress in comparison to their male counterparts. The reasons for these female managers' problems are the perception of gender bias. This finding reflects an earlier study (Culpan et al. 1992) which shows that female bankers in both Turkey and in the US experience the same kinds of gender discrimination at work regardless of cultural differences. However, cultural differences appear to be more relevant in some countries with Kim (2004) arguing that cultural differences are as important as gender differences in trying to understand female employees in Korean banks. The discrimination or disadvantage of female workers in the banking industry is widely discussed but primarily based on a western perspective and therefore more research is needed in other contexts, in order to represent gendered workplaces across cultures.

Women are struggling in employment in general and women in management are continually restricted by dominant cultural and social norms of 'managers' or 'leaders'. At the same time,

because of technology development, some organizations (at least in the west) are able to promote family friendly work environments and create various forms of jobs, such as working from home and flexible working hours. Recent research brings new versions of women's experiences to this field and suggests that they can no longer be treated simply as victims or as a weaker group. Women managers' experiences at work have been re-examined to determine their position in the organizational structures and their conscious acts of doing or undoing gender in their managerial roles (Billing 2011). Women managers' diverse experiences from other cultures, such as China, in relation to its cultural tradition and marketization, have also developed the perspective on women managers (Woodhams et al. 2014, Tatli et al. 2016).

The discussion on the *glass ceiling* concept and the work-life balance issues in the banking industry is an illustration of the current debate on women's gendered experiences at work. Although it is untrue that gender is the only reason to slow women's career movement down, women in general seem to face greater challenges in career advancement than their male counterparts regardless of cultural and social differences. Women's work-life balance issues are only part of the wider work-life balance debate today and some women manage to achieve a balanced life and a successful career, but social norms, religion and culture impact on women's equality in both public and domestic domains. Finally, in the new economy, when employees' emotional and aesthetic skills and qualities become a part of management targets, women experience new forms of gendering processes that produce and maintain the inequality at work.

In some respects, Chinese women have similar experiences of gender discrimination in the work place, the glass ceiling and work-life balance, but there are also aspects of gender issues in the workplace which are unique to China and will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 Women and the Chinese Labour Market

Many Asian countries have their own rich history and traditions that produce their unique gender equality process. In this field, research interests focus more on countries such as India (Caplan 1985, Agarwal 1992, Thorat and Neuman 2012, 2015) and China (Gustafsson and Li 2000, Louie 2002, Knight and Song 2003, Hertel and Zhai 2006, Chen et al. 2013, Chiang et

al. 2015), or regions such as the Middle East (Moghadam 2003, Syed 2008). Syed and Ozbilgin (2009) argue that many of the studies that have been conducted in Asia serve a clear political purpose rather than a management or an organizational intent. This may be because as the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2012, 2014) suggest improvements in managing gender diversity in Asia is motivated by improving the equality of human rights, as well as improving economic incentives for women which would contribute to the countries' overall competitiveness.

It would appear that this dual purpose is a necessity as according to an online report from Bloomberg (2013), Asia loses 89 billion US dollars every year through ignoring women's importance in the economy. Despite this, in East Asia, women statistically appear to have a relatively strong position in the labour market. The ILO (2012) suggest that, in East Asia, women and men have a negative gender gap in the unemployment rate so it appears that the East Asian women have lower unemployment rates than men. The ILO further explains that East Asian women have as high an employment rate as men in advanced economics such as Central and Eastern Europe. However, the World Bank (2013) suggests that more than half of the countries in East Asia and Pacific have restrictions on the types of jobs women can do.

In the following section I discuss the three main circumstances that influence women's position in the Chinese economy which are Chinese cultural traditions, the socialist state and market reforms. Then I present women's current economic position in China.

2.3.1 The influence of traditional gender role on women's employment

'The modern Chinese women today are soaking in the traditional gendered culture that is deeply influenced by the Chinese classics' (Peng 2010: 325) and therefore it is necessary to discuss the notion of gender roles based on Chinese classical philosophy of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism and their relevance to women's position in employment/work-life balance. These philosophies are the three dominant philosophies in Chinese society and they served the purpose for Imperial China to govern the country to organise hierarchies within society and also hierarchies within the family unit. Confucianism is used by the authorities to establish social orders to govern China, and as an explanation of power distribution. Within

the family this philosophy guides moral rules and therefore this continues to influence modern families and governs their choices in terms of education, career, working arrangements, gender roles and marriage choices. Daoism positions women and men in different places and identifies the relationship between women's and men's position in the society and family according to *yin* and *yang* to be dynamic and interchangeable. Buddhism advises people to obey and follow their fate that is fixed by what people have done in their previous lives. These philosophies are unified to create social order and stabilise the society and families and are regarded as part of the traditions which are passed from one generation to the next, therefore these philosophies have a strong presence in the daily lives of Chinese people.

Several authors (Spence 1999, Fenby 2009, Wasserstrom 2010) have observed that Confucianism is one of the most dominant ancient Chinese schools of thought in Chinese society. Confucian classics were fundamental to the administrative principles and the ethical code in imperial China and it was fundamental to the country's governance which was based on 'male culture' (Mann 2000). Peng (2010) points out that Confucianism gave women no position as independent individuals in politics, economy and society and it was fundamental to the male dominance in Chinese society in the past. She explains that those women's personal values, desires, and emotions disappear in the collective needs of their families. Women's lives belong to their men and their men's families. From a Confucian perspective, these are positional differences rather than discrimination against women. Peng further argues that this positional difference still deeply influences Chinese people today. Talti et al. (2016) suggest that even women themselves assume that gender based difference is legitimate in the current Chinese society. It is not only tolerated by society but it is also promoted by the popular media in China and so this positional difference may indicate one reason for the inequality that working women face in today's China.

Discussion of Chinese or Asian gender issues invokes the idea of *yin-yang* in Daoism (Adler 2006). *Yin-yang* is the notion of the harmony of opposites: according to the most common superficial appreciation of *yin-yang* theory is a dichotomy between women as the *yin* and men as the *yang* (Humana and Wu 1971, Louie 2002, He 2006). This binary is similar to the opposition between earth-sky, mother-father. Real men are supposed to have strong *yang* essence (*yang qi*), described as determination, strength and self-control (Sima 1996); and real

women are supposed to have *yin* essence (*yin qi*), vaguely defined as tolerant, gentle and obedient (ibid). However, Louie (2002) suggests that the reductionist understanding of *yang* being male and *yin* being female is only partially accurate, because *yin-yang* are in constant interaction where *yin* merges with *yang* and *yang* merges with *yin* in an endless dynamism.

The *yin-yang* theory on gender has implications for gender and social orders: the wholeness needs both women and men and the dynamism between *yin-yang* explains how women and men live in harmony in Chinese society and further explains how the family, society and the state are managed. He (2006) argues that Chinese classic theory (Daoism, Buddhism or Confucianism), are unified on the importance of harmony in family, society and state: the *yin* and the *yang* maintain a mutual and complementary role. Peng (2010) draws her conclusion from Chinese philosophical studies that gender role differences determine different positions for women and men in family and society but more importantly she stresses that it does not necessarily indicate which one is more important than the other. This may explain partially the social and cultural reasons for ignoring the women's inequality in China over a very long period of time. Gender inequality could be something that maintains the balance in Chinese society and is therefore acceptable. Gender inequality in the labour market could be explained as women's different positions according to these kinds of beliefs and opinions: that equality and fairness is collective. Evans (1997) suggests that the reality is that the discussion of women's problems (for example between 1949 to 1980s) is hidden or forbidden in China, rather than not existing and that social harmony between women and men in China is far from the reality.

Adler (2006) points out that Confucianism emphasizes the subordination of wives under their husbands more than Daoism. Confucianism (Slote and De Vos 1998), and sometimes Buddhism (Cole 1998), also influence gender role stereotyping in many Asian societies. According to these traditions, women are supposed to hold a lower status in comparison to their male family members and take supportive roles to men. Women's primary place is at home and women's primary responsibility is to care for the family and their work should not be their main concern (Ling and Poweli 2001, Granrose 2007, Lu et al. 2008). In countries with a Chinese cultural heritage, women cannot pick and choose their roles of being daughter, wives and mothers. Cultural and social norms are likely to help men to push women into home carers'

positions for both children and the elderly (Lam 1993, Chan and Leong 1994, Yukongdi and Benson 2013), restricting their opportunities to pursue a career.

In addition to Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, Triandis (1989) suggests that the collectivist tradition in Asia preserves and reassures the traditional values and social norms that prevent women's equality in public domain and at home. Woodhams et al. (2014) suggest that this is family collectivism with a man on top and a woman prioritizing the man and his family needs over her own. Chinese cultural heritage has historically subordinated women and excluded them from the public spheres. Triandis (2004) lists several attributes of collectivist cultures which suggest that these countries are more attuned to working within a group and achieving harmony. For example, face-saving is extremely important, self-definition depends on social variables such as a religion and failure is blamed on insufficient individual effort. This can be contrasted with individualist cultures where individual autonomy is sacrosanct and assertiveness and aggression are valued as personality traits. However, definitions of collectivism as opposed to individualism have been questioned (Holliday 2011). Holliday argues that these labels help to perpetuate stereotypes, and also that collectivist attributes are generally perceived as carrying negative connotations.

Rowley and Yukongdi (2008) and Rowley and Cooke (2014) suggest that cultural tradition is important in the discussion of women's work-life balance. Adler (2006) stresses that understanding Daoism and Confucianism are crucial to understanding women's livesa and the implications of gender segregation at work in countries with a Chinese cultural heritage. These Chinese cultural values have been studied in relation to women's weak position in employment and difficulty in improving their positions in East Asian countries and Chinese ethnic groups around the world (Shaffer et al. 2000, Wright et al. 2002, Leung 2003, Kim 2005, Tatli et al. 2013).

Woodhams et al (2014) provide a useful taxonomy to understand the cultural and gender orientations of women managers in China which is represented in Figure 2-1. The authors identify 236 quotes from their participants which they categorise as being conformist, soloist, dissident and revolutionary. The conformists who were collectivist orientated and adopted feminine values provided the largest number of quotations of 53%. Revolutionary were the

second largest group of quotes with 25%, soloists 13% and finally dissidents were the smallest group with 9%. However, the authors acknowledge that the female participants cannot all be completely positioned in one of these groups, and their quotes demonstrate that some participants orientate between these categories, depending on the topic or the context. This indicates that there is dynamism in the women managers' orientation rather than as the taxonomy implies that women can be positioned in static categories. Moreover, the authors seem to have applied a quantitative reasoning and analysis to qualitative data by counting quotation and de-contextualising the data. With only 20 participants the authors have extrapolated this into 256 quotations.

Figure 2-1 Taxonomy of Career Orientation in Chinese Women Managers
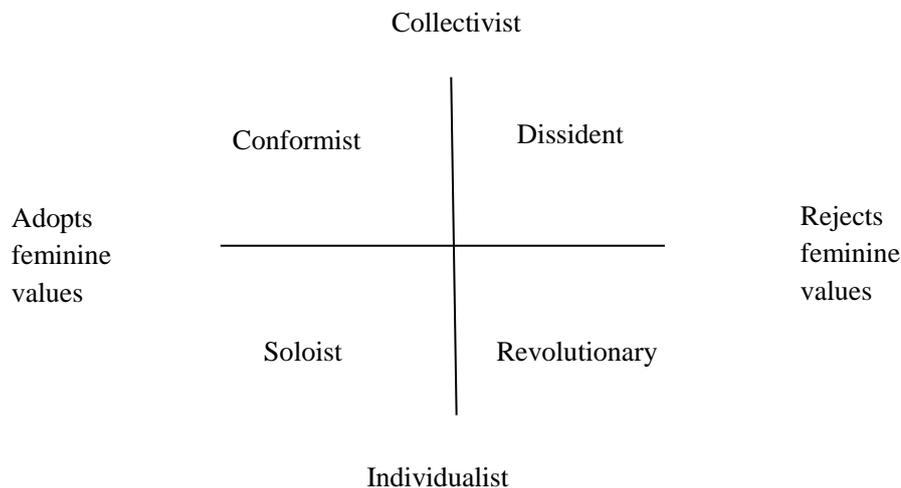
Woodhams et al. (2014 :11)

Furthermore, some of the analysis of the data that is presented is lacking in detail and it is unclear how they reached their conclusion of why a quotation should be categorised as such. For example, Wang Qian's quotation (Woodhams 2014: 9) regarding how her company is supportive of pregnant women is categorised as soloist with individualist orientation and an adoption of feminine values with no clear explanation of why. Wang Xia is characterised as a dissident because she conforms to a collectivist orientation by giving up a work opportunity in order to have a child to satisfy her husband and mother-in-law (Woodhams 2014: 9). However, because she is unhappy about this she is categorized as rejecting feminine values which would

seem to be a rather simplistic interpretation. Her unhappiness could equally be interpreted as displaying an individual orientation, while her decision to put her career on hold to have a child appears to be embracing traditional feminine values. Perhaps a more detailed analysis of the data, or wider research focus would reveal that these women switch between all four of their classifications depending on the topic and context. Despite the methodological and theoretical flaws in Woodhams et al.'s (2014) study, their model provides a positive starting point to conceptualise women managers' orientations in modern China.

The understanding of 'equal' in Asia may also differ from the meaning of 'equal' based on western experiences which I shall discuss later. In general, men historically have superiority in public in most Asian countries despite differences in religion, language, family structure, and culture. However, China's distinctive socialist past has also contributed to women's position in the economy and is discussed in the following section.

2.3.2 The impact of socialism on women's employment

In China, the influence of socialism on women or the integration of feminism with socialism has developed distinctive characteristics of women and women's place in the economy. For some, socialism alone promised to change the social order enough to empower women (Croll 1978, Howell 1996). To others the socialist state succeeded in acknowledging women's oppression as a political and social problem that required state power to solve it (Molyneux 1981). These political, economic and social transformations undoubtedly changed the way women live their lives in China. There are two historical moments when the Chinese Communist government dramatically changed women's role in the economy. The first was after the Communist revolution in the 1950s and 1960s and the second was from the 1980s onwards. In the 1950s and 1960s Chinese women were given equal access in the labour market and since the 1980s the market reform has brought complications to women's employment in China.

The emancipation of women in China was most dramatic after the Communist Revolution and the attempt to introduce new political, social and economic systems. A number of reforms were launched in the early and middle 1950s, such as land reform, a new Marriage Law, founding of new industries, organizing agriculture and the Great Leap Forward. In the context of these programmes and activities that were designed to change the economic base and create

a new social order and value system, women have been able to benefit from new employment policies and support the economic development of the state.

Women escaped from the social abominations of the old feudalism system, such as forced marriages, the traditional authoritarianism of the mother-in-law and the unimaginable slave labour conditions of the old mills and factories (Croll 1983). Women were given the right to vote, and received equal pay in the People's Army. Moreover, women made considerable progress in the workplace during the 1950s, and this was partly as a consequence of the Communist Revolution in 1949. By the end of the decade there were three million women working as civil servants, four female ministers and one vice-president in the central government, six hundred lecturers and professors and twenty-four hundred women taught in Peiping's universities, a quarter of teachers were women, 12% were members of the National People's Congress, which increased to 20% by 1965. There are no comparative figures for women in these areas prior to 1949, but it can be assumed that there were significantly less as women were not actively recruited for these positions (Hong 1976). In the rural areas, more than one and half million were members of handcraft cooperatives and every farm cooperative had at least one female on the board of management (Hong 1976).

During land redistribution in the early 1950s, women received half of the land which had previously belonged exclusively to men, though they had to give up their deeds to the cooperatives. Moreover, their payment was tied with *gongfen*[1] which was calculated on the family unit. Further changes took place for women between 1957 and 1958 during the "the Great Leap Forward" which aimed to build modern industries in the cities (Clark 1959). People were organized into different working commune units, which transformed the life of rural women. For the first time in China's history rural women's labour power was released and they were paid directly in wages and the work load and pay were equal with men (Croll 1978). The commune was the point where the needs of the state met the needs of Chinese women. When the state had no economic resources to equip modern machinery for the industry, it gave full measures to maximise the use of human labour, which utilized women not only as a replacement for new machinery, but also as new capital.

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[1] *Gongfen* is a system of payment for your working hours which is calculated on the value of the production of the community in conjunction with the number of hours worked by individuals.

Despite these achievements in the work environment, Croll (1983) argues that Chinese women sacrificed feminine standards and values. They gave up their human individualism by working, dressing and looking like men in dull, boring blue uniforms. Women workers got eight weeks of maternity leave on full pay and they were entitled to thirty minutes off every four hours to feed their babies. If they had to bring their babies with them to the factories, there were nurseries for them. However, this created other problems in the workplace as according to Snow (2004: 2) 'the unkind suggestion that these [raising children] delays production were partly responsible for Chairman Mao's decision to support organized birth control' and therefore it is difficult to fully appreciate the impact the effect that Chinese mothers' factory work had on their family lives (Snow 2004).

There are no statistics to indicate the birth control situation for the 1950s and no voice was publicly recorded from Chinese women either, which could be explained by the ancient and honourable Chinese strategy to discreetly keep quiet about problems (Croll 1978, 1983). Sex and child-birth are private issues and people are likely to be unenthusiastic about turning to the government or others outside their families. Government policies on family planning changed rapidly in China and birth control, which had been advocated in 1956 and 1957, was quickly abandoned and instead the state created numerous public nurseries, meaning that Chinese women were given the dual job of creating new factory workers and building new factories. However again after 1962 the government veered back towards birth control. The explanation for increasing the legal marriage age in the amendment to the 1950 Marriage Law ine 1962 was because 'women cannot work properly and effectively if they have too many children at an early age': so the amendment again served the purpose of the economic development of the state.

From the 1960s the Cultural Revolution emphasised the new consolidation of different forms of social organizations, extreme socialist education to strengthen the political awareness of people and the struggle against bureaucratic, capitalist and feudal forms of thought and behaviour. The Women's Federation (1961 cited in Croll 1986) conducted a survey and concluded that the greatest difficulty to achieve equal pay for equal work was the persistence of traditional thought and prejudices. The traditional subsidiary nature of women's labour power, female physiological restrictions and the time-honoured evolution of the sexes in China were used as excuses to pay female workers less than male workers. It appeared that equal pay for equal work would be easily implemented once the way of thinking had been corrected, but

at that time, instead of rewarding women for their biological reproduction role and household responsibility, they became the victims of discrimination in the work place.

In the 1970s, issues around enduring patriarchal attitudes and family and marriage were addressed in the Anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucian (*pilinpikong*) campaign. The campaign had positively promoted the national attack on feudal and patriarchal ideology since the early 1950s. The main point that related to women in the campaign was that the traditional ethical code derived from the thoughts of Confucius and Mencius and the ideas of respecting men and despising women still existed and had to be destroyed for the total success of the Revolution (Croll 1986). Therefore, women were organized to study and criticize the Confucian ethical code for women. Ideas such as "Three Types of Obedience, Four Virtues" (*sancongside*) were heavily criticized by women. Furthermore, the private attitudes and the relationship between women and men in the family were raised in public discussion. In addition, discrimination against women in pay and the failure of men to take responsibility for household chores were listed as examples of Confucian ideas. Moreover, free choice of marriage was promoted and 'Bride Prices' that men had to pay to their future wives' families and traditional wedding ceremonies were criticized. Significantly, matrilocal rather than patrilocal marriage was promoted, and men were encouraged to join their wives' community rather than the wives joining the man's community. The impact of preference for sons over daughters on gender equality was also observed in this period.

Defiance of parental influence over marriage, especially whom women should marry, was not encouraged. More strikingly, women's divorce rights were not even mentioned. Nevertheless, the campaign did pay significant attention to the continuing problems of family and marriage for young women. Moreover, the long-neglected sources of gender inequality that were embedded in marriage practice and family structure were questioned. It also called attention to the problems of the traditional ethical code. However, the campaign did not bring lasting and effective changes throughout China because this was a political power struggle rather than a campaign to promote women's rights.

The political position of women was weakened considerably during the reform process (Rosen 1991, 1995) and women's contribution to formal politics declined. Since the late 1970s, the market has provided a new concept and opportunities for success and as a result, it has become less attractive and also unnecessary to join the Party for career success. Moreover, the

development of the privatized and tertiary sectors has created new approaches to employment for both urban and rural women as private traders, entrepreneurs, domestic servants and foreign factory workers and therefore women are less interested in becoming involved in the political process. In rural areas, because of male migration for economic purposes, rural females have less time for public activities and have become more house-bound.

2.3.3 The influence of market reform on Chinese women

After economic reform was introduced in 1978 combined with social reconstruction the relationship between the genders changed. The market reform initiated in 1978 was a necessary precondition for an improvement in general living standards. Although promoted, at the time, as a reinvigoration of socialism, the reform has led to a full blown capitalist economy. For women the consequences have been ambiguous. The power of the market economy has brought new opportunities but also reinforced old patterns of female subordination and formulated new forms of gender oppression in China. In general, Chinese women still hold a subordinate position in the economy (Fan 2003, Dong et al. 2004, Chi and Li 2008, Zhang 2011, Zhang 2014). However, considering China has a population of over 1.3 billion and every one in five women in the world is Chinese, to understand Chinese women's situation is complicated and any generalization is problematic to make. Migrant factory workers, agricultural workers, and the work-life of urban professionals have their own distinct experience (Granrose 2005).

Berik et al. (2007) claims that compared to other transition economies, China's reform has been successful, particularly in reducing poverty, increasing market efficiency and economic growth. Now China has one of the highest rates of female labour force participation and one of the smallest urban gender wage gaps among developing nations (International Labour Organization 2012). Noticeably, some groups of women that are young, or well-educated, or well-connected have found freedom and opportunities in recent decades. However, women's employment problems have increased dramatically, for example, the emerging tendency to employ young, attractive women, particularly for jobs "in the public eye" in the hotel or retail industries (Gamble 2006, Jing and Zhang 2013). This discussion is very similar to the discussion of the aesthetic and sexualized labour in the interactive service industry outside China (Spiess and Waring 2005, Warhurst and Nickson 2009, Williams and Connell 2010,

Jyrkinen and McKie 2012).

Other issues are management forcing prolonged maternity leave on women in order to save money and deal with surplus labour problems (Honig and Hershatter 1988) and massive female workers' redundancy in the state sector due to industrial reform. The commoditization of sexual relations as evidenced first in the return of prostitution and the lucrative 'trading' of women and children present new issues of uneven economic development, poverty, labour migration and illiteracy (Zhang and Zhang 1993). Women are less likely to be occupied in well paid professions or sectors (Wei 2011, Attané 2012, Cooke 2013). Chinese women are underrepresented in managerial or technical jobs (Nie et al. 2014), even in the China Communist Party (CCP) (Luo 2014).

Before 1992, the state-owned enterprises (SOE) and government department (both called *danwei*) represented the employers in China. *Danwei* provided the traditional socialist assurance of a secure job for life (Dong et al. 2006). Outside employment, *danwei* also supplied most of the welfare to their employees in urban areas, which included healthcare, education, retirement support (organized activities, benefit and pension), subsidized housing and child care. Consequently, working age urban women were all full time employed. However, Summerfield (1994) and Yee (2001) suggest that at that time, just as in the west, urban women usually worked in a place 'suitable' for females: women were concentrated in the service industry, manufacturing and trade, and within those industries were in lower-paid jobs. According to the Research Centre for Sustainable Development (2003), male employees, at 63.4 per cent, represent the majority of employees in banks in China. Women are not under-represented significantly in the Chinese banking industry but women bank employees' positions in the Chinese banks are unclear. Chen et al (1997) suggests that, in mainland China, the number of women who are working in the financial and manufacturing industries remains very small, and both industries are regarded as having strategic importance to the Chinese economy.

The process of China's transition to a market economy led to ownership reform of the state-owned enterprises in 1992: many of them were merged, sold to individuals or made bankrupt (Berik et al. 2007). The 1994 Labour Law eventually ended life-long job security by giving employers rights to lay-off workers with little cost. Dong et al. (2006) and Giles et al. (2006)

estimate that almost 30 million urban workers lost their jobs between 1998 and 2002 with women having higher redundancy rates than men. These women found it more difficult to find new employment, and got less support from the State and had less *guanxi* (Giles et al. 2006, Du and Dong 2007, Liu 2007). This economic reform created an 'unlucky generation' who were born in the 50s, missed education during the Cultural Revolution in the 60s and 70s, met the imposed one child policy since late 70s, and were affected by the redundancies of the 80s and 90s (Liu 2007). Dong et al. (2006) further conclude that this group of women particularly suffered as a consequence of restructuring because they are less educated and middle aged. At the same time the young, attractive, educated and well-connected women were getting new jobs created by the 'feminized' private service sector (Summerfield 1994).

One issue during this reform period is that it is unclear exactly how many of the urban workers lost their jobs through various forms of redundancies. For instance, urban workers might lose their jobs taking extended maternity leave; internal retirement (*neitui*); being laid off (*xiagang*, similar to redundancy but with no compensation); redundancy without employer welfare (*maiduangongling*, which was illegal and banned by 1995, 1996, 1998 and 1999 legislations but with weak enforcement). However, in the official statistics only being laid off (*xiagang*) was calculated (Du and Dong 2007, Liu 2007). It is clear that one of these invisible redundancies, extended maternity leave, was only applied to female workers. Employers often argue that women should be the first to go because they could rely on their husband (Liu 2007). This reinforced the traditional gender stereotyping of women as homemakers and not the breadwinners which is little different from the west. In addition, industries such as services often have a preference for young female workers, and close their doors to those over 30 (UNDP 2003). Women's *guanxi* is very limited because most of them spend more time with the family than men do, and if they use their *guanxi* for getting employment opportunities, their peer group normally make assumptions that the *guanxi* must be through sexual impropriety associated with women's 'immoral behaviour' (Liu 2007). This reflects the traditional gender role of Chinese women: that a women's place is in the home, and that women's *guanxi* outside the home must be suspicious or abnormal (ibid).

Despite the opportunities that women have gained because of market reform in the Chinese economy, discrimination against women and gender inequality is still evident which is discussed in the following section.

2.4 Gender discrimination and inequalities in China

In 2014, China's Gender Gap Index (GGI) was ranked 87 out of 142 countries (Table 2-1, page 24) and Chinese women's Economic Participation and Opportunity ratio was ranked 76, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2015). These figures show that China has a very high level of gender inequality overall and in its economy. In comparison, China's gender gap is much more severe than post-industrial countries in the west, for instance Norway, Germany, the USA and the UK which were ranked number 3, 12, 20 and 26 respectively in their GGIs. However, compared to the Asian post-industrial countries such as Japan, China's GGI and women's overall female-to-male economic participation and opportunity ratios are higher, meaning that gender inequality in Japan is worse than China. China is ranked one of the highest in female-to-male ratio of 'professional and technical work' despite being ranked below average in female-to-male ratio of 'wage Equality for similar work'. China and Japan were also ranked particularly low for female-to-male ratio of 'legislators, senior officials and managers'. China and Japan share a similar pattern of gender inequality in their economies: few Japanese and Chinese women become legislators, senior officials or managers.

While Chinese women, compared internationally, are highly educated, they still face several difficulties to occupy a position in the labour market in the same way as men. Gender gaps in earnings, long unpaid domestic work every day, the absence of part-time work, and poor social welfare and health care are the predominant barriers to realising women's equality in the Chinese economy (World Economic Forum 2014). The WEF (2014) reports that in Chinese households, women do 243 minutes of house work every day while men only do 91 minutes. Leong et al (2015) suggests that for a Chinese couple, if both employed, the woman takes care of two-thirds of the housework and this usually relates to their income levels. The higher earner does less housework in Chinese families and usually the man earns more than the woman. Therefore, compared to its economic and human development, China still lacks gender equality in its economy, and traditional values of gender roles still predominate.

Table 2-1: Gender Gap in China in Cross-country comparison (2014)

Ranking by indicator (female to male ratio) out of 142 countries	China	Germany	Japan	Norway	UK	US
Gender Gap Index	87	12	104	3	26	20
Economic Participation and opportunity	76	34	102	2	46	4
Labour Force Participation	56	43	83	14	48	47
Wage Equality for similar work	77	80	53	8	48	65
Estimated earned income (PPP in USD)	55	14	74	1	64	1
Legislators, senior officials and managers	101	63	112	58	47	16
Professional and technical work	1	65	78	71	66	1

Source: World Economic Forum, 2015

In the following section I discuss some of the potential reasons for gender inequality in the Chinese labour market. There are some theoretical explanations that partially address the reasons why Chinese women are segregated into low skilled, poorly paid, unstable jobs with less career prospects. However, this is also a consequence of the opinions, beliefs, and social norms that Chinese people hold which are determined by the wider cultural and social factors. In addition, the communist political system, in which the labour market is embedded, influences the education system, social welfare and taxation that determine observable patterns of gender inequalities. I also discuss how organizations structure and justify inequalities among the employees' jobs and positions.

2.4.1 Recruitment, promotion, retirement and maternity leave

According to Cooke (2005), there is direct and indirect gender discrimination in government policies and employer attitudes that are reflected in recruitment, promotion, retirement and

maternity regulations in China. Recruiting women has been problematic even when female graduates were allocated to the state-owned entrepreneurs under state instructions because employers were reluctant to accept the female employees that they had been given in the past (Granik 1991, Cooke 2005). The job allocation system ended in China in the mid-1990s, and gender bias in recruitment became a significant issue in China. Qiu (2014) reports that a recent survey conducted by the Media and Gender Institute of the Communication University of China shows that gender discrimination faced by China's university graduates is significant with more than 60% of female graduates among 1000 in Beijing saying they had been declined by companies during interviews simply because they are women. Women graduates experienced gender discrimination in job seeking which is as high as 70% in a survey conducted by The Women's Federation in Guangdong Province. Some of the employers expressed themselves clearly in their recruitment advertising that female applicants have to promise to have 'no marriage and no child birth for the first five years of employment'. It is not only state owned enterprises that discriminate against women in recruiting practice but also foreign investment companies, private companies and government departments (Chao 2003, Zhang 2015).

The first government legislation in China that deals with gender discrimination in recruitment was introduced by Shenzhen local government in June, 2012 and the implications were in place in 2013. The highest penalty charge for a gender discrimination recruitment advertisement is RMB 30,000 (equal to about £3000) (Legal people.com 2012). The legislation intends to promote gender equality in recruitment, but it may encourage employers to create new 'invisible' rules to discriminate against women in their recruitment practice. Nevertheless, this is a significant breakthrough in China in terms of the promotion of equality in employment through laws and legislation enforcement.

To illustrate how severe the discrimination is in recruitment, I translated a 'normal' recruitment advertisement from the Chinese media which is one sentence long in Chinese and has been reported to contain 6 different varieties of discriminations according to Xiang (2007). The advertisement is translated as follows: 'our company wants to recruit a clerk, requirement as follows: male, Nanjing residence (*hukou*), healthy, bachelor's degree or above, 1.7m tall or above, under 30 years old'. This is an advertisement for a clerk for a small local firm; there are no job related specific skills required. However, in this advertisement, there is gender

discrimination, age discrimination, height discrimination, health discrimination, and discrimination against non-locals. This advertisement represents a 'normal looking' rather than extreme discrimination case which shows tall, young and healthy educated men in China have great systematic advantages in employment over women, disabled, uneducated, short, old and non-locals.

Discrimination through recruitment in China is far beyond gender discrimination, it is visible, systematic and multi-layered. Jing and Zhang (2013) find that being a 'slightly fat' woman will have a negative impact on job-hunting; and every centimetre taller will make a woman earn 1.5% to 2.2% more salary than shorter ones in Chinese cities. They further conclude that being short and 'slightly fat' has a bigger impact on the women in low skilled jobs than the women in professional jobs. At the same time being short and fat has little effect on men's career and earnings. There is still no legislation in place that targets the unfairness in recruitment in the Chinese labour market. However, a young female graduate who won a legal case against a cookery school's 'male only' recruitment policy in Zhejing Province in 2014 was reported as a benchmark for an official recognition of gender inequality in the labour market in the Chinese media (Zhang 2015).

According to the 1992 Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women and Children (articles 21 and 22) 'no *danwei* should refuse to hire women or set a higher threshold for hiring women on the sheer basis of sex' (relevant English version see Burda 2007: 156). Burda (2007) explains that the problems are a lack of clarity and details of what are 'equal rights' and how the law should be implemented. As a consequence, employers could classify a job as 'not suitable' for women, and therefore gender discrimination becomes reasonable and hidden. The 2008 Labour Contract Law officially provides employees more legal rights to fight against discrimination such as a labour arbitration body, which arbitrates in disputes between employers and employees. However, it also produced a specific list of jobs that are 'unsuitable' for women, for instance, mining, installation and removal of scaffolding. This official list of 'unsuitable' work for women is expressed under the guise of protecting women and promoting gender equality. However, in fact, the 'unsuitable' jobs for women open a new opportunity for the employers to define, or manipulate their own terms of discrimination against women.

It is hard to determine exactly how many women work in managerial positions in different

sectors in China. According to statistics from All China Women's Federation (2006) there were 20.3% urban women working in management, professional and technical work in 1990 and this figure increased to 28.9% in 2000. However, in the 2010 Census women only occupied about a quarter of managerial jobs (Yang 2013) and, reported by Ma (2015), the number of women is decreasing in management in China despite more women being in higher education than men. Cooke (2005) notes that even when women are working in high skilled occupations, they are likely to be found in lower level jobs, that get fewer promotion opportunities and lower earning abilities. On some occasions, state policy promoted women's promotions with 'grand sounding' titles, but in practice they have little authority (Reskin and Ross 1992, Cooke 2005).

Some writers such as Korabik (1994) and Alvesson and Billing (2009: 143-151) suggest that gender stereotyping has a negative impact on women's promotion, and further that this stereotyping affects women's self-perception and discourages their motivations to become managers. The professional women in today's China are commonly portrayed as cold hearted and unattractive (Cooke 2005, 2013); these women in Chinese internet slang were first called 'three high women (*sangaonv*) that are highly educated, and highly paid but old and still single; and later referred to as 'left-over women' (*shennv*); or 3S women where 3S stands for (born in the) Seventies, Single and Stuck. These negative concepts of female professionals or high achieving women may have an important impact on young women's career choice (Ifeng.com 2010). For this reason, some women have low expectations of their careers, and are less likely to intentionally seek promotion into higher positions. In addition, modern corporations generally promote traits such as 'ambition, drive and assertiveness' at the management level. Every single one of these traits which corporations want are seen as extremely unattractive qualities of the traditional Chinese wife (Chow 1995, Chen et al. 1997) and against Chinese traditional values of women (Peng 2010). This suggests that as a direct result of gender discrimination in the promotion process, women are underrepresented at the management level with male resistance to women in sales management positions.

Government policies on retirement for women in China also have a negative impact on their economic position and career progression. The retirement age for professional urban women is 55 and for workers it is 50, and for men it is 60 and 55 respectively (Liu 2007) which has not been amended since 1978. Some could argue that the Ministry of Personnel has drawn up

guidelines for female professionals to work until 60 (Cooke 2005, 2013, Manion 2014) which provides the legal basis for female professionals to work as long as men. However, employers have the right to determine who would qualify as 'expert' and who they want to keep. Therefore, in practice, female employees have no right to stay in their jobs once they are over 55. According to Wang et al (2014), an employee's pension plan is linked to their final salary and the length of work and therefore women's pension is reduced because of their earlier retirement. Lei (2015) reports that the government is preparing new legislation on delaying legal retirement age in China which will be implemented gradually after 2017. However, there are no details about whether the government will bring gender differences into consideration in this new legislation. Instead the priority of this new policy is suspected to benefit the social pension fund rather than working people.

Women are further disadvantaged by government policies in respect to maternity leave. The cost of social welfare is no longer on the state alone, but it has shifted to the employers, the state and insurance. All the employers therefore are required to contribute towards employee welfare programmes (Croll 1999, Leung 2003, Razavi 2007). However, the more women of fertile age that an organization has, the more they have to contribute maternity costs at some point. This sometimes becomes a reason that some of the employers do not want to recruit women in the first place. When the Labour Contact Law was introduced in the 80s, employers could hire women on short term contracts and not contribute to these women's maternity cost. This leads the women who lack professional experience and human capital to live with discontinuous employment and worse social welfare conditions (Cooke 2005). In addition, women are assumed to lose their motivation following childbirth and companies calculate that there is a cost of women's maternity leave (Ebrahimi et al. 2002, Cooke 2005). As a consequence of earlier retirement and maternity leave, women are unlikely to make it to the top positions because the length of their working time is shorter. Cooke (2005, 2010) further stresses that employers are less inclined to train or promote women because they are a 'poor return' on their investment in terms of work time. Therefore, women's reduced time at work reduces their career opportunities for economic reasons (Korabik 1994). However, arguably women's disadvantages in the workplace stem in part from the structural and socially embedded discrimination within the education system and also in training when they do find a career which is discussed in the following section.

Jiao and Zhang (2010) use 100 questionnaires and 12 formal and informal interviews to research female professional or managerial employers' job stress and burnout issues in Huangpu District in Shanghai. They claim that varieties of the job and salaries rather than personal expectations and families are the main source of these women's job related stress and burnout. However, the authors fail to identify whether or not gender issues contribute to these women's work related stress. Jiao and Zhang (2010: 42-43) point out that 'compared to male employees, female employees are less resilient to stress', in addition 'some female employees prefer to work in a quiet environment with a slow pace'. Their claims appear to support the 'universal' stereotyping of women as weak and slow. They suggest that women IT workers are under work pressure and that training and further education are the best way to stabilize their career.

2.4.2 Women's access to education in China

Granrose (2005) suggests that the difficulty for women to access education hugely contributes to women's slow human capital accumulation. This is supported by Zhu (2007) who analyses secondary statistical data and concludes that the lack of basic education makes women have less human capital than men. As a result, female workers have lower employment participation rates, lower pay and higher redundancy rates in China. Developed from Human capital theory, Coate and Loury (1993) claim that women 'choose' to under-invest in education because they anticipate that employers will be prejudiced against them and assign them to jobs which do not require investment.

There is some evidence of improvement in women's access to education in China in recent years. As Fong (2002) identifies, the increasing number of urban middle class families are providing their only daughters sufficient parenting and education conditions, giving empowerment to their daughters. So under China's one child policy, which was applied in 1979, girls born in the 1980s and from wealthy urban families have good educational opportunities (Ryan 2011). However, this is perhaps because these girls do not have brothers to compete with in their families, and their parents expect that their child will have access to well-paid jobs that could provide financial care when they become older (Fong 2002). According to Eddleston et al. (2004), who use multiple predictors of career success, education

and career impatience[2] indirectly lead to promotion and better pay. However, these predictors are only relevant to men, and for women, education alone makes no difference to their opportunities for promotion and better pay in employment. Human capital theory therefore cannot fully explain women's slower progression in their careers.

Peng (2010) suggests that the widespread belief that education is for men strongly associated with the Confucian idea of 'ignorance is a woman's virtue' (*nvziwucaibianshide*), which again reinforces her claim that modern Chinese people are influenced by their own classical philosophies. Gender stereotypes are used to articulate information or to prescribe behaviour according to genders, and they also contribute to gender segregation in employment (Reskin and Bielby 2005, Ecklund et al. 2012). According to these authors, the traditional Chinese gender stereotype of women having a lack of desire, being obedient and less intelligent may partially cause women's overall lack of access to education and their weaker position in the labour market. This is evident in Woodhams et al.'s (2014) study with most of Chinese women managers in their research displaying strong *yin* characteristics in their own understandings of their career.

Discrimination in education at the primary, secondary and tertiary level in China continues into lifelong education when women face discrimination in professional development. England (2005) argues that the under investment in women's job specific training contributes to women's lack of gender equality in the labour market. Employers' gender discrimination against women leads them to have less access to career enhancing opportunities and resources and it is a partial reason for women's moderate career progression (Gundert and Mayer 2012). This can partly be explained by the fact that much of the access to the investment in training is structured and controlled by employers (who are predominantly men) and not by the women themselves (Gundert and Mayer 2012, Dipboye and Colella 2013).

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[2] Career impatience refers to individuals who desire to get ahead in their career and are ambitious and are willing to make sacrifices.

2.4.3 Underdeveloped legal system to promote gender equality

The weak legal system could be a potential reason for the slow improvement of gender equality in the Chinese economy. The new labour and employment law in China, which includes numerous legislation and amendments, is regarded as 'complicated and somehow uncertain' by Ma and Li (2008: 91). The main legislation in China are the 1994 Labour Law of PRC that was implemented on the 1st January, 1995, and Labour Contract Law of PRC, Employment Promotion Law, Labour Dispute Meditation and Arbitration Law that were implemented in 2008 (Brown 2010). The Labour Contract Law has precedence in the case of a discrepancy between the 1995 Labour Law and the 2008 Labour Contract Law. The 1995 Labour Law addresses the idea of equal pay for equal work and states that both women and men shall have equal rights to employment. Women shall not be rejected for employment because of their gender (*xingbie*). The 2008 Labour Contract Law is favorable to the employees because it provides better protection to them (ibid).

However, this Labour Contract Law has some loopholes that are critiqued as lacking clarity and are impractical. For instance, the new amendment allows companies to take labour dispatch workers[3] instead of directly hired employees to increase the flexibility of employment. In fact this makes it much easier for employers to terminate the labour dispatch workers than directly hire workers, so whose flexibility this amendment promotes is questionable. Clarke (2007) suggests that the state used to be both the enforcement body and implementation body of the labour laws in China up until 1992 when state owned enterprises' reform started. Therefore, there was little tension between these enterprises' profit making and law enforcement.

As companies became more profit orientated, and at the same time the state became less involved in the supervision of law implementation, legislation and practice became separated. In addition to this, China's legal system is aiming for a balance between economic development and labour reforms, so its priority is not a safety net for the employees (Nolan 2010). Moreover, Cooke (2005, 2010) suggests that the poor awareness of labour law by both employees and

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[3] A dispatch worker is equivalent to a worker hired through an employment agency

employers adds more complications to the labour law practice in China. And also, China has a decentralized government system. Central government law, for instance the 1994 Labour Law, is a general guideline and its implementation depends on local regulations and its enforcement depends on local authorities (Brown 2010). Compared to China's decentralized government system, the EU provides a more systematic and easily understood legal framework to promote and reinforce gender equality both in the EU and protecting women in poverty internationally. Like China's local governments, EU members can negotiate their own equality acts under the EU's framework. Unlike the central government in China, the EU monitors and publishes legal supervision reports on a yearly basis, although this body has no authority to action any of its findings. The review processes in fact help the EU to identify issues and it is therefore able to deal with problems and issues relatively faster. However, considering that the average development level within the EU and in China and also the lack of experience and inadequacy of the Chinese legal system, imitating the EU approach to promote gender equality in China would not be possible at this stage.

There is clear evidence that public awareness of employment discrimination has improved and people in China are struggling against discrimination. For example, Chinese female college students organized protests in eight Chinese cities against gender discrimination in companies' employment processes in December 2012 (Huang 2013). The All-China Women's Federation (2013), as a government agency, has publicly supported these protests in the media. Although these protests have not caused significant changes in legal enforcement, at least young Chinese women are demanding gender equality in employment practice in China and they make themselves heard, and for the first time they have gained support from both the public and also the government agency, ACWF.

It is not difficult to conclude that the labour law enforcement in China is weak and the enforcement of gender equality is uncertain. The sincerity of the Chinese government's political will to promote equal opportunities is questionable. China's labour law and legislations are weak and may have little impact in practice.

2.4.4 Traditional Values and Attitudes

Overall, Chinese women are hugely under-represented in managerial positions and management is known as a masculine domain in China, despite education and an economic boom which has encouraged more women to take managerial roles (Frank 2001, Yang 2013, Ma 2015). Perhaps the reason for this is that business and management education has also been developed within a masculine perspective, creating a circle of under-representation of women (Alvesson and Billing 2009). Ebrahimi et al. (2002) conclude that women managers in China display no significant gender differences in both motivation and personal traits that make them under-represented in management. Therefore, the under representation of women in managerial positions cannot be addressed at the individual level among women themselves. Other factors such as Chinese culture, economic condition, state policy and organizational practice need to be considered.

The ideological construction of gender roles within these institutions are evident in the values and attitudes of people in the workplace. For example, female managers are often viewed negatively by male employees, who work under women managers, and often rate their women managers lower in comparison to female employees (Liu et al. 2001). Men's resistance toward women managers is also studied by Bowen et al. (2007) in China and they concluded that, among both students and workers, men have a negative attitude toward women as managers. Likewise, Javalgi et al. (2011) claim that Chinese men and women have a lower discernment towards female managers in comparison to Chileans and Americans. The attitude of men is compounded by women's family life, which has a detrimental effect on women's career development despite enhanced economic independence (Aaltio and Huang 2007). A further aspect, Woodhams et al. (2014) argue, is that women managers' career orientation is significantly influenced by the collectivism cultural value and the *yin* gender characteristic and this may be an important factor for women choosing not to explore the role of self–determination by not being proactive and planning in managing their career (Xian and Woodhams 2008).

Woodhams et al (2014) suggest that it is hard for western scholars to research working women in China and gain their trust. There are some studies in Chinese academic journals which discuss working women, but few of them address the reasons for gender inequality from

institutional level through empirical data. The majority of the articles on these topics, such as Liu and Ma (2015) are a brief discussion based mainly on literature review, rather than empirical data. However, the lack of empirical work in the field makes the current gender inequality issue in the Chinese economy less explored. At the same time there is a lack of ideological development in gender equality to compete with the traditional gender norms in the current Chinese context. The reasons for such a pattern of research on gender inequality and employment issues on working women is difficult to determine. However, censorship by the Communist government may contribute to women's current inferior position in Chinese economy being under researched as well as the ancient and honourable Chinese strategy to discreetly keep quiet about any problems (Croll 1978, 1983).

2.5 *Guanxi*

In the previous section I discussed women's position in the Chinese economy. Women's current positions in the economy are potentially influenced by Chinese cultural traditions, the socialist state and market reform. As a relationalist society, the role of *guanxi* in women's employment is unavoidable and complicated. In this section I discuss research on *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices at the individual level to develop an insightful interpretation in women's career experiences in my study. *Guanxi* provides new angles to explore women's careers within Chinese social and cultural context.

Guanxi is a Chinese concept that is widely discussed and can hardly be explained accurately in another language. In Mandarin, *guanxi* has multiple meanings that depends on the context (Xinhua Dictionary 2011). Zhai (2011) suggests that the concept of *guanxi* is distinctive in the Chinese social context, in comparison to social networking or social capital in the western context. To him, *guanxi* is related to activities which indicate people's social status and display one's power. More importantly, *guanxi* collaborates with many hidden meanings and motives which are difficult to be understood without the Chinese cultural and social contexts. Zhai further connects *guanxi* with social equality in Chinese society. He suggests that Chinese people have an idiosyncratic system to understand the idea of 'equality' (*gongping*) that is deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy. There are two levels of equality in Chinese society. The first level is everyone has 'absolute equality' that cannot be controlled by any individual, such as sunshine, air and water. The second level of equality is explained through the linguistic

concept of *gongping* (equality, or fairness). Zhai (2011: 270) claims that through reading Chinese classical philosophy (Confucianism or Daoism), *gong* can be explained as universality that excludes private lives but looks at society as a whole *(tianxiaweigong)*. *Ping* does not mean social equality, but means everyone should be in his or her own post or position in society to ensure the balance and harmony of society (*gejiugewei*). Social equality is unrealistic, and therefore society should not be equal (*jundeng*) but differentially equal (*chadeng*). In other words, people in Chinese society develop their own multi-dimensional and dynamic equality system: everyone in his or her right position in the right time to achieve the balance of the society is 'fair 'or 'equal'. Furthermore, this kind of equality is constantly changing over time, and once a person develops or progresses, his or her 'right position' might change. According to Zhai (ibid) Chinese people may lack social equality from an outsider's perspective, but their multi-dimensional and dynamic equality system is extremely influential and it is the foundation of how Chinese society operates stably.

However, Woodhams et al's (2014) research indicates that Chinese attitudes towards traditional values may be changing, which could be related to the influence of western management practices. They classify the women in their study into four types: soloists, conformists, dissidents and revolutionaries. The conformists who were orientated to both *yin* and collectivist values represented the largest proportion of their sample at 53%. However, that 47% of the managers in the sample rejected feminine *yin* values or orientated towards individualist values or both indicates a decline in traditional values among women managers in China. This indicates that notions of equality, embedded as they are in the distinction between *yin* and *yang,* may no longer be adequate given the social changes that have occurred in China.

2.5.1 Cultural and Institutional Perspectives of *guanxi*

According to Nolan (2011) and Chen et al (2013) the academic study of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice among Chinese can be divided into two positions: one is from a cultural perspective and another is from an institutional perspective.

To Nolan (2011) the cultural perspective of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice are distinct from networking found in other societies, are an essential feature of Chinese culture (Hofstede 2001,

Inglehart and Welzel 2005) and have been formed, practiced and reinforced over two thousand years of Chinese feudal society (Fei 1992). The authors holding this view may suggest that *guanxi* practice has become increasingly important during the period of economic reform as the transition to a market economy meant that people have to utilize their *guanxi* to ensure economic benefits. Boisot and Child (1996) stress that Chinese traditions and values would shape reform to a direction of network capitalism, where *guanxi* could become the label of the Chinese economy. Later Yang (2002) suggests that some aspects of *guanxi* could decline as China develops capitalism; however *guanxi* would adapt to the market economy and find new environments. There has been some supporting evidence for this point of view. Based on the field studies of entrepreneurs from private companies in the city of Xiamen, Wank (1999, 2002) found that *guanxi* has played a significant role in economic activities after China's reform.

Other scholars view *guanxi* as a product of local institutions, rather than culture. Considering China has weak legal institutions and where key resources are in short supply, social networks such as *guanxi* become important to the economic transactions (Walder 1986). From this view point, the dominance of *guanxi* practices is primarily seen as a result of the lack, or imperfection, of legal and regulatory institutions in China (Luo 1997, Guthrie 2002). With market oriented economic reform and the establishment of market institutions, reliance on *guanxi*, especially its corrosive aspects, will generally decrease or shift from being of primary to secondary importance in relationship management (Yi and Ellis 2000, Gold et al. 2002, Khatri et al. 2006). There is supporting evidence, for instance by comparing Hong Kong and mainland Chinese managers, authors have found that culture only plays a minor role in *guanxi* and its utilization (Luk et al. 2008). Furthermore, Hong Kong business executives view *guanxi* practices as more costly, time consuming, and more likely to be perceived as being corrupt than mainland Chinese executives do (Yi and Ellis 2000).

These debates add more complications in researching *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices in Chinese societies. Whether the importance of *guanxi* would decrease or increase largely depends on the context of studies and the researcher's positions: therefore studies that address these debates should be context sensitive and reflective.

2.5.2 Varieties of *guanxi*

The concept of *guanxi* is the most important and earliest contribution that Chinese research makes to management and organizational studies (Lublin 2013). Guthrie (1998) uses the term *guanxi* practices to refer to the use of personal relations for achieving any objective in work and life. Some scholars use *guanxi* at the company level as a term for social networking which could be seen as a competitive strategy (Peng and Luo 2000, Luo 2001, Park and Luo 2001, Luo et al. 2012). Chen et al. (2004) define *guanxi* practices in human resource management (HRM) as a source which personnel selection, performance appraisal, and rewards allocation are based on. I briefly separate the *guanxi* studies into two categories according to the aims of the empirical research. One is the micro level studies which research individuals and interpersonal *guanxi* and another one is macro level studies that deal with *guanxi* at organizational, industrial and societal levels. Micro level studies are more relevant to my study and therefore I will focus on micro level studies and macro level studies will be mentioned briefly.

Guanxi research often classifies it into family vs. nonfamily, or affective vs. instrumental, or personal (informal) vs. impersonal (contractual), or a mixed *guanxi* (Warner et al. 1988). According to the Confucian tradition non-family relations draw upon family relations in Chinese society and therefore the family relations are fundamental and they are the basis of familial collectivism in China (Bond and Hwang 1986, Ho 1998). Tsang (1998) discusses *guanxi* based on the family vs. non-family division. Some authors (Blau 1964, Hwang 1987, Yang 1999) point out that family *guanxi* is relatively expressive while non-family *guanxi* is relatively instrumental. Personal *guanxi* are associated with affect, obligation and informality (Ho 1999, Yang 1999) while impersonal *guanxi* are likely to be distant, legal, bureaucratic and formal (Davies et al. 1995, Lovett et al. 1999, Zhou et al. 2003). The *guanxi* that is between all the contrasting types is identified as mixed (Hwang 1987).

Zhang and Zhang (2006) specifically categorise *guanxi* into obligatory (family and kin), reciprocal (acquaintances or friends) and utilitarian (strangers or seller–buyer). Fan (1964) divides *guanxi* into family ties, friendship ties and business ties. Yang (1986) classifies *guanxi* into family's *guanxi*, acquaintance's *guanxi* and stranger's *guanxi*. In addition, Hwang (1987) suggests that there are socio-affective, instrumental and mixed *guanxi*. Although these authors

use different terms to describe the variations in *guanxi*, they share a common understanding that in general informal, personal and family *guanxi* are more effective than formal, impersonal and non-family *guanxi*. The *guanxi* between friends, acquaintances and colleagues is complicated as it could have a mixed nature according to the specific context and circumstance. Chen et al. (1988) conclude that Chinese *guanxi* is likely to be a combination of family and non-family, personal and impersonal, and expressive and instrumental *guanxi* in the work place and in business.

Research on *guanxi* has discussed specifically the basis, the quality and the dynamics of *guanxi*. The basis of *guanxi* is important as it affects the quality and dynamic of *guanxi* (Warner et al. 1988). The basis refers to the particular relationship between the two *guanxi* ties. Tsui et al. (1992) and Tsui and Farh, (1997) suggest that there are a range of sources of shared social identities such as kinships, school friends, colleagues, shared political party memberships that promote and form the basis of *guanxi* in Chinese society. This differs from demographic similarities such as race, gender and age. Other than shared identities, Bian (1997) suggests that the *guanxi* base could be a shared third party that connects the two otherwise unrelated *guanxi* ties together. Chen and Chen (2004) also suggest that shared aspirations or visions could lead to the *guanxi* basis between otherwise unrelated parties. Although the different *guanxi* bases affect the quality of the *guanxi* practice the relevance between *guanxi* bases and the quality of *guanxi* are likely to be based on assumptions. For instance, Hwang (1987) suggests that family ties are expected to be stronger and closer as they are driven by affective motives in comparison to impersonal non-family ties because they are driven by instrumental motives. There is also an assumption of different degrees of trust, interdependence, and obligation between *guanxi* ties that would lead to different quality of *guanxi* (Bian 1997, Yang 1999, Zhang 1999).

There are a number of frameworks that intend to deal with the dynamics of *guanxi*. For instance Su et al.'s (2007) stakeholder model suggests that *guanxi* management among major stakeholders is positively associated with the quality of the *guanxi*: so the stronger the *guanxi* the better outcome stakeholders can get from the *guanxi*. Wong et al. (2007) propose a *guanxi* model combining relationship specific variables such as face, favour and flexibility and the quality of business *guanxi* involving cooperation, continuity and commitment in a capital

exchange framework. Therefore, *guanxi* is a dynamic and complicated process which is not easy to maintain (ibid). The models researching the dynamics of *guanxi* involve a great number of different terminologies and there is little empirical evidence to further address the usefulness of the proposed models. The reason for this could be the informal and discreet nature of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices that makes data collection difficult and also the lack of unity on terminology among theories that discourages empirical research to some degree.

2.5.3 Relevant ethical perspectives on *guanxi*

There is a diverse interest in *guanxi* studies from economics, sociology, and psychology and business management and there is a vast amount of theoretical perspectives among *guanxi* studies. It is hard to draw on any specific theoretical frameworks that cover all the aspects on *guanxi*. Since my study is concerned with women bank managers in China I illustrate two varieties explicitly used in *guanxi* literature that are the most relevant to the context of this study: the ethical perspective, and the cultural 'relationalism' perspective which connect strongly with the Chinese setting and the relevance of women in *guanxi*.

The ethical perspective draws upon the normative theories of morality and business ethics (De George 1993, Donaldson 1996) and theories of social dilemmas (Dawes 1980) which mainly discuss the ethical characteristics of Chinese *guanxi*. Dunfee and Warren (2001) offer a normative perspective of the ethical aspects of *guanxi* practices which argues that *guanxi* potentially is unethical: *guanxi* practices are unethical when they only benefit individuals, the few, and the privileged ones at the expense of society, the majority, and the less privileged ones. It is also unethical when *guanxi* practice violates the local social norms of justice and fairness (ibid). Lin and Si (2010) stress that Chinese *guanxi* were formed under conditions of resource insufficiency and characterized by strengthening the strong ties and weakening the weak ties. These unique socio-economic and cultural conditions are likely to encourage a few to seek benefit through *guanxi* to cause market fragmentation and to result in state intervention. The personal ethics of *guanxi* practices may conflict with or violate the public ethics of the society and fairness in the community (Fei 1992). Interestingly, Su and Littlefield (2001) argue that *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices can be ethically acceptable or even admirable if contained within the private sphere: when personal and personal resources are exchanged privately. However, when personal and organizational resources or private and public resources are mixed in *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices, they become ethically difficult to justify and explain (Luo 2008, Jiang et

al. 2011).

Warren et al. (2004) studied the helpful and harmful effects of *guanxi* practices among Chinese business people, the group, and the community in China. The participants were asked to evaluate given *guanxi* scenarios and provide their own *guanxi* scenarios. The majority of participants valued *guanxi* practices as always helpful to the central actors, but uncertain for the organization, and most of the time harmful to the community. Their findings suggest *guanxi* could result in both positive and negative outcomes for local actors, organizations and communities.

Tan and Snell (2002) construct workplace ethical dilemmas between Confucian relational morality which encourages role-specific virtues such as xiao (filial piety), and zhong (loyalty), and modernist morality which is motivated by organizational rationality such as informing on the misconduct of peers and superiors and firing poor performers. The results suggest that in making moral and ethical judgments, Singaporean Chinese managers pay more attention to contextualized information such as intention, obligations, roles and the consequences for all relevant parties. Nevertheless, they rated such Confucian relational morality related behaviour as unethical; suggesting that Confucian relational morality among Singaporean Chinese managers played an insignificant role in moral reasoning, and was largely surpassed by modernist morality. In conclusion, moral reasoning reflects a wider cultural heritage beyond the form of corporate culture and individual moral development. However, Ho and Redfern (2010) who later replicated Tan and Snell's (2002) study with the added assessment of moral development on the basis of participants' justifications for their moral reasoning found a different result among Hong Kong managers. They found that among 165 Hong Kong bank managers, those who were attracted to *guanxi* rationales were more tolerant of their unethical judgment than those who were attracted to universal rationales. Therefore, the level of *guanxi* orientation does affect Hong Kong managers' ethical reasoning. Interestingly, it is common among these managers to base their moral reasoning on law and order, and on reason rather than emotion.

Su et al. (2003) investigated whether the level of *guanxi* orientation affects the ethical reasoning of purchasing managers from state-owned, privately owned, collectively-owned, and China-foreign joint venture business firms. They found that, although the purchasing managers of

private and collective firms scored higher in *guanxi* orientation than those of state-owned and joint venture firms, there were no significant differences in the level of cognitive moral development. Therefore, there is little relationship between the level of *guanxi* orientation and ethical reasoning among Chinese business people in their study. Instead the managers' time spent in the purchasing profession and educational levels have an impact on their ethical reasoning. This makes an interesting contrast to Ho and Redfern's (2010) finding in Hong Kong.

The studies on Chinese *guanxi* from the ethical perspective raise moral and ethical issues on Chinese *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice in business (Dunfee and Warren 2001, Lin and Si 2010). However, *guanxi* cannot be simply associated with unethical behavior among business people in China. *Guanxi* and *guanxi* practice as Su and Littlefield (2001) suggest is ethically acceptable in the private sphere in China. The empirical research on managers from Chinese ethnicity (Tan and Snell 2002, Su et al. 2003, Warren et al. 2004, Ho and Redfern 2010) shows mixed findings so it is hard to determine whether the level of *guanxi* orientation affects managers' ethical reasoning, or whether *guanxi* practice is costly or beneficial for individuals, organizations, or communities.

2.5.4 *Guanxi* and relationlism

The Chinese people and society are considered to be relation based as opposed to individual (Hwang 2009, Hwang 2012) and relationships have the dominant position in China (Ho 1998). 'Relationalism' link closely with Confucianism and this concept refers to a social, organizational, and ethical system with small group relationships taking priority over both the needs and interests of the individual and impersonal relationships in communities (Fei 1992, Hwang 2006, Hwang 2009, Wang and Liu 2010, 2012, Chen et al. 2014). Wang and Liu (2010) propose that relationalism more closely reflects the way the Chinese person relates to others in the society than the concept of collectivism. Arguably, collectivism is a concept that has been applied to Chinese societies to distinguish it from the perceived individualism of some western societies, but the label of collectivism does not encapsulate the sophisticated relationships between family and friendship networks. Confucian relationalism represents the fundamental human relationship in which individuals are committed regardless of how the costs and benefits and individual identities are represented through human relationships (Hwang 2006, 2012).

Family or family-like (e.g. official relationships and friendships) relationships have been considered the ideal model of Confucian organizations and authority. Therefore, the boundaries between family and authority, and private and public, and possibly personal and professional relations blur (Warner et al. 1988). Ip (2009) suggests that familial collectivism cannot support the global development of Chinese corporations because of its emphasis on hierarchy and particularism.

Personal relations are unequal and are differentiated according to the degree of particularism (closeness) in Chinese society. Similar to the discussion on the basis of *guanxi*, Chinese people often assess a relationship by classifying others into family, familiar and stranger (Hwang 1987). Other commonly used social categories or shared identities could be kinship, birth place, schoolmate, comrade in arms or political parties (Jacobs 1982, Tsui et al. 1992, Tsui and Farh 1997, Farh et al. 1998). These pre-existing ties may facilitate or obstruct formal and official relationships. Chinese relations are differentiated not only according to particularism but also in terms of hierarchy according to age, gender and one's position in society. The hierarchical relations are ruled by shared obligations and understandings, for instance the leaders are responsible for holistic care while the followers should express loyalty (Farh and Cheng 2000). Relationalism also explains interpersonal and role based ethics but is uncertain about universal ethics (Fei 1992). Chen et al (2013) suggest that ethics in Mandarin (*lunli*) means that relationship appropriateness and therefore the concept of universal ethics may not exist in Chinese traditions and instead accepting people's positions within relationships are universal ethics. This supports and justifies Zhai's (2011) discussion on equality in Chinese society that absolute equality is unrealistic and instead the aim is to achieve the balance of the society which is 'fair' and 'equal' in a Chinese context. Equality in a Chinese context is a dynamic system with everyone in her or his own position to ensure the stability and balance of the society.

Lovett et al. (1999) suggest that Confucian personal commitment to relationships may appear to be more humane than western impersonal instrumental relationships. In contrast Su and Littlefield (2001) suggest that the immature and weak legal and economic institutions in China promote the use of *guanxi* to create a competitive advantage that is exclusive to the elite, the powerful ones and the wealthy ones; and it is possible that *guanxi* practices lead to corruption.

Lovett et al. (1999) further suggest that facing globalization, technological development and socio-political uncertainty, the Eastern concept of *guanxi* and the western market economic system may cooperate. Agreeing with Lovett et al., Davies et al. (1995) argue that Eastern and western business practices may become compatible in the 21st century as western business practices may progressively adopt some *guanxi* practices that rely on personal relationships, trust and reputation whilst Eastern business practices will increasingly rely on rules, laws and regulations.

Chinese *guanxi* is a complex phenomenon and empirical research not only intends to examine *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice from multiple theoretical perspectives but also at various levels of analysis. Wang (2007) and Zhuang and Xi (2003) discuss Chinese *guanxi* marketing in relation to western relationship marketing and they conclude that *guanxi* is unique and essential in marketing in China. This is apparent in Chua et al's (2009: 490) study which observed that Chinese managers, in comparison to their American counterparts, are more likely to use familial norms of *guanxi* within their professional networks. Social affect and cognition were more entwined in Chinese managers than in American managers. Furthermore, this study concludes that 'the effect of economic exchange on affect-based trust was more positive for Chinese than for Americans, whereas the effect of friendship was more positive for Americans than for Chinese (ibid: 490). Chinese managers were also less likely to regard mentor figures as friends compared to Americans. The uniqueness of *guanxi* in marketing in China was also observable in the relations of familial norms in the Chinese workplace (Morris et al. 2008). Morris et al. suggest that Chinese bank employees were more likely to make instrumental exchanges with their superiors in comparison to the American, German or Spanish bank employees. In contrast Sue-Chan and Dasborough (2006: 1267) discovered friendship-based particularistic ties in Australia and Hong Kong while '*guanxi* and mateship' influence hiring decisions in both relation-based Hong Kong and rule-based Australia.

2.5.5 Age and gender related issues on *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice in management

Age and gender are also significant factors in relation to *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices. Age similarity is found to be related to the closeness of the relationship of Hong Kong participants who attend MBA or EMBA classes (Chow and Ng 2004). The same study also suggests that

the effect of gender on the closeness of relationship is uneven: female-to-female dyads are close and male-to-male dyads are distant. Among the Chinese senior and middle managers in Bu and Roy's (2008) study, both Chinese male and female managers largely prefer to form career success network (CSN) ties with individuals who are older than themselves, but they are relatively reluctant to include middle-aged or elder women in their CSN. The age of those included in the participants' CSN was also influenced by tie content and whether the tie extends beyond the organizational boundary. Female managers' person-centred ties with men had significantly lower levels of interaction outside the workplace than person-centred ties with women. While this difference was not shown in the position-centred ties, male managers do not share women managers' reluctance to socialize with the opposite sex in this study. Interestingly, Bu and Roy's (2008) findings share a similarity with earlier studies of American managers (Ibarra 1992, Ibarra 1997): the Chinese male managers' career network was almost homophilous with 79 percent of ties with the same sex, whereas the female managers' career network was predominantly heterophilous with78 percent ties with the opposite sex. This was because the majority of both men and women managers form CSN ties with men. However, Song et al. (2012) suggest that trust is generated with affect-based close *guanxi* ties rather than demographical identical strangers which echoes Farh et al.'s (1998) study that *guanxi* ties are predominantly for trust in comparison to demographic similarity. *Guanxi* therefore has much more meanings and functions than relationships in the business context in China. Although determining whether age and gender both affect Chinese managers' career network is debatable, there is more support for the suggestion that women are favoured less than men in career networks especially when they are middle aged or old.

Zurndorfer (2015) suggests that unmarried young women can trade their femininity and sexuality for material wealth and financial security with wealthy and politically influential men in China. Sometimes women "gift" their bodies and sexual services to cement *guanxi*. As discussed previously Liu (2007) suggests that some urban women use their *guanxi* to regain employment after redundancy: their *guanxi* is often assumed to be *xing guanxi* (sexual relationships) by other women who cannot get jobs after redundancy. So sex is assumed to contribute to the exchange of favours by women themselves. It is no surprise that the networking activities of women in managerial positions with their male counterparts often make them feel uncomfortable (Wylie 2004). However, even for women leaders in Chinese firms, the right *guanxi* that they get through their mentors are crucial to their firms' performance

(Scott et al. 2014). For women to establish and maintain *guanxi* in China is very difficult (Bu and Roy 2008): this could be explained by gender socialization in Chinese society which places women's position in the family. Therefore, the behaviour of maintaining *guanxi* with men outside a woman's family is not considered normal. It is no surprise that women's lack of guanxi in the society also contributes to their weak position in employment. Equality in many occasions is a topic closely discussed with *guanxi* in China because not everyone can benefit from *guanxi*.

2.5.6 *Guanxi* in Chinese human resource management

Studies in the 1990s and early 2000s show that *guanxi* has an important role in gaining access to jobs and promotion (Bian 1997, Bian and Ang 1997, Bian 2002, Hanser 2002). Bian (1997) suggests that *guanxi* had a significant positive effect on job searching in China in 1988 when employment was government controlled. Bian's (1997) study was conducted in an urban area during a period when there was not an open labour market in China, and the importance of *guanxi* in job search and placement was also found in rural areas where economic reform ha promoted labour migration from countryside to towns and cities. For instance, Zhang and Li (2003) suggest that kinship *guanxi* ties facilitate employment for the rural migrant worker in urban areas of China. Later, Huang (2008) showed that though *guanxi* is still important for gaining desirable jobs in the state sector, the non-state sector corporations in China rely on a more transparent and standardized recruitment process that enables the corporations to identify the qualified candidates regardless of *guanxi*.

Zhang and Yang (1998) suggest that when allocating rewards, supervisors take their *guanxi* with subordinates into consideration in rewards allocation, which the authors credit to the Chinese norms of taking care of both affection and rationality (*heqingheli*). Later, Hu et al. (2004) show that workers who have better *guanxi* with their supervisors receive higher rewards. These studies suggest that Chinese supervisors may allocate rewards not purely on the basis of performance and merits but on *guanxi*, which could damage the trust between supervisors and their subordinates Zhai (2011).

The research on leader member exchange theory (LMX) in China is closely linked to *guanxi*

practices and suggests positive effects on employees' job satisfaction, and reduce the negative behaviour of the subordinates at work (Hackett et al. 2003, Aryee and Chen 2006, Liang et al. 2007). Chen and Tjosvold (2006) suggest that LMX also increased participative decision making and constructive debate between managers and their subordinates in China. Law et al. (2000) argue that leader member *guanxi* (LMG) is positively related to the subordinate's probability of receiving bonus allocation and promotion, but not to task assignment and performance evaluation. However, LMX is related to bonus allocation, promotion, task assignment and performance evaluation, though the effect on performance evaluation is less significant. The effect of LMX on job assignment, promotion and bonus allocation are all facilitated by performance evaluation.

Bian and Ang (1997) found that even though Singapore has a mature labour market and a modern HRM system, job seekers seek help from strong tie rather than weak tie contacts. This is supported by later studies such as Giles et al (2006) who argue that the possibility for dislocated urban workers to find re-employment are positively correlated with the number of relatives from the same generation in the same city regardless of their gender. Xiao & Tsui (2007) suggest that managers who build strong ties in their professional network are more successful in their career than those who build a network with weak ties. The authors further elaborate that the high-commitment Chinese organizational culture and collectivist values are possible explanations for the career success of the managers who build networks with strong ties.

In conclusion arguably *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices appear to have their place in HRM in Chinese society: a strong tie probably leads to successfully finding a job, positive outcomes in bonus allocation, task assignment, promotion, performance evaluation and managers' career success and achievement.

There is also empirical research at the macro level which covers firm, industry, and international relationships though the majority of these studies have focused on the firm level and how *guanxi* strategies affect firm performance in China. As this variety of study has little relevance in my study, I will not discuss this.

2.6 Research Questions

In the next section I outline my research questions that guide me to explore the diverse experience of women bank managers in China. While gender in the workplace has been extensively researched, investigation into how gender interacts with other factors such as organizational hierarchy, cultural values and age has not been explicitly undertaken. My research examines how gender, *guanxi* cultural heritage, political position, economic state and age influence the experience of being professional in the context of bank work in China. More specifically the research questions are:

> To what extent and how do Chinese women bank managers experience inequality in their career?

Sub questions

1. What is the influence of traditional gender roles on women managers' careers?
2. What is the influence of *guanxi* and traditional cultural norms on women managers' careers?
3. What is the influence of age, education and economic motivations on women's career?

These questions have been formulated and refined over the course of the research process and match the criteria set out by Lewis (2003) of being clear and focused, able to be researched thorough data collection, relevant, useful, feasible, informed and connected to existing research. These questions were finalised after analysing the data in line with ethnographic studies of an exploratory nature. The research questions aim to investigate how women bank managers experience inequality in their career at the bank.

The main research question seeks to understand how gender inequality practices are represented in the management in this bank. The inequalities that women experience in the work place are in terms of recruitment, promotion and job allocation and in relation to their social standing and how this interacts with their gender. Aspects such as inequality in terms of pay and reward systems were not discussed in this study as these topics are not permitted to analyse in this context. Human resource practices sometimes intersect with women's *guanxi* and therefore the women experience diverse events in the bank. The discussion on gender discrimination and segregation in employment is an on-going debate across the world.

Women's gender disadvantage in employment and earnings in the financial sector has been researched in the UK relatively much less in recent years than during the 1980s and 90s (Metcalf and Rolfe 2009), because of declining academic interest in this area. However, at the same time, there is an increasing interest on the same topic from policy related activities and the media. Among the academic work that has been done recently, little interest is paid to women in junior positions in management in comparison to the study of women in senior positions in management (Richardson and Loubier 2008, Jean-Marie et al. 2009, Van der Waal 2009, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010). In general, women workers who are working in routine jobs have received little research attention (Metcafe 2010). Compared to the UK, research on women finance workers in China is rare. The knowledge of Chinese women's employment condition is limited (Cook, 2005). Gender inequality in modern economies and corporations is rooted deeply in the social system and structure, as well as at the institution and individual levels, and China is no exception. However modern Chinese women's aims for gender equality in the workplace are perhaps slightly different from the western perspective. Whereas western women seek absolute equality for women, Chinese women are aware of the significant gains for equal rights for women over the course of the last hundred years, and have a more pragmatic approach to increasing those rights. Therefore, the gender experience of working women today is worth further investigation in the Chinese cultural and social context.

The sub questions focus on gender roles and the cultural impact on the bank and the female bank managers. Although gender and culture are inextricably interrelated, following Woodhams et al. (2014), I have separated these two phenomena throughout my thesis to ease understanding for the reader. These questions developed during the research process as the participants produced data that guided me to a more focused direction of study. I focus the discussion on four main aspects according to the data provided by the participants' job entry, career path, maternity related career arrangements and HR practices. Gender and traditional values intersect and impact on the experience of bank workers' lives through these four major experiences.

The first sub question is focused on the traditional sense of gender roles in China in order to identify these Chinese women's career and work life relations with distinctive cultural influences. The research question aims to address 'the relationship between the institutional

and cultural times and the spaces of work and non-work in societies' (Felstead et al. 2002) through these women managers' gender related work-life negotiating experience. It intends to represent women bank managers' dynamic gender roles that influence their careers and the diversity among them. Family is always the basic component in Chinese social and economic system. Family as an economic unit is the same idea but in a different context as the western economic view on family (Blau et al. 2010).

The second sub research question focuses on the influence of *guanxi* on women's career, and in order to fully understand the role of *guanxi* it is necessary to also examine the related ideas of relationalism and collectivism, both of which are derived from the concept of *guanxi,* but offer a partial explanation of cultural relations in China. This research question is generated through data from the field. Participants take proactive roles on producing data that they thought most relevant to their career. *Guanxi* appears to be an unavoidable part of their banking career that drives their career entry, career development and career path, and is even expressed in their career expectations.

The third sub research question intends to address the cultural related issues that restrain or promote women bank managers' equality in their career. The issues such as whether women are discriminated against because of their age, how money influences women's gender role and whether education really contributes to women managers' career, are investigated through women managers' stories.

The research questions provide an insight into the chosen methodology, and reflecting on these questions it is noticeable that to achieve the goals of the research it will be necessary to use more than one methodological tool. These research questions can be answered using ethnographic methods to provide detailed and rich data about women's experience. It will be necessary to explore the women bank workers' lives in detail to appreciate how their multiple social identities are constructed and how social structure and institutions influence individuals. The following chapter outlines the methodological tools that were used in the study.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented the conceptual framework for my research in the area of Chinese women in the economy and employment; and in particular Chinese women's careers in management. I also discuss *guanxi* and *guanxi* practice in Chinese organizational context. This chapter discusses methodology in order to explore the institutionalized inequality against women managers' career experiences in banking. In section 3.2 Research Strategy, I will present my rationale and justification for the methodological choice of organizational ethnography. Then in section 3.3 I discuss the organization research setting, followed by section 3.4 regarding access negotiation. Next in section 3.5 I will give an overview of the participants in this study and then in section 3.6 I introduce the data collecting process for the formal interviews, conversations, documents and observational data. Section 3.7 outlines the analytical framework used in this study. Finally section 3.8 gives my reflective account of the research process and 3.9 considers the ethical issues that are relevant to the study.

3.2 Research Strategy

I now explain in detail the reasons for my methodological choice in this study. The research questions in this study can be addressed using qualitative rather than quantitative methods. The methodological tools I used are organizational ethnography: a combination of qualitative interviews (formal interviews and conversational interviews), participant observations, document analysis. The Chinese women bank managers' career experiences I observed and recorded should be discussed in detail in order to fully appreciate the uniqueness of women's contribution to the banking industry's development in China. My ontological and epistemological position in this study is that there is not one reality and that truth is largely dependent on the interpretation of the researcher and can be ambiguous when conducting qualitative research which involves human participants. Undoubtedly there are levels of reality and therefore it is important to analyse the mechanisms, processes and structure that account for observed practices and beliefs of the Chinese women bankers in this study. However, since my primary goal in this study is to explore the women's experiences of gender inequality

through their career in the Chinese banking industry, all philosophical and methodological related issues are important only to the extent that they facilitate this goal.

3.2.1 Organizational Ethnography

3.2.1.1 Ethnography

Ethnography has deep roots in anthropology and later in sociology in terms of theoretical orientation, philosophical considerations and the genre of writing. There is not strong agreement among authors about what ethnography is. Van Maanen (1988: 1) suggests that 'ethnography is a written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture), he goes on to argue that the 'trick of ethnography' is 'to adequately display the culture (or more commonly, parts of the culture) in a way that is meaningful' (Van Maanen 1988: 13). Some writers (Brewer 2000, Tedlock 2000, Brewer 2004) suggest that ethnography is not a research method. For example Brewer (2000: 11) argues that 'ethnography is not a particular method of data collection, but is a style of research that is distinguished by its object'. Brewer (2004: 312) further explains that the 'object' of ethnography is "to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given 'field' or 'setting' through close involvement and 'telling it like it is from the inside by 'participants directly in the setting'. For the 'culture or parts of culture' that should be represented in ethnography Van Maanen (1988: 13) refers to 'the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members' in a given group. He further stresses that 'these are what the fieldworker pursues'. Watson (2011: 215) argues that organizational ethnography 'is the product and not the method of production.' An insider point of view, the strong sense of context and the role of ethnographers have become the special characteristics that distinguish ethnography from other qualitative approaches (Lofland 1995, Tedlock 2000, Prasad 2005, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Neyland 2007).

3.2.1.2 Reflexivity in Ethnography

Reflexivity is an essential part of ethnography and is a word that is used in many different ways in qualitative research (Babcock 1980, Watson 1987, May 1999, Brewer 2000, Davies 2008). As both Davies (2008) and Altheide and Johnson (1994) argue, the main meaning of reflexivity is that the researchers are part of the 'package' that includes the setting, the context and the culture that they are trying to understand and represent. The implications of reflexivity are varied in different features of the research process. Brewer (2000) stresses that there are two

main concerns in the implications of reflexivity which are the problem of the legitimacy of the data and the problem of representation.

Reflexivity is also essential in ethnographic writing. Hertz (1997) and Davies (2008) describe reflexivity as a concern with how the selves and identities of the researcher and the researched affect the research process. For Hertz the 'voice' is the textual representation of the multiplicity of subjects' perspectives. Reflexivity and interpretation integrate together as the attribution of meaning to the material. This integration has to be done reflexively. Therefore reflexivity is the bridge between the interpretation and the process of transforming the interpretation into text.

There are debates among sociologists about whether reflexivity threatens the quality of ethnography data, or improves it and whether reflexivity represents the problem in ethnography or it is the solution for ethnography. Postmodern authors such as Clifford (1983), Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Marcus and Cushman (1982) deconstructed ethnographic practices and text. They suggest that in an ethnographic study the data could be narrowed down to one narrative instead of many and also the text should be used to tell a story. The implications of reflexivity are further supported and developed by authors such as Atkinson (1992, 2014), Hammersley (2013) Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). They claim that reflexivity is a characteristic of social research because researchers are part of the social world that should be understood rather than a post-positivist attempt to eliminate the effects of researchers on ethnographic studies. Because ethnographers themselves are the products of their own culture they have personal beliefs, biases, and individual tastes. Reflexivity should be presented as part of 'good practice' in ethnography, though ethnographers should be cautious to avoid obvious biases by making them explicit (Brewer 2000). Reflexivity in short is a process to improve the legitimation of ethnographic data; it is an alternative to the traditional criteria that are used to judge the quality of ethnographic data. The reflexivity issues in this research process will be addressed later in this chapter (section 3.8, page 76).

3.2.1.3 Organizational Ethnography

Organizational ethnography is distinguished from other forms of ethnography by its research setting in organizations. Organizations can be understood in broad terms; however, the term 'organization' here is narrowly used to refer to formal organizations that have a bureaucratic structure, such as schools, hospitals, banks and factories. These organizations involve both management of people and management of work in work or non-work settings. My discussion is focused and limited to ethnographic methods within the narrow meaning of organizations.

Studying the detailed accounts of organizational life has a long-standing tradition (Morrill and Fine 1997). For instance, Mayo (1933) used anthropological field methods to study human aspects and human effects on industry. Goffman (1961) writes an in-depth analysis of the bureaucratic institution and 'informal organization' based on ethnographic data from mental patients. Furthermore, according to Ybema et al (2009: 3), earlier authors including Whyte (1948), Selznick (1949), Gouldner (1954), Blau (1955), Dalton (1959), Goffman (1959), and Kaufman (1960) have contributed to the field of organizational study by 'showing some of the limitations of theories depicting formal bureaucratic organizational forms as efficiently functioning machines, bringing into view the 'irrationalities' behind-the–scenes politics and other practices taking place in organizational black regions'.

In the later 1970s and the 1980s, writers such as Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that the wider institutional environment should be taken into consideration in the field of organizational studies. In addition, Smirch (1983) argued for a consideration of the importance of cultural anthropology in organizational and management research. In the 1990s, ethnographic researchers associated methodology with theoretical ideas and ethnographic research found its place in organizational studies (Rosen 1991, Czarniawska-Joerges 1992, Morrill 1995, Linstead 1996, Bate 1997, Czarniawska-Joerges 1997). Since then the field of ethnographic study has also become broader and has included strategy, management, leadership, organization design and implementation, organizational change, normative behaviour and ethics (Gregory 1983, Morrill 1995, Barley 1996, Delbridge 1998, Morrill et al. 2003, Moeran 2007, Kondo 2009, Kunda 2009, Johnston and Everett 2012, Choi-Fitzpatrick 2014, Decker 2014, Vesa and Vaara 2014, Van Maanen 2015).

There are some specific characteristics of organizational ethnography that Ybema et al (2009) discuss. First the conduct of organizational ethnography can be seen as a combination of fieldwork methods over an extended period of time. Therefore, studying the complexity of an organization using 'equally complicated methods gives organizational ethnography a specific flavour' (Ybema et al 2009: 6). Second, ethnographers describe the organizational life 'at the scene'. The first-hand, field based observations and experiences make ethnography become what Van Maanen (1988) calls 'a kind of documentary'. Thirdly organizational ethnography could possibly expose the hidden and harsh dimensions of social reality, especially emotional and political or power aspects between people. Finally, organizational ethnography is 'context sensitive and actor-centred analysis' (Ybema et al 2009: 7) meaning that organizational ethnography not only stresses the orientation toward subject experience and the individual in everyday life but it also reflects sensitivity to institutional, social and historical settings.

Ethnographers will normally spend a considerable amount of time, such as a year or more, in the field (Van Maanen 1988). However, the length of the study may vary in different research work. For example, Alvesson (1998: 971) conducted ethnography with a 3-month long participant observation and as he explains it 'is really rather brief for an ethnography, but considering the study object was small this was probably sufficient time'. In Fine's (1996) study, the ethnographer carried out participant observation in four restaurants' kitchens for one month each. Sometimes ethnographic study which involves document analysis and organizing formal interviews could last much longer than the actual 'field work'. For instance, Alvesson (1995) conducted a 6-month ethnographic study with only 3 weeks participant observation in the field. Wolcott (2005) suggests a form of research called *micro-ethnography,* which is a short period of time spent in the organization to achieve a more closely defined cultural understanding of the research site.

The length of time I spent in my field of study was 3 months; although this is shorter than a traditional ethnographic study it appears to be a normal amount of time in the field in comparison to the organizational ethnography studies mentioned above. This study involved participant observation in the headquarters of the bank over three months, formal and informal interviews both inside and outside the workplace and document analysis and therefore can be classified as an organizational ethnography. In addition, I have the advantage of having worked

in this Chinese commercial bank for almost ten years and I have a deep ethnographic immersion in and a clear understanding of its cultural context. Therefore, I have focused my attention on a particular organizational cultural aspect in the field which is the way that this Chinese bank has accommodated women as managers and also how culture is reflected through their managerial work and their personal lives. Getting access to a work organization is very difficult. Being a former employee gave me an advantage of being able to become familiar with the field quicker and to some degree my experience as a female manager in the bank allowed me to get close to the participants more easily. My role as an ethnographer and how I balanced my activities between distancing and immersing will be discussed further in a later section in this chapter (Pages 64-65).

In addition, this study can be developed further when time and resources are available. Therefore, this study could be one of a series of parallel ethnographic studies on women managers in China. This could be done with different cases or with the same case in a different field (for example see Brewer et al. 1997). Alternatively, I could duplicate the way I conducted this project in a different field, for instance women managers in the public sector or health care, so that comparisons become possible and knowledge can be accumulated. The techniques such as qualitative interviews, participant observation, personal documents and vignettes are also used in non-ethnographic research. What distinguishes my study as ethnographic is that there are a variety of techniques that are employed in this study which serve the exploratory purpose of this study. This was to explore the social and cultural meanings of women managers' career experiences in Chinese banking by close involvement and immersion in the field. Thus, the context sensitive nature and the closeness to the field make it ethnographic.

Likewise, organizations are embodied by the individuals who work there and my research interest is focused on examining women's everyday work experiences in relation to other social relations in the organization and the importance of equality in women's lives. More specifically I studied a group of Chinese women managers' experience of organizing and being organized at work (Fineman et al. 2005) in order to articulate gendered cultural management practice and the relevant interaction of social relations such as ethnicity, culture heritage and political status in a Chinese organizational context and their impact on women managers' careers. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) it is 'relatively unusual' in business and

management research for ethnography to be conducted in a way that involves applying a gender perspective with the aim of promoting women's interests. However there are a few organizational ethnographic studies which discuss gender related issues and workplace control in broader organizational studies rather than in a strictly business and management study area in the west (Knights and Kerfoot 1993, McDowell 1994, McDowell 1997, Alvesson 1998, Hodson 2004, Hawkins 2008). The nature and characteristics of ethnographic methods that I have used in my research is to give voice to the 'unknown', and allow, as Down and Hughes (2009: 83) stress, ethnographic 'subjects' to speak for themselves.

The importance of the unexpected or surprises from the field have been discussed by several authors. Bate (1997: 1165), for example, suggests that 'doing and writing ethnography are essentially about fostering, preserving, cultivating, and conveying the surprises that the ethnographer experiences in the field'. Alvesson (1998: 27) also points out that 'an important part of ethnographical work is to focus on surprises'. My participants took an active role in raising interesting contributions to construct their own understanding of their working lives, in particular their careers, by opening up many of their 'secrets' to me during the study. My findings, therefore, come from an interpretation of the data that my respondents provided and are relevant to the organizational and social context in which I operated (Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay 1982). For instance, accounts of data about the workplace, the occupation and industry did correspond to the common description of 'masculine' (*yang*) domination in organizations in a formal setting. On the other hand the importance of *guanxi* (Xin and Pearce 1996, Park and Luo 2001) and *mianzi* (Park and Luo 2001, Tiejun 2004) in an informal (or an invisible) setting in this organization shows a degree of 'feminine' (*yin*) value and principle (Feng 2008, Peng 2010).

Methodology is certainly interwoven with the nature of the particular study I have chosen as well as my personal perspective. My qualitative research is guided by my interpretivist perspective that views me as a part of the research and social process. My orientation is not to simply show my participants at their work place, but also focus on specific language (everyday talk and text), acts (routines, customs and practices) and other features that represent participants' meaning (space and artefacts).

The following section will outline the location in the research, information about the Chinese women managers in banking and a few of their male counterparts who participated in the study.

3.3 Research Setting

I have called the bank I researched Opcitbank or the bank to ensure anonymity and therefore confidentiality. The study was affected by the organizational context both in terms of how participants were selected and their social relations that were relevant to their work. Encouraging participation in this study was affected by the time constraints the bank managers had during working hours. The majority of the jobs in Opcitbank are highly demanding with long working hours. Employees work an average of 55 hours from Monday to Friday. In addition to this, they often have to work extra hours during the weekend for training and marketing events. A further pressure on the workers has come from the regular performance review system and constant on the job training of low ranked workers. The field observation had to adapt to employees' working time. The formal and conversational interviews were difficult to complete because of the participants' working commitment during work hours, so I had to be as flexible as possible and stayed in the field for several hours, and sometimes did interviews during lunch breaks. In addition, because of practicalities and the need for bank authorisation, I stayed in a single site, the Head Office. This had the advantage of providing me with a diverse range of managers in terms of gender, age, career path, personal background, and political, religious convictions. The disadvantage of staying in a single site is that I had limited opportunities to study women managers in an alternative layer of the bank (e.g. branches) which is more profit and target driven. This was limited by the time and access available to me. Multiple sites and a longer period of time in the field would have been preferable, though this would have required longer access from the bank and more time and resources than were available to me.

3.4 Access Negotiation

Access can be problematic especially for business ethnographic studies because companies do not necessarily want to be investigated closely by ethnographers for a variety of reasons. Researchers are more likely to be in a weaker power position in comparison to the management in the negotiation process (Chapman 2001). Organizational ethnographers are called "beggars" rather than having any control of what can be accessed and when (Fine and Shulman 2009),

indicating the power position of organization ethnographers in their studies. As Chapman (2001) states when an organization is publicly active in its economic and political realms, it is highly sensitive morally and commercially and perhaps managers are reluctant to be involved in these types of studies. The negotiation of access was challenging in my study. Opcitbank has never accommodated any academic research or other form of investigation except auditing in the past. Being the first researcher to access the organization was problematic. The management were reluctant to permit my access because they were not sure about what would happen during and after the study. Given this obstacle, I mainly relied upon my previous *guanxi* within the organization to negotiate my access of observing managers' work for three months.

An initial attempt at contact was through a female senior manager who had previously been my manager for several years while I worked for the bank. Given that we had remained on friendly terms, this appeared a likely avenue for successful access. As noted above, however, I experienced problems based on the fact that this was the 'first access' (Chapman 2001). Despite explaining my role as an ethnographer and my desire of gaining access to the organization, my request was rejected with what seemed like little consideration. The reason offered was that "this kind of thing" never happened before and was 'too strange and too much for others", but that if I was willing to conduct interviews, or focus group discussions among managers, she would be supportive of the research. In her words, she advised: "why don't you do something *informal* (or unofficial)? That will be much *easier* for you…. It will be *great* to have a chat….' As such, while using friendly contacts to gain access initially appeared an easier route, in reality the friend became a potential 'gate keeper' and able to block the access to my intended research setting.

Given this set-back, I was forced to contact another male senior manager in the same organization, who had maintained much less frequent contact with me than the female senior manager. I explained exactly the same context to him as I did to the previous contact. He gave me a positive answer and volunteered to talk to the 'boss' for me and he anticipated that there would be no problem for me to gain access and gave me a warm welcome to go back to 'work with us again'. He explains that 'your research will bring some value to improve our managerial practice. I cannot see why *our* 'boss' would reject such a request…' He became

the person who could facilitate my research access. Later, he told me that the bank would prefer to have a written proposal to clarify the research intentions in detail and also provide a report after the research was complete to analyse the organization's managerial relations among staff and senior management in return for access. I drafted a proposal as he told me to do so, and kept regular contact with him regarding my access to the bank.

The responses from him remained positive until I arrived in China. When I contacted him to discuss the project and procedure for me to start the field work, he told me that a document from the parent company had arrived roughly a week ago. Any interviews with people from outside the bank needed a permit from higher-up in advance. He advised me to wait. Since I had limited time and resources for the field trip, to wait an indefinite time was a very stressful situation. I started networking immediately, with contacts and friends who still work in Opcitbank to examine the reason for putting such a restraint on any form of interview from an outsider, and hopefully I could assess the potential risks of having no access at all. One former colleague who used to work in the same department with me told me that the restraint came from 'above' because an undercover reporter published an article which included a detailed account of one commercial bank's salary and reward system a couple of weeks previously. This caused huge tension between the general public and 'the banks' on social media: because apparently, the pay gaps between people working in banking compared to other industries is vast. She suggested that perhaps I would be given a chance to conduct my research because I am not an 'outsider'. Fortunately, after about two weeks of negotiation the senior manager I had contacted helped me to gain access to the bank under the condition that my identity as an ethnographer could only be disclosed verbally, I could only research in the Head Office so I was only allowed to research in this single location, and I was also to be under the supervision of the HR manager. The benefit I got from this arrangement was that I was issued an intern's access card in the bank and I was allocated an office space in the HR department. I was also granted access to the bank's intranet at an intern's level. This meant that I was able to access the bank's staff page, observe activities, general announcements and documents that did not need high level access permission.

I was not required to produce anything in return but still gained access to the bank. *Guanxi* in the Chinese context was very significant in this situation. I may or may not be required to

'return the favour' to the senior manager who helped me gain access in the future. *Guanxi* sounds like people simply helping each other on this occasion, but as earlier noted, *guanxi,* as social currency, is used for the exchange of favours in many social activities and social relations in a Chinese context (Luo 2007, Gu et al. 2008). In my case, when the resources, information and influence were limited, I used my old *guanxi* with my previous boss, to acquire information I normally would not know, and then solved the problem which was unlikely to be solved by an alternative method. The tension of gaining access in this study was unpredictable. The risk involved in conducting ethnographic research in China is great as there are likely to be no formal permits because it is an uncommon methodology in this context and at the same time there is no guarantee of gaining access. Because this study was a rare opportunity to gather ethnographic data in a workplace in China I collected as much field data as I could. This produced a huge volume of data for the study, of which only a part can be presented in this thesis.

3.5 The Participants

The people who work in Opcitbank, according to the job description document supplied by the HR department, are 'categorized according to the nature of their job positions' (see Figure 3-1). They are: operational clerks, sales and marketing staff, administration and management staff, middle managers and senior managers. In 2012, the biggest group is the operation clerks with more than a third of Opcitbank's employees working in these types of jobs. There are equal numbers of sales and marketing staff and administration and management staff in this bank which is just less than 30%. There are a total of 31 middle managers and 5 senior managers that form the management team in this bank. 16 of the middle managers work in the 16 branches as branch managers and 15 middle managers are located in the head office working in managerial and administrative areas. Deputy managers in the Head Office and deputy branch managers are senior staff in managerial roles rather than part of the core management team that makes important management decisions.

Figure 3-1 The proportions of employees of Opcitbank Bank at the end of August, 2012.
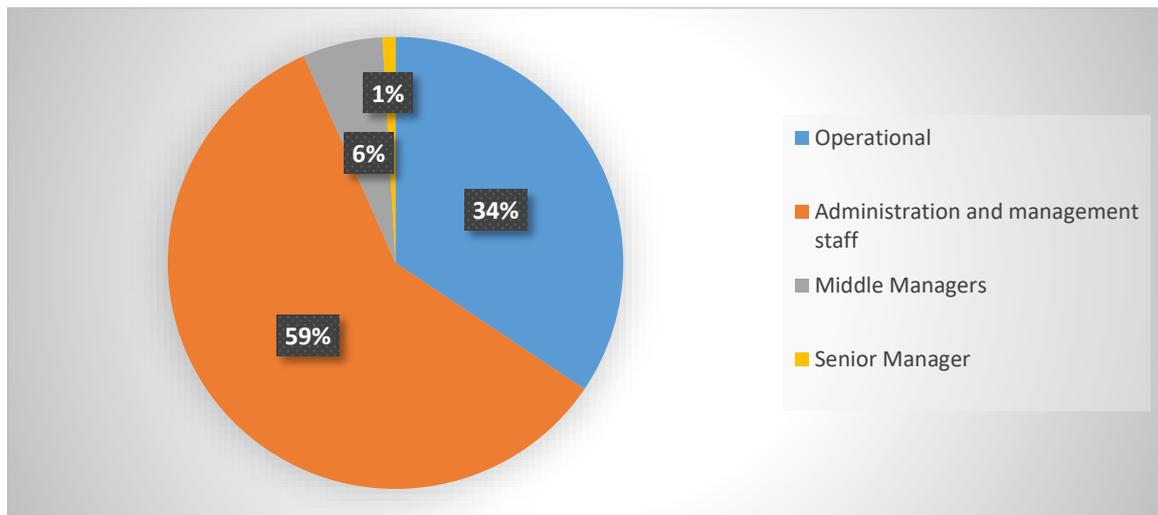
Source: Human Resource Department, Opcitbank, 2012.

Figure 3-2 Staffing Summary

Job Position	No. of Staff	Gender proportion % of women	Average Age	Education % of graduates or above	Political Statues % of CPC members	Reward system	Annual Pay from low to high (1-4)
Operational	188	73	28	82	27	Performance related	1
Administration and managerial staff	322	51	34	66	36	Fixed annual package (a 5-tier bonus system)	2
Middle Managers	31	40	41	80	64	Fixed package + Branch managers have performance related bonus	3
Senior Manager	5	20	44	80	100	Fixed package and Performance related expenses	4
Total/ Average	546	55.86	33	75	35	-------------	-------

The operational employees (Figure 3-2) mainly deal with the traditional commercial bank business. Their average age is 28 years old and about three quarters of them are female. 78% of them are holding bachelor's or more advanced degrees in finance, accounting, public finance, and computer science or business. Around 27% of them are CPC (Communist Party of China) members. As a modern corporation CPC membership might be expected to be irrelevant to individual employees. However perhaps due to this bank's state owned history and state controlled nature, statistically, the higher position in which the employees work, the more likely that they are CPC members. Nevertheless, employees' incomes are determined mainly according to how many transactions they perform, so it is a performance related pay system in this respect. This group receive the lowest average pay in this bank. Also, this is the youngest group, most educated group, and least 'politically aware' group. In addition, this group were mainly women and also managed by female managers. This group is formed by highly educated young women at the bottom of the organization ladder (Figure 3-2).

Half of the administrative and management employees are the people who have worked at operational level in the past (Figure 3-2). Their average age is 34 years old, with almost an equal female and male ratio. About two thirds of them have bachelor's degrees or above. Noticeably, 36% of them are CPC members. Administrative and managerial employees are mainly located at the Head Office and there is a distinction between them. Administration employees are ones who work in managerial roles at Opcitbank. They work in the HR department, the President's Office, Publicity Office, Security Office and the Financial Workers Union: these departments are considered as supports to the main banking business departments. The managerial employees work in departments such as Corporation and Investment, Private Banking Division, Internal Audit and Accounting Department and run the day to day banking business. Most of them are in charge and oversee or supervise the operation and performance of a certain banking product across all sixteen branches. Both administrative and management staff have their fixed annual pay package according to their ranking, which is marked at a five-level system. Their average pay is higher than the operational staff. The management staff are more likely to have a higher ranking in the reward system. Administrative employees are considered "second-class citizens" in this bank because their work requires little specific knowledge in banking. A division has started to be introduced among the employees between those who are involved in profit making and those who are not.

The middle management team is formed by all department managers and branch managers with an average age of 41. 60% of them are male, 80% of them have bachelor's degrees or above and two thirds of them are CPC members. These managers are the ones that are qualified to attend the weekly management meeting every Monday morning. Branch managers in fact work much more independently than the department managers who all work at different locations. Most of the branches have their own administrative system, variety of departments, and operate business at almost all levels, and some of them have sub branches to cover a bigger geographic area.

Middle managers are judged by their 'abilities' to do senior jobs whether they have worked as branch managers or not. The ones experienced in the market and tough competition are regarded as strong; while the ones who have no market experience seem to be considered weak. Financial performance in the market has become the measurement and requirement of being 'a good banker' in Opcitbank. Although there are a higher percentage of CPC members among middle managers, the political status of middle managers does not appear to be the most relevant aspect to their career progression. However, to be considered a 'good' banker in Opcitbank may require the ability to make money and also to be a CPC member to demonstrate political commitment. The senior management responsibilities are outlined on P.97 in section 4.7.1.

Those that participated in formal and informal interviews in my study are 4 of the senior managers (1 women and 3 men), 15 middle managers (8 women and 7 men), 7 Sales and marketing staff (2 women and 5 men), 3 administrative staff (2 women and 1 man) and 21 management staff (13 women and 8 men) (see Figure 3-3). There was one woman who contributed an interview but later HR defined her job in an operational role. In order to focus the research on a clear group, her interview and observational material has not been used in this study. 7 people that were categorized by the HR department as sales and marketing staff and administrative and management staff are actually 'managers' in the real work environment as articulated above. Therefore, I consider them as managers in my study.

Figure 3-3 Summary of Participants in Interviews

Position in the bank	Total No.	No. of Women	No. of Men
Senior Managers	4	1	3
Middle Managers	15	8	7
Administration staff	3	2	1
Managerial staff	28	15	13
Total	49	26	23

4 out of 5 senior managers did not allow me to record or take notes during conversations. None of them would give a direct reason for this. The 'boss' (the most senior manager in the bank) was willing to have casual conversations during lunch or in the banks sports club if we met but he rejected any form of conversation in his office. His schedule was constantly busy. However there could be more to his 'busyness' that involved unspoken cultural meaning: he was not happy that I was conducting research in the bank. There were also one male middle manager and one male administrative staff member who did not participate in any formal interviews: however they were willing to explain issues that specialized in their professional area and provide interesting information on a couple of particular organizational issues. There were many more people captured in the data in other forms, for instance people became the subject of some 'gossip' or characters in 'stories'.

The data used in this study is selected to serve the purpose of the study although a few people who I wanted to interview either rejected being interviewed or were too busy to be interviewed. In the first month in the field I felt that it was very difficult to get any valuable data: people behaved with reservation because I was constantly there and they were not sure about my role and my intention, despite the HR department informing people about my study. However interesting stories emerged slowly during lunch breaks, dinner parties, shopping trips or workers' union events. Openness developed with the building of trust between the people in the bank and me rather than through the HR announcement to explain my role. My relationship with the bank employees was, with many of them, the role of a confidante and they opened up

to me, perhaps more than had I been working there as an employee. If I had worked alongside them at the same time as conducting my research, then it is unlikely that I would have received the same response, as they would likely be more guarded, viewing me as both a colleague and as competitor. Many interview participants were identified by what others said about them behind their backs. However, my weak power position in this study as an ethnographer sometimes did not allow me to "pick and choose" my research participants. Some people participated in the study because I could not decline managers who expected me to interview them. I could not afford to make them feel 'left out' while I interviewed some workers in their department as I did not want the risk of them creating difficulties during my study. The result of this was that I generated a significant amount of data, rather than being focused around particular topics and particular themes. Therefore, the consequence of this when it came to organise the data was that it was necessary to make distinctions between the relevance of some data and how they were connected. Also the way I approached data generation produced both informal and formal data which gave me the opportunity to consider comparisons between these contexts. Although my research interest is women, gender was not a criterion for participant selection. The reason for this was because men, as much as women, contribute to the social and organizational systems which women work for and live in: therefore their views are relevant and I did not want to 'silence' men in my study. The stories in this study about women managers emerged naturally rather than being intentionally guided.

3.6 Data Collection

In the following section I discuss the data collection methods that I employed. Data was collected through a set of qualitative methods that are often used in organizational ethnographic studies. These were participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and document analysis.

3.6.1 Observation

Observation is regarded by Adler and Adler (1994: 305) as the 'bedrock source of human knowledge'. The non-verbal behaviour of my participants cannot be recorded and reproduced, unless using a camera, but can be observed. Observing the participants was essential in my study in terms of capturing meanings which do not reflect my participants' words. The presence of a researcher observing people at work always has an impact on the observed, therefore it is important to reflect on my role in the data (Angrosino and Perez 2000).

Furthermore, as Angrosino and Perez (2000) argue the observational interaction is not a fixed process. Finally, participants' situational identities (e.g. gender role identity and professional identity) are assumed not to be socially and culturally normative while being observed. Therefore, the observational process is a negotiation process between the participants and the observer towards an agreed truth.

Observation was essential in my research. Ideally, any details, events and interaction which were available to me will have value in my study. However, during my research, I only recorded events and interactions that were the most distinctive or most memorable to me. The reasons for this are firstly my experience and capability of observing and recording data in the field, and secondly the conditions available for recording data. Practically, it was impossible for me to record all the information that is observed from the field, though I found my ability to record events and details improved during the time I spent in the field.

My rational plan of observations involved attending key events including public promotions, employees' meetings, managers' meetings, and business meetings with people outside the organization. I also intended to observe conversations in the organization to see how people spoke to each other, how the conversation developed between people in different or the same power positions. My plan for observations included observing the work environment (the relations between ranks in the organization and their working spaces), dress codes in the organization and different life styles. However, I had fewer opportunities to join the formal events in the bank as I was only permitted to observe two departmental weekly meetings and two Retail Banking promotion events (one art exhibition in 'wealth management' and one event to coordinate with foreign education providers to promote 'forex' exchange products). The informal events I observed such as the unscheduled uniform inspections were much more controversial and exposed more conflicts within the bank.

With experience, having a cup of tea with any of the participants, or hearing any of their small talk could be as valuable as attending an important business meeting or observing something formally significant. However, it was easy for me to observe and record events and details in a permitted situation. For instance, when I first started observations, I noticed that participants were likely to discuss sensitive issues or 'secrets' while the digital recorder was turned off, but

sometimes I could not find an opportunity to write it down without people noticing. Later, I tried to write down a few key words to remind me of interesting events or stories very quickly while I was still in the work space and later write down an entry (normally a paragraph) while I was on my own. I would then briefly assess and note its importance before organizing the material after I left the bank in the evening, which I labelled according to date. Considering the scale and goal of this study, only a small portion of the observation notes have been used. They are mainly notes from conversations when I was not permitted to use a digital audio recorder. The criteria to select such data is its relevance to my research questions, so many of the interesting events did not appear in this study.

3.6.2.1 Level of Participation in Observation

Being a participant-observer involved me becoming part of the work place with my own desk in the HR department. This also involved helping the employees with their work on occasion, socialising inside and outside the workplace, and participating in workplace rules and routines such as working hours and lunch hours. There are diverse views on the level of participation in ethnographic observations (Van Maanen 1988: 10). Alvesson (1995: 58) described his role in a three-week field work as a 'participant observer' by attending 'certain corporate activities' and staying with the company's personnel for a week. Ybema *et al* (2009: 6) suggest that observation in organizational ethnography could involve 'any degree of participation'. Brewer (2004: 312) argues that 'the close association and familiarity with the social setting does not necessarily mean actual participation.' Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) and Bryman and Bell (2011) have both discussed the level of participation in observational studies which is relevant to my study.

Bryman and Bell (2011) observe that any definitions of ethnography and participant observation are very difficult to distinguish. Both of these methods gather further data through interviews and document collection. For these writers, ethnography has a specific focus on the culture of the group that the researcher is immersed in. Furthermore, they stress that ethnography is not only a method but also a written product, so ethnography is reflected in the research process and the written outcome. Bryman and Bell (2011) and Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) also discuss the participation level of the ethnographer in relation to the role of the researcher. All these authors adopt Gold's (1958) classification of participant

observation. For instance, Bryman and Bell suggest that there are different degrees of involvement from the members of the social settings. They are complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete observer. Complete participant is a fully functioning member of the social setting and the ethnographer's true identity is not known to others. This is known as a covert observer. Participant-as–observer is the same role as the complete observer, but the other members in the social setting are aware of the ethnographer's identity as a researcher. In the observer-as-participant role the ethnographer is mainly an interviewer. There is some observation but very little of it involves participation. In the complete observer role, the researcher does not interact with people. The degree of immersion and participation in the social setting is an important part of ethnography, and Bryman and Bell suggest that the complete observer should not be considered an ethnographer.

Taking into account the ethical issues which could possibly arise from the research, the complete observer in a working organization is almost impossible by today's standards. Participant-as-observer may also be hard to achieve in a formal organizational setting considering the difficulties of gaining access to businesses and management contexts. In my case, it would not be possible for me to be honest about my researcher identity and at the same time take employment there as a member of staff in the bank. The professional requirements in this bank such as work contract, commitment to work, disclosure agreements and even the passport control policy for certain jobs in this bank would make research impossible. Therefore, my clear position in the study is observer-as-participant. Gold (1958) stresses that the observer-as-participant role has the danger of not understanding the social setting and the people in it sufficiently, which may lead to incorrect inferences in the research. However, this can be avoided in my study which I will now explain.

3.6.2.2 My Familiarity with the Field

My advantage in this role is that I have knowledge about the bank and some of the people until its most recent reform in 2006. Therefore, for me to become familiar with the bank and the people was easier and faster than a complete stranger. For instance, when I arrived at the bank on the first day, one senior manager started to share his unhappy experience with me of him visiting a customer with a couple of bank employees earlier that morning. He talked to me because I had followed him to visit customers when I was working for him, so we share some

common understanding of the banking business and how a banking professional should behave in that sort of circumstance. Nevertheless, taking an observer-as participant role, most of my data comes from formal and informal interviews, while other forms of data are supportive to the main themes emerging from the interviews. Occasionally I was able to participate in some events, such the bank's promotional meetings and small departmental meetings, during my field study because I am a former colleague, friend and volunteer. This sort of participation to some degree reflects the bank's informal culture that is based on *guanxi* rather than a formal organizational structure and procedures.

Field study, and in particular participant observation, is a way to become immersed in the local environment more than only relying on participants' accounts. In my experience, to join the two department meetings gave me knowledge which I could share, in conversation, with other people who were also in the same meetings. For instance, one participant only made a comment to me about her manager's way of drafting documents after I witnessed her being 'told off' because of her 'poor writing skills' during the meeting. Involvement in more organizational activities also provided common ground with the workers to share 'gossip'. Furthermore, by doing so, I was able to make sense of the power relations, the structure of the field and 'analyse the social mechanisms by which informants position themselves' (Moeran 2009). Therefore, participant observation was a way to make my study have a clear context and analytical base, as well as adding richness to the data.

3.6.3 Qualitative interviews (formal interviews and conversations)

McDonald (2001: 78) argues that ethnographical studies provide "open ended flexibility" that can cooperate with other methods like text analysis, historical research, questionnaires and formal and informal interviews. I have adopted interviews in my project. The qualitative interviews used in my study include formal interviews, naturally occurring conversations and online conversations. Some of the later formal interviews were guided by information I collected from participant observations and they were semi-structured. Both the specific follow-up interviews through social media after the field-work in order to corroborate my understanding of the data, and the casual conversations which happened during the fieldwork provided rich and meaningful data for my study.

Interviews are increasingly becoming naturally occurring occasions in general (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), where interviewing has become a part of modern life. The formal interviews in my study were semi-structured but became more unstructured and conversational as the study progressed. The choice of using semi-structured interviews for this study rather than structured interviews was first to allow the insiders to generate maximum organization knowledge (Chapman 2001) and also to allow me to respond to the interviewee as topics developed during the course of the interview (Dörnyei 2007). The use of semi-structured interviews can be justified on the basis that the participants in the study have a broad range of experience in terms of work and therefore this allowed flexibility in the interview process and encouraged them to speak freely. The benefits of using semi structured interviews in my study were to provide a background to the participants' life stories as well as to generate areas of interests to guide my later research topics. By asking the participants to tell me something about themselves, I generated enough data to explore a typical day or week in the life of the participants. These were the only two questions in the interviews, and other questions that I asked were follow up questions which responded to the participants' comments. They provided information on participants' social relations in terms of ethnicity and gender, occupation and political identity and I gained an insight into the influence these have on their working lives.

All the interviews were conducted at a time and place which was convenient for the participants; this was usually during lunch time or late afternoon at their offices when they had no other engagement. There are a total of 51 people who participated in the interviews. There were two rounds of interviews in the field. The interviews were between 11 minutes and one hour forty-five minutes in length. Some of the interviews were broken into several parts because the participants had to deal with their work obligations and spoke to me when they were less busy. Interviews consisting of several short sections sometimes provided information in its simplest forms; while longer interviews sometimes contained information that was not necessarily relevant.

During the semi-structured interviews in the first round I encouraged respondents to talk about themselves by asking for personal information, their work histories, their typical day at work and their future plans. The majority of the interviewees gave an account of these questions based around three main topic areas: personal information and background, views about their

work experience, career choices and prospects and family structure and division of labour within the family. The organization and key topics of the interviews were reviewed and briefly recorded on a daily basis according to the date and time of the interviews. Interesting topics raised in the interviews were marked and used for generating further interview questions for the second round of interviews.

The second round of interviews focused on areas participants avoided discussing in the first round or themes developed from first round interviews. I selected respondents who were particularly relevant to my research topic. Despite having formal access to the bank as an intern rather than a researcher, participants in the study still knew me as a researcher, therefore they could make a choice to approach me or avoid me, depending on their own preference. During my time in the bank, there were people who wanted to have conversations with me as they were curious about the study as well as having lots to say. Also, there were a few people who withdrew from pre-arranged interviews because they decided that they did not want to be interviewed.

Although I have lived and worked in the same society, same culture and same organization as my participants for several years, the ability to distinguish between what people say they do and what they actually do can only come from familiarity with them over time in the field. With the respondents that I know and worked with for about ten years, it was less challenging. With the respondents I did not know very well before, it took some time for them to tell me what they actually experienced and actually did, so many surprising discoveries came from this group in the last month or during the second round interviews with them. In some cases, people corrected their 'errors or inaccuracies' from earlier conversations in the later conversations.

Material collected from the formal interviews is the 'official' narrative that can 'strengthen and reproduce an identity, or that can structure experience' (Van der Waal 2009: 35). I have also collected informal and less structured material from conversations. I consider data from different sources and forms together in order to add the richness of the data. Informal and formal interview materials are both used selectively in my study. For full participants' information see appendix 1.

3.6.4 Documents as Data

Documents as sources of data were also collected in the field. Bryman and Bell (2011) list the documents which can be used as data. These include personal documents (e.g. diaries, letters, and photos), public documents (e.g. laws and regulations), organizational documents (e.g. annual reports and policy documents), mass media outputs (e.g. news articles) and internet resources. Scott (2014) suggests that documents that are used as data in social research should be assessed according to four criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaningful. As Bryman and Bell (2011) point out because documents are not created for the purpose of research there is no reactive effect on this sort of data, therefore it can increase the credibility of other forms of data.

I collected the bank's public and organizational documents as a part of the data for my study. This included publicity, website and media reports, one event's DVD, company annual reports and a large amount of internal organizational documents (including digital copies of photos) that I was allowed to keep provided I did not disclose the bank's identity as a condition. These documents provided me with valuable background about the bank from a variety of aspects. I also collected documents according to my particular research interest in gender roles, human resource management and 'women's work'[4]. I also took advantage of my base in the HR department to have conversations with people who drafted some of the HR documents. The different interpretations of some of the HR policies revealed some interesting information about the relationship between the document producers and employees who have to follow the policies in their practices. I collected the documents according to the criteria that Scott (2014) identifies in the field. However, to assess their 'representativeness' was problematic for me. I was not permitted to access the whole collection of the documents so I could not determine the 'representativeness' of the documents that I collected.

The relevant gender, organizational and cultural literature guided my research planning and my data generation. However, data produced in my study is full of surprises and unpredictable, because of the multivocality of the methods I adopted in my study. The data generation process

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4 The 'Women's work' - *fu nv gong zuo* in Chinese - refers to work that deals with women's issues

in my study started before my first contact with a member of the organization, along with the material generated by my qualitative study.

The three main sources of data used in this study are unstructured formal and informal interviews, observation records and official documents. Predominantly the data utilized in this study is from unstructured interviews, and the observation records are used as support for the contributions of the participants. The documents have been used to give an overview of the company and this information is presented mainly in chapter 4, the research context, and also to identify the position of the participants in the bank.

3.7 Analytical Framework

As Silverman (2006: 237) notes 'thoughtful researchers will often want to use a combination of methods'. Qualitative data that is generated from the interviews, conversations, participant observations and documents were in the form of a large corpus of unstructured text.

The data analysis process involves data familiarization, data translation, theme generation, coding and data interpretation (Ritchie and Spencer 2002). Data was collected in a mixture of Chinese Mandarin and Chinese Wu, the primary languages of all the female bank managers involved in this research. This was to enable them to communicate effectively and express themselves accurately and to ensure that important aspects such as non-verbal communication in their natural language surroundings were not affected and neglected (Punnett and Shenkar 1994, Marschan-Piekkari and Welch 2004). Interviews, conversation transcripts and documents were translated from a mixture of the Wu dialect and Mandarin into English. Data was then back-translated to Chinese Mandarin and translated again to English and then imported into NVivo.

For Gee (1999) the transcript is part of the analysis, with the researcher deciding what to include and what is less relevant, with a 'narrow', as opposed to a 'broad', transcription creating a more trustworthy analysis, though this is dependent on the research objective. The problem of the misinterpretation of meaning in translation therefore has not been neglected. Issues raised by the use of language can affect the research process (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis

2004: 224). However, a shared language between the participants and the researcher is influential in accessing potential informants and facilitating the relationship between parties in the conversation. Green and White (1976), Eckhardt (2004) and Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004) suggest that qualitative data should be translated using a meaning-based or decentred approach to maintain the original meaning of the informants. However, considering this study was conducted by me, a native Chinese Wu and Mandarin speaker, the time limitation and the difficulty of transcript verification, meaning based translation was not used in this study.

The analytical tool I have used in this study is ethnographic content analysis (ECA) (Altheide et al. 2010). The reason for me to use ECA is that the data contains text from documents, qualitative interviews and conversations. ECA was used to code and interpret data generated from the documents, conversations and interviews. As Althelde et al (2010: 128) point out, ECA 'follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis and interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid.' So with ECA I moved among 'locating, identifying, retrieving and analysing' data for the 'relevance, significance and meaning' of the data (Altheide et al. 2010: 128). Using ECA I was able to systematically code the data I collected from the field. For example:

I got a job here after I graduated. Why banking? I studied banking at university, so I didn't think and banking was the natural choice […] en, I don't really know, all my school friends got jobs in banking, and so did I (laugh). My parents, my family also agree that banking jobs are suitable for girls. First the jobs are stable; then (.) for girls, this maybe is important. I have been here for 16 years now. (Fang Yuee, Managerial staff in Internal Auditor)

This section of data was identified being relevant to career entry. In this quotation, each individual sentence was coded according to the relevant themes of the study. Sentence 1 links banking with education. Sentence 2 suggests that the choice of banking job is normal. Sentence 3 says the reason it is normal is because her friends do it and her family believe it is a good job. In sentence 4 she mentions stability, reinforcing this by stating that she has been in the job for a long time. So the codes for this section would be

- Banking and education

- banking and normalcy

- banking and friends and family

- banking and stability.

 This exact is analysed in more detail on page 108 section 5.2.

I used interview and conversational data as the main source of my coding and theme generation. Transcripts were first open coded. While I was coding the data, I wrote notes according to the data in order to establish relevance and connections among different parts of the data. The notes were then read together with the field diary in order to link codes to contexts, consequences and causes. Then the core themes were generated and edited to avoid repetition. Data from documents were coded selectively according to their relationship to the core themes that were generated from the interview and conversational data.

A number of themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews and the conversational data in relation to my research on women managers' career in banking. Gender roles, traditional cultural values, and professional identity are the core themes that consistently appeared. Other themes that were associated with career, professions and management covered women managers' work experience in banking, their decision to join the banking profession, their career progress to become managers and their personal accounts of their managerial experiences. Other themes including political status, *guanxi*, earning, skills and development, family formation and motherhood - in particular *guanxi* - map the intersectional relations among gender roles, professional identity and cultural tradition at organizational and society levels. The themes are discussed in the following data analysis chapters in more detail.

3.8 My Reflective Account of the Research Process

I entered the field with many cultural 'accoutrements': being Chinese, being a woman, being a former employee, being a research student from a British institution, and my implicit assumptions about women's negative treatment in the bank. As Garton and Coupland (2010) point out different relationships between researchers and respondents will have different

implications for data collection. This issue is relevant in my study as my relationships with the people I have studied are complicated. More than half of my interviewees are my former work colleagues: a few of them I had worked with before and the others I only knew for a brief time. There are also interviewees that joined the bank after I left so I did not know them prior to the research. The different types of relationships I have with the respondents affected the nature of the interviews. Little can be done about this: however, I shall reflect on how this affects the data in the analysis. I am also aware that my field study has caused some issues in my project regarding the competing roles of me being a friend, a former employee, a formal colleague and a researcher.

The outcome of the study is dependent on the interpretation that I give to the data I collected and selected. I see myself as an integral part of the research process and contributed to the construction of meaning during the process of the study. The participants have developed and constructed the themes and interests in this study through semi-structured interviews and conversations. The data collection and analysis of the data unavoidably are subjective therefore my research is not value free. As an ethnographer, I co-constructed the reality of the events and situations described in this study with my participants. However, as I applied my own meaning to the participants' words and behaviours, I appear to hold more power than my participants and claim the ownership of the final analysis. I had the opportunity to go through and discuss the transcript of the interview with four participants while I was still in the field, however not all the data was transcribed and analysed when I left China. Therefore, in order to share more of the power in this study to the participants, I maintained access with some of the participants who were willing to be contacted after I left the field through Chinese social media. They were actively involved in the data analysis and also they updated their movements and situations online and in internet phone calls that confirmed or occasionally challenged my interpretation of what they said in the interviews. For example, Wu Ling has literally expressed she has no career expectation in the bank and I interpreted this as meaning her desire of career has been supressed. Wu Ling and I have discussed this several times and she finally admitted she has struggled to develop her career.

However, the unstructured nature of the study, the absence of a specific hypothesis and the on-going updated information from participants make it very difficult to know exactly where the

research ended. The field study was highly intense in terms of following the bank employees' long working hours every day. Also, I socialized with them on a regular basis, as being invited to their activities was part of the field study, because in a Chinese cultural setting to maintain good *guanxi* is essential to build trust and acquire further data. Also, it was hard to find time to sort and tidy the data while I was in the field. The nature of the topic is complicated and the amount of data was overwhelming, and also the area I wanted to research might be too sensitive in formal interviews for the participants or culturally unsuitable. Therefore, parts of the interview data contradict the field notes because some of the information gathered from informal conversations was not corroborated during the interviews. The differences that emerge from the data could be caused by the variations in the way they were collected (Brewer 2004).

3.9 Ethical Issues

Because of the late changes to the conditions of gaining access, I was not supposed to exchange any formal paper work with my participants, also after consulting two of the respondents before the interviews I decided to modify the way to achieve ethical standards in the study. When I started in the field, HR informed the people in the building of my intention of researching managerial staff. Considering my respondents are commercial bank managers, some of them are extremely cautious about leaving their signatures on any piece of paper or document which they are not familiar with and any document they sign would have to be examined by the bank's lawyers. When I first tried to go through the procedure with two of my close friends, both of them rejected signing the consent form. They stated that if they signed the document then the document would be kept by them as a guarantee that I conducted the study according to the ethical code contained in the document. Therefore, I was unable to collect consent forms for this study, and had to adapt to the local culture in order to satisfactorily conduct the study. Instead the information detailing the purpose of the research, the expected duration of the process and giving opportunities to ask any questions regarding the research was shared and recorded before the interview or conversation started or when I contacted the respondents for the first time. It was also stated that they could choose to withdraw from the research project at any stage of the research. Also, I informed them that if there were any questions they did not want to answer, they did not have to. This actually gave the respondents control of their own information. In addition, I told them if they wished to discuss the contents further or

request a copy of the transcript they could choose to have a discussion face to face or through the internet.

The two most essential ethical issues in this study were confidentiality and anonymity. This study was focused in a specific location and with a specific group of people who may be identified through some aspects that were revealed in data. Although the specific corporation may be identified through the financial data presented in this study, the specific bank would not be able to be identified through this as there are 89 regional bank head offices in China. Confidentiality was ensured by avoiding using any data that contained any specific personal details. I also assured the participants that any information that was divulged would not be revealed except for the express purpose of this study. To ensure anonymity all names were replaced with letters and personal details were adapted to ensure non-identification. In addition, anonymity for participation in the research was assured by me. However, this became increasingly difficult as the interviews were conducted in the participants' place of work, and some participants revealed their participation to each other.

The following chapter will outline the research context by examining the banking industry at a national level and then more specifically at the local level and the bank where the research was conducted.

Chapter 4. Research Context

4.1 Introduction

The differences in industrial development between the west and China have affected the development of their financial systems differently. The west's financial system developed because of economic demand, while in pre-modern China[5], the financial system was hugely under-developed. The banking system served little purpose in the country's economic development until the recent economic reform, in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite this the Chinese banks have always provided the possibility for the government's intervention in the economy in China since the late 19th century (Ji 2003). The communist government inherited the tradition of governmental intervention in banking system. The reasons for this were partly related to China's lack of experience of democracy, free market economic development and its political structure (Cousin 2011). In most of pre-modern China, as an unitary country, it had no desire for financial innovation while Europe had financial development as a result of fiscal competition and earlier market demand (Goetzmann 2004). Instead, China's modern financial system developed under the pressure of war indemnities owed to foreign countries (Ji 2003, Treobald 2013). Hence China's financial system was developed by both domestic and foreign financers in 'dual economic' circumstances (Ji 2003: xxi); the traditional agrarian economy and the modern western trading demands. Although this banking system at that time made limited contributions to the country's economic development, the development of the domestic banks has provided opportunities for the government's' intervention in the economy since the late 19th century.

Noticeably, before 1842, there are no records of Chinese women in the labour market (He 1997). Women first appeared in China's financial industry in the summer of 1912 during the Hsin-hai Revolution. A group of women began the initial preparation of founding a 'Chinese Women Citizens' Bank' and drafted documents for this (He 1997). Although their idea of

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5 Many writers, such as Browne and Misra, adapt the historic periodization that uses 1842AD to separate the pre-modern China from modern China. After the First Opium War finished between Britain and China, China signed the Treaty of Nanking to grant indemnity to Britain, opened 5 treaty ports and ceded Hong Kong to Britain.

creating a women's bank never became a reality, their initiative to liberate women through career building and employment was inspirational. He (1997) claims that women were first employed by the Bank of China Beijing Branch as clerks in 1916 because they were assumed to have a careful nature and were paid less than men. Later women were employed in other banks in Shanghai in better jobs such as accountants. However, women's employment in the labour market was supressed and discouraged by both Chinese 'Warlordism'[6] and western imperialism. The *May the 4th Movement* in 1919 encouraged women to seek economic independence through equal rights in employment. The first women's bank, *The Women's Commercial Saving Bank of China*, was eventually established in Beijing and thirty educated Chinese women were trained to manage and operate the bank. Although this bank quickly went out of business, the first group of Chinese female bankers and bank managers had been created. Later, *The Women's Commercial Saving Bank of Shanghai* was established with a female Chairperson and a female Chief Operational Officer. This bank supported and trained educated women to make a career in banking, though it did not reject the idea of cooperation with competent male investors and male bankers (Jiang 2006). In 1931, the government enacted laws and legislation to ensure women's equal pay rights, and also protect women's rights in employment. This included equal opportunities in employment and no more than 8 hours work every day for female workers, encouraging women's employment at that time.

Banks in Shanghai and Beijing employed historically high numbers of female employees in the 1930s. By 1949, there were a total of 1130 women employed in banking in Shanghai: they made up 4.67% of the total banking employees and 0.31% of the total number of working women in Shanghai (Liu 2009). Although the Communist Party of China (CPC) government encouraged gender equality in all industries, the banking industry continued to employ a small number of women until the 1970s reform. This was because of the lack of development and employment opportunities in banking in a highly planned economy and also women's lack of education and skills to work in a bank.

In this chapter I introduce China's financial system, especially focusing on banking development in China since the country's first banking reform in 1978 to provide background on female employment in the industry for my research. First I will discuss China's banking

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[6] From 1916 to 1928, the centre state authority collapsed and the provincial or regional military rulers exercised power and autonomy over the localities in China. For further information see McCord (1993).

system prior to 1978 in section 4.2. Since the 1978, 1994 and 1998 banking reforms have had a significant impact on the banking industry in China, I discuss the institutional and organizational changes in relation to these three turning points in sections 4.3 and 4.4. Furthermore, I examine the organizational development of the bank that I studied in order to provide a context for this study in sections 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7. The discussion mainly focuses on the bank's expansion and some of the management practices in recent years in section 4.7 that have led to my story about some of the women managers working in a Chinese commercial bank.

4.2 Mono-banking system before 1978

Ji (2003) links the early banking system in the People's Republic of China to what she calls 'state capitalism' with commercial and economic activities all undertaken by the state. Cousin (2011: xx) describes the banking system at that time as only a 'socialist money teller', which only distributed government financial resources to all sectors and all departments. Prior to 1978, China had a mono-banking system with only one bank, the People's Bank of China (PBOC Research Bureau), which performed the banking business in the economy. The PBOC was founded in 1948 by the Communist government and for the following thirty years, it was the monetary authority, national treasury, banking operator and regulator. The early forms of the Bank of China (PBOC Research Bureau 2003), the China Construction Bank (CCB paper 2002) and the Agricultural Bank of China were established and disbanded several times between the 1950s to the 1970s. Except serving certain industrial functions temporally for the PBOC, none of them existed stably enough to perform modern banking duties independently in the economy. Banking in general contributed very little to economic growth, and the primary responsibility for the PBOC was to follow the demands of the highly centralised planned economy to allocate financial resources as well as to collect revenue.

4.3 Banking system reforms after 1978

In 1978, China started its 'reforming and opening-up policy' in order to develop its economy. The banking system was also reformed in 1978 when the four large state owned banks, the 'Big 4', became the commercial banks in China. The Big 4 refers to: the Bank of China which

specialized in banking for international trading; the China Construction Bank which financed fixed assets investment; the Agricultural Bank of China which served banking business in rural areas; and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), which became an independent entity in 1984. The last three served the remaining sectors of the economy (Cousin, 2011). Therefore, a two-layered banking system was introduced in 1978 and fully established in 1993, which included the PBOC as the central bank and supervisory body and the 'Big 4' as state-owned banks that financed the commercial activities of the country and took treasury duties (Cousin 2011). Laws and regulations[7] were introduced during this period to support the banking industry's healthy growth.

The second wave of banking reforms, according to Chen (2009), started in 1994. During the 1990s local financial institutions such as city commercial banks and rural commercial banks emerged. Three policy banks, the Agricultural Development Bank of China, the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China were created in 1994 (Zhu 2007). These policy banks implemented the government's economic development plans of financing the policy lending business and long-term development projects in their defined areas. Furthermore, in the 1990s China gradually introduced a large number of banking laws and regulation to provide legal underpinning to the banking system (ibid). These laws and regulations purposively removed policy lending duties of the commercial banks, clarified the rule of the PBOC as the central bank of China and in theory should have decreased the government influence on commercial banks' operation to support the further development of the banking industry (ibid). The third wave of the banking reform started in the 2000s. As Griffiths (2005) suggests China's desire to join the World Trade Organization (Newton et al. 2005) promoted banking reform. The government proposed dramatic and ambitious reforms strategies, including the recapitalization of the 'Big 4' which was enforced by the Ministry of Finance. The government also tried to encourage foreign strategic investors to invest in minority shares in the domestic banks in order to bring in skills and good practice. Since 2003, the majority of the state-owned banks such as the Bank of Communications (BCM) and the

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7 The full list and some of the full text (in English) of the banking and finance laws and regulations in 1980s and 1990s in this chapter are available online at:
http://www.lawinfochina.com/Search/SearchLaw.aspx?subject=0370501

http://www.lawinfochina.com/Search/SearchLaw.aspx?subject=0370502

'Big 4' were partially privatized through IPOs in order to reinforce external monitoring and encourage better performance. Some of the Chinese banks have also successfully cross-listed their shares overseas.

The huge expansion in commercial banking was during the latter 1980s to the end of the 1990s. According to Zhang (2004: 214) this was widely known as 'banks setting stalls' period where big commercial banks established a huge number of branches and sub-branches all over China, which peaked in 1992. The number of employees also dramatically increased during this expansion. For instance, the number of employees of BOC increased from 33,240 in 1988 to 175,524 by 1992, an annual increase of 142.68%. By the end of 1992, the 'Big 4' had a total of 1,537,455 employees in China and this number increased at an annual rate of 0.62% through the 1990s (Zhang 2004). By the end of 1997 the state-owned commercial banks had a total of 2,072,900 employees (PBOC Research Bureau 2003). Liu (2009) reports that during this period, women's employment shifted from the manufacturing to the service industry because of the relaxation of the planned economy and economic development. Although there are no women's employment figures available, Liu suggests that the number of women employed by the banking industry was increasing.

Since 1998, the Chinese government has 'instructed' the commercial banks to 'increase their pace of reforming and commercialization' by reducing branches and controlling their number of employees (PBOC Research Bureau 2003). The state-owned commercial banks started their own reorganization by first closing down branches and sub-branches in remote areas and then closing down branches that had not made enough profit in the cities. The full scale of this reorganization is impossible to assess, however the information from the 'Big 4' partially represents the changes in the employment in commercial banks from 1998 to 2002. The number of branches of the 'Big 4' reduced from 102,913 in 1999 to 98,951 by the end of 2002. A total of 3,962 branches of the big state-owned commercial banks closed down during 1998 to 2002 with 1,782 of these in remote areas (Zhang 2004).

The reorganization had a real impact on the employees in these banks who called this reorganization a 'haircut' or 'pruning' (Zhang 2004). The metaphors reflected the employees' understanding of the reorganization as the banks getting rid of 'unwanted' workers. Managers in the closed down branches expressed some degree of resistance as they had worked hard for

almost ten years to set up these branches (China Construction Bank (CCB) paper 2002). From 1998 to 2002, a total of 556,200 employees (not including the 'natural reduction' of 61,100 employees) left their positions in the state-owned commercial banks. The composition of this 556,200 was rather complicated. The People's Bank of China (PBOC) Research Bureau (2003) suggests that the reduction of the 'formal staff' was 350,800 and 'non-formal staff' (mainly dispatched workers) 205,400. Among the reduction of 'formal staff', 165,400 were made 'internally retired', 7,900 were '*xiagang*' (explained in literature review, page 20), and 89,500 left for other reasons. The 'internally retired' employees were statistically still employed by the banks, but in reality, they were no longer holding positions and were paid full salaries in the banks (Zhao 2002). The PBOC Research Bureau divides the total reduction of staff into two categories: policy reduction (including internal retirement, see page 22, because of age and redundancy because of the reduction of branches) and organizational reduction (including '*xiagang*' because of incompetence and employees who resigned or were dismissed as some kind of disciplinary punishment). The total pay out to the employees that left their jobs because of the 'policy reduction' was close to £1.15 billion.

By the end of 2002, the number of people who worked in the state-owned commercial banks had decreased to 1,638,400. Zhao (2002) concludes that even though banking jobs were still among the most stable jobs in China, they were no longer 'jobs for life' and there was a scarcity of employment opportunities in the banking industry. The PBOC Research Bureau (2003) raised concerns about the challenge for state-owned commercial banks to retain competent employees during this reorganization. Furthermore, the social welfare system and labour legislation, or the lack of it, in China have failed to support and protect either employers' or employees' rights during this reorganization of state-owned commercial banks. The positive effect of this reorganization was that it increased the business efficiency and profitability of the state-owned commercial banks: as the employee numbers decreased the profit per employee increased. The 'haircut' has brought a stronger financial performance to the state-owned commercial banks. The banking industry as a whole has been continually expanding since 2002 but the total employee numbers and the total branch numbers in the industry increased during the 2000s at a slower pace than the 1990s.

By 2005, women represented 47.9% of the total number of employees in the financial sector in

China, while they had only been 24.6% in 1978. The financial sector became the fourth biggest employer for women in China, following health care, hospitality and education. In some cities, such as Beijing there were more women (54.64%) employed in finance than men (45.36%) in 2004 (Department of Population and Employment Statistics 2004). Not only were the number of women employees increasing, women were also working in senior positions in finance. In 2008, women constituted 17.7% of the executives and senior managers in the financial industry. Liu (2009) analyses the recent development of women's employment in finance in relation to educational development in China. The Communist government has promoted gender equality in education since 1949 and facilitated a significant improvement in gender equality in education since the 1970s. In 2005 about 70% of women working in the financial industry had been educated after the 1970s (Liu 2009). This suggests that women's improved access to education in China has brought more employment opportunities for them in the financial sector.

To sum up, the number of employees in the commercial banks displayed a bell shaped curve in the 1990s reaching a peak in 1997 and thereafter decreasing. The reorganization of the state-owned commercial banks in the late 1990s was a direct cause of the decrease in employee numbers of these banks in the early 2000s. The state had a major influence in the reduction of the number of the banking employees during that time. The banking industry has expanded at a much slower pace during the 2000s. Getting a job in banking has become more difficult since then, and as a consequence banks are in a favourable position to pick and choose the new employees. However, the number of women employees in the financial sector kept increasing during the 1990s and the 2000s (Liu 2009).

4.4 Variety of the banks in China

The banking sector dominates the rest of the Chinese financial system. Despite being underdeveloped, the overall banking system is vast (Table 4-1). Table 4-1 shows the different varieties of banks in China and the number of branches for each variety of bank. There were 3,857 different banking corporations in the banking system by the end of 2009. 13 joint-stock commercial banks were formed during the 1980s and the 1990s. 143 city commercial banks were developed from the city credit cooperatives. These 3 types of corporations accounted for nearly three quarters of the total banking assets in 2009. However, ownership of some of the banks is unclear, such as City Commercial banks and Rural Commercial banks because they

are not listed companies and therefore are not required to release information about their shareholders. There were over 200,000 commercial bank branches in China in 2012, and a third of them belonged to the state-owned commercial banks.

Table 4-1 Variety of Banks in China (2009)

Type of bank	Number of banks	Number of branches by the end of 2012
Policy Banks	3	---
State–owned Commercial Banks	4	65,995
Join-stock Commercial Banks	13	9465
Foreign-owned Banks	37	
City Commercial Banks	143	
Village and town Banks	148	
Rural commercial Banks	43	
Rural Credit Co-operatives	3056	
Urban Credit Co-operatives	11	
Postal Savings	1	39,000
Others	397	---
Total Number of Banks	3857	

Source: CBRC 2010 in Cousin (2011:4, 5) and http://www.aacnn.com/8484.html

China's banks provided over two thirds of external funding sources to households, corporations and the public sector in the third quarter of 2014 (People's Bank of China 2014). Therefore, the banks are the major financial resource to support economic growth. The position of the Chinese banks is also significantly different from banks in other transitional economies (Fungáčováand and Korhonen 2011), in terms of their ownership and the size of their assets. As mentioned previously, the commercial banks dominate the sector in terms of total assets. These banks, together with the 12 joint-stock commercial banks, are still controlled by the state through state controlled regulators and supervision bodies. Despite the three banking system reforms, Qian and Zhao (2012) argue that China's lack of financial development could jeopardize economic growth in the long-term. They further explain that the state is still able to control the financing of firms via the state-owned banks while insufficient resources are

available for fast-growing small and medium enterprises because they lack political connections. Whether the financially preferred firms have the incentive to compete and innovate or not will determine whether there is growth or recession. This resource rationing also promotes shadow banking (unregulated banking activities conducted by non-banking bodies) that increases the risks and vulnerability of the financial system. Though China puts a significant amount of effort into continuously reforming its banking system, the banking system remains a weakness of its economy due to its government controlled nature Cousin (2011).

Zhang (2004: 203) points out that because of the state controlled nature of the commercial banks, the role to appoint the senior management in major commercial banks remains with 'the CPC (the Communist Party of China) who are in charge of these leaders. Senior bankers in the state-owned commercial banks could become government officials by appointment or a government official could be appointed to be a senior manager in a commercial bank. Also, senior bankers in one bank could be appointed to a senior position in the other banks by the government. Therefore, it is confusing whether the government or the corporations control the banks' senior management. Zhang argues further that there appears to be no commercial confidentiality among these banks when the bankers move from banks to banks by government appointment. This is a distinctive management feature in China's major commercial banks and how this could have an impact on the banks' management practice is difficult to assess.

4.5 Background to this study

Financial institutions, especially the banks, have a long established strategic position in the market economies. Some authors, such as Prather (1971) and Rich (1995) have noticed that bank employees' feminization happened as early as the 1940s, while the expansion of employment in the financial service industry in the developed economies such as Japan, the US and Britain did not happen until the 1980s and 1990s.

Following the banking sector's development, there has been a continuing expansion of employment in the financial services sector in China since 2002. The big cities such as Shanghai have more than doubled their employers in the financial service industry within a

ten-year period (Finance Eastday.com 2010). Similar experiences in the advanced economies have been described by many (Speagle and Kohn 1958, Bhalla 1970, Rich 1995). For instance, McDowell (1997) suggests that when the financial service sector is expanding, the employees in these sectors would increase dramatically in a short period of time. This normally follows the structural change of the economy, when the economy shifts from a manufacturing to a service based structure. In 2013, there were 3.55 million people in China working in the banking sector which accounts for less than 0.5% of the total employees in China (China Banking Association 2014). There were only 2.56 million banking employees in 2007 and 0.76 million in 1978 (National Bureau of Statistics of People's Republic of China 2008). The absolute number of bank employees may still seem small in comparison to the numbers in developed economies but the speed of its expansion is relatively fast.

Many studies about Chinese managers pay particular attention to mega cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen in China (see for example Leung 2002, Warner 2004, Wong and Slate 2011) but the population in these cities only represents around four per cent of the total population and eight per cent of the urban population in China. Other studies about Chinese women's employment often focus on the new factory female workers in the big cities (Pan 2005, Yan 2008, Chan and Pun 2009). How managers especially women managers work in other relatively smaller Chinese cities is under studied: so the 'voices' of the professional women who live in the urban areas of China's small and median sized cities are missing. Therefore, this study contributes to the study of professional women in the most common Chinese setting that is familiar to the vast majority of the population in Chinese cities.

4.6 The Corporation

This study was conducted in one of the 13 joint-stock commercial banks. As mentioned previously, these types of bank were established in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This particular bank corporation was completely state owned when it was established and in the third wave of banking reform it adopted a shareholding ownership structure. It is a cross-listed company with a European strategic investor. By the end of 2008, the Ministry of Finance of PRC indirectly held a total of 62.33% of the shares of this corporation and this number decreased to 61.78% by the end of 2009. Currently this corporation has divisions in the United States and a few Asian countries such as Singapore.

The number of regional banks and branches increased dramatically in this corporation. This can be seen in Table 4-2 which shows the number of regional banks, branches, the number of employees and profit from 2004-2013. There were a total of 42 regional banks and 392 branches in this corporation in 2004. By the end of 2013, it had a total of nearly 1,073 branches and around 46,822 employees in its Chinese mainland division, and its business reaches about 130 countries and regions in the world. All of its subsidiaries are located in relatively developed areas that the corporation identified as 'economically developed cities'. The staff number increased fourfold and the number of branches increased nearly threefold from 2004 to 2013 while the net profit in this corporation increased by over 18 times during this nine-year period. Although it appeared that there were more employees in each branch by the end of 2013 than the end of 2004, the profitability of this corporation increased faster than its employees and branch numbers. The 2007-2008 financial crisis appeared to have little impact on this corporation's expansion and profitability.

Table 4 -2 Net profit and organizational development of the corporation from 2004 to 2013

Year	Net Profit (Million RMB)	Regional Banks Number	Total Branches	Total Employees	Employees that hold a graduate or higher degree (%)	Main HR development
2004	2,167	42	392	11,598	40	Top management on fixed annual pay
2005	3,148	42	416	13485	---	Top management on performance related pay Appraisal system
2006	3,726	---	-----	----	---	---
2007	8,290	---	-----	15,070	68.03	---
2008	13,320	---	-----	21,385	65.54	Introduced private pension Set up training centre in Shanghai Total training programmes run: 8323 Started online

						training courses
2009	14,320	60	555	24,180	70.98	Improved benefit packages Established 26 professional career development paths Enhanced online training
2010	21,509	79	622	33,552	68.03	Set employee number target Limited recruiting Enhanced appraisal system Increased online training for employees Top managers trained in world class business schools Senior and middle managers on compulsory management training programmes Developed part-time trainers among employees among Ran a total of 2002 training programmes
2011	30,819	89	684	37,195	74.29	Developed redundancy policy Continued middle management training Set up 80

						assessment subjects for the 20 different banking professional career development systems
						Trained a total of 600 part-time trainers among employees
						Developed a new staff induction programme
						Ran 4086 training programmes
2012	31,032	----	900	41,365	78	Continued senior management training
						Developed the corporation's own banking professional certifications
						Promoted employees through professional career paths on 19 different varieties of banking jobs
2013	39,175	----	1073	46,822	82.88	Ran 6 levels of management training programme, in particular reserve management team training and CPC leaders training
						Developed professional career paths for a total of

						26 of banking jobs
						Unified new staff induction programme in the whole corporation
						Supported 3098 employees to gain world or state level banking and finance professional certifications

Source: Company annual reports 2004 to 2012 (on domestic A-share market[8])

In terms of its human resource practice a performance related reward system was introduced to the top management in 2005 and gradually applied to different levels of management and employees. An appraisal system was also set up around the same time, though what the main function of the appraisal was, and whether it was linked to the reward system or not was not established in the corporation's annual reports. Moreover, appraisals, along with the reward system, were a topic which was not permitted for discussion with the bank's employees as part of my agreement to conduct in the study in the bank. The employees' benefit and pension system was also established around 2008 in order to attract competent employees during this commercial bank's expansion. A comprehensive professional career development system has also been progressively established since 2009, and therefore employees in this corporation could make career progress through a recognizable professional path.

Development in management was no longer the only way that employees' competences can be recognized. For instance, a high-level credit analyst could be on a higher pay grade than a senior manager. Recruitment has been limited and strictly managed since 2010 and a standard new staff induction programme was formally launched across all regional banks in the corporation in 2013. The issue of redundancy was first briefly mentioned in 2011's company

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[8] China A-shares are listed on the Shanghai exchange and are largely available only to domestic investors. For further information see Liu (2014).

year book. Without detailed accounts, it is hard to link the need to consider redundancy to this particular corporation.

Additionally, staff training appeared to be extremely important in Human Resource (HR) practice. Training is considered the main achievement for HR in each company year book that has been accessible to the public since 2008. Online training provided huge opportunities for the company to develop its staff training by maximizing coverage and minimizing training costs. Furthermore, the project that trains employees to be part time trainers has been a success so that almost 600 employees became trainers who could provide training courses internally in the corporation. In 2008, the corporation ran 8,323 training projects and a training centre was established in Shanghai. The variety, quality and outcome of such an intensive training programme were assessed by the corporation. Since 2010, the training programme was more concentrated on management teams than the workers. By the end of 2013, the management training programme covered 6 different management levels. It appears that top management got higher quality training courses than senior and middle management. Noticeably, the first time this corporation listed 'CPC leadership training in CPC schools' as a main HR leadership training programme for the management team was in 2013.

In conclusion, the HR activities that are described in the company's annual reports from 2004 to 2013 have indicated that the corporation's main focus was on management and employee professional training and development. Also, a performance related reward system was established, as well as a professional career development system. These HR policies indicate management incentives to increase employees' motivation in work and career development. Furthermore, a private pension and benefit arrangement was set up in order to sustain a competent workforce.

As stated in the company's annual report 2005, the CEO in the corporation and top managers in each regional bank are fully responsible for the bank's business. To ensure democracy in management the senior management committee is the highest authority in each regional bank. Furthermore, in the company's annual report 2011, its business covers 'corporate banking, retail banking, international business, treasure, and capital market, investment banking, auto finance, custodian, credit card and private banking'. Over 80% of its employees work to serve

corporate customers' needs. It is obvious that this bank allocated the majority of its staff to its core business. Therefore, the corporate banking, international business, treasury, capital market and investment banking have strategic importance in this bank, while other areas of business consume significantly less human resources and management attention. It made over 39 billion yuan (equal to about 3.9 billion pounds) net profit in 2013 and the majority of the profit came from its core business. As Chinese domestic banks are categorized by asset size, this is still a small to medium sized bank[9] that appears to be healthy and modern. To sum up, this banking corporation has expanded rapidly in the past 10 years during China's third wave of banking reform. Although the majority of shares are owned by state-owned shareholders, it appears to be a profitable, well managed and developed corporation.

The corporation (Corporation's social responsibility report 2012) describes itself as 'performing outstandingly' with an 'innovative management team' that has 'comprehensive experience in operation' and 'excellent management capabilities'. It further claims that business is managed by 'the three committees' at corporate level: the shareholders' committee which is the highest authority, a management board committee responsible for decision making, and finally a supervisory board committee that is directly responsible to the shareholders' committee. Run according to 'international standards', this banking group has won several awards in recent years from economic and business media and academic institutions such as the Financial Times Press, Institute of Finance and Banking, The Banker magazine (British), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 21st Century Business Herald (China) and Harvard Business Review (Chinese version) for its service, management performance and corporate governance. In particular, the corporation was regarded as 'the best Chinese financial institution that pursues its social responsibilities'. As its Chairman highlights in 2012, the company's main concerns are: economical, societal and environmental. In

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9 Chinese-funded large-sized national banks refer to banks with assets (both in domestic and foreign currencies) of at least 2 trillion yuan (according to the amount of total assets in both domestic and foreign currencies at end-2008). Chinese-funded small- and medium-sized national banks refer to banks operating across provinces with assets (both in domestic and foreign currencies) of less than 2 trillion yuan. Chinese-funded small- and medium-sized local banks refer to banks operating within a single province with total assets of less than 2 trillion yuan, denominated in domestic and foreign currencies. Small-sized rural financial institutions include rural commercial banks, rural cooperative banks, and rural credit cooperatives (People's Bank of China 2014).

particular, he stressed that "[w]e care about our employees' needs at all level" and "try our best to support their benefits and encourage their development". Therefore, this articulates the ideal modern bank in China for the people to work for: the bank not only makes substantial profits, but also takes care of the people who work for the company.

There is an online 'women workers' column' on the corporation's intranet that is devoted to women employees in the corporation. This 'women workers' column' contained a variety of material that is relevant to female employees and it is also written by women employees in the corporation and edited and maintained by the women's representatives in the workers' union. It includes many mini columns such as 'women workers' activities', 'women workers' voice', 'work discussion board', 'women workers' achievements', 'document cabinet', 'women role models' 'stories', 'marriages and families', 'online dating', 'notices and announcements' and 'useful external links'. A collection of laws and legislation that are relevant to women's and children's rights were also listed on this 'Women workers column'.

Lots of activities were organized for employees' children and women employees after work. Women employees appeared to be very active both at work and outside work. The administrator of the column, the workers' union, appears to have close contact with women workers but there are no gender issues which should be raised at the corporation level according to 'the women workers' column'. Therefore, there was no policy needs addressing gender issues in the corporation. The way that the corporation manages 'women's work' was consistent with the way the government manages women in China. While the government sponsor a women's organization to manage women (Howell 1996), the women's representatives in the worker's union are paid by the corporation to manage women workers' issues. Managing women is a part of management's responsibility.

4.7 The Bank

4.7.1 The Management

The research site for this study was in one of the regional banks of the bank corporation in a medium size city on the south-east coast. I have called this bank Opcitbank to maintain

confidentiality in this study. Opcitbank was founded in 1995 and in 2012 it had one head office and 16 branches. As part of a cross-listed company, Opcitbank's operation, management and performance are designed according to a modern bank structure. According to Opcitbank's parent company, from 2005 the President's committee in the regional bank is the highest authority. Table 4-3 shows how the management is structured in Opcitbank and how power is distributed among the management in the bank. However, the management structure (See Table 4-3) in reality is different from what the corporation indicated in the year books. Despite its absence on the publicly available documents, the CPC Committee in Opcitbank is the highest authority in the bank. The middle management is appointed by the CPC Committee. The President's Committee and other business committees are all under the leadership of the CPC Committee. The CPC Committee and the President's Committee in 2012 almost contain the same group of senior managers plus the Executive Office manager and HR manager sitting in the committee meetings. However, the position in the CPC seemed to bring more power to the managers. In Opcitbank, the top manager is formally called the 'President' and he is also the CPC Secretary despite this title normally being 'invisible' in the day-to-day banking business. Informally he is called the 'boss' or 'the big boss' behind his back. The 3 deputy senior managers are formally 'Vice Presidents' (VP): when in spoken or less formal situations normally the word 'vice' is left out as a cultural norm. It appears to be an open secret that employees ranked a certain one of these managers the 'second boss' and another one the 'third boss'. Alternatively, when employees speak behind the deputy's back, they use the three deputys' names directly. Nobody could explain exactly how the deputies were ranked, but some assumed that the 'rank' must be passed down from the 'top' corporation level.

Table 4-3: Management structure of Opcitbank

CPC Committee

Presidents' committee

Risk management committee

Internal Control committee, Business and products development committee, Marketing and Sales committee, Finance and audit committee Information and technology committee
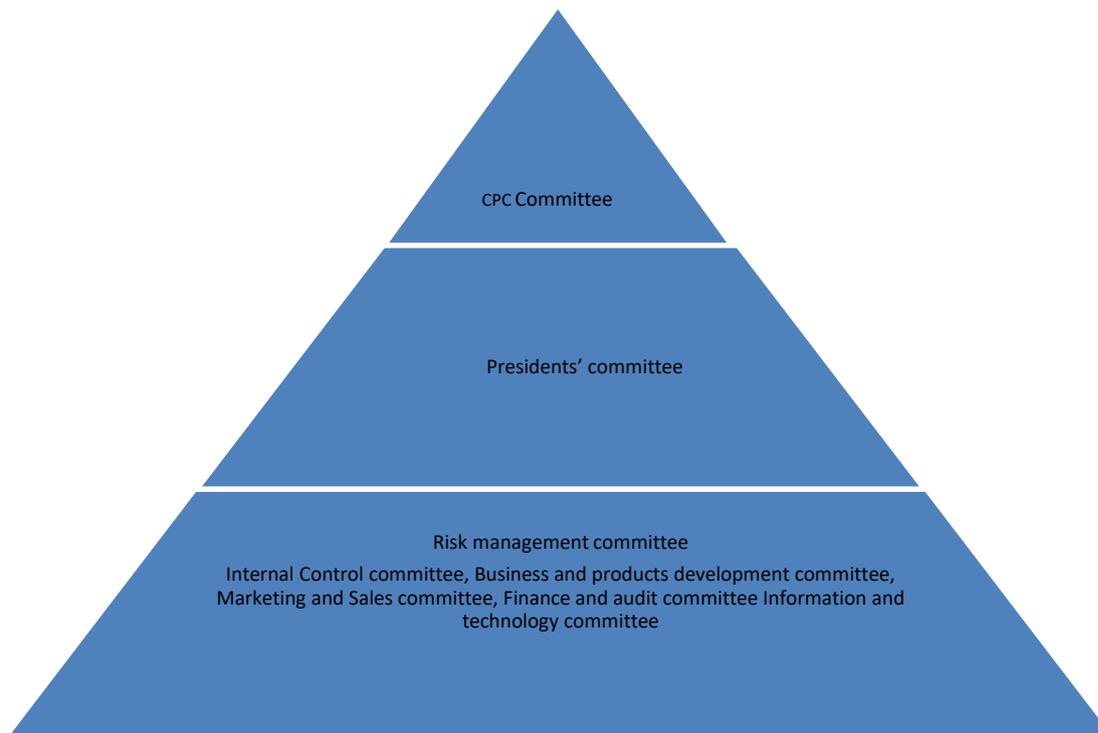
Source: Adopted from HR Manager Jiang, Tong's conversation field notes

Opcitbank's business covers corporate banking, retail banking, global transaction, treasury and a small amount of capital market business, investment banking, auto financing, basic custodian business, credit card and private banking (including wealth management). As it is located in one of the wealthiest cities in China with plenty of wealthy private clients, private banking is regarded as one of the most important business areas alongside corporate banking and global transaction banking. These are the three main areas of business that most of Opcitbank's staff work in, and as a regional commercial bank, these divisions are the most profitable in the local area. Employees who work in the core business in Opcitbank are more valued by the management, and senior managers and managers and are also 'ranked' by the importance of the business or administrative areas they are in charge of. This 'rank system' reflects managers' and managerial staff's power position in the bank as well as their competences in the banking business, and to some degree reflected their income level.

4.7.2 Pay and Reward

The pay and reward system in Opcitbank has changed over time. In 2012, senior management were on a fixed annual package which was paid to them directly by the corporation. This policy ideally detaches the senior managers' personal financial interests from Opcitbank's business, therefore avoiding management corruption. Middle management is on a two-level annual package that is affected by the whole bank's performance. For instance, deputy managers are paid 70% of the managers' total income. Branch managers are on a relatively low fixed salary with an unlimited performance related bonus. Senior and middle management team in Opcitbank appear to have a clear reward system that promotes their different interests in business and careers according to their functions in the bank.

Junior management, middle management and administrative staff, according to the internal HR document 'Job Related 5 Grade Pay Programme (Pilot version, 2007), were on a 5-grade (A, B, C, D, E) reward system according to their positions, skills, scarcity in the society, and the jobs' importance to the business. This reward system not only regulated their income but also restrained the number of employees in each department. A grade C employee would be paid the average level bonus among employees (excluding management) across the bank. If grade C is the benchmark, A, B, C, D, E represented 140%, 120%, 100%, 80% and 60% of the employees' average bonus level. The employees who work in important departments (Table 3-5) such as Corporate Risk Management, Information and Technology, Corporate and Investment Banking, Global Transaction, Retail Banking and Legal Affairs are usually placed on a higher grade of pay. In contrast, employees who work in supporting departments such as Administration or the Operational Centre had few chances to achieve a grade C. There are only two varieties of grade A positions in the bank: Corporate Risk Management and specialist software engineer. Frontline and junior managers are usually given grade B pay. Senior managerial employees are paid grade B and C level bonus. The majority of managerial employees are on grade C or D. All the supporting employees are likely to be on grade E. Although this 5-grade reward programme provides a clear structure of cost control for the senior management, it also offers managerial and administrative employees a clear idea of their income level in the bank. It has limited these employees' motivation to seek promotion. Under this reward programme, employees have little space to move to a higher pay grade unless people in the higher-grade position leave, management decides to create extra higher paid positions or they are promoted. Favouritism developed under this 5-grade reward system, as

being the favourite of the managers is an easier way to gain a higher pay position. In conclusion, the 5-grade reward system has given senior management more control over its employees.

4.7.3 Training

Training and staff development in the bank were constant, as most of the training is delivered through the internal network with online resources that are developed by the corporation. There are a couple of training classrooms that are dedicated to small scale training. There are a diverse range of professions in the Opcitbank; therefore the bank organizes professional skills' training, competitions and exams almost on a weekly basis. Employees' performance in these training sessions is important in terms of their pay grades and which branches and departments they work in. Managers are able to choose employees who perform well in training, competitions and assessment. According to the HR records all these events happen after work or at the weekends and no one has ever formally claimed overtime for these. 'Off-the-job' training is usually offered to a small number of business specialists or managers. Senior managers are offered many opportunities for training and conferences abroad though only a few are selected a couple of times a year. The middle managers are organized for 'off-the-job' training abroad once every two years by the bank and it is compulsory for them to attend the training organized by the corporation. To conclude, management has more opportunities and freedom for 'off-the-job' training while employees only had intensive 'on-the-job' training. The result of training and assessments has more impact on the employees' positions in the bank than on the management.

4.7.5 Recruitment

The bank has only publicly recruited professionals once in the past fifteen years and it was only advertised in the local newspaper. Most of the professionals that received jobs in the bank were recommended by members of staff. This bank, under normal circumstances, only accepts experienced people from the banking industry under 35 years old. There were exceptional cases when professionals with no banking experience received positions in Opcitbank. The reasons for these exceptional cases were not formally explained.

In recent years, the corporation has set up a website for recruitment and a graduate scheme run by the corporation. The HR department in Opcitbank will prepare a recruitment plan in the fourth quarter of the year for the corporation to advertise and collect applications from all over China for the following year's recruitment. Opcitbank's recruitment plan, as an internal document, contains a detailed list of requirements for each graduate job. Except the normal requirements, such as qualifications, education levels, language skills and subject of study, there are also requirements of gender, age and political status. Management in Opcitbank in fact can express their gender preference internally which could potentially lead to gender discrimination during recruitment even though it is invisible to the public.

Graduates can apply for positions all year around but the selection process only starts once a year, around March. The graduates that prefer to work in Opcitbank will be sent to Opcitbank for tests and interviews. Senior managers, relevant middle managers and HR in Opcitbank will then interview all the finalists. Senior managers' opinions normally weigh heavily in recruitment decisions. The new recruits have to attend a one month long induction and training programme. New recruits' performance during the induction and training will be monitored by HR in the Opcitbank. Each new recruit's final assessment will be sent to Opcitbank HR for future reference. In principle, HR will then locate each new recruit according to their educational background, their performance in the induction and training, and the departmental managers' preferences.

However, sometimes, senior managers will make suggestions and recommendations on the recruiting process and job allocations of certain recruits. The HR manager suggested that there are two sets of standards during recruitment: one for the graduates who have *guanxi* with management and another one for everybody else. The HR department in fact loses the power of quality control during recruitment. Almost every year HR has to try very hard to find positions for a couple of graduates who have not performed well in the induction that no department or branch really wants, while a few graduates would be in high demand. This will be discussed further in the data analysis section.

The graduate scheme changes the structure of the labour force and poses some dilemmas in HR practice in Opcitbank over time. The new recruits keep the average age of the employees in the bank low and improve the overall educational level among the employees. However the less educated and more experienced employees tend to retain their jobs in administrative and managerial positions so the newly graduated employees are likely to remain in operational jobs such as cashiers.

4.7.6 Culture

There has been an increasing amount of material on Opcitbank's intranet related to the promotion of the organizational culture since 2007. This includes mainly reports of senior managers' speeches, organized employees' group discussions, and training on organizational culture. However, there is no resource available for me to understand Opcitbank's culture which management and employees had discussed in 2007. It appears that the organizational culture was mostly discussed as a concept with little context around 2007 to promote loyalty to the bank.

A large number of topics such as 'harmony along with profitability', 'quality and scale', 'profit and sustainability', 'performance and fairness', 'manage risks', 'innovation, creativity and competitiveness' , 'learning, communication', 'teamwork' and 'shared value between employees and the organization' are mostly discussed by senior managers in relation to the word 'organizational culture'. It appears that 'organizational culture' is one of the concepts that the senior management try to promote, so that normative control would encourage the bank's performance and profitability in the long term.

In order to promote its 'culture' among employees, the bank provides the employees with a regular reading list of books and articles, and online resources to communicate and discuss organizational culture. Management also encourages employees to form study groups and write columns to discuss culture both in the bank and in the society in general. To train the management to manage its culture, HR organized many training sessions for senior and middle managers on topics such as 'communication', 'learning organization' and 'leadership'. Although 'fairness' was mentioned, the discussion of 'fairness' is grounded in the context of 'performance culture'; therefore, it mainly expresses senior management's commitment to a 'fairer pay and reward system' based on performance.

Documents from 2011 indicate that there was a clear defined organizational culture in Opcitbank. Organizational culture became an important part of new staff induction. Management also wrote a book called 'The Difficulties to Glory' to discuss Opcitbank's culture and this book together with the new version of the 'Employee Handbook' became essential reading for employees. These documents were not available to me. However, there were some clues of what was addressed in the book in intranet material. Noticeably, senior management suggested that there were six personal characteristics that formed an essential part of their organizational culture. They were magnanimous, stately, generous, enthusiastic, masculine, and intelligent. Employees in Opcitbank had different levels of knowledge about its culture. The higher they were in the hierarchy of the bank the clearer they were about Opcitbank's 'culture' while the lower in the hierarchy of the bank the less people are concerned about 'culture'. Noticeably junior managers started to assess themselves in reference to the six qualities as qualities that the senior management desire, which might have a positive impact on their career. In particular, the 'masculine' quality caused concern among some female junior and middle managers, but everyone denied it was an issue. Other female managers suggest that the lack of masculinity has been a barrier for career movement for both women and men. Some female managers suggest that if masculinity is beneficial for business, the senior management is correct to want this in the employees.

4.7.8 Managing 'women's work' in Opcitbank

In Opcitbank, the workers' union is in charge of 'women's work'. This is similar to how the corporation manages 'women's work', but on a much smaller scale. The worker's union organized 'women's work', which includes arranging women's activities, providing 'women only benefit' for female employees (e.g. day trips on International Women's Day and dance classes) and in principle provides support for women employees in the bank. The chairman of the workers' union is the only female senior manager; and the women's representative in the union is a women manager. The other two full-time staff members in the workers' union are also part of management. Therefore 'women's work' in Opticbank is managed by women who are part of the management.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the whole banking industry has gone through a huge expansion in China since 1978. This provides a great opportunity for women's employment. Women were nearly half of the workforce in Chinese banking by 2005 and banking has become one of the biggest employers for women. Some may comment that women's increasing employment in banking is a consequence of gender equality in education that is promoted by the Communist government. Banking jobs have gradually become difficult to acquire since 2004. Despite its state controlled nature, the corporation that controls Opcitbank bank has also developed successfully in the recent ten years in terms of profitability, labour force and branch networks. As a regional bank, Opcitbank's management structure has distinctive political and social features such as the involvement of the CPC. The HR practices at corporation level and their implications in Opcitbank might look similar; however, the career development opportunities that are created at corporate level are limited for employees in Opcitbank. Gender preference publicly appears to not be a concern in recruitment. However, internally gender and age are still of concern in HR practice, with masculinity promoted through Opcitbank's culture building programme and the managing of 'women's work' as part of the management practice in the bank.

Having detailed the research context, in the following two chapters I shall discuss the ethnographic data that I collected in this study. Chapter five focuses on gender roles and the relationship with *guanxi*.

Chapter 5. The impact of gender roles and *guanxi*

5.1 Introduction

Before detailing the analysis of the data, it is necessary for me to make some clarifications about the terminology used in the analysis and discussion. The original data I collected was in Wu dialect and occasionally Mandarin, which was then all translated into Mandarin and then translated into English. Some of the expressions used by the participants do not have a direct correlation with English and my ability to interpret the data is constrained by having different conceptual ideas between Wu and English. For example, words such as cronyism, corruption, ethical abuse, favouritism and nepotism all have pejorative meaning in the English language, however their semantic understanding in the original Wu language context may not necessarily be associated with a negative meaning. Using the original Wu to describe a close relationship that potentially brings benefit to the people involved cannot be written down, the closest Mandarin expressions can be literally translated to something such as 'skirt and belt relationship' or 'when a man attains the Tao, even his pets ascend to heaven'. These expressions do not associate with negative meanings in Mandarin, instead there is an element of admiration or envy when people use these expressions. Therefore, there are occasions when I shall use these words and phrases in the analysis and discussion though I am not making a value judgement in my interpretation: it is just that there is no direct translation for these words in English.

In this chapter I present data about women who are in a managerial rank in the bank. The established literature suggests that although women in China are well represented in management, they face distinctive pressure and barriers in their careers and professions. The patriarchal and collectivist traditions are the common cultural labels used to explain Chinese women's positions in management. My data suggests that western conceptions of Chinese cultural traditions may narrow Chinese women into categories that are not fully representative of female Chinese managers. Although there is an increasing focus on examining the diversity in society among academics, there is a lack of understanding of the gender and cultural dynamics within Chinese women's managerial roles, in particular how gender roles and *guanxi* influence women's careers.

The bank annually recruits graduates, post-graduates and sometimes PhDs. Occasionally experienced employees from the industry will join the bank through employees' recommendations. According to the *Employee's Handbook*, this will only happen when the bank needs 'banking specialists'. Also, these people in principle have to be under 35 years old, hold at least a bachelor degree and have the desirable skills or resources the bank needs. According to HR records, in the past ten years, this bank only recruited experienced people publicly once, through local advertising. Therefore, the new recruits are mainly young and have no work experience. About a quarter of the participants joined the bank with previous work experience. Three of them are in their early fifties and they obtained their job in the 1990s. With a few exceptions, the younger participants joined the bank as graduates.

It is common for the employees in Opcitbank to have degrees in banking, finance, accounting, and economics or in other related subjects such as statistics or mathematics. In general, the banking jobs they have are relevant to their educational background and have become their logical choice when they finish their education. Banking jobs are also regarded as suitable jobs for young women by parents because of their stability. A high income is another reason for women to choose a banking job. In addition, some suggest that they followed the demand of the labour market as the banking industry was expanding at the time they entered the job market. These aspects of women's decisions to join the banking industry are discussed in the following section.

The first section of this chapter, 5.2 focuses on the participants' career entry into the banking industry. Section 5.3 details more specifically the influence of *guanxi* on career entry. Then in section 5.4 I discuss how *guanxi* is relevant in current recruitment practices in the bank. Finally section 5.5 discusses women's career entry development since joining the bank, including how *guanxi* has influenced this.5.2 Reasons for Women's career choice in banking[10]

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[10] All of the data presented in the following two chapters were collected in the participants' office, unless otherwise stated. There are also a few transcription conventions used in this study as follows:

[…]	Indicates a break in the data
((laugh))	Words in parenthesis indicate extra non-verbal sounds
(.)	short pauses
[this job]	Words in brackets indicate a reference outside the data for clarity

A close examination of the participants' work values can potentially avoid the binary overgeneralization of individualism versus collectivism in a Chinese context (Kukich and Henry 2012). Although some of the attitudes that women show in their career choices are the extension of their cultural values which may reflect a degree of collectivist orientation, others are potentially a hybridity of individualism and collectivism.

Stability is a positive quality which more than half of the women discuss when they explain their reasons to choose a banking career.

> I got a job here after I graduated. Why banking? I studied banking at university, so I didn't think and banking was the natural choice […] en, I don't really know, all my school friends got jobs in banking, and so did I ((laugh)). My parents, my family also agree that banking jobs are suitable for girls. First the jobs are stable; then (.) for girls, this maybe is important. I have been here for 16 years now. (Fang Yuee, Managerial staff in Internal Auditing)

It appears that Fang Yuee followed her peers into banking when she left university. She is laughing when she mentions her peer group's careers and this indicates that she might be uncomfortable discussing the reasons for her career entry. However, it is possible that Fang Yuee's career choice was determined when she chose her university course rather than when she left university, and therefore her career choice becomes a 'natural choice'. Considering the bank's policy to recruit graduates from relevant banking disciplines, the subject she studied at university is important to her career entry. Fang Yuee's choice of profession appears to be a collective judgement and decision made by the whole family. Her parents' opinions are significant in her entering the labour market, with them 'agreeing' with her career choice. It is possible that she wants to show autonomy in her career choice to correspond with her own view that a woman in her work position should have some degree of autonomy. However, there is some indication that both her parents and her peer group were influential in her career choice.

Fang Yuee stresses that banking jobs are 'suitable for girls', and she also points out that the stability of the banking career 'maybe is' an important quality for 'girls', in fact she uses the word 'first' to rank it the highest. This could be Fang Yuee expressing her own understanding

through her experience of working in the bank for the past 16 years and she agrees with the belief that stable jobs are necessary for women. This shows she is possibly restrained by the gender order that values stability more for 'girls' than for 'boys'. This may be relevant to the established traditional gender roles that position women in their families, and assert that professional women's stable jobs are better for their families, though stability may also be important to Chinese men in their careers. She uses 'maybe' not because she is not confident about her opinion but because to her, being assertive is not appropriate in this context. She perhaps acts according to Chinese female characteristics of being 'soft' and 'gentle' to avoid potential conflict because she does not know me very well and may consider that I would not approve of her assertive attitude. Fang Yuee shows traditional and feminine values in her career entry into banking while she also shows some degree of autonomy as a professional woman in the bank.

As well as stability, income, in relation to career choice, appears to be very important to almost all the participants. Women appeared to be excluded from public life in Chinese traditional culture but the CPC encouraged gender pay equality in the labour market in China: therefore income is very important to both women and men in their careers.

> This is to do with the subject I studied in the university. I studied accounting in the university. So the people in the same class as me tried to hunt jobs in banking, accountancy firms, other financial related firms or the state taxation bureau. So the job sort of fits me […] At first, I worked in foreign exchange and settlement in here. Also the banking job is a relatively stable job in China and well-paid. (Zhu Ke, Assistant Manager in Corporate and Investment Banking）

Zhu Ke lists three reasons for her career choice in banking: 'it fits', 'it is stable' and it is well-paid'. Again, Zhu Ke's career direction was chosen before her university education. Zhu Ke suggests her career choice 'fits' in with her educational background. When she uses 'fits' she does not refer to how it might be suitable for her personality, interests or gender, but it appears that she only considers the suitability of her educational background and a banking career. It appears that her personal enjoyment, preferences and personality have little to do with her career choice. It is highly likely that her parents had a strong influence on what subject she should study at university therefore when she says the banking job fits her it is only because

she was guided into that direction by her parents. Similar to Fang Yuee, Zhu Ke points out that job stability is important to her, though she does not suggest that only women need stability in their career. This belief indicates that stability is one of the collective orientations in women's career choices. Income is also one of the main factors for her career choice in banking. This is consistent with research findings in other cultures that lifestyle and income increasingly influence people's career choices (Newton et al. 2005). It could be argued that Zhu Ke accepts the traditional values that consider stability highly in one's career choice and her career choice is potentially a collective decision made by her parents.

Echoing Zhu Ke's comment on the influence of income for her career choice, Gao Ming suggests that the good pay and benefits are the reasons for her career choice in banking.

> I got a job here after I graduated. At the time, I studied in a vocational college. All my school friends either became accountants in firms or work in banks as clerks. That was in the 1990s when the economy was developing very fast, and banking was expanding. Banks pay well and provide good benefits. So I decided to work for the bank when I was offered a job here (Gao Ming, Credit Processor, Managerial staff in Corporate Risk Management)

Gao Ming does not link her education and her career entry clearly, though she does mention the career choices of her school friends. It appears that people who study the same course in universities and colleges results in them doing similar jobs in similar industries. She volunteers the information about the banking industry development at the time of her career entry to the bank. Maybe this is because she tries to talk about her career entry less personally. Speaking less personally could be Gao Ming's *mianzi*[11] strategy to avoid talking about her educational background further, since later she indicates that she has a weaker educational background as a managerial employee in the bank in comparison to others. Alternatively, her career entry may connect to the concepts of *quanzi*[12] and *guanxi* because it appears that everyone is friends

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11 *Mianzi* means 'face', refers to reputation, prestige, feelings

12 *Quanzi* means 'the circles', refers to the networks which are likely to be exclusive. Similar to the English word 'clique'.

with people who work in the same industry. Gao Ming says she 'decides' to work for the bank, however it is questionable whether she really had a choice to work for the bank or not after she studied accounting and finance at college.

She agrees with Zhu Ke that economic reward is an important consideration in career choice. In fact the good benefits package is the only reason she identifies clearly as her choice of a job in the bank. As Fan (2007) reports materialism has become a powerful value and China is in an age of conspicuous consumption, despite the government and some people believing that Confucianism can defend their traditional values against capitalism, consumerism and materialism. Gao Ming and Zhu Ke's concerns about income and benefits in making career choices reflect the penetration of capitalism, consumerism and materialism in current Chinese society. At the same time, their concerns reflect their possible anxiety about poverty, as they spent their childhood in the planned economy during the 1970s when people lived in poor economic conditions. Therefore, a good income and benefits from their employer may bring security to their lives. It can also be interpreted as an equal gender role in the society: women are perfectly entitled to earn a decent gender equal salary in the labour market in China and these two women express this need in their career choices. This also shows some of their autonomy in choosing their own needs according to their social conditions.

It is clear that the participants in this study identify a career in banking as a career suitable for women. Whether this follows an established traditional gender role of women being in a subordinate position in society and in families, or it is revolutionary for them to put themselves in a professional career is difficult to determine without examining more details of what they really mean. Hu Xin, similar to Fang Yuee and Zhu Ke, discusses the link between a banking career and women in relation to stability.

> I got the job after I graduated. This bank recruited in the campus. I studied in a vocational college and the bank wanted skilful clerks at that time. Opcitbank had a clear idea of what sort of employees they wanted that year and I was selected. There were many exams and interviews but I survived (*huoxialaile*)[13] really wanted a banking job at the time, because the college is a financial specialist one. Many of the previous students there went into the

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13 *huoxialaile* is a spoken expression literally means ' after the selection process I am still alive'

finance industry. I wanted the job a lot also because the banking job appears relatively stable - I think it is suitable for women. (Hu Xin, Personnel Officer, Administrative staff in HR Department)

Different from other participants, Hu Xin is the only participant who expressed clearly that she is assertive about having a banking career. This reflects her passion, determination and autonomy in her career choice. She suggests the bank had a 'clear idea' on its requirements of employees and could be interpreted as Hu Xin presenting herself as competent, important or special. She is clearly influenced by traditional male characteristics, for instance, passion is described as a *yang*[14] characteristic and is also related to the assumption of a high degree of individualist valuessuch as determination and autonomy. Hu Xin agrees with Fang Yuee and Zhu Ke in supporting the collectivist orientation that banking jobs are stable and she asserts that this suitable for women. It could be interpreted as expressing her acceptance of the established gender roles in making her career choice a 'woman's job'.

Although arguably it could be her personal belief that a stable banking career is suitable for her, it seems that this stems from what society deems a stable job. Interestingly, she uses the word 'survived' to describe her getting the job, implying that the 'many exams and interviews' are similar to a 'battle' which she had to fight to go through. She appears to be proud of her achievement and courage to go through this and receive the job offer. She projects a survivor's image as her position must be highly valued and admired in her social networks and adds a sense of achievement to herself. Again, it shows Hu Xin's modern, professional and *yang* influences which are being confident, brave and boasting about her personal achievement. Hu Xin appears to be switching between collectivist and individualist values, and at the same time she is also switching between adopting feminine values and rejecting feminine values, and does not seem to fit in Woodhams et al.'s (2014) taxonomy (see page 15).

As already noted, in addition to stability and income, the career choice of the women's peers is also influential for the participants, which is mentioned by Fang Yuee (Page 106). Peina

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14 *Yang* here means the masculine principle in nature, as it is the complement or sometimes opposite to *Yin* in Chinese philosophy or medicine

expresses herself in a slightly different way.

> I am very traditional at work as well. I have had a job in this bank since I graduated and so far I am still here. It is simple, why [this job], I studied banking and finance in college. Banking jobs at that time were very popular. I just followed the trend. My parents weren't even involved in my job hunting. (Peina, Manager of Operational Centre)

Peina defines her career choice as what she thinks is 'very traditional'. Similar to Fang Yuee and many other women in the bank, Peina acquired her job when she graduated and stayed in the same place. She links working for one employer for a long time with 'tradition'. She appears to relate tradition to loyalty to her employer, low job mobility, and her needs for job security. In this way, she suggests that a high level of job mobility is modern. It appears that there is limited job mobility for the women in the bank, and this may be the stability that many women refer to when they make their career choices. Thus, seeking stability in women's career entry could be culturally determined rather than an individual choice. Cultural values potentially are more important than economic conditions in determining people's job mobility. For example, despite Japan being a post-industrial country some authors (Marsh and Mannari 1971, Ahmadjian and Robinson 2001, Ono 2010) argue that Japan is a country with low level job mobility in comparison to western countries. Chen et al (2009) also note that the Chinese have much lower job mobility than Americans. Peina's understanding of modernity at work may be associated directly with her imagination of the western style of work values with individual ambition, achievement and success valued higher than job security or stability.

Similar to other participants, Peina also studied banking and finance before she worked in the bank. It is possible that these women were guided by their parents when they made decisions of what courses they would choose at the time. Peina points out that she made her own decision when she entered the labour market. Although her parents might not have been involved in her job hunting, they could have limited her career choice by determining what she studied. She is asserting her independence that is in opposition to Triandis' (1995, 2004) description of people from collectivist cultures. It appears that she feels the need to show a high degree of individualist values such as independence in her career entry while she claims to be 'very traditional'. Her position in the bank now is managing the biggest department and operation. Therefore, she potentially feels the need to show some independence and confidence. It is

interesting that Peina uses words such as 'follows the trend' and 'popular' in her career choice as if she just followed everyone else. It is questionable whether she really is following others or like everyone else she has been guided in her career by her parents and society.

The women who had previous work experience, although agreeing that income and stability were important, did not follow their peers into banking and suggest other motivations to get a banking job which are different from the participants who have worked in this bank since they left education.

> When I graduated, I worked in a travel agency for a bit, more than half a year […] [being] a bank employee *youmianzi*[15] has social status […] Of course this [income] is the main reason as well. Also it is more stable, both the income and the job (Huang Hui, Managerial staff, Specialist in Global Transaction Banking)

Huang Hui, who joined the bank about 10 years ago, has comparable work experience in terms of her time in a travel agency. She suggests that a banking career has improved her social status and she has more respect than being a travel agent. As Hwang (1987, 2012) suggests *mianzi* signifies an individual's social position or prestige. For Huang Hui, the social role of a bank employee is what she highly values, admires and respects while she feels that she did not receive this in a travel agency. It appears that the income, job security and the bank employee's status including knowledge, capabilities, wealth, and social connections potentially all contribute to Huang Hui's *mianzi*. When she implies *mianzi* is derived from having a banking career and that stability is important, she displays a degree of collectivist value orientation and she shares the same orientation as other women who have no other work experience. However, Hwang (ibid) suggests that the idea of *you mianzi* in Mandarin is similar to the idea of boosting self-esteem in English. In this sense, Huang Hui's desire for social recognition and her own self confidence is through her career in banking. This could be interpreted as reflecting a degree of individualist value orientation such as taking a risk to change job roles, being proud of personal improvement and enjoying social recognition which are likely to be connected to individualism in the established literature. It also displays a rejection of established

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15 *youmianzi* literally means 'have face', refers to enjoying due respect

collectivism characteristics such as low self-esteem and the belief in a job for life. Huang Hui is switching between collectivist values to individualist values with the traditional concept of *mianzi* interweaving with this dynamic.

There are not many people similar to Zhu Guo's age (she is in her 50s) in the bank and few are aware that Zhu Guo worked as a cashier in a big manufacturing company before she got the job in the bank through some sort of family *guanxi*. She has been a middle manager for 10 years and always appears to be very capable and tough in business. Her parents and her in-laws were highly ranked officers in the CPC before their retirement. Her husband is a judge in the local court and he is friendly with the President of the bank.

> I have previous work experience […] I got a banking career because it is in my area […] I don't feel there are any other reasons. […] my previous employee, how can I say it? The previous employer was involved in some sort of ownership change during that time (Zhu Guo, Manager of Corporate Risk Management).

There are a few participants who did not like to discuss their motivation to get a job in the bank for a variety of reasons and Zhu Guo, is very cautious when she discussed her career entry. She gives short answers when she discusses her banking career and she chooses her words carefully which may relate to her personal experience and maintaining the right impression. She also uses the phrase 'how can I say it?' to allow herself some time to think. She perhaps does not want to discuss her job entry because she has an influential family which may have contributed to her career entry and would not be consistent with her image of being competent, capable and independent. Therefore, her resistance to discussing her career entry during the conversation could be a *mianzi* maintaining strategy to retain her credit as a capable manager. Her projection of self-image of competence or her self-conjecture about what would be respected by me and others appear to be influenced by the description of the individualist value of personal achievement. Other than that, her family's social power and social positions may influence her responses during the interview such as being politically sensitive or not wanting to talk about anything personal.

5.2.1 Summary

None of the participants in this study chose a banking job because of a personal determination to be in the banking industry or as a sought after career aspiration. According to the participants' accounts, gender roles do not necessarily influence their career entry but culture does. Most of the participants suggest that their choice of education logically led them to a banking or finance career. It appears in this group that their education is instrumental to their career. This could be the result of the recruitment practices in the bank, and in many other firms in China. There is a strong alignment between the subjects the new recruits studied and the profession they would be offered in the bank. Their families' role in the participants' career choices is not presented as obviously significant by the participants. Although it is questionable, the participants' individual career choices suggest that these professional women appear to be independent in their career entry. However, it is also possible that the women in this group were guided to a banking career, hence for the majority of them, their educational backgrounds have narrowed down their career choices. It is probable that their family guided their educational choices and therefore indirectly influenced their career choices. The family is the most fundamental unit in the Chinese society and women's obedience to their families is well documented (Wolf 1985, Chan et al. 2002, Leung 2003, Zhang 2006). Traditional female gender roles have affected these women's career choices; women appear to switch their cultural and gender roles in the process of gaining a career in banking. Therefore, the established cultural and gender roles do not fully reflect these women's cultural orientation and gender positions during their career entry. Maintaining *mianzi* remains important to some of the women and contributes to them switching between different cultural and gender values. It is clear that the economic, social, and cultural context of these individuals has contributed to their career choices. These women managers' cultural orientation and gender roles appear to be a negotiating process which cannot be clearly categorized.

5.3 *Guanxi* in women's career entry

The accounts of *guanxi* revealed more variety in the participants' career entry in the bank. In current Chinese society *pin die*[16] is the way most young people think they are able to get ahead

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16 *pindie* directly translates as 'competing daddies' and refers to competition based on the power and influence of family

of others (Lin 2013, Yan 2013). The appropriate meaning of the word *pin* in mandarin Chinese means 'risk all (in doing something)'. So *pin die* should be understood as 'fiercely competing daddies'. The current time in China is the era of *pin die* and closely associated with *pinguanxi* (fiercely competing *guanxi*) and the intergenerational income differences which are widely discussed on Chinese social media (Zhou 2009, zhihu.com 2014).

Some argue that *pin die* is not something only associated with China, but also happens in other societies (zhihu.com 2014). People holding this view compare the Chinese *pin die* with the western Great Gatsby Curve that describes an inverse relationship between income inequality and intergenerational mobility. They suggest that wealthy parents provide their children with better access to networks and other resources. Therefore their children have a better chance of economic success in many countries and China is just one of them (ibid). It has been reported recently that, among people under 25 years old, civil servants' children have the average highest paid jobs while farmers' children occupy the lowest paid jobs in China; and this report suggests that this is one consequence of the *pin die* phenomena (zqol.com 2015). Furthermore, this online article claims that the huge gaps in young people's incomes reflect the economic and social inequality in society.

When banking became one of the most popular jobs in the labour market, getting a job in this bank became extremely difficult and highly competitive. How the bank's recruitment operated in the social phenomenon of *pin die* would be hard to access without the insight of the people who were involved in the processes. For example, Tong Yi who works in Human Resource management explains her story about how she got a job in the bank when she was in her 30s.

> I was in my 30s. I didn't think much about what career I wanted when I was young. I didn't have a direction when I left education. I studied accounting and law […] Before I got the job here, I worked in the Bureau of Labour and Social Security for a few years […] Anyway I got the job here because the opportunity of this department need more staff. They wanted to recruit people. Hu Xin gave me the information, so I sent my CV to apply for the job. I didn't know anyone here. Everyone thought I must have had *guanxi*, and

used it to open the 'back gate' (*houmen*[17]), but I didn't. The only thing I have done was to pass a copy of my CV to the HR manager through Hu Xin. There were competitions for this job. Someone who has a master's degree in HR management also wanted the job, and a few other candidates. There were written exams and a couple of rounds of interviews. I think my professional qualifications helped, so I got this job. (Tong Yi, Personnel Officer, Administrative staff in HR Department)

Tong Yi worked in the Bureau of Labour and Social Security before, which enabled her to have direct contact with people who worked in the HR department in local businesses. She claims that she 'didn't know anyone' in the bank though this is contradictory as she says Hu Xin had given her the information and Hu Xin is a Personnel Officer. Perhaps this is because the 'anyone' Tong Yi refers to is the manager who has power in the recruitment in the bank. Therefore, she does not want to show any personal connection with the bank to lower her credentials as a Personnel Officer who is competent in her profession. She also suggests that 'everyone thinks she must' have *guanxi* and got the job in the bank through *houmen*. It is implied that the 'everyone' referred to other workers in the bank. She uses the metaphor *houmen* to describe an entry that is associated with potential favour exchange and other forms of *guanxi* rather than the formal procedure of selection. Tong Yi associates *guanxi* with *houmen* directly. This implies that her view of *guanxi* is a cultural product associated with the favour exchange and potentially with a negative meaning. She seems to think *guanxi* and *houmen* have a negative impact on her competences and she wants to distance herself from both of these terms. This suggests that she accepts the individualist orientation that values personal achievement and fairness highly. Tong Yi describes the selection process in order to support her view on her career entry. However, she admits that she had the advantage over other applicants in terms of being given the information of recruitment by a person who works in HR, and delivered her CV to the HR manager through a personal contact. This suggests there was a *guanxi* element involved in helping her to get the job. The ways she denies *guanxi* and then admits *guanxi* appear to be confusing. This could be a result of her interpretation of *guanxi* directly linked to *houmen:* Tong Yi believes that others must think that her *guanxi* alone must be the reason why she got the job.

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17 *Houmen* means back-door or under-the-counter

Tong Yi suggests that *guanxi* and a fair recruitment process, which selects people for their competence, could exist at the same time. Her claim is largely coherent with Huang's (2008) finding on *guanxi* and job searching, in which Huang suggests that *guanxi* may help professionals in providing information about job openings, but other than that *guanxi* is useless in job acquisition except in state-sector firms. Huang further suggests that people applying for posts in the more competitive private sector have no advantage through their *guanxi*. In Tong Yi's case, on the one hand she thinks the role of her *guanxi* in her job entry had little function, and on the other hand she assumes or imagines that 'everyone' understands her job entry differently and that *guanxi* had an essential role in her job entry.

In contrast to Tong Yi, other women choose different approaches to express their experience of career entry in the bank. They do not use the word *guanxi* directly, but they imply that it had a role in their career entry in a local context.

> The company I worked for after I left university, it was in a hopeless industry, it is a part of technology industry but hadn't been developed well, and could close down any time. So I decided to change job. It is not likely that I wanted or planned to work in banking, not like others (.) someone recommended this job (laughs), I didn't think. I just grabbed it (laughs). (Zhou Yan, managerial staff, senior staff in Corporate Risk Management)

Zhou Yan was not a graduate or an experienced specialist that the bank would normally recruit. Her family's *guanxi* with senior managers is an open secret within the bank. When other employees in the head office talked about how Zhou Yan acquired the job, the only collective answer is that Zhou Yan's father is a senior staff member in the best school in the local area. This answer may not indicate any *guanxi* directly, but sometimes *guanxi* is an imaginary concept that is shared by the people in the bank. This could be the result of the informal and personal characteristics of *guanxi* which makes *guanxi* secretive and difficult to be identified but could be imagined or assumed when the people identify the background knowledge of the possibility of the favour exchange. This supports Tong Yi's understanding that everyone else in the bank would assume or imagine that *guanxi* is involved in someone's career entry. Zhou Yan provides relatively more detailed accounts of why she left her previous job, but she does

not want to share many details of her career entry experience in the bank, such as who recommended the job to her and how she could just 'grab' the job while others have to go through the recruitment process. It is in fact very competitive to get a job in this bank, so the job entry would not be easy through the formal recruitment and selection process. Zhou Yan shows her openness to her *guanxi* to some degree by saying 'someone recommended this job', and perhaps this is because many people in the head office are aware of her *guanxi* anyway.

Zhou Yan was laughing while she describes her job entry briefly. The reason could be she had a relaxed and easy career entry experience or she is not comfortable to talk about her career entry in her office. This is in contrast to both Hu Xin's account of 'surviving' through a tough selection process, and Tong Yi who suggests that she had to go through formal written exams and a couple of rounds of interviews, even though she had a contact in the HR department. There is no evidence that Zhou Yan's family connection helped her to get the job. It appears that by identifying Zhou Yan's father's influence, people in the head office share the same understanding on how her family's *guanxi* works in Zhou Yan's favour in her career entry. The imagined *guanxi* appears to be essential in Zhou Yan's career entry to the bank. *Guanxi* can sometime overrule the formal recruitment process in the bank. It is noticeable that Zhou Yan distinguishes herself from 'others', when she suggests that 'others' wanted or planned to have a banking career but she implies that she did not. This may suggest that she believes she is superior to her colleagues in the bank because she did have to go through a recruitment process, and perhaps she thinks this gives her a higher status.

As mentioned before, Huang (2008) argues that institutional changes such as the modernization of HR management and the improvement of the legal system in China in recent years mean job entry through *guanxi* is less necessary. However, the following case of Zhou Yi's experience indicates otherwise. This may reflect the complexity of *guanxi*, and that a generalized model is unable to capture the different varieties of *guanxi*. Zhou Yi's family *guanxi* helped in her career entry but does not help her career in the bank and therefore demonstrates that one's power of *guanxi* is not fixed, it changes when circumstances changes.

> My dad found this job for me, and I quit the job I found myself and came here […] 2001, yes. I first come to work in the bank in 1999, December, 1999. […] Just in case you don't know, my 'probation' time finished in 2009 […] I became a formal employee of this place

after I was working here for ten years. My time of probation was ten years […] now, at the current time to get an official post *(bian zhi)* it is less a problem, probation is short term too. […] yes, more opportunities. It was very strict at that time. I was in the first group of people who got an official post when the policy was less strict. It was already 09, April, 09 (Zhou Yi, Business Unit Manager (Personal Finance Abroad), Private Banking)

Zhou Yi expects me to understand what she says by 'family arranged' career entry. She uses this expression in contrast to another job which she had found herself. Therefore, according to Zhou Yi, the *guanxi* she used to acquire the bank position belongs to her father, so when her father retired the *guanxi* disappeared. It could be that her father's social power as a judge contributed to her initial career move to the bank, but when her father retired, her family influence decreased. Noticeably, Zhou Yi stresses the almost ten years of 'probation' period and discussed in detail about her disadvantage of not achieving an official post in the bank. They are mainly economic disadvantages according to her; however, her distress at the time could also be a result of her lower status in the bank. Lacking a formal post for so many years is a very rare situation in the bank, so her experience is unique. Zhou Yi does not discuss her emotion at that time directly though she is obviously upset when she mentions her ten years' work experience in the bank. Perhaps she is constrained by the traditional values of forbearance and patience and therefore she feels that it is not appropriate for her to talk about her frustration.

HR manager Jing Tong, who is going to retire in six months, explains two reasons for Zhou Yi's case. First in the ten years Zhou Yi worked in the bank as an employee without an official post, the bank has experienced a couple of reorganizations. Under pressure to achieve international standards and improve efficiency to contribute to their parent company's marketization (see page 85), HR outsourcing was common at the time. Second, Zhou Yi does not belong to the highly 'talented' and highly qualified employees that the bank desires, and therefore she was not given an official post. She was not on probation for the ten years but worked as a supplementary worker, and was contracted to the bank through an agency. Her colleagues gossiped about her experience and her manager Zhou Jin suggests that although it is true that there were limited official posts available during that 10-year period, her father's retirement from a judge's position contributed to her 10-year probation in the bank.

Zhou Yi and Zhou Yan have many similarities in their career entry to the bank. Both had previous work experience and were not 'specialists' that the bank would normally recruit, they also had the same level of educational qualifications when they joined the bank and both of them got their job through their fathers' *guanxi*. Although Zhou Yi father's *guanxi* helped her to get in the bank, her *guanxi* failed to help her achieve a formal post while Zhou Yan's did. When Zhou Yi's manager suggests that her father's retirement contributed to her '10-year probation', he implies that the *guanxi* has an important role in Zhou Yi's career. However, according to Jing Tong, her experience is also partially influenced by the development process of the banking industry and this particular bank. The demands of the internationalization and marketization of the banking industry restrained the level of the bank's *guanxi* practice for a period of time. However, the bank was still able to create more official posts three years after its parent corporation achieved their target of internationalization and marketization. As a consequence of this Zhou Yi was eventually able to acquire an official post in the bank. This may cause concern to some about the true development stage of Chinese banking industry when on paper Chinese banking is very similar to its counterparts in the international finance market.

Another aspect which may contribute to an individual's *guanxi* is membership of political organisations, particularly the Communist Party. While Zhu Ke acknowledges that CPC membership influenced people's careers in the past, she suggests that CPC membership has had no influence on her career. Other young employees indicate otherwise as there appears to be a positive correlation between their need for entry into banking and CPC membership.

> I am a CPC member (.) I didn't want to be, but my Professor in the university persuaded me to join in [...] I need to be a CPC member to find a job like this (Xiao Qian, Managerial staff, Specialist in Global Transaction Banking)

Xiao Qian only joined the bank two years ago, and her motivation to join the CPC is directly linked to her desire to find a banking job. It appears that CPC membership gives her an advantage over other graduates who also want a job in this bank but are without a CPC membership. This echoes Liu's (2012) findings that following increased unemployment rates and decreasing labour force participation rate, CPC membership is one important aspect associated with people's employment opportunities. Xiao Qian's description of the

relationship between her CPC membership and getting a job in a former state owned bank also demonstrates the shadow of a socialist planned economy in some parts of Chinese society. Perhaps Xiao Qian is also influenced by the Confucius tradition to respect her professor's advice. This is similar to Markus and Kitayama's (2003) description of the dynamic between Japanese university students and their respect for their professors' opinions. CPC membership seems essential for Xiao Qian's career entry in this bank. Her CPC membership potentially gives her better access to the CPC network that may give her useful *guanxi* for her career in the bank.

5.3.1 Summary

Tong Yi, Zhou Yan, and Zhou Yi's career entry all involve some form of *guanxi*. The way they present their own career entry and deny or distance themselves from the influence of *guanxi* may designate them as professional women who try to defend their competencies and capabilities that are promoted by the western–influenced ideology of professionalism. Except in Tong Yi's case, details regarding the role that *guanxi* plays in the other two women's career entry experiences are lacking. This reflects the 'informal' characteristic of *guanxi* practice in the society and the sensitivity of using 'informal' *guanxi* in a formal organizational context. Maybe it is because using *guanxi* to get a job may pose ethical questions. As Luo (2008) and Li (2011) suggest *guanxi* and corruption are sometime closely linked, therefore getting a job in the bank through *guanxi* is still associated with negative meanings such as *houmen* (back door). Women's cultural and professional values are interwoven with *guanxi* to influence their careesr. There are a variety of cultural values or institutional changes that influence how women understand the role of *guanxi* in their career. Also, the condition to promote *guanxi* could change and the result could change, such as people assuming that Zhou Yi's father's retirement changes the decision making process of her career entry. Therefore, the outcome of a plea such as Zhou Yi's father wanting a post for his daughter in the bank, using *guanxi*, could change when he retired as a judge. It is significant that *guanxi* could potentially be a source of power that is more powerful than the formal organizational recruitment process and gives women such as Zhou Yan special status at career entry. In addition, CPC membership potentially provides graduates better access to *guanxi* and therefore becomes useful in their career entry to the bank.

5.4 *Guanxi* in current recruitment

In the previous accounts, women construct their version of their career entry experiences. However different interpretations exist on how women achieve a career in the bank. Many managers especially the ones who contribute to the decision-making process in the annual recruitment such as senior, middle managers and HR express their strong opinions on this event. However, two asked to withdraw their contributions on this particular topic from this study. They gave very similar reasons for this, believing it is not appropriate for them to comment on this subject, because this is the President's business. Therefore, this is clearly a sensitive issue.

Jing Tong who is the HR manager gives his understanding of the bank's recruitment. As Jing Tong did not want to be recorded I took notes during the interview

> Jing Tong says his job is a very difficult job. It is increasingly difficult in recent years, because of the high staff turnover. So many experienced and capable employees left in the recent three years, he says that he almost lost count. The competition between the banks is much more intense, and the variety of banking business is also double or triple every year. He suggests that the bank does not lack staff, but has a lack of staff that can do the jobs, if you don't mention about doing it well to cope with the daily running of the business. His biggest problem is that his department cannot make all the decisions during the selection process according to the candidates' competences; but he has to supply the new recruits that fit the demand of the business. He says he is given 'two rulers' with different measurement. One is for the applicants who do not have any connection with the bank; and another one is for *guanxihu*[18] . The ruler for *guanxihu* has no fixed standards, so he says it is impossible for him to select the people who are potentially capable to do the job. The middle managers and senior managers would come to him to ask for staff who have certain skills and qualities. For instance, Corporate Banking get to choose all the best, because the business is expanding; and yesterday, managers in Corporate Banking (a man) and Retail Banking (a woman) asked him for 'boys' only this year. The manager of Corporate Banking even asked

18 *Guanxihu* means person with special connections

one of the senior managers to talk to him to confirm the Corporate Banking division will get whoever they want. On the other hand, all these managers have their own *guanxihu* in recruitment that they come to him to *dazhaohu*[19]. When no manager wants the most incompetent *guanxihu*, it happened last year and the year before, he gives them out according to which manager introduced whom. So this leaves less 'trouble' for him, only sometimes if the incompetent ones are senior managers' *guanxihu*, he has to deal with the 'problem' (Jing Tong, HR manager).

Jing Tong uses the metaphor 'rulers' to refer to the recruitment requirements and standards of the bank. He uses 'different measurement' to emphasise the two sets of standards that he has to adopt in the recruitment process. The use of this metaphor expressed his dissatisfaction on the double standards during recruitment and he implies that the current practice is not fair and is problematic. This reflects his individualist values or his personal ethical standards that are concerned with fairness and quality in his own work. However, it is questionable to what extent he thinks *guanxi* should or should not work in recruitment.

Jing Tong uses the word *guanxihu* which clearly identifies *guanxi*'s role in the *guanxihu*'s job entry: *guanxi* was beneficial for *guanxihu*'s job entry in the bank. This is different from women such as Tong Yi, Zhou Yan and Zhou Yi who try not to mention the word *guanxi* or keep a distance from *guanxi* when they discuss their own job entry. Jing Tong is in a position where the use of *guanxi* is detrimental to the bank and affects his decision making so he feels obliged to critique its use while these women are beneficiaries. Both Jing Tong and the women agree that *guanxi* in recruitment is associated with a negative meaning that indicates one's incompetence at work, though this is not necessary true. Possibly Jing Tong and the women believe that if one is competent they do not need *guanxi* to work in their favour. Or alternatively he makes the conclusion from the information he is able to access. It is unknown whether, if Jing Tong was given one standard in the selection process, he would or would not give *guanxihu* priority in recruitment in the bank considering his *guanxi* with senior managers and other middle managers are important to his own career in the bank.

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19 *Dazhaohu* means take care of, attend to: *dazhaohu* here means inform him to look after their *guanxihu*

The requests Jing Tong received for staff reflect the concerns of middle managers in both Corporate Banking and Private Banking about their staff's personal competences and capabilities at work. In business, these managers show a low degree of the collectivist value orientation to share the 'problems' caused by the current recruitment practices. Their requirements for new staff reflect the business driven, profit driven and performance driven culture in the bank.

On the other hand, these managers have their own *guanxihu* and need to be 'looked after'. They would ask Jing Tong for favours, and Jing Tong is obliged to give them *mianzi*, and follow the norm of *renqing*[20], unless he intentionally wants to break harmony, which he appears to have no intention to do. This suggests that when it comes to something personal, having *guanxihu*, the managers in the bank show a degree of collectivist value orientation, using the dynamic of *renqing* and *mianzi* in the bank to take care of their *guanxi*. They put their needs in maintaining and developing *guanxi* over the needs of the bank. Again, Jing Tong's account of the recruitment may reflect some degree of the individualist value orientation: he critiques the incident that exposes the 'secrets' among the management team to me as an outsider. Or it could be that he is frustrated since he cannot do his work properly so an outsider provides an outlet. This could indicate that he values the quality of his work over maintaining the harmony in the management team to a certain extent. However, he does not reject those two managers' requests and maintains the harmony on the surface. This could be interpreted as his method to deal with the conflicting interests between him and those middle managers, because direct confrontations are inappropriate and therefore should be avoided at work at an interpersonal level. Alternatively, he is taking the opportunity to complain about his job and that he conforms does not necessarily indicate any individualist cultural orientation.

Noticeably, both male and female middle managers reject 'girls' coming into their department. This possibly reflects the gender stereotyping in the bank or even wider in the society that suggests women are less competent, less intelligent and more trouble at work. Both Jing Tong in the previous section and Tong Yi in the following section show clear masculine values that assume women are somehow less suitable to work in their departments. Alternatively, the

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20 *Renqing*: worldly wisdom, human relationship; sensibilities, feelings; favour; custom, convention.

managers who make a request to Jing Tong could be understood as them reinforcing their power position in the bank. Both Corporate Banking and Private Banking are core business units in the bank and therefore, managers in those departments have higher status than other middle managers in the bank.

Jing Tong's comments on the recruitment are general, while Tong Yi who also works in the area gives a more detailed account of why she thinks the recruitment works or does not work.

Last year, at least about 20 of them (the new recruits) decided not to sign the formal contracts with us before their induction started. Almost all the people we thought were excellent for the jobs here didn't come. So this is problematic for us in HR. Then we have our local twist to the recruiting: management recommended candidates. These ones are normally less qualified than the normal new employees we would like to hire: less qualified, less capable at work etc. If you are allowed to check the list, among the 50 people we recruited last year, more than two thirds are management recommended. So I feel nothing about the recruitment […] I mean we fail in our function. We can't recruit the best people who deserve to have the jobs and the best people to fit our bank's needs. It affects the sustainability. We have many demanding positions and we have to find capable people to fill the positions. Seldom are the management recommended new recruits capable enough. Most of them can only fill in the low skilled and low demand positions here […] which candidates have *guanxi* with who has to be open to the senior managers who make decisions in the final round of interviews. Every single one of the management recommended applicants get a job here even though some of them did so badly in the interviews. So some people have to be given job offers because of their *guanxi*. We end up getting people we know who don't fit the jobs. How can I express what I think about *guanxi*? I don't think that if you help someone's child get a job here the *guanxi* could develop for you (in the bank) in the long term. I don't think it should be like this. The father or mother may be in a powerful position now, and may be in their positions for another three or five years, but what about after that? I'm sure they'll find some new *guanxi* by that time. But if we get a decent employee, a capable employee, in the years that the person serves here it could create much more value than the ones who get the job because of their *guanx*i. Plus no one really knows the total

value and benefit that *guxihu* brings into the bank. Other banks set targets for the *guxihu*, so the *guxihu* have to earn their place in other banks, but we don't […] half of the highly qualified and very capable post-graduates didn't come for jobs after they had their internships here. This stirred up my manager's feelings. For a few years now, we couldn't retain the best ones. There are many reasons for this, not only because of the *guanxihu* issue. To be honest with you, we recruited so many of them. I always think that the competences of a person should be considered first. New *guanxi* can be created and developed. If everything relies only on *guanxi*, such as when recruiting new employees, it doesn't work (Tong Yi)

Tong Yi speaks a lot about what she thinks about recruitment and expresses her strong opinion on *guanxi* in current recruitment. She gives a detailed account on what happens which is coherent with Jing Tong's critique on the issue and refers to it as a 'spotlessly designed recruitment process', meaning that the recruitment process is designed to recruit the best candidates for the positions in the bank. This indicates the intention to improve the bank's HR management. However, in practice the 'spotlessly designed system' is given a 'local twist', of selecting candidates based on their guanxi, rather than their merits. When Tong Yi suggests that two thirds of the new employees are *guanxihu* she potentially highlights the high degree of the collectivist orientation of the local management that look after or develop their *guanxi* which is very important to themselves or to the bank's business, and more important than recruiting people who are suitable for the banking jobs. Cronyism appears to be normalised in this bank as HR have to give jobs to those who the management want.

Tong Yi's comment on the incompetence of the *guanxihu* among new recruits is negative and this potentially explains her attempts to distance herself from *guanxi* in her own career entry. This shows some degree of an individualist orientation that prizes personal competence and capabilities. Tong Yi assumes the *guanxihu*'s *guanxi* count as all the reasons in their gaining employment which leads her to strongly criticise *guanxi* in this context. She uses 'you' to refer to the bank, and 'we' to refer to HR. This shows that Tong Yi distances herself from the bank's management, and disagrees with the *guanxihu* practice in recruitment and distinguishes herself from this practice even though she is the one who is supposed to do the job. To distance herself from the management can be significant, in a place which is commonly labelled as a collectivist

cultural setting, which indicates Tong Yi's strong diverse opinion on this occasion. Tong Yi also describes what she thinks is the potential dynamic of *guanxi* in the long term: she suggests that *guanxi* will change over time and it may develop or disappear. This suggests that Tong Yi agrees that *guanxi* is needed in the bank's business which reflects a degree of acceptance of a collectivist value orientation that acknowledges the importance of interpersonal relationships and harmony.

Tong Yi discusses the problem of measuring the value of *guanxi* of the *guanxihu* according to if it can be quantified to a more understandable measure, such as profit. According to Tong Yi, the *guanxihu*'s value to the bank is uncountable but *guanxi* gets them jobs in the bank which she believes is unfair. It can be interpreted as her accepting the bank's profit driven culture and she implies that if the *guanxihu*'s value can be quantified, the current recruitment practice would be acceptable. This *guanxi*'s value that Tong Yi discusses appears to be at an organizational level rather than at a personal level. According to her, *guanxi* practice also possibly works cross level: personal *guanxi* could benefit business performance. Finally Tong Yi values personal competence over *guanxi* in recruitment practices which shows her individualist value orientation or it could be argued that she thinks this is only because she feels that she did not have any *guanxi*. Tong Yi further implies that only relying on *guanxi* is not enough, but that *guanxi* has its place in society. Her views on *guanxi*, the bank's recruitment practices and the relationship between *guanxi* and the bank's business are not consistent and clear. Tong Yi recognises and accepts *guanxi*'s role in recruitment and business but it appears that she suggests there should be a boundary to limit *guanxi*'s role in the HR practices in the bank.

5.4.1 Summary

Two managers withdrew their comments on recruitment which indicates that this is a sensitive issue in the bank. Jing Tong suggests that *guanxi*'s involvement in recruitment creates problems in HR practices. Despite this he is aware of the dynamic between *guanxi, mianzi and renqing* and he criticizes the role of *guanxi* in the bank's recruitment. This shows his individualist values that he appreciates the fairness and the quality of his work more than the group action of the management. Both the female and male managers who made requests for

male new employees in the bank show a high degree of masculine and collectivist values by rejecting women in their divisions. Tong Yi shows a mixed individualist and collectivist value orientation by critiquing the *guanxihu* issue in the recruitment process but does not completely deny the role of *guanxi* in the bank business. She associates *guanxihu* with incompetence in the bank. She suggests that *guanxi* is not a fixed concept; it can change or be created over time. She also suggests that the value of *guanxi* cannot be measured. She further suggests that *guanxi* should be used with a fair standard in the bank's recruitment and that its function should be restrained in recruitment. The *guanxi* she discusses sometimes refers to an organizational level which could potentially benefit the bank. The cronyism in the bank is clearly visible and jobs have to be given to those who the management want.

Women show diverse value orientations in their career entry to the banking industry, and *guanxi* plays an important role in women's career entry and the bank's recruitment practices. The women in this study are in the managerial ranks; their stories on their career paths also reflect diverse cultural and gender values. In the following section I present women's accounts of their career paths in the bank and how they got their managerial positions.

5.5 Women's career paths in the bank

The women in the bank occupy the lower ranks of management and they are underrepresented in middle (40%) and senior management (20%). More women, who are not participating in this study, occupy 73% of the operational posts (see page 55, Figure 3-2 Staffing Summary). It is not easy for women to work their way up to managerial level. Although participants with high educational backgrounds, such as people with a master's degree or a PhD, sometimes also had to work for six to twelve months in an operational role during their probations, they will probably move to junior managerial or junior professional posts soon after their probation. Apart from people with master's and PhD degrees, other participants' career experiences were varied. Participants describe their career paths in a variety of ways. However, it is difficult to explain their current career achievement according to their accounts alone and therefore other participants give comments on these managers' career progress.

Sometimes women work in the operational level for a long time and get promotion in

operational jobs, but it appears that moving into managerial posts is the ideal situation for most of them. Fang Yuee joined the bank as a graduate in the 1990s and worked in the bank's retail outlets in operational positions for about 15 years before moving to a managerial post in the Head Office.

> I have worked in all the positions in our retail outlets for many years and I was the line manager in the retail outlets for a few years, and I have worked in a managerial role for 2 years now. Then in 2011 I had my baby. I was in Finance and Planning before I had my daughter (.) I was only there for 2 months. I only just started to learn the work [...] I had my maternity leave. I actually stayed at home for five and half months… (Fang Yuee)

Fang Yuee chooses to work in a low ranked managerial post over the position as a line manager of operational staff in the bank's retail outlets. Many of the women in managerial ranks have worked in operational posts for a very long time. Fang Yuee explains further in the informal conversations that the reason for her moving out of the operational posts is that she was getting 'too old' and 'too tired' for the job and the operational staff should be 'young and good looking girls'. This kind of job change for her was not a promotion (it was in fact a demotion from line manager to managerial staff) but it was a reduction in work load, work hours and potentially not much sacrifice to her income. Her new post was a low ranked managerial job: however she appeared to be happy to leave the operational post after she had worked there for 15 years. It is possible that employees who are in the head office have higher status than the employees who work in the branches in the bank.

Although it is true that the average age of the operational staff is 28 in the bank and Fang Yuee is approaching her 40s, almost all the other women in this study suspect that her job change was because of her marriage. She married someone who is ten years younger and whose family are friends with the senior management and one of the landlords[21] of the bank. This suspicion was probably true as her other personal circumstances have changed little over time. Her career path reflects the overall hierarchy in the bank as operational staff are at the bottom. Some

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[21] People who own the property the bank rents.

women, who worked with Fang Yuee before, commented that it is not fair for the other women who are similar to Fang Yuee's age and are still working as line managers in the operational area. However, it can also be interpreted as the management looking after Fang Yuee when she was in her late thirties and was pregnant with her first child. In addition, the women show little support to Fang Yuee as they suggest her marriage was the 'secret headline' in the bank at that time and still they are quite happy to gossip about her marriage now. This reflects the restraints of the traditional roles on these women regarding marriage: a couple should be matched in terms of age, height, appearances, families, social status and economic conditions to be 'happy'.

Peina who is already a middle manager also suggests that it took her a long time to move to management. And even though she is a manager, working in the operational side, she perhaps needs less management skills and knowledge than other managers. Zhou Rong who is the same age but a more experienced middle manager than Peina suggests that Peina is very quiet and has a low profile in every single management meeting and other management events. On the surface, she appears to be totally opposite from a career woman.

> I worked in frontline operational jobs for quite a long time, and then I worked as a client manager briefly. Then I became an operational manager in a branch. So I went back to what I was familiar with. I was relocated to one of the branches in another city nearby. Later, this department's manager moved to Retail Banking, so I came back to head office and took over the job. This department has about 40 people […] My career path consistently goes upwards […] I think now I can say I get the benefit of knowing what is going on in all sorts of operational jobs. But I think I lack the knowledge of being a manager. I mean I haven't been trained to be a manager and I can do the job well but I can't develop my own management ideas to improve the work here. I feel I cannot stand higher and look further to see things and analyse things. Although I am a department manager, I don't need to get involved much with management level issues because the department is in fact operation involved (Peina).

Peina has worked in operational jobs for about 10 years, and she was promoted to be a middle manager 2 years ago. She seems satisfied and feels good with her career progression as she describes it as 'consistently going upwards'. She suggests that her previous experiences at an operational level were beneficial to her current manager post. However, she appears to lack confidence as a manager when she is concerned about her lack of 'knowledge' to develop her own management ideas and apply them. This seems to contradict what she says about her knowledge and wide experience about the operational jobs. It is interesting that she has her own management ideas but does state that she does not have the knowledge to be a manager; and she is a department manager but cannot implement her own ideas. This may reflect some aspects of the power distribution in the bank as the middle managers have different levels of power depending on their *guanxi* with senior management rather than their titles. Knowing her place is essential for Peina to maintain her upwards career move in the bank.

Peina's career experience was rare in the bank because the majority of women who are working in an operational post would not have the opportunity to be promoted to be middle managers. Other female managers conjectured that because Peina is very quiet and able to keep a low profile at all times, the management would trust her for her loyalty, stability and silence. Peina's career path could be understood as a reward for a long-term-based career relationship, loyalty and maybe other professional competences. The qualities that others describe Peina as having are closely linked to 'people from collectivist cultures' (Triandis 2004). Peina describes this long-term-based career relationship as a 'very traditional' one (page 106). However, she values her own career achievement and shows her ambition for further development in her job, which is possibly associated with 'people from individualist cultures' (ibid;). It is interesting that she feels the need to display a degree of individualist characteristics as a manager even though she is not confident about what she says. It is obvious that how Peina perceives the idea of 'tradition' is a process of negotiation which is difficult to understand using established criteria. This could be the result of the Chinese educational setting she has experienced with modern banking and finance knowledge. She does not have the courage to show a high degree of individualist characteristics directly though this is related to banking, management and work according to western based knowledge.

Hu Xin has a totally different experience in her career from Fang Yuee and Peina and many other participants. Many participants worked their way up to the managerial level from the 'bottom' at an operational level. Instead Hu Xin worked in administration when she first joined the bank. Without an operational background, she has been feeling insecure in her managerial position.

Not until I won a competition in the province and became the finalist in a national level competition, I was given the position to work in the administration which includes administration and human resources. I became the assistant of the administration manager here. Somehow I worked as the assistant for the whole department at the time. That kept me very busy. I had to type files, print documents and do all sorts of admin work I can think of. I was in that position for a few years, and kept switching between being an assistant and a professional trained 'athlete' for all sorts of 'banking workers' skill competitions'. Yes, those were busy years. I felt satisfied at that time because of all the rewards I got, but somehow I feel insecure because I hadn't learnt any banking business. I was thinking about learning what people do in the bank a lot […] because all of my school friends developed knowledge on the frontline banking business and some have become quite capable and do well in their work both in Private and Corporate Banking. I asked the bosses many times, my manager, not the top managers. I said I had to learn some bank related skills from work. I told him I don't mind work as cashier or teller. My manager supported this; because many people don't want to do the casher jobs, they would be happy to do office work. My manager let me go once he recruited another young girl to take over my job. I went to a branch in the city centre and worked as a cashier for a while […] I did it for less than two years. However, I wasn't suitable for the job at all (laugh) although my fingers move quickly on a keyboard I struggled to count the money. My opportunity came when the lady who worked on 'labour and salary' in Human Resource management emigrated to Australia. My old manager thought I could be suitable for the position and he asked me if I would be interested in filling this position. I immediately said yes, yes, yes I am interested (laugh). So I came back to the head office. Only when I had that experience I know the operational jobs such as cashiers' and tellers' jobs are hard. Well, I have worked in this position for 11 years now, more than 11 years in fact. I work hard to be able to do the job properly (Hu Xin)

Hu Xin suggests that she earned herself a managerial post by winning a competition for the bank when she joined the bank as a young 'girl'. To win a competition could potentially add *mianzi* (face) for the bank as the management highly values the bank's positive publicity in the society and reputation in the industry which reflects the competitive nature of the bank. Hu Xin initially felt insecure because of a lack of banking knowledge at work. She values banking skills and knowledge and links these to her sense of security. Her account of feeling insecure is significant in this study because no one else mentions not being stable and feeling insecure in the bank. Her achieved status in a managerial post at the time would not support her *mianzi* retaining strategy within her peers. Her job title in the managerial ranks may not be enough to secure her career in this instance: hence her lack of professional banking skills and knowledge are significant disadvantages to a banking employee's career. Again, the influence of peers is important for her decision for a career move.

Although operational posts in this bank are hard and less valued, Hu Xin still feels the need to understand the basic banking business in order to maintain the stability she seeks from her banking career. She was given extra work in her administration post maybe because she was good at what she was doing. However, she was thinking about learning to progress in her career. She appears to be quite forward for a woman as she shows incentive for personal career development. She has to aim low such as being a cashier or teller, so her manager will accept her request to change jobs and she agrees to do a job no one else wants to do. She has to wait for a couple of years to get the job she asked for and during that time she may have felt she was falling behind in her career. This potentially made her assertive about moving from administration to operations. Once Hu Xin had experienced the cashier job she was enthusiastic to go back to the managerial post again when the opportunity came. It is obvious that she is still in contact with her old manager while she worked in the branches. This may be the reason that she was able to go back to a managerial post, as potentially her good *guanxi* with the manager gave her the flexibility to move between different jobs within the bank as it would be much harder for someone who has no *guanxi* with the managers. It is also probable that most of the women who work in operations, administration or lower management in the bank do not have the *guanxi* to support their career move. It is possible that many women are less assertive regarding their career in comparison to Hu Xin. Hu Xin is satisfied with her own

achievement of 'doing the job properly'. Maybe she is now realistic about her career progress in this bank and is concerned about comfort and stability more than career achievement.

5.5.1 Summary

It is not easy for the female participants who worked in an operational post and moved into managerial jobs. Themes such as *guanxi* and *mianzi* play their role in Fang Yuee and Hu Xin's job mobility and career progress within the bank. Loyalty, stability and silence are highly regarded qualities by the employer and Peina is promoted to middle management from an operational job potentially because she was 'quiet' and kept a 'low profile at all times'. The participants' cultural realities in their career are individually constructed around their own circumstances and can exceed the boundaries of the simple collectivist *vs* individualist cultures dualism.   It is impossible to specify any participant as being either collectivist or individualist according to their value orientations in their career. These women managers' cultural values appear to be a dynamic process which changes according to the context. How the participants want themselves to be seen is complicated but important: they define their own boundaries of their values through their career experiences. This chapter has examined how the participants perceive gender roles and the influence that *guanxi* has on individual careers, however it is also necessary to consider the participants' career development and career expectations.

In addition, the women's personal interests contribute little in their career choices. There is a strong alignment between what these women studied atuniversity and the professions they would enter. This may be a result of the retirement policy the bank adopts. The families' role in these women' career choices are surprisingly not significant, though they may have been guided into a career long before they were ready to enter the job market. Nevertheless, these women managers show some degree of independence and autonomy in work related issues.

Chapter 6. Potential career development and expectations

The majority of the participants describe their careers following a timeline of past–present–future which relates to job entry, career progress, current responsibilities and future plans and expectations. In the past five years, the local banking industry has been booming. Despite the increasing unemployment rate in society, there is a shortage of experienced banking specialists in the local area. When some of the employees were enjoying constant job changes, Opcitbank has experienced a historically high staff turnover rate in the past three years and this has created a shortage of employees in Global Transaction Banking and Corporation Banking and occasionally in Retail Banking. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the participants had a lot to say about their plans for their future careers. There are diverse experiences among the participants: some participants with young children put their careers on hold, the women working in specialist areas seek wider career opportunities, and other women's ambition for career development is suppressed so they struggle. Other participants in the study who are senior and middle managers expressed little ambition for future career development opportunities. The established description of gender roles are closely related to the participants' career advancement with some who have traditional female characteristics perhaps not seeking promotion because of the costs this would involve.

Chapter 6 explores the participants' expectations for future career development. Section 6.1 discusses the conflict between women's traditional gender roles, *guanxi* and career expectations. This is followed by section 6.2 which highlights the role of *guanxi* in bank employees' promotion according to current HR practices. Finally section 6.3 examines the disadvantages that women face in career development.

6.1 Gender roles and *guanxi,* and their impact on women's career development

None of the participants in the study admit that there is a conflict between their work and their families when I ask them directly. However, when a small number of women discuss their career development, they suggest that there are issues of balancing their career development and their time with families. Peina highlights the relevance of employees who have stable jobs and are also the ones who have families.

Most employees in my department have families; they don't have extra time. Young employees are normally allocated positions on the front line such as in branches. People here are more stable, relatively speaking. Young employees in branches may develop to other business units later on, it is rare here (in the department) (Peina)

There are conflicts between Zhou Rong and her husband over the amount of time she spends with their child, because according to her, he spends much more effort and time on their family than her. Zhou Rong's husband is a civil servant with a stable and an above average income for the local area but Zhou Rong earns five times her husband's income from her middle manager's post in the bank.

If the family is not stable, what can you do? Especially for a women's career a supportive family is very important […] I feel it is quite difficult to have further career development in my position. Second, I still have to balance my career and my family. It is not worth it if I have to give more to the work (Zhou Rong, Manager of Corporate Credit Management Department).

Both Peina and Zhou Rong are middle managers. They both connect the potential to achieve further career expectations with more investment in time and effort at work although Peina talks about her staff and Zhou Rong speaks about herself. They recognize that to achieve further career advancement has a cost on their families. Peina assumes that her staff will not have more time for further career development because they have a stable life. She associates a stable life negatively with the unwillingness to invest more time and effort in a career. It is possible that she makes the assumption about her staff's career expectations to show her power or perhaps she tries to protect them from more sacrifices at work, as they are poorly paid and some of them are ranked lower than others.

Zhou Rong suggests that it is more important for women to have a supportive and stable family to pursue career advancement and that a stable job is important for a woman. She rejected the stereotypical gender role that a woman's place is in the family to some degree and instead her husband devotes considerably more time and effort to their family and child. She is negotiating

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her gender role between her work and her family to find a balance that she sets for herself and utilize her resources, neither radically rejecting the established gender role nor accepting it. It is no surprise that her experience of negotiating her own gender role was not easy since there are conflicts in her family. Nevertheless, Zhou Rong's earning power may contribute to her gender role construction with money being important in maintaining the family's lifestyle. It is interesting for a confident woman such as Zhou Rong to admit there are limited opportunities for her to develop her career further. This might be because there is a slim chance for women to work their way to the top in this bank. Or alternatively her career development is constrained by her family commitments even though her husband takes the predominant role in the home environment.

Almost all women middle managers in this study suggest that they have a slim chance to become senior managers in the bank due to the 'reality' that there has only been one female senior manager in each of the top management teams in the bank's history. Significantly none of them mention that they have no career ambition for the top jobs. Sometimes the women managers in the bank make comments on their seniors in all aspects that they think appropriate but mainly in reference to the senior managers' qualities as leaders and their competences in business related issues. Zhang Gu is a CPC member, and is the Vice-President in the bank and ranked second after the President. He has been working in banking since the late 1980s. Prior to this, he worked in the central news agent of the CPC in Beijing. He is the only senior manager who has a PhD in business studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature.

Young employees appear to like Zhang Gu, and middle managers are polite to him but keep their distance while other senior managers do not mention him. He has worked in a senior manager's position since his 30s and he is nice and friendly and liked by most junior employees in the bank. He was supposed to be promoted to 'be the boss' about 10 years ago but it was widely known that he lost the position to the current President who 'acts and looks more like a boss, takes the work more seriously and is tougher'. There are rumours that he did not show that he was politically left enough to be the boss. Except for political correctness, 'being a vegetarian', 'studying Buddhism', 'writing poems', 'being nice and friendly' and even having a degree in literature were arguably constructed by a group of women middle managers in this study as 'inappropriate' and a 'distraction' that 'destroyed his career'. One women middle

manager adds 'he doesn't have enough of a leader's presence to do the job'

It is possibly because he does not fit these women managers' imagination of a senior manager in the bank that a couple of women managers made negative comments on his career in an informal context such as in a tea room after work. Their criticism of their senior manager could be seen as a culturally inappropriate behaviour. However, the women were negotiating their own understanding of gender identities in the bank's work environment to define their own understanding of *yin* and *yang* characteristics. They suggest that qualities that are not obviously associated with strong work performance, such as being nice and friendly, having asense of humour, writing poems, are not the attributes of a leader in the bank and therefore are 'distractions' to one's career. These women managers clearly identify their own understanding of what sort of people will be 'suitable' to be a leader in the bank. Considering people call the best performing branch managers, credit managers or client managers 'meat eaters' to praise their strong capabilities and performance at work, 'nice and friendly' obviously will not be enough for Zhang Gu to be respected as a senior manager in the bank. Or it could be stereotyping that the women just simply cannot imagine a nice and friendly person to be a top senior bank manager. These women's projection of what makes a 'leader' in the bank potentially reflects their understanding of what the cultural and gender image of their senior managers should be. Obviously, they believe someone 'serious' and 'tough' is more suitable to be their senior manager in the bank. Perhaps they denigrate their own ability to achieve the top positions in the bank because they see themselves as not being tough and masculine enough at work to achieve the top job. Therefore, the criticism of this particular senior manager possibly indicates these women's lack of career ambition is to get a top job in the bank. However, the ability of women to achieve their career ambitions may in some ways be constrained by their family choices.

The majority of the women with young children in this study have put their careers on hold for their children. Fang Yuee is a typical example of a woman with young children who gives little thought to her own career development.

> Personally, I think it is good here. I don't plan to move any time soon. In fact, I have an
> emotional attachment to this bank, if you want to know […] if I plan to leave the resources

(social resources including *guanxi*) you have to actually count as your competences in career […] according to my current situation, it is not realistic for me to think this and that and make a plan for my career. But everyone wants to develop and do better. If I have the opportunities and also my capabilities improve, I'd love to move to a better position and take on more responsibilities at work. That is what I think. I am not a particularly ambitious person I feel ((laughs)), so I have to do well in my current position and if I can improve my capabilities I'll try. That's it. (Fang Yuee)

Fang Yuee finds it difficult for her to make any plans for her career with a young child. A partial reason for this could be that she wants to pursue her role primarily as mother. This reflects her strong female values that put her role as mother higher than her role as a professional woman. Nevertheless she shows a strong interest in career advancement. Fang Yuee has just made a career move but she is not confident about her capability for new opportunities. She identifies the reason why she has not progressed as her not being ambitious and she laughs off the embarrassment. To her, the mother's role does not necessarily stall women's career progress but lacking ambition does. She maybe feels constrained by the traditional values that her place should be in the family so she does not want to admit directly that she has career ambition. However she also expresses a strong desire for her career by saying that 'everyone wants to develop and do better'. Fang Yuee's contradictory ideas could be the sign of her struggle with adopting both collectivist cultural values and individualist cultural values. Or maybe the contradictions indicate her career expectation of where she thinks she should be and where she is.

It is interesting that Fang Yuee uses the words 'emotional attachment' to describe her feeling towards the bank; however the bank's management does not necessarily reciprocate her feelings. She uses the phrase 'if you want to know' which suggests some caution about what she is going to say to me and potentially she could be shielding her real thoughts but produce a conversation specifically for me. She uses a lot of 'ifs' indicating caution about what she says to me or maybe she is simply not very confident about her ability to progress. Fang Yuee expresses ambiguity about her career ambitions, while other participants are more direct.

The following field note data has been produced in a Pizza Hut restaurant during a lunch break when I bought a small group of women a lunch and had a casual conversation. These are the

small number of participants who express their frustration in their career development. Most of them work in the Retail Bank department and Wu Ling and Zhou Yi are two typical examples. They both express their dislike of their manager, Li Hai. Wu Ling is desperate for promotion and she tries very hard to maintain good *guanxi* with her manager. However, she still missed the recent promotion despite believing that she is the 'most qualified candidate' for the assistant manager's post. This post went to a woman who is known as Li Hai's 'spy' in this department. Wu Ling is ranked as a middle manager in the department and junior manager in the bank. Li Hai is a women who is the same age as her, married and had difficulty to conceive a child. Li Hai tends to micromanage everything in the department: for instance, what gifts they receive on business trips and what they do during their lunch breaks. With most of the complaints, Li Hai 'hates' people who take annual leave, especially for the purposes of family holidays. No one mentions anything about their children in front of her. Li Hai has a less impressive educational background than Wu Ling and also the majority of the staff who work under her; and Li Hai has a weaker track record of work performance in the bank. People who work in this department appear to be more stressed than the employees in other departments and some of them suggest that Li Hai is not capable at work and must feel deeply insecure.   In the following conversation that recorded in the office Wu Ling responded defensively when I suggested that she looks after her child and her husband by generating income for the family. The following quote has been reduced from its original length, but the length of the passage indicates the desire of Wu Ling to converse about her current work situation.

> I think he is the one who can afford to spend extra time to make a career, not necessarily 'earning the money' […] I feel absolutely nothing (.) I particularly want to talk about this job ((sigh)). It cannot be planned, about my career, short term or long term. I want to, but I can't. I don't have enough resources to do it […] ((sigh)) I think at this moment I try to do my own work well […] If I had the opportunity to choose, I would. What I want most is not a good job to earn a living. I really want to go back to study [...] Maybe, I am different from most of the people here, I don't want promotion and more bonus […] I don't think I will get promotion on administrative ranks. My highest position is departmental manager. […] What else can I expect? I don't see a way for me to progress on my career […] If possible (.) only possible, I will progress when the whole bank does better: cover more geographic areas, develop more products. […]

Generally speaking, I would be satisfied if I was given some training opportunities. Go to bigger and better organizations to learn how they do their credit card business. I want to know more, and do better. I have the ideas but don't have any opportunities…Simply there are no training opportunities available. My superiors don't want to provide me with any further improvement opportunities. I want to attend the training that really talks about business, not the sort of ones that send me for free holidays. Anyway, they won't let me go, because if I wasn't here, who deals with day-to-day business? Besides, this is a Chinese bank; there is no system to look after my needs for professional progress […]

I can understand. sit here like me, no future (.) If there is a good opportunity I'll go without second thought (.) But I am comparatively (.) I am satisfied with what I have (.) I try to do better in my own position (.) I guess I expect little from work. I balance my life by putting more effort on my family. My future life is foreseeable, so when I sit here I don't have any career plan I also don't have any professional prospective. I even don't have anything that I can feel I shall improve myself [….]

I don't have anything (.) I am still devoted to my job (.) I think (.) I guess, it is just me. You look, these couple of years, the turnover of the people around me must be sky high. So many people left for better pay better jobs in other banks. Many of the people won't put up with this kind of working environment (.) let's say it is easier to engage conversation when I have to deal with strangers to build networks outside the bank. But when you see I am doing the same job for so many years and I remain in the same rank, can you see anything positive here? It is obvious, just like in the family; the mother in law and the daughter in law never see each other truly eye to eye. In physics, two like electric charges repel each other. Women hardly ever would really like other women (Wu Ling, Business Unit (Credit Cards) Manager in Private Banking)

Wu Ling is clearly dissatisfied with her career and she wants further advancement but there is no opportunity for her. She prefers to talk only about her career when I try to direct the

conversation towards both her career and her family life. This may be because she has a strong opinion about her work and she wants to discuss this. She appears to be offended by my question in the beginning and indicates that my particular phrasing was unsatisfactory. At the same time it is interesting that she takes charge of the conversation and expresses frustration with my questions. She is doing a lot of sighing during the conversation as she expresses her dissatisfaction. She implies that she cannot choose her job. Her ability, family, and *guanxi* with the manager could all constrain her ability to make a choice. She sets herself apart from most of the people in the bank to project a high degree of individualism. When she discusses her career expectation she first denies she has any thoughts on her career development but had a lot to say about her current post. Perhaps she asserts that she does not want career progression because at present she feels unable to gain promotion. Education and training that she wants could be viewed as the items that would have a positive impact on her career development. Because the bank is not providing her with anything that she wants, she expresses negative feeling towards this Chinese bank.

Conversely, she consistently shows a great desire to make career progress. Considering her strong academic and professional background, she identifies her *guanxi* with her manager as constraining her further career development in this bank, therefore she expresses her desire to leave the bank and go somewhere else and that she wants promotion but in a different bank. It is also noteworthy that she highlights the common understanding in the bank that there are many off-the-job training events which are in fact free holidays for managerial employees. Her comments indicate that her understanding of the norms in the bank are that it requires loyalty and obedience but she is assertive about what she wants to achieve in her career. In this particular department, career ambition will not be respected, instead obedience is an obligation. This is indicative of a collectivist work environment requiring Wu Ling to display traditional female qualities to be accepted. Wu Ling's expectation of personal improvement which is probably linked closely to the description of male identity and individualism was clearly suppressed. If this department promotes a collectivist culture then Wu Ling's strong individualist value orientation certainly would not be accepted. She repeats her opinion on professional training and her bad *guanxi* with her manager twice in this conversation, which indicates her strong dissatisfaction on these issues. Wu Ling left the bank and achieved a middle manager's post in a different bank a year after this study.

Wu Ling also suggests that she is satisfied with what she has by saying 'maybe I am' but clearly, she is not. She mentions that many people have left the bank for better jobs but she has not. Maybe Wu Ling is not as competent as she believes or maybe stability is more important to her. She may suggest that she is better or stronger than others who left because she can tolerate this work environment. It takes a long time for Wu Ling to mention that her superiors are women. She suggests that her *guanxi* with her manager will never truly be good just like relations between a mother in-law and daughter in –law in the family. She concludes that 'women would hardly ever like other women'. Wu Ling's analysis of the *guanxi* between women reflects her own stereotyping of women, including herself: women are not quick to forgive, superficial, intolerant and less rational and therefore they are difficult. Wu Ling's narrative reflects her struggle for career advancement at her work place where her individualist value orientation is deeply suppressed by the collectivist cultural requirement from her superior. Wu Ling's construction of her *guanxi* with her manager reflects her gender stereotyped understanding of women and she tries to follow the norms in the department. Her inconsistency with her own cultural and gender roles could be a result of her western influenced Chinese higher education and her Chinese social surroundings. Clearly Wu Ling's version of career expectations is subject to her surroundings and personal experiences. Wu Ling's frustration at work is also noticeable in other employees such as Zhou Yi.

Zhou Yi works in the same department as Wu Ling and she states that she dislikes her manager Li Hai, and the reason is that she feels that her manager does not respect her as an individual. She is a middle manager in the department and junior manager in the bank and her pay package is on the top level of junior managers. Her husband works as a chief engineer in a respectable global company, but he earned half of her income in the previous year. Therefore, Zhou Yi's income is important to her family.

(I am the) the manager of 'Centre of Finance for Going Aboard' […] For Chinese this expectation (career development) is a monstrous crime. You can't succeed - even if you have the idea you cannot speak. I can only say work hard towards this sort of direction. After all, if you want this position (the middle manager's position) […] Chinese (.) always have to do something to (she means get rid of the boss) … yeah, there's nothing (I can do to develop my career further). This (doing my job better) is to say, widen product

varieties and increase the volume of business in all the branches […] I only can say from this angle. If I go further up, it is relatively difficult […] my expectation for my son first is I want him to be happy. Have a happy career. Choose something he wants to do as a career […] I must be able to afford to support him. I suffer now at my work but I hope he doesn't have to when he grows up. I just want him to be happy. I (.) I (.) I think it is an aim for me rather than for my son. It keeps me going… I have to keep the position, I need it. Actually, I have another encouragement which is my life after retirement. When I am extremely tired, I dream of my life after retirement. I was thinking I only need to work until 55, I won't have any energy left to work any longer. If the state retirement policy changes, I really don't want to accept the change on retirement age. Somehow I feel hopeless. The people who work like me, I don't know others outside here, and at least I don't enjoy my work. I come to work for a demand, to satisfy my own living situation. So every encouragement about working harder or better is developed from this demand [….] I wrote 'work happily 'on my screensaver here to remind myself. Actually it reminds me what I am lacking. (Zhou Yi, Business Unit manager, Centre of Finance for Going Aboard, in Private Banking)

Zhou Yi is very reluctant to talk about her career development in her office. She speaks very quietly and it is difficult to follow her and she is hesitant. However, Zhou Yi still tries to express her opinion and explains the situation to me which appears to take some courage. I have to move the conversation on to ease her tension and continue the conversation. Zhou Yi repeatedly expresses that she hates her job and that she is suffering and dreaming for it to end, she wants to leave as soon as possible and only does it for the money. From other comments, some participants' parents push their children in a certain direction, but Zhou Yi just wants her son to be happy, and she supports him with money. She has an aim for her seven year old son's future which possibly makes her appear to be a controlling parent. The sole motivation for her work is the economic demand of her child, because she is the main breadwinner in the family. Therefore, her motivation for work appears to be a collective one and fits the description of the traditional female role being to care for the child's needs. It is very interesting because the traditional gender roles in Chinese families are men as the breadwinner and women as the home carer. It appears that Zhou Yi adopts both breadwinner role and home carer role to some degree.

Zhou Yi's career advancement in the bank is constrained by her work environment as she calls it a 'monstrous crime' to even talk about it in her office. The original word she chooses is *da*

ni bu dao. In Mandarin, this word is passed from imperial China; and *da ni* means to rebel against the emperor, father or ancestry and *bu dao* refers to an extreme crime. The word now refers to extreme crime that is against ethical or moral standards. She does not really equate her manager to an authoritarian, an emperor, or her father or the ancestry, instead, she uses this word intentionally to articulate how inappropriate she feels her manager's behaviour is in the work environment. With a cultural reference, she expresses her rebellion again oppression without displaying an individualist cultural identity. In fact, she does have a career expectation which is a better, deeper and wider professional knowledge and better performance. Also, she keeps an open mind to opportunities as she says she will 'walk the first step to see the next step', which also can be seen as a sign of resilience against power. Another bank employee, Zhu Ke, is the sole breadwinner in the family while her husband is studying in America.

Zhu Ke is an assistant manager in corporate banking. She is very talkative and she lived in America for two years. She stresses on different occasions that 'it is normal for the couple not to live together, especially for Chinese. I have met lots of couples who live their lives like us now, even the westerners, while I was in the US, unless one of us can give up their career'.

> I have to look for development I mean business wise because you have to think about learning something and it'll make a difference to yourself in the future. […] Experiences differentiate people, it'll make a difference. Capabilities make a difference too […] humans form the society, *guanxi* is essential in jobs and career, no matter where you are. Realistically I and my husband will be satisfied with stable jobs and incomes and a small saving for our child's education […] We need innovative financial products, if you work in this department, doing your own work well, and keep your eyes on other new products other people operate, but you only need to know briefly, […] if you want to be an expert on every new product, it is unrealistic. At least it is important for me to show familiarity to corporate banking business that matches my experience here. I don't want to look silly for sure. It is more achievable to develop our capability and knowledge. For a move upwards in the hierarchy, it is related to bit of luck, bit of opportunities, a bit of personality, and your background and *guanxi*. […] I can say how well I learn the knowledge is determined by my effort and IQ. But climbing up in the administrative

ladder depends more on your EQ[22]. Obviously I can't deny everyone has different opportunities in their career. Newly established institutions sometimes provide better opportunity for career moves if you have the knowledge and capabilities. Four of the former colleagues have moved to other banks and gained manager positions and another one has become a top manager in another local bank. (Zhu Ke)

Zhu Ke is the sole earner taking care of her family which appears to be revolutionary according to the common understanding of the traditional gender roles in China that put women's primary place in the family. Very similar to Hu Xin and Wu Ling, Zhu Ke shows incentive to learn. She expresses her interests in continuing her career in other financial institutions. Zhu Ke also identifies capabilities, experiences, learning, personalities, *guanxi* and even luck as elements in her career development. She repeatedly uses the word 'realistically' as she appears to give what she says a lot of thought before and has assessed the conditions and environment according to her individual needs. Zhu Ke's strong desire on career progression, openness to new knowledge and new opportunities, and personal improvement appear to be the qualities that are highly associated with an individualist culture. It is hard to say how much of her individualist cultural orientation in her career expectation is connected to her experience of living in the US. Zhu Ke suggests that 'realistically' learning is her way to prepare for a career development at the current time.

Zhu Ke's career expectation also includes her husband's career expectation and their child. This shows some degree of collectivist values as family is considered as one unit. Alternatively, it shows Zhu Ke is controlling as she plans her son and her husband's needs for them. Her earning power in the bank may support her power over other family members. While Zhu Ke suggests that for her and her husband to live in two separate countries is normal for Chinese people, still she pictures a sort of long-term goal of her family life of three. Therefore, what her vision of a normal family life for Chinese people is confusing. It appears that Zhu Ke has a strong individualist value orientation that is concerned with her career and personal achievement over her role as a wife and mother. However, examining the details of

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[22] EQ refers to emotional intelligence and can be distinguished from IQ. It encompasses the ability to recognise and adjust to your own and other emotions. It could be suggested that EQ is as important as IQ, particularly in China where relationships contribute to career progression.

her story, Zhu Ke and her husband sacrifice their lives as a couple for the collective goal of pursuing their careers in order to support their child together in the future. There is a difference with Zhu Ke's career expectation when she mentions personalities, luck, EQ and IQ as being important in her career development while other participants do not. This indicates that she has some level of autonomy by suggesting that personality may be significant for a person's career.

6.1.1 Summary

Feminine characteristics are not valued in the bank when it comes to career advancement, but at the same time displaying masculine characteristics in departments such as the Private Banking department are frowned upon. Women, including the ones with young children, demonstrate career ambitions and autonomy in their career expectations. Zhou Rong's family responsibilities and her own understanding of gender roles may restrain her career development to a senior level. However, the traditional gender role in the society may dictate her view on her career and her role in her family to some degree. Some of the participants, such as Wu Ling, Zhu Ke and Hu Xin suggest that learning is important for their career progression. Women also express their vision of career expectations according to their social surroundings. Most participants show a strong collectivist orientation when discussing their family and strong individualist characteristics towards their career. When Zhou Yi and Wu Ling's career progress is suppressed, they are not happy at work, and they struggle to express their cultural and gender roles with consistency as they are restricted by the norms in the bank and in the department. Although this inconsistency could be caused by their individual experiences, such as education, work experiences, and family situation, it appears that in this study, career development is important to these women's work lives regardless of their personal lives. The cultural values that are reflected in women's career development are complicated as sometimes their personal career goals which show some individualist values are instrumental to their collective goals of support in their family. In addition women such as Wu Ling and Zhu Ke highlight the relevance of *guanxi* in career progression, and this is discussed in more detail in the following section regarding how *guanxi* affects promotion prospects.

6.2 *Guanxi* in promotion

Tong Yi who works in HR expresses a strong opinion on *guanxi* in recruitment in the previous conversation (page 126) and again she has strong opinion of *guanxi* in young employees' promotion. She appears to be a very quiet person and very careful if not secretive about what she says in many other topics such as her family and personal life. It is surprising to me that Tong Yi speaks for almost an hour about her thoughts of HR practices in the bank without me asking her to do so. She expresses herself without any hesitation. When I switched off the recorder, she said that no one has ever asked her what she thinks about her work before. Tong Yi was sent to work in a branch to 'help' her to learn some banking business nine months after this study.

> to keep the incompetent ones here takes its toll; maybe the bosses don't feel it that way. But all the people are watching. People asked why someone is never able to pass any new employees' assessment and get offered better jobs than others that demonstrate better skills at work. Sometimes these ones don't even deserve a place here if not because of their *guanxi*. They move to more important positions when they can't do clerks' work. What do you want other young people to think? It shows the management team encourage incompetence, only care about *guanxi* and don't reward hard work and capabilities that the banking jobs need […] some would speak out, some do not necessarily say anything, but often you can hear the gossip. So in branches, the ones we recruited through our normal processes normally perform well, on the top level on all assessments and training, but they are also normally the ones who work on the clerks' positions forever: no moving position, no promotion. Sometimes, by accident, middle managers want a capable hand and they would be moved to more important roles after they work as a clerk for a very long time, but others may stick at the bottom forever. When these young people see others fail job related assessments three times in a row and get promoted, they don't feel right. The middle managers sometimes move these people around to other positions in order to avoid the embarrassment for their branches; you know it is for *mianzi*: it looks bad and sounds bad for the managers that someone in their place fails over and over again. (Tong Yi)

Tong Yi suggests that the 'bosses' and the 'people' have divided views on the bank's current promotion practice among young employees and she implies that the 'bosses' and the 'people'

are two opposite groups. The ones who are incompetent get better jobs and according to her the management encourage incompetence and only care about *guanxi*. Tong Yi is surprisingly outspoken about the HR practices in the bank. Maybe she tries to display her competence at work and shows me that she knows 'how to' in HR which is consistent with her account of her career entry and her discussion on recruitment. Again, this shows Tong Yi's acceptance of the established individualist value orientation that is concerned with fairness and values the competences highly. According to Tong Yi, for the purpose of avoiding embarrassment and losing *mianzi,* the managers promote the one who cannot do the clerk's job. She suggests it is bad management and has a bad effect on the employees. She also stresses again that the ones the bank recruit normally perform well in all assessments, even though she later admits this is not true as there are a few exceptions. She uses the word normal to distinguish the two different recruitment standards that *guanxihu* are recruited abnormally, and others are recruited normally. This is coherent with her views on *guanxi*'s role in recruitment and her own job entry. However, according to Tong Yi, about two thirds are 'abnormally' recruited, so what is normal practice and abnormal practice in this bank is arguable. She implies that people with no *guanxi* get promoted by accident otherwise they have to work in the 'bottom position' forever. It reflects the hierarchy in the bank that clerks and the people who work in the branches are at the bottom and people with no *guanxi* are likely stay in the bottom. Employees with *guanxi* have the social power to give them advantage over others at work in the bank. Her job change from HR to a branch later possibly indicates that the management is less tolerant to the employees who disagree with them and the management is not interested in what she has to say about the HR practices. *Guanxi* appears to have a more significant impact than gender, though it is evident that gender is also important and interacts in some respects with *guanxi* for different reasons which is discussed in the following section.

6.3 Women's disadvantage in careers

In comparison to *guanxi*, gender is not a topic the participants mention directly. When I ask the women at the start of the study what is their disadvantages as women in the bank, the participants do not believe there is any. Instead a quarter of them talk through the history of the CPC's liberation of women to me to prove there is no gender inequality in the modern corporation, and more than half of the women never think about gender equality or have any negative experiences that they could think of regarding their gender. However, the majority of

the participants suggest that their maternity leave brings disadvantage in their career progress. The following conversations represent the women's own understanding of the negative impact of having children in their careers.

> to be honest, you were not in a position the bank should require much responsibility from you [...] as a woman you don't have any advantage in career development. Having a child would cost you almost two years in career although you are only off for a few months. There is one woman in the bank who had only two months' maternity leave. It is not possible for every woman to do what she did. After two month, she started to work half a day in office half day at home. She was in a, en (.) a good position at the time. [...] assistant manager, I think. She didn't want to give up her position. Now the girl has a second child, she only had three months off, definitely not enough... (Zhou Rong)

> in term of the continuity of my career (.) (having a child) has definitely affected promotion. (Zhou Yi, Business Unit manager, Centre of Finance for Going Aboard) in Private Banking)

Zhou Rong claims that having a child cost her two years in career progression. She uses 'you' to refer to women who have just come back to work from maternity leave in the bank. She illustrates a rare case of one particular woman manager who only takes a total of five months break to have two children and was able to work part time. It appears that the bank has one rule for certain managers and another rule for other employees who have babies. How that particular woman manager managed to work part time and keep a manager's position she wants is unknown, because nobody wanted to discuss the details of this particular woman,, either formally or informally. This might be for a number of reasons, which it is impossible to speculate on. Zhou Rong suggests that three months' maternity leave for a baby is not enough however she does not say how long she thinks would be enough. Zhou Rong admits that having children affects women's prospects for promotion. Zhou Yi concurs with Zhou Rong and points out that having children affects women's promotion prospects because they have a break from their career in the bank.

Another employee, Hu Xin, also comments on maternity leave.

> I feel as a woman, I have disadvantages at work. Maternity leave doesn't help women's career, it creates a gap. Women, at least me, spent more effort on family and child than my husband. Especially when the child was young, you need to care more about things in the family. Still, it will, it does affect my work. Although you feel you did your own work and you finish what you should do, but it looks obvious that you ask for more time off. It is obvious and visible, colleagues know and managers are aware (Hu Xin)

Hu Xin suggests that pursuing a traditional female gender role has had a negative impact on her career. However, when she says 'at least me', perhaps, she is referring to other women who do not spend time with their children. It could be that she feels superior as she is a woman with her child, fulfilling her duties as a good mother. Hu Xin implies that even if she does all her work, having to take more time off work creates a negative impression and impacts on her career. This may relate to the bank's working culture that you have to go beyond your normal working hours to be successful; and colleagues may use this opportunity to promote a negative image of a woman who has time off. These women's comments on the negative impact of having children on their career suggest that there is a collectivist view on what women's role should be when they become a mother.

The issues around women's job rearrangement after maternity leaves are complicated and often discussed informally among the women who are of childbearing age. The following stories happened to the participants while they were dealing with job rearrangement after their maternity leaves.

Hu Xin discusses the problem of staffing and she provides some clues of stories regarding women's job arrangement after their maternity leave. Hu Xin highlights two 'rare' cases of women who had problems in job rearrangement after maternity leaves. She explains the problems in detail as 'their departments don't want them back, and they have nowhere to go'. She does not mind discussing these problems in detail and states they were simply the facts but she does not want to talk further about the *guanxi* between the two women and their managers that directly caused the problem. Culturally, Chinese people try to avoid exposing their

personal confrontations in public which is coherent with other Chinese characteristics such as harmony and collectivism on the surface. Hu Xin does not want to break the norm or the harmony at the work place by providing details or commenting on others' *guanxi* with their managers that influenced women's careers after maternity leave. This could be interpreted as her defending her right to tell me these incidents; therefore, potentially this is something she should not tell an outsider. Hu Xin uses 'their department' to replace 'their managers'. By saying that she avoids talking about the particular managers so she avoids expressing clearly that the problems were personal. Also, potentially she suggests this is a collective problem rather than an individual incident. Wu Ling is one of the women Hu Xin highlighted in respect to maternity leave and the following is her account of the events.

I came into retail banking when I came back work from my maternity leave […] I don't know what to say. I (.) I stayed at home for seven months; much longer than usual […] Normal maternity leave is 4 months. When I had my four-month leave, I asked the bank, the bank said there wasn't a suitable position for me. It was through my *guanxi* I asked side-ways, not formally […] Yes, you could call it privately. I contacted Hu Xin in HR, she said to me that I might be better off staying at home a bit longer. To me, this was better, […] Maternity leave, en (.) I took maternity leave. I think maternity leave affected my career for sure, but not my marriage […] There was a gap at work. (My position) had to be re-arranged, it was impossible to continue in the same post. The position won't be empty to wait for me for months. I stayed at home for 7 months ((laugh)). I still think it was too short. I should be off for at least a year. I wonder what happens in foreign countries. (Wu Ling)

It is not necessary that women continue to work in the same post in this bank after their maternity leaves for a variety of reasons. However, for Wu Ling to be rejected by her 'department' and have 'no place to go' is rare. Similar to Hu Xin, Wu Ling refers to the people she contacted as 'the bank' and therefore she is detaching herself from any personal relationship to the event. Wu Ling denies that maternity leave had any impact on her losing her previous post which is contradicted by her later comment that 'maternity leave affected my career for sure'. This contradiction is possibly created by the concept of *mianzi* as to admit that losing her previous post was because of her bad *guanxi* with her pervious manager is

personal and therefore makes her lose face. However, Wu Ling's suggestion that maternity leave affected her career is a women's problem, therefore it is acceptable to discuss it.

Wu Ling discusses in detail about how the department was having troubles so she tried to avoid talking about why she could not go back to her previous post before maternity leave. Her version of the event is contradicted by the 'facts' presented by Hu Xin. Although it is possible that there are different versions of this event according to different people, Hu Xin was involved in Wu Ling's *guanxi* in this incident. The potential reason for Wu Ling to tell her experience differently could again be her *mianzi* retaining strategy because admitting the 'facts' would make her less valued by me or others. This can further be interpreted as her either wanting to maintain the consistency of her image of being competent at work or not wanting to admit she was rejected by her 'department'. Maintaining her competent image could reflect Wu Ling's individualist value of personal achievement at work. She does not want to admit that she was rejected by her previous department, which could be interpreted as her collectivist value, and she prefers to be accepted rather than rejected by the group, and a broken relationship in any form is negative and could be considered a failure. In this incident, Wu Ling shows a mixture of collectivist and individualist values in order to maintain her *mianzi*.

On the one hand Wu Ling was unable to utilise the informal connection with her previous manager to keep her post, and on the other hand *guanxi* provides her with information after she goes back to work, and therefore helps her to avoid being relocated to any 'unsuitable' post. This could be understood as the collective action of women helping each other so good *guanxi* between colleagues normally encourages collectivist values. Wu Ling also describes how the child care tasks are divided between her and her husband. According to Wu Ling, her husband does nothing and she does everything. This could be seen as her emphasising her feminine values as she accepts a woman's role after she has a child. It appears that Wu Ling has never had 'a truly good' relationship with her current manager. It could be understood that when she shows a high degree of individualist and masculine values in work related issues it is not valued by some of the managers in higher positions in the bank. This is consistent with the senior management who praise and reward Peina's (P.131-132) collectivist values by giving her career advancement in the bank.

Wu Ling uses sick leave as a strategy to defend her position at work which gives her more time to seek or reinforce some new *guanxi* which enables her to get other positions that she thinks are equally suitable for her. However, there is no guarantee that her effort to get a suitable position through seeking or reinforcing *guanxi* would work. There is no information available about what variety of *guanxi* Wu Ling has, hence disclosing her *guanxi* is culturally unacceptable in the bank especially when it is an instrumental one. During this discussion, but excluded from the extract, Wu Ling explains that her school friend, who is a doctor, was able to supply her with a medical certificate to gain an additional three months' sick leave. Being able to provide medical proof for sick leave without being sick, Wu Ling demonstrates her understanding of the usefulness of the function of *guanxi* outside the bank: her *guanxi* with a doctor helped her in this incident. Wu Ling does this to defend her career in the bank and minimise the effect of bad *guanxi* with her manager after her maternity leave.

Perhaps Wu Ling's maternity leave provided an opportunity for her manager to 'un-tie' this bad *guanxi* by rejecting her return. Her experience supports Luo's (1997) argument that an individual inevitably faces *guanxi* dynamics in Chinese society. Although Fang Yuee also uses sick leave as a device to gain an appropriate position, her experience of job relocation is slightly different from Wu Ling's.

> I was only there for 2 months. I only just started to learn the work […] I had my maternity leave. I actually stayed at home for five and half months [...] because (.) I just didn't recover well, I guess it was because I'm old ((laugh)) […] ((laugh)) so I managed to have one more month time off. That was sick leave. The doctors recommended it, so, e, you know […] when I came back to work from maternity leave, I worked in the Post-settlements Supervision Department […] can I not talk about this? […] All the details are not clear. I just listened to HR, I just went wherever they wanted me to go. When I turned up, they told me to go to the Post-settlements Supervision Department. About the reasons, I don't know and I don't want to find out why […] I was in Post-settlements Supervision Department for about six months, then, why am I here? Again my manager informed me to move again, so I am here. I can't, I don't know the reasons. (Fang Yuee)

Similar to Wu Ling, Fang Yuee also uses 'sick leave' as a defending strategy when she informally acknowledges that she cannot retain her previous position after maternity leave. However unlike Wu Ling who admits her 'sick leave' is related to the struggle to get a 'suitable position', Fong Yuee claims that her sick leave is 'recommended' by the doctors because of her health issues. This shows she has less openness on this event than Wu Ling, perhaps because she does not trust me. At the same time, she feels very uncomfortable to talk about her job changes after maternity leave and she gives short answers, and laughs a lot to ease the tension.

Fang Yuee does not want to talk about her job changes after maternity leave. When I ask her to give a brief description of her job changes after maternity leave, she stresses that she cannot, and does not want to know the reasons why she cannot go back to the previous job and has another job change within six months. Fang Yuee's defensive attitude in the conversation suggests her knowledge about the events but she does not want to share this information with me. Other women such as Hu Xin comment on Fang Yuee's case that she is the typical example of a woman who struggled to find the right position after maternity leave because her *guanxi* was not powerful enough to get her where she wanted to be. Her job change after maternity leave potentially reflects her process to seek new *guanxi* or reinforce the old *guanxi* and eventually she settles in where she wants to be. Fang Yuee summarised her understanding of the importance of *guanxi* in one's career as a social resource that is one part of career competence.

For some, establishing good *guanxi* with other managers and even senior managers in the bank is the way women regain other managerial posts when they go back to work from maternity leave. Wu Ling and Fang Yuee take months of 'sick leave' to delay the time to go back because they have to wait for *guanxi* to work in their favour and avoid direct confrontation. In the above examples *guanxi* plays an important role in the two women's job re-arrangement after their maternity leave. Sometimes good *guanxi* provides important and informal information for women to find a suitable position in the bank. The suitable positions the women seek are only equal to their posts before they have their maternity leave. Therefore, good *guanxi* only ensures their 'survival' rather than helping them to progress in their career after the end of their

maternity leave. They do not want to discuss the situation when *guanxi* is bad or weak with their seniors.

Other women suggest that they are able to keep their position after maternity leave and it seems that maintaining good *guanxi* with their managers could protect them in job re-arrangement. The women in the bank show great understanding of why the bank sometimes has to move them away from their previous jobs. Both Wu Ling and Fang Yuee suggest that their positions 'have to' be filled, arguably this could be interpreted as their collectivist value that puts the employer's needs before theirs and defending their employer in front of an outsider. Or alternatively this is a part of their effort to maintain their *mianzi*.

In contrast, some other women suggest that job rearrangements to other positions are in their favour: they associate this with *guanxi* in a collectivist sense that according to Yang (1999) links *guanxi* with *renqing* (favour*)* and *mianzi* (face), *ganqing* (feeling) and *bao* (repay) in this context. The management in the bank takes care of women's needs for their family after they have children and therefore removes them from positions that are stressful and require long working hours. In the following extract Gou Ming expresses a positive experience after returning to work after maternity leave.

> I worked in so many different positions. First clerk in a branch, then the clearing house. Most of the time in my career I worked in retail banking, such as client manager, manager in retail banking in branches. I worked in the front line for the bank a lot. I have worked in a managerial position before. En later I had a baby and took maternity leave, so my position was gone when I finished my maternity leave. In reality, the jobs won't wait for you: positions get filled quickly. When I went back to work, I was offered a client manager, […] with the client manager's job you have to maintain the *guanx*i with clients, so unavoidably there are lots of *yingchou*[23] involved. So I went back to a clerk job in a branch: the job that you work for four days followed by two days off. It was the best for me. I could take care of my family. (Gao Ming)

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23 *Yingchou* means socialize, entertain, treat with courtesy

Gao Ming is given choices after maternity leave, and she is satisfied with the job re-arrangement with less responsibilities and she describes it as the 'best' for her at that time. This could reflect her acceptance of a degree of feminine and collectivist values that her priority is her family's needs for her to pursue the mother's role. Gao Ming argues that her job change event after maternity leave reflects the *renqingwei*[24] in her favour. Gao Ming suggests that the job re-arrangement positively stresses the humanistic and emotional elements of the *guanxi* in the bank's management. In a collectivist sense, the employer takes care of the women's needs after maternity leaves by giving them jobs with more time with their babies and families. However, it appears that the bank is not very encouraging of women having babies. Gao Ming is given choices between pursuing her mother's role with a lower status in the bank and maintaining her career progress at the cost of not fully fulfilling her role as a mother. It appears to be different in western countries where employers advertise jobs as maternity leave and temporary. The practice in the bank damages Gao Ming's career.

As shown in the previous conversation about Peina (P.131), Gao Ming presents the cultural and gender values that match what would be valued by the employer in the bank. Maybe this can explain why she is satisfied with her job rearrangement. Another employee Zhou Rong expresses her view directly on this, as she puts her family and child's needs over her own needs for a better career to accept a less advanced post. Zhou Rong worked as an assistant manager in a branch and she was in charge of developing corporate banking business before she took her maternity leave. After four months, when she came back to work, she was re-located to the Head Office and worked in loan management as a managerial employee.

> I had maternity leave I don't think it should affect women's careers (.) yeah it shouldn't have, but that was a special situation. More or less I was looked after, so they won't give you stressful or (.) to be honest what I have done was to just finish my seven, eight hours and leave the office. (Zhou Rong)

Changing from a stressful and demanding front line junior manager job to a managerial job Zhou Rong expresses her appreciation by saying 'I'm looked after'. Her assessment on how

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24 *Renqingwei* means the flavour of human kindness

women's jobs will be arranged reflects her acceptance of feminine values that women should do a less stressful job after their maternity leave and need to be 'looked after'. In doing so Zhou Rong presents herself with a degree of collectivist and feminine values. However, it is questionable whether a lower status in her career is really the result of being looked after by the management. Again, when Zhou Rong demonstrates gender attributes that are valued by the bank, she is in a comfortable situation to be able to accept what was arranged for her. Noticeably, Zhou Rong has made relatively good career progress afterwards while some of the other women made little career progress since their maternity leaves. As a middle manager, maybe she has to speak as one of the management according to her position in the bank.

Gao Ming and Zhou Rong speak positively about the job re-arrangement after their maternity leaves. In their version of the events, the humanistic and emotional element of the *guanxi* in the bank's management is fully appreciated. Job rearrangement for the women after their maternity leaves reflect *renqingwei* in the bank and it is in favour of women's needs after they become mothers. When these women and the bank's management share the same gender and cultural values, job rearrangement after maternity leave is acceptable. These women have fewer problems than the ones who do not share the same values with the bank's management.

Although some of the women cannot go back to their previous post in the bank, other women are able to keep their jobs. Among the women who are able to keep their jobs, they suggest that maintaining good *guanxi* with their colleagues is very important. The strong collectivist characteristics among colleagues work in women's favour in term of preserving their career progress. For example, Zhou Yi displays collectivist characteristics in her experience of maternity leave.

> Some positions have to be filled immediately. Someone comes to fill your place; you can only find somewhere else to go when you come back. You can't kick people away. In this industry, in product management there is no temporary worker to cover for you [...] I was lucky to be able to come back to the same position. At the time there were three of us doing the similar junior jobs. So when I took maternity leave, they covered for me. I did take the advantage of one hour less work every day when I first came back to work. (Zhou Yi)

Zhou Yi describes her career around her maternity leave as a post 'in products management' and as a 'junior' job. She assumed two possible reasons for women to lose their previous managerial positions: first some jobs have to be filled immediately, and 'you can't kick people away'. Second, there is no skilled temporary worker to cover the women's maternity leaves. Zhou Yi's assumption suggests her acceptance of collectivist and feminine values to some extent that the needs of the employer have to be put in front of hers, and also the harmony in the work place cannot be disturbed in any circumstances. She suggests that the current recruitment practice on temporary and skilled workers in China is not sufficient to cover and support women's maternity leave. Zhou Yi uses the word 'kick' to suggests the behaviour is rude or inappropriate.

Zhou Yi identifies her experience to maintain her position after maternity leave as being 'lucky', which implies it occurred by chance. However, she states that her co-workers covered her work load, and she did not indicate that her *guanxi* with her co-workers is the reason for her ability to keep her job. In reference to her use of the word 'lucky', it appears that her idea of '*bao*' (repay) is weak. However, in the Chinese context, it could be interpreted as her having *renqing* (favour) with her colleagues and for her colleagues, and they have to give her *mianzi* (face) to do her a favour. Although the dynamic between these cultural concepts is informal, these cultural concepts are respected by the management in the bank in Zhou Yi's case.

One of Zhou Yi's co-workers at the time, Zhou Yin, describes Zhou YI's maternity leave in the following extract:

> …we were crazily busy when she (Zhou Yi) wasn't here for four months. I only suffered because we always have quite good *guanxi*. I have to give her a bit of *mianzi*, I didn't get paid for doing extra. Of course, she showed appreciation. Maybe now she has forgotten already (Zhou Jin, Deputy Manager of Private Banking)

Zhou Jin was Zhou Yi's senior frontline manager at the time and he covered Zhou Yi's work because of their 'quite good *guanxi*'. The *guanxi* makes him obliged to give her *mianzi* to cover her work during her maternity leave. He provides free labour in the bank in order for Zhou Yi to keep her position, and associates *mianzi* with *guanxi* closely. Zhou Jin's description

can be understood in the local context that he follows the social norm of *renqing* to provide extra free labour to the bank in Zhou Yi's favour to enhance Zhou Yi's *mianzi* when they have a good *guanxi*.   It can also be interpreted as him showing a collectivist value orientation in his actions which is promoted by good *guanxi*.

Zhou Rong had co-workers to cover her work after she came back from maternity leave when she still needed to take care of her child.

> My manager at the time is a mother herself, she understands. Plus there wasn't a huge amount of work at that time. There were two of us, both of us were relaxed and we have good *guanxi* privately. She covered for me if I wasn't there. Now people are too *Jijiao*[25] in that office, I heard there are a couple of women who are difficult to work with. I spent a quite happy time then. (Zhou Rong)

Good *guanxi* with her co-workers creates flexibility at work for Zhou Rong, as a result she associates the experience with a 'happy time'. Culturally her relationship with co-workers could be understood as a relationship which shows strong collectivist values: colleagues in a team helping each other. However, as she points out when people 'have good *guanxi* privately', the collectivist action becomes easier to achieve. In contrast where there are people who are 'difficult to work with', the collective relationship between co-workers cannot be achieved. When co-workers do not share good *guanxi* they 'are too *jijiao*', calculating and comparing the amount of the work each of them is doing. It could be suggested that when people do not see themselves as in the same group, they start to seek fairness. This is coherent with Zhou Jin's indication of his low satisfaction over his *renqing* and *mianzi* dynamic with Zhou Yi. Friendship does contribute to good *guanxi* between colleagues. Although *guanxi* in the previous stories does not have to be associated with friendship, when colleagues do not get on there is definitely no *renqing* or *mianzi* dynamic between them.

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[25] *Jijao* means a person is fussy about trivial things - for example some people always compare how much work they have done with their colleagues.

6.3.1 Summary

Guanxi appears to have an essential role in these women's jobs. In some cases, women such as Wu Ling and Fang Yuee show a degree of rejection of the traditional gender role that put them in a family orientated position after maternity leave. When they do not want to make career sacrifices to accept the job arranged by the employer, they have to adapt their *guanxi* practices in the bank to protect their legitimate right to return to their work at an equal career progression stage. Therefore, it is evident that *guanxi* has a predominant role in their experiences. Bad *guanxi* with their managers is the reason identified by others as the only reason for them to lose their previous positions. However, their cases are rare in the bank. Some other women such as Gao Ming and Zhou Rong happily worked in less responsible or less advanced positions for a couple of years after their maternity leaves. These women may partially adapt to the traditional gender role that women's place is at home and they put families at a higher priority than their career. From their point of view, their job re-arrangement was in their favour and provided them full time jobs that enabled them to spend more time with their children. The employer and these women shared the same gender and cultural norms and there is a harmony between them regarding their job rearrangements. For example, Gao Ming felt her job after maternity leave was the 'best' for her and Zhong Rong described herself being 'looked after' at that 'special period of time'. From their point of view, the employer shows humanistic understanding of women's needs when they become mothers. There are women that returned to their positions in the bank after maternity leave. In comparison to the two rare cases, women retain their positions at work by some kind of arrangement with their co-workers. The co-workers covered these women's job voluntarily to help the women to maintain their previous positions and career progress. Good *guanxi* is essential, when the *renqing* (favour) and *mianzi* (face) dynamic works in these women's favour. Friendships with colleagues make the *guanxi* in the department even better, when this happens, women benefit from a collectivist work environment. The *guanxi, renqing* and *mianzi* between people are not fixed, it is a changing process when *guanxi* changes, *renqing* and *mianzi* dynamic also changes.

Both Zhou Rong and Gao Ming, who were satisfied and accepted their arranged jobs after maternity leave, have made good career progress a few years after they had their children. Their career experience may indicate some degree of change of the traditional gender and cultural norms in the bank with women given opportunities in careers when they are wives, mothers and daughters. However, for some women their maternity leave has a negative impact

on their career for a period of time. Also, according to Zhou Yi and Zhou Jin's stories, the dynamic with *guanxi* could change over time, and therefore the relations between people within *guanxi* could swing between an equity role and a *renqing* role. Therefore, the assumption of a Chinese social setting being one of unity is no longer adequate and the distinction between instrumental ties and mixed ties is blurring during the process of favour exchange.

These professional women are independent in their own career entry. The traditional gender values do not necessarily influence every woman's career entry but cultural values do. The women switch their cultural and gender values in the process of getting a career in banking. Therefore, the clear division between established cultural and gender roles can no longer reflect these women's cultural and gender value orientations during their career entry. These women managers are negotiating their own gender and cultural values in the process of their career. The concept of maintaining *mianzi* remains an important part of women's working culture that contributes to their changing cultural and gender values.

It is not easy for the women who work in operational posts to move to managerial jobs. Themes such as *guanxi* and *mianzi* play their roles in Fang Yuee and Hu Xin's job mobility within the bank. Loyalty, stability and silence are highly regarded qualities by the employer and Peina is promoted to middle management from an operational job potentially because she is quiet and keeps a low profile at all times. The women's cultural realities in their careers are individually constructed around their own circumstances and exceed the boundaries of a simple collectivist *vs* individualist division. How the participants want themselves to be seen as complicated and therefore the concept of *mianzi* is significant. Women define their own cultural identities through their career experiences without boundaries

In contrast to Peina's story, feminine characteristics are not valued highly in the bank when it comes to career advancement. Women managers, including the ones with young children, show career ambitions and autonomy in their career expectations. However, women such as Wu Ling may express their vision of careers according to their social surroundings and therefore sometimes appear contradictory. When women's career improvement is suppressed, they are unhappy at work, and they appear to struggle to express their cultural and gender values with consistency. Although this inconsistency could be caused by their personal

experiences, such as education, work experiences, and family situations, it appears in the study that what kind of values these women intend to adopt depends mainly on their self-concept about what is appropriate and what would be highly valued in a particular social setting; therefore, their cultural and gender values are changing processes which cannot be classified into a clear set of categories.

Chapter 5 and 6 have outlined the various difficulties that women have encountered working in the bank. These will be discussed in the following chapter where I summarise the main findings and the connection to the existing literature.

Chapter 7. Discussion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study which relate to the research questions I proposed previously and then I outline some conclusions based on the data. I first present my main findings, and then reflect on the limitations to my research and also the possible implications for managerial practices. Finally, I discuss the potential direction for future research on women managers' careers in China.

One significant aspect of women's careers that has emerged from this study is the importance that *guanxi* has in Chinese society and some authors (Child 2009, Warner and Goodall 2009) comment that 'human resource management' is fundamentally 'human relationship management' in China. Si et al. (2008) categorise the current Chinese economy as a market driven, *guanxi* based, and government controlled economy. The radical changes in the labour market and employment relations have not led to fundamental changes to the traditional *guanxi* based characteristics of Chinese society. Wright et al. (2002: 173) suggest that *guanxi* 'plays an important role in Chinese professional life'. It is almost impossible to investigate managers' careers in a Chinese context without discussing the role of *guanxi*. It is important to understand the characteristics of particularism (or closeness) and hierarchy in Chinese society in order to examine the impact of *guanxi* on women managers' careers. Hence one's position, gender and age all contribute to the hierarchical relationship according to Confucian relationalism. It is clear according to my research data that being Chinese, being women, being managers, working in a Chinese commercial bank have all impacted on the participants' career experiences. The female workforce is important in the Chinese economy, however the 'knowledge about these Chinese women's employment conditions in general and women's management careers in particular remains limited' (ibid: 112). Cooke (2005: 112) observes socialist China has achieved a level of equal opportunity for women in the past - however the recent economic and social reforms have disrupted this equality. In a recent study, Woodhams et al. (2014) further suggest that women in management in China are culturally distinctive and underrepresented in western business literature. Chinese women managers' careers therefore are too important not to discuss in relation to their gender and cultural experience.

7.2 Research Questions

This study was formulated from one research question and three sub questions. The sub questions contribute to answering the main research question and therefore I shall discuss the three sub questions first before moving onto the main research question.

7.2.1 What is the influence of traditional gender roles on women managers' careers?

The women in the bank occupy the lower ranks of management and they are slightly underrepresented in middle and seriously underrepresented in senior management. This reflects the broad gender inequality that is reported by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2015) that ranked China particularly low (101 among 142 countries) in the female-to-male ratio of 'legislators, senior officials and managers' in the world: women in China have a slim chance to work their way to the top jobs.

The participants in this study deny that they are disadvantaged as women in the bank's management team. These women managers suggest that the socialist state has liberated women and acted positively in gender equality: a quarter of them suggest there is no gender inequality in this modern corporation. More than half of the women never think about gender equality or have any negative experiences that they could think of regarding their gender; and the rest of them have not addressed this issue at all. It appears that for these women managers, there is no gender inequality in the bank or more generally there is no gender related inequality in their lives. The participants' view on gender equality in this study contradicts the finding in Woodhams et al. (2014: 13) study on Chinese women managers' careers. As they point out Chinese women managers were 'acutely aware of the barriers that they faced.' There are several potential reasons for this contradiction. Cooke (2005) argues that China's high female employment rate masks the central problem in women's employment in China that only a few women work in management. Cooke's suggestion may partially explain the participants' opinion on gender equality in China. In addition, the participants' managerial positions in the bank could also contribute to their understanding of the current gender equality in the labour market in China. They have achieved positions in management in banking in one of the most economically developed areas, and they are more likely to have higher economic status than the women managers from other industries in China. Therefore, this influences their views of gender equality and their views may not be representative of the opinions of other working

women from other industries or regions in China. Finally, the methodological difference in the studies may also cause a difference in the research findings. My participants expressed their views when they were asked to talk about how they got the job and what they have done in the bank as a part of an ethnographic study rather than a purposefully designed conversation concerning gender or gender equality. Thus, the discussions about gender equality in my study were naturally occurring.

The common understanding of Chinese traditional gender roles suggests that women should have feminine or *yin* values and be predominantly responsible for domestic tasks (Humana and Wu 1971, Mann 2000, Louie 2002, Adler 2006, He 2006, Woodhams et al. 2014). This has influenced the participants' decision to work in the banking industry and that is probably why the participants suggest that banking is a suitable job for women: some participants have explained that banking jobs are stable and therefore good for 'girls'. However, there is no consistency in their explanations of why banking is a women's job when some of them indicate typical masculine characteristic to compete with other candidates to show a high level of determination in order to get this 'women's job' in their career entry. For example, Hu Xin is very assertive to get a banking career. The participants appear to switch between *yin* and *yang* gender roles to justify their career choices and therefore the established description of gender roles as women being *yin* and men being *yang,* or one person's gender orientation can only be either *yin* or *yang*, are not reflected in this study. According to the data, for some women managers, preconceived notions of gender roles do not necessarily contribute to their career choices. Women's *yang* characteristics in career entry potentially reflect the level of competitiveness to get a banking job in China. As Zhao (2002) stresses employment opportunities are in short supply in the current Chinese labour market. Maybe market competition has promoted the so-called *yang* characteristics in the labour market and the women have to adapt to these changes in the Chinese labour market in order to get themselves the jobs they want.

However, there is a high degree of collectivist orientation among the participants in the belief that banking jobs are stable and that stability is desirable in women's career choices. None of the participants explain why stability is important for women; it is likely that the participants assume that there is a shared understanding that a stable job is better for the family life which

should be their responsibility. This indicates that these participants' views are largely restrained by the dominant gender order that values stability more for women than for men in their career because of their domestic responsibility even though this was not necessarily true in some of the participants' personal experiences. Therefore the women managers show some degree of acceptance of the established gender roles in making their career choice with occasional exceptions. The participants' views on banking jobs echo Zhao's (2002) study which finds that although banking jobs are no longer jobs for life, they are still one of the most stable jobs in China.

Both the female and male managers in the core business units (such as Corporate and Retail banking) show a high degree of masculine and collectivist values by rejecting newly recruited women in their divisions. There are strong masculine or *yang* values among both female and male middle managers in the bank that assume women are somehow less suitable to work in their departments. Both women and men managers in the bank accept the gender stereotyping that women are less competent, less intelligent and more 'trouble' at work. Women managers in the bank sometimes stereotype women, including themselves. For example, one of the participants implies that women are not quick to forgive, superficial, intolerant and less rational and are therefore difficult. Gender stereotyping in core business units potentially has a negative impact on women's career development because of the reward system in the bank (see page 92). The managers' functions or roles in the bank do matter when it comes to economic reward and career development. Therefore, managerial staff in core business units are likely to have more opportunities to develop than the ones in operations and administration.

The women managers were negotiating their own understanding of gender identities in the bank's work environment, defining their own understanding of *yin* and *yang* characteristics at work which may or may not match the established gender roles. They suggest that qualities that are not obviously associated with strong work performance, such as being nice and friendly, having a sense of humour and writing poems, are not their beliefs of what a leader's qualities should be. Women managers' imagination of a senior manager in the bank is someone serious and tough. These women's projection of what makes a competent leader in the bank potentially reflects beliefs in the cultural and gender traits that senior managers should have. *Yin* characteristics are perhaps not valued highly in the bank when it comes to career

advancement. The participants' views on an ideal leader reflect traditional values determining that people with *yin* qualities are more suitable for supportive roles than the people with *yang* qualities and perhaps this is why Triandis (1989) and Cole (1998) suggest that women have a supportive position to men in traditional Chinese culture. This could be one explanation of why Chinese women who are restrained by feminine values have fewer opportunities for career advancement to senior level. Interestingly, the women managers' discussion on their leader reflect the six personal characteristics that senior management has promoted in the bank since 2011(see page 96 Culture). These six characteristics are magnanimous, stately, generous, enthusiastic, masculine and intelligent which all have strong connection with *yang* characteristics in its original expression in Chinese. There is a clear *yang* ideology in the bank's management philosophy and organizational culture. It is likely that a lack of these *yang* characteristics could be a barrier for career development for both women and men managers in the bank.

However, *yang* characteristics are not necessarily always acceptable at all levels of management. For instance, one middle manager (Peina) and a few junior manager participants describe themselves as totally opposite from a masculine manager. Their career development is possibly related to the bank requiring some degree of loyalty and obedience from its managers especially in operational or lower positions in business units which support the core business units. Which department and what position the women managers work in seem important for them to display certain gender characteristics in order to be promoted to managerial positions. There is not a fixed gender description in the bank for women's career advancement but knowing one's own position in the bank appears to be the key to a managerial career. When women managers' career ambitions are suppressed, they show resilience and rebelliousness against their senior managers, but they usually express themselves indirectly and subtly because maintaining harmonious working relations with their superiors is essential. Morris et al. (2008) suggest that Chinese workplace relations are based on familial norms, and therefore it is no surprise that harmony should be carefully maintained even at the expense of some individual cost in order to sustain the unified image of the bank. Kim (2004) argues that culture is as important as gender in women employees' career in Korea which is also a country influenced deeply by a Confucian culture. Moreover, this Confucius influenced characteristic is further evidenced in the way the country is managed. The government calls its political

system 'consociational democracy[26]' rather than 'totalitarian'. Therefore, it is hard to say whether this is the women manager's only issue in the bank or not without further investigation.

Bian (1997) suggests that under market competition, Chinese women in certain industries such as finance, especially those who are managers and professional, face work-life conflict because of their family commitments. Woodhams et al. (2014) also suggest that women managers' family obligations have restrained their career in China. However, none of the participants in the study explicitly admit that there is direct conflict between their career and their families. This could be their strategy to maintain their *mianzi* (face) as professional career women who are competent to pursue both their roles at home and at work. Since some authors have suggested that Chinese women have no position to negotiate their household duties (Lam 1993, Chan and Leong 1994, Yukongdi and Benson 2013) it could also be related to what Croll (1978) called the ancient and honourable Chinese strategy to discreetly keep quiet about problems in front of others. However, the unit of family life the participants understand may be different from the ones that are constructed in other cultural contexts. For most of these women managers the idea of 'family' includes their parents and their husbands' parents, and therefore they are likely to shift their domestic tasks and even partial parent responsibilities to the older generations. Furthermore, the use of domestic workers appears to be popular among the participants in this study. In this sense, to some degree, their work-life conflict is different from women in other social contexts. Although the women suggest that work life balance is not conflicted in their current position they do suggest it affects their career advancement. Some women managers' potential to achieve further career expectations has a cost on their families.

Confident women managers in this study have rejected the stereotypical gender role that a woman's place is in the family to some degree; and instead their families or extended families devote considerably more time and effort to their families and children in order to support these women managers' careers. These women are negotiating their gender role between their managerial career and their family to find a balance by utilizing their families' collective resources and by doing so neither radically rejecting the established gender roles nor accepting

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[26] See Lijphart. (1969).

them. These women managers' earning power may contribute to their gender role construction as money is important to maintain the families' lifestyles. And also as Leong et al. (2015) conclude the higher earners tend to do less housework in the Chinese family, and therefore it is likely these women managers, as the higher earner in their family, do less housework while most of the women in China earn less than men and do more housework than them. However, some participants admit there are limited opportunities for them to develop their career further. This might be because there is a slim chance for them to work their way to the top in this bank because of the bank's strong *yang* management philosophy which maintains the established gender order and therefore restricts their career progression. Or alternatively their career development is still constrained by their families even though their families are supportive. This may be because when women managers do not follow gender roles and collective cultural norms they possibly face internal conflict (Woodhams et al. 2014) and therefore their further career development becomes complicated.

Although it is questionable, some authors (Casey and Alach 2004, Russell et al. 2009) suggest that part-time, flexible or temporary work can improve women's work-life balance. For most of the women managers in this study, part-time, flexible or temporary work is not an option as the bank has no policy to offer these kinds of jobs in any position. It has been suggested that the absence of part-time work is one of the predominant barriers to women's equality in the Chinese economy (World Economic Forum 2014). Maybe this is because as Beauregard and Henry (2009) and Lyness and Judiesch (2008) suggest flexible working and part-time work are not economically beneficial for firms. However, one women manager in the study suggested that in the current Chinese labour market there is a lack of skilled temporary workers to cover women managers' banking work and therefore it is impossible for women to have flexibility in their managerial jobs. The lack of skilled professional temporary workers in the local labour market and the lack of opportunities to access flexible, part time and temporary work in the bank damages women managers' career in situations such as during their maternity leave. Some authors (Warren 2004, Russell et al. 2009) have argued that apart from work and life, women also need to balance their financial security and satisfaction from social life which is related to their social and financial status. Arguably on many occasions most of the women managers in the study do not necessarily want to work part-time as the majority of them are the main breadwinners in their families.

There is one exceptional case in the bank with one woman manager who had worked part-time after a short maternity leave; and the details of her circumstance were not disclosed in this study. However, it is speculated that her very well connected family and her strong *guanxi* with her superior assisted her to gain part time employment. It appears that the bank has one rule for this particular women manager and another rule for other employees. Who is entitled to work flexibly in the bank may need further investigation: it seems probable that *guanxi* may contribute to women's flexible work conditions in the bank.

Leong et al. (2015) suggest that in current Chinese society, if a couple are both employed usually men earn more than women. It is significant that there are women managers in the bank who are the sole earners in their family. For women to be the sole earner who takes care of their families financially appears to be revolutionary because according to traditional gender roles in China women's primary role is in the family. The solo earner who openly discussed this matter in this study, Zhu Ke (p.147), appears to be controlling as she plans all her family members' needs for them and her career expectations are also related to her husbands' career expectations and their children. This shows some degree of collectivist values as family is considered by these women as one unit but strikingly with them at the top of their families. However, it is highly likely that these women manager's economic power at home has changed their traditional gender role dramatically in their families: when women are the sole earner to support their family, they are in control and dominate. It would have been interesting to examine these working women's family life by observing them with their families, though this was outside the scope of this study.

Pursuing a traditional female gender role to become a mother has had a negative impact on women managers' career in the bank. The bank's working culture is that employees, and especially managers, have to go beyond their normal working hours to be successful. Therefore the women who have time off or cannot work overtime because of their children have a slim opportunity to be successful in their career. The majority of the participants suggest that having children affects women's prospects for promotion. Although not all the women managers agree, there is a collectivist view on what women's role should be when they become a mother. This is that women should accept as their traditional gender role to deal with domestic and child care duties, and put their career on hold once they become mothers. This collective view

on women's motherhood duties appears to corroborate Woodhams et al.'s (2014) description of the majority of the Chinese women managers in their study's acceptance of feminine values so that they fit their careers around their families. However, there are an equal number of women managers in my study who reject this collectivist view of women managers' motherhood duties even though that is a shared view between the management and some of the other women managers. For the women who reject this collectivist view (such as Wu Ling), they seem to have not made as much career progress as they had expected. Some of the women managers (such as Zhou Rong) have adopted the collective *yin* values temporarily to put their career on hold to support their families' needs when their children were very young and made career progress later and challenge *yin* values. There is no consistency to these women's gender values in their motherhood duties and their career: it appears that the gender values of these managers could change when their personal circumstance changes. It is hard to distinguish whether women adopt or reject the management philosophy or they adopt or reject the traditional gender roles in relation to their motherhood duties. A two dimensional taxonomy that separates women into 'adopting feminine values' and 'rejecting feminine values' (Woodhams et al. 2014) may be able to classify the variety of career orientations in women managers in one particular study; however it is not sufficient in terms of capturing and explaining the dynamic and complicated Chinese women managers' career orientations in this bank. Women's gender values appear to be a dynamic process, changing according to their personal circumstances in this study.

This bank's 'humanistic' management culture towards women managers' job rearrangement after their maternity leave reflect the Confucian management culture: employer and employee relations should emphasize their commonality and harmony. This is because family relations are the model, foundation and basis of non-family relations in the Confucian tradition (Bond and Hwang 1986, Shaffer et al. 2000). It is obvious that some women managers in the bank possibly maintain their managerial career progress at the cost of not fully fulfilling their roles as mothers, daughters and wives. When these women and the bank's management share the same gender and cultural values, the events of their job rearrangement after maternity leave are acceptable and less problematic. Some authors (Korabik 1994, Cooke 2005, Cooke 2010) suggest that women's reduced time at work reduced their career opportunities, and therefore the lower statuses in careers for women managers are a consequence of this aim for commonality and harmony in the bank.

In conclusion the established view on Chinese gender norms that women are *yin* and men are *yang*, or an individual can only be either *yin* or *yang*, do not reflect the participants' changing gender positions on their own career in this study. The participants are largely restrained by the dominant gender order that suggests that banking jobs are women's jobs because of the jobs' stability. Women managers show some degree of acceptance of the established view on Chinese gender roles in making their career choices. However when prompted by competition in the labour market some of the women managers display strong *yang* characteristics in their career entry to the banking industry. Although in general *yin* characteristics are not highly valued in career advancement in the bank because of the strong *yang* management philosophy and organizational culture, there is still no 'correct' gender characteristics in the bank to help women managers to achieve further career advancement because of their different roles in the bank.

Though they deny it, some women managers experience work-life conflict because the potential to achieve further career expectations has a cost on their time spent with their families. The lack of skilled professional temporary workers in the local labour market and the lack of opportunities to access flexible, part time and temporary work in the bank may contribute to the inequality in women managers' careers on occasions such as during their maternity leave. Although not all the women managers agree, there is a collectivist view shared between the management and some of the women managers in the bank that women should accept their motherhood duties to deal with domestic and child care tasks when they become mothers, and put their careers on hold. It is striking that some of the women managers display inconsistent gender values in their career development after they become mothers. Therefore, it is hard to distinguish whether these women reject or adopt the management philosophy or reject or adopt the gender roles in their job rearrangement after maternity leaves. A two-dimensional gender role classification to classify Chinese women managers' career orientation into either accepting the feminine gender role or accepting the masculine gender role appears to be insufficient to represent the Chinese women managers' career orientation in relation to their gender values in this study as some of the participants' gender roles are constantly changing according to their personal circumstances. Perhaps more significant in women's careers in the bank is *guanxi* and traditional values which are discussed in the second research sub-question.

7.2.2 What is the influence of *guanxi* and traditional cultural norms on women managers' careers?

When banking became one of the most popular jobs in the labour market (Zhao et al. 2012), getting a job in this bank became extremely difficult and highly competitive, and banks were in a good position to pick and choose employees. It is not necessarily true, but Luo (2008) and Li (2011) suggest *guanxi* and corruption are sometimes closely linked, and therefore linking one's career with *guanxi* is likely to be associated with negative meanings in the bank. In addition, the informal characteristic of *guanxi* practice in the society (Chen et al. 2004) and the sensitivity of using informal *guanxi* in a formal organizational context make research on *guanxi*'s influence on women's careers difficult. Some of the women managers deny or distance themselves from the influence of *guanxi* in their careers to defend their professional competencies and capabilities that are promoted by a western–influenced ideology of professionalism. However, women's cultural and professional values are interwoven through *guanxi* to influence their career. There are a variety of cultural values or institutional changes that influence how women understand the role of *guanxi* in their careers.

Recruitment policy is a sensitive issue in the bank because of its involvement in recruitment and other HR practices such as job allocation and promotion. *Guanxi* can sometimes overrule the formal recruitment process in the bank. Some of the participants criticize the role of *guanxi* in the bank's HR practice by associating *guanxihu* (the candidates who get a job because of their *guanxi*) with incompetence and unfairness in the bank but they do not totally reject the use of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices in the bank. Instead the participants suggest that *guanxi*'s function should be restrained in recruitment in order to recruit people by their merits as well as their *guanxi* in order to benefit the bank's business. This reflects their partial acceptance of the established views on traditional and collectivist values that acknowledge the importance of interpersonal relationships, harmony and their function to business success in China.

In addition, there is interesting information on the role of the CPC in the bank. The CPC committee has the highest power in the bank. The state controlled history of the bank, the CPC's remaining power of appointing senior management in the bank and the recent CPC School's leadership training for the management in the bank (see page 85 Corporation) all indicate the authority of the CPC in the bank. CPC membership potentially provides graduates better access to *guanxi* and therefore becomes useful in their career entry to the bank.

Candidates without CPC membership may be discriminated against in recruitment and therefore arguably political status still matters, at least for some, in an individual's career in the bank. Senior managers in Chinese commercial banks could be transferred from one bank to other banks by the state (Zhang 2004) so it is no surprise that CPC membership may give the CPC member candidates an advantage over others as the CPC seems still relevant in the management decisions in the former state owned banks. As a very distinctive feature, the senior management of commercial banks' appointment in China has caused some confusion. Senior managers have double duties: both as a CPC member to show loyalty to the Party and to be the senior managers of the banks to pursue their bank's commercial interests and keep them confidential. It is hard to assess the impact and the cost and benefit of this distinctive management feature on banks' business and management.

Alston (1989) summarises *guanxi* as one form of Asian values that promotes crony capitalism and Fan (2002), Khatri et al. (2006), Leung et al. (2008) and Luo (2008) link *guanxi* with corruption and demoralization in Chinese society. Chen et al. (2004) point out that *guanxi* practices in HRM are the basis of personal selection, performance appraisal and reward allocation in Chinese context. The cronyist and favouritist element of *guanxi* practices in the bank is clearly visible and jobs have to be given to those who the management want so there is an element of ethical abuse in the bank which has been recognised in other contexts (Ang and Leong 2000, Dunfee and Warren 2001, Snell and Tseng 2002). However, the bank's pay and reward system (see page 92 Pay and Reward) may purposefully be designed to minimise senior managers' corruption by detaching their financial interest from the bank's business. Still *guanxi* encourages little justice in the bank's HR practices which reflects the wider social phenomenon that Chinese young people live in a *pindie* (competing daddies) era and having a powerful 'daddy' is more important than personal competences for young Chinese people to get a job. Young employees in the bank without *guanxi* are treated unfairly in job allocation and promotion. This could be the industry's characteristic that the bank's primary role is dealing with money and as a modern corporation the bank's priority is be able to pursue its role of making profits. When 'daddies' can bring benefit and profits for the bank, fairness has no place in the bank's business. However, 'daddies' *guanxi* is not fixed, it changes when circumstances change so sometimes 'daddies' can help them to get banking jobs but cannot help them further their career in the bank. The banking industry, worldwide by its nature, prioritizes profit making. It is questionable that *guanxi* only exists in Chinese banks though

the legal system and supervision system development in some countries may reduce the influence of *guanxi* more than in China.

This might create unfairness in employees' promotions and potentially damages motivation in the whole workforce and encourages employees to emphasise their *guanxi* rather than their competences and creates unfavourable job mobility in the bank. Employees with no *guanxi* in this bank may seek career progress by changing employers, while other women managers in the bank have identified *guanxi* as one of the personal resources that supports advancement in their careers. The management can easily justify their positions in using *guanxi* as it is a process of finding a solution for the business rather than to benefit these managers personally. Arguably, it is hard to determine if these managers get personal benefit from their *guanxi* practice in the bank because of the informal and discreet nature of *guanxi* in Chinese society (Chen et al. 2013). It is possible to conclude that *guanxi* is unethical in the bank's recruitment and promotion practices when it only benefits the privileged ones even though favouritism in the bank is not necessarily only based on *guanxi*.

A university education background is important for graduates who are seeking a banking career in the current labour market. The result from this kind of recruitment policy is that it improves staff educational levels in the bank. However, a significant number of graduates compete to do clerk jobs which require limited knowledge from university level education. This shows the intensive competition for the young generation in the Chinese labour market. As Li et al (2014) argue there has been a sharp increase in the percentage of university graduates who cannot find jobs since the expansion of higher education in China in 1999. This also indicates the uneven distribution of social, economic and human resources across industries and helps to explain why qualified job seekers are concentrated in banking and finance. This leads to the trend that higher education is mainly career targeted, especially in social sciences. The autonomy graduates show in their career choices is seriously doubtable in Chinese society because of this. Families appear to have a direct role in people's career choices, influencing these by influencing their educational choices, therefore the level of autonomy reflected in people's career choices is limited.

The basis of *guanxi* can be formed through a range of shared social identities such as school friends, colleagues or political party memberships in Chinese society (Tsui et al. 1992, Tsui and Farh 1997). The current recruitment practices in the banks of recruiting students from banking related subjects also encourage nepotism and the *guanxi* network in the industry. This is because, as many of the participants suggest, their school friends are likely to work in similar industries and therefore they give assistance to each other. The majority of the women managers suggest their friends work in finance, accounting and banking because they studied banking and finance related subjects in universities which naturally lead them to have a similar career. Job mobility in the industry is difficult to assess according to the information available because banking employees probably change their employment through their *guanxi* in the industry rather than through normal recruitment processes. Thus, the current age limit (under 35) professional recruitment practice (see page 100) potentially has promoted discrimination against bank employees who are over 35 and have little *guanxi* in this industry.

Culturally, Chinese people have a long-standing tradition to avoid exposing their personal problems such confrontations in public which is consistent with other Chinese characteristics such as harmony and collectivism. No participants want to break the norm or the harmony in the work place by providing details or commenting directly on their *guanxi* with their superiors that influences their careers, and instead discuss other people's *guanxi* and their careers. Disclosing any participants' *guanxi* is culturally unacceptable in the bank especially when it is an instrumental one, a weak one or a bad one. However, good *guanxi* between colleagues normally has an element of friendship which encourages collectivist values and benefits and protects participants' careers. As Su and Littlefield (2001) point out *guanxi* between family and friends is influenced by Confucian relationalism which is a legitimate everyday activity. When women apply it well in the bank, this variety of *guanxi* benefits their careera by providing some flexibility at work, protecting women's career progress during their maternity leave, promoting collectivist behaviour and motivating other employees' work and therefore it should be encouraged. Noticeably, even though the dynamic of *guanxi* practice between colleagues is informal, activities such as covering each other's work load are overlooked by the management in the bank. This suggest the reciprocal role obligations in *guanxi* (Farh and Cheng 2000) between colleagues are widely understood and respected in a formal work environment. The findings in my study show the complexity of *guanxi* dynamics between employees in the bank which arguably differs from an earlier study in Chinese banking

employees that suggests Chinese bank employees were likely to make instrumental exchanges with their superiors (Morris et al. 2008).

The women managers rarely make their career choices in banking based on their personal interests, personalities, or enjoyment: though occasionally participants show strong desire to have a banking career. The women managers seek stability, money and benefit, social status, respect, and achievement through their careers in banking. According to the women managers in this study they make career choices for practical reasons. Women's earning power as managers in the bank leads to liberation for them but at the same time it puts much more pressure on these women. Most of the time, these women have to neglect their personal interests, personalities, or enjoyment to concentrate on practical aspects. This reflects their adoption of the established views on collectivist characteristics as their career choices have to serve the purpose of supporting them to pursue their roles as mothers, wives and daughters in their families. Research from other cultures - for instance Russell et al (2009) and Warren (2004) - points out that women need to balance their lives between family, employment, financial security and leisure. Although women's lives are not only divided between family and work, the leisure part of the participants' lives is almost completely missing in this study. The participants were asked to describe their typical day and typical week, but they did not mention their leisure activities at all.

It is also common for the women managers to seek money, social recognition and status, and a sense of success. Following rapid economic, technological and social development, materialism has become popular in China and possibly overshadows the traditional cultural characteristics as people more openly pursue money in their career choices and some of the women managers in the study sought a banking career because they wanted a well-paid job. The women managers are willing to strive for career progression. For the middle managers, some constantly try to find 'a balance' between career progress and family responsibilities. Some junior managers are motivated by materialist and collectivist values with the career promise to be paid well in order to support their children's needs, but others are motivated by better career opportunities somewhere else. Stability and security sometimes are issues for women managers. These women managers do not emphasise post-materialist values, such as 'freedom, self-expression and quality of life' (Leung 2012: 19), despite their relatively high

education level and high income. Maintaining their costly lifestyles, provide their children with the best education that money can buy, and care for the elderly may be the reasons why some of these women managers show few post-materialist values. The lack of social welfare contributes to the reasons for some of them to retain materialist values, such as 'emphasizing economic and physical security' (ibid). These women's independent positions in the economy, such as financial independence and potential higher earning power, reflect, to some degree, the decline of Confucian male dominated culture that Mann (2000) suggests has occurred in China. However, at the same time they appear to show an orientation towards the Confucian ideals of the collective needs of their families (Peng 2010). It is hard to ascertain to what extent these women managers accept or reject the Confucianist description of culture. As Peng (2010) points out Confucianism's positioning of differences between women and men is complicated and cannot be simplified to equal the description of gender inequality in other cultural contexts because the gender positioning differences could be dynamic. According to this idea, gender position in Chinese society is not a fixed hierarchy but a dynamic system and maybe this is the reason that women managers in this study deny their gender inequality experiences in their work and lives because they have the potential to be in a superior gender position in their work and lives.

It is hard to imagine that women managers in this study would have discussed their career the same way as Chinese women managers twenty years ago, and their career orientations are reflective of social changes in Chinese society. Gamble and Tian (2015) suggest that homogeneity is lower in the economically developed areas than the economically developing areas in China. Many women managers in this study are more willing to express their thoughts on their career experiences which are sometimes closer to the established individualist values. This to some degree echoes Ralston et al's (2014) and Yan's (2009) findings that individualism could be increasing and such a trend is likely to be marked in more economically developed parts of China.

Some authors (Wei 2011, Attané 2012) suggest that women are less likely to be occupied in well-paid professions or sectors in the current Chinese labour market after the market reform. The professional women in this study are also joining professional men to seek *mianzi* (face) through their career. *Mianzi* signifies an individual's social position and prestige in Chinese

society (Hwang 2012) and some (Wong et al. 2007) suggest *mianzi* is one of the variables in analysing *guanxi*. It could be argued that the women managers in banking seeking social prestige and position through career choices indicates the liberation of Chinese professional women, as it is possible that they are more visible and respected in society because of their economic independence and occupation. The women managers' desire for recognition and competence in career entry also reflect these women's efforts to be respected and recognized in the banking industry in China. This also shows that Chinese women managers are seeking self-fulfilment through their career choices. This indicates social change in this area of China as the women managers emphasise their personal competences and capabilities in their careers even though modesty is often associated with Chinese people and especially with Chinese women.

Culture clearly influences the women managers' views on their career despite the diverse discussions on this. Some of them show clear collectivist values in their career orientations and others indicate a hybridity of individualism and collectivism. Predominantly the women managers in the study still selectively show many Confucianist cultural values and there is no evidence of the women managers radically rejecting collectivist cultural values in all aspects of their career. So as Triandis (1995) suggests, the essentialist view of assuming China's traditional culture as a collective one needs to be broadened as there is cultural diversity among Chinese people. To recognize cultural changes as well as heterogeneity is important in research on professional women in the financial industry in China and important in this study as Moore (2005: 361) argues there is only a 'grain of truth' in seeing Chinese culture as collectivist.

Interestingly, some of the participants appear to relate tradition to loyalty to their employer, low job mobility, and the need for job security. In this way, they suggest that high level job mobility is modern. Thus, seeking stability in women's careers could be culturally determined rather than an individual choice. The participants' understanding of modernity at work may be associated directly with their idea of the western description of work values with individual ambitions, achievement and success valued higher than job security or stability. The participants' career ambitions reflect their desire for social recognition, and also to some degree their rejection of traditional characteristics such as low self-esteem and the belief in a job for life. Other participants perceive the idea of 'tradition' as a process of negotiation which is

difficult to understand using established criteria. This is possibly because these women managers have direct and indirect exposure to other cultures. Leung (2012: 13) suggests that employees' behaviour in Chinese organizations can be understood through both traditional Chinese cultural and contemporary social forces. The majority of the women managers' responses were more western when primed with career and work related incentives and more Chinese when primed with family and children related incentives. This supports Hong et al.'s (2000) study in Hong Kong that individuals may harbour different cultural orientations which can be activated in different social contexts. Culture can be fluid and dynamic in influencing the women managers' responses, and this is evident in the participants' orientation to a collectivist culture which influences their working practices.

The women in the bank show a greater understanding of why the bank sometimes has to sacrifice their careers in order for business to run smoothly, arguably this could be interpreted as their adoption of the established collectivist value that put the employer's needs before their own and defending their employer in front of an outsider. Even the participants who are not satisfied with their current career or work conditions show great commitment to their bank as many of them believe that the bank's strong performance could lead to personal success in their careers. This is evident in some studies, for instance one suggests that employees show a strong commitment to their employers in Confucianist culture (Zhu and Yao 2009).

Women's cultural and professional values are interwoven with *guanxi* to influence their careers. Promoted by a western–influenced ideology of professionalism, some of the women managers deny or distance themselves from the influence of *guanxi* in their career to defend their professional competencies and capabilities. The industry's characteristics are that the primary role of banks is dealing with money and as a modern corporation to maximise profit, and therefore ethical concerns could be neglected on some occasions. Some of the participants criticize the role of *guanxi* in the bank's HR practice by associating *guanxihu* with incompetence and unfairness. However, they have not totally rejected the use of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices in the bank. Instead the participants suggest restraining *guanxi*'s function in the recruitment in order to recruit some people with merit to ensure the bank's function. Current recruitment practices in banking encourage nepotism and the *guanxi* network in the industry. The banking employees probably change their employment through their *guanxi*

networks in the industry rather than through official recruitment processes. As a social practice, *guanxi* in this bank's recruitment and promotion processes benefits a few employees at the expense of many others by damaging the motivation in the whole workforce and creating unfavourable job mobility.

However, there is *guanxi* in the bank which is similar to the *guanxi* between family and friends that is influenced by Confucian relationalism and is regarded as a legitimate everyday activity (Su and Littlefield 2001). When the women managers practice this sort of *guanxi* in the bank, *guanxi* benefits their careers by providing some flexibility at work, protecting their career progress in their maternity leave, promoting collectivist behaviour and motivating other employees' work. Therefore, this provides women managers with a variety of freedoms similar to part-time, flexible work on an informal basis. This suggests the reciprocal role obligations in *guanxi* (Farh and Cheng 2000) between colleagues are widely understood and respected in a formal work environment, though there is no trace of any official documents to record such events. *Guanxi* unavoidably becomes a central theme of the employees' careers in banking under this non-transparent recruitment policy and unsupportive work arrangements towards women's motherhood duties.

These women managers' career values reflect social changes in the Chinese society. The established collectivist and individualist division cannot fully capture and explain the diverse cultural norms among the participants in this study: the women managers in this study cannot be classified into essentialist categories such as women managers from a 'highly gendered' and 'collectivist culture' (Woodhams et al. 2014). The notion of the collectivist Chinese people is not evident as a problem in my study but the potential problem is the ascription of collectivist Chinese cultural characteristics in the established literature (for example see Triandis 1995, 2004). There is clear evidence in the study that a person's cultural characteristics are individually realized. The women managers in this study have their own culture and this culture is characterized differently according not only to their nationality but also their personal paths which are a dynamic process in their careers and everyday lives. By ascribing a collectivist Chinese culture characteristics to the Chinese women managers there is a danger of essentializing them into an imagined ideological group. Therefore, a close investigation of collectivist characteristics and arguing that these will marginalize or exclude women from

career development in management careers in the Chinese context is problematic if this has been done without a work context. For example, Woodhams et al (2014: 15) suggest Chinese women managers' collectivist cultural characteristics are barriers to their careers and this problem could be solved by enhancing these women's skills in a way suitable for the people with collectivist characteristics; and 'removing gendered assumptions among senior managers who have influence over their career' according to their collectivist values. However, this would not be sufficient to solve the problem the authors raise: collectivist characteristics are negative for women's career advancement in China and the majority of Chinese women managers have collectivist characteristics. I argue that this perception of difference and its solutions are the product of a western ideology of superiority, *othering* Chinese women and marginalising them into a group with imagined negative characteristics such as collectivism in their career development. The collectivist value in the bank has preserved some women's career progress during their maternity leaves and has provided the women managers with flexibility at work on an informal basis, therefore these managers' collectivist values sometimes have a positive impact on the women managers' careers in the bank. Further issues that affect women's managers' career are their age, education and their need for economic stability.

7.2.3 What is the influence of age, education and economic motivations on women's career?

There is no official legal restraint or consequence on employers' age discrimination in recruitment in China. It is common practice in the banking industry to recruit experienced employees under 35 years old. Banking employees over 35 have much less job mobility than younger people in the banking industry through a formal recruitment process. This recruitment policy encourages banking employees with long work experience and who are over 35 to change employers in the industry through their *guanxi* and for most of them '*houmen*' (back gate) is the way to better employment opportunities in the banking industry. Although this is an obviously discriminatory recruitment policy, there is no concern regarding the ageism in recruitment among the participants in this study. This is because the employees who are over 35 possibly have to build their *guanxi* network to defend their rights for job mobility and they adapt to this environment. It is possible that the bank employees who are over 35 and have limited *guanxi* are trapped in their current employment. *Guanxi* is discussed extensively as one form of resource and capability by the women managers in their 30s in relation to their career progress. This appears to contradict Huang (2008) who suggests *guanxi* has little

relevance in recruitment in non-state sector corporations, though the state-owned history of the bank and the shortage of banking jobs in the labour market may contribute to *guanxi*'s role in recruitment. It is possible that age discrimination, which potentially promotes *guanxi* networks among banking employees, could be limited by increasing vacancies in the banking industry and development in China's legal system.

Bu and Roy (2008) suggest that women managers are reluctant to socialize with the opposite sex and both women and men managers are reluctant to include middle-aged or older women in their career success networks (CSN) (see page 44). Ibarra (1992, 1997) suggests that the majority of both men and women managers form CSN ties with men. Middle-aged or older women professionals appear generally not well accepted in CSN in China. There is little direct evidence in this study to show middle-aged or older women's *guanxi* is related to their age. As discussed in the literature, Chinese women professionals experience age discrimination in retirement policies as they have to retire earlier than their male counterparts that leads to their disadvantage in career advancement (Cooke 2005, 2013, Manion 2014). Therefore, Chinese retirement policy and the bank's recruitment policy make women professionals' career shorter than men's and restrains their job mobility. However, when women employees become 'old' (late thirties), sometimes the bank's management 'looks after' them by giving them managerial jobs in the bank. As according to reciprocal role obligations (Farh and Cheng 2000), the management are supposed to provide holistic consideration when the employees show loyalty, 'old' women employees' loyalty will be rewarded by the bank. This potentially creates a new form of issue in the bank for the young employees, as they have less opportunity for career progress because some of the 'older' women take over the managerial positions in the bank (see page 100 Recruitment).

Most of the participants suggest that their choice of education logically led them to the banking or finance career. It appears in this group that their education is instrumental to their career. This could be the result of the recruitment practices in the bank, and in many other firms in China. There is a strong alignment between the subjects the new recruits studied and the profession they would be offered in the bank. Participants with high educational backgrounds, such as people with postgraduate degrees will probably move to junior managerial or junior professional posts soon after their probation. Many women managers think about formal

education, casual learning and professional training to progress in their career. They believe that these would have a positive impact on their career. A few of them appear to be very forward for women as they show strong incentives for career development; and identify capabilities, experiences, learning, personalities, *guanxi* and even luck as elements for career success. These participants' view corroborates with Eddleston et al.'s (2004) claim that education alone will not lead to promotion. In addition, it is a common understanding in the bank that there are many off-the-job training events which are in fact free holidays for managerial employees. Therefore, these professional 'training' events may have little impact on these women's career development but indicate the hierarchy in the bank. However, education is still viewed as a means to acquire material gains and pursue development in training.

As Fan (2007) reports, materialism has become a powerful value and China is in an age of conspicuous consumption. Good pay and benefits is one of the main reasons for women to work in the bank. This is consistent with research findings in other cultures that lifestyle and income increasingly influence people's career choices (Newton et al. 2005). Some of the women managers in this study make career choices based on income which shows the penetration of capitalism, consumerism and materialism in current Chinese society. At the same time, their personal experience, the lack of social security and their possible anxiety of poverty all contribute to their career decisions.

As mentioned in sub-question 1 the women managers' earning power may contribute to their gender role construction at home as money is important in maintaining the whole family's life style, providing education for children and securing welfare for the elderly. For the women managers who are not satisfied with their working conditions, money appears to be the sole motivation for them to stay in their jobs; and this fits the description of traditional *yin* and collectivist values to be supportive to their family and to care for their families' needs. On this occasion, these women managers are looking forward to their retirement and therefore it is impossible for them to relate women's earlier retirement age with gender inequality in China. Instead, they are more likely to support the view that the earlier retirement age for women in China is a protection in favour of women. These women's views provide some space for

debate about the earlier retirement for women in China which is one of the gender inequality issues in the current Chinese labour market.

In conclusion, the employees who are over 35 possibly have to build their *guanxi* networks to defend their rights for job mobility. It is possible that age discrimination potentially promotes *guanxi* networks among banking employees. The 'old' women' employees' loyalty is probably rewarded by the bank and they will be promoted to managerial positions in their late thirties. A high educational background such as a postgraduate degree in a relevant banking area may lead to a managerial position in the bank for the young employees while others with undergraduate degrees may become 'stuck' in operational roles because the 'older' women will possibly occupy managerial or administrative jobs in the bank. Many women managers think about formal education, casual learning and professional training to progress in their careers. However they are aware that education alone will not lead to career advancement in the bank so they suggest that capabilities, experiences, learning, personalities, *guanxi* and even luck are elements for career success. The off-the-job 'training' events in the bank may have little impact on these women's career development because these training events are simply used as paid holiday that reflects the hierarchy structure in the bank. Money contributes to women's career decisions. These women managers' economic independence has continuously contributed to their cultural and gender role construction in the bank and at home as money is an important part of their personal lives. All of these aspects discussed in sub-questions 7.2.1, 7.2.2 and 7.2.3 in relation to *guanxi*, gender, age, materialism and education contribute to a better understanding of the inequality that women experience, and the perception of inequality, in the bank.

7.2.4 To what extent and how do Chinese women bank managers experience inequality in their career?

None of the participants believe that there is any inequality in their work and life and there is no concern about ageism in the bank's recruitment or their work life conflict among the participants. This was the response from the participants when asked directly at the beginning of the study. However, when examining the women managers' career experiences in detail, it is clear that the women managers experience gender inequality in job allocation, promotion

and maternity leave in the bank, but perhaps they do not perceive these as inequalities in the same way that they would in western countries.

The women managers' interpretation of 'inequality', 'work-life-conflict', 'women', and 'ageism' appears to be different from women in other contexts. It is highly likely that inequality is associated with negative meanings by the women managers in the bank. These women participants possibly speak according to their position in the management of the bank and therefore reject anything associated with 'inequality' in the bank. As women managers, these women may not like the idea of associating themselves with 'ageism' as being old will not affect their management careers in the bank. However, being old and having no *guanxi* will have a negative impact on their career mobility in the banking industry. Again, women managers possibly view 'work-life-conflict' as a sign of incompetent women who cannot take care of both work and home. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the women managers said there is no problem with it. The *yin* characteristics are not valued highly in career advancement or associated with the qualitiwa to be a leader in the bank by the women managers and the bank's senior management. The participants are largely restrained by the dominant gender order that values *yang* characterises more than *yin* characteristics in careers. Promoted by a western–influenced ideology of professionalism and Chinese traditional gender roles, women are negotiating their gender roles between their managerial careers and their families to find a balance point by utilizing their families' collective resources. In doing this they neither radically reject the established gender roles nor accept them. The established gender roles of women are *yin* and men are *yang* do not fully reflect the participants' gender positions in this study, and are reflective of the women's beliefs about inequality.

Perhaps women managers are struggling to negotiate their own gender role as both the western–influenced ideology of professionalism and the traditional gender roles support a *yang* characteristic leader or manager image at work. Perhaps women's ignorance of gender inequality and work-life conflict in their careers reflects the legitimacy of the *yin-yang* gender relations in China. Though *yang* is placed in a dominant position and *yin* is in a supportive role, there is a dynamic change element to this gender order because *yin* and *yang* relations are constantly changing, reacting to changes in the environment. Women's *yin* supporting role

therefore could be a temporary situation as Peng (2010) suggests that the *yin-yang* relationship is a collaboration rather than a discrimination against *yin* in a Confucian perspective.

Guanxi between colleagues provides some flexibility at work, protects women managers' career progression during their maternity leave, and promotes collectivist behaviour, providing women managers with a variety of freedom similar to part-time work and flexible work on an informal baseis. Although these arrangements are not official, the convenience this flexible work could possibly bring is very practical, and maybe this is why no one ever claims overtime in this bank. Nevertheless, if *guanxi* between colleagues is not good, this flexibility would not be possible. To some degree, these informal flexible working practices encourage harmony between colleagues and promote a friendly work environment.

Although some of the participants criticize the role of *guanxi* in recruitment and promotion, they do not totally reject the use of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices in the bank: instead the participants suggest restraining *guanxi*'s function. It is highly probable that these participants complain about the proportion of people acquiring jobs through *guanxi* and the disproportionate weight of *guanxi* in recruitment criteria rather than rejecting *guanxi* in recruitment. Thus, it is hard to assess if *guanxi* practice in recruitment reduces gender inequality in recruitment. Nevertheless, it appears that their success at work, with or without the use of *guanxi* has destabilised gender roles in the home environment.

Women managers' earning power has contributed to their gender role negotiation in their homes. Noticeably, when these women managers are the sole earner in their home their economic power at home has changed their traditional gender role dramatically in their families: they are controlling and dominant. Maybe one's earning power contributes to one's gender role at home. As the higher earners, the women managers could be in the '*yang*' position while their partners may be in the '*yin*' position at home.

The established collectivist and individualist division cannot fully capture and explain the cultural norms expressed by the participants in this study: the women managers in this study cannot be classified into neo-essentialist categories such as collectivist or individualist because

their cultural values are changing according to their personal circumstances. Even acknowledging this diversity, to categorize the majority of these Chinese women managers as women managers from a 'highly gendered' and 'collectivist culture' (Woodhams et al. 2014: 15) is problematic. The essential problem to me is not categorizing Chinese women managers as women managers from a 'highly gendered' and 'collectivist culture', but the assumption that they are essentialised into categories. According to these authors individualist and masculine values represent their imagined positive aspects for women managers' careers: women with individualist cultural values and a rejection of feminine characteristics are 'most likely to prosper' in career development. Chinese women managers who have individualist values but accept feminine values have to 'overcome perceived challenges to their feminine values' to succeed in their career. For Chinese women managers who display collectivist values there is a 'concern' that if they do not throw away their collectivist cultural identities they 'will not be able or willing to thrive in this environment' (Woodhams et al. 2014: 15). This has the resemblance of the classic texts on individualism and collectivism (Triandis 1995, Triandis 2004) that present collectivism and individualism as neutral labels for prototypes of national culture. Both of the prototypes exist to varying degree in all countries and suggest that collectivist values represent negative characteristics and individualist values represent positive characteristics. It is hard to accept that associating individualism and a rejection of feminine values would lead to career advancement in China and that having 'the autonomy to deploy competitive strategies to achieve' career success is the solution for Chinese women's career advancement (Woodhams et al. 2014: 15). Are collectivist and *yin* characteristics all negative for women managers' career in China, especially collectivist characteristics and therefore have to be addressed in order for women managers to advance in their careers? From my analysis, the collectivist culture promotes informal flexible work for women managers in the bank. Though I cannot deny collectivist aspects are evident in a Chinese work context, however it flows, changes, with interaction with other cultures regardless of national boundaries; Chinese women managers are culturally complicated, and therefore it is difficult to attribute specific cultural characteristics to them. They do not necessarily need the western centred career theories to problematize their cultural identities and 'help' them to be successful in their career in China. To understand them with some cultural sensitivity may be a helpful first step in the journey of respecting Chinese women's cultural and gender characteristics so that they do not have to be 'westernized' to be successful in their careers.

I will now draw final conclusions of the thesis based on the data analysis and discussion in the next section.

7.3 Conclusion

This study contributes to the discussion on women managers' careers in banking in a Chinese context. My research focuses on women managers' career choices, career paths and career expectations in relation to the negotiation of their gender and cultural values in a Chinese commercial bank. Drawing on a 3-month ethnographic study, I suggest that these women managers define their own gender positions and cultural orientations through a dynamic negotiating process which cannot simply be secured to any fixed category. These Chinese women managers' gender and cultural values are changing according to their individual circumstances and are highly context sensitive and complex. What 'outsiders' see as gender inequality therefore could be legitimate or temporary according to these women managers' gender and cultural orientations. It is interesting that the distinctive cultural themes of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices are sustained in the work place despite the social, cultural and political changes currently occurring in Chinese society and that they have an impact on women's career in the bank. *Guanxi* therefore continues to be an essential aspect of women managers' careers and work lives in Chinese banking.

The women managers in my study show no consistency in their careers related to the established view of Chinese gender norms as either *yin* or *yang*. The established views on Chinese gender norms suggests men being *yang* and women being *yin*, with acknowledgement that both *yin* and *yang* exist to varying degrees in both women and men. The participants display changing gender positions in their own career experiences in this study. The women managers in this study have their own personal gender values and these gender values are characterized differently according not only to their identity as women but also their personal paths which are a dynamic process in their careers and everyday lives. Thus, the women managers' *yin-yang* gender values are contextualized and cannot be classified.

Although in general *yin* characteristics are not valued in career advancement in the bank because of the strong *yang* management philosophy and organizational culture, there are still no 'correct' gender characteristics in the bank to help women managers to achieve further

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career advancement because of their different roles in the bank. Gender positions in Chinese society are not a fixed hierarchy but a dynamic system. The women managers in this study do not fully accept that there is gender inequality in their work and lives. This is probably because they see themselves as having the potential to be in superior gender positions in their work and lives. They potentially view the Chinese *yin-yang* gender relationship to be a dynamic co-operation rather than a competition and therefore they do not express their experiences as inequality. This indicates that some Chinese women are more individualistic than the stereotype of Chinese women would suggest.

The women managers in this study are characterized differently according not only to their nationality and gender but also their personal paths which are a dynamic process in their career and everyday life. The data indicates that individuals may harbour different cultural orientations which can be activated in different social contexts. This suggests that cultural orientations can be fluid and dynamic in influencing the women managers' responses regarding their career experiences in the bank.

Women's cultural and professional values are interwoven through *guanxi* to influence their careers. Some women managers in the bank have identified *guanxi* as one of the personal resources that supports their advancement in their career. *Guanxi* unavoidably becomes a central theme of the women managers' careers in banking under a non-transparent recruitment policy and unsupportive work arrangements towards women's motherhood duties. The cronyist and favouritist element of *guanxi* practices in the bank is clearly visible, however *guanxi* between colleagues also has an element of friendship which encourages collectivist values and benefits and protects participants' careers. The women managers adopt *guanxi* practices to benefit their careers by providing some flexibility at work, protecting women's career progress during their maternity leave, which promotes collectivist behaviour and is motivating. This signals the positive impact that collectivist cultural values have on women managers' careers in the bank. In addition, these women managers, no matter how unsatisfied they are about their current career and work conditions, show great commitment to the bank as many of them believe that the bank's strong performance could lead to personal success in their careers. This is another positive impact on the women's attitude to their employment and careers potentially related to their collectivist values, despite social changes in the last twenty or thirty years that has encouraged a modification of these values in China.

With rapid economic, technological and social development, materialism has become popular in China and possibly overshadows the traditional cultural characteristics as the women managers in the bank more openly pursue money, seek self-fulfilment, desire social recognition but at the same time seek stability through their career choices. This indicates social change in this area of China as the women managers emphasise their personal competences and capabilities in their careers. These women managers' reflection on their own careers in Chinese organizations can only be understood through both traditional Chinese cultural and contemporary social forces. Some of the women managers in this study make career choices based on income which shows the penetration of capitalism, consumerism and materialism in current Chinese society. At the same time, their personal experience, the lack of social security and their possible anxiety of poverty all contribute to their career decisions.

There is also age discrimination in the bank's recruitment practices. Employees who are over 35 possibly have to build their *guanxi* network to defend their rights for job mobility and they adapt to this environment. The state owned history of the bank and the shortage of banking jobs in the labour market may contribute to *guanxi*'s role in the bank's recruitment. Education is instrumental to these women managers and there is a strong alignment between the subjects that the new recruits studied and the profession they are offered in the bank. Although the women managers believe that professional training events would provide them better career opportunities, many of the off-the-job training events are in fact free holidays for managerial employees. Therefore, these professional 'training' events may have little impact on these women's career development but indicate the hierarchy in the bank. It is clear that although traditional values are influential in women's careers in different aspects, there are several indications in this study that more studies are required to understand the changes that are occurring at the macro, micro and meso levels.

As a fast-changing society and having a fast-changing economy, China has caused huge research interest from outside China. My study aims to contribute to the knowledge of women managers' career experiences in the banking industry. My analysis of the data suggests that a dynamic understanding of the complexity in China is necessary as well as an understanding of China that is not based on a western ideology of superiority to 'fix' or 'improve' Chinese people. I have problematized some of the current studies on culture and gender in management

arguing that the so-called collectivist cultural values are not all negative characteristics for women's careers that need a 'prescription' to 'fix' in order to support Chinese women's career advancement in management.

The west is the major source of theoretical and practical orientations in current global business and management studies. As Kumaravadivelu (2007) commented, in the 20th century it was the west that defined the rest of the world. Holliday (2011: 196) concludes that 'we are all sexists and racists in our histories and narratives,' so therefore it is necessary to address the current preoccupation with western perspectives on management and gender. The current western centred cross cultural business and management research may not be sufficient for studying business and management in other cultural settings. Through critiquing the current literature and a deep analysis of the data I address a rich complexity that goes beyond national categories and acknowledges the diversity among Chinese women managers' career experiences. Critical intercultural business and management research is hard to conduct because of the difficulty for researchers to gain access to sometimes secretive institutions and this is partly due to the resistance of some countries and institutions to open themselves up to scrutiny. In some countries, the consequences of an analysis of institutions could potentially have negative personal consequences for individuals, irrespective of whether anonymity has been secured. The reluctance of some individuals to discuss career expectations was evident in my study. The recourse by some authors to depend on the division between collectivist and individualist cultural labels without addressing the dynamics of cultural values at an individual level essentialises the people who are being researched.

My research attempts to address the absence of Chinese women managers' voice in respect to their careers in the banking industry in current research. However, it is limited by the research context. The generalizability and representativeness of the findings are restricted by the industry, the location of the bank, and the small number of participants. As managers, the participants in this study have to speak as one of the management according to their positions in the bank. Therefore, it is hard to access sensitive issues such as inequalities of power distribution within management and inequality in the reward system. However, the study is representative of management views from the perspective of these women.

The research setting is in the bank's head office which was one of the conditions for me to get access to the research. However, the majority of the women managers work in branches that have very different work conditions to those in the head office. Therefore, my study presents a partial picture of the women managers in the bank. In addition, as a fast-growing industry with a significant female workforce, banking in China is one of the top paid industries, so this study cannot capture the full spectrum of women managers' career experiences in China. Female managers in different locations would be affected differently by their age, gender and cultural values.

This study identifies age, cultural and gender values that influence women managers' career experiences in banking. Age discrimination, which potentially promotes *guanxi* and *guanxi* network creation among banking employees, can be limited by the development of China's legal system. Similar to staff in the majority of industries, women bank employees are relatively young. The bank adopts redundancy schemes to dispose of older employees and especially older women. Age discrimination in recruitment is unlawful as stipulated in the labour law of China (Cooke 2005), therefore strong law enforcement potentially would reduce the age discrimination in the business practices. Women's earlier retirement policy is seen as a gender disadvantage in employment (Cooke 2013) though not all women managers in this study agree. This retirement policy was initially introduced for women's benefit so that women can retire earlier than men because of their child bearing and caring responsibilities. However, considering the social and technological changes such as better health care and a better domestic labour market, an equal retirement age option for women is possible to give women more choices. The women in this study are highly educated, and have shifted their domestic and even partial parental responsibilities to the older generation or domestic workers in order to exceed the normal working hours and to make career progression. According to Cooke (2013) industrial, occupational based retirement policies have developed in China. Legislation that protects women against age and gender discrimination appears to be insufficient to improve women managers' equality in China. Therefore, law enforcement must be strengthened in order to protect not only women but all employees from inequality in the work place. However, the experience of western societies in this regard might mean this would only achieve moderate effects.

Chinese women, bound by their histories and narratives, have grown up with these and they cannot be entirely undone. However, they are attempting to overcome these constraints by negotiating their gender and cultural value throughout their careers. The western centred business and management theories and practices and the desire to export these dominant theories to the imagined culturally deficient non-west can only be seen as a form of ideological invasion. Studies on Chinese women claim a high degree of awareness and understanding of the local context: however, how is it possible that this can be achieved when they apply western centred theories which are not sensitive towards women from a Chinese cultural background? Depending on western centred business theories also has practical applications and implications.

For organizations who want to operate in a Chinese context, my analysis suggests that management need to re-think labels of Chinese employees as either collectivist or individualist and reconsider when management apply HR practices that are purposefully designed for people with either feminine or masculine values. Chinese employees' gender roles and cultural values may be much more dynamic than has been imagined under China's current market, economic and social development. Significantly despite the dynamic changes in gender roles and cultural values, the role of *guanxi* and *guanxi* practices in employment and even in business remains essential which indicates that the theme of *guanxi* has evolved and been sustained in current Chinese organizations. For a business to succeed or even just to survive, organizations have to understand and adapt to these Chinese practices to manage and motivate their staff effectively and operate their business in a Chinese context more efficiently. According to my analysis, *guanxi* in this organization can be a source of motivation, and in some ways promotes collectivist behaviour that could lead to employees' high commitment to employers.

This study has achieved its aim to provide findings to address the research questions about the Chinese women managers' career experiences in relation to dynamic gender and cultural values. Considering its limitations that I outlined above, one way in which the research could potentially be extended would be to revisit the same bank in five or ten years' time to see if gender and *guanxi*'s influence on women managers' career has evolved following the slow-down of the economy in China and institutional development. Another potential area of further research could be to study Chinese bankers in the UK or another western country, to examine whether Chinese cultural values have been maintained, and the extent that they influence other

countries' business practices. China's global economic and political power is growing. For instance, China initiated the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to support the investment in the Asia-Pacific region. *Guanxi* and *guanxi* practice has survived in market orientated modern China. The 'mateship' in Australia (Sue-Chan and Dasborough 2003) has many similar outcomes in recruitment to *guanxi*. It is hard to say that *guanxi* cannot penetrate the banking industries outside China. Therefore, it has been argued that cronyism could exist in many other cultural settings including the west (Tangri and Mwenda 2001, Johnson and Mitton 2003, Khatri et al. 2006, Arasli and Tumer 2008).

It would also be valuable to do an ethnographic study in private sector corporations in China. The private sector is continually expanding in many industries in China, including banking. The inequalities in the Chinese labour market are often reported in the private sector, so whether women managers in the private sector elsewhere in China have different career experiences from the ones in the bank or not is worth investigating.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Participants Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Number of Children	Position in Opcitbank	Ranks in the bank	Interview Formal (F) Informal (I)
Peina	30s	F	Married	0	Manager of Operational Centre	Middle Manager	F
Hu Xin	30s	F	Married	1	Personnel Officer, HR Department	Administrative staff, Level B	F and I
Jing Tong	50s	M	Married	1	Human Resource Department manager	Middle manager	I
Yangyang	50s	F	Married	1	Vice President	Senior manager	I
Zhi Hua	40s	M	Married	1	Manager of Executive Office	Middle manager	I
Li Hai	30s	F	Married	0	Manager of Private Banking	Middle manager	F and I
Zhu Hong	40s	M	Married	1	Manager of Finance and Accounting	Middle manager	F
Xiao Qian	20s	F	Married	0	Specialist in Global Transaction Banking	Managerial staff, Level C	F

Gao Ming	30s	F	Married	2	Credit Processer, Corporate Risk Management	Managerial staff, Level C	F and I
Zhang Gu	50s	M	Married	1	Vice President	Senior manager	I
Xiao Yang	20s	M	Married	0	Staff , Corporate Banking	New Managerial staff under probation	F
Qi Feng	40s	M	Married	1	Manager of Corporate and Investment Banking	Middle manager	F and I
Wu Ling	30s	F	Married	1	Business unit Manager (Credit Card) in Private Banking	senior managerial staff	F and I
Zhou Yi	30s	F	Married	1	Business Unit Manager (Personal finance abroad) in Private Banking	Senior managerial staff	F and I
Zhu Ke	30s	F	Married	1	Assistant Manager in Corporate and Investment Banking	Junior manager	F and I
Cai Ji	40s	F	Married	1	Service Quality Control in Private Banking	Managerial Staff level C	F

Tong Yi	40s	F	Separated	1	Personnel Officer, HR Department	Administrative staff, Level C	F and I
Xu Yun	40s	F	Married	1	Personal Credit Manager	Unknown	F and I
Li Jia	20s	F	Single	0	Specialist in Global Transaction Banking	Unknown	F and I
Zhu Hui	40s	F	Married	2	Account Supervisor in Finance and Accounting Department	Senior Managerial Staff, Level B	F and I
Zhou Yang	30s	F	Married	0	Specialist in Global Transaction Banking	Managerial Staff	F
Xia Lin	40s	F	Married	1	Staff in Personal Loan Centre	Managerial staff	F and I
Ying Jian	40s	F	Married	1	Assistant Manager in Finance and Accountant	Junior Manager	F and I
Fang Yuee	40s	F	Married	1	Staff in Internal Auditor	Managerial staff, Level C	F
Zhu Guo	40s	F	Married	1	Manager of Corporate Risk Management	Middle Manager	F and I
Zhou Yan	30s	F	Married	1	Staff in Corporate Risk Management	Managerial Staff Level B	F and I
Ling Ling	30s	F	Married	1	Personal Wealth	Managerial staff	F and I

					Manager in Private Banking		
Jing Ting	30s	F	Divorced	1	Business Unit Manager (Wealth Management) in Private Banking	Senior Managerial Staff	F
Xi An	30s	M	Married	1	Manager in IT Department	Middle manager	F and I
Shao Bo	30s	M	Married	1	Assistant President	Senior Manager	I
Huang Hui	30s	F	Married	1	Specialist in Global Transaction Banking	Managerial staff	F and I
Zhou Rong	30s	F	Married	1	Manager of Corporate Credit Management Department	Middle manager	F and I
Zhou Jin	30s	M	Married	1	Deputy Manager in Private Banking	Middle manager	F and I

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