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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION
AND COPING STRATEGIES IN CHINA

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change

by

Susan Pattis

December, 2023

Margaret Weber, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Susan Pattis

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATION

I thank my family, friends, and consulting team members for your loving kindness, humility, compassion, and unconditional support.

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Finally, I want to extend my deepest thanks to all my loving family and beautiful community of friends.

VITA

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ABSTRACT

This study applied a qualitative and phenomenological research methodology to interview 20 women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China. The study aims to understand how their past experiences, present expectations, and future hopes have impacted their work-life integration strategies. The 20 participants were randomly selected through an expert gatekeeper and a snowball-rolling technique. In this explorative study, the researcher used Giele's (2008) life course theoretical framework and Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) coping strategy instruments by asking the twenty participants to share their sociodemographic backgrounds and answer 27 life course questions covering periods of early childhood, childhood and adolescence, current adulthood, and future adulthood. The study addressed 3 research questions: (1) How do Chinese women entrepreneurs describe their life course stories impacted by identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style? (2) According to Chinese women entrepreneurs, what demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influenced their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style? (3) What are Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work, family, and personal life? The findings revealed 4 major themes with 20 influencers that shaped Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course stories and 5 sociodemographic factors that impacted their decisions on their life choices and career achievements. Freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, and mindfulness are the core influencers to Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences. Traditional norms and family backgrounds are the primary sociodemographic factors that affect Chinese women entrepreneurs' career paths and personal achievements. Among the 33 work-life integration strategies uncovered, the top 5 are delegating tasks, setting boundaries, prioritizing, practicing mindfulness, and relying on a reliable and supportive network.

Chapter 1: Introduction

China's Rapid Economic Growth

China has led the economic growth worldwide for the past 20 years with the highest annual growth rate between 7-10% due to its open-door and reform policies in the 1980s (Fung et al., 2006; G. White, 1991b). There were only 150,000 private enterprises across China in 1978 (Aram & Xiaoli, 1991) and 12 million privately owned companies by the end of 1997 (Quanyu et al., 1997). However, the number reached 47 million non-state-owned enterprises by the end of 2022 (China Global Television Network, 2022). China's private sector has contributed significantly to China's continuous growth domestically and internationally across all major industries. China has become the largest manufacturing nation in the world by producing the cheapest products and goods for the world markets (Chin & Rowley, 2018). Private enterprises represented 48.6% of China's international trade, 56.5% of total real estate investment, 59.6% of national taxes, 60% of GDP, 70% of national innovations, and 80% of urban employment (China Global Television Network, 2022).

China's rapidly growing middle class and mobile workers contributed to entrepreneurial development (B. Wang & Wang, 2020). Inspired by the lifestyles of the Western world through Hollywood movies and tourists from other countries to China, millions of Chinese men and women tried to seek better lives with more economic gains (Cauley & Sander, 1992; Westwood & Leung, 1996; Yueh, 2008). The Chinese government introduced an economic reform policy in 1978, after China's cultural revolution initiated by Chairman Mao, to change its central-government-controlled economy into a market-dominated economy by encouraging private-sector development, which was entirely banned from 1949-1978 (Anderson et al., 2003; Barro, 2016; G. White, 1991a). In the early 1980s, China changed its centrally controlled

economic structure to a market-dominant business environment. Private enterprises grew tremendously in the 1990s due to the massive unemployment and layoffs after thousands of state-owned companies implemented restructuring strategies. At the same time, the Chinese government initiated the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Promotion Law to encourage private business development (Renwei, 2012, 2020; Strategy and International Management Organization [SIMO], 2014; J. Zhang et al., 2015).

China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 with the support of the United States because the Western world hoped to shift China's Communist-controlled system to a democratic government through economic prosperity (Beiske, 2003; Lam, 2009; Magariños et al., 2002; Mavroidis & Sapir, 2021; X. Wang, 2006). The WTO's entry helped China gain at least two decades of rapid economic growth, sustained market transformation, improved lifestyles, and entrepreneurial development (Guo & Miller, 2010; X. He, 2009; Toohey et al., 2015). The Western countries accused China of not fulfilling the WTO promises because China did not open critical sectors and markets to foreign companies, such as financial services, telecommunications, banking, and energy (Tang, 2017). Thousands of transformed state-owned organizations, collective enterprises, domestic joint ventures, private start-ups, and international JVs contributed to China's fast-growing economy (Feng & Wu, 2008; Y. Hong, 2011). At the same time, private enterprises faced more market competition and financial challenges in China's rapidly changing business environment due to limited access to credit, less-developed infrastructure, the communist system, guanxi (social networks) building, under-developed legal structure, and unprotected intellectual property rights (Yueh, 2008; X. Zhao et al., 2010).

China's Global Economic Power

China's economic power has grown gradually since the 1980s when the country opened up by implementing market-oriented economic reforms and lifting restrictions on private enterprises. China's financial strength is based on its domestic consumer market, its significant position as the largest exporter of manufactured goods, and state investments in innovation, technology, research and development, and nationwide infrastructure (Barro, 2016; Dollar et al., 2020). China's economic power has been controversial because some countries are accused of China's engagement in unlawful trade activities and unfair market competition. China's dishonest activities include providing subsidies to domestic companies, especially to state-owned enterprises, controlling the currency, violating intellectual property from foreign companies, forcing technology transfer, increasing debt levels, and ignoring environmental impact. China will retain its economic power in the coming years because government-controlled state-owned enterprises and large private companies have invested extensively in AI, renewable energy, and biotechnology in recent years (Asgarov, 2021). China's increasing power in global economic affairs will likely expand into other areas, such as military and diplomacy. The Chinese government has built allies worldwide through loans and financial aid to weaken the Western influences in countries like Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and other totalitarian nations (Roberts, 2020; Shangguan et al., 2023). China's economic power covers the following areas (China Indicators, n.d.):

1. China's Unmatched GDP Rate: In 2021, China's GDP was estimated at around \$15.6 trillion, even with the economic slowdown due to the pandemic outbreak.
2. Trade: China's exports and imports totaled more than \$4.6 trillion in 2021.
3. Foreign Investment: As the significant destination for foreign investment, attracting more than \$144 billion in 2021.

4. Currency: The Chinese yuan (renminbi) is becoming increasingly important in global finance. In 2021, the yuan was the fifth most used foreign currency for international payments.
5. Infrastructure: China has been the leader in infrastructure investment, including high-speed rail, airports, and ports. China operates some of the busiest ports, including the Port of Shanghai and the Port of Shenzhen.
6. Technology: China is a significant player in the technology industry through Chinese companies' global dominance, like Huawei, Tencent, and Alibaba, in telecommunications, e-commerce, and mobile payments.
7. Consumer Market: China has the largest middle-class population and is the world's largest consumer market of 1.4 billion people.

China attracted foreign direct investment and invested in other countries through its Belt and Road initiative, which spans over 100 countries (Fangye, 2022; Z. Hong, 2015). China's economic power has also given it significant geopolitical influence as it seeks to assert itself on the world stage. China has been expanding its military capabilities and projecting its influence in regions such as the South China Sea and Africa. Its economic power has also allowed it to expand its diplomatic influence, with China becoming a significant player in international groups or organizations such as the United Nations (Chuprii, 2022; Dollar et al., 2020). China's economic power substantially impacts the global economy and geopolitics, and it will likely continue to be a significant player in these areas in the coming years. Despite its economic growth, China faces challenges, including a rapidly aging population, rising debt levels, environmental concerns, and tensions with other countries over trade and geopolitical issues (Chuprii, 2022; Kaiser et al., 2018; Woo, 2018). China's economic growth slowed to 4.3% in

2022 due to the Covid-19 influence. China's future economy will still be driven by infrastructure investment to offset the consumption weakness and lower consumer confidence because Chinese people worry about the resurgence of another COVID-19 pandemic and restricted mobility domestically and internationally. The country's economic power will be challenged due to the projected slowdown in reduced exports, delayed COVID-19-related recovery of production and services, and a continuous slowdown in the real estate industry (Rae, 2022).

The Rise of Chinese Women in Business

Deng Xiao Ping, the former Chinese leader, initiated economic reform and open-door policies in the early 1980s after Mao's centralized planning rules by welcoming foreign companies to establish operations in China, setting up special economic zones, encouraging foreign capitals, and allowing private business owners enter selective industries (Kaiser et al., 2018). The reform and open-door policies allowed Chinese women to own private business ventures in China even though the traditional values and cultural norms prohibited them from entering the private sector. China has a rich and continuous culture, tradition, and civilization with deeply rooted old-style protocols and biased perspectives toward women's public roles and business ambitions (Bai, 2023). China's distinct delimitation of women's family roles and social responsibilities limits their opportunities outside the home. In ancient China, women were utterly denied gender equality rights compared to men without access to education, jobs, and social status (Hinsch, 2018; Siu, 1982; Starr, 1997; Stunkel, 2015). According to Confucius's principles, women were secondary homemakers, and men made money to support the family. Due to cultural norms, women in China did not realize their right to be treated equally. At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese women learned their right to equal opportunities in education and career development (Chang, 1998; Z. Hong, 2018; Ngo, 2002; Peng et al., 2008).

Over the past seventy years, the Chinese government has launched many social and economic programs to lift women's social equality and improve the old stereotypes about Chinese women, including Mao Zedong's propaganda statement: "Women Are Half of the Sky" (Burnett, 2010; Malik, 1997; Shen, 2019). Even in modern China, men have been valued over women in the workplace and given women fewer start-up opportunities due to cultural traditions and social norms (Z. Wang, 2015). The Chinese government strictly enforced a family-planning policy between 1980 and 2015, limiting every family to one child (Banister, 1987; Deva, 2015; Green, 1988; Muhua & Chen, 1979; T. White, 2011). This population control initiative caused a significant gender percentage difference due to China's boy-preference tradition (Statista, 2022). Statista's 2021 China population distribution report reveals that China has more men than women in the total population, with 51.13% of men and 48.87% of women. Today, there are 691 million females in China, representing 17.55% of the world's female population (Knoema, n.d.). Chinese women's career choices, cultural norms, and family responsibilities must be studied (Brown, 2017; Cai & Wu, 2006; Essers et al., 2013; Gervais & Milllear, 2016).

Generally speaking, entrepreneurs become successful through innovations for new products or services in their business ventures (Bertelsen et al., 2017). Women entrepreneurs have generated employment and played significant roles in global economic development (Xie & Lv, 2016). Women in China have become emerging stars for hiring more women in business ventures. There are two motivational reasons for Chinese women to start their private experiences: (a) to make extra income because the primary job cannot meet their financial needs; (b) to achieve their ambitions as flourishing entrepreneurs with

higher social status and public recognition (J. Li et al., 2020; Ng & Fu, 2018; Whitaker, 2016).

Background

Although China has become the world's second-largest economy, women in China have not received fundamental rights and respect due to historical gender bias and Confucious norms regarding women's family roles and responsibilities (Du & Zheng, 2005). Workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and unequal pay discouraged women's ambition and career development throughout China because the Chinese government did not implement strong policies to enforce gender equality and women empowerment. Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has focused on economic growth, global influence, and political domination by attracting foreign direct investments, copying high technologies from developed countries, polluting the environment, and using China's cheap labor (Denton, 2020). Unfortunately, China has not developed strong policies to change the traditional norms and cultural stereotypes of women even though the government claims women have equal rights in education, career opportunities, and community roles (R. Tong & Botts, 2018a). Educated women in China, especially those with overseas education, are more likely to fight for their rights by participating in the global feminism movement and requesting gender equality and inclusion. However, most Chinese women remain silent without voicing their needs and rights due to Communist China's strict control of public opinion and media censorship (Rubin, 2019).

Chinese women want to become entrepreneurs because they can control the workplace and make personal decisions compared to working for other organizations. As a populated country with fast economic expansion globally, China presents more

entrepreneurial opportunities for women than other parts of the world. Even Chinese women entrepreneurs must overcome social biases and traditional challenges to access equal business opportunities and government support (Chen, 2021). The central government, provincial agencies, and local municipal offices do not work together effectively due to bureaucracy and corruption. For the past thirty years, the Chinese government offices at all levels have not provided enough support to female-owned business ventures related to funding, training, policy enforcement, business networks, and mentorship (Cooke & Xiao, 2021).

China's growth rate is slowing down due to inflation and world economic challenges. The COVID-19 outbreak affected Chinese women entrepreneurs' business sustainability and profit because the whole country was shut down, especially the service sectors (K. Song, 2023). Women-owned enterprises in China need more help with financing options and out-of-date technologies due to business closures and reduced consumer needs. Most Chinese women entrepreneurs were concerned about the future uncertainties related to the government's pandemic regulations and intense competition after the reopening in China (Krane, 2022). Chinese women entrepreneurs have tried to develop their entrepreneurship under Communist China's constantly changing policies, gender biases, and feminist influence while competing with their male counterparts (Cooke & Xiao, 2021; Hershatter, 2007). Women entrepreneurs worked harder to be successful due to gender bias and cultural influence in China. Chinese female entrepreneurs struggled to achieve their business goals because of family responsibilities, gender equality challenges, and traditional values regarding women's business capabilities (M. Chen, 2012; Giménez & Calabrò, 2018). Chinese women entrepreneurs did not receive sufficient and

reliable support from societies, local authorities, family members, and business partners due to the cultural protocols and traditional norms, and they had to take more risks than male entrepreneurs for potential opportunities and profits (Acker, 1990; Gartner, 1990; Hu, 2022).

Chinese women entrepreneurs have played significant roles in China's business development for the past thirty years, especially in retail, wellness services, beauty salons, and dining sectors. In recent years, more Chinese women have entered e-commerce markets through the platforms of Alibaba, Taobao, and Amazon (Q. Chen, 2021). Based on the Hurun Research Institute 2021 report, China had eighty-five self-made women billionaires in 2021, representing 65% of the world's women billionaires (C. Li et al., 2013; Song & Li, 2021). In the past thirty years, Chinese women entrepreneurs have drawn public attention because of their contribution to the world's female entrepreneurship. Osburg (2013) reported that women entrepreneurs hired more than 60% of the female workforce in China, especially in the service and retail sectors. Some Chinese women entrepreneurs have fulfilled their dreams as business owners and changed public views on their traditional roles and contributions to China's economic development worldwide by overcoming social barriers, business challenges, family duties, and government control (Wielander, 2019). More and more Chinese female business owners closed their business ventures within five years due to limited funding resources, severe competition, and family burdens (L. Zhu et al., 2019). Although Chinese women entrepreneurs have emerged as the top achievers across global markets since China's WTO entry and increased global market influence, it is still difficult to find studies on their participation and contribution to international economic development as women entrepreneurs (Aaltio & Huang, 2018).

Need for Study

More and more Chinese women are motivated to pursue entrepreneurship as their career dream. More female college graduates want to start private business ventures in metropolitan cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou (Z. Hong, 2018; Z. Jiang & Wang, 2014; Z. Liu & Wu, 2022; Yining, 1989). Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has opened more doors for women to establish their self-made ventures or participate in their parents' businesses because the state-controlled propaganda platforms praise successful entrepreneurs, especially women entrepreneurs, as the symbol of pride, recognition, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment (L. Zhu et al., 2019). Chinese women in China have developed entrepreneurial leadership and empowerment since China emerged as the second-world economic superpower behind America in the 1990s (Meilou, 2020; Ngan-ling Chow & Zhao, 1996). Compared to female entrepreneurs in America and Europe, Chinese women entrepreneurs face traditional gender inequality, cultural biases against women, and structural barriers in China (Luo & Chan, 2021; Seymour et al., 2019).

Researchers need to do more exploratory studies to understand Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course and entrepreneurial experience, including their strategies to balance their career and family life while considering cultural, traditional, and social impacts (Brush, 2006; Bullough et al., 2022; Ho, 2005). China's economic success brings interest and curiosity to Chinese women entrepreneurs' emerging roles in entrepreneurial leadership, empowerment, gender equality, and career motivation, specifically their work-life integration strategies and gender-related experiences (Hsieh & Wang, 2022; J. Li et al., 2020). Chinese women entrepreneurs are now at the crossroads between the past and the future, old and new, or gender equality and gender segregation (Lake, 2018; Z. Zheng, 2022). Empirical studies are needed today to learn about Chinese women entrepreneurs' self-made initiatives and experiences in

entrepreneurial identities and motivations under the communist system in which state-owned enterprises and men-controlled business environments dominate (Henry et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

Women entrepreneurs are highly respected in China today because they have become role models for young girls to pursue their career dreams (Finkel & Olswang, 1996; C. Lin, 2022). However, married women or women with children face more challenges in becoming successful entrepreneurs in China because the traditional Chinese norm puts men in charge of the external duties as breadwinners and limits women's roles to internal housekeepers (Chinchilla et al., 2017). Chinese entrepreneurs' life courses and work-life balance were understudied or unclearly stated. Although some researchers have expressed interest in Chinese women entrepreneurs' business achievement and contributions to China's GDP and employment (Guelich et al., 2021; Zerwas, 2019), research examining women entrepreneurs' life experience and work-life integration is lacking. There has been little study on how Chinese women entrepreneurs balance business dedication and family responsibilities (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, 2012). Scholars researched Chinese female entrepreneurship and leadership (Ke & McLean, 2022; Peverelli & Song, 2012; Zerwas, 2019). However, only some researchers discussed their struggle between business ventures and mental well-being (Hsieh & Wang, 2022). Studying Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, career choices, and family norms is vital because 691 million Chinese women represent 17.55% of the world's female population (Knoema, n.d.; X. Zhao et al., 2010).

Purpose Statement

This qualitative, phenomenological study explores Chinese women entrepreneurs' daily practice of balancing life and work in China's complicated political system and business

environment. It is difficult to find existing literature that describes Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles and barriers and how they integrate work and personal lives. The current study aims to understand further Chinese women entrepreneurs' life struggles and career paths, especially their entrepreneurial experiences in Beijing, China. Understanding why and how Chinese women entrepreneurs chose their entrepreneurial path is essential. It is vital to know female entrepreneurs' strategies to integrate their business commitments and personal responsibilities to family and loved ones. This study also reviews Chinese women entrepreneurs' experiences and various factors that have impacted their choices to become business owners.

Research Questions

Three research questions guide this study.

- Research Question 1 (RQ1):
How do Chinese women entrepreneurs describe their life course stories impacted by identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2):
According to Chinese women entrepreneurs, what demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influenced their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style?
- Research Question 3 (RQ3):
What are Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work, family, and personal life?

Significance of Study

This research is significant because a comprehensive understanding of Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, including their successes and struggles in business and

at home, can encourage women entrepreneurs worldwide to find work-life balance. This study explores four critical factors that affect a person's gender roles and life course experiences by utilizing Giele's (2008) life course structure as a theoretical framework. The participants answered sociodemographic, strategic, and life course questions (Giele, 2008; Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015). Learning about Chinese women entrepreneurs' experiences may inspire other women in China and the world to pursue their entrepreneurial opportunities. Examining Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences and coping strategies can help scholars, researchers, business communities, and government agencies to understand how they overcome gender bias and work-life balance issues while managing their successful ventures. The results of this study can illuminate women entrepreneurs' struggles while working hard to retain a work-life balance. The study's findings can also reveal Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to enjoy business success and happy life.

Using the data collected through semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to analyze Chinese women entrepreneurs' life courses and work-life integration strategies under China's business environment, cultural values, and traditional norms. The current study can bridge the gap in research findings on Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggle for work-life integration. The research has significant values: (1) filling the research gap on Chinese women entrepreneurs' work-life balances; (2) helping other women in China and other countries assess their potential opportunities in female entrepreneurial leadership and work-life balance; (3) improving women entrepreneurs' wellbeing and fulfillment by implementing work-life integration strategies.

Methods and Theoretical Framework

The qualitative study uses a phenomenological design to interview women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China. The study aims to understand how past experiences, present expectations, and future hopes have influenced their work and life integration. The researcher will attempt to recruit twenty participants via a gatekeeper from the Beijing Women Entrepreneur Association (BWEA). A rolling snowball technique will be utilized to secure additional entrepreneurs if necessary.

Giele's (2008) life course model is the selected theoretical framework for this research. The life course is about the exploration framework of studying a concept or a problem with the awareness that changing societies can influence human development. Social pathways, such as time and place, are related to aging patterns and personal development (Elder, 1985; Elder et al., 2003). The life course theoretical framework describes how demographic elements affect gender duties and life course experiences. The current study applied qualitative and phenomenological research to interview the selected human subjects and find patterns from their life stories. Each participant shares personal life stories regarding identity, relationship, drive, motivation, and adaptive style. Examining an individual's whole life course through a single interview is impossible; however, it is possible to discover critical stories with incredible themes in a person's social context and specific triggers among transitional life events (Giele, 2002).

A person's motives and life goals are connected with social requirements because external conditions can affect an individual's choice to change intentionally and unconsciously. Women with similar education, age, race, and economic situations may have different values, attitudes, and personalities regardless of their choices as homemakers or career women (Elder, 1974, 1994, 1998). Giele's (2002, 2008) theoretical framework provides a guideline to find critical factors affecting a person's shift from a

minority to a majority role. A person's obligation, responsibility, function, and action may change with age (Bradley et al., 2005; Giele, 2008; Latz & Rediger, 2013).

This study investigates how past experiences and current expectations have changed their life course and future hopes. Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) expanded Giele's (2002, 2008) life course framework by adding coping strategies to the original factors of identity, relationship, drive, motives, and adaption to change (Elder & Giele, 2009).

Key Definitions

- *Entrepreneur*
An entrepreneur is an innovative and creative source of ideas, products, services, or business protocols or procedures who starts a new venture by taking the necessary risks and enjoying most of the profits (Drescher, 2007).
- *Entrepreneurial Leadership*
Entrepreneurial leadership involves organizing, managing, and motivating others for a common goal or a shared vision by taking opportunities and calculated risks through empowerment and innovation in a competitive business environment (Mastrangelo, 2015).
- *Women Entrepreneurs*
Women Entrepreneurs build and manage an enterprise with confidence, creativity, innovation, and independence by creating employment opportunities for others (Moore & Buttner, 1997).
- *Work-Life Integration*

Work-life integration refers to integrating one's work and life perfectly without conflict by complementing and supporting each other. It allows space for both work and personal life to feel fulfilled in both aspects (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Work-Life Integration Project, n.d.).

- *Gender Equality*

Gender Equality refers to people of all genders (men, women, trans, children, and gender diverse) regardless of their ages, backgrounds, race, and other backgrounds. For example, gender equality in the workplace means all employees, regardless of gender, must receive the same pay for equal contributions (Ortenblad et al., 2017).

Key Assumptions

1. The participants' comments and answers reflected their beliefs and thoughts about their life course experiences.
2. All twenty Chinese women entrepreneurs were business owners capable of managing their enterprises while achieving a work-life integration in Beijing, China.
3. The researcher believed women entrepreneurs in China experienced work-life integration struggles regardless of marital status, motherhood, education, and age.

Key Limitations

1. The sample size of the participants is the first limitation. It was not sure that participants were enough because only twenty were interviewed. The researcher did not participate in choosing the participants.

2. The second limitation was gender diversity because all twenty women entrepreneurs in the current study were female. This study missed the opportunity to explore male entrepreneurs in China.
3. The third limitation was the generalizability issue because the twenty women entrepreneurs were from Beijing, China. The findings might not apply to some regions in China and other countries.
4. The final limitation is the need for more personal rapport with the participants due to the email communications for the study.

Delimitations

This study focuses on 25-65-year-old married Chinese women entrepreneurs having at least one child from Beijing, China. The twenty participants have owned private enterprises for at least five years with 50-500 employees. These women entrepreneurs shared their life stories about their work-family balance issues and strategies since they started their private businesses voluntarily. It is not presumed that this study may reflect other women entrepreneurs in China; however, the data collected can represent some Beijing women entrepreneurs' work-life integration struggles and strategies.

Positionality

As a professional executive coach, public speaker, author, and business consultant, the researcher has consulted over three hundred business leaders and entrepreneurs in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and has published several business-related books for the past twenty-five years. It was the researcher's privilege to have witnessed how Chinese women entrepreneurs evolved from having no business participation rights to contributing to the national economy. It will benefit women entrepreneurs worldwide to understand how Chinese women entrepreneurs

cope with work-life balance issues while managing successful private business ventures over the past thirty years in a country with a Communist system. After twenty-five years of consulting since 1998, the researcher has realized that the essential characteristics of outstanding women entrepreneurs are compassion, motivation, mindfulness, empowerment, and balance between family and work. As a public speaker and author in Chinese-speaking nations (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), the researcher has established excellent credibility and reputation among the business communities through the following business-related books in the Chinese language:

- Modern Business Planning (1999)
- Entrepreneurs' Characters (2000)
- Entrepreneurs' Coffee Time (2004)
- New Thinking of the Cities (2005)
- Online Marketing Strategies (2007)
- City Branding and Beijing 2008 (2009)

Summary

China's fast-growing economy did not change China's boy-preference tradition. The Chinese government tried to promote women's rights but failed to significantly shift the social protocols against women's business roles (Rosenlee, 2023). Cultural bias and traditional norms have become the most significant barriers in China for women entrepreneurs to be treated equally and respectfully, even though they have played essential roles in China's business development. Women entrepreneurs have tried their best to achieve financial independence, gender equality, and inclusion since China's opening to the Western markets. From ancient China to today's man-dominated business environment, Chinese women never stopped finding solutions to overcome gender-related challenges. The Chinese

government has implemented different programs and policies to promote women's equal rights and opportunities. However, the most difficult tasks for Chinese women are dealing with the social norms and traditional roles of mothers, wives, and daughters.

There is a significant need to explore Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles and coping strategies to integrate their careers, families, and personal lives. Chinese women and entrepreneurs were understudies in the past, domestically and internationally. Understanding women entrepreneurs in China can inspire women worldwide to develop strategies to overcome gender issues and integrate their work and life. Chinese traditional norms and cultural protocols limit women's rights to participate in and grow businesses equally.

This study adopts Giele's (2008) life course theoretical framework and strategy instruments (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015) to investigate the life course stories of the Chinese female entrepreneurs about their strategies, challenges, and struggles to integrate their business ambitions and family responsibilities. It is essential to understand the Chinese culture, economic transformation, traditional norms, social stereotypes, and government policies to explore the common themes behind China's women entrepreneurs' perspectives on happiness, success, personal freedom, family relationship, work-life integration, and lifestyles by maintaining the work-life balance.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on China's cultural and economic background to provide a research foundation for Chinese women entrepreneurs' gender equality, work-life integration, cultural bias, and government policies. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, method design, and worldview, including the data source, data collection procedures, data analysis processes, IRB considerations, Data validity and reliability, and the statement of personal bias. Chapter 4 covers the critical findings and key results, and

Chapter 5 presents the implications of the study, recommendations to future research, and conclusions.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

China Background

China is a populous country in Southeast Asia, with 1.4 billion people and 9.6 million square kilometers, the third largest country in the world by land (Dollar et al., 2020; Kroeber, 2020a). China's history dates back thousands of years and has influenced global civilization. China has a diverse geography, with many landscapes, including mountains, plateaus, deserts, rivers, and coastlines (Krane, 2022). China has a coastline along the Pacific Ocean besides bordering many countries, including Inner Mongolia, India, Vietnam, and Russia. China's ancient civilization has significantly contributed to various fields such as philosophy, literature, art, medicine, and technology. It has a written history spanning over 5,000 years and has been home to numerous dynasties, such as the Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing dynasties, which have left a lasting influence on Chinese culture (Mavroidis & Sapir, 2021).

China has undergone rapid economic development for twenty years, becoming the global driving force. Today, China has become the global manufacturing hub and a major exporter of goods, ranging from electronics and textiles to machinery and automobiles. China's increasing role in trade and investment worldwide enhanced its economic ties with nations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. China engaged in economic and diplomatic initiatives like the Belt and Road Project to build strong allies worldwide (Fulton, 2020; Han & Liu, 2023). China has a single-party system and exercises tight control over China's social atmosphere and political landscape. The government has implemented various policies to drive economic growth and social progress, including economic reforms, social initiatives, and infrastructure development. China also faces environmental pollution, income inequality, an aging population, corruption,

urban-rural disparities, and ethnic tensions in regions like Tibet and Xinjiang (Brødsgaard, 2013; Godement, 2015; Mahbubani, 2021).

Chinese culture is diverse, with various regional customs, dialects, and minority groups. The majority of the population in China is Han Chinese. There are over 50 recognized ethnic minority groups, such as the Zhuang, Uighurs, Tibetans, and Mongols, each with unique traditions, languages, and lifestyles. China has made significant advancements in science and technology, including space exploration, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy (Miao, 2019). China has a rapidly growing middle class and a booming urban population but faces social issues such as the increased aging population, rural-urban migration, and the unbalanced wealth gap (Leightner, 2017; S. Liu, 2020). The complex and dynamic China is famous for its long history, diverse culture, and rapidly evolving economy. Its global significance in politics, economy, and culture gives China increasing power in the world arena. China has a rich cultural heritage, with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as significant influences (Pathak, 2020). Chinese language and calligraphy are powerful cultural symbols, and traditional arts such as painting, music, and martial arts are highly regarded. China is a famous tourist destination, offering visitors ancient history and modern culture, such as the Forbidden City and the Terracotta Warriors (Xiaorong, 2022).

The History of China

China (The People's Republic of China) was established in October 1949 after Mao's Communist Party defeated its opponent, Jiang Jieshi's National Party. The Republic of China, led by Jiang Jieshi, occupied Taiwan after the civil war. Today, Taiwan, or the Republic of China, has become the most reputable democratic country in Asia. In contrast, China has become the world's second-largest economic superpower after the United States (Xiaorong, 2022). Mao

intended to develop the country as the most prominent communist nation with a socialist system. Unfortunately, under Mao's rule from 1949 to 1976, China did not grow economically because the country adopted the failed economic model of the former Soviet Union. Mao initiated a Great Leap Forward movement through his imagination from 1958 to 1960 to push China's industrial and agricultural growth by applying labor-intensive strategies without following scientific principles (Renwei, 2020). Mao aimed to build a prosperous communist society within a short period by establishing rural communes on a massive scale for labor mobility and social services. Eventually, the Great Leap Forward became a nationwide failure due to poor planning and a lack of resources (D. Roberts, 2020; T. Saich & Hearst, 2013).

After the failed Great Leap Forward movement, China suffered the worst natural famine disaster, leaving over 30 million deaths nationwide due to food shortages and Mao's blindness to his poor decisions (Wemheuer, 2016). From 1961 to 1965, Mao launched the so-called Cultural Revolution by encouraging millions of youths (also called the Red Guards) to tear down everything related to capitalism, science, education, culture, and traditions because Mao was unhappy with his declining reputation in the Communist Party. Mao's Cultural Revolution destroyed China's liberties, freedom, customs, and culture. A significant change happened after Mao's passing in 1976, the official ending of Mao's era, which was against humanity and the fundamental rule of law (J. Wang, 2018). After that, three of China's top leaders, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao, from 1976 to 2012, focused on opening China's door to the Western world for economic reform and business development. The Chinese government has built hundreds of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in major cities, such as Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, Yantai, Qingdao, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wenzhou, Beijing, and Tianjin. These SEZs were granted special privileges in foreign direct investment, foreign trade, taxation, and Joint

Ventures. Through these zones, China obtained new technologies and innovative patents (Scharff, 2020). Since the 1980s, China has transitioned to a mixed socialist market economy with capitalist elements associated with international trade, global investment, manufacturing, technology, and infrastructure (Renwei, 2020).

Today, China's political system is still Mao's socialism, with the Communist Party as the single ruling party. China's top leader, Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, has the ultimate power similar to Mao's era. China's National People's Congress (CNPC) is the highest symbolic power without the natural right to make political decisions (Kroeber, 2020b; Stepanov, 2022). International human rights organizations have criticized China for its records of human rights and freedom of expression due to China's restrictions on political dissent, media censorship, surveillance, and violations of minority rights have been reported (Kent, 2019). However, the Chinese government claims its political system and human rights practices are consistent with its cultural and historical context. China's active and complex foreign policy seeks to expand its influence globally by using the veto rights as one of the UN Security Members. China has ongoing territorial disputes with neighboring countries. In recent years, China has become increasingly influential economically and politically worldwide. Due to its global significance, the international community pays more attention to the Chinese government's policies and actions (Rühlig, 2022).

Economic Overview

China has achieved remarkable economic growth and transformation over the past decades due to its economic reform and open-door policies, with a nominal GDP of \$14.3 trillion in 2020. The manufacturing sector represents nearly 30% of its GDP, 54% of the services sector, and 8% of the agricultural industry (X. Jiang, 2022; Kroeber, 2020c). Since the 1980s, China has

implemented aggressive economic stimulation policies, including opening up to foreign investment, promoting private enterprise, and gradually liberalizing prices and markets (Koveos & Zhang, 2022). Until today, state-owned enterprises still account for a considerable portion of industrial output and employment through the government's total control of its currency and financial systems. Between 1978 and 2018, there was an average of 9.5% annual growth in China's GDP (Paterson, 2018). In recent years, the government has shifted China from an export-focused economy to a more consumption-led one, promoting innovation, encouraging private sector development, and investing in technological advancement. China's rapid growth has also come with challenges, such as rising inequality, environmental issues, an aging population, and an ongoing trade dispute with the United States of America. Nevertheless, China remains a significant global economic player, with a growing middle class and increasing influence in international trade and investment (Caudevilla & Kim, 2023; Lee, 2020).

China's purchasing power parity (PPP) is the largest worldwide due to its mixed economy combining state-owned enterprises with private businesses. As the largest exporter for the past twenty years, China's continuous growth heavily depends on exports of manufactured goods produced by cheaper labor and supply-chain control (Fang, 2022). The United States, Europe, and Japan are China's export-driven economy's top three trade partners. Although China's exports are much more than imports, China is still a significant country to import oil, iron ore, and other raw materials to support its manufacturing industry (Stepanov, 2022). In the 1990s, China announced aggressive policies to reduce the dominance of state-owned enterprises and encourage private entrepreneurship development (Koveos & Zhang, 2022). In recent years, China has heavily invested in emerging industries such as renewable energy, biotechnology, and

high-tech manufacturing through state-owned enterprises (Chin & Rowley, 2018; Q. Huang, 2022).

Business Overview

China's business landscape has undergone significant changes since the 1980s after it changed from a state-controlled planning business model to a market-driven one. China's business environment is complicated for foreign enterprises to do business in China due to its non-consistent legal rules, Communist-controlled regulations, and cultural differences. After the open-door policies since the 1980s, China has started various investment initiatives and attractive incentives to encourage foreign direct investment, technology transfer, joint ventures, innovation, and global entrepreneurship (Lai, 2015; Moccia, 2018; Ziyang, 2014). However, many foreign companies in China face increasing challenges and unresolved legal issues, such as intellectual property theft, bribing, corruption, market access barriers, and increased human capital costs (Qian et al., 2017). There are still many restrictions for private enterprises and foreign players entering some sensitive industries currently dominated by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), such as energy, telecommunications, banking, and transportation. Foreign companies can enter higher-value sectors, such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing. For entrepreneurs, China has become a land for startups, tech companies, and the service sector, with many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenzhen (L. Chen et al., 2021; Kaiser et al., 2018).

China's business environment is dynamic and rapidly evolving, with collaborative opportunities and challenges for domestic and foreign companies. Some China-based private companies have emerged as the top successful multinational enterprises in the global markets, with clients and business partners in many countries, such as Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, and

Lenovo. The aggressive development plans for 2025 and 2035 initiated by China's leader, Xi Jinping, aim to boost the country's innovation, technological development, military dominance, and economic superpower (J. Lin et al., 2018). Government investments in infrastructure, including highways, railways, and airports, have helped to fuel China's ongoing economic growth. The country's growing middle class has driven consumer spending and created new business opportunities for entrepreneurs (Anglès, 2019; Moccia, 2018).

China's regulatory environment has been a significant concern for multinational companies in China because its legislative system is complex, corrupted, and nontransparent. Most legal cases related to intellectual property protection, technology theft, and trade secret violations were unsettled. The severe trade tensions between China and the United States have created uncertainty for businesses in both countries. It is hard to get things done without bribing the local or departmental officials in China (Ziying, 2014). Despite business challenges and legal issues, China is still an attractive multinational company market due to its size, skilled labor force, and rapidly growing middle-class population. Companies willing to cope with the complexities of China's business environment may find significant opportunities for growth and success. Here are critical summaries of China's business environment (Anglès, 2019; J. Lin et al., 2018):

- Government regulation: China's legislative and regulatory environment can be difficult to navigate. Businesses usually encounter challenges obtaining business permits, operational licenses, labor contracts, and market entry-related logistics, even following and complying with regulatory requirements.

- Intellectual property protection: Intellectual property protection has long been a long-standing issue in China. Counterfeiting and piracy are common, and companies may find protecting their intellectual property rights challenging.
- Labor market: China's labor market is highly competitive, with a large pool of skilled workers and increased costs. Businesses often encounter challenges navigating complex labor laws and regulations.
- Market access: China has opened up significantly to foreign investment, but some sectors remain restricted. Businesses may encounter barriers to market access in sectors such as finance, healthcare, and telecommunications.
- Government Investment: The Chinese government has invested heavily in transportation and communication networks. However, infrastructure quality varies widely between regions in China.

Reform and Open-Door Policy

The economic reform policies and open-door measures in the early 1980s have attracted thousands of multinational companies to set up their China operations. Foreign direct investment, foreign trade, and international collaborations contributed to China's economic modernization (Mavroidis & Sapir, 2021). Before the reform, the state primarily controlled China's economy and was characterized by centralized planning, collectivized agriculture, and a limited private sector. The reform aimed to shift the economy towards a market-oriented system, increase private enterprise, and promote foreign trade and investment. The Open-Door policy focused on attracting foreign investment and technology transfer, establishing special economic zones and industrial parks to encourage foreign businesses and substantial multinational companies to set up operations in China, and reducing trade barriers (Kaiser et al., 2018). The reform and open-

door policies have significantly increased China's foreign investment, global trade, and economic growth (Ziying, 2014). The economic reform policies referred to reforming the state-owned enterprises, liberalizing prices, allowing private companies to operate and compete fairly, decentralizing decision-making processes, and giving more autonomy to city-level governments. As a result of these policies, China has achieved unprecedented development over the past twenty years and has become one of the leading economic nations. These policies brought potential disputes and challenges in income inequality, pollution, labor conflict, and political issues (Toohey et al., 2015).

The increased domestic consumption is crucial in its unprecedented economic growth and development. China's financial system is state-led capitalism, where the government significantly guides all economic activities (Renwei, 2012, 2020). Although State-owned enterprises (SOEs) still dominate China's critical sectors of the economy, private enterprises have emerged as important drivers of economic growth. As a global manufacturing powerhouse with a strong focus on export-oriented manufacturing, China has caused massive job losses in many countries (J. Lin et al., 2018). After becoming a WTO (World Trade Organization) member with numerous bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, China has become a significant recipient of foreign direct investments. China is also a leader in e-commerce, mobile payments, artificial intelligence, and telecommunications. China's large population, rising middle class, and changing consumer preferences have made it a lucrative market for all types of business ventures, particularly for multinational businesses (J. Lin et al., 2018).

The Chinese government tried to enforce business regulations, complex international laws, investment policies, and administrative procedures to improve the country's business environment for multinational companies. Chinese culture, including Confucian values and

guanxi (personal connections), also shapes business practices and relationships in China (Aaltio & Huang, 2018; Guo & Miller, 2010). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become a new path to expand its global presence and economic influences to boost trade and investment along vital international routes. Chinese companies have also pursued overseas acquisitions and investments, seeking access to resources, markets, and technologies abroad (Fangye, 2022; X. Li, 2022; Moccia, 2018; H. Zhou, 2018).

Private Business Development

China's private business development has seen significant growth and transformation since the reform and open-door initiative. The economic reform led by Deng Xiaoping allowed outstanding private enterprises to participate in the country's development across different industries. Since then, private businesses have become increasingly essential in China's economy. China's private sector has become the most prominent in the world, with over 100 million registered private enterprises across various industries, from manufacturing and construction to financing and technology (L. Song & Zhou, 2022). The leading factor in driving the growth of private businesses in China is the attractive policies promoting entrepreneurship, encouraging innovation, allowing tax breaks, offering financial services, and simplifying administrative procedures (Chin & Rowley, 2018). The country's strong manufacturing base is essential to developing China's private business sector because China has become a hub for global manufacturing. However, private enterprises, including foreign entrepreneurs doing business in China, must overcome the systematic challenges in China, such as government regulation, competition from state-owned enterprises, and issues related to intellectual protection and technology transfer (Nothhaft, 2017; Oakes, 2019).

Emerging Entrepreneurship

China's entrepreneurship has risen recently, with more startups and innovative companies emerging across various industries. This trend has been fueled by many factors, including China's large and growing domestic market, a solid manufacturing base, a supportive policy environment, and a highly skilled workforce (Ho, 2005; Tsai, 2018). China's continuous efforts to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in China have enhanced the entrepreneurship boom because private enterprises have contributed extensively to China's economic development. The state and local governments have launched programs to support startups and encourage entrepreneurship in all sizes and sectors, including tax incentives, subsidies, and funding for research and development (B. Wang & Wang, 2020; X. Wang & Wan, 2014). Another factor contributing to China's entrepreneurial success is the country's large and rapidly expanding middle class since more and more Chinese consumers have access to disposable income. They increasingly seek new and innovative products and services, creating a growing demand for startups to meet these needs (Gustafsson et al., 2020; Tang, 2017). In addition to the domestic market, Chinese startups are capitalizing on the country's role as a global manufacturing hub, leveraging their proximity to suppliers and ability to quickly and efficiently produce goods at scale. At the same time, China's entrepreneurship ecosystem faces many challenges, such as regulatory hurdles and intense competition from global players (Chin & Rowley, 2018; Nothhaft, 2017; Oakes, 2019).

The emerging entrepreneurs in China have become the primary job creation source and economic development engine. As a transformational force, China's small and medium-sized enterprises have contributed to China's ongoing economic growth, global expansion, and innovation (Anglès, 2019). Besides the economic development, privately owned small and medium-sized enterprises played an essential role in the country's social stability and middle-

class prosperity after the ending of Mao's Cultural Revolution. China's private entrepreneurs have invested heavily in different countries for the past ten years, especially in natural resources, oil, farmland, and commercial real estate. With a rapidly growing middle class, an increasingly mature business environment, and a competitive labor market, China has continued to be a hotbed of innovation and entrepreneurship. Here are some key characteristics of China's entrepreneurs (J. Kim, 2019; Tang, 2017; Tsai, 2018):

- **Ambitious:** Chinese entrepreneurs are known for their ambitious nature and willingness to take risks.
- **Adaptable:** China's entrepreneurs are also known for their adaptability. They can adjust their business strategies in response to changing market conditions.
- **Tech-savvy:** With China's emphasis on technological innovation, many entrepreneurs are focused on developing cutting-edge technologies and leveraging the latest trends in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and other emerging technologies.
- **Global-minded:** China's entrepreneurs increasingly look beyond China's borders and expand their businesses globally. Many seek to build brands recognized worldwide.
- **Government-friendly:** While China's government is often criticized for its strict controls on business and society, many of China's entrepreneurs have found ways to work closely with the government to secure funding, gain regulatory approvals, and expand their businesses.

Women in China

As one of the world's oldest civilizations in the past five thousand years, China has become one of the most powerful and influential countries. Women in China have not reached their full potential because the historical gender gap has affected the Chinese people's

consciousness of women's roles, capabilities, rights, and social responsibilities. Today, Chinese women are no longer silent as they were in ancient and imperial eras. Modern women refuse to stay indoors without the right to participate in social and political events (Du & Zheng, 2005). The women's calling for gender and social status equality started in the 2000s because each Chinese family could not have more than one child after the government passed the Population and Family Planning Law in 2001 (Deva, 2015).

Women in China often face workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and assault issues. The most significant legal change for protecting women in China was the Marriage Law of 1950, which abolished arranged marriages, polygamy, and concubinage and established legal gender equality in marriage (Du & Zheng, 2005; X. Tong, 2021). Chinese women still face pressures from traditional gender roles deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Gender equality is still too good for most Chinese women, particularly in rural areas like Qinghai, Xijiang, Gansu, and Inner Mongolia. Since China's emergence into the world economy, the government has recognized women's issues and has taken steps to address them, including passing laws and initiating specific policies to educate women to protect their rights and equal opportunities equality (Denton, 2020; Liang, 2007; Scharff, 2020). Globalization gave Chinese women more opportunities, resources, and mobilizations to stop discrimination and gender issues domestically and internationally due to the influence of the global feminism movement (S. Liu, 2020). Chinese women's personal goals go beyond the Chinese border today because China plays a crucial role in today's world economy. Chinese people understood more about human rights, democracy, gender equality, workplace diversity, and inclusion since globalization brought the nations closer than ever before. The women's movement in China is more accepted today than twenty years ago (Mahbubani, 2021; Miao, 2019).

The emperors of the old dynasties and today's Chinese government considered the feminist movement a negative influence because the rulers preferred Confucianism's norms related to women's roles and responsibilities (Sung, 2022; Y. Zhao, 2017). Professional Chinese women living and working in metropolitan cities are ready to contribute to the Chinese women's movement while developing their knowledge and contributing in the workplace (Bank & International Labor Office, 2017; Xiaojiang, 2021). Globalization and China's emerging economic power forced Chinese authorities to support Chinese women's connection to international feminism activities because the Chinese leaders wanted to improve the country's reputation politically, economically, and morally (S. Liu, 2020; J. Zheng, 2016). Chinese leaders' 2025 and 2035 development plans as the world superpower indicate China's continuous economic reform, political modification, and human rights liberation, including women's rights and opportunities in education, business, and politics. China's future economic growth depends on continuous globalization and cooperation to attract worldwide resources, direct investment, and international trade. Women in China will play more critical roles domestically and internationally (Babel, 2022; L. Song & Zhou, 2022).

Women's Rights

For the past twenty years, China has exhibited its ambition to dominate the world politically, diplomatically, economically, and culturally. Chinese women's rights have reached an unprecedented level, and their lifestyles have improved extensively, specifically in education, fashion, spending, and small startup enterprises (Lim, 2021). Compared to men, Chinese women's social status, political power, and economic achievements still need to be recognized by the public, domestically and internationally (Rubin, 2019). China's traditional values from the Confucian principles and the dominant patriarchal cultural norms prohibit women from

being equal to men at home and in public. The government-controlled media in China labeled successful female achievers as workaholics 'superwomen' with no emotions and compassion toward others or themselves. The press often criticizes women fighting for their equal rights by humiliating them for not fulfilling their traditional family roles and being selfish or self-centered (Hershatter, 2007).

The Chinese government controls Chinese women's many rights, such as birth rights (one-child policy), voting rights (nobody can vote in China), and equal compensation rights (S. Zhu, 2020). The Chinese-style socialist system encourages women to emerge in all sectors and contribute to China's economic growth but wants women to take full responsibility at home with children and elder parents (Croll, 2013). The Chinese government used Confucian ideas to request citizens' obedience and subordination to the ruling regime. Most Chinese people want to work in civil services for a proud 'golden bowl' status and stable pay. The Chinese Communist government uses its ideological justifications and historical traditions to showcase the country's 'Opening Up' policies and women's equal rights to the world (R. Tong & Botts, 2018b). Chinese leaders continue to create various mottos to promote nationalism with optimistic and loyal slogans to control Chinese people's thinking and beliefs by creating fear to question government policies related to gender equality, diversity, or inclusion (Bai, 2023; Fincher, 2016; Sun, 2013; S. Zhu, 2020).

China's nationalism campaign focuses on national safety, social harmony, and family stability by integrating small family units into national prosperity, or the 'China Dream' by China's leader, Xi Jinping (Leightner, 2017). Under Xi's 'China Dream' ideologies, Chinese women must take more responsibilities to keep the harmonic family units. They must also play essential roles in maintaining national stability, keeping traditional values, and promoting

cultural values (Ranade, 2022). Chinese women lack the courage to stand up for their rights against inequality, human rights, and humiliation because any feminist movement in China would be labeled an anti-government movement and be cracked down immediately by the national security guards, like the 1989 Tiananmen Square Movement, due to the potential threat to the Chinese Communist Party's ruling (R. He, 2017; A. Saich, 2017).

Feminism Movement

Feminism has expanded to a broader concept that includes different races, ages, sexual orientations, and ethnicities (Kymlicka & Rubio-Marín, 2018). Although feminism is a popular movement in Western nations, scholarly literature has not covered Asian women's experiences and struggles with gender equality, oppression, and inclusion, especially the overlooked group, Chinese women. The lack of literature on feminism in China has led to stereotypes and assumptions about Chinese women, specifically the false perceptions of their submissiveness and easiness to obey, such as the concubine and dragon lady (J. Zhou, 2006). The misconception about Chinese women is rooted worldwide without diverse stories about their identities and experiences. Understanding feminism development in today's China provides a theoretical reference to future research opportunities for exploring Chinese women's voices and perspectives (Denton, 2020; J. Zheng, 2016; P. Zhu & Xiao, 2021).

Feminism refers to all genders' equal rights and opportunities by honoring women's identities, diversities, experiences, strengths, and inclusion (Fernandes, 2020). The feminist movement for women to vote emerged between 1848 and 1920 in Germany and then spread to other European countries before reaching the United States of America (Allwood, 2000; Grady, 2018). Privileged women could vote between 1939 and 1945 in Europe and the US. Most women worldwide still suffer oppression politically, socially, and personally. The second feminism wave

between 1963 and the 1980s was initiated by Betty Friedan's (1963) book *The Feminine Mystique*, with the efforts to fight for women's social equality, including sex, relationships, racism, sexism, and access to birth control and abortions (Friedan, 2001, 2010, 2013). The third wave, focusing on workplace sexual harassment, equal pay, trans-rights, and critical race theory, started in 1991 with the Anita Hill case against the Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas for a sexual harassment lawsuit. The fourth wave is for the present day, calling for sex-positive, trans-inclusive, body-positive, and digitally driven, represented by the MeToo movement worldwide (M. Chen, 2012; Grady, 2018; Real, 2020).

Feminism is a movement to seek multicultural justice, equality, diversity, and inclusion. Feminists continued to pursue more recognition and privilege in race, class, and sexuality after significant changes and freedoms were achieved through the second and third feminism waves. The major paradigms of the third wave include multicultural inclusion, political identity, and intersectionality. Feminism is quickly labeled as extremist, anti-male, anti-heterosexual, and anti-family. Feminism movement participants are proud to be competent, independent, and intelligent (R. Tong & Botts, 2018b). Today, more and more women worldwide seek equal opportunities related to employment, healthcare, education, sexual minority rights, bisexual and transgender rights, and social and political status. The third-wave feminism movement in Europe and America increased the motivation of Asian women, especially Chinese women, to explore their gender identity, class status, and generational position (Fernandes, 2020; Mann & Huffman, 2005).

China was well-known for enslaving women for sex workers or prostitutes in the 19th century, especially during the food shortage times in the 1960s (Barlow, 2004; Croll, 2013). Chinese young girls were forced to wrap their toes under their feet, called foot-binding, for nine

centuries before 1900 to control women's foot lengths under three inches (Howard & Pillinger, 2010). In old dynasties, Chinese men claimed the painful foot-binding process as a unique Chinese cultural and traditional norm to prevent women from escaping from their husbands, homes, and families (Pan et al., 2013). During Mao's era from 1949-1976, Chinese women played more roles within families and workplaces, with the famous slogan, 'Women Hold up Half of the Sky,' created by Chairman Mao Ze Dong, recognizing women's contributions in workplaces at home (Lim, 2021). Chinese women endure more household duties than men, even if they have full-time jobs. Although the Chinese government stopped the foot-binding tradition and promised to give women more equal rights in 1949, Chinese women never had equal rights politically, economically, and financially (Du & Zheng, 2005). Feminism never became popular in China due to the Communist Party's total control of protest, freedom of speech, and the long-established patriarchal tradition and men-dominated culture (Du & Zheng, 2005). Chinese women received some empowerment after the 1980s due to the economic reform and women's movement. However, women in China are continuously refraining from higher-level government positions and corporate leadership jobs. The feminist movement did not happen in China as in most developed countries because Chinese women are powerless to change the deeply-rooted norms against women's equal rights (Lim, 2021; R. Tong & Botts, 2018b).

Confucianism and Women's Rights

Confucius and his students developed Confucianism in 475 and 221 BC to help the emperors rule the Chinese people. Confucianism significantly impacts women's rights because Confucian principles or disciplines remain the roots of China's patriarchy. Emperors adopted Confucianism in past dynasties as rulers' doctrine to control women's destinies. Confucianism guided Chinese people's traditional norms, family values, and gender positions for thousands of

years (Bai, 2023; Sun, 2013). According to the classic Confucian teachings, women's roles are taking care of men, giving birth, and working at home. Confucianism requires women to obey men, including their father and husband, without needing to work or study because their only glories are at home and outside the world (Rosenlee, 2023). Although women's subordinate positions existed before Confucianism, Confucius made this unfair norm a nationally accepted principle against women. Confucianism made women's marriages men's logical and proud possessions without giving women the opportunity to refuse their husbands' requests. Even in modern China, Confucianism influenced social judgment and family decisions about women's social and family roles. Confucianism's long-lasting influence from dynasties to the present time brainwashed Chinese people with the ideology that men are superior. Women are inferior at home and in the communities; the foot-binding tradition of women is just an example (Bai, 2023; Rosenlee, 2023; Sun, 2013).

China's economic reforms did not change the Confucian patriarchal notions reinforcing sons' superior values over daughters. Many Chinese women do not want to admit gender suppression because they adopt their parents' knowledge and discourse. Some women living in rural regions would not understand the purpose of the gender equality movement because they are more frightened by disorders than by the restrictions on their fundamental rights (Croll, 2013; Denton, 2020). Confucianism is vital for the slow feminism movement and the foundation for a men-dominant society (Lim, 2021; Rubin, 2019). Women's status lifted to a minor degree after the end of the imperial dynasties, but Confucianism's influence in China continued. Western feminism entered China during World War I and World War II, and Chinese women did not experience revolutionary changes in social status and equal rights. Since China's open-door reform to the Western world, socialist feminism emerged in China at a slow pace. Chinese

women living in remote poor regions like Xinjiang, Tibet, and Gansu Province are still used to the Confucian traditions because they have little access to information about the feminist movement in the world (R. Tong & Botts, 2018a; J. Zhou, 2006). Educated Chinese women today living in economically developed regions in China embrace a mixture of Confucianism and feminism by combining their historical roles with their current positions as businesswomen, scholars, educators, and female leaders. Confucian ethics have a widespread influence on women's rights and the feminist movement throughout the Pacific Asian nations, not just in Chinese-speaking countries (Rosenlee, 2023; Rubin, 2019; S. Zhu, 2020).

Communism and Women's Rights

CCP (Chinese Communist Party) was founded in 1921 by Chairman Mao and his comrades during the New Culture Movement. Many CCP founders had studied in Western countries, such as Germany and France, with ideas, philosophies, and strategies related to politics and powers (T. Saich & Hearst, 2013). In 1949, after World War II, Mao established the People's Republic of China to build an egalitarian country where everyone worked and shared everything equally (S. Brown, 2017). Mao's government implemented numerous policies to promote China's Four Modernizations, including agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. The modernization plan failed due to Mao's Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, which destroyed China's science, education, culture, and economics. The Cultural Revolution lasted ten years and ended in 1977 with Mao's death. CCP's new leader, Deng Xiaoping, announced China's Opening-Door policy to start China's economic reform in 1979. Unlike Mao's policies, Deng emphasized economic development and global collaboration to bring China a prosperous future (Brødsgaard, 2013).

China adopted the basic ideology from the lineage of Marxism-Leninism's communism because the new country did not have an existing ideological system when the PRC was established in 1949. From Chairman Mao to today's Xi Jinping, PRC's leaders carried on the same ideology of Marxism-Leninism's communism (K. Brown, 2017). The communism theory was never tested or implemented by other countries as a successful ideology, but the CCP enjoyed a centrally controlled government and obedient citizens in China. Under the CCP's rule for the past seventy years, Chinese people have lost all fundamental human rights, democracy, and freedom; for example, the nationwide censorship and internet firewall blocked people's access to the truth and information from the outside world (Yongnian, 2019). Being the world's second-largest economy, Chinese people still cannot vote, speak freely, or receive accurate information (Spinello, 2015). The Chinese government used communism as a ruling tool without caring about the principle of equal rights for all. Therefore, Chinese women never benefited from the communist ideology because few could take essential roles in the Communist-controlled government from all levels. CCP banned feminist activities, and even the popular MeToo movement did not have a chance in China. The Chinese government gave women more opportunities to contribute to China's economic growth at the middle or lower levels across all industries without allowing them to participate in human rights-related movements (Ma, 2021).

Women's Education Opportunities

Before the 20th century, women had limited access to education, with most girls being educated only in basic literacy and domestic skills. Since 1949, education in China has become a priority for the new government, and women's access to education has improved (Denton, 2020). In 1951, the government passed the Marriage Law, which prohibited arranged marriages and gave women the right to choose their husbands. This law, along with other policies aimed at

promoting gender equality, helped to increase the number of girls attending school (Xiaojiang, 2021). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), education was seen as a way to promote revolutionary ideals, and many schools were closed. However, education was again prioritized after the Cultural Revolution, and policies were implemented to encourage more girls to attend school (J. Wang, 2018). These policies included eliminating tuition fees for girls with special needs and establishing boarding schools in remote regions. The government in China has implemented customized programs to enforce gender equality in education and the workforce, such as offering scholarships and financial aid to girls and women and requiring companies to provide equal opportunities for men and women (Cook, 2020).

Today, the Chinese government has committed to providing nine years of compulsory education to all children, regardless of gender. Chinese women have become a significant workforce in many industries (Cook, 2020; Denton, 2020). The enrollment rate of girls in primary schools is now nearly 100 percent, and the enrollment rate in secondary schools is over 90 percent. Despite these achievements, there are still challenges facing women's education; particularly, women in underdeveloped regions still face barriers to education, including poverty and a lack of infrastructure. Access to higher education is still challenging in Tibet and Xinjiang, with men being more likely to attend college than women (Hao et al., 2021; Hsieh & Wang, 2022).

Women's Career Opportunities

Entering the 21st century, women in China enjoyed increased education, training, and employment opportunities, but they still needed to receive equal opportunities as men. Chinese societies still value women who manage the household well, such as keeping the house clean, feeling the children well, and caring for their husbands and other men (Lim, 2021). Women are

still discouraged from searching for personal development and career advancement because their parents, friends, or loved ones prefer them to marry the right men with fame, wealth, and success (Q. Wang & Dongchao, 2016). Although more educated women want to work for multinational companies in China, start their private businesses, or explore opportunities overseas, most Chinese women want basic pay jobs without long-term goals or ambitions. International companies in China prefer to hire Chinese professional men for leadership positions because their local HR managers are influenced by Confucian traditions (Hershatter, 2007). Large private Chinese companies and state-owned enterprises choose men to take senior management positions because these companies believe men endure more pressures and challenges than their female counterparts (Jacka & Sargeson, 2011; J. Zheng, 2016).

Various factors, including traditional cultural values, government policies, and economic development, have influenced women's career choices. Traditionally, Chinese women were expected to prioritize family and domestic duties over their careers. With the rise of the economy and increased roles in the workforce, more women are pursuing career opportunities in traditionally man-dominated industries, like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Recently, the government implemented policies requiring employers to provide paid maternity leave and prohibiting discrimination against women (P. Zhu & Xiao, 2021). Although women in China have made significant progress in career opportunities, it is challenging to achieve true gender equality in the workforce because gender discrimination, limited opportunities for advancement, and gender biases are still common in China (S. Zhu, 2020). Chinese women organizations and individuals continue to promote gender equality in employment and career training by requesting more access to various industries and professions, including science and technology, finance, and the arts (Hsieh & Wang, 2022; Q. Wang &

Dongchao, 2016). Gender discrimination and traditional gender roles persist in some parts of China, particularly in rural areas. Women may need help accessing specific industries and leadership positions, and there still needs to be more pay and employment opportunities. Despite these challenges, Chinese women have made significant progress, and the government and society continue to work toward achieving greater gender equality and opportunities for women (Cook, 2020; Hao et al., 2021; Z. Zhang & Zhao, 2023).

Chinese women are traditionally required to prioritize family responsibilities or roles over professional and personal growth. These responsibilities include nurturing children, caring for elderly parents, and supporting other family members (Hershatter, 2007). Historically, Chinese culture has emphasized the importance of filial piety to parents, which means showing respect with devotion to one's parents and ancestors. This concept is essential for daughters, who are born to be caregivers for their parents. Additionally, women in China are often responsible for caring for family members, cooking, cleaning, and managing household finances. While these responsibilities are becoming more evenly distributed between men and women in urban areas, traditional gender roles persist in many parts of the country (Croll, 2013; L. He, 2021). These family responsibilities can often make it difficult for women to pursue careers or education outside the home. It is challenging for many Chinese women to balance their family responsibilities with professional ambitions (Smythe & Saunders, 2020). Over the long history, Chinese women only took the roles of housekeeper and caregiver for children and other members because they were stereotyped as less efficient and intelligent than men (Lim, 2021; J. Zhou, 2006). China's economic development opened more doors for women to participate in China's workplace (Q. Wang & Dongchao, 2016). Chinese male managers treat women as inferior in leadership or management roles. In the past, the government was slow in actions, plans,

interventions, or policies to improve women's advanced career opportunities and leadership roles. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was formed in 1949 to monitor and enhance Chinese women's conditions at home and in the workplace. However, ACWF did not contribute to women's rights and the feminist movement in China until recent years (Bank & International Labor Office, 2017).

Gender Equality & Inclusion

Gender equality has become a popular topic in China since the 1990s due to the women's movement worldwide. Most Chinese women follow the government propaganda without the motivation to fight for equality and fair treatment in the workplace or at home. The Chinese government initiated different programs to educate women on gender equality, but the public did not take the concept seriously due to the traditional norms and cultural influences (Bank & International Labor Office, 2017; J. Zheng, 2016). Policies in rural areas promote women in leadership positions, requiring at least one-third of village management committee members to be women (Chung, 2017; B. Tang, 2015). China has established laws related to women's rights in employment, education, and property ownership. Despite these efforts, gender inequality remains a problem. Workplace discrimination, domestic violence, and other unequal treatment in many areas, including sports participation, travel-related services, and social events. Women in China are often paid less than men and are underrepresented in top-level corporate positions. Domestic gender-based violence and sexual harassment are still severe problems even though the government wants to protect women (Q. Wang & Dongchao, 2016; Xiaojiang, 2021).

China's Gender equality situation has faced increasing challenges and criticisms from the Western world since its open-door policies and rapid economic development after the 1980s. As a communist country rapidly engaged in money-driven capitalism and the global economy,

Chinese leaders underestimated the influence of the worldwide feminism movement on Chinese women (Kymlicka & Rubio-Marin, 2018). The government wanted to merge into the globalization era while keeping the same centrally-controlled economic and political systems by continuously putting women on a secondary status and letting men dominate all industries and government institutions (Kymlicka & Rubio-Marin, 2018; Xiaojiang, 2021; Y. Zhao, 2017). It was the turning point for Chinese women to recognize their birth rights to gender equality since the World Conference on Women was hosted by China in 1995. Women organizations and feminists worldwide regarded the 1995 conference as a milestone to break the ice on the Chinese women's movement and empowerment (Stefanie, 2017). It was the world's first time to hear Chinese women's voices and their appeals for gender equality and leadership opportunities directly, openly, and freely. 2008's Olympic Games in Beijing enhanced the Chinese women's gender equality movement and inspired young women to seek their identities and rights (Askew, 2009; Q. Wang & Dongchao, 2016).

For the past ten years, the gender equality movement has shifted from government propaganda without significant measures to encouraging discussions and segmented solutions through collaborations with international women's agencies or groups culturally, politically, and intellectually. Besides gender equality, domestic violence issues in China caught international attention in the 1990s due to women's continuous collaboration with the global feminism movement (Xiaojiang, 2021). The transnational feminism movement brought women's association beyond national borders worldwide and gave hope to women in totalitarian countries like China and North Korea (Tai, 2020). The Global Sisterhood movement let the world see women's political challenges against gender inequality globally. Global sisterhood and transnational movement cross national, cultural, and political boundaries and articulated Chinese

women's pursuit of equality at home and in the workplace without stereotyping and bias (Clevenger, 2020). Confucianism-based Chinese patriarchy and men's superior doctrines faced criticism from women worldwide due to the traditional norms against women's rights to lead and achieve more outside the home (Olcott, 2013).

Globalization and China's growing economic superpower awakened Chinese women's inner strengths to be part of the global movement. They encouraged them to reach their full potential with intelligence, happiness, and success (Patil, 2011). The more women movement in the rest of the world, the more attention Chinese women receive from the public and the government (Q. Wang & Dongchao, 2016). China's increased feminist movement relied on women's realization of gender identity and human rights because they were subordinated by men and societies in the name of traditions or customs. Global sisterhood is the most potent phenomenon to terminate Chinese women's isolation from the world permanently. The sisterhood program allows women from all nations to change their destinies with equal rights and respect (Clevenger, 2020; Morgan, 2016; Rubin, 2019; Tai, 2020).

In terms of inclusion, China has tried to address discrimination and improve the lives of marginalized communities. China has implemented new policies since the 1990s to improve the status and rights of ethnic minorities, and there has been a push to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities (Yang, 2020). However, discrimination and prejudice towards these communities still exist, and there is a need for continued efforts to promote inclusivity and equal treatment. More efforts are needed to promote gender equality and inclusion in China. Ongoing efforts and attention from the government and society must address these issues and ensure equal opportunities for all (Walker & Millar, 2020; X. Zhang, 2021).

Chinese Women Entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs in China have contributed to the economic growth for the past few decades. The government has implemented policies to support women entrepreneurs' efforts to start their private ventures. Some of these policies include (Maslak, 2017, 2018):

- **Financial Support:** The government provides financial support to women entrepreneurs through loans, tax incentives, and subsidies. These measures aim to reduce the financial burden and risks of starting a business.
- **Skills Development:** There are many training programs nationwide to help women learn the skills to start and manage businesses through classes, workshops, community training courses, and mentorship.
- **Creating Networks:** The government encourages the creation of networks and platforms for women entrepreneurs to share experiences, access resources, and collaborate with other entrepreneurs.
- **Eliminating Gender Bias:** The government has taken measures to reduce gender bias in the workplace and promote equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs.
- **Encouraging Innovation:** The government encourages innovation and entrepreneurship among women by creating favorable policies and regulations for startups and providing funding for research and development.

Entrepreneurs' Opportunities

Chinese women entrepreneurs are diverse and growing with determination and creativity. Women entrepreneurs have more opportunities in China in both traditional fields and emerging industries. Here are some examples (Brecht & Le Loarne, 2023; Bullough et al., 2022):

- **E-commerce:** Women can start online stores, selling products they create or curate. Platforms like Etsy, Shopify, and Amazon make setting up an online shop easy.

- Coaching and consulting: Women can offer coaching or consulting services in their areas of expertise, such as marketing, finance, or leadership. They can do this independently or through a coaching platform.
- Social media marketing: Women can leverage their social media skills to grow their online presence. They can offer social media management, content creation, and influencer marketing services.
- Food and beverage: Women can start food trucks, catering companies, or specialty food stores. There is also a huge demand for healthy and sustainable food options, which presents an opportunity for women entrepreneurs.
- Wellness: Women can start wellness businesses, such as yoga studios, retreats, or meditation apps.
- Education and training: Women can start training programs, teaching skills like coding, design, or public speaking.
- Sustainability: Women can start businesses focusing on sustainability, such as eco-friendly fashion, renewable energy, or zero-waste products. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the environment, making sustainability a promising field for entrepreneurs.

Women Entrepreneurs' Challenges

Female entrepreneurship and leadership are rising in China. However, like women entrepreneurs in other parts of Asia, Chinese entrepreneurs must overcome cultural biases and traditional norms to receive equal access to business opportunities and funding (Cissna-Heath & Weber, 2020). Today, more women take on leadership roles in domestic and international organizations, but fewer women leaders in Chinese central and provincial government bodies.

Policymakers and corporate leaders in China must work together to build a more inclusive and supportive business environment for women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs' main challenges in China include (Q. Chen, 2021; Cooke & Xiao, 2021):

- **Gender Bias:** Traditional gender norms and social stereotypes persist in Chinese society, affecting women entrepreneurs' ability to access funding, resources, and networks.
- **No Access to Funding:** Women entrepreneurs need more financing than men because most banks and traditional funding sources hesitate to loan women money. A World Bank study indicated that only 4% of women-owned firms could receive bank loans and tend to receive smaller loans than their male counterparts.
- **Lack of Networks and Mentorship:** Women entrepreneurs often need more access to networks and mentors, making it challenging to find the support and guidance to grow their ventures.
- **Work and Life Conflict:** Women are often expected to balance business and family responsibilities, which can be challenging. There need to be more affordable childcare options and other support services that would help women entrepreneurs manage their personal and professional responsibilities.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Chinese culture strongly emphasizes interpersonal relationships and personal connections, which can be difficult for women entrepreneurs due to limited social contacts. Many people in China still hold traditional views on gender roles and believe that women should not be in positions of power.

Women Entrepreneurs' Contributions

As women entrepreneurs grow in China, their contributions will likely become more significant. Women entrepreneurs have contributed to China's growth in many areas, particularly the manufacturing and service sectors (Johnston & Zhou, 2021). These enterprises have provided jobs and contributed to the country's exports. Women entrepreneurs have also been active in education, healthcare, and finance. In China, most private schools, small community clinics, fast-food restaurants, nail shops, beauty salons, wellness centers, tutoring schools, language centers, and traditional services are mainly owned and operated by women entrepreneurs in China (Z. Hong, 2018; Hsieh & Wang, 2022).

Many women entrepreneurs have recently established and managed companies in high-tech industries, such as biotechnology, AI, and robotics. These companies have helped to drive China's technological innovation. In addition to contributing to China's economy, women entrepreneurs are more likely to practice inclusion and gender equality in their enterprises. More successful women entrepreneurs want to be role models for other women to break down traditional, cultural, and societal barriers that have prevented women from pursuing entrepreneurial careers (Jiang & Wang, 2014; Lake, 2018; Ng & Fu, 2018).

Women Entrepreneurs Empowerment

China still needs to catch up in securing women's equal opportunities to start and grow successful businesses. Here are some key elements affecting women's empowerment in China (J. Wang et al., 2019; Z. Zheng, 2022; L. Zhu et al., 2019):

- **Government Support:** Various measures are needed to improve women's entrepreneurial opportunities, such as setting up entrepreneurship support centers, providing subsidies, and reducing taxes for female entrepreneurs.

- **Increased Access to Capital:** Chinese women entrepreneurs gained greater access to capital through various channels, including government-backed funds, venture capital, and angel investment networks.
- **Female Business Networks:** Female business networks have emerged as an essential resource for women entrepreneurs in China, providing them with mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to resources.
- **Changing Attitudes:** Attitudes toward women in business are changing in China, with more recognition, encouragement, support, and respect.

Chinese women entrepreneurs have become the driving force in internationalizing Chinese businesses in global markets. They have leveraged their cultural and linguistic skills to facilitate international trade and investment, and many have established global networks that connect Chinese companies with foreign partners and customers. In addition to driving innovation and internationalization, Chinese female entrepreneurs have contributed to global job creation and economic growth. Chinese women entrepreneurs are motivated to learn new skills and grow their business ventures by promoting a shared vision and building sustainable enterprises in China and the world (Brecht & Le Loarne, 2023; Q. Chen, 2021; Cooke & Xiao, 2021).

Women's Entrepreneurs' Leadership Styles

Women entrepreneurs in China display various leadership styles, often influenced by cultural and political factors. Chinese women entrepreneurs' leadership styles are diverse due to their education, social background, life course, and geographic location. Here are some of the commonly observed leadership styles among women entrepreneurs in China (Kassai, 2022; McLean, 2022):

- Transformational leadership: Women entrepreneurs in China often adopt a transformational leadership style, which involves inspiring and motivating followers to achieve their full potential.
- Authoritarian leadership: In some cases, women entrepreneurs in China adopt an authoritarian leadership style, which involves exercising strict control over their employees and making decisions independently. This style may be influenced by China's hierarchical and collectivist culture, where authority and conformity are highly valued.
- Collaborative leadership: Women entrepreneurs in China also adopt a collaborative leadership style, encouraging employee participation and teamwork. This style may be influenced by the Confucian value of harmony, which emphasizes building and maintaining relationships.
- Servant leadership: Women entrepreneurs in China may also adopt a servant leadership style, which involves prioritizing the needs and well-being of their employees above their interests. This style may be influenced by the Buddhist concept of compassion, which emphasizes helping others.

In 2021, China ranked first in the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs, measuring the progress and success of women entrepreneurs across different countries. This ranking indicates that China provides a favorable environment for women entrepreneurs (Mastercard, 2022). China represents a large market with a growing middle class with consuming power, which presents numerous opportunities for female entrepreneurs. Chinese women have growing opportunities in the domestic and global markets to start their businesses (Z. Liu & Wu, 2022; Luo & Chan, 2021).

Life Course Framework

The life course framework is a way of understanding human development and behavior. It emphasizes examining individuals' life experiences and transitions rather than focusing solely on isolated periods or events. It is a multi-disciplinary framework that draws on various fields, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and public health (Giele, 2008). This framework emphasizes that development is shaped by a complex interplay of personal factors, like genetics, personality, and health, and environmental factors, like family, community, and culture. It also recognizes that human development is a dynamic, ongoing process that occurs throughout a person's life rather than being restricted to childhood or young adulthood (Elder, 1985). One of the critical features of the framework is the trajectory, which refers to the various ways individuals can follow throughout their lives. Multiple factors can shape trajectories, including social and economic circumstances, health status, and life activities or events such as marriage, parenthood, and retirement (Elder & Giele, 2009; Giele, 2008). The life course framework has important implications for public health and social policy. By understanding how individual and environmental factors influence development, policymakers and individuals can implement programs or interventions that support positive trajectories and mitigate the impact of negative experiences and transitions (Elder, 1994, 1998; Elder et al., 2003).

Women Entrepreneurs' Perspectives on Happiness

Women entrepreneurs in China value financial success and personal fulfillment. Community and family support are essential to their happiness and well-being. Chinese women entrepreneurs may have different views or experiences depending on their industry, location, education, family background, and personal circumstances (Inwood, 2019). Women entrepreneurs must deal with various issues related to their business endeavors, including

cultural bias, unfairness, and limited access to resources such as funding and networks. Despite the problems, many women entrepreneurs report high happiness and job satisfaction levels in China (Puppini, 2019). One study by the China Association of Women Entrepreneurs indicated that most women entrepreneurs in China rated their happiness level as "very happy" or "happy." The study also found that financial success, recognition, and personal growth contributed to their happiness (China Association of Women Entrepreneurs, n.d.). Another study by the Shanghai Women's Federation reported that women entrepreneurs in Shanghai valued a sense of achievement and fulfillment in their work and the ability to integrate work and personal life. The study also found that social support from family support and good peer relationships played an essential role in their happiness and well-being (Shanghai Women's Federation, n.d.).

Women Entrepreneurs' Perspectives on Success

Chinese women have diverse and individual perspectives on what success means to them. Some may define success as career achievements, financial stability, or personal fulfillment, while others prioritize family and relationships. Cultural values, upbringing, and life experiences can all shape one's definition of success. It is essential to approach this question with an open mind (Wielander, 2019). According to a 2021 report by Hurun Research Institute, China has the most self-made women billionaires worldwide. The report shows that China has 61 women billionaires in 2021, more than the United States and India combined (Hurun Research Institute, n.d.). Some of the most successful Chinese women entrepreneurs include Xin Zhang, founder and CEO of SOHO, one of the largest real estate developers in China; Wu Yajun, co-founder and former CEO of Longfor Properties, another primary real estate developer in China; and Zhou Qunfei, founder of Lens Technology, which supplies touch screens to companies like Apple and Samsung (Hurun Research Institute, n.d.). These women entrepreneurs have succeeded in

various industries, including technology, finance, and retail. They have overcome cultural and gender barriers to create successful businesses, and their achievements inspire other women entrepreneurs in China and worldwide (Hurun Research Institute, n.d.; Inwood, 2019; Puppin, 2019).

Women Entrepreneurs' Work-life Balance

Integrating business and life can be challenging but significantly more difficult for women (Kiradoo, 2023). Women entrepreneurs often face additional responsibilities at home, such as taking care of children and elderly parents and managing household tasks (Guelich et al., 2021). Most women entrepreneurs acknowledge that achieving work-life balance is an ongoing journey that requires effort, commitment, and flexibility. To integrate career and life, women entrepreneurs in China often take the following steps (Rai & Kiran, 2020):

- **Have Clear Boundaries:** Set specific work hours, and avoid checking work emails or taking calls outside those hours.
- **Work on self-care:** Make time for self-care activities such as physical exercise, meditation, or other hobbies. Stay energized and focused by caring for yourself.
- **Delegate tasks:** Hire employees or outsource tasks to free themselves to focus on high-priority tasks.
- **Build a support network:** Socialize with supportive friends, family, and fellow entrepreneurs who can offer encouragement and support.
- **Stay organized:** Use to-do lists, day planners, and project management software to stay organized and prioritize tasks.

Historically, traditional gender roles have dictated that women should put their roles as wives and mothers over their careers, which can create pressure to conform to societal

expectations (Ngai et al., 2007). Many workplaces in China operate on a "996" schedule, which means working from 9 AM to 9 PM, six days a week. Women need help to balance their professional responsibilities with their personal lives and family obligations. There has been a growing awareness and push for work-life balance. The government encourages companies to offer flexible work arrangements, and many companies are now offering more flexible schedules, remote work options, and parental leave. Chinese women have also been actively advocating for more excellent work-life balance, and some have even started their own companies focusing on work-life balance and gender equality (S. Brown, 2017; Z. Huang et al., 2020).

Women Entrepreneurs' Struggles to Integrate Work and Life

Women's struggle related to work-life integration is a common issue women entrepreneurs face worldwide. Traditional gender roles and expectations of women's domestic responsibilities still exist in Chinese society, creating tension between work and family life (Argys & Averett, 2021; Inwood, 2019). One of the challenges for Chinese women is the family pressure to get married and give birth to children at a young age, which can limit their career opportunities. Women who choose to delay marriage and children to focus on their careers may face criticism from family members, social stigma, and difficulties finding a partner who supports their career goals (Yousafzai et al., 2021). The high cost of childcare and limited availability of family-friendly workplace policies can become critical factors for Chinese women to integrate their career advancement and family responsibilities (J. Song & Li, 2021). Many women in China need help to find affordable and reliable childcare options, which can limit their ability to work full-time or take on more demanding jobs (C. Lin, 2022). The lack of paid parental-leave and a considerate working schedule has become a barrier for women in China to

balance work and personal life. Women entrepreneurs in major metropolitan cities are more optimistic about gender equality in the workplace and at home than those in rural areas. Some companies in China are implementing family-friendly policies under government pressure, including flexible working hours, paid parental time, and convenient childcare facilities to support working mothers. There is a growing movement among younger female generations to shift their traditional gender roles and expectations by promoting greater gender equality and inclusion (Puppin, 2019; Wielander, 2019; Z. Zheng, 2022).

Coping Strategies to Work-Life Integration

Like women worldwide, Chinese women face various challenges in integrating their careers and family life. There are several strategies that Chinese women often use to integrate their professional achievements, social expectations, and family responsibilities (Cooke & Xiao, 2021; Minniti, 2017):

- Hiring domestic help: Many Chinese women hire domestic help to care for their children and perform household tasks while focusing on their careers.
- Negotiating flexible work arrangements: Chinese women often negotiate flexible working hours and job sharing with their employers for more time to fulfill family duties.
- Prioritizing family time: Chinese women often prioritize spending quality time with their families, even if it means sacrificing their careers.
- Utilizing technology: Chinese women often use smartphones and mobile apps to stay connected with their families at work. The popular WeChat app has over 900 million registered users because of its comprehensive functions to help people keep in touch with their friends and family members.

- Seeking support from family and friends: Chinese women often rely on the support of their families and friends to help them manage their careers and family responsibilities.
- Pursuing career opportunities that align with family goals: Chinese women may choose to pursue careers that align with their family goals, such as jobs with flexible schedules or opportunities to work from home.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurs

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Chinese women entrepreneurs in China (He & Wang, 2020). Many businesses have closed or suffered losses (Verma, 2022). However, some women entrepreneurs have found new opportunities and thrived despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. Here are some ways in which Chinese women entrepreneurs have been affected (S. Hu, 2022; K. Song, 2023; S. Wang, 2021):

- Business closures: Due to the pandemic, many small businesses owned by women entrepreneurs in China have closed. The social distancing, total lockdowns, and restrictions on movement and gathering have caused problems for many companies in continuing their operations. According to an All-China Women's Federation survey, over 60% of women-owned businesses in China reported significant losses due to the pandemic.
- Supply chain disruptions: Many women entrepreneurs in China rely on imported materials and products for their businesses, and the pandemic has disrupted supply chains globally. The Covid-19 outbreak has caused shortages of raw materials and finished products, making it difficult for small and mid-sized firms to continue operating.

- **Decreased market demand:** COVID-19 has caused a slowdown in economic activities worldwide, reducing market needs for products and services. This pandemic has affected many women entrepreneurs in China who rely on consumer spending for businesses.
- **Increased caregiving responsibilities:** The Chinese government took strict COVID-19 prevention and isolation measures. With schools and daycare centers closed many women entrepreneurs in China had to take on increased caregiving responsibilities. Covid-19 has affected the time and effort to manage their businesses because they are tied to family responsibilities.
- **Digital influence:** The Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing have led to the shift toward digital transformation. The new lifestyle and working habits have changed permanently because most people in China have to purchase most of their daily needed products online. Women entrepreneurs who have been able to generate online sales or delivery services have been better coping with the pandemic.

Summary

Although Chinese women's contributions to China's business development have tripled in the past twenty years, there were few studies on how Chinese women could lead or manage successful business ventures for multinational companies, start-ups, or private enterprises. Although the feminist movement is popular in the Western world, scholarly literature has not covered Chinese women entrepreneurs' experiences and struggles with gender equality, oppression, and inclusion, especially their life course and work-life integration strategies. The lack of scholarly research and literature on Chinese women entrepreneurs has led to stereotypes and assumptions. The misconception about Chinese women is rooted worldwide without diverse

stories about their identities and experiences. This study on women entrepreneurs' work-life integration and coping strategies in China provides a theoretical and empirical reference to future research opportunities for exploring Chinese women entrepreneurs' voices and perspectives.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China, regarding their work-life integration and coping strategies. Specifically, this study aims to investigate Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles and coping strategies to integrate their work and life by overcoming cultural barriers, traditional norms, government regulations, and business challenges. The study of Chinese women entrepreneurs uses a life course framework to identify themes among the participants by focusing on their specific life periods from childhood to adulthood and the present to the projected future (Giele, 2002, 2008). This chapter covers the role and qualification of the researcher, the research design and methodology, the restatement of the research questions, the data selection sources, data gathering procedures, IRB considerations, data analysis, validity and reliability of data, and personal bias.

The Researcher's Role and Qualification

The role of the researcher is to collect data on participants' perceptions, views, and thoughts (Verd & Lopez, 2011). Qualitative researchers interpret the qualitative data clearly and reflexively to recognize their values and backgrounds, including gender, culture, social status, economic condition, and history (Creswell, 2014). The researcher is a female Chinese American born in Beijing, China, who came to the United States of America 35 years ago. As a women entrepreneur, strategic consultant, and executive coach, the researcher has worked between Southeast Asia (mainly China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) and Los Angeles, California, for the past 25 years. With firsthand experience and knowledge as a women entrepreneur originally from China, the researcher understands how women entrepreneurs struggled to integrate their business and family life while trying to manage successful business ventures in China. As a

founding partner of a prominent business consulting firm in China, the researcher knows how to cultivate a trustworthy rapport with the participants by protecting the participants' privacies.

The professional background of the researcher helps the researcher adopt the social constructivism paradigm. It adds significant value in forming the realities and meanings of the subjects' lived experiences. The researcher must encourage the participants to share their open and honest life experiences without holding back or having concerns during the interviews. As an executive coach, the researcher values observing and listening without judgment during conversations to help the participants feel relaxed and honored. The researcher will ensure that past entrepreneurial and consulting experiences will not affect the data interpretation and findings by focusing on data validity, reliability, and reflexivity.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is a roadmap for researchers to plan, design, and conduct high-quality studies (Yin, 2010). This research utilizes a qualitative research design to investigate the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs in China. A qualitative study is appropriate because qualitative research is to study phenomena in natural settings and interpret the findings through the participants' perspectives. Qualitative research occurs naturally by interviewing the participants to collect data (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research gives the researcher acts as the instrument to shape and manage the interactive conversation with the participants to understand further the participants' experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). Qualitative design helps the researcher seek participants' explanations using verbal and nonverbal interactive signals. With the qualitative phenomenological method, the researcher applies a coding technique to analyze the data collected through the interviews (Creely et al., 2020; Creswell, 2013). Although the researcher's biases may influence the interpretation of the analysis result in a qualitative study,

the researcher can employ validity and reliability protocols to analyze the findings to ensure this study's integrity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

A qualitative study is constructed by participants naturally without a predetermined notion (S. Taylor et al., 2015). There are five standard qualitative research designs: narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Richards & Morse, 2012). Qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design is the most suitable for this study because it allows the researcher to select the interview questions that assist the participants in sharing their life stories comprehensively (Tracy, 2019). The phenomenological design allows the participants to recall and tell their life course experiences naturally and freely and helps the researcher analyze and discuss the core values of the experiences, such as what and how the participants experienced diligently. In a phenomenological design, researchers believe participants' lived experiences contribute significantly to their life events (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; O'Rand, 1998). The phenomenological method studies individuals' experiences with a common phenomenon. The phenomenological inquiry focuses on the meanings of human experiences during daily life (Cardano, 2020; Heidegger, 2005; Richards & Morse, 2012).

The researcher did not use the other four qualitative approaches because the phenomenological design was more suitable for this study to reveal similar phenomena among the participants in their efforts to achieve entrepreneurial success while maintaining work-life integration effectively. The narrative design allows the participants to share the narrative stories of their experiences, revealing their identities and their views of themselves. The grounded theory involves developing data-based approaches by moving beyond explaining or describing a process or event. The ethnographic design examines the cultural background and knowledge, not the shared meanings, traditions, and experiences (S. Taylor et al., 2015). A case study is about

following a specific case, a company, a community, a process, or a partnership. Qualitative research is nonexperimental without conducting group comparisons or using dependent or independent variables with the predetermined hypothesis in advance. Qualitative studies are more holistic in understanding phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2019).

Social Constructivism Worldview

The philosophical worldview is defined as the general stances of the researcher on the world and nature related to the current study. The philosophical worldview contains different paradigms or views related to the design and interpretation of the qualitative research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The intellectual worldview development can be influenced by past research experiences, mentors, chairpersons, and communities. Researchers can define the philosophical perspectives of qualitative research based on their genders, class, race, cultural background, and past life experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Richards & Morse, 2012).

This phenomenological qualitative study adopts a social constructivism worldview. Social constructivism refers to knowledge development through individual interactions (M. Kim, 2014). Social constructivism depends on human perspectives, learning, and experiences through interactions. In social constructivism, the learning process is based on existing knowledge, but a person can interpret historical and cultural knowledge or experiences in new ways (Neimeyer & Torres, 2015; S. Taylor, 2021). In this explorative study, the themes will be identified through human interaction by employing social constructivism principles. Social Constructivism focuses on the social construct by ignoring natural phenomena such as earthquakes or volcanoes. Social Constructivism values individuals' perceptions and experiences about the world they live

and work in by helping the researcher identify complicated views through participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Maxwell, 2022).

Utilizing a social constructivism worldview, this study aims to facilitate the participants' interests and abilities to construct their views of their historical and social experiences by recognizing their life course stories and backgrounds. The researcher will use open-ended questions to understand the participants' worldviews and create themes inductively. Researchers in qualitative studies employ a social constructivism worldview to seek a complete understanding of the participants' cultural and historical contexts by gathering data personally (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

This study will be guided by Giele's (2002, 2008) life course model because traditional surveys and fragmented methods cannot reveal the participant's life course patterns. The qualitative life course methodology requires the participants to recall and describe their life experiences from four significant periods by highlighting their past, present and projected future life stories. This methodology helps the researcher to explore the relationship between external factors and the internal emotions of the participants. The theoretical life course framework allows the subjects to reflect on their experiences comprehensively, extensively, and entirely because they can respond to the guiding questions freely without restrictions. This method is suitable for deriving critical themes through the significant life periods of Chinese women entrepreneurs (Elder et al., 2003; Elder & Giele, 2009; Giele, 2002, 2008; Hollstein, 2019).

The first set of early adulthood questions allowed the participants to share the stories of their college times related to education, career choices, and family plans. The second set of childhood questions extended to the participants' families concerning parents, siblings, wealth,

lifestyles, and education to discover their childhood experiences. The first two sets of questions were about their past life experiences. The next set of middle adulthood questions was focused on participants' present work and family life experiences related to achievements, promotions, contributions, recognitions, successes, challenges, struggles, and problems. The final set of questions allowed the participants to imagine their future projections, expectations, and dreams mindfully by recognizing the potential challenges and concerns for the future (Elder & Giele, 2009).

The repetitive elements of the life course shape a person's life. Cultural protocol, traditional norms, community pressure, social status, family relationships, personal characteristics, and financial situations are essential in determining a person's overall standing regarding the typical life course research design schemes. There are four critical factors contributing to a person's behaviors and decisions: (a) traditional, cultural, and historical; (b) social relationships or community responsibilities; (c) personal drive or motives; (d) Adaptive timing to significant life activities (Elder & Giele, 2009).

The traditional, cultural, and historical identity factor focuses on the surroundings, such as space, time, and context. The factor of social relationships and community responsibilities is categorized as a relational style that reflects the person's networks, community bondages, and reliable circles. The factor of personal drive or motives is labeled as motivation that covers a person's work-related successes or significant achievements. The timing and adaptive styles factor is regarded as an adaptation that reveals a person's adaptability to change for a better future. It is critical to differentiate major themes through inductive studies and discover commonalities and connections among life experiences and influential factors through deductive studies (Elder & Giele, 2009).

Restatement of Research Questions

This study focused on discovering common themes identified from the data rather than a statistical interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Leavy, 2020). Three research questions guided the research process:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1):
How do Chinese women entrepreneurs describe their life course stories impacted by identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2):
According to Chinese women entrepreneurs, what demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influenced their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style?
- Research Question 3 (RQ3):
What are Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work, family, and personal life?

Data Selection Sources

The data of this study will be collected from Chinese women entrepreneurs in China. The researcher will protect the participants' rights and privacy based on the rules and protocols of Pepperdine University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants in this study are women entrepreneurs with established operations for at least five years in China. The researcher will attempt to recruit twenty participants through a gatekeeper from the Beijing Women Entrepreneur Association (BWEA), who will introduce five women entrepreneurs interested in the study. A snowball-rolling technique will secure an additional 15 entrepreneurs through the five committed participants referred by the gatekeeper. The researcher will contact

the five participants for introduction to other women entrepreneurs through their business and social networks for an additional 15 participants based on the selection criteria.

The snowball-rolling technique, also called chain referral sampling, non-random sampling, or respondent-driven sampling, refers to the subject selection method that requests the current participants of the research to introduce one or more subjects, such as family members, business associates, partners, suppliers, friends, or classmates. This sampling technique allows the researcher to grow subjects like a rolling snowball with less biased assessment from the snowball samples (Creswell, 2013; Richards & Morse, 2012). The researcher has access to BWEA's gatekeeper because the researcher has been a dedicated keynote speaker for BWEA's annual conference since 2005.

Inclusion Criteria

The participants selected through the gatekeeper and the snowball-rolling technique must satisfy these inclusion criteria. The participant must be a Chinese women entrepreneur:

- Was born in China.
- Owns a private business in Beijing.
- Has operated a private enterprise for over five years.
- Has a college or advanced degree with English fluency.
- Is married with at least one child.
- Is a single mother with at least one child.
- Is between 25 to 65 years old.
- Employs a minimum of 50 or more employees.

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria consist of the following:

- Unavailability for interviews between August and September 2023.

Optimization Criteria

The optimization criteria include the following:

- Women in different age groups.
- Women with different marital statuses and family situations.

Based on Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) study, the researcher will send an email invitation letter (see Appendix A) to each Chinese woman entrepreneur referred by the gatekeeper or through the snowball-rolling technique, asking for their participation. The women entrepreneurs selected are diversified in age, marital status, years in business, education, and other experiences. The selected participants are entrepreneurs in Beijing, China, trying to integrate an entrepreneurial career and family responsibilities. The interview data of the Chinese women entrepreneurs across different sectors will reveal their challenges, struggles, and coping strategies to integrate their business and family life in China.

Data Gathering Instrument

Giele's (2008) life course framework will be used as the data-gathering instrument by interviewing selected Chinese women entrepreneurs with four sets of life course questions and two sets of coping strategy questions (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015), including the COVID-19 influence. Giele's (2008) life course questions cover the participants' life experiences from early adulthood, childhood and adolescence, current adulthood, and future expectations (see Appendix D). Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) questions focus on participants' strategies to integrate work and life. The participants can easily access these questions through the Work-Life Integration Project website, worklifeintegrationproject.com, from anywhere worldwide to become familiar with the questions before the email interviews.

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview questions are pre-created (see Appendix D) from the Work-Life Integration Project website (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com). The semi-structured interview allows participants to answer open-ended questions through in-depth conversations and follow-up communications. The significant benefits of using semi-structured interviews are flexibility and structure for the participants to share their insights, memorable stories, and meaningful experiences without limitations and concerns. The highly structured interview is a survey that limits the details of the subjects' views and experiences. The unstructured interview cannot help the researcher discover the participants' authentic perspectives and relevant responses. The semi-structured interview method allows the researcher to control the conversation by adjusting, skipping, and adding targeted questions during the interview without predetermining the order, wording, or format (Galletta, 2013; Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The researcher will strictly follow the email interview protocol (see Appendix C) to interview all participants. Each participant's availability will determine the exact schedule and length of each interview. Each interview will be conducted via email to give each participant a flexible and comfortable time and space to answer the semi-structured questions. After receiving the participant's consent form, the researcher will record and transcribe all responding answers via email. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study without identifying the participants' names, organizations, or affiliations to protect their confidentiality and privacy. The researcher will delete the interview answers from the email server after uploading the interview data in NVivo for coding and data analysis. The researcher will permanently destroy the interview data from the researcher's password-protected device five years after the completion of the research.

The reminiscent interview process separates the high and low events of each participant's life course stories (Giele, 2008). This study adopts the six sets of semi-structured interview questions from Giele's (2008) framework and Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) strategy instruments. The subjects will answer the socio-demographic background questions before answering the 27 interview questions via email (see Appendix E).

Data Gathering Procedures

The semi-structured interview questions give the participants flexibility and freedom to describe their life course experiences. The participant can learn about the Work-Life Integration Project on the website and access the interview questions from anywhere in the world before the email interview communications because they only need a computer and an internet connection. Each participant will sign the Informed Consent form (see Appendix B) after understanding the details of this research nature. The participant can take time to answer the six sets of questions within two weeks after receiving the semi-structured email interview questions. The participants can use different or temporary email addresses to communicate with the researcher and to respond to the interview questions for privacy and peace of mind. After completing each semi-structured interview through email, the researcher will review the results and, if necessary, send additional emails to follow up on data collection and clarifications. All participants will use pseudonyms as their identifiers throughout the study to ensure anonymity while coding.

The Work-Life Integration Project is the most functional and convenient website for busy Chinese women entrepreneurs to review the interview questions and learn about the program's background at their convenience before email communications. The interview protocol in Appendix C indicates that participation in the study is voluntary. The participants

can read the Informed Consent form before answering the interview questions. It will assume that the participants agree to the protocols and terms of the interview once they start to answer the questions. The informed consent form protects both the subjects and the interviewer. The researcher will review their signed Informed Consent forms before arranging the email interviews.

The Work-Life Integration Project website is only for graduate research professionals and doctoral studies to access the site. The participants' answers, additional responses, and private information will remain anonymous and confidential in the researcher's final report. The interview responses will be saved digitally in a Word document on a password-protected computer. The researcher will be the only one who can access the computer and the documents. The analyzing and coding process will use participants' pseudonyms without revealing their identifications. After this study, the researcher will send each participant a copy of the final report and a Thank-You letter.

The Work-Life Integration Project is the most functional and convenient website for busy Chinese women entrepreneurs to review the interview questions and learn about the program's background at their convenience before email communications. The interview protocol in Appendix C indicates that participation in the study is voluntary. The participants can read the Informed Consent form before answering the questions. It will assume that the participants agree to the protocols and terms of the interview once they start to answer the questions. The informed consent form protects both the subjects and the interviewer. The researcher will review their signed Informed Consent forms before arranging the live Zoom interviews.

The Work-Life Integration Project website is only for graduate research professionals and doctoral studies to access the site. The participants' answers, additional responses, and private information will remain anonymous and confidential in the researcher's final report. The interview responses will be saved digitally in a Word document on a password-protected computer. The researcher will be the only one who can access the computer and the documents. The analyzing and coding process will use participants' pseudonyms without revealing their identifications. After this study, the researcher will send each participant a copy of the final report and a Thank-You letter.

IRB and Human Subjects' Considerations

The researcher will submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) explaining the framework and the details to gain approval before beginning this qualitative phenomenological research. The application describes precisely how the participants are protected before, during, and after the interviews by following the departmental requirements without copyright issues. Once the preliminary proposal is accepted, the researcher will complete the required IRB forms, including the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) and the Study's Interview Protocol (Appendix C), then submit them to the dissertation chair for final approval. The IRB application will be presented to all dissertation students involved in the Work-Life Integration Project (previously called Work-Life Balance Research Group). The researcher can apply for a claim of exemption by indicating the group approval ID for the expedited IRB application process due to similar theoretical frameworks. A copy of the existing group IRB approval letter related to the Work-Life Integration Project will be attached to the IRB application form (Work-Life Integration Project, n.d.).

This study will follow Pepperdine University's IRB requirements under Title 45, Part 46 of the US Code of Federal Regulations. Data collection will be done online via Zoom conferencing and email communication. Each participant will sign an Informed Consent Form in the study (see Appendix B) to fully understand the purpose and time involved in participating. The participants should know that there is no stipend engaged in this study. All participants voluntarily participate and have the right to question the interviewer, refuse to answer unwanted questions or withdraw from participation without any negative consequence. The researcher will remove subjects' identifying information from all recordings and transcripts by creating pseudonyms for participants during coding and data analysis to protect their anonymity and confidentiality (Richards & Morse, 2012).

The researcher will send each participant a printed copy of the complete research paper. The participants will benefit from participating because the results and findings of this research can help them apply effective coping strategies to integrate their business goals and family life issues. Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China, the subjects of the study, will understand more after reading the completed paper how other women entrepreneurs in Beijing integrate their lives and work while managing successful ventures. The participants might risk time pressure for the interviews or email communications. The final paper will assure the women entrepreneurs of their confidentiality and anonymity because no data or information reveals their identities. The socio-demographic data will be reviewed collectively without recognizing personally identifiable information. Besides following IRB principles, the study's research design will apply Pepperdine University's research ethics policy. Any qualitative research involving human subjects should be

approved by the university's Institutional Review Board and be conducted with ethical and professional protocols or standards (Calder, 2020; Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; Traianou, 2014).

Data Analysis Processes

This qualitative phenomenological inquiry will analyze the coping strategies of Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China, to integrate their career and family life. The researcher will enter the complete interview information sets into the NVIVO analysis system, a qualitative data analysis software. Through NVIVO, various codes will be assigned to applicable categories reflecting the four areas of the theoretical framework, such as identity, relationships, etc. The researcher will use the final codes to compare the emerging themes for similarity and consistency (Walsh, 2015).

The first step is to transcribe all of the participants' interviews. The next step is to isolate the specific sentences or paragraphs related to work-life integration within the subjects' narratives from the interviews. NVIVO software will identify common themes, ideas, and insights and then find the connections between socio-demographic data and qualitative analysis results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the data analysis process, the researcher will only use the pseudonym identification given to each participant. The researcher can only directly use participants' quotes in the dissertation with the participants' written and verbal permission, even by using their pseudonyms. The researcher will subscribe to a private NVIVO account password-protected for analyzing the interview data and finding the themes by transferring the data to the NVIVO system installed in a secured computer.

Data Validity and Reliability

Data validity is critical for qualitative research to understand the findings because there is no numerical measurement. The validity evaluates the measurement accuracy of the

data collected through semi-structured interviews (Golafshani, 2015). This qualitative study with a phenomenological design aims to investigate the life course stories of Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China. This research design lets subjects answer questions and privately share their life stories. The study's methodology allows the researcher to discover common patterns and themes from the participants' social contexts and historical backgrounds through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013; Richards & Morse, 2012).

Data reliability tests whether the study results can be replicated (Golafshani, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher must be appropriately trained before conducting the interviews because the researcher acts as the instrument in the study (Skinner et al., 2020). The credibility of this type of study has already been tested and validated through the research group's previous interviews with the Work-Life Integration Project. All group researchers joining the Work-Life Integration Project understood how to manage the interview process professionally by following the generated interview questions for each research question (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015).

The Work-Life Integration Project requires researchers not to attach personal biases or ask unrelated questions not approved by the IRB during the interviews. The researchers will use professional ways to review the signed Informed Consent Forms and apply the interview protocols with the participants while keeping their personal information private and building a trustworthy relationship with the participants. The interview questions and protocols are based on Giele's (2008) theoretical framework utilized in group studies and dissertations within the Work-Life Integration Project's research group (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015; Work-Life Integration Project, n.d.).

The researcher will invite two peer reviewers who are doctoral candidates in Pepperdine's Global Leadership & Change program who have completed all required courses with knowledge and skill to design qualitative research, conduct interviews, data coding, and data analysis. The two cohorts will peer-review the problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, the interview questions, research questions, and the works of literature by making modification suggestions. The researcher will make necessary changes to the research and relevant interview questions according to the committee's recommendation and the peers' suggestions. The researcher will use the same peer review process for the coding process to ensure reliability and validity. The researcher will share the coding results of the first five interview transcripts with the two peers for their feedback and opinions before coding the remaining transcripts. The researcher will have the dissertation committee involved to settle any differences.

Statement of Personal Bias

It is acknowledged that the researcher selected this topic based on personal experiences of being an executive coach, business consultant, and a women entrepreneur. The researcher will put preconceptions and prejudgments about the subject of the study aside to avoid possible personal bias regarding the findings and results (Richards & Morse, 2012). The researcher will use the *epoché* or bracketing approach to ensure an open-minded mentality in analyzing the data collected without being influenced by prior experiences and personal beliefs. The researcher will entirely focus on the participants' perspectives and experiences during the semi-structured interviews and data analysis process by bracketing personal thoughts, experiences, preconceived views, personal

knowledge, and worldviews on women entrepreneurs in China (Larsen & Adu, 2021; B. Roberts, 2019).

Summary

This qualitative and phenomenological study aims to fully understand how Chinese women entrepreneurs integrate their business ventures and family responsibilities, including the coping strategies to overcome the daily struggles, cultural norms, and social protocols regarding gender roles. This research was guided by Giele's (2008) life course theoretical framework and Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) coping strategy instruments.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study with phenomenological research design was to investigate Chinese women entrepreneurs' lived experiences, struggles, and strategies to integrate their business responsibilities and family life. The study allowed twenty women entrepreneurs in China to describe their life course stories and the impacts of identity, relationship, drive, motivation, and adaptive styles. The study also explored demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influencing Chinese women entrepreneurs' identity, motivation, adaptive styles, and relationships. This study aims to explore the lived stories of twenty Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China. The researcher applied semi-structured interviews to collect data by focusing on participants' perspectives via email. The findings of this study will help women entrepreneurs in China and other Asian countries to face challenges better in today's man-dominated world. This study will increase the awareness of how Chinese women entrepreneurs integrate their business ventures, social expectations, and family responsibilities in China's government-controlled business environment.

According to Giele (2008), an individual's life course experiences shape personal decisions and behaviors along with the impacts of social and economic factors. It is a universal topic of how women choose to have a career or be homemakers (Henry et al., 2016). The current study used Giele's (2002, 2008) life-course framework to reveal the Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course patterns and the relationship between external influences and internal emotions. Giele's (2008) framework studies how identity, relationship, drive, motivation, and adaptivity impact women's life course experiences, from early childhood, adolescence, adulthood, current states, and future hopes. Giele's (2008) interview questions also include participants' parents and husbands' education, financial status, and siblings' influences. Weber

and Cissna-Heath's (2015) interview questions focus on Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work and life, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Three research questions guide this study.

- Research Question 1 (RQ1):
How do Chinese women entrepreneurs describe their life course stories impacted by identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2):
According to Chinese women entrepreneurs, what demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influenced their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style?
- Research Question 3 (RQ3):
What are Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work, family, and personal life?

Data Sources

Sampling can be challenging in China due to Chinese cultural and communicational habits and protocols (Yu et al., 2016). The researcher recruited initial participants through a Beijing Women Entrepreneur Association (BWEA) gatekeeper, who introduced five committed Chinese women entrepreneurs. A snowball-rolling technique was used to secure an additional fifteen women entrepreneurs through the five participants introduced by the gatekeeper. The snowball sampling technique, known as respondent-driven sampling, allowed the researcher to use the five committed subjects to recruit additional participants from their family members, peers, associates, colleagues, and friends (Creswell, 2013). The Work-Life Integration Project

website, worklifeintegrationproject.com, helped the subjects make their decision-making more accessible through the previous publications of similar studies.

Data Gathering Procedures

An email invitation letter (see Appendix A) was sent to each of the 20 committed participants. The 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing received the pre-created semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) and the sociodemographic background questions (see Appendix E) after signing and sending the Informed Consent forms to the researcher via email. The researcher followed the interview protocol (see Appendix C) to conduct the email interview communications to protect the participant's privacy and confidentiality. The researcher communicated with the participants promptly to verify the answers and comments from the 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs. After receiving complete solutions, perspectives, and responses to the email interview questions, the researcher transcribed the interview data into a password-controlled computer by creating a pseudonym for each participant without identifying the subjects' private information. The researcher deleted the email communications with the participants and advised them to delete their temporary email addresses to protect their confidentiality further. The researcher uploaded the interview data in NVivo for coding and data analysis and deleted the interview data from the cloud space. The researcher promised the participants to destroy the interview data from the password-protected computer five years after completing the research. The Work-Life Integration Project website played a functional role in the data gathering process because it offered the Chinese women entrepreneurs the comfort and peace of mind to share their life course stories more openly and authentically without worrying about their privacies.

Population Descriptions

The ages of the 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs were ranged from 29 to 60 years old. They are all from Beijing, China, and have owned private business ventures for at least five years with over 50 employees (see Table 1).

Table 1

Population Demographics

IDs	Pseudonyms	Age/Family Wealth	Years in Business/Industry	Children	Marital status	Employees	Education
P1	Amy	55/Wealthy	18/Electronics	1	Divorced	108	BA
P2	Su	48/Average	17/Beauty Salon	2	Married	270	MBA
P3	Hong	41/Average	13/Retail Stores	1	Married	75	MS
P4	Chen	46/Average	21/Wellness	1	Married	88	BA
P5	Ye	39/Average	22/Women's Spa	1	Married	57	BA
P6	Si	43/Wealthy	16/Plastic Surgery	1	Married	140	BA
P7	Lian	36/Poor	14/Export & Import	2	Married	62	MBA
P8	Xin	51/Average	17/HR Services	1	Married	55	Ph.D.
P9	Ting	47/Average	11/Clothing	1	Married	71	BA
P10	Lin	46/Average	7/English School	1	Married	66	MA
P11	Zhan	60/Average	26/Toys	1	Married	76	BA
P12	Pan	58/Wealthy	31/Cosmetics	1	Married	480	BA
P13	Wei	32/Poor	8/Retail-Toys Store	1	Divorced	56	BA
P14	Liu	29/Average	6/Furniture Store	1	Married	65	BA
P15	Gong	53/Average	15/IT Services	2	Married	72	BA
P16	Tong	47/Average	9/Restaurant	1	Divorced	61	MA
P17	Guo	59/Wealthy	26/Real Estate	1	Married	198	BA
P18	Wang	51/Average	20/Hair Salon	1	Divorced	53	BA
P19	Rong	45/Average	14/Health Spa	2	Married	110	BA
P20	Jie	38/Average	8/Supermarket	1	Married	55	BA

According to their answers to the sociodemographic questions and the six sets of interview questions, among the 20 participants, 16 women are currently married with at least one child, and four participants are divorced with one child. The 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs for this study are educated with English efficiency in reading and writing; 14 have bachelor's degrees, five have master's degrees, and one has a doctorate's degree. These 20 participants have had their private business operations in China for over 15 years on average, from 6 to 31 years.

Their business sectors include electronics, beauty salons, retail stores, restaurants, women's spas, private schools, IT services, international trade, toy manufacturing, cosmetics, plastic surgeries, nutritional products, real estate, supermarkets, and clothing factories. Based on their financial status, only four participants are from wealthy families, two are from low-income families, and 14 are from average families. Nineteen of the participants are practicing Buddhism as their religious beliefs. Four participants have two children, and 16 have one child due to China's One-Child family planning policy (White, 2011). Most of the 20 women claimed their parents had primary education and career background under China's state-owned economic and educational system. Six participants had three generations of family members living in their household. The parents of the four wealthy participants used to be high-level government officials.

Data Analysis

The study participants were diverse with different ages, marriage statuses, children, education, business sector, years in business, and family background. The interview responses were coded using a qualitative data analysis approach by combining the peer reviews and the NVivo analysis software. The data credibility of this type of study has been tested and validated through the research group's previous Work-Life Integration Project (Work-Life Integration Project, n.d.). After transcribing and uploading the complete interview data into the NVivo system, the researcher assigned codes to Giele's (2008) four categories: identity, relationship style, motivation, and adaptive style, based on the research questions. Two peers with full knowledge and skill to design qualitative research, conduct interviews, data coding, and data analysis were invited to check the coding process. After reviewing the research questions, purpose statement, significance of the study, and problem statement, the two peers familiar with the Work-Life Integration Project agreed with the major themes. The NVivo software identified

common themes, ideas, and insights by sectioning out responses based on typical phrases and words to provide foundations for groupings of thoughts and perspectives. After the data analysis process was finalized through NVivo software, the significant themes and influencers were identified and summarized in Table 2. The influencers were ranked and listed in order of times mentioned by the participants and the level of significance referenced. There are five significant influencers to each theme to explore the experiences of the 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs to identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style, and gain a better understanding of their coping strategies to integrate their work and life. The 20 participants of the study have granted the researcher verbal permission to use their direct quotes in the final research paper.

Table 2

Major Themes and Influencers

Themes	Influencer 1	Influencer 2	Influencer 3	Influencer 4	Influencer 5
<i>Identity</i>	Freedom	Independence	Compassion	Integrity	Forgiveness
<i>Relational Style</i>	Loving-Kindness	Support Network	Partnership	Responsibility	Societies
<i>Motivation</i>	Wellness	Hope	Purpose	Learning	Values
<i>Adaptive Style</i>	Mindfulness	Humility	Challenge	Flexibility	Authenticity

Findings

The research questions guided the researcher throughout the study to find out how the life course experiences of the Chinese women entrepreneurs were impacted based on Giele's (2002, 2008) theoretical framework's four dimensions: identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. The themes and influencers of research question 1 (RQ1) set the stage for the findings of research question 2 (RQ2) because the participants' demographic factors shaped their identity, motivation, adaptive style, and relationships. The findings are listed to reflect the degree of impact of each influencer on the relevant theme (see Table 2). The findings of RQ1 and RQ2

establish the foundations for revealing the participants' coping strategies to integrate work and life (RQ3).

Findings to Research Question 1 (RQ1)

- How do Chinese women entrepreneurs describe their life course stories impacted by identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles?

The findings related to RQ1 revealed that Chinese women entrepreneurs considered freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, and mindfulness as their primary influencers throughout their life courses (see Table 2). The second influencers included independence, support network, hope, and humility, while compassion, partnership, purpose, and challenge as the third influencers, integrity, responsibility, learning, and flexibility as the fourth influencers, and finally, forgiveness, societies, values, and authenticity as the fifth influencers. The findings match the Chinese cultural background that most Chinese women want to have the fundamental human rights of democracy and freedom to control their destinies in a country ruled by the Communist totalitarian government. Freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, and mindfulness have become Chinese women entrepreneurs' major influencers to their entrepreneurial leadership styles, empowered communication approaches, and mindful management principles.

All study participants grew up in traditional and supportive Chinese families with strong disciplines and socialist mentalities due to the Communist education and brainwashing system. One participant grew up with a single mother, two grew up with divorced parents, and four suffered the loss of a parent in their early years. Seventeen of the twenty participants expressed their burning desires for higher education, a promising career, and a loving family. In comparison, three participants believed education had nothing to do with their entrepreneurial success. All participants admitted the challenges, struggles, and barriers to integrating their

family lives and career opportunities. However, only three felt pressure to choose between marriage, family duties, and business ventures. Most participants were grateful for their parents to grow up without financial burdens and money issues. All participants regretted not having a giant family circle due to the one-child policy in China after the Cultural Revolution. The participants enjoyed married lives with their loving partners, except four were divorced due to personality differences. Most participants complained about their limited time to travel with family members or take more extended vacations due to business schedules, market competition, and profit-driven liabilities. Some participants wished to live in a country with more rights and gender equality for women entrepreneurs because they must face gender discrimination and male-dominated traditions in China.

Participants, P1-Amy, P7-Lian, and P18-Wang provided insightful responses.

P1-Amy: I feel sad for myself and other women in China because we do not have the right to choose our leaders; because we cannot vote and access the world news because the Chinese government builds an internet firewall to block access to the outside world, and to speak out the truths due to the strict punishment policies against people with different opinions. As an entrepreneur for 18 years, I am grateful to run a sustained factory to produce electronics for the Chinese market. However, I cannot impact the changes politically and economically. I can inspire the employees and family members to live a mindful life with loving kindness, humility, and happiness.

P7-Lian: As a young entrepreneur with a loving husband and two beautiful daughters, I am very content with my life. Although my parents disapproved of my marriage due to my husband's low-income family background, I can manage my international trade business while caring for my daughters without family and community support. I enjoy the freedom to have a business and a loving relationship. I try not to overthink, even if I do not have time for vacation or personal growth. I practice mindful meditation daily for at least thirty minutes to be present for physical and mental wellness. I am grateful to be an entrepreneur even though I have not reached my full potential yet.

P18-Wang: I am a divorced woman with a daughter living in Beijing. I opened a beauty salon twenty years ago. I could not find a full-time job after graduation with a BA in Chemical engineering because the state-owned companies prefer male candidates. I am not wealthy, but I can support my daughter and parents with a comfortable life with my small enterprise. I envy women in America, England, Singapore, and Taiwan because I wish to breathe the free air, eat healthy food, tell and hear the truths directly without

using the VPN software, be treated equally, and see hope for my daughter's generation. I feel depressed most of the time because I must work seven days a week to maintain the lifestyle for my family, but I often miss the important dates, events, or moments of my daughter and family members. I have been trying to balance my work and life more effectively.

These three participants openly expressed their feelings and thoughts as women entrepreneurs in China. P1-Amy addressed the dreams of democracy and freedom in a country without fundamental human rights. In democratic countries, the citizens take democracy and freedom for granted, but in a country like China, people would instead trade wealth for freedom. P7-Lian provided her thoughts on balancing work and life as a wife, mother, and entrepreneur. She bravely made her own marriage choice without her parents' approval. She enjoyed freedom and loving kindness while struggling to live a mindful life by taking care of her husband, daughters, and her business at the same time. P18-Wang's response reflected Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles to integrate work and family life, including their hopes for freedom, loving-kindness, and family wellness.

The following seventeen responses represent participants' ideas and thoughts about the primary influencers of their life courses concerning identity, relationship, motivation, and adaptive styles.

P2-Su: My parents' loving kindness gave me the confidence to pursue my dreams. They used their savings to help me start my beauty salon business. Without my parents' unconditional love and support, I cannot imagine operating a franchise with 12 locations and over 200 employees.

P3-Hong: My parents worked for the government without the option to start their own business. I was not close with my father because he remarried with his lover. My mother encouraged me to fulfill my dreams as a fashion designer and retail store owner.

P4-Chen: I have had a controlling parent who made all my decisions since childhood. I used to resent their involvement in my life. Today, I am happy that the wellness products funded by my parents help thousands of people in China to remain healthy and happy.

P5-Ye: I could have become a violinist if my parents had not pushed me to take over their thriving women's spa business. I enjoyed a wealthy lifestyle and financial freedom but missed my dreams of art and music.

P6-Si: I only understood my parents once I became a mom. My parents wanted me to pursue a master's degree and marry a successful man. I failed them because I was satisfied with a BA degree and married a poor college classmate. My husband and I decided to start a business to give our daughter the financial freedom.

P8-Xin: I was so fortunate to have parents with loving-kindness and unconditional support to let me follow my dreams. After finishing my PhD program at Beijing University, I only needed to work for a living. "You are the best," my parents always told me those magical words no matter what happened.

P9-Ting: My mother compared me with the neighbor's children since I was in first grade. She made all my decisions about my education, career, and relationships. My parents loved me so much and tried to give me everything, but I did not have much freedom to plan my life until I married. I joined my husband to manage his private clothing factory.

P10-Lin: I learned to meditate with my parents in middle school. "Be mindful and present without worrying about anything in the past or the future," my parents said to me all the time. They never pressured me to choose things I did not like. With the freedom to be myself and do the things I like the most, I received a master's degree in English literature and started a private English learning center for teenagers.

P11-Zhan: My family cared about my wellness and happiness more than anything else. I was not too fond of school when I was young, but I still received a BA degree to follow the typical growth path of other young people in China. My parents could not provide financial support, and I borrowed money from my uncle to make toys. Today, my factory produces toys for kids worldwide.

P12-Pan: I was born with a golden spoon due to my parents' cosmetics business. I had a private driver, nanny, tutor, and unlimited toys, bags, and clothes. I did not feel grateful until I had to work at a grocery school to pay my tuition because my parents filed for bankruptcy due to tax-related charges. I finally restored the cosmetic brand created by my parents and expanded the markets to most Asian countries.

P13-Wei: I was from a low-income family with minimal resources growing up. Fortunately, I felt loved and cared for extensively by my parents and my relatives. Their unconditional love and support gave me confidence and joy even though we live in a poor neighborhood. I was determined to change my family's destiny and started a retail shop to sell toys and game accessories. I have not considered it ten years later, but I know what I need now. I wanted a strong family tie with support and love for each other. I have recovered from divorcing a cheating husband and a stressful marriage because of my family and a well-managed retail business.

P14-Liu: I have a BA degree in Civil Engineering. I rejected a job offer to work for the government as my parents wanted me to be myself. I joined college classmates to establish a modern store selling imported Italian furniture. My parents did not influence me because they encouraged me to be myself. As the only child, I was showered with love until today.

P15-Gong: My parents sent me to Hong Kong for the best education. I returned to Beijing after my graduation with a BA degree. My parents sold their old house near Tiananmen Square and invested in my start-up business to provide IT-related services. My private business owner dream has come true with my parents' unconditional love and encouragement.

P16-Tong: My father was a chef at a local restaurant. My mother wanted me to take a different path, not following my father's cooking career. My parents encouraged me to study overseas and have a professional job. I ended up with a master's degree in hotel management and established a restaurant franchise with some investors I met in England. My parents did not blame me for changing my major and running a restaurant business.

P17-Guo: My parents had never gone to college and could not support me to study overseas. My aunt sponsored me to study in Australia. She helped me become a developer when China opened the door to the Western world with the economic reform policies of former leader Deng Xiaoping. I was fortunate to have the investment capital from my wealthy aunt and developed several residential buildings in Beijing. Everyone in my family benefited from the business venture.

P19-Rong: I worked at my parents' Health Spa in high school and college. I took over the business automatically after graduation because they wanted to travel and enjoy life. I was lucky to have a successful business without trying as hard as other start-up entrepreneurs in Beijing. My parents prioritized family wellness by paving the way for my future.

P20-Jie: My grandmother has lived with us since my grandfather died in a car accident. I grew up with my grandmother because my parents were busy as high school teachers. I hated to be a teacher because my parents never had time for me, even during summer vacations. They offered private tutoring classes in the Summer to earn more money to support my education in Singapore. I became a partner in a Beijing supermarket after finishing my business degree. My parents used their ways to love me and encourage my career choice even though I never understood them.

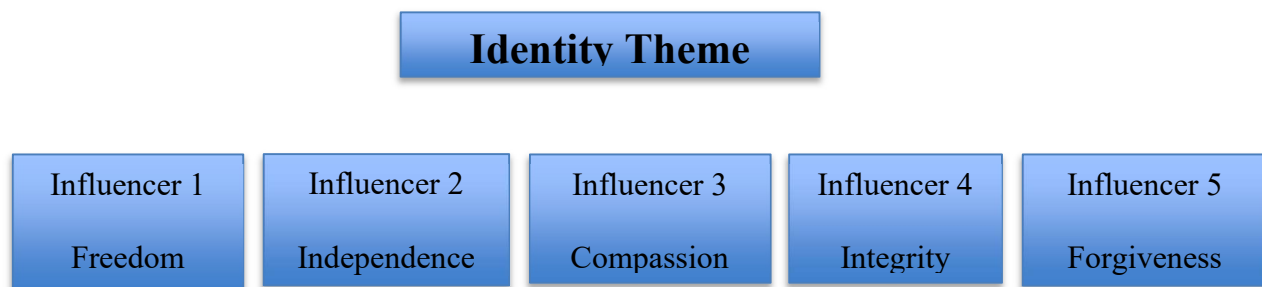
The study's findings revealed that Chinese women entrepreneurs value freedom, loving-kindness, family wellness, and mindfulness as the primary influencers that affect their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles throughout their life courses to live happy and

successful lives. The major themes and the influencers related to RQ1 are reported in detail in the following sections of this chapter.

Identity Theme. Giele's (2002, 2008) life course theoretical framework describes identity as an individual's unique beliefs, faiths, values, thinking styles, and behavioral patterns. The Chinese women entrepreneurs of the study expressed their identity theme with five dimensions or influencers: freedom, independence, compassion, integrity, and forgiveness (see Figure 1). The influencers were ranked in order of times referenced and the degree of significance. The findings revealed that freedom and independence played critical roles in Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course and business success. The study participants expressed gratitude to their parents, who allowed them to pursue their dreams without limiting their career choices. In a country with thousands of years of history, Chinese people's morals, ethics, and traditional norms are heavily influenced by Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Most participants expressed the importance of compassion, integrity, and forgiveness throughout their life experiences. Although the participants did not mention their religious beliefs, their responses reflected their moral principles and ethical disciplines related to the core values of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Figure 1

Identity – Theme and Influencers



Influencer 1: Freedom. The participants recognized freedom as the primary influencer for the identity theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to freedom:

P1-Amy: As a women entrepreneur, I live in a country with a long history and a complicated socio-cultural-political environment like women everywhere. My parents are deeply rooted in man-dominated norms. I sometimes fought with my parents to choose what I wanted, even though they would make decisions most of the time. My lady friends share similar needs for freedom. I got divorced because I married my ex-husband, whom my parents chose for me.

P5-Ye: I became an entrepreneur due to my parents' request. The real reason behind my choice was that I could not see the changes in China's political freedom to allow women to engage in leading government jobs or essential positions in the central government. I envy the female politicians in America, even if I like art and music as personal hobbies. I hope more women in China can enjoy political freedoms and fundamental human rights.

P7-Lian: My parents wanted me to cherish the Chinese cultural heritage to place more values on traditional family roles following the Confucian principles. I refused my parents' perspectives because I did not want to limit my freedom to play the parts at home or as an entrepreneur.

P8-Xin: I wish China could adopt Western family values because traditional Chinese values prohibit women's free choices related to family dynamics, marriage, child nurturing, and senior caring.

P10-Lin: Although I had the opportunity to education and entrepreneurship, most Chinese women still face gender equality issues. My best friends were laid off by their supervisors because they fought for discrimination, harassment, unequal pay, and limited opportunities in management positions. Gender equality should be a form of freedom, especially for women in China.

P12-Pan: The most significant gift I gave my daughter is the freedom to be herself. My parents allowed me to live and work on my terms, not their requests. Women in China usually do not have the rights and options to choose due to social and political limitations.

P14-Liu: I achieved financial freedom at a younger age because I dared to take the chance without worrying about failure or family pressure. My family encouraged me to explore and try new things and supported me with their unconditional love. I am thankful to those who helped me become financially free and independent.

P15-Gong: My daughter and son complained every day about China's Great Firewall and the internet censorship policies because they could not have access to Hollywood

cartoons, movies, animations, and games like the young people in America and other developed countries. Internet freedom has become the number 1 dream for younger Chinese generations.

P17-Guo: For me, wealth is not freedom. I would rather be free to create wealth alone than have everything ready for me without trying. My wealthy aunt arranged everything for me.

P19-Rong: My mom and her sisters had limited degrees of freedom regarding their family and social roles. For my generation, I have more options and space for social engagement and social interactions. The traditional protocols limit Chinese women's rights to pursue their dreams.

Influencer 2: Independence. The participants recognized independence as the second influencer for the identity theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to independence:

P2-Su: My grandmother participated in China's May 4 Movement (1919), and my mother was involved in the 1989 Beijing Tiananmen Square movement. My mission has been to advocate for Chinese women's rights and independence since I started my private business. It has been a long journey to wake up more Chinese women due to the government's control of media content and internet access.

P3-Hong: My mother told me that independence was more important than marrying a powerful husband because my father left us after becoming famous and successful.

P6-Si: Education and a loving family contributed to my sense of independence from when I was young until today. My parents built my strengths to be independent and successful because they hugged me even when I made mistakes or wrong decisions.

P11-Zhan: I was told to be independent since I was a little girl because my rich uncle established a role model for the entire family. I wanted to be like him, making a lot of money to make everybody proud. I went to college to please my parents, but I was focused on building a successful business venture.

P15-Gong: My children were extensively influenced by social media information. They claimed their independence when they were still in school. I cannot imagine I would do the same to my parents. I worry about the future generation losing their ability to make independent decisions without referring to internet information. The Covid-19 lockdown in China gave my son and daughter the excuse to stay online all day.

P17-Guo: My most immense joy was paying off the capital investment from my aunt in Australia because that was the moment of my independence.

P20-Jie: Education in Singapore gave me greater confidence to be independent and empowered. My parents emphasized family and filial piety and sacrificed their entire lives to take care of everyone but themselves. Today, it is my turn to care for my parents because I have become independent and successful.

Influencer 3: Compassion. The participants recognized compassion as the third influencer for the identity theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to compassion:

P1-Amy: My parents worshiped Confucianism as the virtue of our family's core values, such as benevolence or compassion. I use the same principles in my business ventures to promote harmonious teamwork within the company and build loving relationships in family and society.

P 4-Chen: I grew up in a family with strict Confucious rules of filial piety by honoring and respecting the elders, such as parents and grandparents. Compassionate care for family members is considered obedient piety behavior. I have learned that I was obligated to fulfill my cultural, moral, and family roles by building compassionate characters.

P8-Xin: My parents taught me that self-compassion, compassion, and empathy were the most critical values in a family, a community, a company, a society, and a nation.

P13-Wei: My mother accepted her caregiving roles within the family. She never complained, even though she had to take care of everyone but herself. She nurtured and supported me, my father, my brother, and my grandmother with patience, understanding, and compassion.

P16-Tong: My family worshiped Buddhism and Taoism at the same time. Compassion and kindness are the family virtues rooted in my heart and soul until today.

Influencer 4: Integrity. The participants recognized integrity as the fourth influencer for the identity theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to integrity:

P6-Si: My family values were heavily influenced by Confucianism. Integrity, an essential element of Confucian moral values and ethics, was my parents' strict requirement throughout my life.

P9-Ting: As an entrepreneur, I value honesty, integrity, sincerity, and morality.

P14-Liu: My neighborhood is a warm community with harmony and friendship. I have developed a sense of accountability, responsibility, and integrity to maintain the family's reputation and community harmony.

P17-Guo: I was expected to be trustworthy and keep my word since childhood. My parents treated integrity and trustworthiness as the highest ethical standards in their lives, even though my parents had no formal education. Today, I follow integrity and credibility in my business dealings, team management, and strategic decisions.

Influencer 5: Forgiveness. The participants recognized forgiveness as the fourth influencer for the identity theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to forgiveness:

P7-Lian: I have a harmonic family because every member values forgiveness and acceptance. My parents and husband always forgave me, even though I made mistakes.

P11-Zhan: Forgiveness is the core principle of my family. I learned to forgive everyone and everything from my parents. I realized that forgiveness could be the best healing tool for myself than for others.

P15-Gong: I maintained a good relationship with my parents, my husband, my children, friends, and business associates by forgiving them and accepting them without judgment and criticism.

Relational Style Theme. Giele's (2002, 2008) life course theoretical framework describes relational style as an individual's social networks, marital relationships, social actions, and family interactions. The study participants expressed their relationship theme with five dimensions or influencers: loving-kindness, support network, partnership, responsibility, and societies (see Figure 2). The influencers were ranked in order of times referenced and the degree of significance. The findings revealed that loving-kindness and support networks were critical in Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course and business success. Like individuals from any culture, the study participants exhibited various relational styles. However, some general cultural and societal influences have historically shaped the relational style of Chinese women entrepreneurs. While progress has been made in recent years toward gender equality in China,

traditional gender roles still influence their relational styles to some extent. Chinese women entrepreneurs may feel additional pressure to balance their roles as caretakers, wives, and mothers while maintaining freedom and independence in their personal and professional relationships.

Figure 2

Relational Style – Theme and Influencers



Influencer 1: Loving-Kindness. The participants recognized loving kindness as the primary influencer for the relational style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to loving-kindness:

P1-Amy: I often prioritize the well-being of my family and keep strong relationships with my relatives. At my company, I emphasize interdependence and collectivism within the management team and employees. For me, loving kindness to myself and others is the root of happiness.

P3-Hong: I was expected to play a role in caregiving for my parents and elderly relatives since I was a young girl. I was raised believing that keeping harmony with loving kindness in all relationships was the essential quality of a human being.

P8-Xin: I use loving kindness to avoid open confrontations or disagreements at home and work. As an entrepreneur, I use kindness to empower my employees to maintain good relationships and team harmony.

P11-Zhan: My parents' unconditional loving kindness has been with me. "Your parents' positive and loving feelings towards all sentient beings inspire me to love you and others with kindness and compassion without holding back," my husband always said.

P16-Gong: I divorced my husband after twenty years of marriage. I grew up in a family with loving kindness among family members, but my ex-husband grew up in a broken

family with an abused father and an alcoholic mother. He could not understand my care and affection toward my parents and extended family. We fought a lot because he refused to follow the filial piety virtue and showed no respect and love to his parents.

P17-Guo: My parents followed Buddhist teachings, including compassion and loving kindness in family and social relationships. I extend the Buddhist principles to my business environment as the corporate values.

P19-Rong: My family tradition is to invite family members and neighbors to our house to celebrate traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Chinese Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival. It is the best way to express love and kindness among family members and communities. It also allows people to share meals, exchange presents, and enhance relationships.

P20-Jie: I practice Taoist philosophy in my company to emphasize harmony by encouraging managers and employees to be kind, compassionate, and non-judgmental with the world around them.

Influencer 2: Support Network. The participants recognized the support network as the second influencer for the relational style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to the Support Network:

P1-Amy: I could not have a business without my family's support and unconditional encouragement. I used my family savings to start my business after being refused to borrow money from a local bank. As my respected mentor, my college professor gave me good suggestions on business strategy, decision-making procedures, and entrepreneurial leadership.

P7-Lian: My private business was successful due to my husband's financial and mental support. I cannot imagine owning a business venture without my daughters' and my husband's unconditional love and encouragement. My parents finally approved my choices of marriage and business.

P9-Ting: I did not have the capital to start my business, but my husband's clothing factory fulfilled my entrepreneur's dream. I am good at management, and my husband is good at marketing and sales. We have become each other's support resources emotionally and financially.

P13-Wei: I have built a strong business network through my classmates and relatives. My parents' loving kindness and unconditional trust were the most considerable support to start my business. I have lived with my parents after the painful divorce.

P15-Gong: I did not receive support from the local government when I started my business. I would have owned something other than a well-operated IT service in Beijing.

After making much money to show my gratitude for my parents' generous capital investment in my business, I bought a big house for my parents.

P18-Wang: When battling my divorce, my family members, especially my parents and daughter, supported me unconditionally. My entrepreneurial journey was demanding and challenging. Home was my only place to relax and enjoy laughter.

P19-Rong: My cousin, who is a government official, gave me more support for my business's success because he helped me avoid legal issues and benefit from new government policies.

Influencer 3: Partnership. The participants recognized the partnership as the third influencer for the relational style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to partnership:

P2-Su: My husband is also my life partner. I cannot be who I am now without him. I did not follow the traditional gender roles in my family after starting my own beauty salon business. Instead, my husband fulfilled the duties of schooling my two children, caring for my parents and his ill parents, and supporting my business needs as needed.

P3-Hong: My husband and I have shared financial responsibilities, parenting duties, life goals, and family decision-making since marriage. We respect our differences by giving each other space and time to pursue personal interests.

P8-Xin: I cherish the partnership with my husband because he values my independence and autonomy by supporting my business ventures unconditionally and honoring an equal marriage relationship.

P10-Lin: My husband never complained when I came home late because he supported my aspirations and business goals. In my family, my husband cooked more meals and took more time to play with our child.

P16-Tong: A sustainable marriage takes time and effort from both partners. My husband left because I spent more time on my business venture than managing a loving relationship with my husband.

P17-Guo: My mother-in-law wanted me to have more children, but my husband and I did not want another child. We were concerned about the constantly changing government policies, such as the one-child policy and the newly released family planning reforms.

Influencer 4: Responsibility. The participants recognized responsibility as the fourth influencer for the relational style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to responsibility:

P4-Chen: As the only child in my family, I bear significant duties for caring for my parents and other family members as they age. My father had two strokes already. Last year, I moved to a community near my parents, ensuring their wellness and happiness.

P8-Xin: My responsibility has always been caring for myself and my business because my parents managed household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and childcare. I hired a housekeeper two years ago to help my mother cook and clean the house.

P12-Pan: I have been battling between my business responsibilities and family obligations after the Chinese government charged my parents for tax-related crimes. I want to make my parents proud of me by carrying their entrepreneurial dreams.

P16-Tong: My ex-husband complained about my spending too much time at work than at home caring for him and the child. I tried to hire a nanny, but he refused to do so. We finally ended in a painful divorce due to dividing assets. Although marriage and being a mother are women's responsibilities, I could not part from my business duties to stay home as a housewife.

Influencer 5: Society. The participants recognized society as the fifth influencer for the relational style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to society:

P5-Ye: As a daughter, wife, mother, and entrepreneur, I rely on my family as the primary source of emotional and social support.

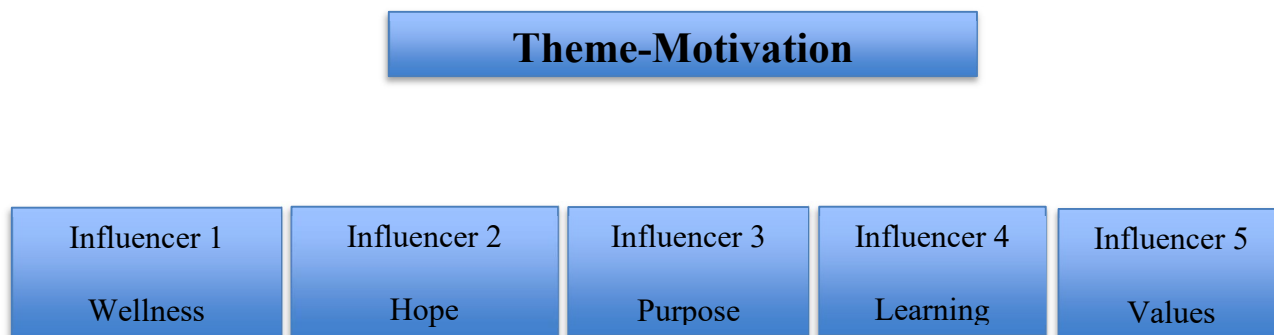
P9-Ting: I did not follow the strict traditional gender roles as a Chinese woman because I refused to take on domestic duties and social responsibilities by focusing on education and business ambition. I participated in several social and political movements addressing women-related issues, such as workplace discrimination, domestic violence, and gender inequality.

P20-Jie: China's long and rich history, deep-rooted traditions, and cultural norms are a combined part of my life. Even though I take pride in these cultural aspects and expectations of women, I still want to change China's societal protocols and social expectations.

Motivation Theme. Giele's (2002, 2008) life course theoretical framework describes motivation as an individual's ambitions, needs, desires, and personal objectives for power, wealth, achievement, nurturance, and fame, including drive and motives. The study participants expressed their motivation theme with five dimensions or influencers: wellness, hope, purpose, learning, and values (see Figure 3). The influencers were ranked in order of times referenced and the degree of significance. Chinese women entrepreneurs' motivation for the study was influenced by their personal experiences, Chinese cultural and traditional values, socioeconomic background, and career objectives. The findings revealed that wellness, hope, and life purpose were critical for Chinese women entrepreneurs' motivation and business success. Confucious-based culture emphasizes hard-working habits, perseverance, goal-driven life paths, and the pursuit of excellence. China has become the second economic power in the world. Chinese women entrepreneurs have become more motivated to achieve personal and professional goals by advancing their business investment and breaking gender equality barriers. Their parental expectations and hopes motivated them to seek higher education, empowerment, and self-discovery. Most participants expressed the importance of wellness, hope, purpose, learning, and values throughout their life experiences.

Figure 3

Motivation – Theme and Influencers



Influencer 1: Wellness. The participants recognized wellness as the first influencer for the motivation theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to wellness:

P1-Amy: My parents favored traditional Chinese medicine to remain healthy, such as acupuncture, herbal supplements, tai chi, and foot massages. In my family, wellness equals a state of harmonious balance physically, mentally, and spiritually.

P4-Chen: I prefer a balanced diet with a variety of food, including fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, herbal soups, teas, and lean proteins. As a busy business owner, I must prioritize wellness management to handle demanding work and pressures.

P9-Ting: I exercise regularly with various physical activities for my total wellness, including yoga, gym workouts, pickleball, walking, and ping pang. I also encourage my employees to take time for physical fitness.

P12-Pan: In my family, mental and emotional wellness can be discussed openly. I have started a stress management program in my company to help the managers and employees reduce stress and heal anxieties through meditation, relaxation, and physical exercises.

P16-Tong: Entrepreneur is a demanding and stressful job. I remind myself daily of the importance of wellness to achieve a work-life balance between my business duties and family life through annual health check-ups, breast cancer screenings, and some advanced detection and prevention of potential health problems.

P20-Jie: For me, maintaining a harmonious family relationship is an essential part of overall wellness. Although I did not play the traditional role of caregiving and housekeeping work, I provided an eco-friendly family environment with wellness awareness and healthy lifestyles.

Influencer 2: Hope. The participants recognized hope as the second influencer for the motivation theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to hope:

P3-Hong: Retail business is callous and competitive. I want to keep the business thriving for my mother's well-being, satisfaction, and happiness. My mother raised me by herself and gave up her dream to become a dancer.

P6-Si: I want to grow my business as one of the top brands in China through diligence, effort, well-planning, and successful operation. I hope my family stays together strong

with good health and prosperity. China's business environment needs to improve for private enterprises, but I hope the Chinese government will lift the restrictions on private businesses.

P10-Lin: Today's social media negatively influences the younger generation. I hope my son focuses on schoolwork rather than video games and various applications. I worry about China's future generation because they enjoy the moments without planning for their future.

P13-Wei: I had a bad marriage. I hope to meet the right man, but I want to remain single because I cannot trust any man after being cheated by my ex-husband. I am good at managing a business, but I need to improve at managing a relationship. My family is everything for me.

P18-Wang: I hope my daughter will take over my business after she graduates from Canada. I also hope she can meet a man with dedication, love, care, and loyalty. My divorce badly influenced her perspectives on marriage and being a mother.

Influencer 3: Purpose. The participants recognized the purpose as the third influencer for the motivation theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to purpose:

P2-Su: My primary purpose in life is taking care of familial responsibilities and protecting the well-being of my loved ones, including my parents, in-laws, relatives, and children. The following purpose is to grow my business with the best services for my customers and empower my employees.

P5-Ye: My purpose is to search inside myself for enlightenment and awakening besides managing my private business. I want to know where I am from and where I will go eventually. My education needed to give me the answer. My business success prevents me from finding the truth of life and the universe because I am so occupied with the business challenges and pressures to grow the company.

P11-Zhan: I want to fight for gender equality and women's rights in China, especially for women entrepreneurs. I want to challenge the Chinese traditional gender bias and old-fashioned roles of women. I received several warning notices from the local government and industry leaders to stop me from promoting women's equal rights and opportunities.

P15-Gong: I seek personal growth and happiness besides being a successful entrepreneur. I want to teach at college, besides working all the time. As a busy private business owner, I never had the chance to pursue my passion, hobby, and special interests, including arts, sports, volunteering, and travel.

P17-Guo: My ultimate purpose is to give back to the community by setting up an education fund to support children from low-income families. I want to learn from women entrepreneurs from the United States by encouraging more women entrepreneurs in China to participate in community activities and contribute to social development.

Influencer 4: Learning. The participants recognized learning as the fourth influencer for the motivation theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to learning:

P1-Amy: My parents strongly emphasized my education and career opportunities. I had to excel in my studies from primary school to college to please my parents. My education helped me to start my private venture and contribute to my family's wellness and happiness.

P7-Lian: I felt a sense of liability to go to college for education without causing shame to my family's pride and face-saving needs. My parents had unrealistic hopes for me to have a Ph.D. and become a professor at a university. I studied day and night to receive an MBA degree. I might always be within my parents' expectations.

P13-Wei: Education is a pathway for building my confidence and motivation to become an entrepreneur. Education is essential for my personal and business growth. I am working on my EMBA degree now at Beijing Qing Hua University. In my company, employees can take educational leave for advanced education and skill development programs.

P16-Tong: My education gave me the courage to challenge traditional gender roles and create business ventures without feeling guilty or ashamed. Education opened my eyes and developed my strengths to compete in a male-dominated industry. Education is critical for Chinese women to break barriers to personal dreams and career advancement.

P18-Wang: For me, education is a lifelong journey for degrees, personal growth, and skill development beyond schooling. I hope the future generation appreciates the rich Chinese cultural heritage and passes the cultural treasures through history, art, language, and teaching.

Influencer 5: Values. The participants recognized values as the fifth influencer for the motivation theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to values:

P8-Xin: I grew up in a family emphasizing moral values, such as filial piety, respect for elders, family and social harmony, and ethical principles, such as honesty, integrity,

credibility, and truth. I carried the family's traditional values and prioritized my family's well-being and happiness.

P9-Ting: I promote community and societal values in my company by contributing positively to low-income families. I launched a "Single-Mom's Helping Center" to provide grants, training, and mentorship for women in the community.

P14-Liu: Ethical considerations are central to my company's corporate culture regarding ethical behaviors, social responsibilities, and environmental consciousness.

P19-Rong: My company faces new ethical challenges related to cyber security, internet access, social media privacy, and consumerism.

Adaptive Style Theme. Giele's (2002, 2008) life course theoretical framework describes the adaptive style as the ability, timing, resources, and readiness to adapt to significant life events, different situations or environments, and unexpected changes to fulfill personal and group goals. The study participants expressed their adaptive style theme with five dimensions or influencers: mindfulness, humility, challenge, flexibility, and authenticity (see Figure 4). The five influencers were ranked in order of times referenced and the degree of significance. Like women from other cultures, Chinese entrepreneurs of the study have various views on adaptability to life and business challenges through their life courses. In Confucious teaching, adaptability is regarded as valuable because, in Chinese culture, the societies honor those who can adjust their attitude, behavior, goals, and communication style to fit different professional, social, and organizational changes. China's rapidly growing economy presents women entrepreneurs with evolving roles and opportunities to overcome old-fashioned gender expectations and barriers. The study participants felt proud of themselves for their readiness to deal with the changing business environments, new technologies, government regulations, global competition, and management changes. The twenty Chinese women expressed their courage to embrace differences, threats, challenges, and opportunities. The findings revealed that

mindfulness, humility, challenge, and flexibility played critical roles in Chinese women entrepreneurs' adaptability to the constantly changing business environment.

Figure 4

Adaptive Style – Theme and Influencers



Influencer 1: Mindfulness. The participants recognized mindfulness as the first influencer for the adaptive style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to mindfulness:

P2-Su: Business owner has pride and honor but also has challenges. I practice Buddhist mindfulness as a mind-calming practice. Mindful meditation has become the regular mental relaxation exercise in my company.

P8-Xin: I face various issues and stresses in my daily business management duties. Mindfulness is a valuable tool that brings me back to the present and grounded without falling into the traps of emotional struggles and mental anxieties. My husband introduced me to a mindful-based stress reduction program, which improved my health and wellness through meditation apps, wellness workshops, and mindful mentorship.

P10-Lin: I use mindfulness to align internal peace and the external environment by finding the inner balance and connecting the outside world in harmonious and mindful ways.

P14-Liu: Practicing mindfulness helps me prioritize my mental and emotional well-being under the pressures of non-stop meetings, challenges, and family expectations.

P15-Gong: Mindfulness is my best tool to develop compassion, empathy, patience, and acceptance for enhancing harmonious relationships with my families and communities.

P17-Guo: As a women entrepreneur in China, especially in today's increasingly crowded and technologically monitored Beijing, I need mindfulness to cope with the fast-paced

and high-stressed metropolitan life and maintain a sense of grounding, stability, and relaxation.

P20-Jie: Although gender roles have improved since China's economic reform, women must balance multiple roles as professionals, caregivers, business executives, and homemakers. Mindful meditation and self-compassion help me navigate different positions and find self-acceptance and satisfaction.

Influencer 2: Humility. The participants recognized humility as the second influencer for the adaptive style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to humility:

P1-Amy: Humility is the core ethical code in my family. My parents taught me at a young age to be modest, respectful, and grateful without self-promotion and boasting.

P3-Hong: Collectivism and humility are the vital heritage of Confucianism. I encourage my employees to prioritize the needs and interests of the group over individual desires to keep the team harmonious and reduce conflict.

P7-Lian: I was taught to show humility in the presence of older family members and authority individuals. In today's China, modesty and submissiveness are still considered women's good qualities.

P11-Zhan: Saving face with humility for self and others by reducing disagreements, avoiding embarrassment, and having no confrontations is essential for a woman in China.

P15-Gong: I have strived to embody humility as a virtue and path to be a better person, not just a business owner.

P19-Rong: My favorite high school teacher told me that humility was the most valuable quality to respect self and others.

Influencer 3: Challenge. The participants recognized the challenge as the third influencer for the adaptive style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to the challenge:

P5-Ye: As a woman in China, I still face challenges related to family and social expectations about the various roles and duties at home and the workplace. My in-laws laughed at me for hiring a housekeeper and a nanny. Top of Form

P9-Ting: Government rules and restrictions are the biggest challenges for women entrepreneurs in China due to the limited access to financial support and legal resources.

Men have more personal and professional development opportunities, while women must overcome various barriers to achieve the same results.

P14-Liu: My challenge is the lower market demand and slow consumer spending in China after the Covid-19 lockdown. I am under pressure to cope with the new online shopping style.

P18-Wang: Gender equality and women's rights are the challenges that affect women entrepreneurs' roles and aspirations.

P19-Rong: Challenges offer opportunities for me to achieve financial freedom and help my family and community.

P20-Jie: Balancing work and family life is the most difficult. My husband often complains about needing more time to dine out together.

Influencer 4: Flexibility. The participants recognized flexibility as the fourth influencer for the adaptive style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to flexibility:

P6-Si: I should be more flexible to balance my business and family responsibilities. I used to argue with my family members for not understanding my busy schedule and work pressure. I need to gain the quality to navigate business challenges and family life.

P9-Ting: I usually give myself flexibility regarding meeting hours, client meetings, and other arrangements to better cope with the increasing demands professionally and personally.

P12-Pan: My parents gave me the flexibility to be myself in terms of education and career choice. I eventually chose to be an entrepreneur.

P16-Tong: I am grateful for leaving my cheating husband. I married him because he offered financial support when I opened my first restaurant. I will let my child have the flexibility to choose a marriage partner for love, not convenience.

P18-Wang: I honor the traditional Confucious values, but I enjoy more the modern non-traditional relationship structure regarding marriage and family relationships. Flexibility is the best way to adapt to a changing market and generational differences.

Influencer 5: Authenticity. The participants recognized authenticity as the fifth influencer for the adaptive style theme. Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to authenticity:

P7-Lian: For me, I value traditional Chinese values, such as modesty, humility, and conformity. I want to be my true self by being authentic no matter where I am or what I do.

P9-Ting: The younger generations value authenticity to confirm their uniqueness and individuality. My parents did not encourage me to focus on personal identity and self-expression. Modern Chinese society should lift the pressure on individuals not to follow traditional social norms and expectations.

P14-Liu: My clients from other countries inspired me to cherish authenticity by accepting the true me without trying to please others and change myself.

P17-Guo: My husband created a blog for me a few years ago. I enjoy using the online platform to present an authentic self by posting a short daily reflection page to connect with online followers.

Findings to Research Question 2 (RQ2)

- According to Chinese women entrepreneurs, what demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influenced their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style?

China's modernization and globalization have brought opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs. On the one hand, they have more access to education and employment opportunities, but on the other hand, they also face increased societal pressures and expectations. It is critical to realize that China is a vast country, and the Chinese women entrepreneurs' diversified experiences can vary widely based on the factors. The life course experiences and perceptions of Chinese women entrepreneurs are multifaceted. Each narrative can only include some of their thoughts and ideas. The study participants have unique life stories shaped by their situations, socioeconomic status, experiences, aspirations, and social contexts in Beijing, China.

The findings of RQ2 revealed that Chinese Women entrepreneurs with higher education levels often have more opportunities and desires to start private business ventures, women growing up in loving families with substantial financial resources have more options and possibilities to become entrepreneurs, and married women with harmonious relationships with

spouses, parents, and relatives, know how to integrate their work and life. The findings related to RQ2 were grouped into five categories based on the responses of the twenty participants of the study: Traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education (see Table 3).

Table 3

Major Sociodemographic Factors

Life Courses	Major Sociodemographic Factors
<p style="text-align: center;">Past</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Present</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Projected Future</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Traditional Norms</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Family Background</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Government Rules</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Financial Status</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Education</p>

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to RQ2:

P1-Amy: China's one-child policy in the 1980s and 1990s had impacted my decisions on fertility and childbearing. My husband left me because his parents wanted a grandson, not a granddaughter. My daughter is everything to me, but a son is the evitable choice for some family members.

P6-Si: Arranged marriages are no longer acceptable in China, but social and financial status affects marriage choices. I must work hard to earn money because my husband's family is poor. My parents did not want to associate with my in-laws at all.

P9-Ting: I became an entrepreneur after marrying my husband in my late 30s. My husband grew up in a wealthier family with enough funds to start his business. I might only have become an entrepreneur if I met my husband because my parents could not help me with investment capital.

P11-Zhan: China's government changes its policies about women all the time without consistency and law-based execution procedures, from family planning, maternity leave, gender equality, discrimination, harassment, and healthcare. The unpredictability of the policies influenced my choices and opportunities as a women entrepreneur.

P13-Wei: Confucious cultural norms, such as filial piety and boy-driven maternity preference, affect women's roles and decisions in a family. I might not have survived if my mother listened to my grandmother's abortion request.

P17-Guo: A good education changed my perspective of the world and myself. China's economic reform allowed me to study overseas. I cannot imagine if my aunt did not sponsor my studies and invest in my business venture.

Sociodemographic Factor 1: Traditional Norms. Most participants pointed out that traditional Chinese values significantly impact the life courses of Chinese women entrepreneurs. China's rich history and deeply rooted cultural values influence women's lives and choices. These values present challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs because most Chinese want to reintegrate traditional norms into modern society. Chinese women entrepreneurs want to challenge the norms and find ways to neutralize traditional expectations. The findings of traditional models were revealed through the themes of identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. For example, the identity dimension indicated that women entrepreneurs wanted freedom and independence, the opposite of the traditional gender roles; the relational style dimension revealed that Chinese women needed loving kindness, support network, and partnership, not just caregiving and obedience; motivation theme was shown that women in China prioritized wellness, hope, purpose, and learning, not just children, marriage, and family; The adaptive style theme revealed that women entrepreneurs preferred mindfulness, humility, challenge, flexibility, and authenticity, not just following parents' arrangements for their life courses.

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to traditional norms:

P5-Ye: Taking over the family business is considered the traditional path. It was not my dream to become an entrepreneur, but I had to obey my loving parents' choice to give up my passion for music and operate a family spa business.

P9-Ting: I used to need clarification on respecting my choice and obeying my parents and senior family members because I had to do things and follow the wrong directions without the right to ask the rationale because my parents had to be right all the time. I sometimes felt torn between my business strategies and my duties to follow my parents' suggestions. I am delighted to care for my aging parents and support other family members, but I refuse to become a dutiful daughter and a wife.

P13: I grew up in a poor, traditional community. When I started my retail business, my neighbors laughed at me for fantasizing about being a business owner. My parents did not judge me and discourage me from becoming an entrepreneur, but they cared about the comments from the community.

P20-Jie: I sometimes fear the consequences of following my career dream without working in the government. My grandmother told me I had to prioritize family obligations before interacting with the outside world.

Sociodemographic Factor 2: Family Background. The findings confirmed that family background extensively impacted Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences.

Although women in China can break from traditional values and expectations to pursue their life paths, regardless of their family background, they cannot cut ties and influences throughout their life journeys. Participants' family backgrounds determined their access to higher education and career choices. Families with higher sociodemographic status are more likely to spend more on their daughters' learning and advanced teaching than women of low-income families. According to the participants' responses, family background shaped their career selections because influential families could provide better networks, resources, and start-up opportunities than those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Chinese women from traditional families could experience stricter family expectations than women from more modern and open families. Family background can shape these women entrepreneurs' options for education, career, healthcare, marriage, social support, and lifestyle.

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants:

A1-Amy: I attended a prestigious school in Beijing because my parents hold high-level government positions. I started my own business in a male-dominated industry with local

government endorsement. I could not imagine the opportunity if not for my family background. Although a wealthy family background can offer advantages, it does not guarantee success and happiness.

P6-Si: My wealthy parents arranged an advantageous marriage match regarding financial status and family connections. My husband's family owned a private pharmaceutical company.

P7-Lian: My parents worked ten hours daily to raise me and my brother. I had to fight for education because my mother gave family resources to my brother, not me. Poverty can restrict girls to quality education.

P12-Pan: My family always has access to high-quality healthcare services for wellness and longevity. My father was diagnosed with lung cancer due to his smoking habit two years ago, and I arranged for a famous American doctor to do surgery on my father in a Hong Kong hospital. I cannot imagine what people should do if they do not have the wealth and extensive resources and networks to spare.

P13-Wei: I married at 19 years old because my poor parents used my marriage to reduce the family's financial burden and receive some funds from my husband's family. I divorced my husband a few years after our marriage because he constantly blamed my family's poor background without showing respect to my family members.

P17-Guo: I inherited significant assets and capital from my aunt for my financial security and independence. As a private developer, I help more families in China to live in their apartments or homes.

Sociodemographic Factor 3: Government Rules. The findings revealed that government policies and rules in China had a critical influence on Chinese women entrepreneurs' life courses over the past 30 years. It is essential to know that Beijing, China's capital city, has more favorable policies than rural areas or remote regions. According to the participants, the Chinese government has increased its attention to gender equality, inclusion, and women's rights. However, the discrimination issues and harassment challenges are deeply rooted in China's cultural norms and practices impacting women's life courses. Some study participants complained that policy implementation was the biggest challenge at local government bodies. Most participants mentioned that China's One-Child Policy, implemented in 1979 and relaxed in 2015, significantly impacted Chinese women's lives. The strict limitations on the number of

children in a family could have led to the preference for male children, sex-selective abortions, skewed gender ratio, women's pressure to have a boy for the family lineage, and the aging population.

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses:

P2-Su: The banking policy for small and medium enterprises was too strict for women-owned start-ups in China. I have tried to borrow money from the local commercial bank for several years and am still trying to be successful. I hope the government can implement a financial support program for women entrepreneurs.

P5-Ye: My mother had two abortions because my parents tried to have a son. They kept me when my mother was pregnant the third time. My father said to me often, "I wish you were a boy." I wish I could have a brother or sister because I was unavailable when my aging parents needed me during emergencies, sickness, or other family matters.

P8-Xin: The central government promotes gender equality in education and employment, but the local city officials do not want to give women equal access to higher education and government jobs. My cousin was rejected for a government job even though she scored the highest because the officials gave the positions to those they knew with good relationships.

P12-Pan: China's IRS needs transparency, consistency, and efficiency. I have tried to communicate with the Beijing branch office for several months to defend my parents related to tax charges against the cosmetic company. However, the only answer I received was waiting.

P17-Guo: I am almost 60 years old now. China's economic reform initiated by Dent Xiaoping allowed me to seek financial independence by owning a supermarket with my high school friends.

Sociodemographic Factor 4: Financial Status. The findings revealed that financial status is critical in impacting Chinese women entrepreneurs' life courses, such as educational funds for higher education or overseas studies, personal skill development locally, nationally, or internationally, child care, health care, and working capital to start-up opportunities. Although financial status significantly influences women's life course experiences, other personal characteristics also affect women's overall well-being, happiness, and lifestyles, such as personal aspiration, cultural expectations, government policies, momentum shifts in gender roles and

economic opportunities, and social support networks. Most of the women entrepreneurs in the study indicated that financial status in China extensively influenced their entrepreneurial success in several aspects of their life courses, including overall well-being, wellness, family relationships, career choices, gender equality, and education. Several participants expressed concerns about public ignorance in improving women's rights and financial independence.

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to financial status:

P5-Ye: I won a harassment case against my former boss before starting my business. My family's financial support helped me to assert my rights by hiring the best legal team in Beijing.

P7-Lian: I benefited from China's emerging global economic power because my international trade business brought me financial freedom at a young age. I am 36 now, but I can retire today and spend time with my two beautiful children. The neighbors raised their thumbs now to my parents without looking down on our low-income family background. For me, financial status changed our family's social status in the community.

P11-Zhan: Before starting my own business, I faced challenges in the job market, such as limited opportunities, wage gaps, and career advancement. I finally borrowed money from my uncle and started my toy business. My sister-in-law was rejected for higher education because she lives in a rural region in China's Xinjiang province with financial constraints.

P15-Gong: My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago but refused treatment because she did not want to cause a burden on the family's financial situation. Indeed, in China, a family's financial status determines a woman's access to good healthcare and a family's prosperity.

P16-Tong: Fortunately, my two male partners had access to capital resources to start and grow our restaurant franchise. As a woman, I might have struggled for financial resources without partnering with two male classmates while studying in London. My financial independence allows me to make the right decisions that align with my long-term goals and aspirations without the pressure of traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

P18-Wang: As a successful women entrepreneur, I understand how difficult it is to balance business duties and family expectations in China. My ex-husband expected me to fulfill both roles, but my busy schedule kept me in my office. Thanks to my vital financial status, I can afford to hire supporting services related to childcare, household assistance, and elder caretaking.

P20-Jie: I donated 10% of my annual net profits to local hospitals and other charitable and philanthropic programs, supporting social causes and bringing encouragement to local communities.

Sociodemographic Factor 5: Education. According to the participants' responses, education profoundly impacts Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, such as happiness, career advancement, gender equality, entrepreneurship, and success. The participants revealed that the Chinese government has made significant progress in increasing educational opportunities for women in China to have incredible achievements across various industries. Some participants pointed out that higher-educated women were more likely to become entrepreneurs due to their broader visions, aspirations, and motivations.

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to education:

P1-Amy: Thanks to my parents' emphasis on my education, I was better equipped to make intelligent decisions about my life, start-up choice, wellness, business achievements, and happiness. Education empowered me with knowledge, skills, self-esteem, and independence.

P3-Hong: I was fortunate to have an MBA degree and a successful franchise. Higher education opened the doors for me to become a business owner with strong leadership skills. Education gave me knowledge and wisdom and built a strong business network with my cohorts, peers, teachers, and associates.

P8-Xin: My education with a master's degree opened my global vision and encouraged me to challenge the traditional gender roles and fight for gender equality in today's man-dominated economy in China. I learned to make better choices in healthcare, marriage, family relationships, and happiness.

P14-Liu: As an educated women entrepreneur, I dared to make wise choices about delayed marriage, childbirth, family size, maternal options, and personal well-being. Education led my life to better career fulfillment and personal happiness.

P16-Tong: I have become an active member of my community to promote social change and women's rights to education and career opportunities. I encourage female employees at my company to live a life with purpose and fulfillment for themselves, not for others.

P17-Guo: Studying in Australia broadened my horizons to global perspectives and creative thoughts on social awareness, cultural understanding, diversified tolerance, and

women's rights. I have developed my financial stability and intelligent decision-making capabilities. Seeing the outside world through my eyes empowered me to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

P19-Rong: Education prepared me with problem-solving skills and the capabilities to face challenges and issues. I have built my resilience and pathway to future changes, social mobility, and business development barriers.

Findings to Research Question 3 (RQ3)

- What are Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work, family, and personal life?

The term work-life balance assumes a competition between work and personal life. The solution is reducing work stress by prioritizing personal life or prioritizing work by ignoring individual needs. Work-life balance involves giving equal attention to work and life (McNeff, 2021). Work and life integration refers to applying creative and innovative ways to make four parts of our lives: work (career), family (home), community, and personal life (well-being), work together seamlessly and constructively (Friedman, 2014). According to Professor Friedman (2014), busy professionals feel better about life after integrating life's different parts through three actions: clarifying what is most important in life, recognizing how the other parts interact, and communicating with family, peers, and community for new ways to benefit everyone. Fortunately, COVID-19 has forced individuals and organizations to work remotely with flexible hours. The study participants expressed their work-life integration experiences and coping strategies that shaped their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style.

Most participants described their struggles to integrate their work, family, community, and life because they were trapped in unbalanced work schedules without quality time with their loved ones. Almost all participants realized the need to fix the issues through innovative ways to have all parts done effectively. The Chinese women entrepreneurs indicated that the

expectations, pressures, and responsibilities of their business ventures, family life, and communities did not have boundaries. Some participants reported having to choose family first if there were conflicts. All participants realized the importance of freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, and mindfulness to integrate work and life. The participants expressed their concerns and hopes for the issues related to caring for elderly parents, raising children, managing business development, contributing to community services, and maintaining overall personal well-being. All participants were open-minded to sharing their coping strategies to integrate the four parts of their lives. These strategies support the findings of the themes: identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. Chinese women entrepreneurs' specific strategies and experiences of work-life integration can vary widely depending on factors like types of business, family structure, financial status, and personal interests.

Here are some of the direct quotes from the participants' responses related to work-life integration strategies:

P1-Amy: In my company, female employees enjoy extended maternity leave, flexible working hours, parental leave, and daily yoga exercise. As a busy entrepreneur, I needed more time to dine with my parents and daughter. Social activities took my private time because building relationships is the most critical routine for business owners. I plan to integrate my multiple duties efficiently in the future, such as morning tea with my parents at least once a week, movie with my daughter at least once a month, family vacation once or twice a year, and community service bi-weekly. My strategies include starting a new romantic relationship, empowering my employees to take on more work-related duties, reducing unnecessary social events and activities, organizing family gatherings at least once a month, and giving myself time to practice mindful meditation.

P2-Su: I used to have more time with my family and community besides work and personal growth when I started my first beauty salon. After becoming a franchise, I felt pressured to find time for private and family life. I missed most of the school events of my son and daughter and forgot my husband's birthday and anniversary. Sometimes, I skipped meals due to the operational challenges and customers' demands. I used the following strategies to integrate work, family, personal wellness, and community: hiring a full-time housekeeper, using Zoom communication with the management team, traveling with my family often, having more private time with my husband, and arranging time for myself.

P3-Hong: I usually rely on the support of my husband and my parents to integrate my work and family life, such as sharing domestic responsibilities in childcare, household chores, caring for elders, and community contributions. Due to the one-child policies, my husband and I must care for the extended families, including my parents and his parents. Our parents can provide additional support in childcare and household duties. My grandmother played a role in my daughter's care before she passed away.

P4-Chen: I balance my work and family duties better now because the COVID-19 pandemic and new technologies have made remote work and flexible working schedules possible. I applied the time management skills learned at leadership workshops to juggle my business, family, personal time, and charity work by delegating business tasks to my team and setting boundaries between work and personal life. I practice meditation and mindfulness techniques to manage work-related stress and improve overall well-being.

P5-Ye: I have joined local professional networks and women entrepreneurs' associations for mentorship, emotional support, valuable advice, business networking, and friendship. I learned to play violin with a famous violinist to fulfill my dream that I did not follow due to my parents' objections. I also learned to play tennis for physical health. My husband and I often attend concerts, art exhibitions, operas, and other cultural events to strengthen our relationship. I like to take leadership courses, participate in mindful workshops, and develop new skills.

P6-Si: For me, self-care is equally important as family responsibilities. I have dedicated more time to physical and mental well-being through self-compassion, mindful meditation, jogging, and spa treatment. I play cards with my parents and relatives whenever I have time. I arrange time to attend industry events, conferences, and other business-related gatherings. My strategies to integrate my work and life are regular family outings and holiday celebrations.

P7-Lian: The more successful my business is, the more time I have for my family because I can provide a sense of security and independence to myself and my family. For me, managing business and finances, saving more funds for my children's future, and planning for my family's long-term prosperity are my strategies to balance work and life. My greatest pleasure is volunteering and donating to charitable organizations for good causes. At least once a month, I spend time with friends for meals, entertainment, and social gatherings to stay connected in a relaxing way.

P8-Xin: I used a combination of strategies to achieve work-life integration. As a business owner, I often delegate 90% of the tasks at work to team leaders and 80% of the household duties to family members or trusted housekeepers. Delegation allowed me to focus on the most significant responsibilities without burning my energy. I like to use calendars and to-do lists to stay organized by prioritizing tasks and setting boundaries for work-life integration.

P9-Ting: Building a solid support network is critical for women to integrate work and life. I am lucky to have a supporting husband, loving parents, and an extended family circle besides hired helpers for childcare and household work. The full-time nanny for my child has been with my family for over twenty years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, I have used more telecommuting, flexible hours, and reduced personal commitments at work.

P10-Lin: I made time for exercise, relaxation, and personal hobbies to stay focused and energized. I have tried to stop checking work emails and taking all business calls during my committed family time. I have communicated with my colleagues, employees, clients, and family members to help them understand my goal to integrate work and life without confusing their needs and expectations. Despite busy demands at work, I make a mindful effort to spend quality time with my family, including special gatherings or vacations.

P11-Zhan: My uncle was my mentor and role model to guide me through the entrepreneurial process. Through his valuable insights and guidance, I also learned how to integrate work and life. My uncle also taught me to define success and align with values and priorities by setting realistic business goals and accepting failures sometimes. I never had the pressure to excel in all business milestones continuously.

P12-Pan: I joined many leadership programs to learn and develop management skills. Continuous learning helped me adapt to changes and face challenges. I applied many new action plans at my firm to support employees' work-life balance, including family-support grants, equal pay, and maternity/paternity leave.

P13-Wei: I trust and empower my management team and employees to solve various programs and free up my time at work. I outsourced many business functions in my organization, such as legal services, accounting, marketing, branding, public relations, crisis management, IT, and HR. I focus on strategic planning and critical decisions to have more time for family commitments and personal wellness activities.

P14-Liu: I utilized modern technology, such as smartphones and applications, to stay connected with my family and manage business remotely. I quit checking work emails during family dinners and set a specific timeline for business-related communications or activities. I have allocated time for relaxation at the spa, exercise at the gym, and stress management with conscious meditation.

P15-Gong: I enjoy engaging in business networks and mentorship programs to receive valuable advice, insights, mental inspiration, and emotional support. Learning from other women entrepreneurs helps me stay competitive and prepare for the changing market environment. I have become a sponsor for initiatives that promote work-life integration, including best family-friendly business practices, the gender equality movement, and women's entrepreneurial leadership development.

P16-Tong: Hiring domestic help to take on the household responsibilities allowed me more time and energy to manage my business decisions and spend quality time with my

family. Being a single mother after divorce, my hired housekeeper took over the household and childcare duties. I have learned to say “no” to traditional expectations and ensure personal time for well-being through the facial spa, meditation, yoga, and walking.

P17-Guo: For me, a robust professional network is more beneficial for work-life integration because the network provides access to business resources, mentor advice, shared experiences from other women entrepreneurs, and insights on balancing work and life. Time management, stress control, and staying up-to-date with new technologies and skills are the best ways to increase efficiency without wasting time on some tasks.

P18-Wang: I used to be a perfectionist because I tried to achieve the best results in both work and family. I have gradually learned to set realistic expectations for myself either at home or at work. I took regular breaks, vacations, and time off to recharge and relax. I realized that achieving work-life integration is an ongoing process that requires flexibility, adaptability, and patience. Some of my business associates told me they enjoyed more working and chatting with me than before because I smiled more often and laughed a lot.

P19-Rong: My family is very supportive of my business ventures because they are willing to share responsibilities for childcare, housework, and other obligations. I have used different task management tools and virtual assistants to integrate work and life. I also tried new communication technology to streamline tasks and prioritize high-impact events. Traveling is critical to sharing quality time with loved ones. I like to read fiction books to relax my mind at night. I visited several countries in Africa earlier this year with my management team and MVP employees to build a happy corporate culture.

P20-Jie: I often only accept additional responsibilities or expectations if I stretch myself enough. I prefer childcare options from family members or experienced caregivers to fulfill the childcare responsibilities. Mentorship is crucial for my business because I need valuable guidance from supportive mentors and allies in today's competitive marketplace. My regular exercise activities to keep my physical health and reduce stress include yoga, swimming, gym workouts, meditation, and ping pang. My new hobbies are oil painting, playing pickleball, journaling, ice-skating, ballroom dancing, line dancing, cooking, and gardening.

The coping strategies to integrate the work and life of the Chinese women entrepreneurs of the study are summarized in Table 3. The 33 strategies shared by the 20 participants of the study are placed in numerical order according to the times mentioned.

Table 4*Work-Life Integration Strategies*

Work-Life Integration Strategies	References
1. Delegating business tasks to capable teams	20
2. Setting boundaries at both work and home to avoid burnout	20
3. Prioritizing the high-impact events or activities	19
4. Practicing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace	18
5. Relying on a reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities	18
6. Empowering employees and others to share duties	17
7. Using hired aids to support childcare and household responsibilities	17
8. Spending quality time with loved ones	16
9. Finding self-care time for physical and mental health	16
10. Exercising regularly (yoga, gym workouts, walking, and jogging.)	15
11. Utilizing new technology to stay connected	15
12. Managing time effectively by using a to-do list and calendars	15
13. Traveling domestically and internationally with family	14
14. Attending social networks and associations for guidance and resources	14
15. Reading exciting books before going to bed	14
16. Reducing the time to check work emails during family dinners	14
17. Learning new skills and knowledge to be competitive	13
18. Participating in community activities as a volunteer	12
19. Donating to charitable organizations for good causes	12
20. Creating flexible routines and schedules	12
21. Setting realistic and achievable goals	12
22. Stopping being a perfectionist by accepting that nobody is perfect	12
23. Spending romantic time with a partner or spouse	11
24. Taking breaks regularly	10
25. Grounding in nature	10
26. Being compassionate to self and others	9
27. Being non-judgmental all the time	8
28. Seeking guidance and advice from mentors or allies	8
29. Developing new hobbies	7
30. Supporting gender equality initiatives	5
31. Managing expectations and needs	5
32. Saying “no” to traditional norms sometimes	5
33. Thinking positively and consciously	4

The top 10 work-life integration strategies of the Chinese women entrepreneurs of the study were:

1. Delegating business tasks to capable teams
2. Setting boundaries at both work and home to avoid burnout
3. Prioritizing high-impact events or activities

4. Practicing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace
5. Relying on a reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities
6. Empowering employees and others to share duties
7. Using hired aids to support childcare and household responsibilities
8. Spending quality time with loved ones
9. Finding self-care time for physical and mental health
10. Exercising regularly (yoga, gym workouts, walking, and jogging)

The findings for RQ3, the work-life integration strategies support the results of RQ1 and RQ2. The answers to RQ3 align with the major themes and the influencers because the participants expressed the importance of freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, and mindfulness in work-life integration strategies. The 33 coping strategies also reflected the sociodemographic factors that shaped women entrepreneurs' life courses in China, such as traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education.

Summary

The 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs of the study openly described their childhood and adulthood experiences, including their parents' views on education and career choices, family financial status, siblings, and their significant others. The participants expressed the impact that family backgrounds, values, faiths, cultural dynamics, and Chinese traditions had on their motivation to become entrepreneurs. Some participants indicated that Chinese women entrepreneurs not only had to compete with their male counterparts in Communist China's business environment but also fought against socially accepted Confucian norms related to women's roles and responsibilities. Compared to women entrepreneurs in the Western world, Chinese women entrepreneurs' gender equality, political leadership opportunities, financial

support, and work-life integration issues must be addressed by the Chinese government, the public, and global communities. This study also investigated the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of 20 women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China. The researcher presented the qualitative findings of 20 participants through email interviews by following the guidelines and protocols of the Work-Life Integration Project website. Giele's (2008) life-course framework and Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) instruments allowed the participants to share their life-course stories freely and naturally through the segments of identity, relational styles, motivation, and adaptive styles. Pseudonyms and password-protected methods were applied throughout the study to protect the participants' privacy and anonymity. The findings revealed four major themes, each including five major influencers, listed in the number of times mentioned by the participants and the significance level.

The study's findings indicate that Chinese women entrepreneurs value freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, mindfulness, independence, support networks, hope, and humility throughout their life courses. The participants expressed the major sociodemographic factors that shaped their life course stories, especially their entrepreneurial experiences, including traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education. The study uncovered 33 work-life integration strategies used by Chinese women entrepreneurs, such as delegating business tasks to capable teams, setting boundaries at both work and home to avoid burnout, prioritizing high-impact events or activities, practicing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace, relying on reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities, and empowering employees and others to share duties. The results related to RQ1 and RQ2 align with the findings of RQ3. The 33 coping strategies reflect the four themes (identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style), 20 influencers, and five sociodemographic factors.

In summary, the study's findings present a picture of Chinese women entrepreneurs' daily struggles to face business challenges in a Communist country with a male-dominated economic environment and cope with the traditional norms and stereotypes against professional women. The findings let the world see the authentic life course experiences of women entrepreneurs in China and their work-life integration strategies to win back their fundamental rights at work and home as women and business owners.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chinese women entrepreneurs have contributed significantly to China's economic growth and social evolution despite their extensive struggles and challenges in their entrepreneurial path and balancing their work and personal lives (Hsieh & Wang, 2022; Shen, 2019). The 20 participants of the study have demonstrated their commitment and determination to become entrepreneurs regardless of the slower development of China's government policies and social stereotypes that involve gender equality in the workplace and entrepreneurship. Most of the twenty women entrepreneurs in the study have found innovative ways to integrate their work and personal lives by leveraging technology to work virtually with flexible schedules, seeking family members' support to manage household and childcare responsibilities, and delegating tasks to trusted teams.

Review of Problem

Chinese women entrepreneurs have developed entrepreneurial leadership and empowerment since China became a second-world economic superpower in the 1990s. More Chinese women are motivated to become entrepreneurs in metropolitan cities in China (Cooke & Xiao, 2021). For the past 30 years, women entrepreneurs in China contributed significantly to China's business growth and economic transformation. However, Chinese women entrepreneurs' life courses, entrepreneurial experiences, and work-life integration strategies were under-addressed or stated (Krane, 2022). More studies need to be done on how Chinese women entrepreneurs integrate business dedication and family responsibilities and what sociodemographic factors affect their life course experiences. Studying Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, career choices, demographic characteristics, cultural

biases, and family norms is vital because 691 million Chinese women represent 17.55% of the world's female population (Knoema, n.d.; X. Zhao et al., 2010).

Restatement of Purpose

This qualitative phenomenological study explored Chinese women entrepreneurs' daily practice of integrating personal lives and work in China's complicated political system and male-dominated business environment. It is difficult to find existing literature directly describing Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles and barriers and how they integrate work and personal lives. This study helped the researcher understand Chinese women entrepreneurs' experiences and influential factors throughout their life courses, especially their entrepreneurial journeys in China. Knowing Chinese women entrepreneurs' strategies to integrate their business commitments and personal responsibilities to family and loved ones is vital.

Research Methods Review

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to investigate Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles and coping strategies to integrate their work and life by overcoming cultural barriers, traditional norms, government regulations, and business challenges. This study used Giele's (2002, 2008) life course framework and Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) coping strategy instruments to reveal themes and influencers among the 20 participants by focusing on their specific life periods from childhood to adulthood and from the present to the projected future and discovering the sociodemographic factors that were impacting their life course experiences.

Ethical Considerations Overview

The researcher received an IRB approval letter and earned CITI certification as part of the preparatory process (see Appendix F and Appendix G) by Pepperdine University's rules and

regulations. Confidentiality and privacy of the participants are the primary focus of the study by using temporary email addresses and pseudonyms and storing the data safely in a password-protected computer. The researcher followed the highest ethical standards throughout the study.

Data Analysis Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study analyzed the work-life integration strategies of 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs throughout their life courses. The researcher entered the complete data sets, including all email interview responses of the participants, into the NVIVO data analysis software. Various codes were assigned to the applicable categories reflecting Giele's (2008) theoretical framework, such as identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. The researcher used the final codes to reveal the emerging themes, influencers, critical sociodemographic factors, and work-life integration strategies.

Key Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study explored 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, sociodemographic factors, and work-life integration strategies using Giele's (2002, 2008) theoretical framework and coping strategy instruments (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015) through the dimensions of identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. Data analysis revealed that the Chinese women entrepreneurs valued freedom and independence in identity, loving kindness and support network in relationships, wellness, hope in motivation, and mindfulness and humility in adaptive style.

Three research questions guide this study:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1):

How do Chinese women entrepreneurs describe their life course stories impacted by identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles?

- Research Question 2 (RQ2):
According to Chinese women entrepreneurs, what demographic factors (age, ethnicity, generation, and socioeconomics) influenced their identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style?
- Research Question 3 (RQ3):
What are Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate work, family, and personal life?

Critical Findings Related to RQ1

The findings related to RQ1 revealed four major themes and 20 influencers (see Table 2). The Chinese women entrepreneurs identified themselves with five influencers of freedom, independence, compassion, integrity, and forgiveness at home, work, and community. In a country with the Communist Party's ruling, the participants wanted to be free and independent in their life decisions and career choices. Most participants applied compassion, integrity, and forgiveness in their daily lives and professional conduct. In relationships, the participants described their preferred influencers of loving kindness, support networks, partnerships, responsibilities, and societies. About the motivation to become entrepreneurs, the participants indicated that overall well-being, hope, purpose, learning, and values were the driving forces to their personal happiness and business successes. Most participants admitted their primary goals to become entrepreneurs were to help family's wellness and bring hope to the future. The theme of adaptive style revealed that Chinese women entrepreneurs valued mindfulness and humility to cope with future challenges and changes by being flexible and authentic in integrating their work and personal lives. The findings related to RQ1 suggest that drives to freedom and independence financially, mentally, and culturally are the core contributors to Chinese women entrepreneurs'

success, wellness, and work-life integration. These findings help more people understand Chinese women entrepreneurs' life purposes and commitments to integrating business responsibilities and family duties. The findings enable other women in China to find ways to break the traditional and cultural barriers and achieve their career dreams without sacrificing personal happiness. The results related to RQ1 give hope to women in other parts of the world to integrate work and life while being successful entrepreneurs in all industries.

Table 2

Major Themes and Influencers

Themes	Influencer 1	Influencer 2	Influencer 3	Influencer 4	Influencer 5
<i>Identity</i>	Freedom	Independence	Compassion	Integrity	Forgiveness
<i>Relational Style</i>	Loving-Kindness	Support Network	Partnership	Responsibility	Societies
<i>Motivation</i>	Wellness	Hope	Purpose	Learning	Values
<i>Adaptive Style</i>	Mindfulness	Humility	Challenge	Flexibility	Authenticity

Critical Findings Related to RQ2

The findings related to RQ2 revealed that five sociodemographic factors of traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education shaped Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course stories and entrepreneurial experiences (see Table 3). The findings indicated that Chinese culture, traditional norms, social stereotypes, and family background significantly impacted women entrepreneurs' business experiences and personal life courses. Although Chinese women have access to education, their level of education and career choices as entrepreneurs depend heavily on their financial status and family backgrounds. Most study participants realized that the government rules did not give women the complete freedom and support to be successful entrepreneurs. The findings related to RQ2 help women in China, especially young generations, to break through the traditional norms and government rules to

pursue their entrepreneurial paths by counting on family support networks and good education. The findings also give the Chinese government the task of developing more women-friendly policies in education, career choices, and gender equality. One exciting result was that most participants did not want to share more about their religious beliefs or practices due to the Chinese Communist Party's restrictions on personal faith in GOD. However, they mentioned that the traditional norms originated from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The findings related to RQ2 support the conclusions of RQ1 in the following ways:

- Traditional family norms prohibit women in China from seeking freedom and independence. Compassion, integrity, and forgiveness help Chinese women to understand and accept their domestic duties without giving up their career dreams.
- Family background provides loving kindness, a support network, and partnerships to share family responsibilities and social connections.
- Government rules in China have not helped Chinese women entrepreneurs in the most effective and efficient ways yet in gender equality, discrimination, workplace harassment, and financial support for small and medium female-owned enterprises.
- Financial status is critical to female entrepreneurial success because education and start-ups need working capital.
- Education provides the fundamental skills, knowledge, vision, and courage for Chinese women to start private ventures.

Table 3*Major Sociodemographic Factors*

Life Courses	Major Sociodemographic Factors
<p style="text-align: center;">Past</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Present</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Projected Future</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Traditional Norms</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Family Background</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Government Rules</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Financial Status</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Education</p>

Critical Findings Related to RQ3

The findings related to RQ3 revealed 33 coping strategies for Chinese women entrepreneurs to integrate their work and personal lives (see Table 4). The top 10 work-life integration strategies chosen by the Chinese women entrepreneurs include (see Table 5):

1. Delegating business tasks to capable teams
2. Setting boundaries at both work and home to avoid burnout
3. Prioritizing high-impact events or activities
4. Practicing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace
5. Relying on a reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities
6. Empowering employees and others to share duties
7. Using hired aids to support childcare and household responsibilities
8. Spending quality time with loved ones
9. Finding self-care time for physical and mental health
10. Exercising regularly (yoga, gym workouts, walking, and jogging)

Table 5*Top 10 Work-Life Integration Strategies*

Work-Life Integration Strategies	References
1. Delegating business tasks to capable teams	20
2. Setting boundaries at both work and home to avoid burnout	20
3. Prioritizing the high-impact events or activities	19
4. Practicing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace	18
5. Relying on a reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities	18
6. Empowering employees and others to share duties	17
7. Using hired aids to support childcare and household responsibilities	17
8. Spending quality time with loved ones	16
9. Finding self-care time for physical and mental health	16
10. Exercising regularly (yoga, gym workouts, walking, and jogging)	15

The findings related to RQ3 supported the findings of RQ1 in areas of freedom, independence, loving-kindness, support network, education, wellness, mindfulness, hope, compassion, responsibilities, and humility. The findings of RQ3 also supported the findings of RQ2 in areas of traditional norms, family background, financial status, government rules, and education. The results of coping strategies support that Chinese women entrepreneurs know how to integrate their work and life by dedicating and empowering their teams and trusted networks with important tasks through sound planning, time management, mindfulness practice, and boundaries at work and home. The 33 strategies reflected the socioeconomic factors that shaped women entrepreneurs' life courses in China: traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education.

In Chinese culture, work-life integration is not often used because Chinese women have been told for the past thousands of years that ‘鱼与熊掌不可兼得’- a woman cannot have both the fish and the bear's paw at the same time, she must choose one or the other. Most Chinese women have realized that they could integrate their work and personal lives without giving up one for the other. The findings of Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies revealed their inner

voices to integrate their family lives and business ventures without the obligation to choose just one. The participants of the study were inspired to share their work-life integration strategies because they were never asked about their opinions and insights related to work-life integration strategies. Other methods include Utilizing new technology to stay connected, managing time effectively, attending social networks and associations, learning new skills, participating in community activities, and creating flexible routines.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings of the study related to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 also support the literature reviews regarding the impact of traditional Chinese norms and cultural values on women entrepreneurs their professional ambitions, family responsibilities, and personal well-being (Bai, 2023; Denton, 2020; Deva, 2015; Du & Zheng, 2005; Liang, 2007; S. Liu, 2020; Miao, 2019; Scharff, 2020; Sun, 2013; Sung, 2022; X. Tong, 2021). Chinese entrepreneurs want to have the freedom to choose their lifestyles and career choices without being pressured by family roles and domestic responsibilities because the Chinese government promotes Confucianism and men-dominated business policies (Babel, 2022; Lim, 2021; S. Liu, 2020; Rubin, 2019; L. Song & Zhou, 2022; S. Zhu, 2020). The researcher's experiences as an entrepreneur support the findings related to the impact of Chinese culture, Confucious tradition, and social stereotypes on women entrepreneurs' struggles, challenges, contributions, sustainable business success, and overall work-life integration strategies.

The findings of sociodemographic factors that shaped Chinese women entrepreneurs' life courses support the literature reviews about traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education (Croll, 2013; R. He, 2017; Leightner, 2017; Ranade, 2022; A. Saich, 2017; R. Tong & Botts, 2018a; S. Zhu, 2020). The major influencers of Chinese

women entrepreneurs' life course experiences in the dimensions of identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style are in alignment with some of the literature of the study, such as freedom, independence, loving-kindness, wellness, mindfulness, humility, hope, and support network (Inwood, 2019; Z. Liu & Wu, 2022; Luo & Chan, 2021; Puppin, 2019; Rai & Kiran, 2020; Wielander, 2019). Some of the work-life integration strategies used by Chinese women entrepreneurs, such as delegating and empowering tasks, using technology for connection with family members and employees, prioritizing essential tasks, spending quality time with family members, and using hired aids to manage household work and child care, are confirmed by Kiradoo (2023), Guelich et al. (2021), Rai and Kiran (2020), S. Brown (2017), Z. Huang et al. (2020), Inwood (2019), Minniti (2017), Cooke and Xiao (2021), C. Lin (2022), J. Song and Li (2021), and Z. Zheng (2022). The findings of the impact of Covid-19 on women entrepreneurs in China, such as business closures, supply chain disruptions, and digital influence, support the literature by Verma (2022), S. He and Wang (2020), K. Song (2023), S. Hu (2022), and S. Wang (2021).

As the significance of the study, the following findings related to RQ1 contributed to the existing literature regarding Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences:

- In the relational style theme, Chinese women entrepreneurs value loving kindness more than support networks. Most study participants expressed gratitude to their parents and family members for their unconditional love and compassion.
- In the identity theme, Chinese women entrepreneurs want freedom more than independence as their primary value because they did not enjoy complete women's rights in Communist China.

- In the motivation theme, Chinese women entrepreneurs list wellness before hope and purpose as their core driving force to become business owners because they want to improve their family's well-being.
- In an adaptive style, Chinese women entrepreneurs focus on mindfulness and humility to face changes and prepare for the future.

The findings related to RQ2, the sociodemographic factors, support the literature of the study. The 33 work-life integration strategies align with all research results and the existing literature.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation was the sample size interviewed on China's large population. Making assumptions about prominent people like China from a small sample size of 20 participants can lead to inaccurate conclusions (Ruel, 2019). Other limitations were gender diversity and generalizability because all 20 study participants were female entrepreneurs from Beijing without considering male participants and women entrepreneurs from different regions of China. Although email communication lacks personal rapport with the participants, for this study, participants felt more comfortable responding via email due to China's strict censorship and restrictions on global voice communications (Gamso, 2021).

Implications

The results of this study are significant for a better understanding of Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course stories and entrepreneurial experiences in the dimensions of identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. The findings regarding the influencers and sociodemographic factors that shaped Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course choices, work-life integration strategies, and business decisions give scholars and researchers inspiration and

visions to explore further Chinese women entrepreneurs' leadership styles, approaches, and empowerment. The coping strategy helps other women in China and other Asian countries, such as India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand, to integrate their work and personal life without making difficult choices between career and family. More comprehensive research on this subject is needed for policymakers in China to understand the needs and appeals of Chinese women entrepreneurs. The Chinese government should pay serious attention to women entrepreneurs' rights by implementing more workable gender equality policies, providing inclusive business environment, giving women-owned enterprises more financial support, promoting women's rights, and encouraging women entrepreneurs to balance their work and family life. Work-life integration strategy should be taught in China's schools, universities, and public agencies to increase awareness of women's rights, gender equality, traditional norms, and cultural stereotypes against women. Although Chinese women are usually shy and humble due to Confucious standards, they can be open-minded and willing to share their authentic stories with the right setting and research questions. The participants of the study expressed themselves fully and freely via email communications.

For Chinese women entrepreneurs, there are seven implications from this study:

- Freedom means unlimited independent, happy, and successful options. Freedom is different from independence for Chinese women entrepreneurs. Freedom refers to the options to choose their education, career paths, birth, children, and marriage, and independence is about economic success and wealth to support family and loved ones.
- Loving-kindness means family support, social understanding, human rights, mutual respect, and personal responsibilities.

- Wellness is the foundation for the entire family and organization to hope, life purpose, continuous learning, and moral values.
- Mindfulness is the tool to help individuals be present and live life fully without resenting the past or worrying about the future.
- Work-life integration is achievable but needs creative thinking and innovative actions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative phenomenological study applied Giele's (2008) life course theoretical framework and Weber and Cissna-Heath's (2015) work-life integration strategy instruments via email interviews with 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China to investigate their life course stories, entrepreneurial experiences, and their coping strategies to integrate work and life. The findings of four themes and 20 influencers, five sociodemographic factors that shaped Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, and the 33 work-life integration strategies align with most of the literature and the data analysis results. Further research could expand the themes, influencers, sociodemographic factors, and coping strategies through a mixed methodology approach using the same theoretical framework and instruments. A comparative study among women entrepreneurs from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan could help researchers or scholars discover the influential factors to their life courses because they share similar cultural backgrounds and traditional norms but live under different political systems. This comparative study could include Chinese women entrepreneurs in America, England, Canada, and Australia because they have the same cultural and traditional backgrounds but live in fully developed countries. Additional recommendations for future research could employ an alternative design approach by using surveys or structured interviews with women entrepreneurs throughout major metropolitan cities in China to support the existing findings. The final recommendation for

further research is to consider male participants and global implications to expand the research dimensions.

Conclusions

After China's economic reform and open-door policies, millions of Chinese women-owned enterprises have contributed to China's economic growth and become a global superpower. Although China's business environment presented opportunities and challenges, many women entrepreneurs have evolved as successful business owners and contributed to China's economic success (Stefanie, 2017; Y. Zhao, 2017). Since the 1980s, women entrepreneurs in China have raised public awareness and reshaped China's entrepreneurial landscape through their continuous strives for fundamental human rights, remarkable business achievements, and appeals for gender equality and empowerment (Xiaojiang, 2021). Chinese women entrepreneurs have become a crucial driving force across various industries by contributing to employment, innovation, and international commerce. Their achievements have inspired and empowered other women in China and other Asian countries to choose entrepreneurial paths (Z. Hong, 2018). Some Chinese women entrepreneurs have become distinguished philanthropists worldwide to support charitable programs for women's education and career development (Hsieh & Wang, 2022). However, China's traditional norms, cultural bias against women, structural barriers, and societal stereotypes have emphasized women's family roles and social responsibilities without encouraging them to pursue business opportunities and leadership roles (J. Wang et al., 2019).

As the second world economic power, China is a populous country with a rich cultural heritage and deeply rooted traditional norms towards women's family responsibilities and social roles (Bai, 2023). Chinese women entrepreneurs have suffered gender issues and business

challenges in their efforts to grow their entrepreneurial leadership and sustainable business development (Maslak, 2017). Although their entrepreneurial experiences vary based on their socio-demographic factors and life course stories, Chinese women entrepreneurs face profound difficulties in the business world:

- **Stereotyping:** Chinese women entrepreneurs often face gender bias and stereotypes prohibiting them from growing their start-up ventures and maintaining profitable operations compared to male entrepreneurs in China (Cooke & Xiao, 2021).
- **Work-Life Integration:** Integrating business aspirations with personal responsibilities is the biggest challenge for Chinese women entrepreneurs because the traditional Chinese cultural norms, demand for filial piety, and domestic obligations often request women to take more family and caregiving duties.
- **Lack of Resources:** Chinese women entrepreneurs need personal connections or strong relationships to secure funding, government endorsement, human capital, state-of-art technologies, market access, legal services, role models, and mentors (Q. Chen, 2021).
- **Negotiation Bias:** Chinese women entrepreneurs encounter biases in business negotiations due to the stereotypes about women's abilities to handle the terms and liabilities (Z. Hong, 2018).

Chinese women represent 17.55% of the world's female population (Knoema, n.d.; Statista, 2022). The family planning policies between 1980 and 2015 and the boy-preference tradition caused China's structural population to become unbalanced. China had 36.4 million more men than women by the end of 2022. Compared to Chinese women entrepreneurs' emerging roles in China's economic development, it is hard to find studies focusing on how they integrate their work, family, and personal lives (Z. Liu & Wu, 2022). Researchers must

understand Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course stories, business struggles, career barriers, self-made initiatives, entrepreneurial experiences in a male-dominated business environment, and Confucious-driven traditions (Luo & Chan, 2021). Some studies have focused on Chinese women entrepreneurs' business contributions and achievements in the past 20 years (Kassai, 2022). Still, minimal studies have touched on their barriers and coping strategies to integrate work and life under China's historical bias and traditional norms against women's roles in the business world.

This study aims to explore Chinese women entrepreneurs' struggles, barriers, and challenges between family roles and business responsibilities, as well as their coping strategies to integrate work and life efficiently. This qualitative phenomenological study utilized Giele's (2002, 2008) life course theoretical framework and the coping strategy instruments (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015) to interview 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs from Beijing, China, via email. The participants shared their life courses through four segments, including identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive style. The responses from the participants were authentic, diverse, and inspirational because their identity and privacy were fully protected by using temporary email addresses and pseudonyms throughout the study.

The findings revealed four major themes with 20 influencers (freedom, loving-kindness, wellness, mindfulness, independence, support network, hope, humility, compassion, responsibility, learning, flexibility, forgiveness, societies, values, and authenticity) that shaped Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course stories and entrepreneurial experiences (see Table 2). Five sociodemographic factors (traditional norms, family background, government rules, financial status, and education) impacted these women entrepreneurs' life choices, career paths, and personal evolvments (see Table 3). The 20 women entrepreneurs in the study shared 33

work-life integration strategies (see Table 4), including delegating business tasks to capable teams, setting boundaries at work and home to avoid burnout, prioritizing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace, and relying on a reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities.

The findings related to researcher question 1 (RQ1), research question 2 (RQ2), and research question 3 (RQ3) are in alignment. The significant findings of the study include the following:

- Chinese women entrepreneurs have been appealing for freedom to break the traditional norms and cultural bias against women in China. They must become independent to determine their life choices and career paths.
- Chinese women entrepreneurs have longed for loving-kindness from their family members, relatives, friends, associates, and communities. They are grateful for their parents' compassion to have them born without having abortions in China's boy-preference background and Mao's one-child policies.
- The primary motivation for Chinese women entrepreneurs to own their private enterprises is their family's wellness, especially their parents' well-being. They want to care for their family members and help others with enough money in their bank accounts.
- Mindfulness and humility have become the winning powers for Chinese women entrepreneurs' success and happiness because they realize that positive thinking, a grateful mind, an accepting attitude, a nonjudgmental mentality, and a forgiving heart are crucial entrepreneurial characters.

- Traditional norms, family backgrounds, government rules, financial status, and education significantly influence Chinese women entrepreneurs' life course experiences, especially their career choices and family relationships.
- Gender equality and inclusion movements still have a long way to go for Chinese women entrepreneurs because the traditional norms, cultural bias, and the Communist Party's control of free speeches and censorship block Chinese women entrepreneurs' direct connections to the world.
- Hiring trusted aids to manage household responsibilities, childcare, and caring for elders has recently become the most popular trend, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The top 10 work-life integration strategies for Chinese women entrepreneurs include:
 - Delegating business tasks to capable teams
 - Setting boundaries at both work and home to avoid burnout
 - Prioritizing the high-impact events or activities
 - Practicing mindfulness and meditation to relax and find peace
 - Relying on a reliable and supportive network to share responsibilities
 - Empowering employees and others to share duties
 - Using hired aids to support childcare and household responsibilities
 - Spending quality time with loved ones
 - Finding self-care time for physical and mental health
 - Exercising regularly (yoga, gym workouts, walking, and jogging)

The current study revealed that Chinese women entrepreneurs' burning desires were freedom to make life choices, loving kindness to build good relationships, wellness for entrepreneurial motivation, and mindfulness for facing future challenges. Most of the participants wanted to break the traditional norms upon them but value family backgrounds. Compassion and humility played significant roles in Chinese women entrepreneurs' leadership development.

EPILOGUE

This study is not the end but a new beginning for the researcher to continue the exploration of Chinese women entrepreneurs under the same theoretical framework (Giele, 2008) and interview instruments (Weber & Cissna-Heath, 2015) on work-life integration strategies. The study participants have expressed their appreciation for participating in this type of research because they never had the opportunity to share their authentic thoughts, insights, and perspectives about their needs, worries, appeals, struggles, desires, career challenges, family duties, and hopes publicly and freely. Specifically, the 20 participants revealed their grateful feelings to their parents for letting them be born without abortions during China's strict One-Child Policy era. Furthermore, living in Communist China, the 20 Chinese women entrepreneurs could not speak out loud since they had no channels to voice their opinions without being punished or criticized by government bodies and communities. This study was a profound breakthrough for Chinese women entrepreneurs even though the participants were limited to Beijing, not covering a broader range of women entrepreneurs in China or other countries. "I cannot imagine speaking out truthfully with the Chinese scholars or researchers because I worry about my confidentiality and privacy," said a participant in the study. "Thank you for allowing me to voice my opinions to the world through your study," another participant told the researcher. The study's findings allowed Chinese women entrepreneurs to connect with the outside world and tell their stories openly, freely, and naturally. Work-Life Integration Project, founded by Dr. Margaret Weber, offers opportunities for more Chinese women entrepreneurs from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other countries to share their life course.

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APPENDIX A

Email Invitation Letter

Dear [name],

I am Susan Patts, a doctoral student in the School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining Chinese women entrepreneurs' work-life integration and coping strategies, and I need your help! I am seeking volunteer study participants to complete semi-structured interview questions via email between August to September 2023. Your participation in the study is through email communication only and is anticipated to take up to two hours to complete the email interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and your identity as a participant will be protected before, during, and after the time that study data is collected. Strict confidentiality procedures will be in place during and after the study. I will assign a pseudonym for you throughout the study to mitigate the risk of breach of confidentiality.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in this study, please get in touch with me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your participation.

Susan Patts

Pepperdine University
School of Education and Psychology
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Participant Study Title:

Chinese Women Entrepreneurs' Work-Life Integration and Coping Strategies in China

Formal Study Title:

Chinese Women Entrepreneurs' Work-Life Integration and Coping Strategies in China

Authorized Study Personnel: Susan Pattis

Principal Investigator:

Susan Pattis

Secondary Investigator:

Margaret Weber (Chairperson of the Study)

Key Information

Suppose you agree to volunteer and take part in this study. In that case, you will be asked to participate in an email interview regarding Chinese women entrepreneurs' work-life integration and coping strategies in China. You will be provided a copy of this consent form.

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study by Susan Pattis, Ph.D. Candidate at Pepperdine University because you identify as a Chinese women entrepreneur in Beijing, China. You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form will help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also discuss involvement with your family or friends.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Chinese women entrepreneur, in Beijing, China, with a continuous operation for over five years.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

This study examines Chinese women entrepreneurs' work-life integration issues and coping strategies in China.

What will be done during this research study?

Approximately 20 participants who read and write in English will be interviewed via email in English. The participants will be asked about six semi-structured and open-ended interview questions. The interview will last approximately 2-3 hours to answer all questions. Additionally, the investigator may email you with follow-up questions or clarifications if needed.

How will the data be used?

With your permission, the researcher will transcribe your email interview answers. The researcher will save your answers in a password-protected folder, and a unique identifier (such as "CWE001") will be assigned to your information. Any information you share that could uniquely identify you (such as names, places, or events unique to you) will be given a pseudonym and anonymized before, during, and after the email interview process.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

No information being collected would pose a risk to any personal employee outcomes at work. Participants' responses to these questions should not pose any risks to the participant's reputation, employability, financial standing, and educational advancement.

What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The study findings might help other Chinese women entrepreneurs integrate their family life and career challenges.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating.

What will be in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

You will receive no compensation for your participation in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the primary concern of every member of the researcher. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

Documentation of informed Consent

You are voluntarily deciding whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered, and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant Feedback Survey

To meet Pepperdine University's ongoing accreditation efforts and to meet the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) standards, an online feedback survey is included below:

<https://forms.gle/nnRgRwLgajYzBq5t7>

Review Board (IRB): Phone: 1(310)568-2305, Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or choosing to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University (list others as applicable). You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

How will information about you be protected?

For confidentiality, the participant's name will not be on the identified. Pseudonyms will be given to the names of participants and their organizational affiliations. The researcher will be the only person to transcribe and code the data. After completing all interviews, the interviews will be uploaded in NVivo, a software program for coding and inductive data analysis. The data will be erased from the email server after being uploaded into NVIVO, which will be downloaded on the researcher's password-protected computer. All research data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer for a minimum of three to five years after completion of the study, and then destroyed.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study-related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional.

Participant Name:

Name of Participant: Please Print

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

The following protocol will guide the individual interviews in the qualitative phase of the study. Interviews will be conducted via email to ensure an accurate representation of the participant experience.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Interviewer (s): _____

Interviewee: _____

Introduction Script (to be read at the beginning of each interview):

Thank you for sharing with me via email regarding your experiences and role as a Chinese women entrepreneur in China. As you may remember, I am conducting a study examining Chinese women entrepreneurs' coping strategies to integrate their business ventures and family life. Please take the time needed to answer the 27 semi-structured interview questions and the demographic information and send your answers back to me within two weeks of receiving this email interview protocol.

Remember that participating in this email interview is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue the interview at any time. Additionally, you are not obligated to share any information you might be uncomfortable sharing. Any information provided and identifying records will remain confidential and kept in an encrypted file on a password-protected computer for at least five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a pseudonym, and your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and quoted in

professional journals and meetings. However, information from this study will only be reported as a group rather than individually.

Finally, I would like your permission to send you a follow-up email, if necessary, to accurately represent your answers and responses when reporting the results of my research. Once the study is complete and the reporting of findings is nearing completion, I can provide you the opportunity to give feedback on the accuracy of the information relative to your experience.

Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions or need clarification during our email communications. However, I encourage you to answer the questions as best you can, according to your initial perceptions and interpretations.

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions (Instrument)

(Total 27 Semi-Structured Email Interview Questions)

First Set of Questions [Early adulthood] (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com)

The period in your life immediately after completing your education (the early twenties):

1. What was the level of your education?
2. Did it include college education or graduate education?
3. What would you like to become in terms of occupation and lifestyle or family life?
4. What were you thinking then, and how did things turn out?

Second Set of Questions [Childhood & Adolescence] (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com)

The period before completing your education:

1. What are the goals you and your family held for you?
2. What was your family's attitude toward women's education, and what would you become?
3. What was the effect of your parent's education, the presence of brothers and sisters, family finances, involvement in a faith community, and family expectations?
4. How was your education different from or similar to your parents, brothers, and sisters?

Third Set of Questions [Adulthood - Current] (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com)

The period after completing your education:

1. What kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced?

2. What type of mentors have you had?
3. What has happened that you did not expect employment, family, faith, further education, etc.?
4. Has there been job discrimination, children, separation or divorce, or health problems of yourself or a family member?
5. What about moves, membership in the community, faith community, housing problems, racial integration, and job loss? And feelings about yourself?
6. Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

Fourth Set of Questions [Adulthood - Future] (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com)

Your life period from this vantage point and ahead to the future:

1. What are your main concerns?
2. What are your goals, hopes, and dreams for the next few years?
3. What problems do you hope to solve? Where do you hope to be in a few years concerning work or additional schooling, family, faith, community, mentors, health, finances, etc.?

Fifth Set of Questions [Coping Strategies] (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com)

1. What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns about the plurality of roles?
2. Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home?
3. What made you think that you could do both successfully?
4. Do you feel your life has suffered because of your involvement in work or family?

5. Have you felt any guilt related to either family or work?
6. Are there times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why?
7. Were you prepared for the needs of an integrated life? Why or why not?
8. What strategies do you implement in your own life to have an integrated life?

Six Set of Questions [Strategies under Crisis] (www.worklifeintegrationproject.com)

1. With the COVID-19 pandemic that invaded the globe, what strategies and responses did you have to the pandemic?
2. What adaptations occurred in your life (work, home, remote working, learning, spending time with family and friends)? Share any other insights about this.

Final Remarks and Closing Script (to be read after each interview)

Thank you for your participation. I appreciate your willingness to discuss your experience; your responses will be valuable to my work. If you have any questions about the research or would like to add any other information or insights.

APPENDIX E

Sociodemographic Information Sheet

Date of Birth:

Birth Place:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity/Tribe:

Country of residence:

Education Level:

Date of Business Establishment:

Marital Status:

Education Level of Spouse or Significant Others:

Occupation of Spouse or Significant Others:

Business Sector:

Children Listed by Birth Years:

Mother's Maiden Name:

Mother's Education Level:

Mother's Occupation:

Father's Education Level

Father's Occupation:

Faith/Religion:

Overall Financial Condition:

Overall Physical and Mental Well-being:

The social class of the family of

Total Household Income in 2022

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval Letter

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: July 13, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Susan Pattis

Protocol #: 23-06-2183

Project Title: Women Entrepreneurs ' Work-Life Integration and Coping Strategies in China

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Susan Pattis:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX G

CITI Program Completion Certification



Completion Date 17-Jan-2023
 Expiration Date 17-Jan-2028
 Record ID 53603274

This is to certify that:

Susan Pattis

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of
 certification through CME.

GSEP Education Division

(Curriculum Group)

GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

CITI
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US

www.citiprogram.org

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w56ca89f5-b60e-4ed3-96ea-ba4ecadad152-53603274