The Careers of New Chinese Professional Women: Planning, Pathways and WeChat

By

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Abstract

This paper considers a specific cohort of *new Chinese* professional women born under the one-child policy in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It explores their perceptions and experiences of career in Australia through qualitative data collected from twenty-one professionals. This paper seeks to unpack the complexities of their career planning, pathways, and change, including their use of the WeChat platform to mediate their careers. I argue that *new Chinese* professional women's experience of career is ambivalent. They aspired to achieve some degree of 'freedom' through choosing to further their career in Australia; simultaneously, they attempted to build homeland connections and fulfil familial obligations as *Dushengnv*. *1* As a result of constant negotiation, their career pathways were full of 'nonlinear' changes. WeChat works specifically as one important platform that structures the ambivalence experienced – it allows them to establish connections with family in China and the local ethnic community, but it may also limit their ability to develop networks in the Australian workplace; it offers opportunities for entrepreneurship, yet it complicates their social positions. The paper contributes to broader knowledge of *new Chinese* professional women's careers.

Introduction

This paper explores the careers of *new Chinese* professional women, looking at the neglected interplay between one-child policy and migration to Australia and its associated social and cultural effects on their career pathways. Research on the 'new Chinese' often refers to new immigrants from mainland China born after 1949 (Anderson et al., 2019: 65). Yet this is not a homogenous category. For many women, the most significant experience of change occurred with the introduction of the one-child policy which lasted for more than three decades, from 1982 to 2015. Its significance lies in their new status as *Dushengnv* (the only daughter), growing up in the one-child policy era. The one-child policy provided women with a sense of liberation, because more resources were allocated to the only child, so many girls were more likely to receive higher education (Ren 2013). They are different both from the generation of the post-Mao, 1970s era (born 1970-1981), who experienced extreme material deprivation, and from the late 1990s generation (born after 1995), who experienced enormous technological, economic, and social benefits. Girls in this in-between generation had greater access to higher education but were now under increased pressure to fulfil the promises of social mobility for their parents (Fong 2004). Recent studies suggest that the one-child policy accelerated progress towards gender equality in mainland China and increased women's presence in better-paid work (Liu 2017).

In Australia, the numbers of mainland Chinese migrants have been rising in recent decades. According to the Census, 46.6% of these migrants reside in the Greater Sydney region, and about 13.1% hold professional positions (ABS 2016). They are part of an emerging Chinese middle-class that possesses higher qualifications. Women make up 56% of these arrivals. However, the numbers and characteristics of Chinese women migrants have varied over the past three decades. One of the significant differences is that Chinese women are no longer the 'trailing spouse' or simply joining family members. Instead, a high proportion of them are now skilled and temporary working visa holders (Australian Department of Home Affairs 2016, ABS 2016). One of the consequences of these changes is an increasing presence of Chinese professional women in the Australian workplace (Cooke, Zhang & Wang 2013). These changes have, however, raised a number of questions around gender roles (Ip 2001), professionalism and workplace identities (Krajewski & Blumberg 2014), the rise of digital labour (Zhao 2020), and work/life balance (Grimshaw, Murphy & Probert 2005).

Migration complicates life for this cohort because, while it may offer opportunities, it also means their accumulated economic, social, and cultural capitals in the PRC – including qualifications, skills, and work experiences – do not necessarily transfer equivalently in a different social context (Erel & Ryan 2019). In particular, the ways they navigate their careers in Australia take a

different turn. Even though their experiences in other aspects were studied, there is limited understanding of how Chinese international students transition from their study to work (Martin 2017, 2018, Zhao 2020), particularly in navigating their career and negotiating that with their parents. Moreover, digital technology has impacted this navigation and how they use WeChat to build careers.

Becoming a parent, moreover, increases responsibilities and the time dedicated to the care of young children. Motherhood works as a penalty in suspending their career temporarily to meet these familial demands. The gendered assumption of women as the primary caregiver of young children and being in charge of domestic labour still prevails (Kamp 2018). It often leads to a situation where Chinese professional women become stay-at-home mothers due to limited resources of affordable childcare services or little support from their husbands. They alternatively endeavour to utilise other resources such as WeChat as a platform to strategise their approach to paid work (Zhao 2020).

In this paper, I first analyse career planning and change challenges for *new Chinese* professional women. I then look at connections between career aspirations, familial relationships, and transitional jobs through the online platform WeChat. I seek to explore the different pathways many women take to demonstrate how inequality regimes shape *new Chinese* professional women's careers. I argue in the conclusion that *new Chinese* professional women's attitude towards their careers is somewhat ambivalent. They aspire to achieve some degree of 'freedom' through career planning in Australia; simultaneously, they attempted to fulfil their obligations to their parents as the only child, which pulls them in different directions. As a result of negotiation, their careers often reflect 'nonlinear' and 'transitional' pathways. WeChat works specifically as one platform for integrating these possibilities and challenges – it allows *new Chinese* professional women to connect with their family in China and the local ethnic community in Australia. Still, it might limit the development of social and work networks in Australia.

Career, the Australian Workplace, and New Chinese Professional Women

Existing studies suggest that a career is typically seen as a project of the self (Wajcman 1999, Edwards & Wajcman 2005); however, women's careers are often gendered to 'fit men's life course' (Edwards & Wajcman 2005: 77). Women's careers are constrained by their life course and expectation of having children. They can sometimes be at the cost of a 'broken' career trajectory, falling into the rabbit hole of a 'mummy track' (Schwartz 1992). Motherhood is an obstacle to career progression because masculine organisational structures penalise women with child-rearing responsibilities (Berggren & Lauster 2014, Kelley et al. 2020).

Motherhood sometimes becomes a 'normative discrimination' even if professional women are proven competent and committed to working (Benard & Correll 2010). All these are commonly faced gendered structural issues in the workplace for professional women.

Australia comparatively offers more flexibility at the policy level and various practices in the workplace. The idea of work and life balance is more appealing as 'a good life' for *new Chinese* professional women to have a career and be a mother. The lure of a 'lifestyle' change afforded by migration to Australia is tempting for many Chinese professional women, particularly because it seemingly offers a balance between work and life not so easily gained in China (Shen & Jiang 2020). Yet this is somewhat illusory. Far from providing balance, the blurring of boundaries between work and life (Edwards & Wajcman 2015) poses more challenges than it solves. On one hand, it works as an exit strategy to depart from China and an entry ticket to migrate to Australia. On the other hand, they may face various structural issues once they enter the Australian labour market, such as racialised glass ceiling (Gu 2015).

As a result of this, career pathways are often gendered for Chinese professional women in Australia (Ho 2006a), given vast differences in corporate operation in mainland China and Australia. More specifically, migration is often a deskilling process because of the linguistic disparity and non-equivalent qualification recognition between China and Australia, adding an overarching barrier and reinforcing nonlinear career trajectories (Ho 2008, 2006a, 2006b). In some cases, when these professionals manage to have their qualifications, skills and experiences recognised, they come across the gendered issues across organisational structure and practices, often subtle and impossible to challenge (Gu 2015). This is usually where 'inequality regimes' play out (Acker 2006).

The interplay between migration, ethnicity and career is often subtle and dynamic. Erel and Ryan (2019) propose that migrant women draw on place-oriented opportunities and develop temporal strategies as contingent and multi-level negotiations with their gender, class, ethnic and national positioning. And Xu (2020) argues that Chinese international students navigate their careers as an imagined orientation through strategies as 'deferred gratification' and 'temporal destructuring' because of their familial class privileges in China. New Chinese professional women's careers are primarily shaped by immigration regimes, their familial background from their country of origin, and their positioned identities in Australia.

While globalisation and digitalisation have transformed the nature of much professional work, it is also true that they have changed the nature of careers. WeChat, for example, offers more than a way of connecting people with their family and friends in China (Zhao 2019). And in Lu's study, WeChat works as

a public platform to strengthen Chinese academics' global competitiveness in non-English speaking countries (Lu 2020). It becomes a vehicle to practice digital marketing and space for their everyday social and cultural interaction. Combining a career with WeChat breaks the boundary of paid work in the physical and digital areas and blurs the time between work and life.

What is often overlooked for new Chinese professional women, distinguishing their working lives from other women, is the effect of the one-child policy in China. One aspect of pursuing a career for women in this study demonstrates their independence and capability, which works as their aspiration to enter the workplace. Under that historical policy, parents often impose their hope on their only child to achieve more at school and in their career afterwards (Fong 2004). Consequently, it is often claimed, the only-child generation became 'little emperors' and self-centred in the workplace due to inferior socio-emotional attributes because they had no siblings (Chen et al. 2020). Research has found wider consequences: Tu (2016, 2018) examines Dushengzinv's mobility in the UK as part of the process of building their transnational networks. The single child's career cannot be reviewed separately from one's extended family but associated with their family social and global mobility. These studies indicate that being *Dushengnv* is complex and needs more attention. Yet, research has rarely grappled with the consequences of the connection between career and the one-child policy, especially for women who migrate. How do *new Chinese* professional women negotiate their relationships and distance with their families through their careers? How do these women manage the tensions between their career aspirations and the sense of family obligations? What is the role of digital technologies in this?

Methods

This paper draws on twenty-one life history interviews. Discussions covered a wide range of questions regarding my interviewees' migration, career, life, and family, motivated by a sense that 'the open-endedness of the approach offers clear benefits as a means of giving voice to the participants in the research, allowing their perspectives to be represented' (Smith 2011:8). The life-history interview also allowed my informants to reflect on their individual experiences - not just in a way to voice their struggles and success, but also to enable self-reflection in terms of their positionality and constraints under this 'privileged' and 'lost' generation being the only child in their family. More specifically, it worked well in identifying their Chinese and transnational experiences (Smith 2011).

Participants were recruited via online platforms, including professional associations and social media, Facebook, and WeChat. Interviews were conducted via face-to-face between July 2019 and March 2020. Eleven interviews were

conducted in English and ten interviews in Chinese. A thematic analysis was adopted to identify, analyse, and interpret data (Clarke & Braun 2006, Terry et al. 2017).

The cohort of *new Chinese* professional women researched here held comparatively high qualifications - the majority had a Master or PhD degree. All twenty-one participants came from a wide range of industries and occupations. Twenty arrived in Australia after 2010. One had arrived before 2000 because she aspired to have more than one child, which was not possible under the one-child policy at the time. The age ranged from 26 to 49. Family status was diverse, including single women, in a relationship, married and married with children. Different life stages without and with child-rearing responsibilities allowed a more nuanced understanding of their choices of careers. In terms of current visa status, twenty had a permanent visa or Australian citizenship and one was on a student visa. Their visa pathways varied - three came to Australia on a family reunion visa, and the rest arrived with a student visa or skilled visa.

Career Aspiration, Family, and the One-Child Policy

Sixteen of twenty-one participants were the *Dushengnv* in their family. They possessed diverse skills in linguistics, culture and communication, or technical skills, management, and leadership skills. Many of these professional women went through a lengthy process and nonlinear trajectories to their current occupations. Only three participants established themselves in either the same industry or professional path as their parents. This raises interesting questions around the relations between gender, career planning, coping with changes as well as negotiating parental expectations in both developing their career pathways and working in Australia. The status of being Dushengnv was often overlooked in existing studies, mainly, how it played out with new Chinese professional women's career planning and influenced career change.

Career planning: Fathers, husbands, and 'gendered' pathways

Existing research suggests that Chinese migrant women are more likely to be constrained by gendered norms and take a 'gendered' pathway after migrating to Australia when established social networks in China are no longer available, and therefore, gradually withdraw from the workplace and return to their family and maintain care responsibilities (Ho 2006a). More recently, Tu and Xie (2020) claim that the one-child girls are 'privileged daughters' who can utilise their family resources to pursue higher education and career in the transnational mobility from China to the UK. However, their familial obligation is often transferred and passed down by their mothers at a certain age to reinstate the importance of their

'gendered roles' as wives and mothers. This section discusses the role of gendered encounters in *new Chinese* professional women's careers, specifically their fathers and their husbands in the private domain.

Familial involvement in career planning is somewhat 'gendered' to some extent.

> My dad suggested I choose STEM because it was much easier to find a job in any field of STEM. So, I decided on STEM… by the time I needed to determine what major for my university degree, my dad asked me what kind of career I would like to have. I said I wanted to be a detective. My dad said that it would be challenging for a girl, and he wasn't very sure about the police system because it was challenging to get into the system. I thought about engineering because of my dad, to be more specific. He was a mechanical engineer. (Darcie, 28, Technical Engineer)

Darcie was influenced by her father's interpretation of an appropriate career which was not simply a way to avoid getting into a male-dominated field but was in itself a submission to patriarchal authority. Meanwhile, her mother was less influential, even though she was a dentist and had adequate knowledge about careers.

> My mum's consideration was simple. She wanted me to do something like my dad, so stay close to him, and stay close to our home. (Darcie, 28, Technical Engineer)

For some participants, decisions on higher education and career plans are highly determined by the father's suggestions and preferences. This approach represents the unequal distribution of decision-making and gendered power dynamics in both the family and social structures, particularly within the context of one-child families in China. Darcie's father's perception of male-dominated industry and occupation shaped Darcie's choice in the hope that his network would lessen Darcie's way into the industry – "*he [my dad] said why not choose something like mine. Hydraulic engineering sounded great. What he meant was, if I had no luck finding a job myself in China, he could help me finding one*" (Darcie). However, his suggestion led to Darcie's difficulty finding a professional job in Australia beyond her father's circle.

Similarly, Nicole's father disapproved of her interest in gardening but suggested she become a doctor.

> I have to say it was because of my parent's generation. I remember very clearly that I wanted to do gardening, but no one supported that.

> Everyone said to be a doctor was great. Back then, I had no idea what different professions meant and what people with these professions do. If I knew more about these professions and followed my passion, I would have chosen gardening. But there were other aspects, and when I talked about gardening, people couldn't see a way out and where I can get a job. (Nicole, 37, Research officer)

His consideration, however, was more from a 'class' perspective that gardening was considered no different from farming and geographically bound to rural areas. Again, the father had the final decision over Nicole's career.

Familial resources and parental social networks often shape a career pathway.

> My father's an outstanding hydraulic engineer. And if I also become a hydraulic engineer, at least he can help me find the first job. (Bella, 29, Senior Technician)

Bella believed that her father's connection in the industry would open the door for her. Migration to Australia, however, meant that her father's network would not matter as much. Her husband's career as a Civic Engineer established her connections in the industry and led to her first full-time employment as a junior engineer.

> My husband helped me - he sent out a few emails to his connections in the field… I got an interview with my current employer, and I went there. We had a great conversation on a Friday evening, and then I received the offer the following Monday. (Bella, 29, Senior Technician)

As the only child in their families, both Bella's and Darcie's career choices functioned as their father's desire to bond them in a future relationship, to some extent a reflection of their patriarchal power in their attempt to plan their daughter's career within proximity. This way of 'controlling' worked as an invisible 'pull force' to keep their only child nearby but suffocated Bella and Darcie to some degree that they wanted to escape.

Darcie, who could not find a professional job in her field for an extended period (over six months), is financially and emotionally supported by her husband and dependent on their single income from his job as an IT specialist.

> I almost gave up looking for a professional job, but my husband supported me. My husband said, why don't you quit the job and focus

on finding a new job? And he will afford all the expenses meanwhile…
It was four months of unemployment and three months of the internship; I didn't have any income for over half a year. (Darcie, 28, Junior Engineer)

For Bella and Darcie, migration to Australia shifted the negotiation of their career pathways from their father to their spouses as they set up their family units. Both received support from their husbands in achieving a career pathway. The 'gender' aspect in both experiences lay in the challenges that prevent professional women from entering male-dominated industries and occupations.

Males, first their fathers and then their partners, played significant roles in Bella's and Darcie's lives in pursuing their professional pathway. Their husbands did not act as surrogates for their fathers in the family gender dynamics but took their place in supporting their careers in their country of residence. Noticeably, their attempt in seeking or maintaining a career is not just an independent decision as women but reflects a new generational shift where husbands support these women to pursue a career before they have any children.

Career change: Distance and proximity of familial obligations

Career change is often associated with discussions about parental expectations. Victoria experienced a few career changes: she first worked as a theatre instructor and then as a university lecturer in China. After she migrated to Australia, she became a housewife, then a full-time research student and a part-time theatre director, and a volunteer in the local community.

I didn't have that idea of a stable job, working for the government [in Australia]. It is more like ideas imposed by my parents… looking back, my dad is a public servant in China, a high-level provincial officer, and he used to bring his attitude to our home [when I was young]. My first instinct was not to take that career path; that's too horrible… My mother used to be a high-school teacher, and she strictly disciplined me for six years; I couldn't take it anymore. So, I took the opportunity to go to university in Beijing to get away from her…

I went to a critical high school in our city, top class. Our next door is Zhejiang University. All my classmates followed that pathway to that university. The road is called Sunrising Road. Most of my classmates never left that road. It was too much. We went on the same route from kindergarten to senior high school, and most of my classmates' parents worked in Zhejiang university. That's our life, that's our pathway, that's my

> network. So, I decided to go to a university outside the circle, and I wanted
> to go to another province. My mother was the first one against this idea,
> and she didn't think highly of art at all. (Victoria, 39, Curator)

Victoria described a long history of resisting her parents' involvement in her career from early on - she pursues a different career from her parents signified her eagerness for independence. Her father's voice was absent, but his influence and presence of power at home were not. Victoria's parents had planned for Victoria to stay on the 'Sunrising Road', like her classmates. Career worked as an escape for Victoria back in China and drew her away from her parents' circle.

Victoria's parents did not stop their interventions.

> Our migration to Australia threw away everything because I tried to
> show my parents that I am finally leaving [China]. I gave up everything,
> and I left [my hometown]. (Victoria, 39, Curator)

A career in a different context, in this sense, worked as a negotiated space between the submission to patriarchal power and a symbolic attempt at rebellion and independence. Such choices often involved a reflective evaluation of familial relationships. Lucy was in a similar situation to Victoria:

> Neither of my parents supported my decision. Because from their
> points of view, I had a perfect job back then. They thought that girls
> at my age were supposed to have children instead of studying abroad.
> At that time, I didn't care about any of their thoughts. They would talk
> with me, but none of their ideas would get through to me. Sometimes, I
> would say... sometimes I would argue back, but sometimes I would keep
> my silence. (Lucy, 36, Junior Accountant)

Being the only child in the family, her parents believed that fulfilling the gendered norm of having children was more important than having a career. Lucy's perception here was more of a rebellion against her parents' design of 'an easy life' for a girl - having a stable job and raising children as her priority.

Sky's career pathway altered when she was no longer the only child in her family. She used to work full-time as an environmental engineer, but her idea of career transformed after her little brother was born.

> I started to read more and pay more attention to kids' education. I think,
> their [my parents] way of educating my brother may not be necessarily

wrong. Still, their way may not keep up with this generation… And I want to sponsor my brother's migration to Australia. In that case, he needs to adapt the environment here, so we are thinking about how to bridge something between here and China, that's why I went to the tutoring organisation and work there. So now my students range from year two to year five... these kids are the similar age as my little brother. I would talk with them and learn about their lives, so I will use similar topics to speak with him [my little brother].

Because of my mother or father, my parents' kind of switched their attention to him, not to bother me. That's the first thing. And the second thing is a perfect practice for me to learn how to get in touch with them, like kids at a baby age… I can see I expect I'm going through that same stage in the next maybe three to five years. (Sky, 30, Environmental Specialist)

Sky's consideration of a career change indicated a certain level of self-realisation and independence. Since her younger brother's birth, she switched to a more 'gendered' career as her attempt to perform care through an online platform. The career could work as a vehicle for *new Chinese* professional women to find a space between a complete submission to a patriarchal relationship and a sense of independence while fitting into gendered, class, and migration norms.

Even after they migrated to Australia, it is not a completed process, although still deeply embedded in familial obligations. For example, some participants like Iris went to Australia for postgraduate study and consequently established a career as a research officer. It was, however, against her parental expectation.

My initial plan is that I just wanted to go outside and see what the world is like and then get some experience and come back [to China]. I remember that probably after I worked for a year...I invited my parents to come over [to Australia], but I was away for a long time. And I had a boyfriend back then, but he's an Australian. They [my parents] had this frustration to communicate with him. Having that idea that their only child might stay in Australia is very frustrating… My parents mainly, my mother, felt like she's losing her child. I also went back to China, and I've seen all these changes and development and an exciting relationship between people, particularly between females and males. I think here [Australia] is more independent. But in China, I can feel that females, girls, were at least back then treated like princesses. I thought maybe I should give my parents a chance and give myself a chance because I had

some internship experience, and I had a little bit of a problem with my relationship. We couldn't reach the same page about plans. Maybe, in that case, both of us should focus on our job; he was doing something he was very interested in. I better find something that I'm interested in, something I wanted to do. Then I found a job in China. (Iris, 30, Research Officer)

Iris's career pathway is deeply impacted by her filial piety to her parents, her guilt of being Dushengnv unable to live up to their expectation to stay within physical proximity. Her parents did not recognise her relationship with an Australian, and consequently, she accepted it and went back to China. In Beijing, she found her current husband and negotiated with her parents to return to Sydney again. She was able to negotiate a limited period for her freedom, although it is somewhat constrained.

Heavily influenced by the familial obligation of being the only child, *new Chinese* professional women must make difficult choices in their careers. Parental deep involvement with precise planning starting from their secondary school indicated their high expectations for my participants to have a future career. They seized this opportunity to negotiate a temporary space to exercise their agency, but with constraints (Gregory 2020). Different degrees of dialogues led to a nonlinear career trajectory, and in some situations, a 'staggered' career. Although their parents have influenced the direction of their career planning, career pathway and career change, their career decisions reflected a shift in the power dynamics with their parents. The distance and proximity of the parent-child relationship also have changed dynamics between them in various ways.

Digitalizing the Career: WeChat as Alternative Space for Mediating Careers

One way of negotiating these dynamics and changes above is to make use of merging social media platforms as an alternative space to mediate careers. Recent research shows that migrants often must negotiate with 'indentured temporality' - where migrants are confined by certain visa restrictions as specific forms of suspension of 'more desired and intended trajectories' (Robertson 2019:179). Half of the *new* Chinese professional women in this study found their career paths were disrupted, as we saw above, in a state of suspension involving a temporary or transitional employment period before landing a job in their field. Some were on their student visa with limited working hours during school terms, and some had to put their career on hold while waiting for their spouse visa. As Mia, a Human Resources Director, previously claimed, *'there is a lost track of time… I was busy*

with my everyday life, cooking, cleaning, and looking after my children. I couldn't recognise myself. These routines of everyday life at home made Mia feel isolated and disconnected from her previous profession. This suspension compelled many of these women to find creative ways of reigniting a sense of career. A popular social media, WeChat, is widely used by *new Chinese* professional women as an emerging digital platform to explore alternative possibilities.

WeChat works as a digital tool to stay connected with their family and 'synchronised' with their lives through moments or family WeChat groups. As well as this, WeChat provides new Chinese professional women with their family's networks and resources and prompts some to develop their entrepreneurship - in a temporary or transitional sense, by exploring possibilities of small scale online business as *Daigou* (also known as a purchaser, purchasing vitamin supplements and sell them to friends and relatives in China via WeChat) and *Weishang* (a small business owner on WeChat who purchases goods on behalf of their clients outside of China (Zhao 2020). By developing this form of entrepreneurship through WeChat, some Chinese migrant women improved their socio-economic status in the host country (Zhang 2019). On the other side, it also complicates their way of social engagement and network. This digital platform provides women in this project with a space to navigate their previous social network and develop a clientele, creating a 'staggered' sense of suspension in their professional careers.

As a result of navigating migration governance and migration policies, some participants suspended their careers in their previous occupations to find some short-term jobs. Some made use of social media, WeChat specifically, to develop transient jobs, as *Daigou* and *Weishang*. For those newly migrated to Australia, after they have already established their professional network in China, they could quickly transfer their WeChat as a platform to market and search for potential clients. Martin (2017) argues that Chinese international students utilise the digital platform to navigate mobility and secure employment due to experiencing social exclusion. Zhang (2019:186) explores similar experiences of Chinese housewives in Japan working as *Daigou* to 'overcome social isolation', stepping outside their household and familiarising with local consumptions.

Some participants also made use of the WeChat platform. Mia did *Daigou* because of the demands of her social network in China.

> My friends, colleagues and relatives knew that I am in Australia, they would ask me to purchase some baby products or vitamin supplements for them; that's how I started [daigou]. (Mia, 37, HR)

A career developed through WeChat is, however, problematic. On the one hand, there are no clear regulations in either China or Australia concerning

the quality of products or services sold on the WeChat platform. On the other hand, *new* Chinese professional women are subjected to Australian local tax and legal obligations to register their business and file their incomes. This platform, therefore, works as a mediated 'grey zone'. The media in Australia often represent Chinese *Daigou* as 'thieves', smuggling baby formulas and vitamin supplements outside of Australia, as competitors with local mothers for this tension of creating a scarcity of certain products (Vincent 2018, Puddy & Burnie 2018). The impact of these professional women taking *Daigou* and online platforms as temporary jobs potentially takes away their attention in building up 'meaningful' connections in real life and consequently slow down their integration into the host country. In doing so, they might restrict the possibility of building social and professional networks and accumulating resources for their career in the long term.

As Quinn explains, she develops her business through a local ethnic network. As a result, she could not establish any professional career within the broader Australian society.

> Most of my clients are Chinese… I opened my shops in Burwood. I didn't have a life at all. I was online to post advertisements [on WeChat] until 2 or 3 am and then I woke up the next day to go back to my store again. (Quinn, 32, Small Business Owner)

Quinn's claim also indicated another consequence - her social network remains limited to the Chinese community. Online selling or buying activities via WeChat also blur the boundaries of work and life and, therefore, result in ambivalent feelings towards time and experiences in both. It assists participants like Quinn to develop their livelihood and early forms of entrepreneurship. However, in developing their social network via WeChat groups, migrants are rendered vulnerable to the validity of the authenticity of their relationship within these virtual spaces (Zhang et al., 2017).

> But I have sub representatives working for me [via WeChat], so I cannot stop there [even during my pregnancy]. I have to work hard because they all rely on me. So, I created a busy image on my WeChat. (Quinn, 32, Small Business Owner)

Meanwhile, the quickly formed social community does not necessarily foster integration into the Australian society. Victoria mentioned her challenges in dealing with old generations of Chinese migrants.

> We have to face not only the local community but also old generations of Chinese migrants. I was dragged into a WeChat group [here in Australia] by a senior artist in my previous study in China. There were all artists, curators, or art-related professionals who migrated earlier to Australia. Some of them didn't know me at all, a man – vice president for that group, jumped into criticising me straight away and asked me to arrange events for them for free, which was more like behaviour from the 80s. (Victoria, 39, Theatre Instructor)

This channel commonly identifies misconceptions among Chines migrants from earlier generations because of a lack of social interactions in real life and a generational difference within the Chinese community.

WeChat groups are also a 'gendered' space with a reproduction of 'motherhood' through virtual groups, for example, school selections and extracurricular activities. Abby expressed some anxieties over WeChat groups.

> I have a few WeChat groups. Most of my friends who have kids already send them to the Early Learning Centre for education [in China], since they're just a couple of months old, one or two years old. They, at this age, you know, three, four years old, they are all in kindergarten in China. They talk about many studies; what did they study into how well the English should their English should be? But here, there seems to be an academic achievement. I seem not to be competitive as that. (Abby, 36, Senior Project Officer)

Abby's friends' anxieties transferred from the WeChat group discussions into her real-life in Australia – she had to act for her daughter's academic training; otherwise, she would feel like falling behind.

Meanwhile, WeChat groups could also work as a source of information for some participants who were busy with their work.

> I use WeChat to chat with my friends here in Australia, mainly mothers of my daughter's friends. We talk about parenting stuff, extracurricular activities… I understood what's going on at school because I am always busy at work and didn't want to miss [any information]. (Yvonne, 36, Accountant)

Yvonne did not have any social network outside of her work colleagues but utilised WeChat to connect with other Chinese mothers. They shared resources and specific Chinese norms about parenting. Like Gius's (2019) study of Italian

immigrants in Toronto, the online diasporic community is a 'privileged location' in reinforcing a particular layer of identity transformation.

WeChat works as a unique platform for my participants. On the one hand, it was set up by a Chinese corporation, under the strict surveillance of the Chinese government, to the extent that my participants work with extreme caution as to what they discuss on the platform and how they develop their relationship with it. On the other hand, it was an effective vehicle for my participants to avoid complete isolation; particularly, through WeChat groups, they could quickly establish a social network in Sydney or within the local Chinese community. Quinn and Fiona used it to quickly develop their entrepreneurship and accumulated their economic resources and ethnic networks for suppliers or clients. Bella and Darcie used it as a tool to communicate with their family and friends in China, managing their long-term relationship through this virtual space as a familial obligation and a practice of care regularly. WeChat, therefore, plays out as a substitute for *new Chinese* professional women to perform their familial and career agency – but with some limitations and constraints. They have accumulated a comparatively large number of social interactions and ethnic networks. It sometimes reinforces the idea of social and cultural norms that originated in mainland China from early generations and the gendered dimension of household tasks and childbearing responsibilities (Zhang et al. 2017, Wang et al. 2019).

While WeChat creates a shared space for *new Chinese* professional women, it also reinforces the boundaries of the ethnic community and norms around gender, class, and motherhood. Consequently, it contributes to the 'staggered' trajectory by either stopping or slowing them into an occupation. It works effectively as a financial and social stopgap in a temporal or transitional manner to bring extra income. Still, it could also potentially prevent them from building 'meaningful' social networks for their future professional career.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the ways *new Chinese* professional women navigate their careers. It has been argued that, as Dushengnv, this involves ongoing negotiation with – and sometimes negotiation of – their parental expectations. At the same time, they engage in the strategic use of a digital platform WeChat, but this also has ambiguous consequences for their career. The uniqueness of this cohort, who migrated as professionals and had affluent financial resources available and raised as competent and independent girls, eager to establish independence but also intend to stay connected with their parents. Nonetheless, they drew on the entire family's resources to build a possible career in Australia. With the support of their fathers first and husbands later, some *new Chinese* professional women could

enter male-dominated occupations and establish a career. This paper argues that *New Chinese* professional women's choices of careers are subjected to changes in gender, culture, and migration since they migrated to Australia. Sometimes, their careers resulted in 'staggered' and nonlinear trajectories.

The complexities of career pathways and transitions lie in the changing social and cultural contexts for *new* Chinese professional women. Moving to Australia offers some possibilities, but these pathways also involve constraints. During their career planning and career change, they attempt to escape and resist parental influence and try to meet their families' expectations, which involves negotiating patriarchal and workplace structures. The inequality regimes are fluid and complex, therefore, in need of a more nuanced approach to unpacking the ambivalence that new Chinese professional women had to face when planning their careers and making changes. The gendered and ethnic constraints are more than compelling feelings but structural barriers, invisible and difficult to challenge. The complexities of being Dushengnv, in particular, are often overlooked - the intensified experiences of being pushed out of their family but also being drawn back through familial connections.

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[1]Dushengnv is the only daughter in Chinese.