

**Employment Types and Work-Life Balance among Chinese Immigrant Women
in the Netherlands**

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This thesis has been written as a study assignment under the supervision of an Utrecht University teacher. Ethical permission has been granted for this thesis project by the ethics board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Utrecht University, and the thesis has been assessed by two university teachers. However, the thesis has not undergone a thorough peer-review process so conclusions and findings should be read as such.

Abstract

This research contributes to the work-life balance literature by exploring the experience of Chinese female immigrants working in the Netherlands. Employing semi-structured in-depth interviews, I aim to outline the individual work-life interactions and understand how they perceive the work-life balance or conflict as Asian immigrants living in Europe. This study also examines the impact of employment types as different employment types could bring varied resources or obstacles. It identifies two mechanisms through which employment types impact their ability to achieve work-life balance: the Social Connection Mechanism and the Autonomy Mechanism.

Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) is described as achieving a balance between employees' family or personal life and work lives (Brough et al., 2020). It is a critical aspect of individuals' lives, influencing both organisational performance and personal well-being (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Hoffmann-Burdzińska & Rutkowska, 2015). This delicate equilibrium between one's professional and personal life varies from person to person, with factors from the work sphere, family roles and socio-demographic characteristics shaping this dynamic equilibrium (De Klerk & Mostert, 2010).

There is a gender disparity in perceived work-life balance, with many studies revealing that women usually report a greater impact of work on their personal life (Walia, 2015; Karkoulian et al., 2016). The experiences of immigrant women, particularly, are less discussed in the existing literature on this subject, yet they are worth exploring as their work and family experiences can be more complicated than those of non-immigrants (Ali et al., 2016; Dyer et al., 2017). Growing up in a collectivist culture, Chinese people are taught to compromise when personal interests

conflict with collective goals (Kwan, 2009). The highly competitive environment also often leads them to prioritise professional achievement over personal leisure (Xiao & Cooke, 2012). Research shows that Chinese immigrants tend to work longer hours with little rest (Badanta et al., 2020), facing various barriers ranging from financial stress to racial discrimination in achieving a balanced work and life (Leung et al., 2018). Therefore, in this study, I aim to investigate what Chinese immigrant women in the Netherlands prioritise in their lives and how they perceive their work-life balance situations.

Employment type is an important factor in work-life balance from the work sphere. When Hughes concentrated on women's entrepreneurship, she has found that self-employment is a chance to develop a more balanced lifestyle (Hughes, 2006), supported by the argument that self-employment gives people greater flexibility and fewer external obstacles. However, entrepreneurship is also viewed as a primary cause of dissolving work-life boundaries, resulting in an imbalance (Adisa et al., 2019). Since self-employment can create both opportunities and impediments, I am particularly interested in understanding what being a self-employed person or an employee brings to individuals and how their occupational type specifically affects their perceived work-life balance.

This study focuses on the challenges of balancing work and life, with particular attention to the less discussed experiences of Chinese female immigrants in the Netherlands. It attempts to fill a gap in the work-life balance literature by emphasising the impact of employment types on work-life experiences. The research seeks to address these two main societal and scientific concerns by answering the following research questions:

1. What are the situations and perceptions of WLB among Chinese female employees and self-employed individuals in the Netherlands?
2. What are the specific challenges and facilitators on their way to WLB?
3. How do employment types influence their perceived WLB and what are the mechanisms?

Literature Overview

Conceptualising Work-life Balance

Early definitions of work-life balance emphasised an equal allocation of time and resources between work and family or other responsibilities (Kirchmeyer, 2000; Greenhaus et al., 2003). This point of view has drawn criticism because it did not take into account individual preference, only considering absolute equality. Jones et al., (2013) argued that “balance” is not ideally about evenly dividing time between work and home. Personal preference is a significant factor to consider since different people have different goals. For example, some people might prioritise their career advancement while other people may find spending time with their family or pursuing a hobby more important. Individual preferences make their work-life balance adapted to these varied goals.

For the purposes of this study, WLB is defined as the ability to meet personal objectives in both work and personal life (Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006). Many studies on WLB focus on the relationship between women’s work and family. However, the idea of WLB is fairly broad, especially for singles or those without children. Life is about more than just family; it’s about hobbies, social or political involvement, etc (Nitzsche et al., 2014). Therefore, rather than focusing solely on their domestic responsibilities, this study employs a comprehensive way to understand the women’s

WLB status. This definition also allows me to explore the reasons why women choose their career type and how they combine their work and other life domains.

Understanding the Work-life Balance of Chinese Immigrant Women

People from different backgrounds may have varying opinions about WLB, primarily because of differences in their culture (Spector et al., 2004). The perception of WLB by Chinese people may differ from that of Western people. One reason might be that the collectivist culture of China generally makes people see themselves as a small part of the big picture, leading them to attach great importance to individual responsibilities towards work and society (Chan, 2008; Chen et al., 2021). In contrast, Western people are more likely to live in nuclear families, making their primary concern their own goals and preferences, and those of their immediate families (Chan, 2008). Therefore, in individualistic cultures, value conflicts between work and family roles may be more typical since people tend to separate themselves from these two domains (Wafula, 2010). In collectivistic cultures, however, people's work and family roles are more integrated, and conflicts are more invisible (Nini, 1996).

Perceptions of WLB among Chinese individuals may have changed in recent years. The Chinese job market has seen a significant influx of women after the socialist market economy reform (Cai et al., 2008). More and more women seek improved career prospects to better balance their work-life commitments (Ahmad, 2001; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Gu (2011) argues that economic reform challenged traditional Chinese values of obligation, and people are more inclined to identify with individualistic values such as freedom, independence, and pursuit of personal goals. Consequently, long working hours may no longer be seen as deserved sacrifices but the cause of conflicts between work and personal life (Gu, 2011). Given the inconsistencies in current research, this study seeks to learn how Chinese immigrant women perceive WLB.

Employment Type on Work-life Balance

Faced with limited employment opportunities, many migrants see self-employment as a pathway to upward mobility (Sanders & Nee, 1996). In this study, self-employment is defined as people who work for themselves rather than paid employees who work for others. It also implies that the individual actively participates in developing his or her own job (Loscocco, 1997).

Most studies on WLB focus on salaried employees in large organisations (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001), and a few studies have investigated the WLB of self-employed workers. Adisa et al. (2019) research whether self-employed people's more flexible working habits help them better manage the boundaries between work and life, and results imply that they prioritise work over leisure activities and put in longer workdays. It also shows that self-employed people have a higher likelihood of being single or divorced. Nordenmark et al. (2012) have found that self-employed individuals tend to have higher control and demands from their work, while there is a negative correlation between job control, job demands and WLB. It is noteworthy that some studies focus on women and mothers (Annink and den Dulk, 2012; Bourke et al., 2010). For instance, Annink and Dulk (2012) discover that job control is an important factor in how self-employed women with children in the Netherlands manage their paid work and other life domains. The discussions on self-employment have centred around flexibility and job control, which have guided me to pay more attention to these aspects during the interviews and the data analysis.

Autonomy, Social Capital and Work-life Balance

To analyse the impact of employment type on work-life balance, this study adopts the concept of autonomy and social capital to better understand the distinct characteristics and influences associated with various types of employment.

In the resources-demands approach commonly used to analyse employees' work-life balance, autonomy is considered one of the important resources for avoiding tensions between life domains (Valcour, 2007; Voydanoff, 2004). It is defined as the freedom and discretion to decide when, where, and how a job should be carried out (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Autonomy is often measured by work autonomy (content) and form autonomy (time and space). The former refers to the ability to decide which tasks to do and how to complete them, while the latter refers to the flexibility to decide where and when to work according to one's work-life arrangements (Pisljar, van der Lippe, & den Dulk, 2011).

Job autonomy has a significant impact on work-life balance (Novianti & Fuadiputra, 2021; Johari & Yahya, 2016; P. M. Valcour & Hunter, 2004). Employees who have greater autonomy at work appear to reconcile life domains better (Baum & Rau, 2024). A study of female entrepreneurs worldwide has found that their sense of job autonomy is positively associated with higher satisfaction in balancing the demands of work and personal life (De Clercq & Brieger, 2021). Conversely, some scholars suggest that autonomy does not necessarily lead to better work-life balance (Schieman, Milkie, & Galvin, 2009). Fuadiputra and Novianti (2021) argue that compared to work autonomy, workload has a more significant effect on the work-life balance of female workers.

This study also adopts social capital theory to understand the role of different resources available to people in different working conditions. Coleman (1988) refers to social capital to the benefits that individuals can derive from their connections with others, and it explores how positive social relationships can have a significant impact on individuals by providing emotional and social support and building trust and reciprocity. Social capital at the labour market level may be conceptualised as an

element of labour market citizenship, or social contracts concerning working life (Suikkanen & Viinamäki, 1999). A study has found a positive relationship between co-worker support and both work-family enrichment and family-work enrichment (Siu et al., 2010). Similarly, engaging in social interactions with coworkers, among those who are employed, demonstrated a notable correlation with self-assessed health, unlike interactions with family and friends (Veenstra, 2000).

In summary, Autonomy and social capital are the main theory tools for the mechanism analysis of this study. Whether autonomy has a positive or negative impact on WLB is still controversial; hence, this study will focus on the participants' autonomy experience in data gathering and analysing process. Since there is limited research on the work-life balance experiences of female migrants in Europe, the study aims to narrow this gap by focusing on a specific ethnic group. Scholars also have inconsistent explanations on how Chinese people perceive work-life balance and conflict nowadays, so it attempts to reconcile these different arguments from the perspective of Chinese immigrants. Additionally, while some studies have explored the relationship between self-employment and WLB, there is a gap in observing and comparing the experiences of self-employed individuals and employees together. Thus, another important goal of this study is to identify the differences in work-life experiences between these two groups and understand how employment type leads to these differences.

Method

Study Design

To understand the dynamic and nuances of work- life situations, this research adopted a qualitative research method, which is more oriented to individual life experiences. In support of this approach, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used

to unravel the participants' backgrounds and their work-life encounters in the Netherlands.

Study Sample

In terms of the selection of interviewees, they were required to be immigrant women who were born and raised in China and now working in the Netherlands. They can either be employees or self-employed individuals. Since one of the research questions is to understand whether there is a difference in the level of work-life balance between employees and self-employees, participants chosen shall not have children. The goal of this selection criteria was to minimise variations in family factors as many studies have proven that women without children tend to have better work-life balance than those with children (Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018; Pânișoară & Șerban, 2013). Participants were recruited through social media and snowballing method (Cohen and Arieli, 2011), which involved acquaintances' introduction. As a result of this recruitment strategy, people chosen for the study share some similar characteristics. For example, most employees work in standard nine-to-five jobs and have a high level of education (often a Master's degree). To create a more relaxing and comfortable atmosphere for sincere discussion and transparency, the interviews were conducted in Chinese, which is their native language. Nine interviews in total were completed, each lasting between 30 to 1 hour.

Data and Measurements

I primarily focused on the impact of the work domain (rather than the family domain) on work-life balance and aimed to explore women's attitudes towards their work and potential challenges from their work on WLB. The interviews consisted of the following aspects. Firstly, to contextualise the discussion and get familiar with each other, I inquired about how long they have been in the Netherlands, and why they

decided to work here. The second part was to gain a basic understanding of their working environment, including their working hours, team structure and relationships with colleagues. Following this, drawing upon the work of Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003), I specifically asked about their work interference with personal life, life interference with work and work-life enhancement since I wanted to learn more about what is unique about their working environment, their personal life and how do they interact. Additionally, they were directly asked how they felt about their abilities to achieve both work and life goals, whether they were satisfied with their current WLB, and if they wanted to make any changes.

Data Analysis

I have the habit of taking written notes during interviews for the purpose of data analysis. After the interview, I organised those notes and converted them into digital ones. All interviews were transcribed using TurboScribe. I manually coded using Microsoft Word software by reading through and comparing both my observation notes and the transcripts. I started by concentrating and coding on terms that would help me answer my research questions. Then I conducted open coding and categorised all the codes I thought would be interesting or inspiring. The codes were integrated into three main themes: job characteristics, culture and personalities, and personal life pursuits. New codes were included as the interview progressed.

Critical Reflection on Research Process and Positionality

Reflecting on the research process, I think I have both shortcomings and good practices in my data collection process. On the one hand, I admit that my selection of interviews was influenced by my own experience and the people I could easily reach. As a master's student, I instinctively reached out to employees who, like me, came to the Netherlands for studies and stayed on to work. My search for self-employed

individuals also started from industries I was familiar with or interested in. This made me fail to explore those women with more diverse backgrounds, for instance, people who work in the service sector of the economy.

On the positive side, I think I have shown great empathy during my research by prioritising the feelings of my research participants. For example, one of my interviewees was going through life changes due to her work-related reasons. As the interview progressed, I noticed her low emotions and suggested we pause the interview. I also kept in touch with her afterwards. I finally decided not to conduct the interview again considering her need for rest and the significant changes in her life, even though she hadn't asked so and her insights could have been valuable for my research.

Results

Experiences and Perceptions of WLB from Chinese Immigrants

The results of my interviews with these Chinese female immigrants show that self-employed individuals work longer than employees, but they do not necessarily report lower satisfaction or lower abilities in achieving work and life objectives. Specifically, most employees work nine-to-five, managing work-life conflicts well and feeling comfortable taking time off from work when needed. When we look at self-employed people, the line between their work and life is blurred, with more than 50 working hours per week on average. They also admit that they are more likely to choose work if their work is conflicted with their holiday plans or personal arrangements.

Participant 4 runs a small business with her husband. She realises that her personal life takes a backseat to work, but she does not intend to change as she is still happy with her current status. For her, maintaining the status quo is easier than making a change:

If I were to rate my work-life balance from one to five, I'd probably give it a three. But I'm still quite happy with it and I feel a five-point happiness. This might be because I

did not make a lot of effort to achieve my ideal status so I'm fine with current status. If

I strive to achieve the work-life balance, I might be a little more tired.

Participants 7 and 9, both self-employed, provided narratives very similar to above. Their answers show their high tolerance for high work demands. This insight is particularly relevant to my first research question: self-employed individuals prioritise work and dedicate long hours to it, yet this imbalance in time and effort between work and personal life does not result in lower perceived work-life balance.

Participant 4 further explained that the connection between her family and her career is one of the main obstacles for her to change. This is because her business is supported by her families, who help her connect and collaborate with suppliers in China:

My family and I talk on the phone once every two days, they might ask about what we eat today, when we return China, and where we've been, then suddenly ask about our business and if we need help. The topics jump around a lot. My partner and I can try to avoid talking about work in the evenings, but I just can not avoid this with my family.

This quote shows her compromise with her parents. As the younger generation of China, though she may have different views on the work-family relationship and attach more importance to work-life boundaries than their previous generation (Gu, 2011), family and cultural factors still significantly impact her actual practices.

Next, we will look at the specific challenges and facilitators regarding their work-life balance based on their employment type.

Challenges to Work-life Balance

For employees

Nearly all employees in this study mentioned negative working experiences caused by team structures or management. Participant 1 suffered a period of time without her manager when she just joined the company:

After I joined our company the manager left, leaving our team without leadership. It was chaotic, with everyone asking me to do things and I had no choice but to do it. Later, some colleagues also left or burned out.

Participant 5 also experienced disorganised team management leading to uneven task distribution, which had a negative consequence on her work and life:

I had low productivity and a feeling that the work could never be finished. I often worked in the evening, feeling stressed.

As for Participant 6, she has been facing a great workload for a long time and this is because she works for the core business of the company but there is only a limited workforce. These examples show that when the team structure goes wrong, employees under it could be exposed to consequences including increased workload, decreased efficiency and even mental health problems, all of which can be harmful to their work-life balance. And Chinese-born employees could be particularly vulnerable to organisational factors due to their cultural context. Sha (2018) argues that Chinese employees are more likely to comply with their employers compared to American employees due to the large power distance in Chinese culture. The obedience to authority inherent in collectivist culture makes them more likely to experience higher stress at work, as they prefer not to seek help or adjust work arrangements (Pye et al., 2009). Even if there are opportunities to say no, it is just common and safe to simply accept the requirements in any situation in China (Sha, 2018).

Besides, prior research repeatedly concludes that Chinese migrants in general, and women in particular, have difficulties in gaining employment reflecting their skills and qualifications (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2007; Cooke & Rapino, 2007; Foroutan, 2008). This was validated through my conversation with Participant 1. She mentioned facing challenges in adapting to her work as it required learning new skills that did not align with her academic background:

I studied food science, and now I'm doing polymer chemistry and organic chemistry.

Both of those are things that I haven't been exposed to before. They're very new and difficult, and then you have to learn them, and it's a bit stressful at that time.

This shows that Chinese women immigrants may choose jobs that do not perfectly match their capabilities or interests, out of the necessity to secure employment and a visa, which could result in stress and a lack of confidence in their work.

For self-employed people

Lacking a mature team structure can also be a challenge for self-employed people. Since most self-employed women interviewed in this study only own start-ups or small-scale businesses, they are mostly on their own without support from co-workers or supervisors. This is most evident in Participant 4 who took multiple roles in her business:

My partner is mainly responsible for construction, then it is my responsibility to take product marketing, accounting, programme design, and client operations. I also have to handle emergencies when things happen during the construction.

Moreover, without standardised procedures provided by the company or guidance from senior mentors, many procedures need to be improved by herself independently. These have directly led to the fact that she works very long hours and is almost on standby at all times.

Opportunities for Work-life Balance

For employees

An international working environment and diverse colleagues are important facilitators for Chinese women employees to achieve WLB. All the employees participating in this study work in multinational companies where English is the primary language. This reduces the feeling of exclusion and enhances their cooperation at work. It also makes it easier for them to find common ground and build friendships

that could be beneficial to their personal lives. This opportunity, as the important condition for the social connection mechanism, will be explained in the mechanism analysis sector in detail.

For self-employed people

Self-employment offers significant flexibility, allowing individuals to decide when and where to work. For example, Participant 4 has a fixed workout from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. as the gym is the least busy during that period, which makes her feel most comfortable. The flexibility helps her to exercise and maintain her fitness routine, which is conducive to achieving her personal goals.

Another opportunity comes from the fact that the work self-employed individuals engage in is often what they are truly passionate about. Participant 9, for instance, is the founder of a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping those in need. The content and nature of her work are perfectly in line with one of her most important personal values: to become a selfless person who thinks more about others. Her career has given her the ability to connect resources with those who need them, not only allowing her to respond to others' needs but also to meet her expectations on her own.

Mechanisms

Drawing from the opportunities above, I distilled two mechanisms through which employment type has an impact on the work-life balance. Figure 1 shows the social connection mechanism and Figure 2 shows the autonomy mechanism. They both illustrate who the mechanisms work for, how they work and what are the outcomes.

Figure 1

Social Connection Mechanism

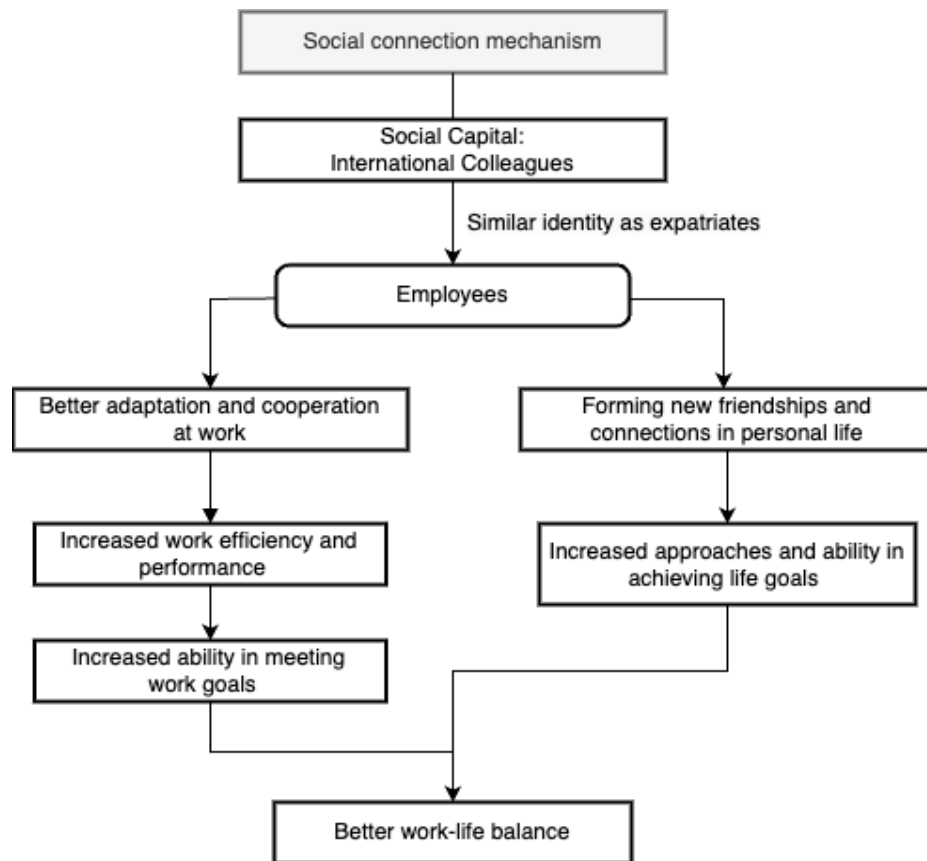
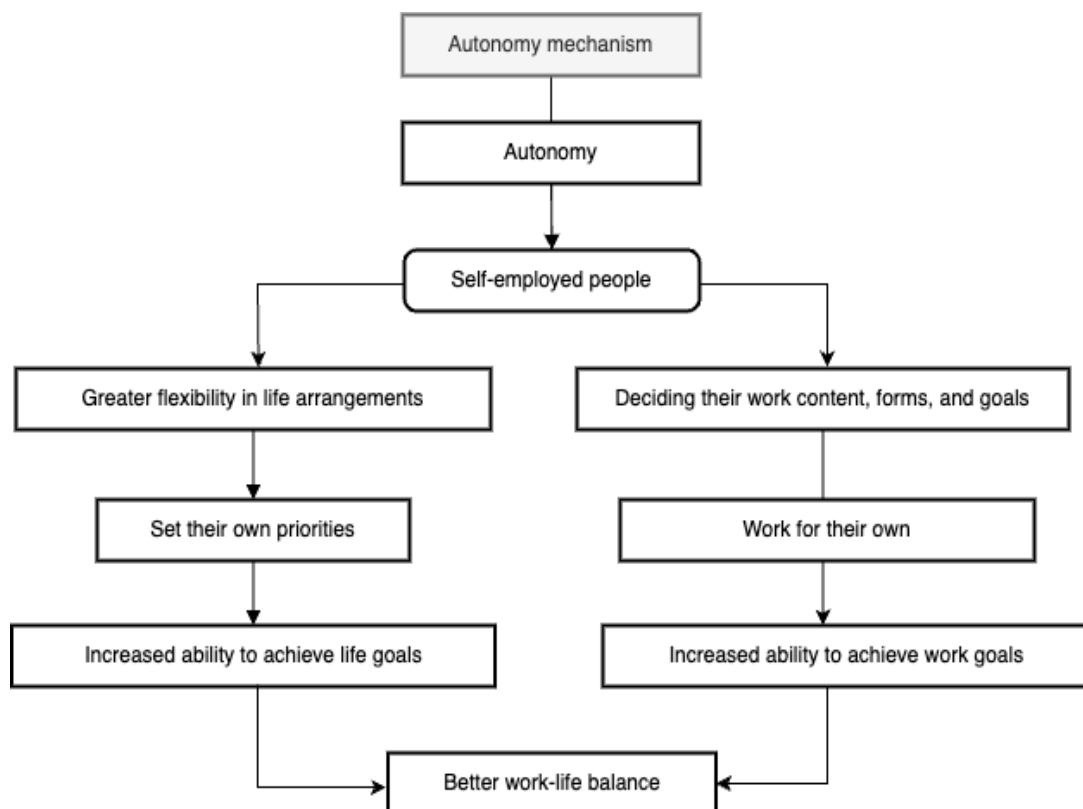


Figure 2

Autonomy Mechanism



Social connection mechanism

Applying social capital theory, I identified the social connection mechanism, which applies to employees in this study. This mechanism highlights that international colleagues serve as a significant form of social capital for Chinese women employees in the Netherlands to achieve better WLB.

Compared to self-employed individuals, employees tend to benefit from positive co-worker resources. Sharing a similar identity as expatriates, Chinese employees and their international colleagues often have common feelings and topics of discussion, which facilitates better adaptation and cooperation at work. This not only provides emotional support but also helps to improve work efficiency and performance, leading to an increased ability to meet work goals. Moreover, these international colleagues are more likely to become their friends in their personal lives, creating new connections that can enhance their abilities to achieve goals outside of their work. As many interviewees noted, work is a primary way of making new friends. Consequently, these strong co-worker relationships and the resulting sense of connection contribute to a better work-life balance for them.

My interviews with Participants 1, 3 and 6 have supported this finding. Participant 1 mentioned how her international colleagues and English-speaking environment made her feel comfortable and more integrated in the company:

My colleagues are all from different countries, not only Dutch, so we have more common topics. I've heard that in companies where there are more Dutch people, it's highly possible that when a Dutch person meets a Dutch person, then they start to speak Dutch you know...

Participant 3 pointed out that her international working environment facilitates better colleague relationships, which is beneficial to her performance at work:

There are around 50 people in our department who come from more than 20 different countries and regions. We're very close and there are many events to get to know each other better at least one day a quarter, which makes the cooperation between us at work better.

One of the main ways for Participant 6 to relax during her spare time is by hanging out with friends and having good food. She often does these things together with two international colleagues of her:

There are two girls in my team coming from India and Romania. They are really nice and we are close to each other. During the weekends we often go to Karaoke and have food together.

Autonomy mechanism

The second mechanism I identified is the autonomy mechanism which applies to self-employed people. Since the self-employed people interviewed in this study don't have fixed working hours and all work from home, they have greater autonomy in deciding life arrangements as well as their work approaches and goals. High autonomy allows them to set their own priorities and do what they truly want to do, enhancing their ability in pursuing both work and life goals, which leads to their better perceived work-life balance.

Participant 7 is a solo self-employed individual who expressed overall satisfaction with her work-life balance, despite working more than 60 hours per week. Her work and life are highly integrated, but she shared with me why she is happy with her job, among which the autonomy stands out:

Firstly, I have more control over my time, and secondly, I can decide whether or not I want to do something. This reduces a lot of internal conflict. For example, I work from 8 p.m. to 11. p.m., but it's because I want to, and I don't feel like I'm being forced to work for a boss or something.

She also explained why she chose self-employment, which was because this met her subjective willingness:

For the first twelve years of my career, I was working for others. Then I started to reflect on what I really wanted. Being self-employed was a result of this introspection. I began to think about what kind of value I wanted to deliver. It's not about work-life balance; it's about whether my work can make me feel meaningful or make an impact.

Additionally, this job allows her to take care of her parents, which is the thing she wants to do out of herself:

I want to keep myself in a state where I can show up whenever they (parents) need me. I strongly felt this need after 35. It's not what they expect but what I feel I want to achieve.

Participant 9 works as a PhD student and a founder of a non-profit organisation which aims to help Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands. She majored in social work in her undergraduate times and has been doing voluntary work in the Netherlands for more than 3 years. Now she helps immigrants in the Netherlands better navigate their lives by linking different resources and organising activities. Her approach to her work and attitude towards work-life balance are very similar to ones of Participant 7: though dedicating a lot of her spare time to her organisation and community, she views it as something she really wants to do:

My own career is closely related to my PhD research. If my PhD is about influencing policy, having a structural impact, my organisation is about having a more practical impact. I've always wanted to have more actual impact on specific people.

Her work is all about helping people in need or difficulties, and she is the kind of person who cares little about herself but much about others. By working and helping people, she is on the way to becoming the kind of person she aims to be:

I can feel that I have been influenced by my father's expectation that I should be a selfless person who thinks about others and helps others from a very young age, and I

can feel that I have been influenced by this expectation deeply. So my work makes me become someone I want to be.

Discussion

In this study, I have focused on the work-life balance of Chinese-born women who immigrated to the Netherlands as employees or self-employed individuals. Although they may find themselves in different types of work and have different priorities, they all work to better build up their own lives in the Netherlands. The results show that women who have their own businesses tend to work longer hours and have blurred work-life boundaries, but they don't necessarily view this as a significant issue or report less satisfaction. This confirms that people have more integrated work and family in collectivistic cultures (Nini, 1996); in addition, it validates that women in collectivistic cultures are more likely to endure work-family conflicts than those in individualistic cultures when facing high work demands (Wafula, 2010).

I have also taken a deeper look at the specific challenges and opportunities regarding work-life balance faced by employees and self-employed people respectively. Employees tend to benefit from more structured work environments, which facilitate clearer boundaries between work and life. Challenges such as disorganised team structures and mismatched roles would negatively impact their work-life balance. This is consistent with the findings of Khawand & Zargar (2022), which emphasises the crucial role that organisations play in maintaining a work environment where employees' work-life balance is prioritised. It is also worth noting that I have confirmed that these challenges can indeed be more significant for Chinese immigrants due to cultural factors (Sha, 2018). For self-employed individuals, this study not only validates previous research on the positive effect of autonomy on work-life balance, but also reveals that self-employed individuals exhibit a stronger awareness of autonomy and can more actively leverage it to increase their work-life balance.

Last but not least, I looked in more detail at the role of employment type as they can lead to varied work-life arrangements and affect work-life balance. Little research has been investigated in this regard, therefore, my research has also narrowed this gap by identifying two mechanisms by which occupation type impacts WLB: the social connection mechanism and the autonomy mechanism. The social connection mechanism underscores the role of international colleagues as a key form of social capital for employees to improve their ability in achieving work and life goals. Autonomy, the ability to control their schedules and goals, plays a crucial role for self-employed people. It helps them to align personal aspirations with their professional pathways, giving them a sense of achievement; additionally, it can increase their competence in pursuing work and life goals at the same time, which has a direct impact on their work-life balance.

Strengths and Limitations

This study integrates social capital theory and job demands-resources theory to understand the work-life balance among Chinese female immigrants in the Netherlands. Specifically, it mainly draws on sociological knowledge and methodologies, such as social capital theory to analyse how different employment types provide resources and support to WLB. Additionally, I apply the job demands-resources theory from organisational psychology to explore the role of autonomy. This interdisciplinary approach not only enables me to have a deeper understanding of individual experiences, but also allows me to translate these diverse opinions into a common approach to address challenges. Moreover, trying to unravel the cultural difference in perceived work-life balance also shows my interest in cultural studies. This perspective is crucial as I hope to inspire Chinese women immigrants to reflect on how their cultural

backgrounds shape their strategies for work-life balance, and whether these strategies are sustainable in their new environment.

I have also identified a few limitations in this study. First, the number of full-time self-employed women I interviewed is insufficient. One of my research goals is to understand the overall work-life situation of Chinese immigrants from the perspective of employment type, which is a question I intended to answer by interviewing both employees and self-employed people. However, I encountered challenges when attempting to contact self-employed women. Three potential participants were too busy with their work to participate. One participant was dealing with the negative impacts on her personal life because of her work, therefore I decided not to include her in my study to avoid causing distress. Consequently, this study has a notable underrepresentation of self-employed individuals, and additional samples in this category would be beneficial to address this gap.

Second, there is a lack of diversity among the interviewed employees. My second research question is to understand what specific challenges and facilitators employees may be presented by, but all the employees are white-collar workers in multinational companies. Research shows that many Chinese immigrants in Europe are active in the service industries (Latham & Wu, 2013), and many Chinese individuals may work in local Dutch organisations rather than international companies. Therefore, the challenges summarised in this study may not fully represent the actual experiences. I discovered a social connection mechanism among employees regarding how their international colleagues contribute to their work-life balance. The limitation in my sampling approach may also affect the applicability of this mechanism. For instance, a Chinese waitress working in a local Chinese restaurant would probably not be captured

by this mechanism. Future research should aim to include a more diverse range of employee types to further investigate these dynamics.

Implications and Recommendations

This research underscores the cultural differences in perceived work-life balance, confirming that individuals from collectivistic cultures, such as Chinese immigrants, may experience work-life interactions differently than those from individualistic cultures. This contributes to the existing literature by substantiating cultural variations in work-family conflict. The study further identifies two mechanisms by which employment type impacts WLB: the social connection mechanism and the autonomy mechanism. These two mechanisms are promising as they address the gap in how employment types impact work-life arrangements, providing a basis for future research on exploring the roles of occupational types.

There is a growing trend in the Netherlands that English-speaking positions have been reduced in favour of Dutch-speaking ones, which will inevitably decrease the internationalisation of the workforce. Diversity policies within the company cannot address the challenge of social diversity and coherence alone. This study emphasises the importance of maintaining open and inclusive recruitment policies at the country level. For self-employed people, as this study identifies the challenge of multi-tasking and lack of guidance, policies that support entrepreneurial activities and provide resources for self-employed immigrants can help them achieve better work-life balance. This might include offering training programs, networking opportunities, and financial support tailored to their needs.

In conclusion, this study examined the work-life balance of Chinese born women working in the Netherlands, revealing differences between employees and self-employed individuals. Overall, self-employed women dedicate more effort to their

work compared to employees, but they do not perceive lower abilities in achieving their work and life goals. I also have observed the influence of traditional Chinese collectivist culture on their perception of work-life conflict. A key challenge for employees arises from disorganised team structure or management, with this negative impact being more pronounced among Chinese immigrants. The social connection mechanism highlights the importance of international colleagues as valuable social capital for employees, whereas autonomy emphasises the inherent initiative within self-employed individuals, and these factors can impact their abilities to realise a better work-life balance.

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